TRANSPORTATION AND UTILITIES

ROADS
The Town of Norway was settled during the transition from the canal era to the railroad age. Because neither of these transportation forms was in a great building stage at the time of settlement, roads were the chief and only means of transportation inland from the port cities along Lake Michigan.

The earliest settlers, either walking or traveling in light but sturdy wagons, simply struck out across the open prairie. Detouring only as needed to avoid marshes or to cross streams, these settlers often followed trails left by the Indians.

Highway 45 with North Cape Lutheran Church in background

As the population increased the need for roads grew. One of the first acts of the Territorial Legislature was to establish a system of roads. Three such acts were passed in the first session alone. An additional 243 territorial
roads were authorized before statehood was achieved. A typical territorial road act required that a survey be made and filed with the district court in each county affected and that mileposts be placed along the road. To accomplish this, the act would also call for employment of a surveyor and his chain carriers at the rate of $3.00 per day and a group of commissioners at the rate of $2.00 per day. The latter individuals were directed to make estimates of the cost of bridges and other improvements needed to make the roads useable.

Though the Territory and the County governments created the roads, neither were required to pay the costs. Instead the burden fell on the townships, who in turn levied property and poll taxes. These taxes were generally paid in labor, the going rate being $2.00 per day of labor. However, a person who supplied a plow or wagon and a team of horses or oxen when requested by the road supervisor, received credit for three days of labor for each day actually worked.

Territorial Road Number 6 passed through the Town of Norway. This road originated in Milwaukee, passed through the town, and continued on to Waterford and beyond. Like other early roads, part of this road followed the trails left by the Indians that were later used by the first settlers. This road was numbered as Highway 30 when the state trunk system was created in 1918. Paved in 1922, the same road was renumbered as Highway 36 in 1927. Replaced by a new highway in 1968, portions of the original territorial highway are now called Loomis Road or Rustic Road No. 5.

Financing roads by taxes paid in labor resulted in very poor roads. Loads of any size could not be hauled except by using two, three, and even four teams of oxen. Even then, the trip from Milwaukee to the Norwegian settlement was a two-day venture.

To provide more reliable transportation, privately owned plank roads were constructed throughout the region. Construction and upkeep costs as well as a profit for the
owners were obtained from tolls paid by users at toll gates along the road. One such road passed through Muskego along the route of the present Highway 24. James Reymert, one of the more prominent residents of the local Norwegian community, received permission to build a plank road from Muskego to Waterford. However, information that would indicate if this plank road had ever been completed could not be found.

The town government and individual citizens also constructed numerous roads within the town boundaries. Generally, these roads followed property lines between farms and were therefore built along section and quarter-section survey lines. At first, these roads were simply patches of ground that had been scraped level. In the spring of the year, when the frost left the ground, such roads became nearly impossible to travel by wagon, beast, or foot. As time passed, however, these roads were built up with gravel to form firmer roadbeds which have since been paved. Today, the only remaining dirt roads within the town are privately owned.

THE ELECTRIC RAILWAY
An electric railway originating in Milwaukee and terminating in Burlington was built through the Town of Norway roughly parallel to the present Highway 36. Chartered to The Milwaukee Electric Railway and Light Company for
passenger service, the railroad was also used to haul coal, lumber, and produce to and from steam railroad junctions at both ends of the line.

The first passenger car service was begun in 1908. Passenger waiting stations were placed at four sites within the town. These stations were known as Wind Lake (located near Highway 36 and Loomis Road), Edgewater (located next to the Edgewater Resort, now known as Shad's), Waubeesee (located near the present intersection of Highway 36 and South Wind Lake Road) and Norway Hill (located at the east base of the Norway Church Hill).

Norway Hill station

The railroad provided fast, reliable passenger service to downtown Milwaukee. The rail cars, reaching speeds of 60 to 70 miles per hour in the better sections, could make this trip in as little as 45 mintues. Owners of the railroad built it not with local transportation in mind, but rather to profit from recreation excursions from Milwaukee to resorts at Wind Lake and Burlington. Because the Edgewater Resort was a popular spot for charter excursion trips, tracks in the area of this resort were doubled to provide a siding where cars could bring passengers to the area and then wait until the end of the day for their return. Word has it that the excitement for the city folk at the Edgewater included slot machines.
The railroad, by providing city residents with a means of transportation to and from the lake recreation areas, was responsible for the first development around the lakes in the northeast corner of the township. It was also responsible for the first electrical service in the township. Electric lines to homes and businesses were first installed along Loomis Road in 1908 and then gradually extended to the rest of the town.

Begun at a time when automobiles were gaining in popularity and the roads were being improved to permit their use, the line to Burlington never became a profitable venture for its owners. Prevented by government regulations from expanding its freight service, the owners decided to abandon the line from Burlington to St. Martins Junction in 1937. The rails and ties were then removed for salvage, but the electric company retained the right of way for its electric lines. Today, much of the right of way and even one of its most spectacular features, the large cut at the base of Norway Church Hill, no longer remain as they were destroyed during construction of new Highway 36.

Norway Hill cut, destroyed by construction of new highway 36
DRAINAGE DISTRICT

Land around the outer edges of the township is high and well drained. Ideally suited for farmland without extensive improvements, this high land was bought and settled quite rapidly. At the same time, swamp and marsh land nearer the center of the township remained the haven of prairie chickens and other wildlife.

Because the swampland remained unclaimed, the state deeded this land to the township in 1861. Money obtained from the sale of this land was to be devoted to drainage improvements that would make the land usable for farming. Though this land was priced by the township at only $1.25 per acre, it was not sold quickly or easily.

Wind Lake, north and west of the unsold area, flooded each spring and covered the land. Flooding was severe because the lake was drained through a narrow creek that flowed through low spots to the Fox River at Rochester. In 1887-88, a dredging company was hired in an attempt to reduce the flooding. The company assembled a floating

Flooding dredge widening canal
dredge at the outlet of Wind Lake and began to straighten and deepen the creek into a canal. However, this company completed dredging only as far south as Highway K before going bankrupt. The company’s dredge was then taken apart and returned to Chicago, making it necessary to hire a second company to complete the dredging to Rochester. Successful in the end, this project reduced the flooding, but also lowered the level of Wind Lake by about four feet.

In 1891, private enterprise entered the scene. The James Reynolds Company, a name that can be found in the abstracts of much property around Wind Lake, was granted permission to make a second dredging of the canals from Big Muskego Lake to Rochester. The act passed by the State Legislature giving them this permission, also granted the company title to all land that it thereby drained. The dredging completed by the company lowered the level of Wind Lake another four feet. However, the State Supreme Court in 1896 declared that the legislature lacked the power to grant the land title and thereby invalidated the company’s land claims.

Having seen the loss of shore line beauty created by dredging, local property owners decided to build a stone dam at the outlet of Wind Lake. This dam was not
effective. The Milwaukee Electric Railway and Light Company, with the aid of local farmers in 1903, then built a concrete dam upstream from the stone dam. The concrete dam raised the water level four feet, returning the lake to its level prior to the second dredging. The second dam remained in use until 1973, when it was replaced by a much improved dam built by the Town of Norway.

With a good main canal to Rochester completed, it was then possible to drain much of the swamp and marsh land. In 1908, farmers gathered at the town hall to form the Norway-Dover Drainage District. Three commissioners, namely Hans Jacobson, Adam Apple, and Ole Hanson, were elected and engineers were hired to make surveys and recommend placement of canals. Assessments, based on resulting improvements, paid for construction costs of about 40 miles of canals in the Towns of Norway and Dover. Completed in 1915, the main canals were dug by a floating dredge while the smaller canals or laterals were often dug by hand.

Further dredging of the laterals was done in 1940 and again in 1954. The main canal from Wind Lake to Rochester was widened and deepened in 1957. These improvements combined with improved dams at Wind Lake and Rochester turned land that no one wanted into some of the finest, most productive farmland in the state.
TELEPHONE COMPANY

The first local telephone company was formed in 1902. At that time, stock in the company was sold to local residents for $5.00 per share. Money raised in this manner paid for the installation of six lines, one in each direction from a switchboard located in a local grocery store. These lines were numbered as follows: 1 - Waterford, 2 - Norway, 3 - DeNoon, 4 - Tichigan, 5 - North Cape, and 6 - Dover.

Wires for the lines were not insulated and were strung on oak or tamarack poles. The poles, bought locally, were often exchanged for stock of the company. As a public convenience, one phone was installed on each line. Individuals wishing phone service bought their own phones and paid $5.00 per year for use of the line.

In spite of such low rates, the company prospered. In 1946, the Wind Lake Telephone Company purchased the Burlington, Rochester and Kansasville Telephone Company. The combined corporation with two exchanges, one at Wind Lake and the other at Waterford, was named the Southeast Telephone Company of Wisconsin.

Handcrank phones continued in use until 1955. Dial phones which made their appearance in the Wind Lake exchange in 1959 were introduced in the Waterford exchange in 1962. Today, the company services more than 4,000 subscribers with approximately 6,000 telephones.

The Rev. Schmidt of Norway Church, who organized the company and strung the telephone lines
SANITARY SEWER DISTRICT
When people fail to learn from the past, bad historical events recur. But often, people do learn from history. An example of such learning here in the Town of Norway is the sanitary sewer district.

The early Norwegian settlers had obtained drinking water in their homeland from pure, rushing mountain streams. Here, in their adopted homeland, they continued to use simple groundwater sources for their drinking water. These sources, the lakes and marshes, were too stagnant and soon became polluted. As a result, periodic outbreaks of cholera and typhoid devastated the community until the settlers learned to dig and use wells.

As time passed and indoor plumbing came into general use, a new threat appeared. That threat, overflows from septic systems used for sewage disposal at individual homes, began to pollute our lakes. These same conditions, as pointed out in a two-year study authorized by the Town Board and the State Department of Natural Resources, would eventually contaminate even the wells.

Armed with these facts, the town board under the leadership of Melvin Johnson, a descendent of Norwegian settlers, authorized the start of preliminary plans for a sanitary sewer system in the more urbanized lake section of the town. By 1969, the plans had proceeded to a point that allowed formation of a Sanitary Sewer District.

Further engineering and planning continued while the search for the needed funds began. Though construction loans and some grants were obtained quickly, large grants from the state and federal governments were not made available until 1976. Soon after, the people approved the project and bids were let. Construction contracts were signed in November of 1976. A year and a half later, in May of 1978, construction of the system was completed at a cost exceeding $5,500,000.