HISTORY
FROM THE BEGINNING
By J. G. Johnson

From 1673 to 1898 in the settling of Manitowoc and Two Rivers (Courtesy January 1948, "Mixing Bowl")

First court house and jail at Manitowoc Rapids, 1840-9

There was a forest since the time before history—a dense pine and hemlock growth, with boughs intertwined, holding the sun’s rays from the ground. The leaf-carpeted ground was the home of countless animals—deer, bear, wolf, and lynx, in addition to small game. Indians found their food and clothing in the forests around their villages, from the rivers rolling to the great lake.

And then, a strange incident. Two men of pale complexion, wearing strange clothing, came out of the distance in their canoe. They were exploring the coast of the immense water, they said, and were called Marquette and Joliet.

Though there is no record that Marquette and Joliet stopped at Manitowoc or Two Rivers, they must have landed at many spots along the Wisconsin coast. It was in the year 1673 that they set out to map the shoreline from Green Bay to Illinois and it seems probable that they picked camp sites near rivers such as at “Mundewik” and “Twin Rivers.” They were the first white men to see the sites of Manitowoc and Two Rivers.

First Written Record
The first written record of Manitowoc county was made more than a hundred years later in a book called “A Voyage on Lake Michigan,” written by Samuel Robertson, a trader. He spoke of an Indian settlement at “Twin Rivers,” some distance north of Milwaukee.

A few years later, in 1795, Jacques, sometimes known as Jean Vieux described another town which he called “Munde-dowk” where the Indians speared whitefish at the mouth of the river.
This name was derived from the Ojibway and Chippewa Indian language, and was interpreted to mean "home of the great spirit." Later, the same settlement was known as "Mainitowauk," river of bad spirits. The name finally became Manitowoc when the first settlers came to stay. And it was known as the home of the great spirit.

In 1825 there were still only Indian villages to mark the sites of Manitowoc and Two Rivers. Not until 1836 did the settlements spring up, following a rumor of a gold strike near Kewaunee. Both towns started in the same year, in almost the same manner.

In Chicago, a Manitowoc Land company was formed by Benjamin Jones with the purpose of settling and exploiting the land around the Manitowoc river. A party of men was sent to Manitowoc to begin logging operations. When they arrived, the dark and forbidding forest discouraged many of them, leading them to desert to Sheboygan or other neighboring settlements. By nightfall only five of the party were left. Of these, only three had courage enough to stay through the winter, building their own cabin and starting logging operations.

40 Settlers in 1837

The next year, 1837, forty settlers landed at Manitowoc. They found it still an almost impenetrable wilderness which, it seemed, could never be cleared. There were still wild animals in the woods, lending some danger to a walk through the woods.

But pioneers were not discouraged easily. Twenty years later Manitowoc was platted as a village and in another 14 years, 1870, was incorporated as a city.

Both Manitowoc and Two Rivers owe their growth to the dense forests which appeared so frightening to the first settlers. The rich forest made logging a profitable business. Benjamin Jones
built one of the first mills, employing 50 men. Abundant hemlock also made tanning profitable since hemlock bark was one of the chief ingredients of the tanning mixture. Tanneries were begun in both towns. In Two Rivers, fishing became one of the principal industries and a source of income to many villagers.

But the forests melted away with the loggers. Settlers turned to agriculture for their livelihood.

In Manitowoc and Two Rivers, it was a struggle to stay alive while the dread cholera swept through the village. In Two Rivers, the disease got its start in 1850 when six Indians fell sick after an evening of celebration. Panic-stricken settlers jammed aboard a small ship lying in the harbor, not stopping even to gather their personal belongings. Others fled through the forests to other settlements. But, before the epidemic passed, 50 persons had been buried and others lay near death. Only after several years did Two Rivers regain its former standing. Another cholera epidemic struck Manitowoc in 1854. This time there was less panic and fewer deaths.

Indian Scares

In addition to panic caused by epidemic disease there was the fear of Indians. The first Indian scare was in 1842 when a drunken squaw reported that Indians were planning a massacre. The rumor spread quickly and preparations were made to repel the attack. Scouts were sent out to locate the Indian tribe only to find that the whole report had been false.

As late as 1862 there was another Indian scare. Panic spread quickly and whole families moved into the county seat, fearful for their lives. Again there was no credence to the report and the scare ended. Both towns settled down to peaceful growth.

Industry came to both towns. With a population of 1,300, Two Rivers maintained saw mills, tanneries, fisheries, and wood industries. Manitowoc had 3,398 citizens and almost the same sort of industry in 1865.

The harbor in Manitowoc was instrumental in drawing industry. It was the only port on the west shore where there was any real safety for vessels during a southwest gale. Eventually the railroad was brought to town to connect with other lines across the lake by ferry.

Indian Tribes

Manitowoc county which derived its name from the Indian word "Munechook" is most interested in its Indian history. The name "Manitowoc" is said to mean the "home of the good spirit." Another translation for the word was "the devil's den."

The earliest tribe known to have inhabited the county were the Mascoutins, who according to Canadian voyagers, hunted the county lying along the western shore of Lake Michigan. Later came the Ottawas, Menominees, Winnebagos and Pottawatomies. All these later tribes, with the exception of the Winnebagos, were of Algonquin stock. The Pottawatomies had all but disappeared when the first white settlers came to this region. The latter tribe claimed the lands along the lake shore until they relinquished all their rights to this territory in a treaty signed at Chicago in 1833. The Menominees, however, were recognized owners of the county until 1831 when they ceded to the government their claims and rights.

Settlers Find Indians

Bands of Chippewas and Menominees were living in Manitowoc county when the white settlers first came in 1836. They were reported as peaceful at
all times, causing little or no trouble for the pioneers. Some form of crude agriculture was carried on by these tribes with corn and beans the principal crops. Wild rice was gathered along the river and marshes near Collins. The principal occupations of the men were hunting and fishing. Early traders wrote of seeing the shore of the lake lined with Indians, many of whom were out in canoes spearing white fish. The Indians seemed to be well disposed to traders and exchanged their cranberries and venison for the pork supplies of the pioneers. These Indian tribes moved into the interior for the winter months.

The headquarters of the Chippewa was located along the upper Manitowoc river near Cato Falls where plantations of corn were under cultivation as late as 1837. The chief of this tribe was a kindly Indian by the name of Waumegesako or Mexico. He was very intelligent and a great friend of the white man. The government presented him with a medal for being an arbiter in many disputes. A picture of this venerable old chief hangs in the Wisconsin Historical Art Gallery. At his death in 1844, he was buried by the settlers with due honors in the town of Rapids where a monument was erected in his memory.

Camping Grounds

Indian camping grounds were common throughout the county, especially along the rivers and creeks. Some of these areas served as burial grounds as well. Indian relics were found in large numbers at Rapids, Two Rivers, Zambo creek, in Franklin, and Schleswig. Many fine collections of Indian arrowheads, stone hatchets, and other relics were found in this county. The collection on display in the Schuette Brothers store is one of the more outstanding ones. One of the best known camping grounds was located along the Branch river in the present Franklin No. 1 school district. The pioneer residents reported that large numbers of Indians camped at that spot during the winter months. The settlers traded potatoes, flour, and locally raised tobacco for venison and trinkets. They reported that they often attended their pow-wows which sometimes became very noisy affairs as the Indians came under the influence of "fire-water." Wigwams were found at that location as late as the year 1830.

Judge Jerome Ledvina in his history of the Quarry district reported that numbers of Indians camped along the Manitowoc river at Quarry and on the knob of the George Thompson farm west of the village. Relics of axes and arrows were found in considerable number at those places. The three principal enemies of the Indians he said, were whisky, cholera and smallpox. Judge Ledvina reported further that solitary Indians were known to have camped on the Knute Thompson farm as late as the year 1893.

Certain mounds and implements have been found which indicate Indians more ancient than those whom the early settlers contacted. H. C. Hamilton of Two Rivers, who owned a large collection of the relics of an earlier race, substantiated this fact.

Indians But a Memory

The late Judge J. S. Anderson, one of the most important figures in Manitowoc during the period following the Civil war and into the present century, wrote a first hand account of Indian life in the county. He visited many camps and found that the Indians lived very well on the abundant birds and game. The Indian boys took him with them on their canoe trips for the privilege of using his single-barreled gun. On the west side of the Neshoto river there was a large tract of sugar maples which the Indians tapped for making maple sugar in a most primitive fashion. Indian dances were very common and exciting
scenes to the pioneers who settled in our county.

Sometimes, when the Indians were under the influence of liquor, they became unruly and threatened to go on the warpath and kill off all the "pale faces." Rumors of up-risings were often spread causing the settlers to go into hiding or to seek protection at nearby villages and trading posts. No actual Indian massacre ever occurred within our county.

Today, a little more than a century after the county was taken over by the white men, the Indians and their ways of life are but a memory. Only the Indian names of Mishicot, Neselho, Mee-mee and Manitowoc are still with us, to remind the present generation that this area was once the home of the red men. The nearness of the Indians was truly one of the colorful aspects of pioneer life in Manitowoc county a century ago.

Early County History

What is now Manitowoc county was owned by the Indians until taken possession of by the French as a part of the French claim to North America. It remained so until it passed to Great Britain as a result of the French and Indian war in 1763. At the close of the Revolutionary war in 1783, this territory became a part of the United States. In 1787 it came under the provisions of the Ordinance of the Northwest territory. As territorial states were carved out of the Northwest territory, our county became part of the Indian territory in 1800, Illinois territory in 1809, and of the Michigan territory from 1818 to 1836, when it became a part of the Wisconsin territory.

Manitowoc county was originally a part of Brown county until the organization of a separate county government for Manitowoc county was authorized by an act of the Wisconsin territorial legislature in 1838. Under the act, the date for the first election was fixed for the first Monday in March, 1839. The commissioners of Brown county were authorized to canvass the vote and to issue certificates of election.

First Election

The first election was held March 4, 1839, at the home of P. P. Pierce, in the village of Manitowoc Rapids. Thirty-five votes were cast to elect county commissioners and county officers. Commissioners and territorial county officers carried on the official county business until Wisconsin became a state on May 29, 1848. Before the board of commissioners turned over the affairs of government to the Manitowoc county board of supervisors, they divided our county into towns as required by law. They divided our county into four township units composed of the towns of Two Rivers, Manitowoc, Manitowoc Rapids, and Meemee.

From time to time, as various parts of the county developed and were settled, petitions were presented to the Manitowoc county board of supervisors, asking that certain tracts be set off and established as separate towns. By these steps, as recorded in the proceedings of the county board of supervisors, the number of towns increased to 18, the present number.

Townships Formed

The chronological order of establishment of the last 14 townships was as follows:

1850, Newton, Centerville and Maple Grove.

1851, Kossuth and Eaton. (In 1853 the name of Eaton was changed to Walders. In 1854 it was changed back to Eaton).

1852, Mishicot. (In May, 1853, the name Mishicot was changed to Saxonburg, but in November of the same year it was changed back to Mishicot).
1855, Schleswig and Franklin.

1856, Cooperstown and Rockland.

1857, Liberty (originally named Buchanan from 1857 to 1861), and Cato.

1858, Gibson.

1859, Two Creeks (originally named Rowley, changed to Two Creeks in 1861).

(Information above from Official Directory, Albert Tetzlaff, county clerk.)

The beginnings of actual settlement in Manitowoc county date from 1836, but events of the previous years are of importance in explaining the character of this settlement. Four villages, Manitowoc, Manitowoc Rapids, Two Rivers and Neshoto, sprang into being almost simultaneously. On May 6 President Jackson issued a proclamation for land sales to be held in Green Bay, earliest settlement in point of and that signified the opening of this entire area to settlement. The Manitowoc Land company was formed in Chicago in 1836 by the firm of Jones, King and company. Benjamin Jones, a leading member of this firm, was properly the founder of Manitowoc, since he took the Wisconsin property as his share, about 2,000 acres in extent. He sent a large number of men up to Manitowoc on a vessel, which arrived May 5. Their new surroundings were so formidable that only three men, E. L. Abbott, Mark Howard and Farnham remained all winter, busying themselves with the construction of a crude log cabin at the foot of what is now Seventh street, and in cutting timber. They awaited the arrival of their employer in spring. Mr. Jones rewarded his faithful employees with $100 apiece aside from their wages. Abbott remained in Manitowoc until 1856, and his marriage was the first to be performed in the county, but the other two men left shortly.
Early Pioneers

New settlers, 40 in number, arrived in April, 1837. Among these pioneers were O. C. Hubbard and D. S. Munger with their families. In July, Benjamin Jones arrived with his wife, son, Alonzo, and two daughters. He soon completed a home for his family at the corner of York and Seventh streets. All these new settlers rapidly accustomed themselves to the rigors of pioneer life and the new settlement was soon in prosperous condition. The first white child born in the county was the son of D. S. Munger.

The panic of 1837 left the small settlement at a standstill. In 1846 the first stock of groceries was brought to Manitowoc and a store was built at the site of the Smalley Manufacturing company. That year also marked the German influx into the small community.

Rapids First Settlement

Manitowoc Rapids was the time Eastern interests purchased hundreds of acres and built a mill. The first ship builder in the county was Captain J. V. Edwards of New Jersey, who was induced to remain and build the scows for transporting lumber from the Rapids into the bay for loading into other vessels. Other mills were built and the Rapids became the county seat. By 1850, however, the Rapids had been outdistanced by Manitowoc, which three years later became the county seat.

In Two Rivers, lumbering and fishing were the two principal industries. Lumber was plentiful with the hemlock forests practically inexhaustible. Fishing was carried on entirely by seines, but the catches were large and the business became very profitable.

Neshoto was founded eight miles from the mouth of the West Twin river where the water power was excellent. A mill was completed and operated by its first owners until 1841, when it was sold to Frederick Borcherdt, the first German settler in Manitowoc county, who continued its operation for seven years. Then he sold his mill and moved to Two Rivers.

The population of the whole county was 240 in 1840. A census showed there were only 11 horses and 80 meat cattle in the county and the aggregate of all crops raised was a few hundred bushels.

Preservation of Historical Materials

The Manitowoc County Historical society was incorporated in 1906 by Emil Baensch, Dr. W. G. Kemper, Ralph Plumb, John Schuette, J. S. Anderson, and Fred Christiansen of Manitowoc; H. P. Hamilton and W. F. Nash of Two Rivers; and Dr. Louis Faige of Reedsville. It was organized for historical and literary purposes, and especially for the purpose of discovery and collection and preservation and publication of historical data and records. All of the incorporators with the exception of Mr. Plumb and Mr. Christiansen are deceased. The society used the second floor rooms of the public library for a meeting place until the Rahr Civic Center was obtained for the city of Manitowoc from the Rahr family through the efforts of J. G. Johnson, Ralph Plumb, Judge Albert Schmidt, and Harry Kelley. The museum sponsored by the organization was not begun until about 1925. The first historical exhibits were on display in the south room of the second floor of the public library.

Houses 5,000 Items

The Rahr Civic Center, located at Park and Eighth streets, Manitowoc, was accepted by the society in 1941. It now houses over 5,000 items of historical
value. The marine exhibits is one of the outstanding ones in the state and nation, showing marine history of this region for the last century. The four floors of the museum have fine exhibits, well-catalogued and displayed. The city and county of Manitowoc provide funds for its maintenance.

The society promoted the Manitowoc city Centennial in 1936, and the 100th anniversary of shipbuilding and malting in this city in 1947. Historical spots throughout the county have been duly marked by this and other organizations. There are six of such historical monuments in the county, one in Two Rivers, and 23 in Manitowoc. Pictures and histories of these markers are on file at the museum. The present historical society officers are from leading communities throughout Manitowoc county.

**Historical Markers, Sites**

The Soldiers and Sailors memorial was erected in 1923 through general subscription to commemorate the services of the soldiers and sailors of World War I. It is located on North 18th street opposite Evergreen cemetery.

The Solomon brothers memorial was placed on the northeast corner of the courthouse lawn. It was erected by the people of Manitowoc and the Solomon unit of Steuben society in memory of the four Solomon brothers who distinguished themselves in the Civil War. 1927

The William Rahr marker, located at the east end of Hamilton street. Manitowoc was erected by the Knights of Pythias in memory of William Rahr, "our city's benefactor."

The Henry Stoze memorial is located at the south end of South Seventh street on the public utility grounds. It is a boulder placed there by the Knights of Pythias in memory of a "mayor of accomplishments."

Another boulder memorial erected by the Knights of Pythias is located in Riverview park at the west end of St. Clair street. It was placed there in memory of John Schuette, the donor of Riverview park.

Kiler K. Jones, who founded the first public library in Manitowoc in 1868, has a marker placed in his honor on the north side of York street, between Sixth and Seventh streets. It was erected by the Knights of Pythias.

A flag staff and concrete base were erected by the Veterans of Foreign Wars in 1923, "For Our Flag." It is located on Westfield, South 16th street, between Clark and Wollmer streets.

**Other Markers**

Another flag staff on a concrete base located at the north end of Lincoln boulevard, at the entrance to Lincoln park, was presented by the four units of local I.O.O.F. lodges in 1927. It seems to mark no particular spot or event.

A marine anchor and chain and pilot house wheel on a stone base are located at the south entrance of Lincoln park. It is in memory of the Manitowoc shipbuilding industry and dedicated to W. E. Elliot, a life member of B.P.O.E. No. 987. It was erected by the Manitowoc Elks lodge.

The Henry Vits memorial was presented by local I.O.O.F. No. 55. It is a large stone memorial to Henry Vits. "Who so lived as to enrich our community as an educator and industrialist." It is located in Washington park, 12th street side. Manitowoc.

"To the men and women who offered their lives for the freedom of mankind in the World
War of 1914-1918.” That is the inscription on a cut stone base erected and presented by the American Legion auxiliary and located on 25th street, north end of Riverview addition, Manitowoc.

The John Nagle monument in honor of the county’s great educator, philosopher and editor, was presented by the rural teachers who taught under him, as well as by his friends. It is located on the County Normal school grounds on Michigan avenue.

The Pulaski square memorial is located in Pulaski square, corner 17th and Columbus streets, Manitowoc. It is a large stone monument erected in honor of Brig. Gen. Casimir Pulaski, the brave and famous Polish leader who was mortally wounded in the Revolutionary war.

The Riverview arch located at the entrance of Riverview park on North Water street, was donated by John Schuette and has the following inscription: Riverview, 1909, Manitowoc, the Copper City. Settled in 1837—Village 1851—City 1871.

A bronze tablet placed at the entrance to the Elks club building, South Eighth street, Manitowoc, is a memorial tablet to the boys who served in World War I. It was presented by the Wisconsin Elks association, August 16, 1934.

The Women’s Relief corps in 1934 placed a monument in Evergreen park in memory of the G.A.R., the H. M. Walker post.

A George Washington tree was planted by the Manitowoc chapter of D.A.R. to commemorate the bicentennial of Washington’s birth. The tree was planted at the west end of Waldo boulevard in 1932.

The Old Military Road marker, erected by the D.A.R. chapter in 1932, is located at the west end of Waldo boulevard.

The American Legion planted a tree in memory of their fallen comrades of World War I. The tree is growing beside the Solomon brothers monument, Eighth and Washington streets.

Another tree was planted and a small tablet of stone placed beside it by the auxiliary of the National Women’s Relief corps, at the northwest corner of the courthouse lawn in 1939.

Chief Mexico’s monument is located at Manitowoc Rapids. It was dedicated August 8, 1909, and erected through the efforts of the historical society.

Monument to Chief Mexico
In Manitowoc Rapids

The Jambo Creek memorial was erected to mark the spot of the first trading post in our county. It is located on the Jambo Creek school grounds and was erected in 1922 by the society.

Soldiers Monument

Soldier’s monument in Two Rivers is now located in the Washington park. It was erect-
ed in 1900 in memory of those who fought in the Civil war.

Manitowoc county’s Liberty pole was first erected in 1852 by Nickolas Dittmar. It was moved from its first location in the road to a roadside park in 1937. It is to be found at the junction of highway 149 and county trunk M, Meeme.

The Fred Carus memorial, a bronze tablet, is placed on an enclosure erected at Camp Sinawa protecting the camp’s water supply. A plaque to his memory is placed on one of the game pens in Lincoln park.

A landing marker was erected at the foot of North Seventh street to commemorate the landing of the first settlers in Manitowoc on May 5, 1836.

A Benjamin Jones plaque is placed on the Washington park band stand, Manitowoc. It was placed there because of his gift of the park to Manitowoc. Another tablet honoring him is found on the band stand in Union park as he also gave this park to the community.

A stone marker at the location of the first courthouse is to be found on County hill in Rapids.