

THE GEOGRAPHY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The five counties* with which this bulletin deals can scarcely be regarded as forming a natural or geographic unit. The three counties, Milwaukee, Racine, and Kenosha, owe much of their industrial eminence to two geographical advantages which they possess in common, namely, their frontage on Lake Michigan and their nearness to Chicago. All five of the counties lie in the Chicago industrial district, and this gives them a degree of economic unity.

XX The most influential factor in the industrial development of Wisconsin has been its frontage on Lake Michigan. Along this water front the most important group of cities in the state has grown up. From these cities the chief lines of transportation have been built into the interior, and so the lake ports became the commercial gateways of the state.

During the first quarter century of Wisconsin's statehood, the region for 100 miles inland from the lake was very closely connected in a business way with these lake shore cities. Nearly all of the main highways and railways led to them; one road (C. & N. W.), in the Rock River Valley, led to Chicago, but the others terminated at Wisconsin ports. For many years, wheat, wool, lead, and other products were hauled by teams scores of miles from the interior to markets on the shore of Lake Michigan; and lumber, shingles, salt, machinery, and general merchandise were hauled back.

From the beginning, Waukesha County has been closely linked up with Milwaukee; and Walworth County, for a long time, was directly tributary to Milwaukee, Racine, and Kenosha. The only early railroad line traversing any consider-

* Milwaukee, Kenosha, Racine, Walworth and Waukesha.

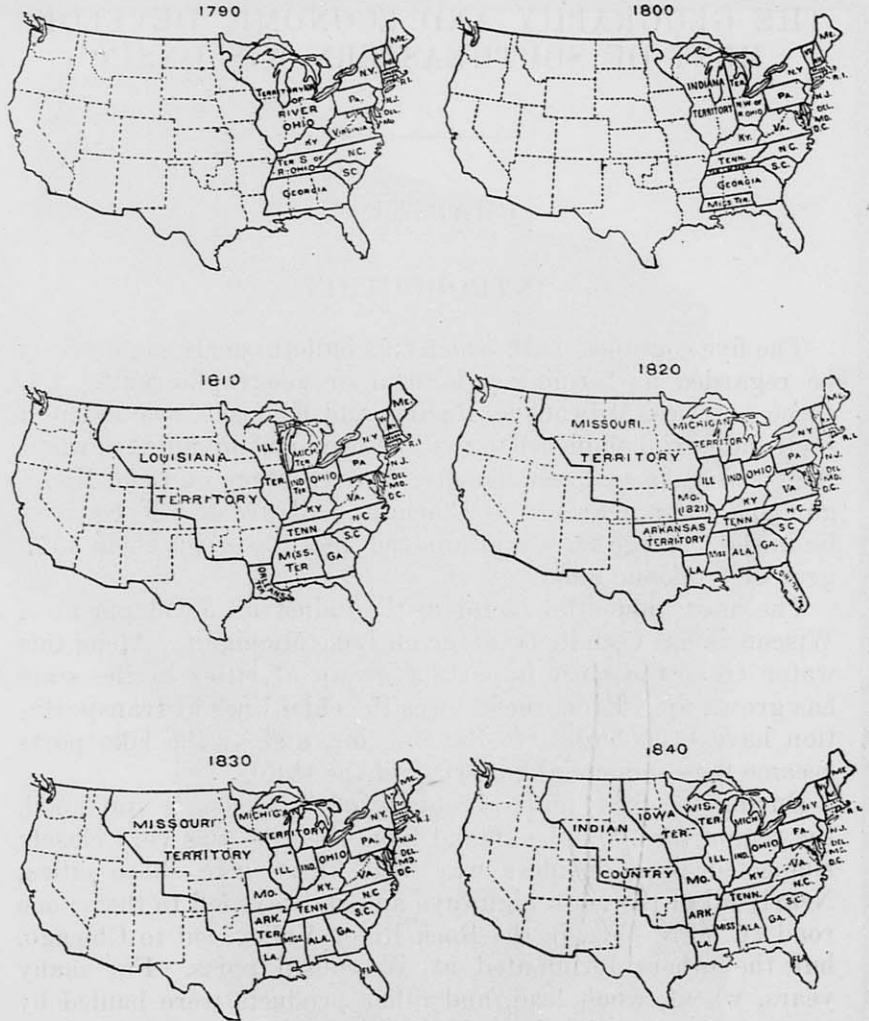


Fig. 2—The United States at different periods. In 1790 Wisconsin was in the Territory N. W. of the Ohio; in 1800 it was a part of Indiana Territory; in 1810 a part of Illinois Territory; in 1820 and 1830 a part of Michigan Territory; in 1836 Wisconsin Territory was organized and it then embraced Iowa and the Northwest Territory. In 1848 Wisconsin became a state with practically its present boundaries.

able part of Walworth County had its eastern terminus at Racine. It is true therefore that, although the five counties may not form a natural unit, they are all closely linked together and have been, from their first settlement, notably interdependent.

A second geographic factor making for economic unity has been the fact that the region is plain-like in character. No deep valleys, separated by steep divides, have interposed barriers. Therefore roads and railroads have been readily extended in any direction that their builders deemed expedient. The wide stretches of level or gently rolling land have made agriculture attractive and profitable. The dominantly clay

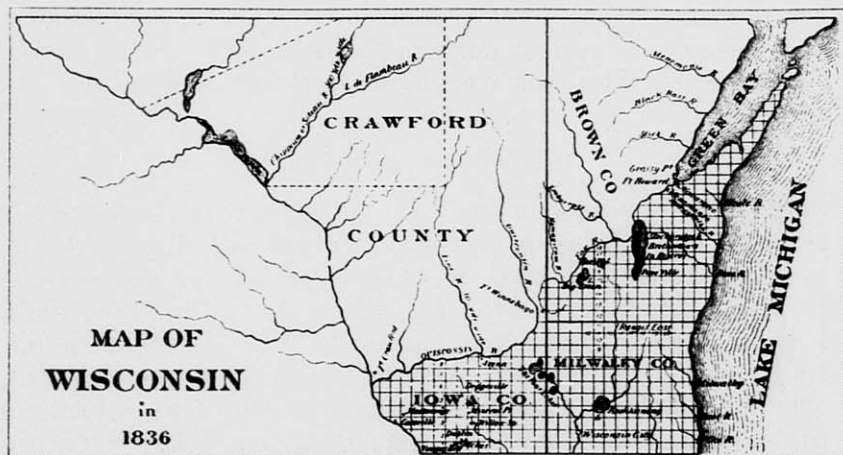


Fig. 3.

loam soils and the summer rainfall have combined to make dairy farming successful. The absence of any large amount of waterpower tended to limit manufacturing to steam-driven machinery; this limitation, in time, caused the notable concentration of industries on the lake shore, where coal is cheapest. Consequently manufacturing was handicapped in towns away from the lake. More than 90 per cent of the manufacturing done in the five counties is done in three lake shore cities—Milwaukee, Racine, and Kenosha.

Lake transportation is still of importance to Milwaukee because it gives the city cheaper coal. It is also a large factor in making Milwaukee an important grain market; yet the industries of the city have gained such a momentum that they would, in all probability, continue to grow with little if any abatement even without the advantage of lake transportation.

Racine still makes use of the lake to a certain extent, but lake transportation is a minor factor in the business life of the city. In the case of Kenosha it is a still smaller factor. Of the seven cities* which are not on the lake shore and are not immediate suburbs of Milwaukee, only Waukesha—which has excellent railway facilities—is having a noteworthy industrial growth. Many of the villages are smaller than they were a generation ago, and the rural population is scarcely holding its own.

* Burlington, Delavan, Elkhorn, Lake Geneva, Oconomowoc, Whitewater, and Waukesha.