“...Spirit of La Crosse does more than satisfy my curious interest. The authors present a concise and descriptive reference of noteworthy city events, which readers will appreciate. The chapters are well-written and easy to read, with useful information unfolding in an entertaining way.”

—Lorraine Severson
Farmwife and Consumer

“I came to La Crosse as a ten-year-old in 1932, when the city had streetcars, milk stations, corner groceries and icehouses, all of which have since disappeared. I’ve watched the city change and mature. This book covers many of these changes and will be good reading for old-timers and newcomers, as well as visitors. I’ve always been proud to say that La Crosse is my hometown.”

—Herb Arenz, Army Veteran, Retired Salesman and Military Historian

"Spirit of La Crosse is a grassroots effort to tell the story of this city’s past through words and pictures. Nathan Myrick’s landing at Barron’s Island in 1841 sets the stage, and other chapters offer new looks at subjects like La Crosse’s aviation, sports, communications, social services, minorities, the military, and religious life, plus covering standard subjects like government, economy, education, and the arts. Also, contributor-city officials offer insight into La Crosse’s future in the 21st century.”

—Anita Taylor Doering
La Crosse Public Library Archivist

The adult Writing for Publication and Photography students David J. Marcou taught for Western Wisconsin Technical College in 2000 contributed much of the writing and some of the photos to this book. More than a dozen community experts and officials also contributed. Included are chapters by two La Crosse mayors, the city planner, a police officer, other government officials, librarians, teachers, nurses, a minister-publisher, a priest, a journalist, a banker, an engineer, retail clerks, entrepreneurs, artists, singers/musicians, and many world travelers. With the aid of historical and contemporary photographs and community support generally, these authors have told La Crosse’s story, at the turn of the millennium, in a complex, generally complete way for the first time in the city’s history.
Front Cover:
Background: Main Street at Third Street looking east at Christmas-time, circa 1930.
(Courtesy La Crosse County Historical Society)
Center: Elmer Petersen’s lacrosse players statue at western edge of Main Street, 2000.
(By David J. Marcou)

Back Cover:
Top: Vocational School co-eds circa 1942, when Commonweal and Reader’s Digest ran “A City That Goes to School.”
(Courtesy WWTC)
Middle: City Police Chief Edward Kondracki carrying the Olympic Torch, en route to Atlanta, 1996.
(By Matthew A. Marcou)
Bottom: Graduate Chai Yang and siblings after Central High School graduation ceremonies, circa 1995.
(By David J. Marcou)

Inside Cover: A 1939 aerial view of downtown La Crosse, looking east from the riverfront. Many buildings have since been razed.
(Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)
Spirit of La Crosse

A Grassroots History
Project Director and Editor: David Joseph Marcou

SECOND EDITION
To all the past, present and future residents of
and visitors to La Crosse, Wisconsin,
as well as to all the historians, journalists, photographers,
teachers, students, entrepreneurs, medical personnel,
coaches, athletes, entertainers,
government officials, readers and religious,
and all those brick-and-mortar citizens
who have made and will continue to make
the study of our city so rewarding —
may this book redound to all our credit.
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**FOREWORD**

*By Former Mayor Patrick Zielke*

When Nathan Myrick built his cabin and trading post at Prairie La Crosse in 1841, he did not dream that some day there would be a city as we know it today. Success came thanks to what God and Mother Nature gave us, along with the hard work and desire to build a city where the early settlers and those who followed wanted to raise their families and make a living. The three rivers and the open prairie nestled below the bluffs was a natural and beautiful spot to call home.

Early on, the population was predominantly German and Norwegian, with a mixture of Irish, Italian, and French. Since then, we have seen a wide variety of nationalities arriving in our city, the latest being the Hmong, along with other Asians, and African-Americans. We are represented by almost every country. The Native Americans who were here when we white Europeans arrived melded into our community.

In 1975 a federal grant commissioned the Kansas Institute to evaluate the 243 standard metropolitan areas in the United States. La Crosse was named the number one small city in the nation, with a quality of life second to none. This award was not solicited, nor were we aware of its making, which made it even more pleasing.

Quality of life includes ample public parks (nearly 2,000 acres) with playgrounds spaced throughout the city. We have award-winning housing for the elderly and low-income housing, a first-class library system, and the arts are alive and well. Thankfully our leaders have provided our city with the best police and fire departments available, and maintained an infrastructure of sewers, water mains and streets to accommodate our citizens and visitors.
La Crosse has clean government, which strives to keep property taxes within reasonable limits. The City and County of La Crosse share the governing tasks of their specific areas, and have worked well together over the years. La Crosse is one-half of the county population, therefore it made sense to turn the City health department over to the County, along with the 911 system that was created. Emergency government was another area in which border lines needed to be crossed.

The turn of the twentieth century is an excellent time to look back to see where we have been, as well as the opportunity to look ahead to see where we hope to be. The city of La Crosse has had a history of logging, lumbering, trading, steam-boating, and eventually manufacturing. In the mid-1970s, we had four Fortune 500 companies that originated here, as well as other large manufacturers. Today we see the city’s economy supplemented by medical, educational and financial institutions. We have added a new dimension, becoming a retail and distribution hub. Thanks to river, air, rail, and interstate highways, La Crosse has maintained a steady pattern of growth. We have always been strong and competitive because of our proximity to large markets. Today’s emphasis has expanded to include tourism and entertainment to keep our area viable and versatile.

One of our concerns has been the large number of tax-exempt properties, estimated to be about 50% of the city’s area. Of course, this puts a burden on the property taxpayer. Because of this, La Crosse has been firm about not providing our services to the surrounding towns without their agreeing to be annexed into our city. We have a definite need to expand our tax base to relieve the burden on homeowners. This has caused confrontations, and sometimes bitter feuds. But the policy of annexation for services has been successful.

In the last 40 years we have seen the most dramatic changes: the loss of Allis Chalmers, Auto-Lite and Northern Engraving. This was all painful, but because of the will of the people and the diverse economy, we kept from drowning in self-pity. The sales of the Trane Company, Heileman Brewery, Allied Signal, LaCrosse Footwear, Gateway Transportation, and Gateway Foods meant there were no longer high-profile, locally-owned companies in La Crosse. Fortunately many of these companies are still operating here.

To further add to our concerns, the Valley View Mall was slated to be built outside of La Crosse. This meant the major retailers would no longer be a part of La Crosse’s economic base. That initiated a bitter battle for annexation to keep major retailers, if not downtown, then at least within our borders.

We had a large, vacant piece of land along the riverfront called “Harbor View,” sometimes called “Gopher Race Track.” It was created by the Redevelopment Authority from an area along Front Street that the 1965 flood had made less than marginal. When it became known there would not be a shopping mall on the site,
the decision was made to build a Convention Center with a 10,000-seat auditorium. That and a Radisson Hotel, along with a Heileman’s headquarters and a parking ramp, created an area that spurred the revitalization of the central business district. This center is one of the hallmarks of La Crosse, not only for financial reasons but also for entertainment opportunities for citizens throughout the region.

Our downtown is alive and well with the building of two more parking ramps. First Bank agreed to build a 10-story office building in conjunction with one ramp. Combining business and parking in the same structure was a new idea, and it met with resistance. Once it was completed, it opened the door to new ways of doing things. These projects helped to encourage the improved utilization of valuable space downtown. This led to replacing a worn-out ramp with a new, larger one that has retail space on the first floor, public parking above it; and the top floors’ residential apartments. Now we have taxable property where only non-taxable once existed, as well as more shops that bring people into the central city. Progress was not limited to the central business district. Several thousand acres were annexed by the city. This allowed our residential areas to expand and increase our tax base.

We cannot forget what building the new airport terminal has meant: by improving our front door to visitors arriving in La Crosse, it has become self-paying. The terminal was funded with tax incremental funds from the newly created airport industrial park. We now have four industrial parks, adding to our pride and employment. The aim was to increase the number of small companies instead of worrying about the multi-thousand employee ones. Stability is what the leaders searched for and encouraged.

The late 1960s and early ’70s seemed to be a period of self-doubt, which lasted until the middle of the ’70s. No one knows if the forces that wanted to stop growth were behind this attitude. Some felt we should keep what we had for ourselves, and not let our area become overcrowded. They did not understand that growth would come all around us and end with the same land use. We could not exist as an island.

During the mid-1970s is when La Crosse moved from an anti-business, anti-labor, anti-progress stance to a pro-attitude. Just prior to those years, there seemed to be dissension and turf battles everywhere.

The City and County were at odds; the City and the school district were battling; and there were labor-management fights, as well. Somehow City Hall kept getting involved, and eventually cooler heads succeeded, and a team effort evolved. When everyone started working together, things were accomplished. Total harmony would be a misleading statement, but when the chips were down team spirit prevailed. The call went out: “Let’s work together.” It received a positive
response. This only happened when the leaders in government, business and labor took a firm position on the issues.

There were many individuals from all walks of life who were involved directly in making things happen. It was a tremendous lift to see both business and labor working with the city to accomplish our goals. The positive attitude of the Common Council should be given a great deal of credit for having the vision to see into the future. There is a positive attitude that helped to make it happen.

La Crosse has a bright future, and will always remain a city on the move, a well-balanced city that is both progressive and conservative. This is the reason for our success and quality of life. La Crosse has had its good years and bad years. But like Grandad’s Bluff, it remains solid as the rock that looks over our beautiful city. The flag waves proudly for all our citizens, as well as for our Number One City.
La Crosse, Wisconsin, was built on the banks of the Mississippi, Black and La Crosse rivers. Native Americans have long known the rivers’ value, calling the first the “Father of Waters.” Today’s community, which Nathan Myrick founded in 1841, continues to thrive, with its rivers still being key impetuses and dangers to its preservation. The three rivers give life, cleanse, and drive commerce; they can also destroy. But “Lucky Lindy” flew over our river city on one of his mail runs in the era when he piloted the “Spirit of St. Louis” across the Atlantic. And the likes of Buffalo Bill-crony Dr. Frank “White Beaver” Powell, film director Nick “Rebel Without a Cause” Ray, and one of the wives of Mike “60 Minutes” Wallace have come from this heartland community.

What makes La Crosse an even more remarkable river city, though, is the spirit, we might say the mystique, of its people and history. Now-retired Coach Roger Harring said about his final UW-La Crosse football team, which rebounded from its only losing season in 31 years (1998) to win yet another league title and pursue another national trophy in 1999: “The team had to learn the La Crosse mystique. It’s believing in yourself and believing in the things you want to accomplish.” That is what our city, and grassroots historical, team has tried to do: believe in ourselves and in what we want to accomplish.

In 1990, when I wasn’t a teacher, I thought to write a history of our city, solo, since nothing comprehensive had been done on it in years and I was still young. Many specialized La Crosse histories have been written over time (see Selected Bibliography). But the most thorough history was the Western Historical
Company’s *History of La Crosse County*. . . . , done in 1881; and Sanford and Hirshheimer’s key narrative, *A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin*, done in 1951, only covered to 1900. More needed to be done.

I needed backing and began teaching writing and photography for Western Wisconsin Technical College, did freelance journalism, and didn’t think much more of it until 1997, when one of my students, Jerry Severson, suggested my classes could write a history of this city. I told him I’d wanted to do that solo in 1990. We didn’t act on this revised idea until spring 1999, when Jerry (who has reminded me often that La Crosse, like St. Louis, was once called the Gateway City) announced that if I wasn’t going to start a local team-history, then the students might have to take matters into their own hands. I then began arranging assignments, and Charles D. Gelatt came to our financial aid.

D’Toqueville wrote, “The Americans of all ages, all conditions, all dispositions, constantly form associations.” Our association of volunteer chroniclers has a few experts and many brick-and-mortar Americans (see About the Authors). We hope, then, that we’ve read/interpreted signs fairly and accurately from our city’s past, via the news, histories, and our judgments about all sources, including non-historians. I’ve asked for true accounts from our city-team, and if we have not provided them here, it is my fault. I hope we have.

Historian John Lukacs says historical consciousness springs from the remembered past, and one of my best students once wrote that she often identifies with a Madeleine L’Engle character who feels her team is always fated to lose. But Packer legend Vince Lombardi’s mantra was St. Paul’s “Run to win,” which says a lot — as does the coach’s “Winning is a team thing.” My “glum” student may celebrate a win now, if we remember, and look ahead in a new millennium with the Spirit of La Crosse. Our entire team deserves this victory, springing from our city’s lively historical awareness.
In the beginning, the glacial cover of the Ice Age melted. Runoff of the watershed to the rivers and streams eroded the hills, forming the coulees, hills, exposed rocks, plains and sandy beaches. Fertile lands emerged whereupon trees and grasses grew. Moisture came in the form of rains, rivers, marshes, and creeks to irrigate the land for the well-being of man, animals, trees and plant life. There, in the midst of this naturally created glory, was the grass prairie (meadow) that would become “Prairie La Crosse,” then “Village” of La Crosse, and finally, “City” of La Crosse, Wisconsin.

Early man came to hunt mastodon, elk, buffalo, deer, bear and other animals. It was a productive land for people willing to work for the comfort, security and pleasure it would afford them. Early nomadic people gathered wild food plants; later generations learned to plant crops. Societies developed, seeking things those who came later also pursued: food, water, shelter, liberty, love, honor and happiness. They would fight to protect these things.

Trade flourished between settlements on lakes, rivers and creeks from the surrounding area. Games of competition were played on Prairie La Crosse with tribes from different cultures. Plains Indians, woodland and farming people, gathered here where the Black and La Crosse rivers converged into the Mississippi River, adding to its greatness.
Early white man contacts are not well-documented. Vikings could have been here in the 1100s; Phoenician traders may have been here before that. These ancient travelers explored the Rio Grande, Columbia, Ohio and Arkansas rivers. We can surmise that they would have explored upper Mississippi waterways as well. We know that a Frenchman, in 1688, designated the La Crosse area, “La Butte Hyvernement (The Hill Winter Camp) on the Rivière Noire (Black River). This Black River was called Chebadeba by the Indians. The region was claimed by the French in 1689. The prairie area was given the name lacrosse (the stick), a descriptive comment about the stick and ball games natives played here. These explorers developed a prosperous fur trade.

The future city of La Crosse was a natural place for generations of people to survive. These former residents worshiped the Great Spirit Creator God. Before that, we do not know the rules and authority they lived by to hold families and communities together.

Legends say burnt offerings were made on a pedestal rock formation on the top of the bluff south of where Gillette Street meets Highway 16 today. Sadly, this historic landmark, known as “Table Rock,” is only a memory. The flat sandstone rock, easily seen by travelers, was destroyed by vandals in the 1960s. Earlier cultures sought meaningful vision-dreams on the bluff ledges. Native Americans revered exposed rock cliffs as places where ancestor spirits dwelled and watched over them. Grandad’s Bluff and other rock outcroppings were considered sacred places.

These former inhabitants often buried their dead within sight, to have eye and thought contacts with those passed away. Some followed the custom of bringing back to the homeland those who had died elsewhere. Where the family had started and expanded from was the honor place for burial. They loved and honored their families in health, sickness and death. They were charitable, sharing fish, game and crops with those in need.

These were proud people. With care, they used skills of craft to make personal things decorated with ornaments and meaningful trinkets. There were dedicated people of vocations to help them. Holy men and women provided counsel and guidance for personal and spiritual well-being. Men and women with herbal knowledge provided medicinal practices to aid in sickness and injury.

Gatherings and celebrations were held. Legends say a steep, tier-sided draw near Table Rock was an amphitheater, where speeches and ceremonies were held. They had gifted orators and leadership was respected; elders were valued for their wisdom and knowledge. Education was family-oriented, with help from aunts and uncles teaching nieces and nephews the skills for living. In this way, talents were identified and individual potential was developed for the good of families and community.
White men eventually came through the La Butte Hyvernement area to explore. In 1654 Pierre Esprit Radisson explored the Mississippi River, perhaps camping here. Daniel Greysolon, Sieur Duluth, explored the Black River Valley from 1679-1689. His operating base would likely have been Prairie La Crosse. In 1695, Pierre Charles La Sieur came with 17 French miners to develop the silver mine he felt surely was somewhere in the Black River watershed. The miners were killed by Indians, and silver was never found.

The prairie was unsettled except for Winnebago Indians, who lived in domed shelters covered with tree bark or skins, called wigwams. There was not enough security for settlement by white people. The nearest fort was the French St. Nicolas in Prairie du Chien, later named Fort Crawford by the British. The French controlled the fur trade until after the French and Indian War, 1754-60. The British, by treaty, took the area in 1763 and held it until 1816. Two wars were fought during this time, the American Revolution, 1775-83, and the War of 1812.

Americans took control after the War of 1812, a major change for Native Indians. French and British had both claimed the territory and controlled the trade. They traded guns, powder, shot, beads, knives, needles, belts, blankets, cloth and whiskey for furs of bear, deer, wolf, muskrat, otter, mink, and beaver, taking the pelts back to Europe. This trade was carried out by French “voyageurs,” men hired by French and British to carry 90-pound packs over portages. They were happy, singing, hardy men who lived to have fun. The food supplied to them each day was two hands full of corn with grease on it. Life was treacherous: if a man fell and broke a leg, he was left behind by his companions with a few meals of corn to fend for himself.

These traders used Native American birch-bark canoes for transportation, and designed larger ones for hauling the goods of their bustling business. Cargo canoes were 25-footers, capable of carrying 3,000 pounds of supplies, paddled by four to eight voyageurs. Prairie La Crosse was a place where furs and supplies were accumulated for distribution and shipment down to Fort Crawford on the way to the trade centers at Montreal and Quebec, Canada.

Americans came, claimed the territory, took over the land and the fur trade. Conflicts between these new border people and Native Americans were inevitable. Native Americans lost their land to military power. Also, white men continually moved through the area to cut the huge pine trees along the banks of the Black River, and some started farming the meadows. At first Prairie La Crosse was not considered the best area to acquire wealth. The pineries near Black River Falls developed first. Lumbermen started from Fort Crawford in 1818, traveling north by canoe and by sled on frozen rivers in winter. Timber was cut and floated down the Black River to established sawmills at Black River Falls, and later at La Crosse.
A group of settlers came to Prairie La Crosse in 1839. They built a 5-by-60-foot flatboat (keelboat) and loaded it with 10 tons of supplies for the trip up the Black River to the pineries. Natural resources, such as furs and pine trees, were depleted. Growth was set back by natural disasters. Storms and floods on several occasions caused damage to properties and progress. These events were taken in stride by people working to rebuild and move on.

Harmony of the four seasons of beauty is still being transmitted to the people, who, in appreciation, try to live and form a harmonious society. Environmental beauty is adored. Individuals and governments have been improving the image and culture since the city was established. Continuous effort is made to preserve natural places for public enjoyment.

Natural areas remain an important aspect of La Crosse to its residents. Early residential developments included areas called public squares, which were green areas set aside for the enjoyment of all. Cameron and Burns parks are two such squares. Myrick Park, first called Lake Park, is a large area that was once used as the fairgrounds. It was eventually purchased by private citizens and given to the City in the late nineteenth century. Pettibone Park was not developed by the City but by A.W. Pettibone, and it was given to the City in 1901. Other public parks developed in the twentieth century include Copeland, Riverside, Grandad's Bluff, Hixon Forest Nature Center, and the La Crosse Marsh trails. These areas are part of the greatness of the friendly community.

May it always be so — La Crosse people will meet in friendship, having and showing appreciation, gratitude, and respect for those past, present and yet to be, as visitors or residents.
The Founding of La Crosse

By Sean Niestrath

In 1853, La Crosse was a bustling community of 745 residents. The New York Tribune reported, “La Crosse must figure as the second city of Wisconsin,” even though La Crosse wasn’t officially a city yet. The same article said its one drawback was that Chicago was too far away from La Crosse. How this city came into being is a long and involved story. We will try to encapsulate the essence of its core in this chapter.

On November 4, 1841, 19-year-old Nathan Myrick and a new acquaintance of his, Eben Weld, loaded up a borrowed government keelboat in Prairie du Chien and headed up the Mississippi River. Young Myrick spent all but his last dime on supplies and food. Mormons from Nauvoo, Illinois, arranged to transport him and his goods to Prairie La Crosse. Weld had recommended this locale because it was a gathering place for Indians. It was customary for traders and trappers to carry supplies into the wilderness in late autumn and trade during the winter months, when furs were in peak condition. In spring, around May, they would converge on various outposts so the goods could be transported back east and to Europe.

Prairie du Chien had been inhabited since 1685 by French traders. Its location at the confluence of the Mississippi and Wisconsin Rivers made it an important post. From here, goods could be shipped to New Orleans via the Mississippi or to Ft. Mackinac via the Wisconsin and Fox Rivers. There had been discussion of a permanent settlement at Prairie La Crosse, but as of 1841 it had not happened. The prairie was so named because the French had observed an Indian game that
they called lacrosse. This is the name which would later be given to the town. At the suggestion of the first postmaster, Nathan Myrick, “Prairie” was dropped from the name and it was then known as La Crosse.

In a later account, a missionary, Rev. Alfred Busnon, described the game when he visited the place in 1837: “This was a gambling game, in which they often staked all they had, and one-half of them, of course, lost their stake, and if not fortunate in another contest, left the scene of their folly poor and pennyless [sic]. The game was played with a ball, thrown by a stick some four feet [long], to which is attached a bag of network made of strong thongs of some kind of skin. The parties start at a center post. The ball is thrown into the air as perpendicularly as possible against the opposite party. This ball is caught up and thrown back and forth, and the victors are those who drive it eventually by the center post on to the side of their opponents. It is a very exciting sport, and many get an unlucky blow, sometimes from friends, and sometimes from foes; but as no one is supposed to design it, no offense is given or insult imagined.”

Nathan and Eben arrived at the prairie and discovered there was not enough timber accessible to build a dwelling. Instead they decided to set up shop on the opposite shore on an area called Barron’s Island. There was plenty of timber, and they had harvested enough by February of 1842 to sled it across the river to set up the first permanent settlement on Prairie La Crosse.

Myrick wrote in his diary: “At the time of our arrival there was not a man, either white or Indian, in sight, or in the vicinity of prairie la crosse. The Indians had all gone to the Turkey River Agency to draw their money and supplies. There was not a habitation of any kind about the place . . . . We put up our cabin, and after waiting perhaps ten days the Indians returned with plenty of money, and we had a pretty good trade.”

If the arrival was somewhat mundane, the time spent there was punctuated with some tense moments. One that is recorded involved an Indian who became belligerent and eventually started shooting at Myrick and Weld. The shooting attracted others; one of them was a man of French-Indian stock whom Nathan had met only a couple of weeks before while traveling to Prairie du Chien. It was this man, Alexis Bailey, who relieved the tension and restored peace to a situation that was lengthening the odds of Nathan seeing the sunset.

During the winter Harmon J.B. “Scoots” Miller joined the party and became partners with Myrick, and Eben Weld apparently left the partnership and the area. La Crosse’s founder was obliged to leave his business and house in the hands of Miller in the summer of 1843. In the spring of that year, Winnebago Chief Yellow Thunder offered one of his daughters to be Nathan’s wife. Nathan politely refused the offer, claiming he had a wife waiting for him in the land of his birth, and that it was not customary for white men to have more than one wife. Having explained
himself, it was time to produce a wife from New York, where his adventure had started two years earlier.

He did indeed go back to New York and returned with his bride, Rebecca Ismon Myrick. As it turned out, he brought back a wife for Miller as well, Miss Louisa Pierson, a relative of a prominent lumber dealer in Illinois. “Scoots” was later appointed the first judge of La Crosse and was known after that simply as “Judge.” The first child in La Crosse was born to the Myricks, but he died in infancy in the fall of 1845. The next child born was to the Millers. Martha Miller grew up in La Crosse and later moved to Illinois.

In September 1843 a large number of Mormon families camped at Front Street until they settled in what is now Mormon Coulee. There was throughout the west at that time a great opposition to the “experiment of Joseph and Hyram Smith.” In a history written in 1881, their failure to convert people was because “... the people in the West, at this time, were hardly prepared to embrace a creed the cornerstone of which was laid in superstition and immorality.” The Mormons left after only a short time to eventually settle in Utah, but the name Mormon Coulee remained as part of their legacy to La Crosse’s history.

In 1848 the U.S. government decided to remove the Indians from the area. Generally, this was a peaceful event, although it did have a few difficulties. A history written in the 1800s gives us some flavor of the feeling and attitude of the white people. The decision “... was not accepted with a spirit of resignation or willingness to accept the situation.” The meeting that settled the issue took place at the home of John M. Levy. There was much tension in the settlement that day. The Indian removal took place from 1849 to 1850. This left the area “safe” for European settlers, and from this point the town grew more rapidly.

Nathan Myrick’s stay in La Crosse was not long-lived. In fact, he left before the first official survey of the city was made in 1851, by William Hood, under the direction of Lt. Governor Burns. He apparently left for financial reasons. He and Miller had made a substantial investment in logs, booms, and other timber-related goods on the Black River in 1847. A flash flood, perhaps caused by heavy rains and a sudden thaw, swept away the men’s investment. Myrick left for St. Paul in 1848, where he was to spend the rest of his life. Half of the land that Myrick had was deeded to Miller in 1848, and the other half was sold to Lt. Governor Timothy Burns in 1851. Burns later deeded a quarter of the city back to Myrick. This land was subsequently donated to the city, and the struggling village of La Crosse had been born.
Nineteenth Century Economy: A Trading Post Grows

By Gordon Hampel

In addition to being the founder of La Crosse, Nathan Myrick was also its first capitalist. Myrick arrived from New York to establish what he hoped would become a successful fur trading post at the confluence of three rivers — the Mississippi, Black and La Crosse. He and his partner, H.J.B. “Scoots” Miller, collected furs from Native Americans and in return gave them beads, guns, liquor and other goods.

Also in 1841, a small group of Mormons began lumbering in the La Crosse area. By 1848, a dozen lumber mills had appeared along the Black River, three owned by La Crosse businessmen — the beginning of an industry that thrived here until the close of the nineteenth century. Myrick and Miller floated the first rafts of logs down the Mississippi to St. Louis, Missouri, in 1844. The first buildings in what is now downtown La Crosse were raised by Miller, who also became first justice of the peace and later, judge. Myrick’s and Miller’s wives were the first white women to settle here.

John Levy, a prominent businessman who came to La Crosse in 1845 with wife Fredericka and son Willie erected the first frame building, a trading post and inn at the corner of Front and Main Street. Land claims were registered at the U.S. Land Office at Mineral Point. First claimants included Nathan Myrick, Asa White, Peter Cameron, John Levy and Samuel Snaugh. Cost of land was $1.25 per acre in 1848. The Land Office for the La Crosse area moved to town in 1854.

M. Manville opened the first hardware and tinshop in La Crosse in 1850. The Post Office, with Nathan Myrick as first postmaster, was established in 1846.
Myrick was followed by Major E.A.C. Hatch in 1847, then Scoots Miller in 1850. From 1850 to 1851, the total amount of mail revenue collected was $71.50. Simeon Kellogg was postmaster after Miller; he counted 15 letters in his first mail delivery. Founder Myrick moved to St. Paul in 1848.

Timothy Burns came to La Crosse in 1850 from Mineral Point, became involved in politics, purchased much land, and became lieutenant-governor of Wisconsin. His settlement here attracted attention and followers, so that he was known as the second founder of La Crosse. He died in 1853 at age 33.

La Crosse became known as the Gateway City because it was a stopping point for stagecoaches and wagon trains in and prior to 1850. In 1851, La Crosse County was established by an act of the Wisconsin Legislature. Rev. Spencer Carr wrote a booklet published in 1854 about the village of La Crosse. In it, Carr gave a summary of La Crosse businesses. The list included 104 dwellings; five fancy and dry goods stores; four groceries; two drug and medicine stores; two boot and shoe stores; two hardware stores; two tinshops; three shoe shops; one harness shop; four blacksmith shops; one gun shop; two bakeries; one cabinet shop; three doctor’s offices; four law offices; one justice’s office; five taverns; one barber shop; one printing shop; four joiner’s shops; one steam sawmill; one wagon shop; one jeweler and silversmith’s shop; and one mantas and milliner shop. Carr added to the list one office for the sale of government lands; one Odd Fellows hall; one courthouse and jail; and two meeting houses, mainly used as churches.

For nine years after the start of the settlement, both population and business in La Crosse were nearly stagnant. Then, in 1850 and 1851, settlers came with a rush, building up business and industry. Also, the people of La Crosse voted in 1851 for a banking law, which was enacted in 1852. This was the start of real banking in La Crosse.

Mons Anderson came to La Crosse from Norway. Known as the “Merchant Prince,” he established a large retail dry goods and clothing store at Second and Main Street. The establishment became headquarters for Anderson’s “Lion” brand clothing. Still later, it became the Master Clothing Company.

In 1856 La Crosse was incorporated as a city, with a mayor-council form of government. From 1852 to 1858, the La Crosse and Milwaukee Railroad was organized through the efforts of Thomas B. Stoddard, A.D. LaDue, and Timothy Burns. In 1858 this railroad came to La Crosse for the first time. Census figures then showed that there were 745 persons, 301 families living in La Crosse.

John Gund started his first brewery in La Crosse in 1853. It later merged with G. Heileman to form City Brewery. The partnership was dissolved in 1871 and the facility became G. Heileman Brewery the following year.

Abner Gile came to La Crosse and made a fortune in lumbering and other businesses. He built the mansion known as “Pasadena” in La Crosse in 1855. The
first stone mansion, built at Fourth and Cass Street, became Mons Anderson’s home. That year about 40 million linear feet of logs were cut along the Black River; the next year steamboat traffic averaged more than 200 boats a month stopping here.

Around that time, John Levy’s Bank of the City of La Crosse merged with the Katanyan Bank, with total capital of $50,000. The nationwide Panic of 1857 did not affect La Crosse as much as eastern banks.

The first telegraph office was established here in 1858, and the La Crosse Board of Trade was organized to further business interests in the city, later becoming the Greater La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce.

In the 1850s, population showed real growth. The adventurous newcomers were of a different type. Investing money for the purchase of land or advancing loans for its purchase by others, merchandising, and a free field for professional careers all appealed to them. These people required a settled home life, the familiar setting of school, church, government, well-ordered business practices, and the means for social enjoyment. Life in La Crosse began to take on, in its second decade, a more varied, complicated form of the type usually found in older communities.

Banks formed during the next two decades included Batavian in 1861; National in 1876; State in 1879; Exchange (on the Northside) in 1884; and Security in 1884. Batavian National opened with G. Van Steenwyk as president. This today is the U.S. Bank of La Crosse.

It is noteworthy that in 1862, beef was seven cents a pound; eggs 12 cents a dozen; flour $3 a barrel; and apples $1 a barrel. After the first shock of secession and the outbreak of the Civil War (1861-65) passed, business in La Crosse became lively, due in part to war demand for commodities. The local Democrat of November 18, 1862, stated, “The growth of our city this season is surprisingly large and very gratifying, since the first of April (1862) over two-hundred buildings of various kinds have been erected.” Building was still active the following year.

The Civil War did not wholly dominate the local scene; business continued, and although efforts were made to improve, there was also evidence of crude and backward conditions. Horse manure still was piled high on city streets and sewage disposal was a real problem.

In 1865, the La Crosse Plow Company was started by Albert Hirshheimer. It was the most important business in the city for many years. The same year, the Chicago Burlington & Quincy Railroad came through this city on its way to Prescott, Minn. John A. Salzer started his seed company in 1868. It became one of the largest seed distributors in the United States. Also, the first boatyard was established at the foot of Main Street. It built, repaired and sold boats. In 1867, Segelke Kohlhaus was organized. They made window sashes, doors and other millwork. Destroyed by fire in 1897, the complex was rebuilt in 1900.
In 1871, the Northside of La Crosse was annexed by the Southside. Wooden sidewalks were constructed on State Street from South to Seventh Streets. Torrance & Sons Foundry & Stove Manufactory was begun in 1876 and made stoves, iron work, and steel for buildings. Then, the first train of the Chicago, Northwestern Railroad came to town. Also, the La Crosse Rubber Mills was founded in 1879.

From 1890 to 1900, the city’s population increased to 28,800, with lumber still the first-ranking industry; flour milling was second; beer brewing third; agricultural implements fourth. By 1890, the lumbering industry seriously declined because of indiscriminate cutting. The average year’s cut of 178 million linear feet in 1890 fell to 40 million linear feet in 1903. In 1900 there were eight foundries and machine shops in the city. They employed 108 men. The four breweries in La Crosse — Gund, Heileman, Monitor and Bartl — helped to solve unemployment as the lumbering industry declined.

Twentieth Century Economy: From Manufacturing to Services

Gordon Hampel

The economic boom brought on by the rise of lumbering here followed a different path after 1900. The brewing, heavy industrial, and retail industries would pick up lumbering’s slack after the latter industry virtually folded here in 1906. As a result, key economic integers changed locally. In 1900, eggs cost 13 cents a dozen; by 1915 they cost 20 cents. In 1910, potatoes were 35 cents a bushel; coffee 20 cents a pound; a good quality man’s suit was $16, a cheap one $7; a woman’s tailor-made suit $10; and a man’s work shirt 29 cents. A worker could support his family of four on $400 a year in 1900 with the help of a larger summer garden and chickens and probably a cow in his yard. Also in 1900, the average annual earnings of an unskilled worker were $360 a year; by 1909, they were $460 a year. Skilled workers earned about $1,100 and unsalaried workers (office people) earned an average of $1,000 annually.

Around 1900, no local labor unions to speak of existed here, and there were no strikes. In the period from about 1880 to 1905, small craftsmen’s operations shifted completely to retailing, or they expanded their shops into factories with markets larger than the neighboring territory. After 1905, many medium-sized businesses folded or sold to larger ones. Surviving companies included La Crosse Breweries Corporation, G. Heileman Brewing Company; Segelke-Kohlhaus
Company; Voight Auto Shop; La Crosse Plow Works; La Crosse Boiler Company, Pamperin Cigar Company; Torrance & Son; Salzer Seed Company; and Franklin Iron Works.

Many industrial plants established before 1900 no longer existed due to mismanagement, centralization of industry nationally, and changes in consumer buying habits. Some grew and made it well into the twentieth century. They included the E. Hackner Company; Star Knitting Company; La Crosse Rubber Mills; Advance Bedding Company; and Badger Steel Roofing and Corrugating Company. From 1895 to 1905, total wages of La Crosse industrial labor increased. The total payroll of all local industries in 1895 was $2.6 million; in 1905, it was more than $4 million.

Several local businesses, such as the Packers Package Company, La Crosse Can Company, and the Wheel and Seeder Works, were absorbed by larger concerns and left the area. At the start of the twentieth century, La Crosse was in its third cycle, a new industrial La Crosse marked by a few large manufacturing units — the Trane Company (refrigeration); Motor-Meter Gauge & Equipment Company; Rubber Mills (footwear); Northern Engraving Company; and Allis-Chalmers Manufacturing Company. The lumber mills may have done much to sponsor the early growth of the city of La Crosse, but after 1906, it was up to new companies like those above to carry the economic load for the city.

In 1880, there had been 42 business telephone lines in La Crosse; in 1912, there were 4,098 phones in service in the city. Then, World War I (1914-19) brought discrimination and the flight of local people to bigger cities. Still, by 1927 (good economic times), there were 112 manufacturing concerns in La Crosse, with more than 6,000 employees. Manufactured goods were valued at about $23 million; 464 retail firms had annual total business of $6.5 million; 84 wholesale firms had annual business of about $5 million. Most employees worked a 60-hour week — 10-hour days for six days a week.

On October 29, 1929, the nation’s stock market crashed, ushering in the Great Depression. There were 97 manufacturing plants in La Crosse with 5,523 employees at that time. Manufactured goods were valued at $24.5 million, while wholesale business remained static. The Trane Company erected a new building at 16th and Bennett Street.

Allis-Chalmers of Milwaukee purchased the La Crosse Plow Company. Albert Hirshheimer must receive credit for the phenomenal growth of the agricultural implement industry in this area, from 1865 until his death in 1924; he was founder of the La Crosse Plow Company and one of the founders of the La Crosse Rubber Mills. Also a noted philanthropist, Hirshheimer was well-liked and known for his fairness in all matters and for his willingness to listen to all sides and opinions. He was especially admired by his employees. “The best of bosses,”
he formed the La Crosse Plow Company Mutual Relief Association long before such organizations became popular. It was composed of and operated by factory workers. In January 1975, the Wisconsin Genealogical Society conferred one of its rare Century Certificates on the Hirshheimer family for more than a hundred years of productive contributions to the state.

In 1930, the population of La Crosse was 39,614, and in 1940, 42,707. In 1932 there were about 1,500 unemployed people in La Crosse. Some 10,000 transients were cared for by social service agencies. Each transient had to register and remain in the city for a day. Police then escorted that person to the city limits. Meanwhile, a bank holiday was declared for 14 days, starting on March 6, 1933. Banks then reopened if okayed by inspectors.

During the Great Depression (1929-41), the Public Works Progress Administration (WPA) provided work for the unemployed here (street paving, construction of public parks and buildings, etc.). The WPA helped build an addition to the La Crosse Vocational School; the federal government paid 45% of the cost and the city paid the rest. Also, the city became involved in every phase of World War II (1941-45 for America), and defense contracts awarded to industrial plants greatly helped La Crosse’s economy.

Then in 1948, 1,000 industrial workers struck at the Trane Company’s four plants. They wanted and got six paid holidays and a 13-cent raise. Trane Company, Heileman Brewing, and Northern Engraving expanded their plants in 1949. (Trane Company still employs 3,000 people here; it is La Crosse’s largest private employer). In 1959, Electric Auto-Lite (Motor-Meter Gauge Company) closed its La Crosse plant; 1,200 workers lost their jobs.

At mid-century, the manufacture of automobile accessories, heating and cooling devices, agricultural implements, durable goods, and beer employed most of the 35% of the labor force engaged in manufacturing in La Crosse. During the middle and latter part of the twentieth century, heavy industry began to compete with and/or for service industry trade here. Everything from food supply companies to medical centers grew in importance. A recent survey showed that there were nearly twice as many people employed in the service industry here as in the next largest sector, government employees. Also, colleges and the tourism trade now play central roles in this river city’s economy.

As time has passed, specialized businesses and systems have been established. Tax Incremental Finance (TIF) districts have been set up in La Crosse by the City government to allow taxes collected from individual businesses to be plowed back into improvement in streets, sidewalks, parking, sewage and water systems, and lighting, within each business’s immediate area. Industrial parks and business incubators have also been built to perpetuate the growth of more diversified business districts. Redevelopment projects have gone ahead too, with the Valley View
Mall (which opened in 1980 on the far northeast side of the City), Harborview/Civic Center, and Downtown Mainstreet, Inc. being key projects and players in the 1990s.

In 1961, the Oktoberfest celebration was begun annually here. It is still popular and highly profitable to local businesses. Its main sponsor, Heileman’s, was sold by the Stroh family in 1999 to Platinum Holdings, Inc. of New York, led by Aquinas graduate Jim Strupp. Thus was City Brewery formed. With the influx of Hmong and other immigrant/minority groups, especially since the end of the Vietnam War (1975), new economic forces and parameters have evolved here. Today, La Crosse is the largest metro market between Madison and the Twin Cities. If the city’s economy remains healthy, it will continue to be part and parcel of a vibrant Coulee Region. Recently, the economy has become so rich that there are not enough workers to fill some job categories. The price of a healthy economy may not be unemployment, then, but rather discontent by some workers over specialized, lower-end jobs, which will have to use people who are not used to earning big wages — e.g., new immigrants or people who have been let go from higher-end jobs. Problems still need to be addressed for local and national economies to develop further.

La Crosse and the Great Depression, 1929-41

By Bridget Flood

The entire country suffered deprivation during the Depression years of 1929 through 1941. The economy crashed and as a result, Americans got used to doing more with less. People became more dependent on governmental services. New laws were passed to regulate banking, the stock market, business, and labor relations. Ray Bice was a La Crosse politician, writer and historian. He recalled, “By September 1929, almost all stocks were at an all-time high. . . . On October 24, 1929, a date later labeled Black Thursday, the stock market collapsed. . . . By 1932 almost half of our nation’s workers were jobless.” The people of La Crosse also suffered, although “the city was in a relatively good business area compared to most of the nation.” In fact, while there were signs of depression in La Crosse in 1930, the amount spent on building in La Crosse that year was higher than in 1929, though less was spent on residential building.

Headlines from the La Crosse Tribune and Leader Press from that infamous week in October were confusing. On Thursday, the day of the crash, the paper carried a large front-page article entitled, “Panic Averted on Wall Street — Selling
Moves Checked and Stocks Rally.” The headlines on October 25 said that the market had rallied on Friday and that banking interests threw their “. . . Power Into Market to Stabilize Price Levels.” Prominent bankers and even President Herbert Hoover gave assurances that American business was “. . . on a sound basis.” It wasn’t until October 31, 1929, that Tribune Leader Press readers saw the event referred to as a crash. Still, they were assured that the crash wouldn’t affect business. The economy in La Crosse did not crash in October 1929, but it slowly slid until it hit bottom in 1931-32.

During the Depression years, making do was a way of life for everyone — town people paid for what they could or bartered. Farm families generally paid their medical bills with produce. Carroll Gundersen, whose husband was a urologist, used their family garage as a receiving station for Gundersen Clinic. The medical profession got paid in potatoes and apples and turkeys. Dr. N. Phillip Anderson of Grandview Hospital also received payment in produce. His wife used the abundant food to feed the hungry; the Andersons’ daughter, Priscilla Dvorak, remembered there was a white X marked on the curb: this house was a place to get a meal.

Across the United States, the worst Depression years were 1932 to 1933. In 1933, one-third of this country’s work force was unemployed (16 million people). In La Crosse, the worst economic years were 1932 and 1937. Generally, unemployment in La Crosse ran from 1,500 to 1,800 people during the Depression years. In 1932, La Crosse had 2,000 people unemployed. In December 1937, the “second depression,” the ranks of the unemployed reached 3,000. There was not much in place to help people through the tough times — the county referred people to the County Poor House, and the City of La Crosse had an Unemployment Relief Committee and provided as much employment as possible with public works. People were also referred to charitable organizations such as the Social Service Society and the Salvation Army Shelter.

Ray Bice was a county board member during the first five years of the Depression. He recounted, “During the first years of the Depression, a few of my constituents would wait for me at my carpenter shop every morning. They were desperately in need of food and fuel. All were destitute and unemployed. They were not ‘bums’. . . they were good honest citizens who were unemployed and trying to care for their families.” By 1932, the City was unable to provide any more relief, and the unemployed had to rely on County highway projects.

In 1932, changes at the national level translated into some relief for the La Crosse area by late 1933. November 1932 ushered in the New Deal with the election of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In November of 1933, La Crosse started receiving federal aid, “first in the form of the Civil Works Administration projects and later as Public Works Administration and Works Progress Administration assistance.” Building Highway 35 was a Civil Works Administration job that
employed 125 area men. By December of 1933, 867 men were employed through civil works projects in the La Crosse area.

In 1933, the “best economic news of the year” for La Crosse was the repeal of Prohibition. The local reaction was conservative — the La Crosse Tribune and Leader Press reported, “No Celebration of Repeal in City or County.” The G. Heileman Brewing Co. had been able to stay open by making near-beer, but other city breweries had to close down during Prohibition. Resumption of beer production in city breweries meant 150 new jobs. The bad news in 1933 was the collapse of two city banks: Gateway City Bank and Security Savings Bank closed their doors for good in October 1933. The next year brought other changes. La Crosse’s First Federal Savings and Loan Association came into being in 1934 as a direct result of the Federal Home Loan Bank Act of July 1932. That year the Civil Works Administration funded jobs building the French Island Airport. “The airport would never have been built if aviation had been the only consideration.” Runways were compacted and grass planted — all without machinery — in order to provide for more jobs. Business was on the upswing in La Crosse. Between 1933 and 1935, production at Allis Chalmers increased so much that two shifts were added. Four hundred people were employed there. And, here, as in other parts of the country, labor demanded more rights. In La Crosse, 1,000 Rubber Mills employees went on strike in 1934. They demanded a raise, the right to bargain collectively, and a closed shop. Rubber Mills management wanted the company union out the door. Eventually, the employees won those concessions from their employers. Also in 1934, the Listman Flour Mill, a major La Crosse employer, burned down.

Except for late 1937, the economy in La Crosse continued to grow stronger. In 1936-37 the Isle La Plume Sewage Disposal Plant was built as a Public Works Administration project (the federal government paid 45% of the project, the city paid 55%). In 1937, 150 new homes were built in La Crosse. That year, Trane Company built another addition to meet the demands for its new air conditioning products. Allis Chalmers employed 580 men in 1937. In 1938 the Fair Labor Standards Act established a minimum wage for all American workers. From 1938 to 1940, there were several Public Works Administration projects supplying jobs in La Crosse. They included building the municipal swimming pool, Longfellow Jr. High School, Emerson Elementary, and additions to Logan High and Roosevelt Elementary Schools. Other changes in La Crosse were due to the increased leisure time caused by higher unemployment. Parks were often crowded during the Depression years. The City of La Crosse added ice skating rinks, wading pools, tennis courts and a small zoo. The public library reported a much higher circulation rate during the Depression years, and the Vocational and Adult School saw increased enrollment.
Although the local economy continued to grow steadily, it was not until this country engaged in its next major struggle that the Depression ended. The climb back up out of the Depression did not reach the 1929 level until the advent of the war, with defense contracts. World War II signaled the end of the Great Depression in La Crosse and throughout the United States.

**Nineteenth Century Government: From Tiny Village to Bustling City**

*By David Marcou*

The area around and including the eventual site of the city of La Crosse was first formally governed as part of the Northwest Territory, which had been claimed by Virginia before 1784. The United States claimed it by the Ordinance of July 13, 1787. Early on, important lawsuits were heard in Detroit, Michigan. For a while after that, the area that became La Crosse was part of Crawford County, which had acquired a court and judge in 1823. In 1836, the U.S. Congress established the Wisconsin territorial government, and on May 29, 1848, the State of Wisconsin was admitted to the Union.

Following Nathan Myrick's move from Barron's Island across the Mississippi River to the ground where La Crosse now resides, in 1842, La Crosse County and the Town of La Crosse were established (1851). La Crosse's first courthouse was built at no cost to taxpayers, and was home to the county court from 1852 to 1867. In December of 1854, there was a move to make La Crosse a formal village, but the idea was changed so it could become a city. In March 1856, the state assembly passed a bill making La Crosse a city, which the governor signed on March 14. Also on March 14, a meeting of Democratic voters of La Crosse nominated John M. Levy as their candidate for the first mayor of this city, after Thomas Benton Stoddard had declined the nomination because he was not a Democrat. On March 15, a meeting of voters from both parties, Republicans and Democrats, was held and the Republicans claimed it was "packed" with Democrats. After a "people's ticket" was narrowly defeated, the meeting adjourned and the Republican minority met and nominated Stoddard, who accepted.

Levy had not wanted to run against his friend Stoddard, but when party lines were drawn, as they were, he found it possible to do so in good conscience. Sanford and Hirshheimer told of the election, "The party men and politicians evidently took charge of the campaign and made it a real political fight. There
were accusations by the Democrats that strangers and lumberjacks were being brought to the city by their opponents. They identified the ‘citizens’ movement as Republican, and condemned that party as having ‘Know Nothing’ views. These accusations were vigorously denied.” In any case, Stoddard won by one vote; Levy had voted for him, and thus Stoddard became the city’s first mayor.

Also elected on April 1, 1856, were a city clerk, treasurer, marshal, attorney, and school superintendent. In addition, in each ward there were chosen three aldermen, a constable, a justice of the peace, and an assessor. The mayor and the aldermen constituted the Common Council, and they received no salaries. The mayor appointed the police, and the aldermen were street commissioners. The council was to elect a fire warden for each ward and the city surveyor. Several ordinances were soon passed, and the new city had a more rigorous form of government.

The system of government set up by the city charter in 1856 was known as the mayor-council type. Neither the mayor nor the Common Council had complete power — i.e., one could check the other, within the purview of the courts. Between 1856 and 1870, the state legislature passed more than 50 laws concerned with the details of the city’s government.

One key issue in those days was the voting power of the mayor. Originally, the mayor had the right to vote on any matter that came before the council. Then the revision of 1869 gave him a vote only in case of a tie. Until 1868, the mayor did not have a veto power; a charter amendment that year gave him the power, which could be overridden by a three-fourths vote of the council. That was changed in 1869 to a two-thirds vote. Although the mayor and the aldermen were not paid at first for their services, other city officials were, with the highest paid official being the city marshal, at $500 per year.

Originally the mayor was elected for a one-year term; that was amended to two years in 1887. Sanford and Hirshheimer pointed out that during this period, “City officers were elected on the lines of national party politics, for instance as Republicans or Democrats.” That was not the case in the latter part of the twentieth century, where mayors began being elected on a non-partisan basis.” In the 1800s, “The mayor, elected as a party man, felt bound to appoint a man of his party as chief of police. He, in turn, naturally paid attention to political appointments in his force. . . . This unfortunate system lasted until 1912, when a state law provided for the use of nonpartisan ballots in municipal elections.”

Other areas administered by the City included health, public works, public schools, and city finances. In the council, there was a standing committee on health, and a board of health was soon appointed by the council: it consisted of one alderman from each ward. The council appointed a city physician and the
marshal acted as “inspector of nuisances.” These officers had authority over “all matters affecting the health of the city.” Special areas of concern were “the spread of smallpox or other pestilent diseases.” Sanford and Hirshheimer also stated, “The inspector of nuisances had authority to enter all buildings and places where conditions dangerous to public health might exist; also, to remove infected persons to the ‘city hospital,’ or the pesthouse, an institution which existed at least until 1919. It was not until 1910 that the board of health became comprised of three citizens and a commissioner of public health, who would thenceforth be a physician ‘especially trained in the vocation of public health.”

To be sure, when the city began to lay out streets, a city surveyor was also needed. The charter provided for one to be elected by the council, usually a surveyor or an engineer. Aldermen were in charge of the business side of such matters, and were made street commissioners in their wards. Homeowners with property abutting the streets were liable for expenses depending on how much property of theirs was frontage. Streets and sidewalks were often neglected under this system, and in 1876 a single street commissioner was elected by the council.

There was no plan for a general sewer system until 1878, when a state law forced La Crosse to divide into sewer districts. In need of more expert service, in 1881 the office of City Engineer was created. That person was to be appointed by the mayor, with the consent of the council. Then in 1887, a charter revision established a board of public works made up of three commissioners elected for two-year terms. This board had charge of municipal grounds and buildings, roads, bridges, sidewalks and alleys. They let contracts to bidders for construction and repair. Waterworks were soon added to the street commissioner’s coverage.

In 1851, a superintendent of schools was first elected in the Town of La Crosse. School district number one was established, and administered all local educational monies until 1867, when the state legislature passed a law forcing the district to turn its money over to the City of La Crosse. The new city school system was placed in charge of the board of education, consisting of one commissioner from each ward and one from the city at large, elected by the council for two years. The board was to elect annually a superintendent of schools and to hire teachers. Beginning in 1887, the council elected seven commissioners, and these were chosen without reference to wards.

City finances were also undergoing changes during this period. At first, tax assessors were elected by voters, one from each ward — an unsatisfactory political situation. In 1857, one assessor was elected for the city at large, and in 1887 that number was changed to two, plus a tax commissioner was also elected to act with the assessors. The situation was improving. Also, a board of review was eventually
set up, consisting of the mayor, clerk, attorney, treasurer, and tax commissioner, to ensure that tax assessments were fair. And to ensure that auditing bills and accounts of officers were fairly dealt with, the office of city comptroller was established. The officer was elected.

Early on, the council was forbidden from levying property taxes beyond one percent of the city’s valuation. School taxes were levied separately. This was increased to two percent later, which could be amended upward by the council by one-fourth per cent with a three-fourths vote. Also, bonds could be sold up to a total of $15,000 a year. Interest paid ranged from seven to ten percent, and at least three bond issues were sold to help finance the railroads. The city also borrowed from state trust funds, e.g., $40,000 in 1878, with interest of seven percent. In addition, the city issued six bonds, totaling $132,000, from 1883 to 1887, for schools, waterworks, and/or sewer extension, at the rate of five percent interest.

Other changes in the city’s nineteenth century government included the lessening of administrative and supervisory duties for city aldermen and the reduction in political appointments for these jobs; the introduction of more scientific methods of running the city, which included increases in terms of office for non-political appointees; and the trial-and-error discovery of how to manage the city’s government and needs. Sanford and Hirshheimer stated: “The history of government in La Crosse is in one respect different from that of many cities. It is this: during the years before 1900 there was no instance of serious scandal due to gross misappropriation of large funds, or the looting of the city treasury, or the control of the city government by a corrupt gang for personal gain. But there were instances of petty theft and losses from inefficiency, especially when party politics rather than the public interests ruled the day.”

In 1893 a state law was passed allowing salaries for the mayor and council; the council passed a parallel resolution and salaries have been paid to them ever since. As times passed, state control of city charters came under strong criticism, and in 1921 “home rule” was adopted in Wisconsin. Whereas previously the statutes had contained long lists of powers granted to cities, after 1921 powers were not enumerated in the same way or degree. General laws went into effect then that granted to cities all powers necessary for their proper government, except as the legislature placed restrictions upon all cities of the state or upon the class to which the city belonged. A state constitutional amendment of 1924 and a law of 1925 carried out this home rule policy. Thus, cities in Wisconsin had more power to govern themselves, and the nineteenth century mandate of state rule over cities had virtually expired.
Twentieth Century Government: Finding Common Grounds

By Patricia Kendhammer

The modern political life of La Crosse is tied to its economic life. Significant trends occurring in the twentieth century here included the end of lumbering, the rise of manufacturing, and a population growth of 28,000, to 51,003 people. There was also an accompanying rise in a sense of civic responsibility. It was generally accepted that the following “common good” services were correctly within the domain of municipal government: street paving, sewers, water supply, sanitation, and fire and police protection. Light, telephone, mass transit, and power were provided by the utilities.

The Park System, Public Health Department, and the City Planning Department were all vigorously objected to originally. For example, there was great resentment early on against health department workers, since they had the power to quarantine families and thus lessen a family’s income. But these services were eventually accepted as legitimate functions of the city’s government.

Over time, the city has found it increasingly difficult to finance major projects. During the Great Depression, local relief projects gave way to the federal government. When the Mississippi River bridge collapsed in 1935, the city government had to ask for state and federal funds to replace it. The federal government also backed the new airport.

The City of La Crosse has a strong council-weak mayor form of government in which heads of departments exercise most administrative powers, and the Common Council exercises legislative, policy-making powers and some administrative powers. The mayor, as the city’s chief executive, enforces City ordinances, sees that officers carry out their duties, and gives information and makes recommendations to the council. He can veto most legislation enacted by the council, but can be overridden by a three-fourths majority. He presides at council meetings, but can vote only to break a tie. The mayor is currently elected every four years. He also serves on the Board of Public Works and on several city boards and commissions in an “ex officio” capacity.

The city’s mayors — from Knutson to Medinger (especially Mayor Zielke) — have fought valiantly, and also stubbornly, for what they believed were the best interests of the people of La Crosse. There has been much controversy (e.g., with the present City-County dispute over the industrial park located between La Crosse and Onalaska). Also, the current Town of Campbell question, in which La Crosse wants Campbell to annex and wants to sell them water
involves Campbell’s desire to obtain village status so they will be immune to annexation.

For its part, the La Crosse Fire Department began operating efficiently in the early 1900s, with a resultant drop in the frequency of major fires. In 1912, mechanization began when L.C. Colman presented the City with a Knox run-about to use as the fire chief’s car. Chemical and hose machines were first purchased in 1919, when there were 54 firemen on the force. Until 1973, firemen worked 12 hours on duty, 12 hours off. In 1999, La Crosse firefighters worked a complex 56-hour work week, with 24 hours on duty and 24 hours off. Between 93 and 100 men were on the force then. The fire department is a much needed resource. The Milwaukee Depot and Cameron House fire, at Second and Vine Street, happened at night in the midst of a late December snowstorm in 1916. People in the hotel were forced to grab their clothes, run downstairs, and seek shelter in nearby buildings. It was arguably the most spectacular fire in twentieth-century La Crosse.

The La Crosse Police Department, comprised of about 100 men and women, is under the control of the mayor and Common Council. New patrolmen work about a year on night duty, 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. It takes five to six years for an officer to have the chance to work days. The greatest challenges facing the police department today are greater workloads — and paperwork! Turn-of-the-millennium perspectives included the 50-50 cost split with the schools for liaison officers, and the memory of the comforting police presence provided by mounted officers during Oktoberfest.

Other basic government services were provided by the Public Health Department. In 1907, the La Crosse Medical Association described two dangerous health situations: abundant manure from the many horses and cows in the city, and an unsanitary milk supply. The Common Council passed ordinances regulating the sale of milk and cream in the city. Also, in 1908, the law was passed that cattle must be kept in sanitary stables and submitted to tuberculin testing. A three-citizen Board of Health was set up and the office of Commissioner of Public Health was created. In the early years, this was hectic, thankless and sometimes dangerous work. Manure piled to the ceiling! There were 4,000 open septic vaults in the city in 1910, many not connected with any sewer system. In addition, when people became ill with contagious diseases, families tried to hide it so they could keep on working. Irate owners dashed pails of milk at health workers.

Progress meant unpleasant encounters, but progress there was. Haphazard rubbish collections became efficient. In 1911 the infant death rate was 70.7/1000 living infant births. In 1915 the death rate was 30.43, and in 1921 it was 18.3. Scarlet fever deaths were 23 in 1913, 10 in 1915. Diphtheria deaths were 82 in
1913, and 19 in 1915. Delivery of unsanitary milk was stopped. Apathy and neglect of vaccinations were the greatest problems.

The Board of Park Commissions was established in 1908 during Mayor Wendell Anderson's second term. The council passed an ordinance creating two park districts and a four-member nonpolitical unpaid Board of Park Commissioners. The board then selected a landscape architect, John Nolan, and held a public meeting and decided: 1) Park land would never again be so cheap; 2) That the experience of every city that has judiciously undertaken park improvements had demonstrated that they pay for themselves; 3) That once acquired, they would steadily increase in value; 4) That the adoption of a permanent park policy is more likely to bring rich gifts of land and money for park purposes.

Next, the board appointed a park commissioner and approved a one mill tax for park purposes. Later, bonds of $75,000 were issued to purchase land and pay for construction. Wealthy citizens guaranteed a private subscription, which added to the money raised. Levee Park (Riverside) land was acquired. Myrick Park drives were laid out. Land was donated and bought for Copeland Park. Second and Jackson, and Fifth and Hood Street properties were acquired. Isle La Plume was donated by the John Paul Lumber Company and the C.L. Colman Lumber Company. In 1912, Joseph N. Hixon donated Hixon Forest, Grandad's Bluff, and the La Crosse Country Club (Forest Hills). A proposal to use Hixon Forest as a nature center was made in 1976 by the environmental group CREED. In 1982 the Nature Center board was established. And in 1992 Hixon Forest was used by more than 10,000 people.

La Crosse’s third courthouse was built from 1903 to 1904 at a cost of $189,300. The fourth courthouse was completed in 1965 at a cost of about $2 million. The present courthouse cost about $18 million and was built in the 1990s. Circuit court judges included William Knowlton, George Gale Newman, J.M. Morrow, O.B. Wyman, John J. Fruit, and John Brindley, who was a county judge. Other well-known La Crosse judges include Chojnacki, Doherty, Neprud, Pappas, Roraff, and Toepel. Today, there are five circuit court judges for La Crosse County.

La Crosse’s government in the twentieth century fared well more often than not; but the fight goes on to give the city and county residents a better quality of life. Government has a lot to do in leading that fight. People like Abraham Lincoln knew about that, and about forming a more perfect union, as well as about good government in places like La Crosse.
The Post Office That Still Survives

By Patrick Brunet

La Crosse's Post Office has always been crucial to the city. Mail kept residents in touch with the outside world; delivery contracts underwrote the early steamboat and stage lines while pushing them toward regular schedules; spurred the development of stage lines and post roads linking La Crosse with points east and then west; and provided a steady source of income for the railroads for more than a century.

Nathan Myrick was appointed the first postmaster on May 22, 1843, before La Crosse was incorporated. La Crosse had only a few residents, and Myrick handled only about three letters a week. Myrick did not receive a salary at first, but did receive free mailing privileges. Still, the position was highly coveted. Until 1942, the postmaster was a political appointee. As a new political party was voted into office, a new postmaster was appointed. By 1853, La Crosse had had six postmasters!

Despite the changes, the volume of mail steadily increased; about 4,000 mailings were received and 5,000 sent from La Crosse in 1854. Part of this increase was due to the stage delivery from Portage that started in 1853. Previously, mail came by foot, horse, sled or steamboat from the older communities of Prairie du Chien, Dubuque or Galena. In late 1858, the tracks of the Milwaukee Road reached La Crosse. By the start of the Civil War, La Crosse had regular mail links to Chatfield and Dakota, Minnesota, Black River Falls, Melrose, Viroqua, Trempealeau, Portage and Prairie du Chien. The railroad had a huge impact on postal service: mail traveled faster, could be shipped year-round, and because the railroads developed reliable timetables, the railroad brought a new level of predictability to mail delivery.

The first local post office was Myrick’s trading post. In the following years, the post office was located in at least nine different locations, mostly between the river and Fourth Street and in the area of Main and State streets. Mail was generally there for recipients to pick up. It was not until 1853 that postmaster Simon Kellogg (father of noted local journalist Mark Kellogg) initiated the use of boxes for mail patrons at the lofty sum of $1 per year! A local merchant who was appointed postmaster could then be assured his business would have a source of traffic. Also, the business would become popular, because it was the first place residents could get the latest news from out-of-town newspapers.

Postmasters might also carry some letters around in case they met recipients during their rounds. James Holmlund, a freelance writer, former La Crosse Tribune reporter, and local historian, told of an early postmaster’s wife who took care of
many of her husband’s duties — “including tucking mail in her bosom and pulling out a letter when a mail patron was spotted in the street.” The story goes, “One male youth became impatient for his letter and ‘broke into the Post Office.’” Mr. Miller later accosted the youth, but the result is not known.

Rail growth boomed after the Civil War and continued into the twentieth century. At one time, six lines served La Crosse, including the Milwaukee Road; the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy, Green Bay and Western; and the Chicago and Northwestern. With so many trains coming through, and the major rail depots downtown, it is no wonder that Local Superintendent of Mails Robert G. Carroll could say in 1934 that, at the peak of the railroads, as many as 20 mail dispatches could be made in one day. Next-day delivery was virtually assured for letters going to most cities within 150 miles. North La Crosse was also awarded its own post office in 1865, and kept it until 1886.

In 1884, Postmaster Benjamin F. Bryant, who later wrote a history of La Crosse, initiated home delivery. Jobs like those of the postmaster and his assistant were considered political plums and remained so until the positions came under civil service rules. Head carrier Ed Cronin’s $850-per-year salary shows how desirable such a post was. In 1892, the letter carrier position was made a civil service post and shortly thereafter, in 1894, the local carriers formed Branch 59 of the National Association of Letter Carriers. Jobs at the Post Office continue to be coveted.

La Crosse’s continued growth fed agitation for a new and permanent building, not just another rented space, because 219,908 mail items were handled in September 1889 alone. Treasury Department architect William A. Fretets designed a three-story Richardson Romanesque edifice completed with a four-story tower on the northeast corner of Fourth and State, costing more than $150,000. This had formerly been a field used for small circuses and medicine shows. Other federal agencies, including courts, weather bureau, IRS and later, Selective Service, had space in the building that opened in April 1890.

Around 1900, La Crosse had its first female postal employee, who was paid $700 annually, a substantial wage at the time. By 1902, 17 uniformed mail carriers provided twice-daily residential delivery and three-times-a-day delivery in the downtown business district. The first mail flight to La Crosse landed on October 19, 1911, but it would be some time before air-mail was delivered regularly. Also in 1911, the Post Office built an addition to the east side of the 1890 structure, with an open-cage elevator. Sunday delivery was stopped, but the Postal Savings service, a precursor of savings bonds, was now offered. Postal Saving stamps were thought to be a sound way to help immigrants develop the habit of saving. The Post Office staff had to be familiar with many tongues to deal with the babel of languages. Louis Prucha, for example, a long-term clerk at the Post Office, could
Spirit of La Crosse

speak Czech, German, Polish, Syrian and Slovak. Also at this time, Oscar “Pops” Paulson began his long postal career. An employee from 1906 to 1956, Paulson had another distinction beyond being the longest tenured employee at 49.5 years: he is the only employee who started at the bottom and retired as postmaster.

Through the next two decades, the use of mail increased steadily, parcel post was added and carriers used streetcars and buses to get to the starting points of their routes. In 1925, the last horse was retired. Three years later, a group of civic leaders traveled to Washington to lobby for a new building to handle growth. They failed in their request, but did obtain funding for another addition and remodeling. This addition was built on the north side of the existing structure and opened in 1932, almost doubling the structure’s size. It cost $162,000, but during the Depression, the federal government was willing to fund large construction projects to create jobs. During the building process, most postal services functioned out of the former Northern Engraving building at Fourth and Vine.

Postal use grew inexorably during the Great Depression and World War II. By 1947, 125 employees handled the mail of the post-war economic boom. In the early 1950s, three events signaled a transition. In January of 1950, twice-a-day home delivery ended. In 1953, first-class mail started to be placed on flights heading out of La Crosse, and this began the decline of the link between the railroads and the Post Office. Lastly, Congressman Gardner Withrow began efforts to build an entirely new Post Office building. Agitation for a new building, originally estimated to cost $250,000, continued into the 1960s, during which time zip codes were introduced and the La Crosse Post Office was established as a section center to serve 60 smaller post offices in the area. By the mid-1960s, the Post Office Department in Washington, D.C., agreed with the need for a new building and planned for the facility. In 1967, funds were appropriated but the project was delayed by the proposed national reorganization of the postal service, which established the Post Office as a semi-independent, self-sufficient agency. The issue causing the delay was which agency would have control over the construction — the General Services Agency or the Post Office. The former federal agency became the U.S. Postal Service on July 1, 1971, and in 1972 the dispute was settled and contracts were let.

The delay in post office construction and the demolition of other civic landmarks raised the issue of whether flattening the old building was the right way for La Crosse to go. Many local residents felt that remodeling the structure would save an architectural treasure. The remodeling option would have cost a million dollars or more and delayed the project, but backers of this plan pointed out the loss to the city of the equally beautiful old City Hall (behind the Post Office on Fifth and State) and old Courthouse (across the street on Fourth). The controversy filled the Tribune’s editorial pages and radio opinion lines. Construction was
suspended after $1.5 million of the $7 million budget had been spent, but oppo-
nents failed to save the building. The new building, our current Post Office, 
opened on April 16, 1978. The debate did spur a new level of historical preserva-
tion consciousness, though, that exists to this day. 

Recently, the Post Office has added more automation to handle more than a 
half million items per day, and most residents continue to express satisfaction with 
the service. The only recent controversy was a 1991 proposal to move mail sorting 
from the La Crosse building to the Rochester, Minnesota, Post Office; that pro-
posal died a quick, deserved death. 

If Nathan Myrick could have magically reappeared at the turn of the millenni-
um and seen the changes in postal service, he would have marveled. He would see 
a local staff of about 215, who handled nearly 150 million pieces of mail in fiscal 
1999, using laser scanners, computers, trucks and planes. But he would still recog-
nize the Post Office’s importance to our daily lives.

**The Courts Keep the People Honest**

*By Mel Loftus*

If it is your lot to be involved with the state of Wisconsin or the La Crosse County 
justice system as a juror, witness, defendant, plaintiff, lawyer or spectator, you 
would likely interact with the system in the courthouse at 333 Vine Street. Your 
dealings might be conducted in the purposeful courtroom, say, of Judge Ramona 
Gonzalez, a well-carpeted space with the modern amenities of computer termi-
nals, central heating and handsome furniture.

But suppose you had been involved with the first court session in the La Crosse 
area. That was in 1848, when Wisconsin was first admitted to the Union and 
Judge John M. Levy heard cases in his home at Front and Pearl Street. Then, in 
1851, the State statute creating La Crosse County and designating the city of La 
Crosse as county seat was passed, providing the city could build a courthouse at 
no cost to taxpayers.

The first courthouse was erected in 1852, and was a wooden structure that 
served until 1867. In that courthouse served the first circuit judge in La Crosse County — Hiram Knowlton, who had been elected in 1850. Knowlton started 
practicing law at Prairie du Chien in 1843. His circuit included the territory north 
of the Wisconsin River to Lake Superior. He served as circuit judge until 1856, 
when he was succeeded by Judge George Gale, the founder of Galesville.

In 1861, the state legislature divided the La Crosse Judicial Circuit, making 
Trempealeau County part of a new judicial circuit. Judge Gale served as circuit
judge of the Trempealeau Circuit and Colonel Isaac Messmore was appointed by the governor to the vacant judgeship in the La Crosse Judicial Circuit. However, his appointment was challenged because he was appointed and not elected. The Supreme Court agreed and Messmore was succeeded after one year in office by Edwin Flint (1863), who served until 1869.

Romanzo Bunn (1868-77) became the first judge elected from outside the city of La Crosse to the circuit judgeship. In 1878, Judge A.W. Newman became circuit judge and served until 1893. J.M. Morrow succeeded Newman in 1894 and served till 1895, when he was defeated by Attorney O.B. Wyman of Viroqua. Judge John J. Fruit was appointed upon the death of Wyman in 1900. Fruit had experience as the president of the State Normal School Board, district attorney of La Crosse County, and assistant U.S. attorney for Western Wisconsin.

Judge Edward Higbee succeeded Judge Fruit in 1909 and served two terms, until 1925, when Higbee was defeated in his bid for a third term by Robert S. Cowie, a successful trial lawyer. Judge Cowie served until 1951, when he was succeeded by Leonard F. Roraff, who was soon defeated by Vernon County Judge Lincoln Neprud. Judge Roraff reclaimed a spot as a county court judge when he was elected to the County Court Branch II in 1962. He also served as a president of the La Crosse County Bar Association and as a governor of the State Bar.

Peter G. Pappas was appointed circuit judge in 1969 and served until 1995, when he retired and was replaced by Judge Ramona Gonzalez, the first woman elected judge in La Crosse County. Other judges who served in the Sixth Judicial Circuit are Eugene A. Toepel, Leonard F. Roraff, Dennis G. Montabon, Michael J. Mulroy, John J. Perlich and Dale Pasell.

The first county judge in La Crosse County, Timothy Burns, was elected in 1851. He served only a few months and then was succeeded by George Gale. Other county judges were R.C. Van Rensselaer, James I. Lyndes, Samuel S. Burton, Hugh Cameron, Daniel Webster, Benjamin Bryant, E.J. Hughes, Thomas Dyson, John Brindley, John Doherty and Roy V. Ahlstrom.

In 1856, the City established a police court in compliance with state statutes. The court had the civil and criminal jurisdiction of a justice of the peace within the city limits of La Crosse and exclusive jurisdiction of offenses against City ordinances. Between 1862 and 1882, the court dealt with more than 8,300 cases; larceny, drunk and disorderly, and morals charges were frequent.

Five men who led the police court as police justice were Harvey Hubbard, who served from 1856 to 1858, 1864 to 1874, and 1878 to 1882; William A. Fuller, from 1862 to 1863; Cyrus K. Lord, 1874 to 1878; William E. Howe, from 1882 to 1884; and Augustus Steinlein, in 1891. The Police Court played an active part in taming the rough and tumble of La Crosse’s early, colorful years as a river town.
Following the invention of the automobile at the end of the nineteenth century, traffic violations increased as horse-drawn vehicles declined in use. City judges had to deal with speeding issues early on. Police Chief John B. Webber said in 1920, “We find it impossible to hold the speed limit down to 15 miles per hour. We make no effort to arrest drivers unless the speed is over 20 miles per hour.”

Also, school truancy became more of an issue after the first compulsory school law was passed in the state legislature in 1903. Although traffic and truancy laws have changed over the years, the city still enforces those laws, with both handled by the municipal court. Judge Dennis A. Marcou currently presides over municipal court.

Over time there have been many changes and reorganizations in the court system. The most significant of these were driven by workload and the court’s need to be flexible, responsive, and uniform. In 1962, the legislature established all courts throughout the state as uniform; each has the same jurisdiction. In La Crosse County, Branch I and Branch II were established, where Branch I, Judge Toepel presiding, covered probate and juvenile matters, and Branch II, Judge Roraff presiding, covered traffic, criminal, and civil matters.

In 1977, a statewide, uniform system of trial courts was established. This change wiped out the distinction between circuit judges and present county judges. In La Crosse, Branch III was created. Later, because of workload, Branch IV (1985) and Branch V (1999) were also established.

On February 6, 1922, women first began serving on juries in La Crosse County. Judge F.C. Higbee said in his formal statement then: “. . . The struggle by women for equal participation in the affairs of government has been a long and arduous one, and sometimes discouraging. . . . It is my judgment and always has been that if women, given the privilege of participation in the affairs of government . . . would perform their duties without attempting to shirk, then great good could be expected from the change. . . .”

The first women to serve on a jury were Susan Swarthout, Louise Tenneson, Bertha T. Hickisch, Cora M. Bangsberg (all of La Crosse), Anna Cullman of West Salem, and Julia Mayo and Mabel Boersma of Onalaska. The first mixed jury of seven women and five men heard a case involving arson, and their verdict was guilty.

In 1979, the state’s public defender system replaced the previous system of court-appointed attorneys for needy defendants.

Although there has never been a woman district attorney in La Crosse County, the current district attorney, Scott Horne, appointed Loralee Clark to be the first deputy district attorney in 1994. Clark had been an assistant district attorney here since 1987.

After the initial wooden courthouse that served from 1852 to 1867, the County built a second, at Third and State, in 1864, which was used till 1904. The County
built a third courthouse in the same location and opened it in 1904. This third one was noted for its French Renaissance style and was completed for the cost of $189,000. In 1965 it was torn down because it lacked elevators and hot water and simply was no longer big enough. A Montgomery Ward store was erected at that site, and the County completed the fourth courthouse in 1965. This time it cost $2 million. The present building — the Court House and the Law Enforcement Center — was completed in August of 1997. Its cost was $18.4 million.

Timothy Burns came to La Crosse in 1847. In 1851, he was elected the first county judge of La Crosse. He also did much to lay out the city of La Crosse. He gave Burns Parks (7th and Main Street) to the City. Also in 1851, he was elected lieutenant-governor of Wisconsin and held this office until 1853, when he died at age 33.

In 1847, George Gale was elected a delegate to the Second Constitutional Convention, which adopted the present Wisconsin State Constitution. In 1851 he began practicing law in the La Crosse area. He was elected a county judge and circuit judge for the La Crosse area in the 1850s. From the state legislature, he secured an act creating Trempealeau County and making Galesville the county seat. He died in 1868.

Cadwallader C. Washburn practiced law in Wisconsin and the La Crosse area in the 1840s and 1850s. He was also a successful lumberman and mill owner. From 1855 to 1861, he served in the U.S. Congress from the Mineral Point area. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he raised the Second Regiment of Wisconsin Cavalry and served as its colonel and major-general. After the War, he was again elected to Congress and served from 1868 to 1872. In 1873, he was elected governor of Wisconsin. Upon his death in 1882, his will established a library for the city of La Crosse and set up a trust fund for the library’s operation.

August Cameron began practicing law in La Crosse in 1857. In 1861, Cameron took into practice the young attorney Joseph W. Losey. The firm was involved in almost every important case in western Wisconsin and southeastern Minnesota for the next 20 years. (Losey Boulevard is a memorial to the civic accomplishments of Mr. Losey). Cameron was a member of the Wisconsin Senate in 1863, 1864, 1871, and 1872. He was speaker of the Wisconsin Assembly in 1867. He was a regent of the University of the State of Wisconsin from 1866 to 1875. He was a U.S. senator from 1875 to 1885. Cameron died in 1897.

Thomas (Tom) Morris began practicing law in the La Crosse area in 1889. He was a partner in several La Crosse law firms, such as Morris Hartwell; Morris, Hartwell, and Holmes; and Winter, Morris, Esch, and Holmes. Morris successfully defended the Universal Chiropractors’ association in almost every state of the union. Chiropractors faced severe opposition from the medical profession
throughout the country. Morris was elected district attorney in La Crosse in 1898 and served until 1903. In 1904, he was elected a Wisconsin state senator and served until 1909. During these years, he was an able ally in passing the socially innovative legislation of Governor Robert “Fighting Bob” La Follette. Morris was instrumental in securing a state normal school for the city of La Crosse. UW-La Crosse stands as a memorial to the work of Tom Morris.

Quincy Hale graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1919 and began practicing in La Crosse with the firm Hartwell & Cowie shortly after. In 1929 Hale was elected president of the La Crosse County Bar Association, and in 1945 was the first La Crosse lawyer to hold the presidency of the Wisconsin Bar Association. Hale was a civic leader and was actively involved in the Pettibone Park Commission, La Crosse Municipal Airport, Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium and the La Crosse Public Library.

Razey Kletecka Chojnacki, the wife of former Police Justice Leonard Chojnacki, graduated from Marquette Law School in 1943 and began practicing in La Crosse the same year. She was the first woman attorney to actively practice in this area, possibly due to early opposition from male members of the Bar. When the first woman (Lavinia Goodell in 1875) sought permission to practice before the Supreme Court of Wisconsin, Chief Justice Edward Ryan responded with these formal but ultimately disqualifying words: “So we find no statutory authority for the admission of females to the bar of any court of this state. And, with all the respect and sympathy for this lady which all men owe to all good women, we cannot regret that we do not. We cannot but think the common law wise in excluding women from the practice of the law.”

As of this writing, a more progressive routine goes on for the La Crosse County courts in their attempt to provide justice for all.

Public Safety: Police and Fire Departments

By Daniel Marcou

La Crosse was incorporated as a city in 1856. Initially there was no police or fire department. Public safety was the concern of the sheriff. Fires, on the other hand, were fought by informal “bucket brigades.”

Shortly after the city incorporated, a fire started at the New England House, a public hotel that was located at Front and State Street. By the time the fire was extinguished, all of the buildings on Front Street, from State to Mt. Vernon, were charred ruins. This devastating fire took place on March 7, 1857.
The first volunteer fire company was then formed, and was called the “Pioneer Fire Department.” The foreman of the company was W.W. Crosby. The uniform adopted was a square hat, black trousers, and red shirt. The city appropriated funds for fire fighting equipment and an engine.

The city fathers also hired a city marshal for law enforcement purposes. He was assisted by constables. The constables were elected, and each ward had its own constable. During the Civil War, the marshal-night watchman system proved adequate. The military presence in La Crosse had a stabilizing effect on the city.

After the Civil War, the first fire department was incorporated into the new City Hall being constructed in 1868 at 413 Main Street. The building’s steeple was functional, so the fire companies hung their hoses from the steeple to dry after each fire.

On April 12, 1870, John Simonton became the first chief of police of La Crosse’s Police Department. His first official act after hiring seven officers was to conduct a raid of a house of prostitution and gambling on April 28, 1870.

The La Crosse Fire Department became a paid, full-time department in 1896. By 1900, the Police and Fire Commission had come into existence, thanks to a new state statute. One of the major proponents of this change was Chief H.H. Byrnes of the La Crosse Police Department. This took politics out of the police and fire departments. Up until then, it was not unusual for mayors to hire and fire police officers and fire employees along party lines.

After the turn of the century, police and fire responses improved considerably with the transition from the power of live horses to “horsepower.” Police and fire units evolved to be much more than just transportation, and became tools of the trade.

The 1920s saw Prohibition, which did little except make criminals out of many otherwise law-abiding citizens. The criminals in America became organized, and made millions. Police were unable to keep alcohol away from the public that demanded it. Some notations in the police logs of the time indicated that people were still drinking, because parties were arrested for “driving with a jag on.”

The 1930s saw radio communication become a reality for police and fire units. And on July 20, 1935, two inmates were shot and killed in a moving gunfight with police after attempting a jail break from the La Crosse County Jail.

The following decades saw the onset of professionalism. Police and firefighters were gradually trained better, and were paid according to the work they did for the community. The La Crosse police and fire departments now serve as examples of professionalism for other agencies.

In 1857 a group of about 300 citizens gathered on the Court House Square. They were fed up with the lawlessness of some. The crowd decided to take the law into their own hands; they marched on a well-known “house of prostitution,” the St. Charles House, and burned it to the ground.

The city of La Crosse showed a penchant for mob violence once again in 1865.
A well-known “Copperhead,” (i.e., a Southern sympathizer in the North) Marcus “Brick” Pomeroy, at one point commented on Lincoln’s election by stating in the La Crosse Democrat, “We trust some bold hand will pierce his heart with a dagger point for the public good.” After Lincoln was assassinated, this and the many other inflammatory comments Pomeroy printed were remembered, and served as fuel for a fire. A mob surged through the streets of downtown La Crosse for three days. They wanted to burn Pomeroy’s building, which was located at the southwest corner of Fourth and Main Street.

The mob talked loudly of burning Pomeroy’s building and of hanging him. They were then going to draw and quarter him and burn a quarter of his body in each of the city’s four wards. At one point, Pomeroy took to the streets and confronted the crowd while armed with two revolvers.

Although the crowds of April 1865 did not make good on their threat, a crowd on October 5, 1884, was able to do so. On that date a large political rally was held at the intersection of Fourth and Main Street. The rally was to support Grover Cleveland for president. Frank Burton, a prominent and wealthy grain broker, who was also a former member of the La Crosse Fire Department, was one of the rally leaders. A mentally ill river-man, Scotty Mitchell, walked up to Frank Burton, in full view of the crowd, and shot him five times. Mitchell then began to kick the body and threw his revolver at Burton. Then Scotty drew a second revolver and fired two more shots into Burton’s lifeless body.

After Mitchell’s incarceration, a crowd of 3,000 gathered outside the jail. They demanded that the prisoner be turned over to them. Police refused. The crowd rushed the jail, smashed in the door, and forcibly removed the prisoner. The mob hanged Scott Mitchell until he was dead.

A grand jury investigation into the death of Scotty Mitchell was able to conclude that Nathaniel Scotty Mitchell was unlawfully hanged by the neck until dead. The grand jury stated, “Mitchell was hanged by the neck until dead by a great number of people to the jurors unknown.”

La Crosse also experienced large disturbances at the 1966, 1972, and 1991 Oktoberfests. Chief Ron Wold stated that in 1972, police could have made 2,000 arrests if they had had more officers.

In 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1992, crowds deliberately rioted in downtown La Crosse. These riots were staged by individuals on the weekend that Coon Valley, Wisconsin, held its annual Coon Creek Canoe Races. Tear gas was used to clear crowds during the Coon Creek riots of 1991 and 1992.

The Police Department implemented a plan that prevented a confrontation at the Oktoberfest of 1992. This plan was improved upon in 1993, during the weekend of Coon Creek. It worked, and peace returned to La Crosse’s festivals.

Many police and fire personnel have made great sacrifices for this city. On
September 8, 1900, 37-year-old Perry Gates pulled his patrol buggy up to three subjects who matched the description of robbery suspects. The suspects had robbed some subjects and pistol-whipped one man near La Crescent. As Officer Gates drew his weapon and ordered the men to “halt,” all three men drew weapons and fired at Gates. Gates was struck once in the right arm and once in the abdomen. He died at the intersection of Third and King Street. The suspects escaped.

On November 18, 1916, Officer Frank Groeschner was killed when he was struck by a Gund Brewery truck while on police motorcycle.

On December 5, 1937, Officer Joe Donndelinger was riding with new officer Granville Smith. They stopped a vehicle that had run a stop sign at Fifth and Jackson Street. The driver, Floyd Wagener, had stolen the car, which was being used as a getaway vehicle for some of his friends who were cracking the safe at the Sears store downtown. Wagener produced a gun and disarmed Smith, who had gotten into Wagener’s vehicle to drive him to the station. Donndelinger could see there were problems, and a running gun battle ensued. Smith, who was now clearly a hostage, was forced to drive the fleeing vehicle.

Wagener was forced off the road just before crossing into Minnesota. Both Donndelinger and Wagener exited and stood face-to-face exchanging gunfire. When silence returned to the night, both the suspect and the officer lay alongside the road, seriously wounded. Wagener would survive his wounds. Officer Donndelinger died on December 10, 1937.

Firefighter James McCormick, who was 46 years old, died of a heart attack while fighting a fire at 612 Ferry Street.

On December 18, 1964, after 27 years of service, Assistant Fire Chief Edward Sciborski died when he responded to a smoke call in the alley between Sixth and Seventh streets, and Cass and King. The smoke was actually steam from a ruptured hot water main. Assistant Chief Sciborski fell into a hole gouged out of the alley by the escaping steam and was scalded over 60 percent of his body.

During June 1996, La Crosse was one of the many places fortunate to participate in the Olympic torch relay. Police Chief Edward Kondracki had the honor of lighting the torch at the Amtrak station and running the first leg of the relay past the fire station on the Northside. The Olympic spirit of fairness, justice and helping each other to succeed was embodied in this symbolic gesture.

The Mayors Take the Lead, 1856-2000

By Mary Marsh

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the citizens of La Crosse elected 40 individuals to the office of mayor. Many influential men have served the citi-
zens of La Crosse. The office was initially a one-year post, and was increased to two years in 1887. In 1981 the term was extended to four years. Being mayor was considered a part-time job until the mid-twentieth century. The names of a few of La Crosse’s illustrious leaders follow.

In 1856 La Crosse elected Thomas B. Stoddard as its first mayor. Stoddard won the election by one vote over his friend John Levy. Stoddard was born in Genessee County, New York, and graduated from Columbia University in 1819 and Yale University in 1820. While a law student in New York, he wrote a play that became a hit. On opening night, a young woman in the audience liked it so much she wanted to meet the author. They fell in love at first sight and got engaged, but the woman became ill and died the day they were to be wed.

The people of La Crosse loved Tom Stoddard for his desire to help the community in which he lived. He was a man of clear vision and foresight, and instrumental in bringing a railroad to this city. The Stoddard Hotel, formerly located at the corner of Fourth and State Street, was named for him in 1903.

Born in England in 1820, John Levy was educated in Holland and lived in Paris before coming to America in 1841. He first came to St. Louis and moved to Prairie du Chien in 1844. The next year he moved to La Crosse. In 1846, his family followed him, settling at the corner of Front and Pearl Street. Levy and his wife Fredericka were the only Jews in La Crosse. The first religious services in La Crosse were in the Levy home and were Christian services conducted by Episcopalian and Methodist itinerant preachers.

Mayor Levy served a one-year term in 1860, and again in 1866 and 1867. He made a handsome living as an Indian trader, warehouse owner, storekeeper, grocer, banker, grain dealer and mail carrier. He also built the first hotel. When he died at age 91 in 1910, most of the city’s residents attended his funeral.

Wilson Colwell, a banker, served as mayor for two meetings of the Council in 1861 and then joined the Light Guard Unit in the Civil War. He was killed in the Battle of South Mountain on September 14, 1862.

Albert W. Pettibone was born in Vermont in 1827 and came to La Crosse in 1854, where he started at once in the lumber business. He won a host of friends during his terms in office from 1862 to 1864 because of his honesty and upright dealings. In appreciation for the cooperation of the citizens during his terms, he purchased Barron’s Island and later donated it to the city for park purposes.

Dr. Frank Powell was born in 1847 in a lonely cabin in Kentucky, the son of a Yankee woman and a Scottish father. He and his two brothers were homeschooled by their mother. At an early age, the mother and the boys moved to a ranch in Nebraska. Young Dr. Powell was sent by the state of Nebraska to Louisville Medical College so that he could enter the Army as a surgeon. He graduated valedictorian of his class and entered the Kentucky School of Medicine, graduating a few years later and becoming an instructor in anatomy.
Dr. Powell served as mayor from 1885 to 1886 and then again from 1893 to 1897. He acquired the name of “White Beaver” after healing the daughter of a Sioux chieftain. He was presented with the skin of a white beaver, the highest honor the Sioux could bestow.

As mayor, Dr. Powell put on and paid for a children’s picnic one July 4th that went down in history as the largest local celebration of its kind. He gave the city a drinking fountain that was located on the corner of Front and Main Street as a gift. It now resides in the foyer of city hall. Powell Place, named after the late mayor, is located at the northeast corner of Second and State Street.

Dr. Wendell Anderson was a native of Maine, descended from notable ancestors. He served in the Civil War both before and after receiving his medical degree in 1863. He came to La Crosse in 1866 and served terms as president of the board of education from 1873 to 1876. He also served on the board from 1880 to 1881. His creditable terms as mayor ran from 1899 to 1901, and from 1907 to 1909.

Anderson had been accused in one mayoral campaign of wanting to become mayor to obtain the Democratic nomination for governor. Thus, it was said, city affairs would receive little of his attention. On the contrary, he assumed the attitude that his duties as mayor were a full-time job, announcing that he would have regular office hours in City Hall, the same as other officials.

Joseph J. Verchota served as La Crosse’s mayor from 1923 to 1929. He also served from 1931 to 1935 and again from 1937 to 1947. Mayor Verchota was a life-long resident of La Crosse and a first-generation American, born of Bohemian immigrants. He was a tailor by trade. For many years he was president of the Trades and Labor Council. La Crosse Municipal Airport was built during his second term. Editorials in the La Crosse Tribune and Leader Press referred to him as a man of vision who had the abilities to look to the future.

Henry Ahrens was born in La Crosse on September 14, 1902. He was a life-long city resident and a graduate of Central High School. He served three terms as mayor. After his time in office, he was appointed La Crosse Postmaster, in 1956. Before becoming mayor, Ahrens operated the Gasoline Alley garage and service station for 22 years. While Postmaster, he invented a device to improve mail service that was adopted nationwide. He received a citation from the U.S. Postal Department for the innovation.

In 1964, Mayor Milo G. Knutson, in his fifth two-year term as mayor, campaigned to be the governor of Wisconsin. He ran as the “conservative” Republican candidate. A newscaster and commentator besides being news director, Knutson was heard during four newscasts daily on radio station WKTY. In 1967 he suffered a heart attack and had open heart surgery. In June 1974, he suffered a stroke. At that time, he was serving as 32nd District State Senator. He served two four-year terms before retiring for health reasons.

Warren Loveland’s tenure began in 1965 and ended in 1971. Loveland was
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born in La Crosse on August 8, 1920. Following graduation from Carroll College in Waukesha, Loveland entered the U.S. Navy in 1943 during World War II. Together with his brother Donald Loveland, he founded Crusade, Inc., a firm that employed disabled persons. During his terms in office, Mayor Loveland oversaw the downtown Harborview Urban Renewal project, the construction of a new city hall and the establishment of the city’s Northside Industrial Park.

Patrick T. Zielke was born on April 7, 1932 in La Crosse. He received his education in La Crosse and married the former Bea Forer in 1949. He was elected to the Common Council in 1965 and became council president in 1973. He took a leave of absence from Trane Co. and served as mayor for 22 years. Some of Mayor Zielke’s accomplishments included the construction of the La Crosse Center, the Radisson Hotel, the Heileman Brewing Corporate offices, the ten-story First Bank Building, and the Valley View Mall. The entire Highway 16 commercial corridor also became a reality during this time.

Mayor Zielke was also responsible for the construction of the new La Crosse Municipal Airport and the Airport Industrial Park. And he was instrumental in the signing of the historic agreement between La Crosse and Onalaska over the development of an industrial park near the La Crosse County landfill on land sought by both municipalities.

In 1997 the royal mayoral reins were handed over to John Medinger. Mayor Medinger holds a bachelor’s degree in history and political science from UW-La Crosse, as well as a master’s in education from that same institution. He is a former Wisconsin Assembly Representative from the 95th District. John’s father, Donald Medinger, served on the Common Council for 32 years. The politician’s life is not new to this family. The revitalization of downtown has begun and bus service to Crossing Meadows Shopping Center and La Crescent, Minn. and surrounding areas has been established during his tenure.

Many men have held the esteemed office of mayor of La Crosse throughout the years. Each mayor, in his own way, has had an impact on the city, making it the great city it is today.

Others were: E.O. Campbell (1857); David Taylor (1858); James Lyndes (1859, 1872); William J. Lloyd (1865); Theodore Rudolph (1868, 1870); Charles L. Coleman (1869); Alexander McMillan (1871); G. Van Steenwyk (1873); G.M. Woodward (1874); James J. Hogan (1875, 1876); George Edwards (1877); David Law (1878, 1879, 1882, 1883); Joseph Clarke (1880); H.F. Smiley (1881); W.A. Roosevelt (1884); David Austin (1887-1889); John Dengler (1889-1891, 1911-1913); F.A. Copeland (1891-1893); James McCord (1897-1899); Joseph Boschert (1901-1903); William Torrance (1903-1905, 1905-1907); Ori J. Sorenson (1909-1911, 1913-1915); A.A. Bentley (1915-1917, 1917-1919, 1919-1921, 1921-1923); John E. Langdon (1929-1931); C. August “Gus” Boerner (1935-1937, 1937-1939); Charles A. Beranek (1947-1949); W. Peter Gilbertson (1971-1973, 1973-1975).
Understanding the history of early cultures in La Crosse requires a pre-1841 review. The Winnebago Indians, now known as the Ho-Chunk Nation, resided here when the first white explorers found the prairie where the Black and La Crosse Rivers flowed into the Mississippi. They were friendly and, in a short time, a fur trade was established. Fur-bearing animals were abundant, and the explorers had a ready market for the pelts in Europe.

Good relationships allowed French explorers to live through the cold, harsh winters with the natives, sharing shelter, food and companionship. The first name we know for La Crosse was “La Butte Hyvernament” (winter hill camp). This was in the 1600s, and for 200 years Native American was the majority culture. The name of the winter camp site became Prairie La Crosse, another French name based upon a ball and stick game played by teams of Indians.

For a time after the French and Indian Wars, the British had control of the area. During this time, things stayed much the same.

When Americans took over, things changed. More and more white people arrived. Relatively small numbers of Ho-Chunk living here year-round became the ethnic minority. Lumbering and farming activities replaced the fur trade, which diminished because of declining market demand and numbers of animals.

Native peoples tried maintaining themselves by hunting, fishing, native food-gathering and craft sales. Baskets woven from grasses and tree bark were sold and traded. Deerskin shirts, moccasins and birchbark canoes were made and traded for things needed or wanted. This peaceful coexistence lasted until 1832,
when the Black Hawk War began. Its battles were the last fought in Wisconsin — the result of Chief Black Hawk trying to coexist on traditional lands in Illinois. His Sauk Indians were forced west of the Mississippi River. Black Hawk and his people, chased by U.S. and Illinois militias, retreated into Wisconsin. The last battle — a massacre of mostly helpless, tired-out women, children and elders — was at the Bad Axe River, south of La Crosse. Black Hawk's people were reduced in numbers from 1,000 to 150. Soldiers slaughtered them as they tried to flee across the Mississippi.

Four notable leaders served during the Black Hawk War — three on the U.S. side: Zachary Taylor (later 12th U.S. president), commander of the U.S. troops; Abraham Lincoln (later 16th U.S. president), an Illinois trooper; Jefferson Davis (later Confederate Free States president), a lieutenant at Fort Crawford in Prairie du Chien who was in charge of the prisoner Chief Black Hawk. Davis described the captured chief as “a noteworthy leader.”

These events had important results. Black Hawk sought help from the Ho-Chunk at Prairie La Crosse. They refused, feeling it was hopeless fighting such odds. And U.S. forces had their canoes under guard. After the war, land was confiscated from not only the Sauk but other tribes as well, including the Ho-Chunk, even though they had not participated. After these treaties were signed, around 1838, military troops forcefully extricated the Ho-Chunk from Prairie La Crosse and all Wisconsin lands. Their homes were destroyed. They were gathered at La Crosse, ferried across the Mississippi and told never to return from the West.

As word got out that the American government had taken the land from the Native peoples, men like Nathan Myrick surveyed pieces of it (in his case, 100 acres that would become the village of La Crosse), paying $1.25 per acre to the U.S. land office. Native Americans no longer had claim to land that for centuries was theirs. Some white men in government, clergy and military, considered Native Americans to be savages; without education, they were little more than “beasts,” and therefore without rights. Others, like Thomas Jefferson, countered these opinions, giving the Native Americans credit for their bravery, honor, strong friendships, and affection for children and family. His thought was that if they had the means to write and read, they would develop skills and arts similar to any “civilized” people. These thoughts were not much shared by white “borderers” (frontier people), who were constantly in conflict with the Natives over land use. Many of these borderers considered killing Native Americans an aid in ridding the land of a “cruel and unnatural race.” Many acts of genocide were perpetrated against the indigenous peoples.

Some Ho-Chunk returned secretly from the reservations they were assigned to in Minnesota and Nebraska. They lived in out-of-the-way places, scratching out
a living any way they could, trading and begging from the white settlers to get by. In 1874 they were given some recognition for the abusive ethnic cleansing they had been subjected to by the federal government and allowed to purchase homesteads. These lands were made subject to taxes, and because Native Americans were not part of the normal work force sharing in the economy, they lost their lands in back taxes they could not afford to pay. Most homesteads have been sold over the years as a result.

Government policy toward the ethnic minority was to assimilate them into white society. To do this, government agencies, like the Bureau of Indians Affairs (BIA), were created to take care of them as wards of the government.

Educational policies forced them to break away from their traditional cultural ways. Children were enticed and, when necessary, forced to go to boarding schools and taught the ways and values of white society. They were denied ethnic cultural ceremonies and use of their native languages. These policies were somewhat successful at encouraging integration. Families became participants in white society when they started finding low-end jobs to sustain themselves. Examples of successful Native Americans in La Crosse include:

Lavern Carrimon, who became a repair and assembly man for a Northside retailer. He clung to his traditions using his gifted singing voice. He sang both Native and non-Indian songs, sharing his gift for entertainment with the people of La Crosse. His splendid voice and Native American costumes were wonderful attractions at various events.

Alvin Blackdeer, who became an engineer on the railroad and a Town Board supervisor. He served both white and native brothers and sisters with sincere concern and good common sense. He, too, clung to his heritage, engaging in family traditional ceremonies. Small groups would gather to sing and dance in colorful native regalia around campfires, enjoying picnic feasts and fellowship. He was a gifted storyteller and delighted young and old with his tales.

Eleanor St. John, a Ho-Chunk woman, was Mrs. Oktoberfest 1999. She continues the heritage she learned from her parents, using her potential to support the community. She is a businesswoman, and her activities include Kiwanis, Christian Business Women and committees for WWTC and the Mayor’s Sesquicentennial.

These three individuals have been “typical people.” They are proud of who they are. They have lived in La Crosse neighborhoods and worked in city factories, businesses and service institutions.
Immigrants and Their Associations: Changing Stereotypes

By Ursula Chiu

The hard work and ingenuity of immigrants and their offspring has paid off for the community of La Crosse. After the German-American Nathan Myrick founded the settlement here, more settlers arrived from the East Coast. Among them was John Levy, a British citizen of German-Jewish origin, and his German-Jewish wife, Fredericka Augusta Levy. At this time La Crosse was comprised of five houses. Augusta's diaries tell much of life interrupted by not-so-desirable Indians, who peeked into her windows and scared her while berry-picking when she mistook their helpfulness for aggression.

Once the state of Wisconsin had been created in 1848, all Indians were removed from the area and north European immigrants were no longer reluctant to settle here. Germans became the largest immigrant group, followed closely by Norwegians and Scandinavians. They were lured to La Crosse by farmland and jobs in the developing pinery industry, which had been advertised in European newspapers. The first census, taken in 1853, shows that there were 417 adults in town, of whom 129 were foreign-born immigrants, coming from Germany, Norway, Sweden, Britain, Ireland, Canada and France.

Harsh and demanding were their journeys to La Crosse. J. Hirshheimer's father reports traveling from New York harbor by canal to the foot of the Alleghenies. There the boats were hauled on ropes and lifted across the mountain range with passengers and freight inside. Coming from Scandinavia to Quebec, Canada, Dr. J.E. Engstad described his journey to La Crosse in 1858: "We reached Quebec in 30 days by steamer. From there 300 immigrants traveled to Montreal by box car with seating planks. The trip continued in open cars to Sarnia on Lake Huron, where we boarded an unworthy steamer to Milwaukee, where we were kept in quarantine. From there it was by box car again to Prairie du Chien, and by steam to the port of La Crosse. All along we kept alive with flat bread and dried beef, which we had brought in boxes from home." No wonder many foreigners reached La Crosse ill and exhausted! Seeing this, concerned citizens built a shelter along the Black River, "Castle Gardens," named after the immigrant shelter in New York. The building offered storage and tiny rooms to immigrants who were sick and friendless.

The German immigrants who came from 1850 to 1879 were a most energetic group, well-trained as mechanics, beer brewers, and businessmen. They were social, yet protective of their language and heritage. As early as 1855, they organized the Turner Society for physical exercise. Music lovers established singing
societies: the Liederkranz (1861), and the Frohsinn Singing Society (1889). Theater Verein (1858) offered biweekly plays in German. Eventually, several associations formed the “Deutscher Verein” in Germania Hall in 1877 for social and educational events that later extended into the Summer Garden.

In 1868 La Crosse became a Catholic Diocese under the German immigrant Bishop Michael Heiss. He invited German Sisters of the Order of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration to establish their motherhouse in the city in 1871. Soon this group of Sisters built a hospital, a college, and staffed many parochial schools in La Crosse.

Irish immigrants arrived as raftsmen and railroad workers. In that capacity, their number fluctuated, but reached six percent of the population by 1860. The ancient Order of the Hibernians became their national club, which introduced the still-popular St. Patrick’s Day to La Crosse residents.

Norwegians, stated the census of 1885, accounted for 11 percent of the population. Like the Germans, they formed associations for the preservation of their language and culture. Their Scandinavian Society (1866) supported members and the indigent. The Norwegian Working Man’s Society (1874) offered lectures and theatrical performances. A Norwegian male chorus, the Normanna Saengerkor (1869), kept alive folk songs of their homeland and hosted, with German singers, many Saengerfests here.

Other nationalities came in much smaller groups. Immigrants from Switzerland arrived in 1854, bringing expertise in dairying and cheese production to the city. They founded the Schweitzer Verein (1894) as a rallying place. And after 1880 immigrants from Czechoslovakia and Bohemia contributed their crafts as butchers, bakers, stone cutters, coopers, and cigar makers. Bohemian immigrant coopers soon built barrels for the six German breweries that had developed by 1880. Social gatherings by the Bohemia Association met in Bohemia Hall (1876). The Bohemian “Masopust,” or Mardi Gras masked ball, became a famous yearly feast here. The frolicking on that day might even have permitted some Bohemian women to smoke their corn cob pipes in public!

La Crosse’s Northside became home to Greeks, Syrians and Lebanese, who added unusual Middle Eastern foods to the north European fares of the city. For worship ceremonies and social gatherings, these immigrants needed Syrian and Orthodox rite churches. The latter, St. Elias, still features Arabic/English inscriptions on its cornerstone.

Some Jewish immigrants who had left Germany after the revolution in 1848, nicknamed “48ers,” chose La Crosse as their home in 1860. A second group of orthodox Jews from Russia and the Middle East reached here in 1900. Most of them remained in an area known as Goosetown. By 1976 they comprised 50 families and were socially active in the community, in city affairs, and in their synagogues.
A group of French-Canadian immigrants concentrated on French Island, just northwest of the city, finding the sandy soil adequate for their truck gardens.

Only a handful of African-Americans came to La Crosse before the Civil War, working as barbers or as steamboat cooks. The group increased to 50 members by 1865. Several had served in the Wisconsin 19th Regiment of Colored Troops. The free-born Abraham H. Holland and the boatman William Rice married white women in town. And city records list three marriages between African-American males and white females in 1865.

Helping provide athletic, social, and residential opportunities for immigrants and others has been the YM/YWCA. Begun nationally in 1857 and locally in 1885, the Young Men’s Christian Association promotes progressive undertakings on behalf of the La Crosse area. The YWCA, founded nationally in 1858, took root in La Crosse a while later. It has provided women of all ages, religions, and ethnic backgrounds the chance to meet and learn how to improve themselves.

Around 1900, lumbering, then a key La Crosse industry, declined along with river transportation. Diversified small industries and breweries replaced sawmills. During the first decade of the century, German immigrants were welcomed again for their expertise in beer brewing. The 1910 census shows that 23.9 percent of the city’s population was German-born or of German extraction. But being German during World War I often brought threats from angry neighbors. When hostile citizens demanded a change of German names in the city, Germania Hall became Pioneer Hall, Berlin Street, Liberty Street, and sauerkraut was served as “liberty kraut.”

After World War I, industry and building in La Crosse grew; more workers were needed in manufacturing plants, and more Europeans settlers arrived. The arrival of immigrants slowed during the Great Depression, while former immigrants began to lose their “foreignness” via intermarriage and gradual integration here into the melting pot, which protected local Germans during World War II from further hostilities.

After 1950, new waves of Central Europeans arrived in La Crosse, some as displaced persons, others as war brides. Some Latvian immigrants who had arrived in the city as early as 1914 and 1920 were joined by a new Latvian influx in 1949-50. The displaced persons in this group were given the opportunity to emigrate to America. In the 1960s and ’70s, some of these first-generation Latvians began teaching at the University, at Central High School, and working in La Crosse hospitals.

From 1950 to 2000, the character of immigrant groups coming to La Crosse changed. The census of 1970 reported the presence of 400 new refugees in La Crosse, among them 96 Vietnamese, 221 Laotians (Hmong), 31 Cambodians and 60 Cubans. They arrived seeking asylum from wars and Communist persecution, like the many Koreans who came here in the aftermath of the Korean War (1950-
Like the Koreans, the 80 Vietnamese refugees, arriving after the Vietnam War in 1975, were well-educated, and many had once held important positions. They proved to be quick learners in the new environment, and soon found jobs and were accepted here. To help them, area churches developed “Operation New Neighbor,” which became an ecumenical project when one Protestant church retained a Catholic nun to teach Buddhism to 30 Buddhist refugees. The Vietnamese added their Tet Lunar Year Festival to La Crosse’s cultural life.

Another group of Asian immigrants, the Laotian Hmong, began settling here after 1975. As allies to the U.S. military, they had fled from Communist revenge by crossing the Mekong River into Thai refugee camps. Invited by the U.S. government, they came to La Crosse in small groups from 1975 to 1995, until the city was home to 3,300 Hmong. As former mountain villagers, they faced the task of fitting their lives into a modern, urbanized Western community. Their neighbors had to muster understanding of unusual cultural ways and the courage to overcome deep-rooted racial prejudice. The Hmong Mutual Assistance Association (HMAA) began in 1982, contributing guidance, language, job and financial counseling to their own people, and disseminating cultural understanding. HMAA supports the elaborate Hmong New Year Celebration, with its display of ethnic costumes, music and dance.

Like the Hmong, Cubans fled Communism, via the “Freedom Flotilla,” and arrived in Florida first. Fort McCoy in Sparta, Wisconsin, became a shelter for 15,000 Cubans, mostly men. Sixty settled in La Crosse after they found sponsors to help with language skills and jobs. Their settlement program in the city was not very successful because the men lacked family ties and had trouble learning the English language. Most Cubans have since left.

Checking the new citizenship records in La Crosse for the 1980s and 1990s, one realizes that immigrants stopped coming in large national groups, but now come as individuals from all over the world. Immigrants from Korea, India, France, Rumania, Japan, Nicaragua, Turkey, Iran, Denmark, the Philippines, Mexico and Belize are included among the city’s residents today. Long-time La Crosse residents have had to readjust themselves to these new arrivals, and in the process share in and learn from their contributions.

The merging of immigrants into an existing community is a challenging task, more so for the newcomer who has to prove and assert himself than for established residents, who need to grant space and tolerance. While the city was busy defining itself in the nineteenth century, white European immigrants from the most prominent cultures were absorbed more easily into La Crosse than immigrants from varied ethnic cultures have been in the twentieth century. Recent adjustments have opened a rather enclosed La Crosse society to a larger world community, a process which can be predicted to continue in the second millennium.
The history and contributions of women and nonwhite ethnic groups in La Crosse have not been documented as extensively as those of white men. Early social conventions, habits, and negative beliefs about the abilities of women, and most certainly the negative stereotypical beliefs about the talents and contributions of people of color, have surely played a part in the less prominent documentation of these histories. The lives of local senior citizens have not been examined as a category very often, either. We hope to remedy these situations to a significant degree here.

Women have always played a significant role in helping to “tame” rugged settlements in this country. Early women confined their work to the home, but it was also common for women to help plant and harvest crops. The typical hard-working, married La Crosse housewife was not employed outside the home in the 1800s or the early 1900s. She cared for her family and home, made and/or cleaned clothing, prepared food, and cared for the children and the elderly. Women in rural areas performed similar tasks, but did them without the benefit of running water or electricity and had to walk or travel long distances for supplies.

Women first became employed in their own homes by taking in boarders, doing laundry or sewing, or as servants in other households. In the fall of 1852, 18-year-old Mary Bagley was hired as the first female teacher’s assistant, since women were not permitted to teach during that era. Miss Bagley had to remain single to keep her position, and was paid half of what the male teacher received. Also, nursing was viewed as a natural extension of a woman’s domestic responsibilities, and was viewed as an honorable profession by the larger society, where a woman could be single or married and pursue an acceptable paid service. In 1883, the first five-member group of Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration began training nurses. Another Franciscan nun, Sister Seraphine Kraus, gave La Crosse its first college curriculum.

After the death of her husband, Gottlieb, in 1878, Johanna Heileman continued ownership of the brewing company founded by her husband. In 1890 she became the first women president of a corporation not only in La Crosse but perhaps in the entire country. Johanna Heileman was the only brewer who hired women, but even she believed that women might spread yeast infections, and as a result she did not allow women to work in the brewing and fermentation areas.

Women began entering the workplace, learning new skills and earning paychecks in greater numbers when men went off to World War I. The boundaries
for women became even wider during and after World War II. Unskilled women found much better work schedules and pay in the factories, and did not return to domestic service in private homes.

White women first voted in La Crosse on September 7, 1920. Records do not reveal when a Native or black American woman first voted here. On March 22, 1921, Tillie Zein was the first woman to act as an election official, but it wasn't until 1951 that Alice Dixon became the first female city clerk, a position that has been held by women since. Slowly but steadily, La Crosse women have entered and succeeded in male-dominated professions like news, banking, law, medicine, general building contracting, the armed forces, public safety, and as owners and operators of shops, to name a few. Ruth E. Root became the first female member of the Common Council in 1980.

Native Americans enjoy the oldest history in La Crosse and inhabited the territory we call Wisconsin prior to European settlement. Speaking different languages, these ethnic groups included the Sioux, the Menominees, the Potawatomis, and the Winnebagoes. The friendliest of the tribes, the Winnebagoes, seasonally moved to the La Crosse area, along the Mississippi River, in the 1700s. A famous native woman was the daughter of a Winnebago chief, Ho-po-e-kaw, “Glory of the Morning.” Married to the Frenchman Jean Nicolet, “Glory of the Morning” became very influential and was highly respected, later becoming chieftress of the Winnebago people.

It was along the principal trade route of the Mississippi River into the Midwest from the South, and the Midwestern connection to Pennsylvania directly through the Ohio River, that many African-Americans first came to Wisconsin as tradesmen or working aboard paddle wheelers and steamboats. However, many also traveled overland by railroad. The first black settlers in La Crosse had paid steamboat passage and were encouraged to migrate to the area by John Levy, a white banker who was also a store and hotel owner. In 1852, John Williams and his wife Elizabeth left their native state of Pennsylvania to become the first African-Americans in La Crosse. John Levy opened a shop at 212 Main Street adjoining John Williams' barbershop. Williams and his wife would later build a house on Fourth Street and go on to have three children. Gradually, some 36 other African-Americans would migrate to La Crosse, including Henderson and Zachariah Moss, Charles Carley, and John Carter, who were all barbers, and Albert Burt, a cook.

Most African-Americans settled in La Crosse after the Civil War and were primarily involved in service industries. They served as barbers, cooks, and in domestic and hotel service, but also as skilled and unskilled workers on the railroad and riverboats. It is believed that as many as 500 blacks lived in La Crosse during the period 1865 to 1905.

Several African-Americans became very prominent. John W. Birney arrived in
La Crosse in 1857, built a home at 1001 State St., became wealthy as a land speculator, and then left La Crosse in 1885. Raised in the La Crosse area, publisher and newspaper editor George E. Taylor was the campaign manager for Dr. Frank Powell’s 1886 race for mayor of La Crosse, was chairman of the Wisconsin delegation at the first national convention of the Union Labor Party, and became the first black to run for President in 1904, with the all-black National Liberty Party.

George Poage grew up in La Crosse’s wealthy district at 1327 Cass St., went to the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and won a bronze medal at the 1904 Olympics held in St. Louis. Zachariah Moss emigrated to La Crosse from New Orleans, and became the most celebrated of all African-American barbers, as generations of his family were barbers at their shop located at 532 Copeland Ave.

The African-American population in 1999 is estimated to be three to four percent of the total population and continues to grow and be part of La Crosse’s history, participating in all economic levels and represented in most professions, as doctors, teachers, journalists, corporate executives, as well as in the skilled, non-skilled, and service industries.

The newest and largest minority group in La Crosse are the Hmong from Southeast Asia. In their own country of Laos, the Hmong were allies of the United States, and they stood, fought, and died in America’s secret war against Vietnam until a communist victory in 1975 sent tens of thousands fleeing for safety into Thailand, while many others came to America as refugees.

The word Hmong, which means “free men” or “free human being,” illustrates the importance of freedom and independence to these new immigrants, who began arriving in La Crosse in 1980. They are a proud people who brought with them their customs, values and their courage. Despite the shock of losing their whole way of life, friends and family members, coupled with the burden and difficulty of becoming accustomed to American culture and the English language, the Hmong are gradually overcoming many obstacles. The importance of family, education, and religion, along with a hardworking and independent heritage, all but ensures the success of their children, and that their children’s children will move forward to become successful competitors for highly-skilled jobs and professions.

Senior citizens in La Crosse had at one time been a community primarily cared for by homemakers. As medical and surgical techniques improved, seniors began living longer and doing so with greater independence. The challenge was not to just enhance longevity, but also to provide a greater quality of life and an opportunity to network with other seniors as a sizable percentage of the community began to retire and age.

In 1965, 80 interested retirees elected a slate of officers to a Seniors Executive Board at the senior center, which used the then-vacant U.A.W. building at 624
Gillette Street. To qualify for federal funding, Esther Keilholtz was hired in October 1968 as Senior Center Director. After overcoming some financial hurdles, the Senior Citizen Center became incorporated in February 1969, and became the Harry J. Olson Center. Harry Olson was the president of the United Auto Workers Advisory Board. In 1976, the Harry J. Olson Center moved to its current location at 1607 North Street. It is with thousands of hours of volunteer help, renovation, helping hands, donations, dues money, and grant funding that this center has grown and expanded to its current size, successfully meeting the needs of La Crosse’s seniors. Bernice Berg became the center’s third and current director in 1995. The center offers many activities and services, some of which have included card games, pool, lip reading, writing and painting classes, ballroom and square dancing, a nutrition program, birthday parties, potluck dinners, Sunday programs, an Autumn Queen contest, and various other community projects too numerous to list. Southside Seniors Inc. also serves the city’s senior citizens and is located at 1220 Denton Street.

The La Crosse Committee on Aging (L.C.O.A.) was organized in 1965 under the federal Older Americans Act as a support and liaison group for seniors, with Marianne O’Neil as its coordinator. O’Neil retired in 1991. The L.C.O.A. was plagued with controversy over bookkeeping practices, loss of funding, and a lawsuit that was later dismissed. After a series of stormy meetings, the L.C.O.A. closed its operation on February 20, 1992.

With federal funding, the City and County governments of La Crosse participate in providing for the needs of its seniors, which include but are not limited to subsidized meal programs, medical and nonmedical transportation, and equipment and operation costs for the meals programs. Despite the loss of the L.C.O.A., La Crosse still has available a wide range of support and liaison services that add to the quality of life of its senior citizens.

What Did La Crosse and Its People Look Like and Do in the Year 1900?

By Gordon Hampel

To arrive at an answer to the question posed, let us tell a story. Herman S. Katzmeeyer had just disembarked from the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad’s early edition of the Pioneer Limited, which was simply called train Number One. It was a highly regarded, superbly equipped, and very fast passenger train that followed a route between Chicago, Illinois, and the Twin Cities,
Minnesota, and Portage and La Crosse. Pioneer trains One and Four were awarded the first U.S. government mail contract to the Northwest. The train attracted such luminaries as Prince Henry of Prussia in 1902 and Woodrow Wilson in 1912.

It was late morning when Katzmeyer entered the Cameron, a brick and stone hotel and train station, to engage a room. It was a formidable structure that catered to travelers, railroad personnel, drummers and hucksters, with some rooms also rented to permanent tenants. The C.M. & St. Paul had its passenger depot at the north end of the building. Passenger trains had to back into town from Grand Crossing to the north to discharge their passengers.

This was Katzmeyer’s third business visit to La Crosse since he had started working for a large and well-known wholesale dry goods company in Chicago as a traveling salesman, and he was known to the trade as a drummer. Now he felt more at ease going about his job soliciting business. He rented a low-priced room, the last one vacant among 24 rooms on the second floor. It had its own water closet and gas-lighted fixture mounted on the door wall. He placed one of his bags on a rack at the foot of the bed and the other, his sample bag, on the floor. He put his room key in his suit pocket after locking the door and soon was through the hotel exit.

Outside, Katzmeyer found the late summer air on the crisp side as he made his way down Vine Street in his single-breasted wool worsted suit. He adjusted his felt fedora to a comfortable fit as he approached a block-square public landing for riverboats later called Spence Park to honor Thomas Spence, an important La Crosse businessman. Train tracks set in the dirt-like pavement of Front Street held several resting freight cars. Telephone poles, six stories tall and parallel to the train tracks, were strung with wires from south to north. As he walked, he watched where he stepped to avoid the mud and manure. He looked to the west across the mighty Mississippi to the opposite shore, then known as Barron’s Island. Ten years earlier, in 1890, prominent lumber baron A.W. Pettibone had given the island now named Pettibone Park, along with $50,000 for upkeep, to the City of La Crosse. To the north, he noted dredging operations just below the mouth of the La Crosse River. Right where he stood, had he revisited the spot 11 years later, he might have witnessed the dedication of Levee Park, so named as the place where steamboats and other river traffic moored. It is now called Riverside Park. He admired the municipal wagon bridge that spanned the Mississippi from Mt. Vernon Street to Barron’s Island.

Katzmeyer walked back to Front Street and along its railroad tracks to Pearl Street. Here at its foot, an excursion steamboat stood at leisure along the shore, which was stacked with pipes, lumber, boxes, barrels; nearby were wild undergrowth scrubtrees, weeds and wild grass straining to hold back the sand and mud from once again entering the Father of Waters.
He turned again toward the east. Here he viewed the western terminus of the Gateway City, a hodgepodge of brick and wood industrial structures, warehouses and wholesale houses, their outside walls mired and stained with soot and smoke, with signs as much as four stories high painted over their brick exteriors, describing the goings-on inside the structures. In among all this was a stable that kept a supply of horses and carriages. Weekdays were busy for the livery stables as well as Sunday, when an army of workers donned their Sunday best to go out for the afternoon. In 1898, there were 267 men employed in blacksmithing in La Crosse and its environs. Horses, the prime movers of people and goods, created up to 20 tons of manure daily in 1897 in the city.

Numerous businesses that began prior to 1880 survived the depression caused by the shutdown of the saw milling industry and continued to grow. Included were breweries, agricultural implement plants, foundries, machine shops, sash and door factories, flour mills, cigar factories, and a tannery. Between 1880 and 1900, a total of 40 industries were begun. Nineteen plants were founded between 1900 and 1905. Between 1880 and 1900, the total payroll of all industries was $2.6 million, which climbed to $4 million in 1905.

Katzmeyer walked east up Pearl Street and looked in shop windows along the way. He stopped in a saloon just up from the corner of Second Street, where he had a glass of Heileman’s Golden Leaf beer. There he learned there was a carnival on Market Square at Fourth and Jay Street. From the corner of Pearl and Fourth Street, he could hear the strident sounds of the steam calliope. He soon reached the hastily built tents and stalls that covered the small area. Here, numerous mothers with small children rode the merry-go-round, threw balls at moving objects to win prizes, and bought refreshments to satisfy their demanding children. Herman played a shooting game and won nothing. He left soon after.

He pulled his Elfin National watch from his pants pocket and decided there was time aplenty to retrieve his sample case from his hotel room and go pay Mr. William Doerflinger of the well-known Park Store at Fourth and Main Street a visit. Tomorrow morning he would muster up the courage to deal with the “Merchant Prince of La Crosse,” Mons Anderson. With sample case in hand, the dry goods salesman patiently waited on this fine day in 1900 in the somber outer office of the Park Store’s owner. The store — a combination of the Trade Palace Store, J. Gutman’s Great Western Clothing Store, the Cozen Dry Goods Store, and the Farlane Millinery Store — was united with doorways and archways broken open between the four buildings’ walls. Little did salesman Katzmeier know that in three years, this marriage of four buildings would be destroyed by fire. He needlessly concerned himself about his salesmanship, because less than an hour later he left the Park Store’s main doors with quite a handsome order.
Back on Main Street, he reminded himself that his sister, Charlotte, had invited him to supper that evening. He decided to return his sample case to his hotel room and freshen up. On his way, he stopped at the Batavian Bank to get some bills changed to fives and singles. Both the bank and the Doerflinger Building still stand on Main Street today.

Herman called Charlotte from his hotel. Charlotte's husband, Gaylord Tahitian, had had a telephone installed at home for business reasons, as he was an auxiliary volunteer fireman. Herman told Charlotte he was coming for supper and would stop at the La Crosse Theatre for tickets to the evening's performance of *School for Scandal*, with Mrs. Leslie Carter and Fanny Davenport. Charlotte said they already had plans for the evening, and he should forget about the tickets and come out to the house directly.

After a short streetcar ride up Main Street, he disembarked at Ninth Street. Here the roadway was unpaved and small pools of recent rainwater stood in wagon-wheel ruts. He found the large, nondescript clapboard house at the southwest corner of Pine and Ninth Streets. After a greeting and warm embrace, Katzmeyer and his genial sister sat together in the small inglenook of the parlor fireplace and talked, during which time she managed to inquire about his love life. Charlotte was noticeably disappointed with his reply. He changed the subject by asking where the children were. Charlotte replied that they were at school rehearsing a Thanksgiving play. Katzmeyer asked how things were in her daily life. His sister explained, saying that Gaylord came home every night and made himself comfortable reading the *La Crosse Chronicle*, and she prepared the evening meal. Her daily life was spent washing on a washboard, ironing with stove-heated hand-irons, cleaning, cooking, baking, canning in season, sewing, getting the family off to work and school. Charlotte continued on endlessly. He broke her recitation by asking to use the indoor bathroom, a very modern addition to the home.

The warm evening meal was adequate. The family ate their supper in sporadic conversation. Upon finishing their chocolate custard, they gave thanks to the Lord for what food he provided. Charlotte, Gaylord, and Herman spent the evening bowling, a popular indoor sport. They played in the basement of the Germania Hall at 720 Fifth Avenue South. Back home they said their good-byes — Charlotte with teary eyes. Herman placed an envelope for the children on the grotesque square parlor table with clawed glass ball feet.

Early the next morning, Herman breakfasted at the hotel. He was satisfied with a generous order from Pulling Dry Goods Store on Main Street, but left the Mons Anderson dry goods store almost without an order. He found the merchant prince to be arrogant and intimidating. Finally, he almost missed the morning Pioneer Limited to St. Paul-Minneapolis, but made it in the nick of time.
City Prodigies
By La Vonne Mainz

La Crosse has been called home by many who have gone on to achieve national or international fame. Among those personalities are Albert Sanford and Pulitzer Prize winners John W. Toland and William Mullen. They are included in the literary history chapter in this book.

Cadwallader Colden Washburn (1818-82) came to La Crosse in 1861. During the Civil War, he served in Co. B Second Wisconsin Cavalry, advancing to Major General, the most eminent La Crosse citizen in Civil War service. He served in Congress, 1867-71, and was governor of Wisconsin in 1872. His sawmill (La Crosse Lumber Co.), was the largest here, and he had a financial interest in Minneapolis Flour Mills (that later became General Mills).

Timothy Burns (1820-53) lived in La Crosse for only three years, but made a lasting memory. He came to La Crosse in 1850, was elected lieutenant governor of Wisconsin 1851, became chairman of the first County Board, and was the first La Crosse County judge. Buying a large tract of land, platting out lots and streets, he became the first real estate dealer in La Crosse.

Arthur Kreutz (1876-1950) violinist, composer, orchestra director and teacher, was born in La Crosse and was educated in city schools and at the University of Wisconsin. Some of his awards were American Prix de Rome for Musical Compositions, the most coveted musical award (1940); the National Association of American Composers & Conductors in New York prize (1941); the Guggenheim Fellowship (1944-45); and the American Composers Alliance Award (1945).

George Coleman Poage (1880-1962) was the first black American to participate and win medals in the Olympics, winning bronze medals in the 200- and 400-meter hurdles in the 1904 Olympic Games in St. Louis, Missouri. A star football player, he graduated second highest in his class at La Crosse High School in 1899 and went on to graduate from the University of Wisconsin in 1903.

Mauree Applegate Clack (1897-1969), a nationally known educator, author of eight books, speaker, and radio personality, began airing her Wisconsin School of the Air weekly series, Let’s Write, in 1953. She was a faculty member of La Crosse State College from 1945 to 1966. Awards included Meritorious Award for Service to the English Profession, 1962. In 1963 Clack was recognized at the Arizona State University for “distinguished service to teaching profession.”

Romy Hammes (1900-81) was featured twice in Life Magazine in 1938 and 1946, as an example of how to be a success in America. He got his start in the auto dealer business with Harry Dahl in the 1920s, and was soon running Dahl’s Kankakee, Illinois, Ford agency. He eventually owned many auto agencies. His
motto — “You not only sell the product, but sell the happiness that goes with it” — explains his success.

Walter Ristow, born in 1908, gained an international reputation as a geographer. Graduating from Central High School in 1925 and obtaining a geography degree from the University of Wisconsin, he taught at Oberlin College. Ristow was named chief of the map division of the New York City Library. In World War II he used his map making skills in military intelligence. In 1946 he became chief of the Library of Congress Geography and Map Division before retiring in 1977.

Nicholas Ray (1911-79, real name Raymond Kienzle) and Joseph Losey (1909-84) both became famous movie directors. After leaving La Crosse, both worked in New York theaters, then went to Hollywood and Europe. Both directed many classic films and guest stars. Ray’s most popular work was Rebel Without a Cause, with James Dean in 1955. Ray died in 1979. He was not blacklisted in the 1950s, although he was a Communist Party member, because his boss was the very powerful Howard Hughes.

Joseph Losey, the grandson of city pioneer Joseph W. Losey, graduated from Central High School in 1925. He was the first stage director of New York’s Radio City Music Hall’s opening in 1932. His left-wing films and Communist Party membership caused him to be blacklisted in Hollywood in the 1950s, so he lived and worked in Europe until his death.

Julie Haydon (1910-94, real name Donella Donaldson), a Broadway and movie star, spent the last 16 years of her life in La Crosse. She acted in many movies including The Scoundrel (1935), The Time of Your Life (1939), MGM’s Hardy Family series, and Tennessee Williams’ The Glass Menagerie (1944).

Donald J. Herbert, “Mr. Wizard,” son of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert G. Kemske, was born in 1917. He attended Hamilton Grade School, Lincoln Junior High and Central High School, graduating in 1935. He received a bachelor’s degree from La Crosse State College in 1940. He was a highly decorated pilot during World War II, flying 56 combat missions. After the war, as Don Herbert, he became a radio scriptwriter, actor and producer for many popular radio shows. From 1951 to 1965, he created and directed a network TV show, Mr. Wizard. He has received several awards, including the Peabody Award for “Best TV Program for Youth and Children” in 1954. Mr. Wizard returned to TV in 1971-72 and again the 1980s. In 1994, he taped 70 programs for Nickelodeon.

Mary (Olberg) Yates Wallace graduated from Central High School in 1947. She met Italian dress designer Emillio Pucci and became involved in the dress designing business with him. She married NBC newsman Ted Yates, who was killed in 1967 filming the Six-Day War. In the early 1970s, she became the producer of the CBS television program Face the Nation. In 1986 she married Mike Wallace, a TV interviewer and reporter, who co-hosts the CBS news-magazine 60 Minutes.
D.B. (Dwayne B.) Reinhart (1920–96) started out working for a wholesale grocer near Shell Lake, Wisconsin. In 1956, he and David Nudd bought Gateway Foods, a La Crosse-based wholesale food company. Buying Nudd out in 1957, he turned Gateway Foods into the largest privately held food wholesaler in the country. He created Rainbow Foods, Festival Foods, Kwik Trip, and Reinhart Institutional Foods. He was very benevolent and involved in many community organizations.


D. Wayne Lukas, born in 1935, taught and coached basketball at Logan High School here for 10 years and trained quarter horses on the side. In 1967 he began working full-time as a horse trainer. Career highlights have included the Eclipse Award (four times) as the nation’s top trainer, winning the Belmont Stakes three times and Triple Crown races 12 times. He was inducted into the National Museum of Racing’s Hall of Fame in 1996.

Dallas Weekley and Nancy Arganbright, billed as “America’s foremost one-piano, four-hand duet team,” began playing piano together in the 1950s when they were students at the University of Indiana. Married in 1957, they started playing professionally in 1960. They moved to La Crosse in 1965 and were employed in the music department of UW-L. Giving duet concerts from coast to coast, several concert tours of Europe, publishing 30 music books and several record albums, they have gained worldwide fame. In 1993 they retired from UW-L and moved to Louisville, Kentucky, but continue to give concert tours.

Don Iverson, born in La Crosse (1945), and a Central High School (1963) and UW-L (1968) graduate, won golf tournaments beginning at age 14. He won the Wisconsin State Open Championship in 1966 and turned pro in 1968. He played for nine years on the PGA tour (1971-79), winning the Shreveport Open (1972) and the B.C. Open (1975). He and his family currently reside in La Crosse.

Tom Newberry graduated from Onalaska High in 1981 and from UW-L in 1985, where he played football. In 1986 he was drafted by the Los Angeles Rams in the highest draft choice ever from UW-L. In 1987 he was selected to the NFL’s All-Rookie Team, and was named to the Pro Bowl in 1988 and 1989. In 1995 Newberry went to the Pittsburgh Steelers, where he played in the 1996 Super Bowl. He retired in 1996 and lives in Florida. In 1997 he was inducted into UW-L’s Hall of Fame.

Green Bay Packer football receiver William “Bill” Schroeder played football only one year at UW-L. A four-year track star, he helped the UW-L Eagles win six NCAA Division III National Championships, and received All-American
honors 17 times in track and field. Drafted by the Packers in 1994, he was traded to the New England Patriots a year later, but came back to the Packers the following year. He is now a regular starter for the Packers. Other Packers from La Crosse were Walt Gudie and Jim Temp.

Several La Crosse natives have played major league baseball. Most prominent was first baseman Edward Konetchy (1885-1947). A candy maker off-season, he played baseball in La Crosse, was hired by the St. Louis Cardinals (1907), Pittsburgh Pirates (1913), Boston Braves (1916), Brooklyn Dodgers (1919), and Philadelphia Phillies (1921), and managed minor league teams for many years thereafter.

Other local major league players were Roy L. Patterons (Chicago White Sox, 1901-07), Walter Meinert, Paul Fitzke, Webb Schultz, Frank Skaff, Craig Kusick, Jerry Augustine, Charles Hockenbery, Tony Ghelfi, George Williams, Brian Colburn, Keven Henthorne, Scott Servais and Damian Miller.

Dr. C. Norman Shealy — pain specialist, author, lecturer and consultant — received a medical degree from Duke University in 1956 and was at one time chief of neurosurgery at Lutheran Hospital until he opened a Chronic Pain Center at St. Francis Hospital in 1971. In 1980 he moved his clinic to his rural home, and in March of 1982 moved his pain center to Springfield, Missouri. He has written ten books.

Famous and Infamous La Crosse

By Joyce Beilke

The histories of all river cities have their shady sides. Lumbermen, isolated in the woods in the La Crosse area, would come to town on a spree — they sought ladies and libation! “Booze and Broads!”

In 1909, when Ori Sorenson was elected mayor of La Crosse, he allowed the red-light district to flourish because it was “a necessary evil to assure a safe city.” The La Crosse Tribune editorialized, “Keep the evils of prostitution segregated into the district.” The paper reported in 1911, when John Dengler was mayor, that he did what he could to improve the moral condition of the city by closing the district and assignation houses that had existed for 40 years. Dengler noted there had been 47 houses of ill-repute.

The red-light district was gone, but houses of prostitution still existed on and off Pearl Street. If a streetwalker was to a client’s liking, he could easily engage her services on Third Street between State and Pearl. There were no stereotypical prostitutes in La Crosse. There were old timers like Mrs. S. Bennett, who moved
to a flat at 125 S. Third Street, where she ran an assignation house and her two daughters were available for men who did not have their own girls. Mrs. Howe could be had for two dollars, or if a fellow brought a girl of his own he could have a room at her place at 111 1/2 Pearl Street for a dollar. Most of the girls were younger — some as young as 18, but most were in their 20s. They represented several nationalities, but were mainly Polish, Norwegian, German, and Canadian.

In the 1940s a Pearl Street tavern owner, “John X,” told of the upstairs cubicles, small rooms with a cot, known as “cribs,” where years ago business was transacted. There were no sanitary facilities. Other “houses” he told of were around Second and Front Street, called Washington Alley. In that same area was the infamous match box shack, where a client would drive up to the window and strike a match, whereupon a form would appear, pull back the curtain and display her wares. John X said that on summer evenings, business was steady. He spoke of another popular house known only as “Ida’s,” a nicer establishment that was very popular. And then there was Ma Bennett. Mrs. Anna “Ma” Bennett purchased the European Hotel at 216 N. Second Street in 1925. It was a red-brick, two-story building with two large front windows, with a door in the middle that faced the street. The living-reception room was very nicely furnished, the kitchen was in the rear, and there were eight rooms upstairs and at least as many girls.

One of the area’s businessman, “Jay S.,” said that sex was not the only commodity at Ma’s. She and the girls had “regulars” who would lunch, have a few drinks, play a little poker, and just enjoy the girls’ company. The going price was $2.50, but Jay S. said the guys dropped big bucks there. Everyone used the alley entrance, and when Ma marched the girls up State Street for their regular physical checkups, it was a time-out for the neighborhood. Jay S. noted, “Ma was strictly a Madam — everyone liked her — she paid her bills — was always friendly and provided a service.” He said he “hated to see her leave.” Ma left for California after a raid in 1946.

For a time massage parlors of questionable reputation emerged here, but have since shut down. Now, we have a titillating resurgence of advertisements for “discreet dancing girls and guys who will come to your house.” The law has pretty well closed things up locally.

In 1920 the Volstead Act went into effect and closed down all businesses making or serving alcoholic beverages. The “Roaring Twenties” with Prohibition was the century’s most colorful era. According to various storytellers from that time, Prohibition didn’t stop drinking — it just made it a greater challenge and more fun! Stills sprung up all over the country and operators sold throughout the city of La Crosse.

Home brew, bathtub brew or wart beer — the liquor of Prohibition masqueraded under a variety of names — all added up to illegal brew. An old-timer who
worked on State Street, “Gene O.” told with relish about how one of La Crosse’s most successful nightclub operators, in later years, had a custom-built car. The whole chassis was beefed up with welded-on steel supports. In fact, he carried so much booze that he needed new tires every couple of months. Gene O. went on to say that the “Feds” caught up to the fellow, though, and little did the customers of his new classy establishment in the 1940s know that their proprietor had served time with a Georgia chain gang for bootlegging.

One of the larger stills was located in a cellar on Third Street, right across the alley from Ma’s. Gene O. continued telling how Ma’s girls often went to the Busy Bee Café on Third Street for sandwiches and a little libation. He noted that they were never out of line, were really attractive, and always wore housecoats. One of the men he knew there played in the orchestra pit at the Rivoli Theater. This musician, “Steve M.,” would meet with one of Ma’s girls from time to time at the café. They eventually married and lived happily in La Crosse until they passed away. Steve M. summed up by saying, “No one went thirsty and times were sure not dull.”

“Trying to enforce Prohibition was never easy,” said Clarence Koblitz, in an article written by Corinne Martin in the La Crosse Tribune. Koblitz was a policeman during this period. A lot of police manpower went into the enforcement of Prohibition; bootleggers and moonshiners ran many distilleries in the area, and others made beer or liquor in their homes without ever being caught. The potential to make great amounts of money made for some dangerous situations, as Koblitz very well remembered.

The officer once stopped a car for speeding in the city and gave the man a ticket. About a month later, a fellow officer asked him if he remembered the incident. Koblitz responded to his colleague that he had told the man he was lucky to be alive. The man was carrying a trunk full of moonshine to La Crosse and had a gun in his lap as Koblitz talked to him. Koblitz said he knew he would have been shot for the sake of a little moonshine and a lot of money had he asked the man to step out of the car.

In this new millennium, Mrs. Bennet’s Hotel has long been razed, Pearl Street between Second and Third has been refurbished, and the old sidewalks have been replaced with shiny new bricks. But what still stand are the old brick walls, stone foundations and mortar left from those bygone, memorable, famous and sometimes infamous buildings so long ago destroyed — including our glorious La Crosse County Court House — where so many famous and infamous La Crosse folks ventured. But that’s another story!
Celebrities Who Have Visited Here

By Anita Taylor Doering

Prairie La Crosse, where three rivers meet, has been a gathering place for Native American ethnic groups for centuries. Before the village of La Crosse was founded, French explorers and missionaries paddled along the Upper Mississippi, including Father Hennepin (1680) and Nicholas Perrot (1685). Much later, U.S. Army Lieutenant Zebulon Pike traversed the “Father of the Waters” and passed by here in 1805.

In the early years, La Crosse didn’t receive many well-known visitors because travel was difficult and the population was small. Most local pioneers were originally from the East Coast and were accustomed to a more cultured life than they found in this new frontier town. Traveling musicians taught and performed here as early as the mid-1850s, shortly after the first railroad was established. Ole Bull, the famous Norwegian violinist, played in the city in 1856 and returned in 1872 as the lead in a production by the Normanna Saengerkor, a men’s Norwegian choral group.

By the 1870s, La Crosse had grown in size and transportation had improved, so the city was able to attract more famous people. During this time performers often appeared at the Pomeroy Opera House, built by the fiery La Crosse Democrat publisher, Marcus “Brick” Pomeroy, in 1868–69, on the southwest corner of Fourth and Main Street. Acting troupes and other traveling entertainers performed here. The McMillan Opera House succeeded the Pomeroy, and later the La Crosse Theater was a popular venue.

Local literary groups also sponsored programs, inviting notable people on lecture circuits to stop here. The Young Men’s Literary Association invited some very eminent men and women to La Crosse, including Ralph W. Emerson, former slave Frederick Douglass, Theodore Tilton, Henry Wheeler Shaw (pen name: Josh Billings), and Robert Collyer. The successor to the Literary Association, the Young Men’s Library Association (YMLA), also hosted presentations by women’s rights advocate Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1869), women’s suffragette Susan B. Anthony (1886), Wendell Phillips, T. De Witt Talmadge, Bayard Taylor and James T. Fields. Author Samuel Clemens (pen name: Mark Twain) appeared with George W. Cable publicizing Huck Finn in 1885. Twain also visited La Crosse for two days on his own while conducting background research on his book about the Mississippi River and the following year while traveling up the river. Booker T. Washington came to the city in 1898 and stayed at the Hotel Law. Other literary figures who have visited are Jacki Lyden, Sinclair Lewis, poet laureate Robert Pinsky, Amy Tan and Studs Terkel.
Several U.S. presidents have visited La Crosse while in office, and some were here for a very short time. **Grover Cleveland** was in the city 25 minutes while on board a train (October 10, 1887). The *Morning Chronicle* newspaper dubbed the event “the first visit of an actual president of the United States to La Crosse.” **Theodore Roosevelt** spoke at Market Square (April 4, 1903), while **William Howard Taft** dedicated the YMCA building at Seventh and Main Street (September 17, 1909). Taft’s old college friend, George W. Burton, was a member of the YMCA board of directors.

**Harry Truman** was greeted by a crowd of 4,000 people at Grand Crossing while en route to St. Paul, Minnesota. He appeared at the rear of the train briefly (November 3, 1949). **Gerald Ford** spoke at the Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium (March 26, 1976). **George Bush** held a press conference at the Radisson Hotel, jogged in Pettibone Park and addressed a crowd of 1,200 people at the La Crosse Center (October 31, 1992). **Bill Clinton** spoke to thousands of onlookers and television viewers in downtown La Crosse (January 28, 1998).

Other presidents who have visited La Crosse but not while holding that office have included **Millard Fillmore** (1854) on board the *War Eagle*, and Lieutenant General U.S. Grant on the steamboat McClellan (Aug. 25, 1865). **Theodore Roosevelt** visited shortly before he succeeded assassinated President William McKinley (September 11, 1900), while **Franklin D. Roosevelt** and **Eleanor Roosevelt** stopped (April 19, 1932) while on board a train heading for Chicago. **John F. Kennedy** appeared at the Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium (September 25, 1959) and the next year at the airport (October, 1960). **Richard Nixon** spoke to crowds in La Crosse twice (October 8, 1960 and 1968) at the Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium. **Jimmy Carter** spoke to several hundred people at the UW-L Cartwright Center (April 5, 1976). **Ronald Reagan** campaigned here two times (1976 and December 8, 1980). And **Bill Clinton** also campaigned from the Clinton Street Bridge (August 7, 1992).


The temperance and social welfare movements have lobbied strongly around the country. Temperance leader **Carrie Nation** reached La Crosse in 1902 and stated, “La Crosse is a bad town.” **Dorothea Dix**, a militant Massachusetts woman, visited the city poorhouse (now the site of Hillview) in 1860 with Marcus Pomeroy and was horrified at the treatment of the “inmates.”

Two famous Native Americans who visited here after white settlement were **Chief Sitting Bull** (1888) and a very elderly **Chief Black Hawk** (1897). **Dr. Frank**
Powell, a two-time mayor of the city known locally as “White Beaver,” was a good friend of William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody and Native Americans. Cody visited La Crosse many times because of his friendship and business partnership with Powell. In 1880, “Wild Bill” and his Indian Braves came here to enact a drama. The next year, Cody returned to La Crosse to play the lead with Frank Powell as a supporting character in the Prairie Waif at the Opera House. Cody’s Wild, Wild West Show came to La Crosse in 1896 and 1898, and Cody was a visitor of his friend Powell up to the end of the nineteenth century.

Traveling circuses were also annual entertainments beginning in the late 1850s. Other noted traveling events were the Ringling Brothers Circus and P.T. Barnum (later Barnum & Bailey). People with unusual physical features or talents were exhibited in town as curiosities, such as Midget Major Tot (1880) and Mrs. Tom Thumb (1892). Exhibitions and aerial feats, like balloon ascensions and airplane displays, were also popular. In fact, Charles Lindbergh buzzed over the city in his plane “The Spirit of St. Louis” (August, 1927).

Famous entertainers and musicians have long been invited to perform in La Crosse. Many of them, ranging from presidents to rock-and-roll singers and boxing champions, stayed at the Stoddard Hotel at Fourth and State Street. Early serious music was presented by the Mendelssohn Quintet of Boston, Camilla Urso, Fannie Kellogg and the Boston Philharmonic Club. Many classical musicians have been hosted by groups from the La Crosse Symphony, La Crosse Vocational Choir, La Crosse Civic Choir and the Community Concerts organization. Concert halls at Viterbo University, Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium and the La Crosse Center have also attracted celebrities. Classical artists who have visited the city included black opera star Marian Anderson, opera soprano Geraldine Farrar, contralto Kathleen Ferrier, composer Percy Grainger, James Melton, Robert Merrill, violinist Itzhak Perlman, Roberta Peters, soprano Lily Pons, contralto Ernestine Schumann-Heink and violinist Isaac Stern.

Pianist Walter Liberace may hold the title for most visits to the city as a famous performer. He first played at the Cavalier Inn in 1939 and returned to La Crosse three times in 1940. In 1962 he again played to a crowd at the Vocational School Auditorium, and then next year at the Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium. In 1984 the La Crosse Center was his stage. Ironically, in 1982, former La Crosse native Scott Thorson, who had been in Liberace’s employ, filed a palimony suit against Liberace, which eventually was thrown out of court. Although many notable musical performers have appeared in La Crosse, the most memorable was Elvis Presley, performing two shows on May 14, 1956, at the Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium.

Popular entertainers visiting La Crosse also included the comic duo of Abbott and Costello; country-western musician Gene Autry; actress Tallulah Bankhead; jazz musician Count Basie; pop rockers the Beach Boys; magician Harry
Blackstone; singer Pat Boone; comic pianist Victor Borge; actress Susan Cabot; comedian Bill Cosby; singer John Denver; the Jimmy Dorsey Band; Bob Dylan; the Everly Brothers; Errol Flynn; Woody Herman and his swing band; comedian Bob Hope; actor James Earl Jones; Spike Jones; band leader Sammy Kaye; radio humorist Garrison Keillor; drummer Gene Krupa (1948); journalist Charles Kuralt, the 1990 recipient of Viterbo’s Pope John XXIII Award for Distinguished Service; poet-author Louis L’Amour; The Lettermen; big band leader Guy Lombardo; E.G. Marshall; Audie Murphy; Ricky Nelson; comedian Pat Paulsen; musician Cole Porter; actor Vincent Price; children’s entertainer “Mr. Rogers” (Fred Rogers); comedian Red Skelton; astronaut Donald “Deke” Slayton; John Philip Sousa and his 60-piece military band; the Trapp family (as in Sound of Music); a pop group led by Frankie Valli; rock-and-roller Bobby Vee; band leader Lawrence Welk; and Aquinas High School graduate and TV actor Charles Dierkop, who was arrested while visiting.

Major sports figures who have made the trip here have included Green Bay Packer greats Don Hutson, Bart Starr, Paul Hornung and Brett Favre. Sportwriter Dick Schaap visited the city to hawk his book Green Bay Replay. And Olympic legend Jesse Owens gave a speech at an athletic function at UW-L. Among the boxing champions who came are John Sullivan, Joe Louis and Jack Dempsey.

Other celebrities who journeyed here included inventor Alexander Graham Bell, who twice visited La Crosse regarding education for the hearing-impaired and to chat with local teacher Nida Saunders. Barber Ted Lapitz gave a shave at his shop at 312 S. 4th Street to John Dillinger (July 25, 1934) just two days before the gangster was gunned down in Chicago. Finally, architect Frank Lloyd Wright stopped here between Minneapolis and his home in Spring Green, Wisconsin.
La Crosse Helped Save the Union and End Slavery

By Daniel Marcou and Jerry Severson

La Crosse soldiers marched to war, fought and died in many Wisconsin regiments during the Civil War. Many of these units gained fame, fighting in every major engagement in the Civil War.

The 8th Wisconsin Regiment became famous for taking their mascot to battle with them. They built a special perch for “Old Abe,” who was a pet bald eagle. The Confederates tried to shoot the “federal buzzard,” but Abe survived the war. For its part, the 3rd Wisconsin Cavalry captured and hung the notorious Confederate guerrilla “Sue Mundy.”

One Wisconsin unit charged Missionary Ridge, which raised the siege of Chattanooga. They did this without orders, led by young Arthur MacArthur, who was later to receive the Medal of Honor and also become the father of General Charles MacArthur and grandfather of General Douglas MacArthur. The highest-ranking La Crosse resident to come back from the war was Major General Cadwallader C. Washburn.

Camp Randall Stadium is now the home of the Badgers. From 1861 to 1885, it served as training grounds for 70,000 Wisconsin volunteer soldiers, who helped save the Union. The first company of troops to march through the gates of Camp Randall in response to the call for volunteers by President Abraham Lincoln was the “La Crosse Light Brigade,” a group organized in La Crosse in 1858 to drill, shoot, and socialize. This unit became Company B of the 2nd Wisconsin Regiment of the famous “Iron Brigade.” Wilson Colwell of La Crosse became its captain. They fought in the skirmish at Blackburne’s Ford, which was a precursor of the First
Battle of Bull Run. They also were heavily engaged at Bull Run. That early battle became a rout of the Union, though the Wisconsin soldiers fought bravely.

Before the 2nd Wisconsin would see action again, it would be combined with the 6th Wisconsin, 7th Wisconsin, and 19th Indiana. They were commanded by General John Gibbon, a regular army man from the South who stayed with the Union. He immediately put his brigade in the distinctive uniform of the regular army. They found themselves dressed in tall, black “Hardee” Hats turned up on one side and pinned with a gold eagle. They wore long frock coats and white leggings. Gibbon not only dressed his men like regular soldiers, he trained them like regular soldiers. The rest of the army called the unit “the Band Box Soldiers” because of the uniforms. This name would soon be all but forgotten.

The brigade’s first engagement under Gibbon occurred on August 28, 1862, late in the afternoon as the unit marched lazily down a road in front of the Brawner farm, near the battlefield of Bull Run. General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson formed his men for the battle and expected to devastate the Union soldiers, who were outnumbered and surprised.

Jackson was met by a brigade that formed and advanced coolly under fire. The Wisconsin and Indiana men stood toe-to-toe with the best unit in the Confederate line. This engagement cost Jackson’s subordinate, General Richard Ewell, a leg. The fighting did not stop until well after dark. Both units had stood their ground. One of the Confederate commanders, William Taliaferro, who was wounded three times during this engagement, praised the Union brigade. In his battle report he stated, “Out in the sunlight, in the dying daylight, and under the stars they stood, and although they could not advance, they would not retire. There was some discipline in this, but there was much more true valor.”

This battle preceded “Second Battle of Bull Run.” The battle would turn into another Union loss. The Wisconsin men were assigned to cover the retreat of the Union army. They acted successfully as the rear guard of the retreating army, and would hold back the Confederates long enough for the rest of the army to get safely away.

After General Lee won the battle of Second Bull Run, he invaded the North. The Wisconsin men would again see action as they advanced on a strategic gap held by the rebels. The Wisconsin men advanced on the rebel position steadily with one line moving and loading, as another fired. This steady, brave movement under constant fire was witnessed by General McClellan. He was said to watch the fight and comment, “Those men fight like iron.” The name “Iron Brigade” was therefore earned for this action under fire, and secured forever. It was during that battle, at South Mountain, that La Crosse’s Captain Colwell died in action.

The Confederates retreated to Sharpsburg, Maryland, and spread out a line of defense on the banks of the Antietam. The Iron Brigade was one of the first units
to advance on the Confederate position in the early morning hours of September 17, 1862. They made their advance through a cornfield. Because of the deaths that took place on “America's Most Bloody Day,” the cornfield would forever be called “The Bloody Cornfield.” During the advance of the Iron Brigade, “Starkes Louisiana Brigade,” a Confederate unit, was decimated by its deadly fire.

When a Confederate unit was sent by Stonewall Jackson to counter the Union advance, the Confederates were able to stem the Union tide by this counter-attack. After the counter-attack, General Jackson asked the attacking unit’s commander, General Hood where his unit was, and his reply was, “Dead on the field.” Due to losses at Antietam, the 24th Michigan was added to the Iron Brigade. This young regiment was keenly aware of the reputation of the brigade it had just joined. They would earn the right to wear their Black Hats. The Iron Brigade would find itself engaged in the Battle of Fredericksburg, and also see action in the Chancellorsville Campaign, taking part in a successful feint on Fredericksburg. It would achieve its legendary status at Gettysburg.

The Battle of Gettysburg was begun because Union Cavalry General John Buford recognized that there was some choice ground to give battle for, near town. At 5:30 a.m. on July 1, 1863, his troops engaged the Confederates as they marched out of the mist heading toward Gettysburg. Burford’s troopers stubbornly fought for every inch of ground until the Iron Brigade became the first federal infantry brigade to arrive there. The 2nd Wisconsin, including Company B, advanced, and were ordered by General John Reynolds to clean the rebels out of McPherson's Woods. As he shouted “Iron Brigade Forward,” he was struck and instantly killed by a rebel sharpshooter’s bullet. The Iron Brigade advanced and captured rebel General Archer and much of his brigade.

The 6th Wisconsin later advanced on the famous Railroad Cut, which held a Mississippi brigade. During this advance, the Wisconsin boys captured the Confederate battle flag and much of the enemy brigade. There was a brief pause in the fighting, and then the Confederates attacked in force. At this point, they outnumbered the Union forces on the field. Some units crumbled, but the Iron Brigade slowly retreated and reformed repeatedly, giving up ground slowly.

The Confederates, facing the Iron Brigade, had also given them the name of “Those Damn Black Hats.” The perception of the Confederates was that when you advanced on the Iron Brigade, they did not retreat, and there was a point in front of the unit that no one passed because of their fast, accurate fire. One description of the Iron Brigade in action was that they stood “looking like giants with their tall black hats, and giants they were in action.” The Iron Brigade was the first infantry unit on the field on July 1. They were the last infantry unit to leave the field. The high ground to their rear was secured. The strategic high ground at Gettysburg was won with the blood of the Iron Brigade. Of the 1,883
Western men who marched into battle on July 1, 1,212 became casualties. Before the end of the war, 2nd Wisconsin would finish with the highest killed percentage of any federal regiment of the Civil War. The brave young men from the La Crosse Light Guard paid for our freedoms with their blood. While alive, they would always be proud to proclaim that they wore the black hat of the “Iron Brigade.”

About 130 men from the La Crosse area were volunteers serving in Company B of the 2nd Wisconsin Infantry in 1861; 21 came out in 1864, when the Iron Brigade was disbanded. The battles of Gettysburg, Vicksburg and in 1864, Atlanta, turned the tide against the South. President Lincoln was re-elected in 1864. The opponent, General McClellan, lost.

From the Bad Axe River to the Mekong Delta
(Military-Related Activities)

By Sam McKay

Even though La Crosse was nonexistent in 1832, the area where the three rivers came together had Indian settlements and was well-known to the white man. On April 1, 1832, General Henry Atkinson, garrisoned at St. Louis, was notified of the impending Indian troubles in the area and was charged with the task of Indian pacification. On April 5, Black Hawk, the leader of the British Band of the Sauk Indians, so named because of their sympathizing with the British in the War of 1812, crossed the Mississippi and started up the Rock River, in direct violation of a treaty he had signed in 1831. General Atkinson departed from St. Louis on April 8, and the Black Hawk War of 1832 began.

On June 28, General Atkinson, with his Second Army, started up the Rock River in pursuit of Black Hawk, his spiritual advisor, and the British Band of Sauk. They got as far as the trembling lands near Lake Koshkonong, a wide spot on the Rock River, where the Chemokemons, as the Americans were called, built a fort. The pursuit continued through the Four Lakes, now Madison, to Ouisconsin Heights, around Baraboo, where a battle was fought on July 21. On July 27, General Atkinson, at the Ouisconsin River, where Tower Hill State Park is now located, continued the pursuit along a route that today would terminate at Victory, 24 miles south of La Crosse.

On July 30, the arrival of the steamboat Warrior at Prairie du Chien brought the war close to La Crosse. The Warrior was chartered to reconnoiter the river as far as Wabasha’s village north of La Crosse. Here they alerted the Sioux, an
avowed enemy of the Sauk, about the latter’s incursion. While returning to Prairie du Chien, the Warrior encountered a Sioux who said the Sauk were gathered at the Bad Axe River and were 400 strong. The steamboat stopped, probably at La Crosse, gathered wood for the boilers and steamed on downstream to the Bad Axe. On August 1 they found Black Hawk, and the chief tried to surrender. Due to poor communication, the Warrior bombarded the Indians, thinking they were trying to trick them.

The next day, Atkinson’s troops arrived and “that disgraceful affair” was on. While the Warrior steamed up and down the river, the deck loaded with troopers, friendly Indians and unruly civilians all relishing the target practice, Atkinson’s men were pouring murderous barrages into the river. On September 21, the Sauk ceded their Iowa lands as reparations.

Following the U.S.-Mexican War of 1845 and the U.S. Civil War in 1865, the Indian Wars engaged local people — La Crosse journalist Mark Kellogg being one example, who died at Custer’s Last Stand in 1876. During the Spanish-American War in 1898, Wisconsin units were not activated for long. They arrived in Puerto Rico in late July, and the war ended on August 13. Only the Second and Third regiments of the Wisconsin troops saw any combat. Company B of the Third regiment was organized at La Crosse shortly after the President’s call for 100,000 men on April 23, 1898. The company consisted of 104 men and 25 officers. Most of the men were between the ages of 20 and 25, and were born in La Crosse. However, 14 of them were from Germany, five from Norway and one each from Poland and the area later called Czechoslovakia.

On May 10 the unit was ordered to Chickamauga Park near Chattanooga, Tennessee, where they trained in deplorable conditions. On June 28, the men thought they were going to Cuba, but went to Charleston, South Carolina, instead. The conditions at Charleston were no better than at Chickamauga. Because of poor food, bad sleeping, and long forced marches, the State of Wisconsin demanded an investigation. But before it started, the units were ordered to Puerto Rico.

They landed at La Playa Harbor near Ponce on the southern coast on July 28. On August 9, the Second and Third Infantry of the Wisconsin National Guard and one artillery battery were ordered to capture the city of Coamo, which was inland to the northeast of Ponce. The 16th Pennsylvania, which later got the full credit for the victory, assisted in the battle. What happened was that the city was surrounded, and the Wisconsin units engaged the Spaniards while invading the city, driving them out in the direction of the Pennsylvania unit, which had the escape route blocked. After a short battle, the Spaniards surrendered. The Wisconsin unit had the satisfaction of raising the Stars and Stripes in the city of Coamo.
On Saturday, August 13, 1898, a courier arrived at central headquarters stating that the Spanish had surrendered. After many frustrating delays in September, on October 11 orders came to ship the Third Wisconsin home; the men were overjoyed.

In April of 1917, when the United States entered the First World War, many of the young men of La Crosse born around the time of the Spanish-American War were ripe for military service. The war had been raging in Europe since 1914, as America tried to remain neutral. When the Germans refused to end their submarine warfare against Great Britain, which included the sinking of U.S. merchant vessels, President Woodrow Wilson declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917.

In America, every German was considered a possible enemy agent. It hit hard in the Coulee Region. From 1840 to 1850, Germans were the most active group emigrating here. In 1905, 23.9 percent of the population of the city was either from Germany or of German descent. Discrimination surfaced here, as sauerkraut became “liberty cabbage;” Berlin Street was renamed Liberty Street; and Germania Hall became Pioneer Hall. There were taunts from adults, vandalism, and the prohibiting of children from playing with German children.

“Hans” Zoerb was born here, but his family went back to Germany. In 1912 they returned with his grandmother and two great aunts. The old ladies were not naturalized citizens at the time of the war, and were photographed and fingerprinted. He tells the story of Fritz Steiff, who liked to play his flute on Grandad’s Bluff every Sunday. One Sunday he played it in Riverside Park, and was promptly arrested as a spy trying to photograph the bridge. He was closely observed from then on and, being disillusioned, after the war he returned to Germany.

On June 5, 1917, 2,761 La Crosse men registered for the draft. Although they served in many branches, the majority of the soldiers served in the U.S. Army’s 32nd Division. This unit was organized from the Michigan and Wisconsin National Guard, and was activated on July 18, 1917. It was sent into combat in France on July 26, 1918, as part of the 38th French Corps. It saw continuous action until November 11, 1918, when the armistice was signed. More than 800 officers and men of the 32nd were decorated by Allied governments.

On June 25, 1950, five years after the end of World War II, North Korea invaded South Korea, and the Korean War began. Many men who were still in the Armed Services from World War II were sent to Korea to fight on the Southern side; many reserve units were called up and thousands of men were drafted. No great patriotism drove recruiting. One La Crosse resident remembers returning to his hometown in Missouri and discovering that few people knew anything about Korea or the war that was fought there. It was a long, brutal war, ending where it had started, leaving Korea still divided on July 27, 1953.
This “forgotten war” resulted in nearly 35,000 American deaths. Two of those deaths, among the many from La Crosse, are singled out because of their extreme sacrifice and performance “above and beyond the call of duty.”

Corporal Mitchell Red Cloud Jr., a Jackson County native, was a World War II vet who reenlisted in 1948. On November 5, 1950, he was at Chongnykon, Korea, with the 24th Division, dug in on Hill 123, and that hill was overrun by the enemy. Corporal Red Cloud, while badly wounded, singlehandedly held off the communists until the rest of his company escaped. He finally ran out of ammunition and was killed. His valiant deed allowed his company to regroup and retake the hill. His mother was given his Congressional Medal of Honor, awarded posthumously. A park in La Crosse is named for him today.

Private Stanley R. Christianson was also a World War II vet who was discharged from the U.S. Marine Corps in 1945, but three months later reenlisted. On September 18, 1950, he was awarded the Bronze Star after the landing at Inchon. Eleven days later, he was manning a listening post on Hill 132 near Seoul when the enemy attacked. He managed to kill seven communists and hold off the rest until his position was overrun and he was fatally wounded. This allowed his unit to overcome the attack. He posthumously became La Crosse County’s first Congressional Medal of Honor winner.

While the Korean War was going on, Ho Chi Minh and his communists had forced the French out of Vietnam, a French protectorate since the 1880s. In 1954 a Geneva conference partitioned the country, with Ho Chi Minh’s communists occupying the Northern part and Ngo Dinh Diem’s anti-communists occupying the southern part. In 1959, Ho decided to renew his determination to forcibly unite Vietnam under his rule. The U.S. government believed that if one country fell to communist rule, the rest of other countries nearby would also crumble, like a row of dominoes. This led to U.S. military involvement and the escalation of the war, with U.S. troops engaged in combat.

The war was increasingly unpopular on the home front. There were widespread demonstrations against it, especially on college campuses. There were protests at UW-La Crosse. Finally, in 1973 the last of the American troops were brought home, and in 1975 South Vietnam fell. In 1976 the country was united as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. U.S. casualties were 57,685 killed; 153,303 wounded; and an estimated 2,500 unaccounted for.

Unfortunately, media coverage during the Vietnam War was difficult for the government to censor. There were massacres like the one at My Lai in 1968, where many women and children were slaughtered by our GIs. Dan Bliznik wrote in the La Crosse Tribune in 1995 that the Vietnam veterans were treated terribly on returning home: “Most of us felt like outsiders and tried to figure out how we became the bad guy for serving our country. In addition, Vietnam vets had to
justify their involvement in the war and defend themselves against the stereotype: a half-crazed, baby-killing, dope-smoking fool." In 1981 Bliznik participated with the Vietnam-era Veterans of La Crosse in their first Oktoberfest parade. They were very apprehensive about it, but were greeted with a continuous standing ovation. Shouts of “We love you,” and “Thank you” were heard, and “Tears flowed freely down the cheeks of everyone,” Bliznik continued. He concluded that the years marching in the parade “did more to heal wounds and pain than 10 years of therapy every could.”

World War II and La Crosse

By Jerry Severson

World War I was not the “War to End All Wars.” Conflicts continued until the defeated Axis countries rebuilt their war machines. Adolf Hitler took control of Germany, using the hard economic times to lead the people into another war. Benito Mussolini did much the same in Italy. They both started aggressions against neighboring European and African countries. Japan started Pacific warfare under Emperor Hirohito, thinking Japan was destined to rule the Pacific area, by attacking Manchuria in 1931.

The Allies were tired of war, recuperating from enormous war debts incurred for World War I. Great Britain, France and the United States acted opposite to what Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese were doing. The Allies dismantled military machines used to end World War I.

An attempt was made to have world peace through a “League of Nations.” The League did not accomplish its goals because it did not commit armed forces to settle and stabilize conflicts between nations. It failed to subdue dictatorships by not providing a means to maintain international law and order. Mankind is still not convinced that armed aggression is not a worthy practice. Without means to control it, the gateway stands open for more conflicts.

Hitler’s armies trampled over weaker countries. In 1939 Hitler’s modern German army boldly invaded Poland. War was declared on Germany by Great Britain and France. In 1940 Hitler extended aggressions, attacking Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and France. Italy, Romania, and Bulgaria joined Germany. In 1941 Greece, Yugoslavia, and Russia were attacked; war was also declared against the United States.

Japan extended aggression, attacking Indochina. It attacked the U.S. at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The United States entered the war the next day. By
1942, Japan had invaded Burma, Malaya, the Netherlands, East Indies, Thailand and the Philippines. The world was again involved with a major war.

Stopping World War II aggressions fell upon U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt, Prime Minister of Great Britain Winston Churchill, and Premier of Russia Joseph Stalin. This world conflict resulted in social reorganization. The numbers of soldiers and equipment escalated, requiring modernized manufacturing capabilities. To understand the cultural change, consider some numbers.

World War I had Allied casualties over 22 million, Axis over 15 million. World War II had Allied casualties over 29 million, Axis over 15 million. Property and equipment losses were enormous. Traditional workforces could not meet demands. There were not enough workers. Women had to become workers in unprecedented numbers. The local labor pool of men was depleted, as many men were scattered abroad in the military. Demand for war materials after the United States entered the war, skyrocketed. The United States bore most of the war costs, paying 46 percent, $330 billion, to supply itself, France, Russia, Great Britain and China with equipment. The American people paid dearly for the European and Pacific wars.

America was taxed by war demands, and La Crosse was no exception. Men and supplies were needed to support military leaders — General Dwight Eisenhower in Europe, General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz in the Pacific. Office jobs were still needed, along with manufacturing. Women proved they could meet challenges, learning on the job to operate machines and processes to produce ammunition, military clothing, vehicle and airplane parts. A blend of workers was developing that would revolutionize the social makeup of the city.

Women workers started a reconstruction of society. Equal rights in acceptance and compensation is still addressed in a society now consisting of a more balanced workforce of men and women. It started with companies like Northern Engraving, which produced ammunition and vehicle parts. Auto-Lite produced gauges and speedometers. La Crosse Rubber Mills produced footwear. Machine shops and foundries produced components for artillery and other equipment. Trane Company produced coils for heating and cooling air and fluids in tanks, airplanes and ships. All manufacturing, services, education, and retailing were affected. Every kind of production had to be increased. Day and night shifts worked to meet demands. Non-war economic support was still needed. Allis Chalmers produced equipment for farm and war use. Breweries produced beer, farmers food, and bottlers soft drinks.

Women workers arranged care for their children. There were home front hardships. Butter, sugar, chocolate, meat and coffee were in short supply. Families learned to get along with rationed allotments. Old cars and trucks were kept running one way or another. Tires were patched on patches and run till there was
nothing left of them. There was more walking to work, school, shopping and the visiting of friends and relatives. Gasoline and tires were in short supply. City buses were well-used. Sharing rides and ration coupons was the norm.

Stresses of the wartime pace had to be addressed. Relaxation was needed, so workers joined bowling leagues, played cards, attended movies, joined church groups, knitted mittens, wrapped bandages, and entertained troops on furlough or those training at the Camp McCoy military base. “Care packages” and letters were mailed to men and women in the service of the country. Mail was a priority for everyone, home and away. Romances started between men and women brought together in new ways. Young people participated in U.S.O. (United Service Organization) activities, dances, letter writing, listening, talking, eating and hanging out with servicemen away from home. Friendships were formed and many couples who met in these encounters later became engaged and married. There was a romantic mood connected and entwined in the forced integration with new and different mixtures of friends and relationships. Many local girls fell in love with men in uniform, and many men away from home found love where they were stationed. Marriages and love commitments between couples were strained with concern for each other over distances, strange places, dangers and being unsure of when they would be reunited.

Youth joined the war effort. Young girls babysat. Boys started working at 13 years of age. Gas stations, grocery and retail stores employed workers, both young and old. Elders cut short their retirement years. Concern for loved ones in service and those being drafted was a constant burden felt by every family. Windows all over the city had red, white and blue service flags displayed with stars for each person in the family serving in the armed forces.

Dead, missing in action and wounded in action telegrams were dreaded. The U.S. had over one million casualties, with 400,000 dead. The world suffered 45 million casualties, 15 million dead. Total cost was $1.08 trillion. A terrible price was paid for a war of revenge and aggression. Of 6,250 La Crosse men serving, 204 died. While giving their lives, they earned Silver Stars, Distinguished Flying Crosses, Air Medals, and Purple Hearts. Training accidents claimed the lives of 25 of the men serving. Many decorations were earned by wounded and returning, able-bodied veterans. La Crosse’s men and women were patriotic and brave.

These examples are of men making the ultimate sacrifice of their lives for duty, honor, and country: Air Force 1st Lieutenant Robert Carr, fighter pilot, was killed after 30 combat missions and after he had received an oak leaf cluster. Marine Pharmacist Mate 3/c John Finanger was killed on Iwo Jima. Navy Seaman 1/c Helmar Hanson was killed at Pearl Harbor. Navy Airman Lieutenant Donald Hicks was killed in the South Pacific after destroying four Japanese planes, and received the Distinguished Flying Cross. Army Lieutenant Maurice
Mourning, a National Guardsman called into service, was killed on Luzon in the Philippines. Private Leonard Nieland was killed near Mittelwirh, France. First Lieutenant David Young was killed on a B-17 bomber mission in Italy after he fought in North Africa and received the Air Medal with bronze and silver oak leaf clusters.

Private Warren Waller, like many vets, came back aged beyond his years. He fought in battles to relieve troops trapped in the Belgium Bulge. He wore out his BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle). That’s a lot of shooting and killing by an 18-year-old. Stories could be told about each man and woman who contributed to the war effort. They have our admiration and praise for their part in preservation of our liberty and freedom.

Why do wars start? Are government leaders too powerful or too weak to protect the sovereignty of their countries? The U.S. Constitution was authored to answer these questions. Representatives must be elected that will adhere to it. Leaders that use war to build prosperous economies are tyrants. We must learn, by assessing mistakes, to find better solutions. War seldom has a lasting positive effect, and lives are sacrificed for no real purpose. It must be ended, somehow.
The Entrepreneurial Spirit

By Bob Floyd

Somebody said
IT COULDN’T BE DONE,
But he with a chuckle replied
That MAYBE it couldn’t,
But he would be one
Who wouldn’t agree till he’s tried!
—Anonymous

Since its founding, many entrepreneurs have come to La Crosse with the above attitude. As a result, many new businesses have been established, usually with a minimum of capital and a lot of good hard work! Some were quite successful, and those are the ones we will highlight in this chapter, for it was with this entrepreneurial spirit that the jobs were created that have helped La Crosse grow and prosper.

La Crosse Plow Company (La Crosse Plow Works)

Albert Hirshheimer was one of those entrepreneurs. He was schooled in Germany, but came to America at age nine. He held several jobs until 1860, when he was hired at Barclay and Bantam, a small blacksmith shop in La Crosse, where he learned to manufacture plows. In 1865, he succeeded Mr. Bantam as part owner of the business. They had no capital, filling orders for cash, often using a small down payment to purchase the steel they would need to build the plows. By focusing on quality and being extremely frugal, they prospered while plowshare companies in surrounding towns folded. In 1881, Mr. Barclay retired, and ownership fell to Mr. Hirshheimer. The business was incorporated in 1893 as La Crosse Plow Company, and a new plant was built in 1895, covering eight acres of land.
By 1912, La Crosse Plow was one of the largest plants in La Crosse, employing more than 250 men in the factory, plus 50 more in the office and the sales force. In 1929, Allis-Chalmers bought La Crosse Plow Works. At its peak in 1949, the business employed 1,593 people in this city. Allis-Chalmers closed the business in 1969.

Albert Hirshheimer was typical of many entrepreneurs in that he was involved in several businesses as well as being active in civic affairs. While serving as president of six companies, he also served in local government, during which time he was chairman of the committee that put electric lights in the city. Such is the contribution of one entrepreneur in La Crosse!

**Rubber Mills/La Crosse Footwear**

The same Albert Hirshheimer incorporated the Rubber Mills in 1897 to make rubber horseshoes. By 1899 there were 400 employees, and in 1921 the company was producing 3,000 pairs of “people footwear” per day! In 1912 Hirshheimer and Michael Funk acquired controlling interest. It was under the direction of two of Funk’s sons, Albert and Arthur, that the company saw unprecedented growth. By 1930 the Rubber Mills was the largest employer in La Crosse, with 2,000 employees. It stopped making athletic shoes in 1978, edged out by Nike. Switching to protective rubber footwear, it became the nation’s largest manufacturer in 1979. The company was renamed LaCrosse Footwear in 1986. By 1997, it had produced a total of 400 million pairs of footwear and was producing at a rate of 21,000 pairs per day.

**Hackner Altar Company**

Another German immigrant who brought his entrepreneurial spirit to La Crosse was Egid Hackner. A wood carver trained in Bavaria, he arrived here in 1860 at age 23, and started his business with one employee. His company designed and carved altars, pulpits, statuary and church furniture that were known throughout the nation for quality and originality.

Marble carving was started in the late 1800s, and their first major work comprised six altars installed at St. Rose Convent in 1907. By 1910, they employed 60 people, mostly Swiss and Bavarian craftsmen. In 1940, they built and installed the new throne for Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago, where Archbishop Stritch was installed.

Egid Hackner died in 1952 at age 95. His company gradually lost business, completing its final job in 1967.

**La Crosse Garment Company/Company Store**

The Garment Company was organized in 1914, manufacturing women’s frocks. By 1927, they were selling 12,000 dresses coast to coast, and employed 500 people. After a history of roller coaster sales, Terry Gillette, a local attorney, bought the company in 1975. It landed an $11 million contract in 1977 to produce
sleeping bags for the government and started producing down-filled coats in 1978, signing Bill Blass to design a line of coats for them to produce. By 1983, it became The Company Store, moving into direct marketing of coats and bedding. In 1996, it had grown to 850 employees, and was owned by Hanover Direct, and continued to produce coats and bedding.

**The Trane Company**

James A. Trane, from Norway, started a plumbing business in 1886. His son Reuben joined him after graduating college in 1913, and incorporated The Trane Company to manufacture heating systems, with four employees. The company experienced rapid growth, selling its heating systems through this country, Canada and China. By 1937, it had 623 employees. After World War II, growth continued, but labor problems and hostile takeover attempts bothered Trane into the 1990s.

In 1948, 1,100 workers were on strike for 32 days. Again, in 1961, a three-month strike slowed down the company. Other strikes occurred in 1973, 1979, and 1985. Yet growth was steady, and Trane reached $500 million in sales in 1978 and 3,800 employees in La Crosse in 1981.

The company fought off a hostile takeover from IC Industries of Chicago in 1982 by merging with American Standard. Then Black and Decker tried to take over American Standard in 1988, until Kelso & Company, of New York, bought them. After that turmoil, there was another 55-day strike in 1991.

By 1998, Trane had 3,050 employees in La Crosse, along with four manufacturing sites, the Reuben Trane Headquarters Building, Technology Center, and other warehouses and support function facilities. Refrigeration and air conditioning are its bread and butter today. Quite a success story has grown from a small plumbing business a century earlier.

**Northern Engraving**

In the twentieth century, a family name associated with entrepreneurial activity in La Crosse is Gelatt. In 1919, the Northern Gage and Equipment Company was founded to produce dials for automobiles, with P.M. Gelatt as the first president. It acquired the assets of a photo engraving firm, Northern Engraving, and retained that name.

The company grew steadily and had 600 employees by the early 1940s, making anti-aircraft shell casings during World War II. It returned to dials, name plates and plastic parts for automobiles after the war. By 1951, it had 800 employees. In that year, the UAW called a strike, and labor disputes continued over the next few years, while the company continued to grow.

In 1952, Charles D. Gelatt was named president, as well as general manager and chairman of the board. In 1961, Northern Engraving moved to Sparta for
better labor conditions. It continued opening plants in small towns surrounding La Crosse as well as maintaining some production in La Crosse itself.

By 1986, Northern Engraving had 3,000 employees in eight plants throughout the tri-state area, a number that continued at least through 1995. Charles D. Gelatt continues as chairman of several of the companies. He strongly champions manufacturing businesses rather than the current move to service industries. An entrepreneur all the way, Charles Gelatt has helped build La Crosse in a major way in the twentieth century.

**Northern Plastics/Norplex/UOP/Norplex-Oak/Allied Signal/Isola Laminates**

James S. Gelatt, brother of Charles, literally brought another company to La Crosse. In 1947, James bought a Kansas City firm that made laminated plastic components for the aviation industry for $13,000. When the lease expired on his building, he loaded all the equipment into a boxcar and moved it to La Crosse. In 1966, James sold the resulting business to UOP for $18.5 million. The Norplex name was adopted in 1965, and is still probably the best-known name for this company. Soon after bringing the equipment to La Crosse, the company perfected a process to make copper-clad laminate, which its customers use to make printed circuit boards. That remains its business focus, and it has become the largest copper-clad laminate producer in the world.

Norplex survived a prolonged strike from 1972 to 1973, lasting more than six months. Labor tension lasted another 20 years, until 1994, when the UAW and Allied Signal (as it was then known), instituted “win-win” bargaining. In this process, the focus is on problem-solving techniques to resolve issues, with a meeting facilitator present throughout the process (this author was asked to fill that role in 1994). The talks were successful, with resolution of the issues in advance of the deadline, and the largest percentage of acceptance by UAW members. In 1999, Allied Signal put the company up for sale, and in July 1999, Rutgers AG, Essen, Germany, was the successful bidder. Henceforth, the company will be known as Isola Laminates Systems Corporation.

James Gelatt died in 1985 at age 71. His father taught him the maxim: “Teach me the rules, and I’ll play the game.” James learned the rules and played well, giving La Crosse a thriving business for the future. Another entrepreneurial success.

**Final Note**

Many other companies have played a part in our business heritage. Such names as Wisconsin Pearl Button Factory, La Crosse Trailer Corporation, La Crosse Cooler Company, and Electric Auto-Lite (Motor-Meter Gauge Company) have been well-known in the past. Dairyland Power, Dura-Tech, EDS, Earthlight, and Firstlogic continue to be part of La Crosse, as well as that new little start-up that’s just a gleam in some entrepreneur’s eye at present.
La Crosse’s Romance With Lumber

By Betty Holey

Surrounding Nathan Myrick in 1841 were beautiful bluffs, three rivers, and seemingly limitless forests — riches for a man with imagination and grit. The first lumbering in the area was by the Mormons, who came for a short time to cut logs for their settlement in Nauvoo, Illinois.

In the summer of 1852, the first lumber yard in La Crosse was established by George Farnam, who got most of his lumber from the Chippewa River. These logs were rafted to La Crosse by Indian workers. The next year, Farnam and Samuel Weston began receiving logs from the Black River. Many were sent down-river from there, but about two million feet cut by Farnam supplied the sawmill of Nichols & Tompkins at Onalaska, newly built to take care of the logs.

This was only the beginning of the sawmills that sprang up along the Black and Mississippi rivers. The largest business was conducted by W.F. and P.S. Davidson, brothers who began in 1860 and continued in full capacity during the Civil War to supply wood for boat building. Surprisingly, the demand for wood to build homes by the flood of people coming to this part of the world continued a thriving business after the hostilities were over, although the demand for lumber for boats declined. The business of lumbering really began to increase during the 1880s because of the growing number of sawmills and an increased ability to get the logs to the mills. In fact, it can truly be said that the lumbering industry was responsible for the early industrial and population growth of La Crosse.

The Pinery, a vast area around Black River Falls, was heavily forested with pine trees, and considered to be inexhaustible. Land was owned initially by the government, except for land owned by settlers or land grants to the railroads. Men could buy land in the Pinery at or near the government price of $1.25 per acre. Those who had cash or could make arrangements to buy were ahead of the game in this rush to get building supplies to areas without trees.

A great deal of trial and error ensued as the thriving businesses sought to improve methods of cutting, getting trees out of the woods, gathering each owner’s logs beside the river, and waiting for clement weather to send the logs down to waiting sawmills. The Black River had many twists and turns, making it extremely dangerous to raft logs without creating jams. Methods to improve the process were continually being tried.

Where did the workmen come from? This was a time of a great emigration of people from Europe, especially Germany and Scandinavia. These people came to find land, and find land they did, but the economics of the time did not provide for cash. Often these farmers would spend summers working their land, and go to
the logging camps for the winter. If frugal, and not too interested in liquor or gambling, they would have a tidy sum in the spring to return home to buy seed and other items they could not produce themselves. Word of mouth was another way men could be found for the logging camps. People were moving west, and news of work could be sent back to those in the East eager to find precious land and security.

Lumber campers’ work began at daylight and ended about dark or 8 p.m. Food would be brought while they rested at noon, and then they would return for the big meal at night after work. Bunkhouses had sleeping shelves, one above the other around the long sides. There was a stove at one end where they could tell stories and rib each other before turning in if they were so disposed. Most probably fell into bed exhausted as soon as the meal was over. Their food had to be adequate to supply the large output of energy. One account said the salary of $1.25 plus food and board per day was quite good if the men were “saving in nature.”

Also serving the camp was the chief cook and his “cookies,” the stable men, the bookkeeper and blacksmith, as well as the foreman. Swampers cut away the brush before crews could reach the trees. Sawyers felled the trees. Then the logs were “snaked” or skidded out to a road by horses or oxen. There the logs were piled on a skidway with the help of cant hooks. Owners’ “end marks” had to be put on the side of each log when felled. Then at the skidway, a mallet and iron head with raised figures was used to set owners’ “end marks” on both ends of the logs.

If there was no snow, the logs had to be sprinkled with water to cause ice to build up to reduce friction during skidding. Sleds, piled high, took loads from skidways to the rivers, pulled by oxen or horses. They were then “banked” in rows until the spring thaw.

Once the logs were in the river, men were organized to prevent drifting or jamming. This was done by boot soles with short calks or spikes and the long pike pole each man had to guide the logs. Even today, logs may be found that had floated free and were buried for a century. Most, of course, reached the sawmills.

At the sawmill, a powerhouse — with furnaces and a smokestack on one side and the rafting shed on the other — accepted logs. An endless chain carried each log to a large rotary saw that cut boards or trimmed slabs from the sides. Besides boards, special cuts included large dimension lumber, beams, joists, two-by-fours, laths, pickets and shingles. A trimmer was hired to decide the best use of each piece of wood.

The final cuts completed, wood had to be stored and protected from the weather until it was sold and delivered. Most of the shipments from La Crosse went far down the Mississippi. If logs were to be shipped, a log raft, 16 feet wide and 500 feet long, held together by piles and lines used as binders, was used.
Lumber rafts were constructed under a special shed. Over a foundation of heavy planks, 20 layers of lumber were laid in opposite directions to form a “crib.” This then could be joined to other cribs to form a 500-foot-long raft.

Islands, sandbars, whirlpools, and sharp curves were dangers to be avoided on the Mississippi. It took a lot of skill for the men riding these rafts to be aware of problems ahead. The advent of using a steamboat to float the rafts to market was a revolutionary change. Not only was the technique of marketing changed, but the demand for building steamboats in La Crosse brought a new and constant need for lumber. Thus it was that La Crosse became the most important center of rafting logs and lumber on the upper Mississippi.

Then, with an unexpected suddenness, the Pinery was exhausted. Men had expected the wealth of trees to last forever. By 1899 only three mills were operating in La Crosse. Fortunes had been made. Farmers were better established to barter their way, and the gangs from the woods had built small houses and found work on the river, in stone quarries, and in brickmaking.

Grand houses had been built by the lumber kings, especially in the area along Cass and King Streets. Hixon House boasts interior rooms constructed entirely of walnut, birch and cherry. Other exotic woods were sought to give elegance to the large wooden homes we enjoy driving past today — evidence of a time of opulence that gave La Crosse a precious reminder of a young nation in its impetuous leap forward.

Charles P. Crosby in his stories of “Logging and Lumbering in La Crosse” summarizes the following:

“From the time my father came to La Crosse in 1854, when the lumber industry was just getting a start until now, which is about 72 years (1926), and in that period the timber and lumber industry grew up and thrived, and is now far down toward the end. Ten years more will see hardly a dozen of the large lumber concerns operating in this state.”

La Crosse can truly be said to be the city that lumber built.

The Printing Industry Still Scores Points

By Patrick Brunet

The importance of printing can be found in the fact that William LaDue brought the first printing press to La Crosse from Prairie du Chien in 1851, five years before the town was incorporated. LaDue’s primary business was his newspaper, the Spirit of the Times, but like all printers, he also printed stationery, posters,
broadsides, schedules, business forms, letterhead, flyers, advertisements, labels and other job printing. By 1860, at least six printers had set up business in La Crosse. Through the early 1900s, the major printers also were newspaper publishers, like the Republican and Leader (1854-1903), the Chronicle Company (1878-1917), and Spicer and Buschman (1887-1967), while the La Crosse Tribune can trace its lineage through merger and purchase back to 1855. Type was set by hand, and illustrations, when found, relied on woodcuts. Photoengraving did not come in until the 1880s.

By 1866, the first La Crosse City Directory noted four printers in business. After the Civil War, paper made from wood pulp became popular because it was much cheaper than the cotton-based paper prevalent before the war. In the 1880s, with paper costs reduced and with the introduction of hot-metal typesetting replacing the more labor-intensive Washington press, the industry flourished. The annual report of the La Crosse Board of Trade, published in 1881, found that 65 individuals worked in seven shops and collected $26,632 in wages. By 1905, the last year the board’s annual report was published, 217 individuals worked in 11 shops and collected $95,343 in wages. During the 25 years the board’s annual report was published, it listed employment by type, and during much of that time, the printing industry ranked as high as the seventh largest employer in La Crosse!

There were 15 printers in La Crosse by 1915, but by the end of World War I, the shakeout in the newspaper industry left La Crosse with one only daily newspaper. Some of the city’s longer running printers started around this time. For example, the company that became Jansky Printing started in 1898 to print the Vlastenec, a Bohemian-language newspaper. Inland Printing started in 1907, while both Crescent Printing (in Onalaska) and Northern Engraving started in 1909. In 1919, George Curtis purchased Frank Geisenheimer’s print shop on St. Cloud Street. Geisenheimer had been a printer at that address since 1895. Curtis paid $2,400 for the building, an electric motor, the press and ten fonts of wooden type. Demand was so strong in the trade for skilled pressmen that the La Crosse Vocational School started a printing program sometime before 1920. Since then, the school’s printing and graphics program have been among their most popular offerings.

The Great Depression hurt almost all businesses, but the strength and importance of printing can be found in the fact that the number of printing companies rose from 10 in 1930 to 15 in 1939. The economic boom years after World War II boosted the industry here, but the number of local printing businesses declined until it reached only nine in 1969. Predictions were made that the inroads of word processors and photocopiers, the so-called Xerox machines, would reduce the need for commercial printers. Yet while some companies withered in the face of change, others prospered.
Charles Gelatt established the Microcard Corporation, now Northern MicroGraphics, in 1947 to address some of the changes in data delivery. Inland Printing, purchased by John Glendenning in 1944, made the biggest change when, during the 1960s, it started to do more national business, particularly in label printing. As Heileman’s grew, so did Inland, but it didn’t limit its work to just beer labels. Other well-known customers included Anheuser Busch, Trane, Northern Engraving and Procter and Gamble. It is now the largest printer in La Crosse, with about 240 employees, while the La Crosse Tribune is the second largest shop, with about 200 employees. Northern Engraving, reorganized under P.M. Gelatt in 1919, specialized in printing on metal by screen and lithopress for appliance and automotive trim. It is now one of the largest metal decorating companies in the country, and for years was one of the largest employers in the city, until the Gelatt family moved its major La Crosse plant elsewhere for lower wages.

In 1974 Delmar Brown and Toby Hendrickson, printing instructors at Western Wisconsin Technical Institute (WWTI, now WWTC), and Dave Curtis, of Curtis Printing, as well as others, established the Hiawatha Valley Club of the Printing House Craftsman, an organization dedicated to cooperative educational opportunities for those in the printing and graphics trade. A La Crosse Graphics Arts Association also existed, but little is known of that group. Currently there are no printing unions representing employees in La Crosse, although that was not always true. There was a chapter of the International Typographers Union, but technology made typographers obsolete.

The desktop personal computer started to become common in the early 1980s, and articles began predicting we would soon live in a paperless society, dooming the entire industry. Instead, computers, particularly computers manufactured by Apple, expanded capabilities, especially for graphics, and greatly increased efficiency. The declining cost of computers gave the small shops a better chance to compete with larger, more full-service shops, and their relatively low cost allowed more individuals to start their own businesses. So rather than decline, the number of establishments printing in La Crosse rose from 15 in 1981 to 35 in 1999. The latest County Business Pattern, for 1996, details the importance of printing. Forty million dollars in wages were paid to the approximately 1,600 employed in the printing/graphics industry (as defined by the U.S. Department of Commerce). Six firms employed over 100 while 13 employed 20 or more in the county. This does not include in-house printing operations. Computers also boosted screen printing. A 1985 article in Screen Printing magazine, quoted in the La Crosse Tribune, found that two of the nation’s largest screen printing firms were in the La Crosse area: McLoone Metal Graphics and Empire Silk Screen. There are so many firms doing this type of business that the Tribune headlined the article, “Screen printing firms: area’s ‘Silicon Valley.’” Other prominent firms are D-Lux Silk Screen and Dura-Tech.
Printing in La Crosse has spanned almost a century and a half, and during that time has moved from a craft to a technology-driven industry. Over that time, printing also changed from a highly desired commodity to an absolute necessity. What was once a manual skill on Washington, ramage, and bed-and-platen presses is digital today. Now, all varieties of commercial printing are offered here, including full and multi-color, digital, imagesetting and graphic design. Clearly the electronic age has not had a negative effect on the need for print!

**Nineteenth Century Farming:**
**Fairs, Races, Associations, and Breadwinning**

*By Patricia Heller*

Agriculture has long been a staple of Wisconsin’s economy. Cities developed as trade and industrial centers due to the impact agriculture had upon their economies. This was especially true of La Crosse. Early civilizations utilized all resources available to them because of their location near rivers. This included, but was not limited to, the growth of crops on the fertile land. Not until the mid-1800s did early European immigrants and their descendants develop La Crosse as a trading center; the thriving city that grew did so partly because it was surrounded by an agricultural community and La Crosse transportation was the means used to distribute farm products.

Agribusiness flourished due to the city’s position on the banks of the Mississippi, La Crosse and Black rivers. Recreation born out of a farming nature also affected the city. Fairs, horse races, harness racing, and cattle associations were brought to the city. The impact agriculture had on La Crosse can be neither measured nor overlooked.

A far look back in time shows Native Americans cultivating crops in La Crosse. Earliest agriculture in this area dates to the Oneota culture (1300–1650 AD). Evidence was uncovered leading archeologists to believe that those early Native Americans cultivated corn, beans and squash. Over the next 200 years, the Oneota were followed by seasonal visits of Native American tribes who used the land to sustain themselves. From 1820 to 1840, the Wisconsin Territory of what was known as Prairie La Crosse became home to French and American settlers. Soon after Wisconsin became a state in 1848, all remaining Native Americans, namely local Winnebagoes, were removed from the La Crosse area to a reservation in Minnesota. The nineteenth century saw Prairie La Crosse sprout from a small riverbank community into a commercial trading center. Upon arriving here in
1841, Nathan Myrick envisioned a future and built a trading post. Throughout the rest of the century, agriculture continued to play a prominent role here.

With the establishment of trade, particularly fur trade, and the availability of lands to be claimed as homesteads, La Crosse grew by leaps and bounds. In November of 1853, the Reverend Spencer Carr completed an informal census, counting 745 people in La Crosse. By 1855 a census reported the population to be 1,637. By the 1860s, 50 percent of La Crosse County was farmland. “King Wheat” was produced locally until its harvest had drained the land of vital nutrients. The production of wheat also decreased as the number of dairy cows increased; more land was claimed for sustenance of the animals versus cash cropping.

During the 1850s, tobacco was the primary cash crop grown in this area. Strawberries also emerged as a commodity during the 1870s. The Northwestern Horticultural Society was formed in 1879 to “improve cultivation of apples, horticulture and gardening, and to discuss and disseminate information upon all questions pertaining to horticulture.” Backyard gardens and neighboring farms produced potatoes, green peas, beans, cucumbers, beets, sweet corn and cabbage for large families and for extra cash. During the 1850s and '60s, specialized street markets sprang up informally along Front Street between Pearl and State Street. By 1886 the City of La Crosse acquired Market Square, between King and Jay Streets, fronting along Fourth Street, and moved the street markets there. This move was minor compared to the overall effects of agricultural business and trade upon the city.

With the coming of the railroads and the use of the rivers for transportation, La Crosse flourished. Early settlers built many businesses dependent upon agriculture. The breweries needed barley, flour mills purchased wheat, packing plants used raised farm animals, mills used wool, and tanneries purchased supplies of hemlock for tanning leathers. Other businesses produced materials and machinery for farmers. Threshing machines, fanning mills, plows, and special-order, individually-built implements were supplied by La Crosse factories and blacksmiths. These early businesses included:

- **The Iron Products Company**, the **James Brothers, Smith Manufacturing Company**, the **Torrance foundry**, the **Franklin machine shop**, and the **La Crosse Plow Company**, which made products directly for harvesting and indirectly for shipping grains and cattle.

- **Davis, Medary, and Platz, Andrew Pfiffner and Otto Oehler**, and **E.B. Wiggert**, who used supplies of hemlock and hides from nearby farms to produce saddles, harnesses and footwear.

- **John Langdon Sr., Andrew Boyd**, and **Otto Kiene**, who were active in the pork-packing industry in La Crosse.

- **C.A. White** and **William Listman**, who purchased wheat and operated a flour mill; **Heileman Brewing Company, La Crosse Brewery, and Eagle Brewery**,
which purchased grain for distilling. In the twentieth century, breweries even recycled brewers grain to farmers, selling it as a feed product.

The Pamperin Cigar Company, which used tobacco grown by farmers.

This brief list does not contain nearly all the businesses related to farming. Many others, including implement manufacturers, local groceries, meat packing plants, mills, and blacksmiths, were influenced by neighboring farms. The mid to late 1800s was a time of beneficial growth for farmers and the city.

In the spirit of recreation and competition, various local agencies, cattle associations, and horse breeders held fairs, competitions and races. From 1873 to 1890, the Northwestern Agriculture Stock and Mechanical Association held its fair on land that is now Myrick Park. In 1890 the La Crosse Interstate Fair Association was formed and held its first fair near the present site of Campbell Road, the Green Bay Railroad tracks, and La Crosse Street. Exhibits included agricultural products and livestock as well as examples of handiwork. Around the same time, various cattle associations came to the area.

The La Crosse Interstate Fair Association was incorporated in 1890, providing an annual fair to La Crosse residents. The county fair was held in West Salem at the time, and several local businessmen formed an association to hold a fair within the city. The La Crosse fair opened on September 1 and ran for six days. Entries were exhibited under these classifications: food, flower, craft, meat, dairy, livestock, and fowl. On September 6, Barnum & Bailey Circus set up at the fairgrounds for a presentation of “The Destruction of Rome.” The fair held horse races evenings. Fair week provided La Crosse residents with six days of entertainment and social outings.

Horse racing, particularly harness-style racing, was very popular in La Crosse during the 1800s. Horsemen were proud of their animals; they had invested in breeding, with an eye on bloodlines. The local fair provided an excellent time to show and race their animals According to a pamphlet titled, La Crosse Time Trip, An 1898 Chronology of La Crosse, Wisconsin, the entries paid a $5 entry fee and the winner of the race paid, rather than received grand prize money. Evidence shows there were at least two local horse organizations. The La Crosse Gentlemen’s Driving Club was organized in 1898. The Oakwood Park Driving Association used the half-mile racetrack called Oakwood Park. In 1895 Oakwood Park was replaced by a track built south of the city. In that year, notable races were held with horses from La Crosse and famous horses and racing experts from around the nation. Horse racing remained popular in the area until the 1940s.

Interest in fine bloodlines did not stop with horses. Purebred cattle, more commonly referred to as “full blood,” were sought after. Several La Crosse businessmen became interested in registered breeds. In 1885 Mons Anderson was the first national member of the Holstein Association from La Crosse who purchased sev-
eral registered Holsteins and brought them to the city. Other popular breeds brought to the area during the 1800s included Jerseys, Guernseys, Ayrshires, and Brown Swiss. Some breeds that are less common today were popular and shown at the county fair by local residents, including Galloway, Holderness, and Durham.

Agricultural associations provided more than just a place to show top quality animals and goods. According to a March 27, 1932, article, the La Crosse County Agricultural, Horticultural and Dairymen’s Association celebrated its 44th birthday then. The members organized in 1888 and held monthly meetings in the Campbell town hall to discuss agri-business. Membership in ag organizations provided an outlet for farmers. Only once a year did they enjoy the competition of “showing” cattle in the local fair. Cattle associations provided the means to promote their favorite breeds and animals throughout Wisconsin and across the nation.

**Growing Up Alongside Twentieth Century Farming**

*By Patricia Heller*

As the people of La Crosse and the surrounding areas prepared to celebrate the coming of the twenty-first century, decorations and bright lights filled the city. La Crosse seemed to burst at the seams with people and celebration. A nostalgic look back in time by 100 years would paint quite a different picture. In 1900, La Crosse citizens could have looked toward the bluffs and seen farmland. To the north and south of the city, crops were still cultivated and cattle still grazed in pastures. Stables and gardens were as common as garages are today. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Market Square had been created for the sale of locally grown cash crops. Although the city was establishing itself as a prosperous industrial and trade center, it still held to its agricultural roots; throughout the twentieth century, both La Crosse and agriculture changed and advanced.

The evidence as witnessed in early photographs included in a collection titled “La Crosse Illustrated 1887 and Phillippi Art Souvenir of La Crosse, Wisconsin 1904” shows farmland near Grandad’s Bluff. The collection includes a picture of dairy cows getting a cool drink from a Mississippi River bottom pasture. In 1951 Frederick G. Davies researched and wrote about the history of agriculture in La Crosse County. His findings point out that general dairy farming and raising hogs were the main types of farming in the area. Crops grown included hay, oats, corn, barley, rye, wheat, potatoes, buckwheat, alfalfa, sugar beets, and peas. Davies’ findings listed the principal types of cattle raised in La Crosse County early to mid-century as Holstein, Jersey, Guernsey, Shorthorn, Brown Swiss, Angus, and native grade cows. Early fairs also
listed Ayrshire, Galloway, Holderness, and Durham cattle as shown by local residents. Pictures and stories don’t always tell the whole story. It should be remembered that farming in the early 1900s was strenuous work, and early farmers should be given credit for the sacrifices and long hours of toil they endured.

Before 1900, both agribusiness and farming were important to the La Crosse economy. Even more ag-related businesses opened in the early twentieth century. Agricultural training became important to local and rural people in the county. Trade and commerce expanded with agricultural products.

Some businesses, products, and promotions developed in La Crosse that may not be well known to La Crosse residents include:

- **Happy Farmer** tractors produced by the La Crosse Tractor Company. This company opened in 1917 and was sold to Oshkosh Tractor Company in 1921.

- **The John A. Salzer Seed Company**, founded in 1886 from Salzer’s Floral Gardens. By 1892 Salzer’s was considered the largest mail-order seed house in the United States.

- A **milk campaign** and visit to La Crosse Normal School spearheaded by Actress Eloda Beach in 1922 to encourage school children to drink more milk.

- **Five working breweries** in La Crosse before Prohibition.

- **Listman Flour Mill**, a major employer whose employees were early union members in La Crosse before the mill burned down in 1934.

Several other businesses deserving a listing here include but are not limited to **La Crosse Plow Works**, the **John C. Burns Wholesale Fruit Company**, the **Rehfuss Meat Market**, and the **Fox Brothers Practical Horse Shoers Shop**. These agribusinesses, as well as many others that could not all be listed here, brought economic growth to La Crosse.

Realizing the importance of agriculture, area residents opened the La Crosse County School of Agriculture and Domestic Economy in 1909. The goal of the school was to give special instruction in agriculture and domestic economy aimed at educating young men and women for good citizenship and intelligent, profitable living. Admission requirements included age of 14 years, good moral character and good health, and an eighth grade graduation certificate. Students enrolled in four-year, two-year, or one-year course lengths. They could enroll full-time, part-time, or for winter courses only, so young people could be educated when they were not busy working on family farms. The school closed in 1925. The total number of graduates in those 16 years was 269. Tuition was free to county residents meeting admission requirements. Low enrollment caused the board to close the school, and the building was eventually sold to the Onalaska School District.

Beginning in the latter part of the century, Western Wisconsin Technical College offered several agricultural degrees or certificates. According to the La Crosse Zoning Office, farms were still present within the Southside city limits
until the 1960s. Since that time, the area has become residential or commercial; however, the county and surrounding rural areas continue to farm. Technology and government regulations have made education a necessity for future farmers. Today courses and programs are taught full-time, part-time, and as extended programs, with instructors and students improving agricultural practices on the students’ farms.

This chapter would be incomplete without some discussion of how farming has changed throughout the twentieth century. The scenes depicted in “La Crosse Illustrated 1887 and Phillippi Art Souvenir of La Crosse, Wisconsin 1904” exist only on Amish farms today. Education, environmental concerns, technology, and the need for increased profits have caused changes in farming. Twenty years ago, a 300-cow dairy facility would have been considered large; today it is of average size. Smaller dairy farms of 30 or 40 cows are typically expanded or sold for development. Farmers are realizing the importance of specialization; many will raise either crops or cattle rather than attempt to do both. Custom crop operators are very common. Pipeline systems, milking parlors, and free-stall barns are replacing traditional barns. Silos and unloading equipment are being replaced with large bunker silos and skid steers. Governmental regulations control the use of medications, chemicals, manure systems, and crop rotation. Tax regulations have been made much more complicated. The ability to change is necessary for any businessperson anticipating success, and farming is no exception. While there are many people who worry about the changes affecting small farms, those in the industry realize changes must be made if they wish to continue farming into the twenty-first century.

Toward the end of the twentieth century, agribusiness also changed. A small list of businesses in La Crosse dealing with farmers in the late twentieth century includes Cargill Feed, Heileman’s Brewery, various insurance companies, accountants, transport systems, and crop specialists. As La Crosse enters further into the twenty-first century, changes will continually occur in agriculture; no doubt some La Crosse entrepreneurs will step forward to service the needs that arise.

When the G. Heileman Brewing Company Shone

By Yvonne Klinkenberg

In the 1840s Gottlieb Heileman was brewing beer and baking bread in his native village of Kircheim unter Tuck in the southern German province of Wurttemberg. That was decades before William I was proclaimed the first Kaiser of Germany during a period of political turmoil.
Heileman, in his twenties, tried to become a master brewer, but because of his young age, was not permitted to pursue that dream. In 1852 he left his “Fatherland” to come to this “New World” to find his fortune and a better life, but he was still too young to hold a master brewer’s job.

He spent a year in Philadelphia, then moved to Milwaukee, where he tried again to find a job in the brewing industry. Because of his baking skills, he and an unknown partner were able to get by. Undaunted, he still had a dream to become a brewmaster and continue his brewing art. He had the skill of putting together “fine barley malt, choice grains, aromatic hops and pure artesian spring water.”

In 1857 Heileman came to La Crosse and became a foreman in a brewery owned by Dr. Gustavus Nikolai. Only a month later, this brewery closed down. Still looking for an opportunity to become a brewmaster, he went to work for another brewery that had just opened — the Michel Brewery. There, he was given the coveted title of brewmaster.

He married Johanna Bandle on June 28, 1858, after he realized that prosperity was just around the corner. He entered a partnership with John Gund later that year. Together they built the City Brewery on the corner of Third and Mississippi Street. On November 13, 1858, they officially opened for business, only two years after La Crosse became a city.

John Gund was also a German immigrant who had previous brewing experience in Galena, Illinois, and Dubuque, Iowa. When he moved to La Crosse, he opened a very small brewery in August of 1854. Gund’s original brewery was in a log cabin he had built on the southeast corner of Front and Division Street. In 1872 John Gund formed his own company after withdrawing from the City Brewery, leaving Heileman as sole proprietor. In February of 1878, at age 54, Heileman died, leaving his wife, Johanna, as the first woman president of a corporation within the state of Wisconsin, and, perhaps, within the United States.

The G. Heileman Brewing Company began bottling beer in 1889. Before that they used pitch-lined oak kegs. In 1890, the 64-ounce picnic bottle was added to the line. In 1902 Old Style Lager was introduced with a distinctive logo. The label on each bottle carried a caricature describing “the history of beer from the ancient Teutons through the monasteries to modern time.” The company’s beer was sold in places like Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Canada. Heileman beer was known all over the United States. In 1908 Chicago became a new market for Heileman products, and production tripled from 1902 to 1912.

On January 16, 1920, National Prohibition took effect. Non-alcoholic beer, soda pop, and malted extract helped save the brewery. New Style, Lager Coney Island, King of Clubs, Heileman’s Delight and Spike were the brewery’s near-beer brands. When Prohibition ended, on April 7, 1933, the breweries could start selling beers with a 3.2 percent or less alcohol level. In 1933 Heileman’s became a
public company and became the Heileman Brewing Company. The year 1935 saw the beginning of canning beer. The first that came out was of the “all-steel cone-top” variety. Later, they were replaced by “flat-top” and “pull top” types. Starting in the 1970s, aluminum cans were used instead of steel.

In 1959 Heileman’s was ranked 39th in the country in barrels of beer sold. In 1960, the brewery’s leader, Roy Kumm, hired his son-in-law, Russ Cleary. Cleary wasted no time in acclimating himself to the business. Trained as a lawyer, Cleary knew what the law could do for a company like Heileman’s. He began sitting on Heileman’s board of directors in 1967 and didn’t stop there. Heileman’s started to buy stock in other small breweries in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Kentucky. In 1969, due to anti-trust action the U.S. Department of Justice brought against Heileman Brewing Company, the brewery was ordered to divest itself of the Blatz brand. In 1969, through bidding, Blatz became part of the House of Heileman. In 1972 Heileman acquired the Jacob Schmidt Brewery of St. Paul, Minnesota, and the Sterling Brewery of Evansville, Indiana. With those acquisitions, Heileman’s had moved into the top ten largest breweries in the United States.

Shares of G. Heileman Brewing Company common stock were up for sale and trading on the New York Stock Exchange on May 23, 1973. More acquisitions followed, including Grain Belt of Minneapolis, Minnesota (1976); Rainer Brewing of Seattle, Washington (1977); Falls City of Louisville, Kentucky (1978); Carling National Brewery in Baltimore, Maryland, Belleville, Illinois, Phoenix, Arizona, and Frankenmuth, Michigan (1979).

From 1971 to 1989, Russ Cleary served as President, Chairman of the Board, and Chief Executive Officer of Heileman’s. He took the La Crosse brewery from fifteenth to fourth place in the American brewing industry, with sales increasing from $100 million to $1.4 billion.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Heileman’s stock split on five occasions. Stockholders received cash dividend payments each year. *Fortune* magazine ranked Heileman seventh in the nation’s top 500 companies in the total return for investors for the ten years ending December 31, 1982.

In 1982 Heileman acquired Pabst Brewery in Perry, Georgia; Blatz Weinhard in Portland, Oregon; and Lone Star Brewery of San Antonio, Texas, at a total cost of $182,500,000. In 1986 they also bought the Champale brand, and the following year acquired C. Schmidt & Sons in Philadelphia.

On Labor Day weekend in 1987, Bond Corporation Holding LTD of Australia announced that they wanted to buy Heileman. After negotiations, Heileman was sold to Bond for $1.3 billion on September 17, 1987. Because of the deal, Heileman took on a debt that they could not meet. Bond’s projection measures were taken to “show up efficiency,” so some breweries were closed.
On January 24, 1991, Heileman gave notice to file a petition for reorganization, which was accepted by its creditors and approved by the bankruptcy court on November 20, 1991. In November of 1993, Hicks, Muse and Company sought to purchase Heileman’s, and the deal was finalized on January 21, 1994. Owned by the Stroh family, Hicks, Muse and Company had experience in acquiring and operating companies. In the three previous years, they had made 16 acquisitions with a total capital value of more than three billion dollars. They managed to operate in the “top niche” market with Dr. Pepper, Seven Up, and A&W brands. They expected a strong market presence with wholesalers and a successful management team.

Just before the Stroh team sold Heileman to Platinum Holdings, Inc. of New York, Heileman’s was the fifth largest brewer in the United States, with breweries in La Crosse, Baltimore and Seattle. The brands they carried included Colt 45, Rainer, Schmidt’s, Blatz, Mickey’s Malt Liquor, Lone Star, Special Export, Old Style, Henry Weinhard, and Champale.

Today, as the new City Brewery gears up for enhanced business, the Heileman motto still is key: “We don’t aim to make the most beer, only the best.”

Other Breweries Have Their Stories, Too

By Yvonne Klinkenberg

The first breweries in La Crosse were built to satisfy the thirst of the people who came from Germany and Scandinavian countries. People came here due to the shipping along the Mississippi River. The logging was good, and the land was great for farming. Also trading with the Indians for furs brought great profits to the early settlers. Many left for the gold fields in California, but returned when they realized the real gold was here, with their own people from their native land. They understood the language and custom of the people from their homeland, and stayed here.

The immigrants also brought brewers who knew how to brew their homeland beers. The land around Bangor could grow hops, barley, and other grains they needed for their brew. The water was another reason for staying. It was clear and pure. Many tried their trade, some were able to build, and others did not make it for reasons unknown. Eleven breweries were active from 1854 to 1999, the main one Heileman’s, which was sold three times.

During the 1800s brewing was long and hard work. There were sleeping quarters right in the brewery. Twelve to 18 hours was the standard workday then. Workers cleaned bottles by heating pitch to a liquid form and pouring it into the
containers, where it was rolled back and forth by hand till all particles were loosened. Eventually things became easier for workers. Lead shot was used, then shaken by hand, till the residue of dirt was loosened and cleaned out. Originally each bottle was handled separately for cleaning, pasteurizing, and labeling. Then modern equipment came into use. Everything became automatic, including the label being glued to the bottles.

Since no refrigeration was known then, brewery workers used other ingenious means for cooling beer. Beer that was made during the winter months was taken by horse and sleigh to caves located near the bluffs along Mormon Coulee Road. Beer made during the summer was put into large wooden kegs in caves. When the caves became full, the kegs were rolled down the hills to where they could be loaded into whatever kind of transportation they had at the time.

In the early 1860s brewery workers started using river ice in “storage houses.” Ice refrigeration was the first “modern” step. The European brewers laughed at this method, saying it couldn’t be done, and indeed production did not grow much despite ice refrigeration. Lack of modern machinery was one reason for low production, as all the work had to be done by hand.

Bottle beer was unknown at that time. Cooperage shops made the casks for the breweries because the breweries did not have their own shops. During the Civil War, it was hard for local breweries to keep going. A one-dollar-per-barrel tax had been placed on all beer produced in an attempt to raise additional revenue for the U.S. It was promised the tax would be lifted in about three years. By an act of Congress, it was cut to 50 cents a barrel.

At one time there were 15 breweries in La Crosse. Heileman’s changed names and became part of Stroh Brewery, but many breweries went through name changes and financial reorganization. Following are some of them:

**Eagle Brewery:** Jacob France ran the Eagle Brewery from 1850 to 1860 on the northeast corner of La Crosse and 12th Street. Frederick Miller and France became partners for a year. Until 1886, there were five different owners of that brewery. From 1886 to 1920, after the Eagle Brewery was sold, the name was changed to the Bartl Brewing Company. In 1900 a bottling plant was built. Louis Zeigler Brewing Company of Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, operated the old Bartl Brewery from 1948 to 1950. Earlier, from 1933 to 1937, it was the site of the George Kunz Brewery. Eagle Bottling later incorporated into the Eagle Bottling Company, where lager beer was bottled.

From 1868–1900, **Gustave Carl’s Bottling Works,** which was located at 77-79 South Third Street, produced soft drinks, soda water, mineral water, champagne cider, sparkling catawba, lager beer, seltzer water, ginger and liquors. Later, its address changed to 510–520 South Third Street. Around 1897, Gustave Carl and Sons had Warninger and Houthmaker placed in charge of the business, but one
of the Carls stayed on to supervise. In 1900 the Carl family retired from the business and until 1906, Warninger and Houthmaker ran the brewery. The La Crosse Bottling Works continued under different owners and closed a few years later.

The Voegel Brewery was known by two other names — as Erickson and as Monitor Brewery. Located at Monitor Street and Copeland Avenue, it was the only brewery known to have been built on the city’s Northside. In 1898, John Erickson, father of W.A. Erickson, who lived at 2147 Cass Street, and a brother of Oscar Erickson, took possession of the brewery and ran it till 1923. John Voegel’s grandfather from his mother’s side, W.A. Erickson, had built the plant but Gottlieb Voegel operated it. It was closed for a while, and then in 1928 Mr. Erickson reopened the plant and manufactured wort, which is used to produce beer.

George Zeisler and Otto Nagel founded the Plank Road Brewery in 1867 at 718 North Third Street. Nagel withdrew in 1869. In December of 1873 a fire destroyed the brewery. On July 4, 1874, another fire destroyed the rebuilt brewery. In 1880 the brewery was producing 3,200 barrels of beer per year. Zeisler died in 1902, and John Gund bought the Plank Road Brewery. In 1890 the land was incorporated into Heileman Brewing Company.

The La Crosse Brewery was located at 727 South Third Street and ran from 1933 to 1956. It was the old Michel Brewery, organized by Carl Michel. They put out 70,000 barrels Peerless Beer, Elfenbrau and Wisconsin Best in 1935. In 1951, beer was first put in cans there. The La Crosse Brewery was also directed by L.J. Roberts, Charles Michel and W.E. Fantle. It closed in 1956.

**Nineteenth Century Housing and Hotels: Expressing Style**

*By Roberta Stevens*

The architectural history and the demand for buildings in La Crosse was first motivated by the need to conduct trade. Pioneer and trader Nathan Myrick is credited with erecting the first shack, in 1841, on Barron’s Island. A year later, Myrick and partner Harmon J.B. Miller moved their trade operation to a 16-by-20-foot log cabin in what was then called Prairie La Crosse. In 1842, Miller built the second house in La Crosse, a 20-by-30-foot log structure with a brick chimney. In 1846, the first frame house was built by John and Fredericka Levy at the corner of Front and Pearl Street. The Levys’ building served not only as their home, but as a warehouse for trade materials, a tavern, and a rooming
house. With Fredericka's help, the Levys became known for their exceptional hospitality and kindness, and their multi-functional building style set the standard for other merchants, who would include enough space in their buildings for their home, a tavern and boarding rooms.

A sawmill built locally in 1852 provided a ready supply of lumber, which made home and commercial construction easier and more modern than the log structures. Brick was an important construction material in La Crosse, as well. The first bricks known to be made in the area were produced on Mons Anderson's Clifford Farm in 1851. The next year, the first brick house was constructed on Front Street, south of Main, for liquor dealers Lake and Webster. Brick was less costly and would become the material most frequently used to replace wooden structures.

With the rise of lumbering, grain milling, railroads, and the growth of local shipbuilding and the steamboat industry, hard-working immigrants, investors, other residents, and a bank came to the area, which in turn produced a need for houses, hotels, and commercial property. A building boom was triggered in La Crosse, but development occurred without diagramed plans or orderly growth. Residential areas were pushed haphazardly east and south as commercial trade grew along the waterfront.

In the mid-nineteenth century, as La Crosse was being settled, the profession of “architect” in this country was still in its infancy. Still, builders and contractors called themselves architects despite their lack of formal academic training. Some of La Crosse's houses could not be strictly classified according to a particular style. Instead, they were an amalgam of styles as builders and/or architects borrowed and experimented from several sources, but the majority of local builders generally continued to follow the older, simpler forms of the Colonial and early Republican periods of American building, using available materials. The style was based on a large, rectangular structure with a slightly raised roof and a hallway extending through the center of the house or hotel. An example of this style is the George Zeisler House built before 1860, located at 903 S. Second Street. The house is believed to have been constructed by the local stonemason Andrew Sheperd for a brewery owner.

Many of the 400 to 500 houses built in 1856 were destroyed by fire, demolished to make room for new construction or moved to new sites. There are, however, a few existing structures in La Crosse that are fine examples of traditional architectural design.

The Gothic Revival was always a rare occurrence in the Midwest, and one of the most significant architectural structures in the city of La Crosse was owned by a prominent merchant, Mons Anderson. His house at 410 Cass Street is a very rare interpretation of the Gothic Revival style. Originally built by stonemason A.W. Sheperd as a small cottage in 1854, the house was enlarged and changed to
its present appearance by 1878. Built of local stone, the two-story house has a tall, square tower, pointed, arched windows and an arcade. The house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. A second example of the style is the Cyphus Martindale House, constructed at 714 Cass Street in 1874, which still retains its board and batten exterior and gingerbread trim along the gable edge.

The **Italianate style**, which began to place more emphasis on the vertical as opposed to the horizontal, was characterized by a Greek gable with a low-pitched hip roof with wide overhangs and heavy brackets to support the roof. Lumber baron Gideon C. Hixon built a home of this style at 429 N. Seventh Street, which was placed on the National Register in 1974. A more elaborate Italianate style is the Laverty-Martindale House, built in 1865 at 237 S. 10th Street. It still maintains its wooden scroll brackets under the broad eaves, flat hip roof topped by the rectangular cupola with round arched windows, and thin corner pilasters that frame the facade. The house was put on the National Register in 1977.

The **French Second Empire style**, characterized by its mansard roof, was the design utilized for the first city hall, fire station, and jail at 407-409 Main Street, as well as the first hotel (the Western Enterprise Hotel), built at Front and Pearl Street by Simeon Kellogg. The only architecturally significant structure of this style left in La Crosse is the “Bishop’s House” at 608 S. 11th Street. It displays a straight-sided mansard roof, long, arched dormer windows trimmed with small columns, a two-story cubic shape, paired brackets and ornate trim under the eaves, with elaborate molded stone window heads designed by the Catholic Diocesan architect Joseph Leinfelder in 1877.

The **High Victorian Italianate style** emphasized mass and heaviness. This style tended to employ a form of decorative window heads, low gable roof over scaled brackets, and large overhanging eaves and cornices. This design was used in the family home Johanna Heileman is believed to have built in 1880 near the Heileman brewery at 925 S. Third Street. Alteration to the porches has lessened the house’s architectural significance.

A northern Italian style, **High Victorian Gothic**, was made popular in Europe and America by architect John Ruskin in 1849. Ruskin extolled the importance of color as an integral part of construction and design. As a result, the house at 1024 Cass Street, designed by architect W.L. Carroll, was built for lumberman James Vincent in 1884 with white limestone arches and lintels contrasting with red brick, creating decorative bands to highlight the windows, basement and doors. The interior of the house showcases Egid Hackner’s master-crafted woodwork, stained glass, as well as early use of central heat, indoor plumbing, and gaslights.

**Romanesque Revival** detail was used to give the Romanesque Queen Anne-style Nymphus and Jesse B. Holway house at 1419 Cass Street more pretentious-
ness by architects Udo Schick and Gustav Stoltze when they added the stone facing, round Syrian arches on the porches and windows, and rounded buttresses to form the front gable in 1891.

**Victorian Queen Anne style** was the most popular and fashionable type of architecture in the city, and 269 houses still retain this characteristic. An exceptional Victorian Queen Anne style home is the W.W. Crosby House at 221 S. 10th Street, built in 1886, with its multiple decorated gables, conical roof tower, many patterns of shingles, overhanging second story, stained and colored glass, and ornamental chimney.

The building boom that had begun in 1851 included only two hotels built that year, the Western Enterprise Hotel (the first hotel built in La Crosse), and the two-story La Crosse House. The Augusta House, built by John Levy in 1856 (his wife Fredericka’s middle name was Augusta), had four stories, but was consumed by fire in 1903. Economics of the time, along with home and business owners who were also innkeepers, severely affected the hotel industry. The hotel building boom that began in the 1880s drastically slowed by the end of the nineteenth century. Even grocer C.B. Solberg built temporary quarters for immigrants, on South Front Street. These immigrant rooms and dormitories were sparsely furnished with only a wooden cot, mattress, wool blanket, no sheets, a small wooden table, and kerosene lamp, with common bathrooms and kitchen. A fire in 1870 destroyed these immigrant quarters. The Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad also operated immigrant rooms, and financed the elegant Cameron Hotel in 1880, which was operated by Warren Fox. As a result of this oversupply of rooms, several of La Crosse’s hotels, which had grown to more than 20 in number in 1882, found it necessary to close soon after.

None of the many nineteenth century large and small hotels that were constructed in the city, particularly near the train depot in the “hotel district” between Vine and Pearl streets from Front to Fourth Street, have survived. However, the architecturally significant Goddard Hotel, designed by William Parker in 1888 at 1639 Prospect Street, was enlarged in 1891, and is used today as an apartment building. It still maintains its Victorian style, characterized by segmental arched windows, a cornice and the remains of a square tower flanking the facade. In addition, two small hotel buildings remain: the American House at 222 Pearl Street and the Hotel Bronson at 205-209 Pearl Street.
Twentieth Century Housing and Hotels: Democratic Revivals

By Roberta Stevens

Home construction greatly decreased during the first decade of the twentieth century after the collapse of the lumber industry in La Crosse. The home building that did occur between 1900 and 1910 was dominated by the Period Revival style, which took on a more modern flair, made easier by catalogs of house plans and Sears Roebuck precut components that could be ordered by anyone and delivered anywhere. These catalog homes required few laborers and encouraged a lot of neighbor-helping-neighbor-type building.

By the 1920s, architects in La Crosse began to benefit from training in architectural schools as well as traditional apprenticeship programs. Some buildings were commissioned and completed by architects outside La Crosse, though just as in the nineteenth century, it was local architects, carpenters, and masons who continued to be responsible for the majority of the design of the city’s residential and public buildings. One of the largest building booms in La Crosse’s history occurred during the 1920s, when an average of 175 homes were built each year.

The majority of the fashionable and architecturally historic styles — like Italianate, Victorian Queen Anne, Neoclassical, English Tudor, Spanish Colonial-Mediterranean, and Romanesque Revival — were being located in the Cass and King Street areas. Very few large and fashionable homes can be found among the cottages and bungalows on the Northside and in the area south of Jackson Street on the Southside. Further evidence of this social division is the great number of vernacular and builder-styled houses on the Northside, as well as the lack of finer architectural detail, such as stained or leaded glass, and finely crafted cut-stone foundations. As the wealthy and upper middle class built homes in historic styles, the working class built homes that were practical, inexpensive, and with large amounts of room. These working class home styles usually fit one of three categories:

The American Foursquare House style showcased a simple box, hipped roof with board overhangs, dormer and full-length porch. These homes were produced almost exclusively by builder-contractors. Excellently maintained and constructed of brick, the twin houses built for August and Charles Kutzborsky of the Segelke-Kohlhaus Company at 721 and 729 S. Fifth Avenue exhibit the simplicity of unadorned surfaces and the hip roof dormers typical of the style.

A large number of the Prairie School House-style homes were built on the Southside between Jackson and State Streets and on the 200 block of South 17th
Street and 17th Place. Percy Dwight Bentley, a La Crosse native, built and was an advocate of the Prairie House-style homes, like Frank Lloyd Wright. The finest example of this type home, built in 1912 by Bentley and draftsman Otto Merman, was for seed merchant Henry Salzer. His home at 1634 King Street is unique for a city this size, and is characterized by its horizontal emphasis, broad hipped roof, a band of windows compressed between the heavy roof and the stucco ground floor, and careful alignment of all of the horizontal elements.

The **Bungalow Style** was a small, single-story house with attic space with a dormer or windows in the gables. Sets of working drawings for bungalows could be purchased for as little as $5. Great numbers of this style home were built in the 1920s and 1930s. An estimated 459 bungalow homes still maintain their architectural design today. Well-constructed and well-maintained in this original condition are the frame bungalows at 617 S. 14th Street, 609 S. 6th Street, 421 S. 19th Street, 1221 East Avenue South, 334 S. 21st Street, and the bungalow at 2123 Grandview Place constructed by builder-contractor William Crowley in 1927.

After the economic collapse of 1929, few houses were built in the 1930s. By 1940, over 1,000 La Crosse homes still had outhouses, and wells became contaminated as the city grew. Boarding houses and innkeeper rooms continued to serve the needs of newly arrived immigrants, single persons, and those families who could not afford to build or rent a house. Multi-family houses, such as row houses and flats, were found in relatively small numbers.

Most of the hotels built in La Crosse prior to contemporary times have been destroyed by fire, demolished, or seriously altered. To prevent fires from continuing to claim hotel structures like the luxurious Cameron House in 1916, methods had to be found to reduce the flammable nature of public building materials. Architects and engineers perfected the new and modern Chicago steel frame style of construction for commercial buildings and hotels by the early 1900s. This style provided ultimate structural support and function, would likely not burn to the ground, and at the same time exhibited modern architecture and natural flow of historic design and lines.

In 1903, two buildings erected using the Chicago steel frame style were the Doerrflinger Store at 400 Main Street, which still stands today, and the elegant Stoddard Hotel, which was demolished in 1982. The best of this Chicago steel frame style are the W.A. Roosevelt Building at 230 Front Street, designed by Parkinson and Dockendorff in 1916, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983, and the Hotel Linker at 318-320 Main St., built in 1925. Concrete construction had become popular in the country, and in the 1930s, hotels and public buildings were being constructed of reinforced concrete. The new concrete material was used to create the smooth surface texture essential to the Art Moderne style still being used today.
Art Moderne was the style that strove to create an architecture to complement the machine age. A significant house of this type was Romeo Denzer’s home constructed in 1940 at 2537 Edgewood Place, which features rounded corners, flat roofs, smooth wall surfaces without ornamentation, and windows that wrap around the corner in a machine-inspired, streamlined design.

The 1940s and 1950s was a period in which many of the structures built during the last century were renovated to not only improve them, but to preserve some of their original splendor. The Hotel Grand, originally built by Henry Espersen as the Espersen House, underwent an extensive renovation in July 1948. Elegant homes like the Queen Anne-styled Gantert house at 1304 Main St. were broken up into apartments in the 1950s, as were many of the homes in the Cass-King Street area, along with the fanciful Frank Hixon house at 1431 King Street.

Ranch Homes were built in the new housing developments east of Losey Boulevard, and a few were constructed as fill-in in older neighborhoods. These homes had multi-paned windows associated with the English Colonial Revival style that was used in the rambling, low-pitched, gabled roofed houses like the one built in brick at 1142 22nd Drive and the one of brick and wood at 209 S. 25th Street.

From 1950 to 1960, the housing supply was almost 11 percent higher than the growth in population. Many houses were vacant, 15 percent were in a dilapidated state, 1,238 lacked private toilets or running water, and another 367 had no hot water. Modern motels were being built on well-traveled highways, allowing traveling salespersons on a budget and holiday and vacation travelers to seek lower-cost alternative accommodations to downtown hotels. This contributed to the high number of empty rooms and gradual decrepitude of some hotel buildings. A downtown rehabilitation program cleared 11 acres of La Crosse waterfront, aiming for new development, and in 1967, bids were accepted to demolish 45 more buildings.

By the late 1970s and 1980s, home building became new-age, with consideration given to lifestyle and prospective homeowners being very involved with the architect or builder in the design process. Wood continued to be the building material of choice for homes, but adherence to characteristics and details of the historic styles became less and less important as modern and contemporary styles became dominant. Major hotel chains have become a part of the La Crosse landscape, with national names prominent here like Best Western, Courtyard by Marriott, Ramada, and the Radisson (which completed a major renovation in 1998). The Ramada Inn closed suddenly in November 1999 without explanation.

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, recent home building has been for those residents who are upper-middle-income-to-wealthy, and renovations of
older homes and buildings keep contractors very busy. Two downtown apartment complexes have been constructed, one in 1995 on the waterfront called the River Place Apartments on Front Street, and the Marketplace Apartments, at Fourth Avenue and King Street, which opened in 1999. Like any other vibrant city, La Crosse hopes to retain its major industry in order to maintain its population growth and housing market. Redevelopment in the downtown area is already under way, and new business interests have begun construction of new office buildings. New employees mean additional need for new and existing houses.

The Profession of Engineering

By James Ritter, P.E.

The history of engineering and La Crosse may be gathered from many related fields, which include chemical, civil, electrical, industrial, mechanical, structural, and some other branches of engineering. Engineering did not originate as a recognized or well-defined human activity at any single stage of the world’s history, and the use of the word “engineering,” particularly as applied to a professional calling, is relatively recent. The exact date is disputable and difficult to fix.

Engineering services may be provided in-house, such as by the city engineer and his engineering department, or by consulting engineers who specialize in various fields.

The City’s Engineering Department has the responsibility to design streets, water systems, sewer systems, sewage treatment systems, water pumping and storage systems, and to conduct consultation with other utilities. The latter include electric, gas, telephone, television, fire protection, and transportation.

An attempt had been made in 1836-37 by John B. Cooks and Colonel Cubbage to establish a trading post at Prairie La Crosse, but after their store had been twice destroyed by fire, presumably set by the Winnebagoes, they gave up the venture.

Nathan Myrick learned about Prairie La Crosse, and the description of the place led him to believe that the site was well-suited to his purpose.

The Winnebago Indians, who inhabited the area, came to this place down the Black River and other streams and held powwows as well as their tournaments.

Early business was brisk on Barron’s Island and Myrick decided to move to the main land. Logs were cut and the new cabin was built on Front Street, north of State Street. Myrick and partner H.J.B. Miller moved in before the cabin was completed. A howling blizzard during the night ripped off the roof boards and
deposited six inches of snow in the cabin. Despite this discouragement, the new store was completed and the stock laid in.

Only a few settlers moved in early on, but beginning in 1852, there was a very rapid increase in population. A sawmill had been built in 1851. There were only five dwellings in April 1851. But in November 1853, there were 104 dwellings, eight dry goods stores, four grocery stores, two drugstores, one harness shop, four blacksmith shops, one gun shop, two bakeries, one cabinet shop, three physicians, four lawyers, one justice of the peace, five taverns, one barber shop, one print shop, one sawmill, one wagon shop, and miscellaneous other places. Altogether, up to 1910, there were 33 sawmills at various times in La Crosse, North La Crosse, and Onalaska.

On March 19, 1863, the La Crosse Gas Light Company was organized.

The first electrical company in La Crosse was the La Crosse Brush Light and Power Company. It was incorporated on October 29, 1881. On April 7, 1924, the Wisconsin-Minnesota Light and Power Company officially changed its name to Northern States Power Company-Wisconsin, and has existed as a wholly-owned subsidiary and integral part of Northern States Power Company-Minnesota. In 1960 natural gas was installed in the La Crosse area.

The State of Wisconsin requires that to practice engineering, a person must be registered. Registration requires one eight-hour engineering fundamentals exam and one eight-hour engineering ethics and practice exam, taken at the UW-Madison. Upon satisfactory completion of these exams, the engineer becomes a registered professional.

In order to maintain competent engineering practice, engineering societies provide continuing education seminars. The Wisconsin Society of Professional Engineers formed in May 1944. The Western Chapter of the Wisconsin Society of Professional Engineers was chartered on April 2, 1947, in La Crosse. The chapter’s mission is to allow local professional engineers from all fields to meet and keep informed of professional, social, and economic interests. This is accomplished by the promotion of education, legislation, and public relations via the establishment and maintenance of high ethical standards and practices.

In concert with WSPE, the La Crosse area has a chapter belonging to the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE). The La Crosse area chapter was chartered on April 10, 1972. ASHRAE provides a Web site where engineers can engage in meaningful discussions about all disciplines associated with the latest in equipment, legislation, design, and applications. Many fields of engineering use this service.

Other engineering groups with chapters in La Crosse are: the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME); American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE); and American Manufacturing Engineers (AME).
Many companies located in La Crosse have contributed to the local economy, but the history of the Davy Engineering Company suggests the contributions of many by the nature of its endeavors. Davy Engineering is the oldest and largest consulting engineering firm in La Crosse. The firm provides engineering and surveying services for commercial and residential development and for municipal improvement projects. It serves as “city engineer” for communities that do not have their own staff and handles larger, more specialized projects for large municipalities. Its projects involve civil/environmental engineering and land surveying.

Frank J. Davy founded the firm as “Frank J. Davy, Consulting Engineer” in 1928 after leaving the position of assistant district engineer for the Wisconsin Highway Department (now Department of Transportation). The firm initially provided engineering and surveying services to La Crosse and nearby communities for local streets, highways, bridges, sewer systems and water systems.

The firm’s name was changed to Frank J. Davy and Sons when Philip S. Davy, Frank’s son, joined him in June 1938. Project types shifted more to water supply/treatment and wastewater treatment. During the 1930s, many of the Davy projects were financed and constructed under the Works Projects Administration (WPA), a federal program intended to create jobs during the Depression.

After the firm’s name was changed to Davy Engineering Co., Michael F. Davy joined it in 1969 following graduation from UW-Madison. In 1976, Davy Laboratories was formed. The lab operates as a division of Davy Engineering Co. and provides chemical and biological analysis of water and wastewater.

Michael F. Davy is the current president and Thomas H. Davy is office manager. Mark S. Davy, the fourth generation, is a project engineer, having joined the business after graduating in Civil and Environmental Engineering from UW-Madison in 1994.

Many of the firm’s projects have been located in this area. Davy provided the engineering and surveying services for many local residential subdivisions, including Green Meadows, Irish Valley, Sherwood Manor, Wedgewood Terrace, Wedgewood Valley, Greenwald Coulee, Heather Hills, Highland Park, Cliffwood Terrace, Cliffwood Heights, Cliffwood Addition, Hoeschler Park Plaza, Hiawatha Islands, Lauderdale Addition, Country Club Estates, Waterford Valley and Aspen Valley. Commercial/industrial/institutional developments include Pralle Center, Woodman’s, Shelby Mall, Crosseroads Center (Cub Foods), Menard’s, Market Place (Home Depot), Gundersen Clinic-Onalaska, Kramer Industrial Addition and Seminary Park. The firm has provided engineering service to all of the adjoining townships, La Crosse County, the city of Onalaska, and the city of La Crosse.

From after World War II until the mid-1950s, the Davy offices were located above Hoeschler’s Drug Store at Fifth and Main. The firm then moved east about
a half block to a building adjacent to the Cathedral rectory, sharing the second floor space with the office for Mathy Construction. In 1960 the business relocated to the front half of the second floor of 115 Sixth Street S. The Goodyear Tire Store was located on the first floor until the early 1970s. Now, the Davy Building is nearly entirely occupied by Davy Engineering Co. and Davy Laboratories.

Other leading engineering firms or firms greatly dependent on engineering in this city have included A & M Electric Inc., Altec International, American Engineering Testing, Braun Intertec Corp., Diesel Services – La Crosse Diesel, Earthlight Technologies, ETC Inc., HSR Associates Inc., Kalmat, La Crosse Engineering & Surveying, Michaels Engineering Inc., Midwest Environmental Management Company, and Trane Company. All the engineering firms of La Crosse have contributed to the effective operation of the city in one form or another.

Retail Trade Makes Its Mark

By Mary Gagermeier

The definition of retail trade is “the sale of commodities in small quantities to the ultimate consumer.” Whether or not Nathan Myrick realized this when he set up shop in his one-room log cabin in now-Pettibone Park in 1841, we’ll never know. He earned his $100 stake from his father in New York State, clerking and working in a tannery. And his mother slipped $15 into his Bible, as mothers will do.

Nathan’s “ultimate customers” were fur traders and Indians. Credit was given to any honest face until furs were sold or the Indians received their federal allotments. The system worked for him, as he sent home, via Hercules Dousman of Prairie du Chien, a draft for $1,000, having carried his silver coins downriver in a saddlebag.

Myrick returned home to the eastern United States, stocked up on goods to sell and acquired a wife, Rebecca. She kept the house and store, and kept in order the too friendly Indians, using her hefty skillet. Nathan moved across the Mississippi to Second and State Street. He had help from partner H.J. (Scoots) Miller, building a 16-by-30-foot cabin and storage shed in the spring of 1842. He became the first postmaster of Prairie La Crosse that year. Mail arrived by canoe, sleds on the ice, or horseback. Myrick left La Crosse in 1848 to trade furs in St. Paul; however, he still held real estate claims here.

John M. Levy came onto the scene in 1846, setting up home and shop at Front and Pearl Street. Not only did he trade, but he also provided shelter for wayfarers traveling up and down the Mississippi.
By 1853 the village of La Crosse had eight fancy and dry goods stores, two drug and medicine shops, two hardware stores and even a milliner's shop, according to historian Reverend Spencer Carr.

La Crosse became a city on March 14, 1856. Today we see some early local businessmen's names on streets: Cameron, Farnam, Travis, Horton, Hood, Zeisler, Rublee, Gillette, Sill, Clinton, Sumner and Copeland.

The Hastings and Hoare Drug Store of 1854 sold stationery, groceries, dry goods, boots, shoes and clothing. Rublee's General Store carried almost everything, including ointments and liniments, but no prescriptions.

In 1883 Samuel Clemens (pen name: Mark Twain) stopped off on a steamboat trip and described La Crosse: “Here is a town of 12,000 to 13,000 population. It is a choice town.” The rapid growth of La Crosse can be credited to its easy access by river: 1,560 boats docked here in 1857, and prairie schooners came across country from Milwaukee.

In 1851 Mons Anderson, the “Merchant Prince,” came to the city through the influence of Daniel Wells and Samuel Smith. Smith took Anderson as a partner, and soon he was sole proprietor. Anderson erected the second brick building on Front Street.

Anderson purchased a large statue of a lion from merchant tailor John Paul. He placed it on Second and Main, where it remained for 40 years. It was the trademark and brand name for the overalls he later manufactured. In 1861 he constructed his store on Second and Main, the largest building here at that time. He kept his buildings brightly lighted when the Brush Light Company was organized. He lit up his store to the wonder of people for miles around.

Anderson was the first merchant to employ female clerks. Some customers protested, but this did not sway him; the ladies stayed. He was generous to his employees and a great influence in helping to bring many immigrants from Norway to settle in La Crosse and farther west. He was influential in building the city, but unfortunately died a pauper due to poor investments in silver mining.

Starting his career in retail at the age of 14, William Doerflinger learned in the workplaces of John Voegle Grocery, Rau and Klein Dry Goods and the Trade Palace, with John Smith, manager. The firm of Bosshard and Doerflinger began business as the Park Store in 1886. It was located across from Market Square. The building burned in 1903. Rebuilding was done by George Zeisler on Fourth and Main, the present location of the Doerflinger Building. Doerflinger was known for his generosity to the orphans of St. Michael's; his great joy was to bring the children into the toy department at Christmastime to choose whatever they wished. La Crosse memories of Doerflinger’s include the Santa and sleigh in the Christmas window, Mr. Daniell's ice cream shop in the basement, and the “Halfway Lunch,” where ladies met to chat between shopping sprees.
Traveling up Main Street in the 1950s and ’60s, the ladies would visit the dime stores, Kresge’s and Woolworth’s, and go on to the E.R. Barron Department Store, with perhaps a stop at the Elite, the Pappas family’s candy store and restaurant.

Barron came to La Crosse in 1886 from McGregor, Iowa, being originally from New Hampshire. G.R. Herberger bought the store in 1964, and in 1982 sold it to the employees as he went on to make a fortune in Arizona real estate. He rewarded 100 of his employees with gifts of $1,000 each, a nice surprise for three La Crosse women, Margaret Karsten, Gen Weiss, and Lois Molzahn.

The 1950s, ’60s and ’70s brought into being new gift shops such as Honig’s (still on Main Street) and Garvalia’s. Nearer to the Cathedral was Fantle’s, a women’s wear store, which later moved to Fifth Avenue. The jewelry stores most prominent in this area were Cremer’s; Crescent Jewelry, which featured “Mac, the Singing Jeweler”; and Rose Jewelers, a family concern since 1856.

Drugstores necessary for health in the early years started with Hoares in 1852, which went on through the years as Hebberd Drugs, and on further to the Dumont products Art Hebberd manufactured, outliving Boerner, Hoeschler and Hilton.

The joy of Easter bonnets for the church ladies was supplied by Aletta’s Hat Shop on the Southside and Lil Wittenberg’s on the Northside. Across from the Cathedral, Noelke’s has taken care of religious needs from Grandpa Bernhard in 1883 to Ned and now Ned Jr. Some family-owned businesses have survived; many have not. Adam Kroner’s Hardware has lasted 132 years, but those of Tausche, Doerre, and Wiggert are gone. Newburg’s Men’s Wear survived until the twentieth century, but Henry Boehm’s Continental did not. La Crosse Floral, owned by the Zoerb family, has outlasted Kienahs and Lund. Some longtime family-owned businesses that are still downtown include Salem Markos & Sons, retail and wholesale clothiers; Rowley’s Office Equipment; Leithold Music; La Crosse Leather and Fur; and Wettstein’s Electric.

A third-generation liquor store, Soell’s on Main, founded by Otto Soell, who got his training under the Spence McCord Drug Co. roof, has now moved south to Mormon Coulee Road, under the management of Art Sr. and Art Jr.

In 1937, before the trend to department stores began, La Crosse had four furriers — Bicha, Conrad, Krueger and Lutz; ten florists — Gen’s, Grabar, Hillview, Havlicek, Kienahs, OakGrove, Puents, Salzers, Yehle and La Crosse Floral; five clothiers for men — Continental, Maders, Howards, Nelson’s and Newburgs; and six furniture dealers — Boyers, Ganterts, Leath, Nelson, Sletten and Tillmans. In 1942 final needs were cared for by Blaschke, Dahl, Dwyer, Hellwig & Morris, Madden, Nelson, Schumacher, Sletten-McKee and Tillman funeral homes.

Downtown shopping “took a hit” with the 1980s Mall Age. Valley View and
large discount stores, like Target, Shopko, Walmart, and K-Mart, attracted shoppers in the two-car family era.

Market Square was a center for the new community in the nineteenth century. It was used as a shelter for immigrants, a workplace for convicts, and on into the twentieth century, a place to sell farm products. The open square disappeared in the late 1960s to be replaced by a parking ramp and recently a new parking ramp and apartment complex. In summer, farm products are sold at the Farmers’ Market in a lot west of the Post Office, which is as close as modern La Crosse comes to a market square.

**Banking and Other Financial Institutions**

*Stay the Course*

*By Stanton Jorgens*

The story of banking is an extraordinary part of the economic history of our country. The importance of the contributions made by banks and other financial institutions to our growth and development can hardly be overemphasized. The State of Wisconsin during the mid-nineteenth century was largely agricultural, the opportunities for cultivating new lands were abundant, and new industries were being created, which require large amounts of capital and credit. The primary reasons for the establishment of banks were the pressing needs for credit to develop this new country and currency to facilitate financial transactions.

As the Wisconsin Territory was being settled, banking services grew in direct relationship to the increase in the population and the businesses required to serve the new immigrants, who were arriving in large numbers. Most of the early banks were private banks, which were able to operate without the strict regulation we know today, and were susceptible to failure during the numerous financial panics that often swept through the territory. Because of widespread concern about private banks, the practice of banking was even deemed illegal during the 1840s. Wisconsin became a state in 1848, but it was not until the passage of the State Banking Act of 1852 that banking was legalized and banks in their modern form began to spring up through the new state.

The first banks to be chartered in La Crosse were the City Bank of La Crosse and the Katanyan Bank, both in 1856. The financial panic of 1857 caused both to fail, the City Bank in 1858 and the Katanyan Bank in 1861. Banks in those days issued their own currency and were forced to close when they were unable to meet the withdrawal demands of “a run on the bank” by their customers. In exceptional
instances, some bank owners and directors used their own resources to meet those demands. Private banks were outlawed in 1903, but were given the opportunity to switch to a state charter, which all but a few did.

Gysbert Van Steenwyk, the Wisconsin banking commissioner in 1860-61 and a famous name in La Crosse history, got into banking in an unusual way. In fact, he was in charge of all Wisconsin banking before he even opened a bank of his own. He opened the Batavian Bank of La Crosse in 1861 “and became immediately a prominent factor in the development of the city,” according to one La Crosse County history. The Batavian Bank was acquired in 1955 by First Bank Stock Corporation. It now operates under the name of U.S. Bank Corporation, and its branch in La Crosse is the oldest continuously operating bank in the city.

The national Banking Act was passed in 1862 and had a very detrimental effect on state and privately chartered banks, but soon became the basis for the dual system of banking. Since that time, banks may be chartered and supervised by either the state or federal governments.

Three other banks, still operating in La Crosse today, were chartered during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The La Crosse National Bank, now Norwest Bank La Crosse, began operations in 1877. The banking firm of J.M. Holley and Emil Borresen was formed in 1879 and was incorporated as the State Bank of La Crosse in 1883. The Exchange State Bank, now M & I Bank, has been in operation on the Northside since 1884.

Savings and Loan Associations came to La Crosse with the establishment of the Mutual Loan and Building Corporation in 1881. It was the forerunner of Home Savings and Loan Association, which was subsequently acquired by First Financial Savings and Loan. First Financial was itself acquired in 1997 by Associated Bank Corporation, headquartered in Green Bay.

The stock market crash of 1929 and Depression of the 1930s had a profound effect on the banking system. While a few of the city’s banks did fail, the majority of our financial institutions were able to weather the storm and remain viable today. The banking crisis of the 1930s was followed by a period of banking and financial reforms aimed at the prevention of specific abuses that became apparent during those troubled times. The Federal Reserve System, which had been created in 1913, was strengthened. Deposit insurance was created. Enabling legislation was passed to encourage other types of financial service companies, such as savings and loan associations and credit unions. The beginning of World War II here in 1941 marked the end of the Depression.

It was during the 1930s that the savings and loan industry began its rapid growth. The Home Owners Loan Act of 1933 created the Federal Home Loan Bank Board to oversee the creation and supervision of federally chartered savings and loan associations. The National Housing Act of 1934 set up the Federal
Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation to insure deposits in savings and loan associations — much as the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation insured deposits in commercial banks. During the savings and loan crises of the 1970s and 1980s, the two insurance funds were combined under the supervision of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. First Federal Savings and Loan Association was chartered in 1934. Its name was changed to First Federal Savings Bank after its merger with First Federal Savings Bank of Madison in 1989. It became a publicly owned company that same year, and is now the largest financial institution with headquarters in La Crosse.

Another type of financial institution that began this century was the credit union. Groups with a common affiliation, usually employment within a company or an industry, were permitted to create this type of financial institution. They resembled co-operatives, and had as their primary purpose providing credit and deposit services to their members. The first credit union in the city of La Crosse was the Holy Trinity Credit Union, which became the La Crosse Community Credit Union in 1931. Since the passage of the Federal Credit Union Act in 1934, credit unions have experienced significant growth. By the 1990s, there were 16 separate credit unions operating within the Greater La Crosse Area.

As this area continued to grow and prosper after World War II, its financial institutions participated in that growth and enjoyed a long period of stability. Market forces and ethnological change created pressure to modify or eliminate much of the restrictive regulation passed during the Great Depression. The financial crises of the 1970s and 1980s added to the movement to have those laws changed and began a significant wave of mergers and acquisitions within the entire financial services industry that is still continuing. The collapse of the real estate market in the mid-1980s practically eliminated the savings and loan industry as we had known it. The number of individually chartered banks was reduced dramatically. The Glass-Steagall Act of 1933, designed to safeguard the consumer by creating firewalls between various types of financial institutions, was effectively eliminated by the passage of the Financial Services Modernization Act of 1999.

No discussion of banks and other financial institutions would be complete without mention of key changes currently underway and a prediction as to what we are likely to see as we move further into the twenty-first century. In an address to business leaders in La Crosse on November 8, 1999, Richard Kovacevich, president and chief executive officer of Wells Fargo & Co., the nation’s seventh largest bank, commented, “Deregulation — breaking down the Depression-era walls between deposit taking and securities — began in the 1970s. Money market funds were born. They now have assets of $1.5 trillion. Mutual funds became popular as an investment, offering even higher returns. By the end of this year, mutual funds are expected to have more funds under management — $4.5 trillion — than exist
in the entire banking system. . . There are still too many banks in this country. In 1990 there were about 15,000 banks in the United States. Today there are about 8,600. In less than two years there will be about 7,000. That’s still too many.” Wells Fargo took over Norwest Bank here in 2000.

Due to technological innovation, the market for bank products and services is changing rapidly. With financial reform now law, banks have been given carte blanche to offer any and all financial services. Before you know it, bank customers will be able to one-stop-shop for all of their financial needs.

Early Journalism: Shining Light on the Civil War and the Death of a Cow

By David Marcou

Newspapermen began work in La Crosse just before the Civil War. The first press brought to La Crosse was bought in Prairie du Chien in 1852 by A.D. LaDue. Immediately, he began the first paper published in La Crosse County — the political circular-like *Spirit of the Times*. Then, in the fall of 1853, William C. Rogers, described by Dr. A.P. Blakeslee as “an excellent printer,” issued the first number of the *La Crosse Democrat*. It was succeeded by the *La Crosse National Democrat*, which started in July of 1854. The *La Crosse Union* appeared by 1859. The *Union* and the *Democrat* united in that year, and the name of the result was the *Union and Democrat*. Dr. Blakeslee had owned the *Democrat*, and issued it until his sale of that paper to C.P. Sykes, a “Know-Nothing” (enemy of foreigners and Catholics). Sykes then sold his interest to Marcus M. “Brick” Pomeroy, who would play a national role in newspaper politics during the war.

In late 1860, Pomeroy gained total control of the paper, and the name *La Crosse Democrat* was resumed. After the war, Dr. Blakeslee wrote that the “small office of 1855, for half of which Blakeslee paid $350, has now become one of the best newspaper and job printing establishments in the Northwest.”

The editor of the Chatfield, Minnesota, *Democrat* described editor Pomeroy thus: “We expected to find him with a fiery red head of hair and whiskers, with comets for eyes, and a corporation of aldermanic proportions. . . . we are pleased to say that we found him to be just like the balance of mankind, only more so. He is rather a small man physically, with but a slight covering of hair upon his head, and that very similar in color to a Milwaukee ‘Brick’: a clean-shaven face, boyish and bright blue eyes. His nose and mouth are nothing remarkable, but his tongue is hung in the middle and never says a foolish thing. His body, we
should judge to be a composition of whip crackers and steel wire, and the motive power of his brain, electricity and gun cotton. In short, he is a little, white headed, witty cuss, brave as Caesar, sharp as tacks, and saucy as the devil himself.”

Pomeroy was a leading “Copperhead” (Southern sympathizer in the North) during the Civil War. Just before the election of 1864, he advised readers not to reelect Lincoln. At the start of another war, World War II, the only daily paper in the city then, the La Crosse Tribune and Leader Press, reviewed the events that had led Pomeroy and his paper into prominence. In “Mark (Brick) Pomeroy, Early La Crosse Editor, Drew U.S. Criticism Following Lincoln’s Death,” the paper quoted that editor’s advice: “Lincoln is a traitor and murderer. . . . And if he is elected to misgovern for another four years, we trust some BOLD HAND WILL PIERCE HIS HEART WITH A DAGGER FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD [paper’s capitalization].” Lincoln was assassinated soon after.

A debate had erupted between the Democrat and Rogers’ La Crosse Daily Republican, which reported Lincoln’s death on April 15, 1865. Quoting a hateful Democrat passage and its hypocritical bulletin on the 15th, “A NATION WEEPS,” the Republican said, “Yes, indeed, a Nation may well weep over the clemency that has spared those who have lost no opportunity to influence the worst passions of deluded [assassins].” Pomeroy went on to publish books, including six of his own. He died in Brooklyn, New York, in 1896.

Bruce Mouser has written that George E. Taylor, a black journalist who began the weekly Wisconsin Labor Advocate here in 1886, “was following the lead of Brick Pomeroy who . . . had taken the National Democrat from being La Crosse-based to a national newspaper and a national leadership in the 1860s.” Born in Arkansas in 1857, Taylor was raised by a former black slave and West Salem farmer, “N—— Nathan Smith.” He worked for local pro-labor papers, then began the Advocate — a solid paper, with front devoted to national and international news (the first issue’s lead story dealt with Irish riots); labor news on page two; local news and ads on page three; and human interest stories, short stories, poems, songs, and more ads on page four. Illustrations were rare due to the need and great expense of woodcuts.

The local labor movement began to materialize as a viable force during the first two mayoralties of Dr. Frank “White Beaver” Powell, in 1885 and again in 1886. Local papers were involved in his campaigns, especially the anti-Powell, Republican La Crosse Chronicle, and the pro-Powell, pro-labor La Crosse Free Press (which folded between terms), La Crosse News, La Crosse Evening Star, and Taylor’s Advocate. Also affected by the Knights of Labor, the movement broke into factions in the mid-1880s.

Taylor, who favored political action and opposed labor activism, backed Powell for governor in 1886. Powell’s name did not even get onto the gubernatorial ballot.
then, but he was reelected mayor of La Crosse. Then, when the publisher’s house and office were burgled (newspapers were often “burgled” in that era; some were even burned down), Taylor claimed the thieves had stolen his subscriber list. He was becoming a liability for Powell, so in 1887 the politician broke off ties with Taylor.

From 1900 to 1904, Taylor was a member of the radical reform fringe of the Democratic Party. But many African-Americans left that party during the 1904 St. Louis Convention and formed a new, African-American party, the National Liberty Party. Taylor was nominated as its candidate for the U.S. Presidency in 1904. He was the first candidate of a national African-American party for that office.

Nineteenth-century papers were sold on newsstands, street corners, and by subscription. All sorts of cure-alls were advertised in them, plus beauty aids, clothing, and lotteries. One paper, founded in La Crosse in 1894, achieved status when it moved to Milwaukee in 1878: George Peck’s *Sun*. Peck’s fictional “Bad Boy” was a Bart Simpson–like kid named Hennery, who helped the *Sun* gain a national circulation of 100,000 readers. Peck was elected mayor of Milwaukee in 1890, then governor of Wisconsin in 1892.

As for the curious, the *La Crosse Republican Leader* ran a story on a poor cow on December 13, 1887. Bought by Nicholas Hintgen, he found in its stomach 23 shingle nails, six carpet tacks, two knitting needles, two wood screws, one dime, and one street railway spike. The paper said, “One of the knitting needles had pierced one of the cow’s lungs and a tumor weighing nearly a pound had formed as a result.” Speculation ensued.

On a more contemporary note, on February 17, 1895, there was a special women’s edition of the La Crosse *Sunday Press*. Sanford and Hirshheimer state: “This issue was edited entirely by a staff of 51 women headed by Mrs. Angus Cameron, the Editor-in-Chief. . . . The material of its twelve pages was illustrated by sketches drawn by La Crosse women. In this edition the editors and contributors spoke up bravely for recognition of the rights and abilities of women and called for better city government. . . .”

Many local papers wielded power during that age, including foreign-language ones. The first La Crosse-based foreign-language paper was the German *Nord Stern*, published from 1856 to 1921. Dr. Blakeslee wrote: “This weekly German paper was started by Colonel T. (Theodore) Rodolf, on the 20th of November, 1856. . . . It was published by C. Holbroocks, and for a while ably expounded Democratic principles to the German population of La Crosse. . . . In March, 1857, Ulrich & Fisher became proprietors, and it continued Democratic . . . until July, 1860, when it abandoned the party that had thus far sustained it, and became a strong advocate of Republican principles.” The doctor added that a Catholic German paper was started in 1859, *Die Wagle*, which had a brief life.
Other nineteenth century city papers included *Amerika* (1868-72), the Norwegian language weekly; *La Crosse Democratic Journal* (weekly, 1863); *Faedrelandet Og Emigranten* (1864–92); *La Crosse Leader-Press* (daily, 1859–60, 1864–1917); *La Crosse Patriot*, (German weekly, 1888–1902); *La Crosse Daily Press* (1889–1903); *Republican and Leader* (weekly, 1854–1903); *Vlastenec*, (Bohemian weekly, 1898–1927); and *La Crosse Volksfreund*, (German-language weekly, 1891–1918).

Newspapers were strong in nineteenth century La Crosse, but few magazines were published here then. In the August, 1999 *La Crosse Observer*, Doug Connell wrote that *Storey’s Monthly* was the city’s first magazine. Begun in 1897, it closed quickly. The most ambitious magazine ever published here was *The International Review*. Twelve monthly issues were published in 1898 by Clement Craft, a Milwaukee Road agent. Connell noted, “[it] was similar to today’s *Reader’s Digest* as it was comprised of articles and stories represented from leading newspapers and magazines. . . . The magazine covered a broad range of subjects such as national and world matters, finance, education, science, bicycling, women, humor, travel, and book reviews. [Even today,] the magazine’s appearance [shows] pleasing typography, photographs, and illustrations.” Circulation was 10,000. Distributed on trains and at newsstands nationally, the *Review* didn’t deal with local issues but did run ads from city firms.

La Crosse’s *The Light*, published bimonthly from 1899 to 1939 by B. Samuel Steadwell for the National Purity Federation, claimed to be “the world’s best known magazine for social and moral reform.” Steadwell retired to Texas and died in 1947. Connell wrote, “Jack Storch, a La Crosse resident and history buff, recalls that as a boy he visited the *Light* offices at 303 Division Street where his mother worked for a time. During his visits he said he collected stamps off subscription letters arriving there from around the world — which gives some indication of the magazine’s readership.”

American journalism in the nineteenth century resembles modern journalism in key ways. For instance, much of the news then was politically crafted, just as it is now. Also, news was then, and is today, Big Business. Staffs may have been smaller 150 years ago, but news was a highly saleable commodity even then, and many papers were sold.

A new type of story had emerged that would add even more potency to the circulations of a U.S. papers — the human interest story. The *Penny Press* made a fortune from the idea. Publishers like Benjamin H. Day, of the *New York Sun*, and Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune*, Henry J. Raymond of the *New York Times*, and William Lloyd Garrison of the abbreviated *Liberator* caused social and political revolutions to occur in mid-nineteenth century America. The Civil War and expansion westward were two of the biggest stories then.
Twentieth Century Journalism: The Tribune and the Rest of the Local Field

By David Marcou

The La Crosse Tribune, now a morning paper, has long been the city’s main paper, since its daily competition faded in the early 1900s. It began publication on May 16, 1904, due to a dispute over power rates. When two competing power and light companies joined forces here to create a monopoly and increase rates, five established local papers apparently failed to report it. That led to resentment against the “private-interest” press of three dailies — the Morning Chronicle, the Republican-Leader, and the Daily Press, — and two weeklies — the German language Nord Stern and the Bohemian Vlastene (Patriot).

As a result, Aaron M. Brayton, managing editor of the Chronicle, and three colleagues left that paper and founded the Tribune. Brayton wrote in the latter’s first edition that his paper was to be a “newspaper for the people,” adding, “A public journal has influence by virtue of its deeds. We hope ‘I read it in the Tribune’ will become a guarantee of accuracy, and that ‘The Tribune thinks so’ will have the weight that goes with opinions from those habitually fair and accurate.” That paper has often been a “Tribune for the people.” It has carried key international and national news (via the Associated Press and, for many years, United Press International, too), plus in-depth reports on local subjects.

When the Armistice went into effect ending World War I, the then-La Crosse Tribune and Leader Press ran on the front page of its November 10, 1918, extra edition the huge headline: “EXTRA! War Ends — Armistice in Force/Germans Accept Defeat Terms.” Victory was touted with a basic photo-montage of Allied leaders at the bottom left-hand side of page, and the same of Entente leaders at the bottom right-hand side. The titles read: “They led the fight for freedom for all — and won” (Allies), and “They tried to enslave the entire world and lost” (Entente). That edition sold for five cents.


In the November 22, 1963, final edition, the Tribune headline was equally direct: “Pres. Kennedy Assassinated/By Sniper in Downtown Dallas.” A UPI
telephoto showed President John F. Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy just before shots killed JFK. The lead story also dealt with the succession of Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson and Texas Governor John Connally’s wounding. The entire front displayed related stories and photos.

More-positive world events were also well-presented by that paper, including Charles Lindbergh’s triumphant transatlantic flight (“Paris Gives Lindbergh Wild Welcome”), in the May 22, 1927, issue, and the equally heroic first moonwalk (“World Watches 2 Yanks/In First Walk on Moon”), in the July 21, 1969, paper (which still sold for 10 cents). In the latter coverage, President Richard Nixon was quoted, “For one priceless moment in the whole history of man all the people on this earth are truly one.”

Other Tribune coverages have involved more wars; social, economic, sports, religious, and artistic news; and weather stories, like the Great Flood of 1965. The paper reported on April 21, 1965, the heroic work of hundreds of volunteers here, who piled sandbags as the Mississippi crested at more than 17 feet. On its front page that day, manpower coordinator Eugene Fry was quoted, beneath a photo of him, “If We Win It’ll Be Tremendous.”

During those years of press success, few people recalled that, in 1907, a then-failing Tribune had been purchased by Lee Enterprises, a chain of three papers. A. Brayton was named editor and publisher, a dual post he would hold until 1919, when he assumed the same roles with the Wisconsin State Journal in Madison, another Lee paper. By 1917, the local daily had only one real rival, the Leader-Press. The Tribune bought it for $100,000 after Tribune business manager Frank Burgess had pushed his paper’s subscription levels to new highs. The resulting paper’s name reflected the merger until the late 1940s.

The Tribune was first located at 123 Main Street, but moved to the southeast corner of Fifth Avenue and Jay Street. After expanding there, it moved into a new building at Fourth and Cass Street in 1938. Then, in 1973, it moved to its present site, at 401 N. Third Street. Governor Patrick Lucey and George Reedy, then-dean of the Marquette University Journalism School and former press secretary to President Johnson, were the speakers.

While about 13,000 people subscribed to the Tribune in the 1920s, more than 36,000 people bought it daily in 1993 (its daily price had shot up to 50 cents by then). William Burgess followed his father as publisher, and was in turn succeeded by his son, James Burgess. Kenneth Blanchard followed him. The publisher now is James Santori. Editors after Brayton have included Russell Pyre, Henry Noll, Richard Brayton, Sanford Goltz, Robert Gallagher, Kenneth Teachout, David Fuselier, and current editor Rusty Cunningham.

The Tribune has had things its own way for decades, although regional dailies like the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and the St. Paul Pioneer Press, and national
papers like *USA Today* and the *New York Times* still put a few dents in its armor. But, for better or worse, no one has run another daily here since 1917.

Fate has been kind to *Tribune* staff. Raised in La Crosse, Howard Mumford Jones wrote the column “Unfamiliar La Crosse” for that paper. He went on to win a Pulitzer Prize in 1965 for his trilogy, *O Strange New World*. And La Crosse-born William Mullen, a two-time Pulitzer-winning reporter, was an intern for the paper in 1966.

Another *Tribune* writer was Pat Moore, who retired in 1998. Moore wasn’t meticulous — her copy needed many corrections. But her work could show heart. In her June 26, 1998, front-page story (with a photo of her, waving, as marshal for an Oktoberfest parade), “Thanks for the Memories,” she noted, “I love to write about people. And I’ve written about a lot of them over the years. . . . One of the most unforgettable stories I’ve ever written was about Michael Blackburn, an 11-year-old La Crosse boy who had cystic fibrosis. . . . He idolized the Packers — especially Bart Starr, the quarterback.”

When Ms. Moore learned Starr was coming here to speak at a banquet, she called Jerry Miller, a pilot for G. Heileman Brewing Co. He was going to pick up Starr and his wife Cherry and fly them to La Crosse. Michael had been in and out of St. Francis Hospital for much of his young life. Moore said she hoped Starr could send the boy a card.

She wrote, “When Starr heard about Michael, he insisted on stopping at the hospital to visit. He also sent Michael a poster with most of the Packers’ autographs on it and a sweatshirt. A few months later, when Michael died, the team sent a bouquet of yellow and gold flowers for his funeral.” Even the city’s powerful daily can have a heart.

Since halftones became easier to reproduce around 1915, local photojournalists have been illustrating text. *Tribune* photojournalists more recently have included Cathy Acherman, Ron Johnson, Steve Noffke, Dick Riniker, Bill Lizdas, and Erik Daily. Many others have contributed to that paper’s success, too, from printers to paper carriers — who replaced street-corner hawkers many years ago — to advertising salespeople.

Meanwhile, weekly papers doing well here in recent decades have been led by the La Crosse Catholic Diocese’s *Times Review*, first called the *Register*. Founded in 1936 to fight social injustices, it was part of the Denver-based Register chain until 1958, changing its name around that time. Its first editor was Father J. Francis Brady, who worked with local news exclusively. Other key editors have included Monsignor Anthony P. Wagener and Jerry Ruff.

One of the *Times Review*’s most active and literate editors was La Crosse native Father Bernard McGarty, who ran the paper during the 1980s and early 1990s, while he was diocesan director of communications. Father McGarty’s Ph.D. dis-
sertation was on the English poet-clergyman John Donne. The paper’s editor today is Thomas Szyszkiewicz; its reporters include Patrick Slattery and Joseph O’Brien. Paid circulation has reached as many as 30,000 subscribers. Its stories deal with theology and church administration, and social issues like abortion and media irresponsibility. Big events for the paper in recent years have included Pope John Paul II’s U.S. visits; the Diocese’s 125th anniversary Mass in 1993 (the 50th anniversary of Bishop John Paul’s ordination); the installation of Bishop Raymond Burke in 1995; and President Bill Clinton’s visit in 1998. Other religions have mainly relied on national church papers, magazines, newsletters and the Internet to help hold their local congregations’ interest.

Other weekly papers here include shoppers like the Buyer’s Guide and its successor, the Foxxy Shopper, and business papers like the Enterpriser, begun in 1997 and now edited by JoAnne Killeen. All three are Lee Enterprise publications.

Meanwhile, city magazines like Gateway Magazine, The Light, The People, Encounters, Alumnus, La Crosse Business Journal, La Crosse City Business, The Howling Mantra, Women & Co., Commerce Now, and Jam Review have seen mixed results. Doug Connell, publisher of the new magazine La Crosse Observer, has written, “Compared to other La Crosse media, magazines published here have largely gone unnoticed. A key factor of this is due to the narrow subject matter covered by most of the magazines and the resulting small reading audience and advertising base.”

Women & Co. was a spirited magazine published monthly from 1985 to 1987 by CityBusiness. Its editors included Shelley Goldbloom and Vickie Lyons. Also, Audrey Kader and Jan Gallagher began Commerce Now (now published via Internet only) in 1991. Reggie McLeod was its first editor. David Skoloda publishes it today.
TRANSPORTATION IN LA CROSSE

Driving Currents: Steamboating and River Transportation

By Edwin Hill

Although steamboats represent the most influential aspect of river transportation history at La Crosse, the river played a major role in the lives of Native Americans here. There is evidence of human occupation at this site at least as far back as 10,000 B.C., with successive cultures in residence up until European arrivals in the seventeenth century and after. These native peoples often traveled and traded on water routes. The Mississippi River and its tributaries influenced the direction of this trade, as well as the spread of native cultures.

The La Crosse site was characterized by its sloping prairie where gatherings could occur and where games and contests could take place. The site is near the confluence of several rivers, with several other rivers within a day’s travel. It is likely that at certain times of the year, numbers of canoes converged here to bring these early people to important gatherings. The Winnebago, or Ho-Chunk tribe, established a camp here in the late eighteenth century, and this was probably the last Native American group to settle at the La Crosse site.

The site was known to early European explorers, who followed the water routes through the nation's mid-section. It was not until 1823, however, that the first steamboat, the *Virginia*, passed this way on its trip from St. Louis to Fort Snelling at present-day St. Paul. This first trip was difficult and time-consuming, and until 1844, only one or two steamboat trips per year were made on the upper river.

By the 1840s, more villages appeared along the river, European immigrants began to spread along the river route, and opportunities improved to make steam-
boating profitable. In 1844, for example, four boat arrivals were counted at Fort Snelling. Nathan Myrick and his fellow traders came upriver in 1841 to establish a trading post at Prairie La Crosse. The post was moved the following spring from what is now Pettibone Island to a site on the east shore of the river, near the present corner of Front and State Street. While Myrick and his friends had poled upriver from Prairie du Chien on a keelboat, steamboats soon dominated all of the river trade, here and elsewhere in the Midwest and South.

There was little growth in the La Crosse settlement in the 1840s, but the next decade witnessed a real surge, carried in part on the decks of an increasingly sophisticated steamboat trade. Inland river steamboats were broader in proportion to other boats, flexible and light in construction, and powered by a light, non-condensing engine. The trick was to carry as much weight as possible on the shallowest, lightest craft possible. The paddle wheels were either at the stern of the boat or as sidewheels. The former was more efficient in its application of power, while the latter was more maneuverable on an often treacherous river. As time went on, the sternwheeler became more popular, especially in its use as a towboat. As with modern barge tows on the river, the boats did not really tow. They pushed the barges, and the modern tow is a direct descendant of those early steamboats as they were modified for pushing rafts.

The influence of steamboats on towns like La Crosse can hardly be overestimated. The boats carried goods upstream for a rapidly growing population in an increasingly agricultural region. Downstream, the boats carried the commodities produced or finished here. These included grain, hides, lead from the mining regions of southwestern Wisconsin, ginseng, wool and furs, and until the turn of the nineteenth century, lumber. The latter was pushed in huge rafts, not barges, and might consist of either logs or finished lumber. While barges began to appear in the 1860s, much of the freight in those early years was carried on board the steamboats. Such cargo handling was obviously quite labor intensive, and the boats created a labor market that contributed mightily to the local economy. City directories for this period included local men who were listed in such occupations as pilot, captain, owner, engineer, or simply “river man.” The average daily wage during the 1860s was between one dollar and two dollars per day for these laborers. Steamboat captains could earn $200 to $300 each month, and pilots even more.

La Crosse was home to two major boatyards for the construction and repair of steamboats. These were owned by the Davidson Brothers and the McDonald Brothers. Of these two, the Davidson Brothers’ yard was the more productive, and the Davidson family was regionally prominent as owners and captains, operating under several company names. There was also a Ramsey boatyard of modest production (H.T. Ramsey died in 1871), and the Cargill grain company operated a boatyard for its own trade. The importance and influence of steamboating at
La Crosse was immense, given the number of boatyards, dozens of local boats, boat crews, local shippers and forwarders, grain production, flour milling, lumber rafts, and the businesses that catered to all this.

Railroads began to criss-cross the country more efficiently after the U.S. Civil War, and steamboating began a slow decline. Patterns of immigration and migration changed, as did the needs of the growing nation. Freight tonnage carried by steamboats decreased starting about 1866, until there were comparatively few working steamboats by 1900. Although the internal combustion engine had been invented several decades before, it was the oil wells and cheap petroleum fuels of the early 1900s that drove the change from steam paddle wheelers to propeller-driven boats.

As settlement and population increased, there was a growing interest in tourism and sightseeing. Steamboats turned to excursions as a way to stay in business, and many local residents can well remember the excursion crews on the upper Mississippi. Boats such as the Avalon, the Capitol, the Washington, and the President stopped often at La Crosse for moonlight dancing trips and day excursions.

In 1903, Pabst Boats of La Crosse began making small pleasure boats, then produced a line of nationally famous racing boats. The firm closed in the late 1940s. Murphy Boats began operations in 1982, as builders of handmade wooden boats. This company seems to have ceased operations in the late 1990s.

Transportation on the water has changed since those bustling days of waterfront activity, but it is still important. Barge traffic on the river, much enhanced by the construction of the lock and dam system in the 1930s, carries immense quantities of commodities up and down the river. The totals for such tonnage on the upper river have increased nearly every year since 1924. A typical tow might include 12 to 15 barges and carry 22,000 tons of grain or coal.

Recreational use of the river has also increased. In the late 1990s, citizens could go to Riverside Park in La Crosse and see the big excursion steamers: the Delta Queen, the Mississippi Queen, and the American Queen. La Crosse’s own paddle wheelers, the Julia Belle Swain and the La Crosse Queen, run excursions from Riverside Park, and a modern boat, the Island Girl, works out of Pettibone Island. Houseboating has become extremely popular, and several companies provide rental boats here. Many private houseboats and cabin cruisers pass daily. Sandbars are popular for boat-camping and picnics, as they were a hundred years ago. The SkipperLiner Marine Group of La Crosse has manufactured houseboats, motor yachts and replica paddle wheelers since 1971.

Technology and a growing population have changed how the river looks today and the kinds of boats we see there, but the Mississippi River at La Crosse remains a path of commerce, trade and pleasure. There is a growing appreciation
of the river as an asset among citizens, businesses, and government, and our waterfront is, once again, a place to enjoy, to look out over a beautiful valley, and to reflect. On a warm summer day, we can still hear the haunting sound of a steamboat whistle, connecting us to a river that represents our history and our future.

**Grand Crossings and Winter Bridges: Railroads in the Nineteenth Century**

*By Sam McKay*

In the decade of the 1840s, La Crosse became prosperous because of its strategic location on the Mississippi River. The city’s founders realized that the city would need railroads to bring in new settlers and goods from the East. The only rail connection east was shipping and receiving goods by steamers through river towns like St. Louis, Galena and Prairie du Chien, which all had rail connections to Chicago by 1854.

In the spring of 1852, the La Crosse and Milwaukee Railroad was organized, as a result of the efforts of Thomas B. Stoddard, the first mayor of the city, and others. Construction was begun at Milwaukee, and by October of 1858 it reached La Crosse. For La Crosse to become the railroad “Gateway to the West,” Stoddard saw the need for joining southern Minnesota to La Crosse. In 1864 he reorganized an earlier plan and got a new charter from the State of Minnesota for The Southern Minnesota Railroad. The City of La Crosse, in February 1865, issued a cash bonus to start construction, and in October 1866 the city issued bonds to continue the operation. In 1865 construction began toward the west from Hokah through Rushford to Lanesboro. In 1866 the railroad was built eastward from Hokah to a point opposite La Crosse just below Target Lake, which was called Grand Crossing, Minnesota. Several steamboat owners were contracted to transfer goods between Grand Crossing and La Crosse.

The Panic of 1857 bankrupted the La Crosse and Milwaukee Railroad, and after years of legal manipulation, the Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad, chartered in 1863 to take over small bankrupt railroads in eastern Wisconsin, acquired it in 1867. It acquired the Chicago, Clinton, Dubuque and Minnesota Railroad in 1879. It became the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad, hence the Milwaukee Road.

Government regulations then favored the entrenched steamboat lines and made it difficult to build bridges across the river that might hinder navigation and military defense. In November of 1870, the railroad began transferring cars on
barges between Grand Crossing and the Milwaukee Road terminal on the Black River in North La Crosse. In the winter months, goods had been carried across the river by sleighs and wagons on an ice route maintained by the City from Pearl Street. The need for railroads to cross the river during wintertime led to the concept of the “winter bridge.” In October of 1870, the Southern Minnesota and the Milwaukee railroads entered into an agreement to build the bridge. The Southern Minnesota extended its track from Grand Crossing in a northeasterly direction, crossing the west channel to Barron’s Island. The Milwaukee continued the track up the west side of the island to the north end and diagonally across the Mississippi and Black rivers to its depot on the Black River in North La Crosse. Piles were driven into the river from the island’s north end to a switch-track north of the depot. A gap of 45 feet was left in order to allow navigation to continue until the ice froze solid in the gap. The winter bridge was designed to be erected and dismantled quickly as the seasons changed.

In 1872, anticipating the completion of the Chicago, Clinton, Dubuque and Minnesota Railroad from Dubuque to La Crescent, the Milwaukee constructed a winter railroad from North La Crosse across the Black River, French Island and the Mississippi. This bridge was in service until 1875, and was used by the CCD&M and the Southern Minnesota. In 1873 the Milwaukee started a car-ferry following the route of its winter bridge.

It would seem that the Milwaukee interests had an iron grip on the control of the traffic west. There was fierce competition between the cities of Milwaukee and Chicago to have the main route from the west terminate in their cities. In 1854 the La Crosse and Milwaukee Railroad received a land grant from the Wisconsin Legislature for the purpose of building a railroad from Tomah to St. Paul, thus bypassing La Crosse. This could have made Milwaukee the center of transportation in the Midwest. However, in 1856, it was discovered, after a legislative investigation, that Byron Kilbourn, president of the railroad, had bribed legislators, the governor and other state officials by giving them stocks and bonds of his railroad. Lurking in the background was the specter of the Chicago and North Western Railroad. This was an organization formed in 1859 to reorganize several bankrupt railroads in east central Wisconsin. The C&NW had influential friends in Wisconsin, and in 1863 it persuaded the legislature to rescind its previous decision and give the land grant to them. It called the railroad the Tomah and Lake St. Croix, and after construction was begun, it became the West Wisconsin. When it was finished, it was hooked up to the C&NW at Elroy.

A railroad, originally chartered in 1857 as the La Crosse, Trempealeau and Prescott, was built to connect from a point near the Milwaukee line north of La Crosse, through Onalaska and Trempealeau, to a point on the east bank of the Mississippi opposite Winona. This would give the Milwaukee an important link
and the LCT&P became known as the “Cut-off” line. Unknown or not, it was considered a threat by the Milwaukee, when the Winona and St. Peter Railroad took control of the LCT&P in 1867. By 1870 the LCT&P was completed, connected to the W&StP and both were delivered into the hands of the C&NW. In 1871 the C&NW built a bridge across the Mississippi, thus connecting its subsidiaries at Marshland to Winona. In 1873 these railroads connected to the Western Wisconsin, which was a subsidiary of the C&NW. This gave the C&NW a through-route directly from Chicago to St. Paul, making Chicago businessmen very happy. Previously, freight had to be transferred from the W&StP at its southern point north of La Crosse to the Milwaukee road. A depot was built here and it was called Winona Junction, which became Medary. Between 1873 and 1876, passengers wishing to travel on the C&NW had to take a bus or a stage to Winona Junction or Onalaska.

After the C&NW bridge was built at Winona, the Milwaukee Road and the City of La Crosse realized that despite government regulations, a bridge must be built at La Crosse. The railroad wanted it on the Northside, following the route of its winter bridge. But the businessmen on the Southside wanted it to go across, from the foot of Mt. Vernon Street. This argument from 1873 to 1875 was known as the “great bridge fight.” Finally the railroad won out, the bridge was completed in 1876 and the Milwaukee bought the Southern Minnesota and the CCD&M. This led to the decline of the rail barges and the closing of Grand Crossing, Minnesota.

In 1871, another railroad appeared on the scene. This was the Green Bay and Minnesota Railroad, which was built from Green Bay and, in 1873, connected to the C&NW and its subsidiaries at Marshland. The C&NW entered into an agreement with the GB&M to let it use its bridge and tracks to Winona. It also let GB&M use its tracks to Onalaska. The GB&M wanted to build a branch line from Onalaska to La Crosse, and the City gave it a bonus of $75,000 to do the job. The Milwaukee Road could see no harm in letting a branch of a small railroad cross its tracks near Winona Junction. Thus the hated C&NW had sneaked through the defenses of the Milwaukee and had a route into La Crosse. This created the second “Grand Crossing.” The branch was built across the marsh and came into the city at the east edge of town along East Avenue. It eventually turned west and ended at the Gund Brewery. The street paralleling the railroad became known as Green Bay Street. The depot was at Ninth and Green Bay. The C&NW used this depot until 1885, when it built its own track into the city to its depot at Third and Vine.

The last big player in the formation of La Crosse as an important rail center was the arrival in 1885 of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad. Originally known as the Winona, Alma & Northern Railroad, soon it was
renamed the Chicago, Burlington and Northern Railroad. It ran from Savannah, Illinois through La Crosse to St. Paul. The City let it use busy Second Street for its mainline. The railroad wanted a second track but the city refused. Knowing it would be impossible for the city to obtain legal procedures to stop it, the railroad started construction early one Sunday morning and completed the work by nightfall. On Monday morning, it was too late. The downtown route was excellent for passengers but to accommodate its fast, through freights, the railroad built a cut-off line around the far eastern side of the city under the bluffs in 1887.

Many railroad schemes were proposed and abandoned or lacked approval of the legislature in the nineteenth century. The major railroads were established, and it remained for them to consolidate what was left of the smaller rail lines in the decades ahead.

### Railroads, Cars, and Buses in the Twentieth Century

*By Gordon Hampel and Belinda Weinberg*

The year 1900 closed an era in La Crosse history. The lumbering industry all but vanished overnight. The battle of the riverboats against the railroads left the railroads victorious, along with the depletion of riverboat transportation and the depletion of the log reserves and resources. The railroads added strength to La Crosse’s industrial growth. In 1900, the city’s population stood at 28,895.

In that year, there were five railroads serving the city. La Crosse was now the largest railroad center between Chicago and the Twin Cities. Very few cities the size of La Crosse have had the benefit of so many railroads. This city’s location gave it advantage, because it provided a gateway through the obstacles of the bluffs and over the Mississippi River. The five railroads in La Crosse in 1920 were the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific; Chicago, Burlington & Quincy; Chicago Northwestern; Green Bay & Western; La Crosse & Southeastern Railroads.

During the first 50 years of the 20th century, and not including the years of the Great Depression, the railroads were a major source of employment in La Crosse, and the generally increasing volume of railroad traffic until the 1950s meant increasing job opportunities in addition to the service the railroads provided for business and travelers.

La Crosse was a division headquarters for both the Milwaukee Road and the Burlington, which meant that railroad offices were located here and that engine
and train crews worked out of this city, in addition to the shop forces, so that the
Milwaukee and Burlington, taken together, made railroading a major industry for
La Crosse.

The railroads, a new creation, required many types of buildings, and in many
cases the older types of buildings were built to fit new uses. Railroad freight-
houses are not significantly different from large warehouses, which have not
changed their form since ancient Egypt.

Four of the leading railroads in and out of La Crosse early on had built one
or more wooden freight-houses, then torn them down and replaced them with
larger brick buildings. Back in 1874, after the tracks of the Milwaukee and St.
Paul Railroad were extended from the landing area of the steamboats to down-
town La Crosse, that company built a passenger depot and a freight-house on
the north edge of downtown. The Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad, in the
same year, built a depot in North La Crosse. A small frame structure, somewhat
later remodeled, was used for passengers until the new depot was built at St.
Andrew Street in 1927.

This station was again remodeled, in 1997-98, and currently receives Amtrak
passenger and freight trains. It is not as elaborate and castle-like as its predecessor,
the Cameron House & Depot. Perhaps it was because the railroad had such a
monopoly on transportation in the late 1920s that it no longer felt the need to
provide a grand image in La Crosse, which was declining in regional importance
as Chicago and Minneapolis grew.

The Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad built the last passenger depot in
La Crosse, a simple building of stone, at the base of Grandad's Bluff. It was built
in 1939 at 27th and State Street, despite strenuous objections of residents in the
area. It was demolished in 1974. In 1915, people living in La Crosse could choose
among 73 trains a day entering or leaving the city!

On Sunday, January 31, 1927, the new $300,000 Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul
& Pacific passenger station, at 601 St. Andrew Street, was dedicated. The Sullivan,
Mediterranean-style, two-story brick and stone station met with a good deal of
hostility from the community due to the failure of the Union Station proposal.

The Chicago and Milwaukee Railroad instituted a guaranteed fare of 25 cents
on any Yellow Taxicab from its depot to the elegant Stoddard Hotel, located at
Fourth and State Street, considered the heart of downtown, or from the Stoddard
to the depot, and tried to counter some of the complaints about the location of
the station. The elegant Stoddard was named for the first mayor (1846) and rail-
road entrepreneur, Thomas B. Stoddard. In 1982, after 80 years of service, it was
demolished.

Railroads served commercial interests as well as providing public transporta-
tion across large distances, but public transportation within the city was still nec-
necessary to get people to and from their places of work, shopping, worship, and visiting. In 1878 the first horse-powered streetcar service on rails, called the La Crosse Street Railway Co., began connecting the North and South sides of the city. The first streetcar operated with one horse and seated 30 to 38 passengers, covering a line of 1.6 miles. By 1886 the line had been expanded to 3.66 miles. The City Street Railway Co. was organized in 1891 and laid a line covering 2.6 miles on the Southside of La Crosse. In 1885 the two private companies merged. By 1893 the streetcar system was electrified and lines were extended farther, including both Oak Grove and Catholic cemeteries.

With the increased use of the automobile, trolley use declined in favor of the cheaper, more versatile bus. Still, the streetcars remained a common sight here until 1945. In 1936 a total renovation of public transportation began via cooperation among the City of La Crosse, the Mississippi Valley Public Service Co., and the federal government. Most streetcar tracks were removed, two new buses were added, and routes were altered to give better coverage to the Southside. By 1948 the La Crosse Transit Co. had carried six million passengers and operated 28 buses. They traveled more than 18 miles of routes in an 18-hour day, serving downtown as well as suburban areas.

Ridership by 1971 had declined to 28,696. Four years later, the city bought the La Crosse Transit Co. with a grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation. It purchased 11 new buses, constructed a municipal service building on Isle La Plume, and improved signage. Buses were rerouted and lines expanded. From 1975 to 1979, ridership increased by 108,000 and service was expanded to the Shelby area. Since 1980, routes have been expanded to access Valley View Mall, the Onalaska area, and La Crescent, Minnesota. By 1999 expansion reached the Town of Campbell and more shopping areas in Onalaska. Shared Ride Taxi Service from Onalaska complete the connections to residents in Onalaska, while buses continue to be the mainstay of local transportation. Meanwhile, national destinations can be reached via Greyhound and Jefferson bus lines, located at 600 S. Fourth St.

In addition, modern trolley service was reinstated in July 1999, to attract tourists. Sporting a top hat for the occasion, Mayor John Medinger said, “People are really going to enjoy this. It’s a nice touch to kick it off during Riverfest.” On weekdays (save Mondays), Trolley #58 covers a downtown route. Saturday stops also include Pettibone, Myrick, and Copeland parks and Old Towne North.

Some residents prefer taxis, which run door-to-door service. For a time, Yellow Checker of La Crosse, Inc. was the only taxi service in La Crosse. Although it served many elderly and handicapped people with a fleet of 27 cabs, the firm was unable to share in the federal subsidizing that went to a mini-bus program formed to meet the needs of these special customers in 1975. The mini-bus program was spearheaded
Transportation in La Crosse

by County Board Supervisor Elizabeth Gundersen and became a joint project of Bethany Lutheran Homes and the La Crosse Area Committee on Aging. Subsequently, Yellow Checker closed in 1982, leaving La Crosse without any taxi service. But soon after, several taxi services formed to fill the void. Topp’s Taxi and La Crosse Cab continued until 1986, when they combined to form Community Transportation System. In 1999 they operated 12 cabs and several special service vehicles, built wheelchair vans, offered non-emergency medical transportation, an airport shuttle, and a limousine service called Top Hat, Inc. Today there are three taxi firms in the city: A-Cab Co., Inc., Metro Taxi Co., and Community Transportation System, and the mini-bus is operated by La Crosse County.

Aviation History: Soaring High

By Michael Daigle

La Crosse and its residents have had a long association with aviation that started very early in the Aviation Era. From the Wright Brothers’ first flight in December 1903 until La Crosse area residents’ first opportunity to see an airplane in flight was a short eight years. In October 1911, Hugh Robinson, a regional daredevil, gave a flying demonstration to people who had gathered at the local fairgrounds. Hugh returned several days later and landed a hydroplane on the Mississippi River to deliver airmail to the city.

The city’s first airport was known as Salzer Field. It was located on the city’s Southside, at the corner of Losey Boulevard and Ward Avenue, on land that was owned by the Salzer Seed Company. A group of local aviation enthusiasts formed the La Crosse Aero Club. The City and Chamber of Commerce believed that aviation would catch on and help bring economic growth to the area.

In 1926, the City purchased the land known as Salzer Field, and thus it became the City of La Crosse’s first airport. Northwest Airlines also began the first commercial service to the city. The City had difficulty maintaining the airport because of the large demands to modernize, and abandoned Salzer Field on July 13, 1933. In 1932 La Crosse was dropped from the airmail route, which was a huge setback to the city.

In 1933 a field on French Island was leased by the La Crosse County Board of Supervisors to serve as a new airport. While initial work and progress there was slow, a Depression-era “New Deal” program that was designed to put people to work allowed progress at the new airport to continue, largely through the efforts of County Supervisor Raymond C. Bice. The new two-runway field, known as
Pfafflin Field, was dedicated as the new county airport on August 18, 1935. A contract was negotiated that said Ray Pfafflin would operate Pfafflin Field for five years, at the end of which time the county would have the option to purchase the airport. The County Park Commission purchased the land for $14,141, and the County eventually gave up its attempt to develop and run the airport.

Shortly after the outbreak of World War II, a citizen committee under the leadership of local lawyer Quincy Hale was organized to study long-range plans for a municipally owned airport. The City of La Crosse purchased Pfafflin Field in February of 1946. A class IV airport called the La Crosse Municipal Airport was dedicated on March 1, 1947. Northwest Airlines began scheduled air service the same day with five flights daily. The three asphalt runways at the new airport were 5,299 by 150 feet. The City, recognizing that continuous improvement was required at the airport, built and dedicated a new terminal building in 1953.

The City hired Socony-Vacuum Oil Company, Inc. to develop a general plan for the La Crosse Municipal Airport. The recommendations identified three separate stages of building development: T-hangars, a large hangar, and refueling facilities. The report also included a recommended location for these items. The second and third stages of development included building other hangars, when traffic warranted, and the hiring of somebody to oversee and manage the airport.

The report stated that the location and overall layout of the airport were impressive. The report also stated that the recommended hangars would solve the initial problem of having space for transient and La Crosse-based airplanes that must be hangared overnight and recommended sizes and designs for these hangars. The large hangar could and should serve as an administration building until activity at the airport increased to the point where a separate administration building was required.

Air service continued to improve at the La Crosse Municipal Airport as the airport kept pace with the ever-increasing requirements to ensure safety to all who utilized the aviation system. These improvements included wind-indication devices, improved lighting systems, improved communication systems, emergency backup electrical power, better snow removal equipment, security fencing, maintenance storage buildings and a terminal building. By 1975 the city had built at the airport a terminal building to accommodate the traveling public. There were two fixed-base operators to provide necessary aviation services, an air cargo facility, various corporate flight facilities and seven T-hangars. La Crosse Airline Service was provided by North Central Airlines with a combination of Convair 580 and DC-9 jet aircraft, while Mississippi Valley Airlines provided service with Metroliners and DeHavilland Otters. Viking Aviation, Inc. and La Crosse Flite Center and Viking International Airlines provided charter services and air cargo services. The airport was the fifteenth largest employer in the La Crosse area, with
over $1.4 million dollars in wages paid in 1974.

By 1990 the airport had grown to approximately 1,380 acres and had a new terminal building, located on Airport Road. Local companies, like Colgan Air Services, have made good use of the airport, as have other passenger and freight carriers. In conjunction with the new terminal building, an Airport Industrial Park was developed. La Crosse Municipal Airport was and is a modern, capable, and all-weather facility. In 1998, more than 115,000 passengers went on and off airplanes in La Crosse, and about 400,000 people used the airport. Also, recently the Deke Slayton Airfest — named for an astronaut from Sparta, Wisconsin — has been held annually on Father’s Day, drawing 20,000 people in 1999. And the famous Blue Angels flight team performed at the 2000 show.
Sick people have always desperately hoped and prayed for recovery, and they have used folk remedies, common sense, magic, Indian sources, sorcerers, or superstitions to cure their ills.

Untrained and untutored men were eager to learn and try their wares. In 1891, 33 persons were listed in the La Crosse telephone directory as “physicians.” The pioneer, with a life expectancy of 40 years and a high rate of death for children plus women in childbirth, turned to educated people, to clergymen, and even to quackery and pseudoscience.

“Medicine men” traveled and sold patent remedies good for men or horses. “Excelsior liniment” was good for corns, rheumatism, sprains, headaches, burns, and toothaches. Lobelis, well-bruised and pressed, added to four pods of red pepper with enough “good whiskey” to fill a quart jar, did wonders for croup, whooping cough, and bad colds. For indigestion, rhubarb bitters or cayenne pepper was applied to the abdomen. Pleurisy was treated with applications of boiled nettles to the chest. Nosebleed was treated by writing a name on a piece of paper, which was rolled up and pressed under the upper lip. If the bleeding didn’t stop, the wrong name had been used. Lady slippers were used for headaches, epilepsy, tremors, and to induce sleep. Heated leaves, applied, relieved earache and toothache. The skin of a toad, when eaten, had the same effect as digitalis.

The standard treatments were bleeding (removing 10 to 20 ounces of “poisonous” blood); blistering (applying vinegar and sandpaper to the skin, supposedly
draining disease from the body); cupping (drawing blood to the surface by use of a glass vessel evacuated by heat); puking (administering an emetic such as puke weed); and purging (purifying the body with use of cathartics).

Public health was a concern of the city government in the early 1800s. The board of health comprised an alderman, an experienced physician, and a marshal to enter buildings and remove contagious people. Membership was dependent upon popular vote. Not until 1910 did this matter move from the political realm to the appointment of more competent physicians and health-trained people.

The La Crosse Medical Society began in 1855. A constitution and bylaws for La Crosse County were adopted. All doctors were invited to join. Members were not to hold professional intercourse or extend courtesies to nonmembers. Incorporators included the well-known Drs. Dugald Cameron and McArthur.

The student of medicine was apprenticed to a practicing physician, to whom he paid $100 plus services rendered about the house and stables. He observed his master in treatment of patients and completed his apprenticeship. Wisely, he’d move to an area without physicians to practice. Doctors were more competitive than helpful to each other.

Physicians received calls by messengers on horseback who were alerted by white sheets displayed at homes where ill people lived. They rode through bad weather at night through treacherous areas. They lived in boarding houses, sometimes with bedbugs, warmed by buffalo coats and newspapers. They traveled by horse and buggy, sleeping in the buggy; by horsecar, using a saddle bag for a pillow; or in a cutter or buckboard pulled by a team of tough trotters. Livery stables favored them. Canoes or snowshoes helped. Although short on learning, they were respected.

Often after a midwife tried unsuccessfully to deliver a baby, the doctor was summoned. The basic drugs of the physician were jalap, a cathartic prepared from the tuberous root of Mexican plant; Dovers’ powders, containing an emetic; and opium, for alleviating pain, inducing euphoria, lessening diarrhea, suppressing malarial symptoms and breaking fevers.

Hospitals, or “pest houses,” were avoided and looked upon as places to die. Victims of virulent diseases shared beds with obstetric and communicable disease patients. Institutions were called asylums, poor houses, and infirmaries, and patients were inmates. The mentally ill were shuffled to back rooms. The City of La Crosse established a pest house near the present day Family & Children’s Clinic, and a poor farm by the early 1860s. The City poor farm was later sold to the County and became Hillview.

La Crosse County government established or took over three public institutions between 1896 and 1918: Hillview Care Center, known as the County Poor Farm until 1942, then as the La Crosse Infirmary; the West Salem Asylum for the insane in 1888; and the Oak Forest Tuberculosis Sanitarium.
Cholera was a most lethal disease, carried to Wisconsin by troops from the Black Hawk War. Epidemics hit Wisconsin pioneers in 1832, 1834, and from 1849 to 1854. In 1854 Dr. John Snow determined that the disease was caused by polluted water, and it was eliminated wherever possible in Wisconsin.

During the Civil War, many soldiers were sick with disease. Amputation was the popular cure for wounds. In 1830 many died at Ft. Crawford at Prairie du Chien from malaria. By 1914 mosquitoes were identified as carriers of malaria and quinine was the treatment.

Thousands of ordinary women nursed men in hospitals, battle areas, and improvised shelters. Dr. Frank “White Beaver” Powell gained medical experience working for Dr. James K. Ish, and later was a partner in his medicine business. Dr. Powell had a colorful and rugged career. As a marksman, he traveled with Buffalo Bill’s show circuit, manufactured patent medicines, planned real estate projects, was twice mayor, and practiced medicine. He was given the name “White Beaver” for saving the life of a Sioux Chief’s daughter who was critically ill; Dr. Powell’s mother had been a member of the Beaver clan of the Senecas.

Dr. Powell was noted for advertising by placing large signs in strategic places and numerous signs on his office building on Second and Main. He regularly submitted articles to the *Chronicle*, a La Crosse newspaper, exemplifying his practice. Patients appreciated him, but he disagreed with the La Crosse medical group as early as 1882 and fought with the State Board of Medical Examiners in Minnesota. He was an opportunist who wouldn’t retreat.

Men from Europe indirectly advanced the medical care of the residents of La Crosse. For instance, Ignaz Semmelweis discovered germs on the hands of people coming from the dissecting room and examining obstetric patients. Thereafter, hands had to be washed in lime solution before examining maternity patients.

Joseph Lister discovered bacteria on hands and instruments, and their potential for infection, in 1860. William Halstad promoted asepsis with the introduction of rubber gloves in 1890. The discovery of anesthesia and steam sterilization in 1886 created a great change in surgery. Dr. Adolf Gundersen, educated in Europe, received this type of knowledge. Prior to the use of rubber gloves, he taught his colleagues to touch the surgical site only with sterile instruments, never with their hands.

Nurses worked in surgery and where surgical dressings were changed. After each procedure, the walls were washed and instruments sterilized, either in five percent carbolic solution, or in a wash boiler with a hammock of towels over the top. Water for this purpose was heated in the kitchen and carried up three flights of stairs. Sterilizers were not marketed. Surgeries were sometimes performed on kitchen tables, and commonly were paid for with produce.

Meanwhile, Robert Koch isolated the tubercle bacillus, eventually eliminating tuberculosis sanitariums. Other advances were: Louis Pasteur developed pasteuri-
zation in 1882; Carl Leipzig discovered that fever was not a disease, but rather a symptom; Dublins Rynd created the first hypodermic needle and Francis Parvas the first hypodermic syringe. The tetanus bacillus was isolated; leading to preventive inoculations; diphtheria was stopped with antitoxins; and inoculations against rabies were successful. Willhelm Konrad von Roentgen discovered x-rays in 1895. Watches with a second hand to count pulses, clinical thermometers, stethoscopes, laryngoscopes, ophthalmoscopes, and sphygmomanometers surfaced in the 1880s.

In 1873 La Crosse had been established as a port, where government officials surveyed steamships and issued licenses. Consequently, St. Francis Hospital, incorporated in 1883, and Lutheran Hospital, incorporated in 1890, served many river men, along with area patients.

Street railway cars ran from downtown to Green Bay Street along South Avenue. A special platform and entrance at Lutheran Hospital accommodated the sick who arrived on cots in box cars. Staff members nicknamed the train the “Appendicitis Limited.”

Meanwhile, bacteriologists and chemists with knowledge of cellular growth and disease, aided by pathologists, improved hospitals.

The Growth of Social Services in La Crosse

By Belinda Weinberg

Early in La Crosse, some social services were provided by family, religious and fraternal groups. With the city's growth, charitable groups began to organize. As their programs developed, governments passed laws to regulate social services and provided funding. Very destitute families could seek some monetary support from churches and poor officers of the city and county.

Social services formally began in 1888, when the Humane Society was established to prevent cruelty to animals, distribute old clothing to the needy, and get probation officers to handle juvenile delinquents. In 1911, professional social services began with Associated Charities of La Crosse, which incorporated with the local branch of the Wisconsin Humane Society, later known as the Social Service Society. During the Great Depression, the care of the unemployed and their families fell upon this society. In 1930 they offered families food, milk, fuel, rent, and clothing. The city council appropriated $5,500 to help out. A home known as New Haven of Rest, or Municipal Hotel, was opened in 1931. It was maintained by the City and Salvation Army, with aid from local merchants. In a year's time, 10,000 men sought shelter there.
The Social Service Society’s main goal was to do family casework and counseling, and to prevent domestic problems. But early on, the society had many other roles — like juvenile protection, foster home placement, child welfare, and relief work. It helped establish a school nurse, visiting home nurse and housekeeping services, mothers’ pension, care for tuberculosis patients, a probation officer, and traveler’s aid. Many duties were later absorbed by other agencies. For example, the city health department took over visiting and school nursing in 1915, and tax-supported agencies took over relief work in 1955. The La Crosse County Pension Department changed its name to the La Crosse Department of Public Welfare in 1954, and in 1976 became the La Crosse County Department of Social Services. They had 41 departments and 83 staff members providing financial aid in an array of programs.

Besides establishing programs, the various charities and social service organizations in La Crosse developed group home and treatment facilities for the unfortunate. In the 1880s the Young Ladies Mission Band united with another charity and bought a house at 717 Badger Street — called the “La Crosse Home for the Friendless,” seeking to help the homeless. It moved to 11th and Ferry in 1891, when it was known as the Home for Women and Children until 1933, when only children were cared for there because of increased pensions and more homes for older women.

In 1983, the La Crosse Home for Children merged with the Family Service Association, formerly the Social Service Society, to become the Family & Children’s Center. The merged center was first located at 2507 Weston Street. Its services expanded in the late 1980s to include respite care for the elderly or handicapped, a men’s abuse group and the Leadership Program, which provided alternative schooling. In 1993, a counseling and parenting program for families at risk of child abuse and neglect, Healthy Families, was started at 1707 Main Street. They continue to provide residential services to children ages 6 to 17 who have behavioral problems or were abused.

A Catholic orphanage was opened on Sixth Street in 1874. It started with 50 girls cared for by the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. Then, in 1889, the girls were sent to St. Mary’s Academy in Sparta and the boys to a new site on Winnebago Street, named St. Michael’s Orphan Asylum. Children ages 2 to 13 were housed at the latter until 1910, when a new St. Michael’s was built on East Avenue. In 1922, the number of children peaked at 210. In 1954 it changed from an orphanage to a residential treatment center for disturbed youth ages 8 to 14. It was the only institution of its kind in the nation. Children were referred by courts, the public welfare department, agencies, and private individuals. St. Michael’s was licensed for 54 children, but referrals declined and it closed in 1982. The children were sent to their own homes, group homes or other residential centers. The St. Michael’s site later housed St. Joseph’s Nursing Home, also run by Catholic Charities.
Chileda Institute, a treatment center and school for youths with developmental disabilities, was founded in 1973 in Stevens Point but moved to La Crosse in 1977. La Crosse was chosen because of the local support available from hospitals and colleges. Initially the Catholic Diocese of La Crosse donated the third floor of the former Holy Cross Seminary to Chileda. By 1978 it had 56 children with 200 staff. The average stay for the children, ages 5 to 18, was 20 months. Chileda provided medical evaluation, therapy and biofeedback. In 1980, St. Francis Medical Center built a $1.4 million structure at 1020 Mississippi Street and leased it to Chileda. Financial problems led to many fund-raising events in the 1980s. By 1993 the institute served 236 children and employed 150 people. It is one of 54 agencies like it accredited nationally, and the only one in Wisconsin.

In 1971 the Coulee Youth Center of La Crosse opened. It was a group home for troubled and disadvantaged juveniles. Today there are four types of group homes here — foster homes, housing for recovering drug/alcohol males (Options Health), in-home programs and parent aid programs.

St. Francis Hospital began its organized community service in 1936 with the Gerard Group Home for unwed mothers. Sponsored by the Diocese of La Crosse's Catholic Social Services, the program was first housed in St. Ann's maternity annex. At its present home at 940 Division St., unwed mothers receive medical care, education, and counseling. St. Francis continued deinstitutionalization when they converted Siena Hall from a home for the Franciscans to a rehabilitation center for psychiatric patients in 1967. Siena Hall was among the first halfway houses licensed under Wisconsin law, effective July 1971. St. Francis started two three-quarter-way houses, in 1974 and 1975. By 1982 they ran seven. Laar House, opened in 1970, was the first Alcoholism Rehabilitation House in western Wisconsin. St. Francis created this eight-bed halfway house for males, and later included females. ARK, an Alcoholic Reception and Crisis Intervention Center, was opened under a contract with La Crosse Unified Services Board in 1975. It was the first of its kind in the Midwest treating alcoholics and minimizing hospitalization for the mentally ill. Scarseth House, an eight-bed halfway house for recovering alcoholic youths, opened in 1982.

The Coulee Council on Alcoholism opened at 833 S. 19th Street in 1977. It provides information, referral, chemical dependency assessment, consultation, educational materials, and a drop-in center for recovering alcoholics.

Riverfront Inc. was begun in 1977, after parents and educators voiced concerns that the developmentally disabled were being institutionalized or isolated. As of 1999, this center provided a production plant on Green Bay Street and a program to aid with adjustments to various living and work arrangements. Originally Riverfront provided services to 55 people in the five-county area. Now it serves 800 people and relocated recently to the former St. Dominic's Monastery.
Lutheran Hospital’s community services began in 1982 with Unity House, a halfway house and treatment facility for chemically dependent people, which later split into two homes, one for women and one for men. By 1986, Harmony House, a halfway house for crisis intervention of the mentally ill, started. Today, Gundersen Lutheran Health Care has four housing alternatives in the area.

New Horizons, a shelter with counseling for battered women and children, was begun in 1978 by the YWCA. Its office and counseling center was first provided by St. Francis Hospital, while the shelter was established at Lutheran Hospital until 1979. By 1987 support services had served 1,164 women and by 1988 the shelter had housed 113 women. New Horizons split from the YWCA on January 1, 1993. Current services include a 24-hour crisis line, a shelter, a support group, legal advocacy, a children’s program, night advocates, and community education. New Horizons provides outreach services to seven counties.

The Hmong Mutual Assistance Association (HMAA) was founded in 1982, when the jobless rate among the new immigrants here was about 96 percent. By 1995 it stood at 50 percent. The association was set up in donated space in Our Savior’s Lutheran Church, at 612 Division Street. The HMAA has helped immigrants learn English, acquire jobs, and develop skills. It has also helped with family life, parenting, legal and youth issues. Another program reduces racial tensions. The present office at 2615 George Street is partly funded by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement, state and local programs, and grants.

Family Resource Center opened in 1990 at 215 S. 4th Street It has since moved to 122 N. 7th Street. The center provides parents and children with information, help with parenting, support and referral. Services are free.

ATTIC, a program offering help to male convicts making the transition back into the community, opened in 1996, with offices at 811 Rose Street. It also has three apartments above the treatment center and a halfway house (Brunk House) at 2734 Harvey Street. Services are provided via contracts with the federal government and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections.

By 1985 there were already 37 group homes around the city, serving practically every need. The programs, group homes and treatment centers were for children and adults, but many more homes and programs were also being established for the elderly and handicapped.
The Evolution of Nursing Homes

By Belinda Weinberg

The first local nursing home was built in 1858 at the foot of the bluffs on 165 acres in the Town of Shelby. It was called the City Poor House. City physicians also sent paupers there for medical care. Conditions were terrible. Superintendent C.F. Scharpf reported to the city council, “I have to call your attention again to the miserable condition of the poor house. Thank providence that we have a mild winter or else the old people would freeze.”

In 1889, La Crosse County bought the property from the City and its name changed to the County Poor House. In 1942 the county home housed 72 men and eight women. Besides offering recreational activities, its farm was devoted to garden products that fed the inmates. In 1938, a 38-bed infirmary was added. In 1952 it was named the La Crosse County Home and Infirmary. Then in 1965, it became Hillview Home. A new, 204-bed nursing home was built in 1979. A 46-bed addition was built in 1981. In 1984 the vacant old home/infirmary was converted into residential care apartments called Carroll Apartments. They were for people who wanted minimal assistance and extra security. Today they are known as Carroll Heights. Deficits in the County’s Hillview and Lakeview Homes — the latter a home for the emotionally handicapped and elderly in West Salem — plagued La Crosse supervisors in the 1990s. Hillview’s deficit was less than Lakeview’s because Hillview had more residents with private insurance. The County considered closing Lakeview Health Center, but because it was the only nursing home admitting very difficult patients, it remains open.

The County opened the 40-bed Oak Forest Sanitarium for tuberculosis patients in 1918, where Onalaska High School is now located. The county funded additions for 25 more beds, and a nurse’s home was built in 1931. Treatment included direct sun, rest, long-term isolation and even surgically collapsing the lungs. By 1942, 1,353 persons had received care there, aided by 30 staff members. By 1988, better drugs were found to treat patients, so they could safely be transferred to nursing homes and Oak Forest was demolished.

In 1948, due to concern for the elderly left without anyone to care for them, the congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church bought the old Easton residence and built Bethany Lutheran Home in 1955. In 1965, it moved to a new building, at 13th and Cass, with rooms for 62 residents. In 1978, Bethany Lutheran expanded, providing in-home services. By 1980, the home was licensed for 147 beds, but was limited to operating 121 beds to meet government codes. So in 1980, a request for a new 123-bed home, at 2575 S. 7th Street, was approved by the Western Wisconsin Health Systems Agency Review Committee. Built at
a cost of $4.7 million, Bethany-Riverside opened in 1981. Residents were transferred from the old home on Cass. The Cass Street home was turned into 60 secure apartments for older, middle-income persons, called Bethany-On-Cass. In 1990 a group home for people with Alzheimers, Hearten House, was built nearby on Seventh Street. By 1995 Bethany Lutheran Homes also provided transportation, mobile meals and an elder advocate to help the elderly sort through the growing array of resources for them. In 1997, after many debates, the City allowed Bethany Lutheran to expand, regardless of any payment for City services. Today it also owns Bethany Heights, a senior housing development.

The Catholic Welfare Bureau of La Crosse (Catholic Charities) opened its 62-bed home for elderly and handicapped on January 16, 1926. St. Joseph Home for the aged was built at 2415 Cass Street. Due to limited resources, only ambulatory persons needing minimal aid were accepted in 1951. The Franciscan Sisters cared for elderly of all backgrounds from the Diocese of La Crosse. By 1982, the home on Cass had deficiencies, forcing it to operate under state waivers. So although there was a moratorium on nursing home building, the state allowed construction of a new, 80-bed facility. Costing $2.4 million, it was built on the just-vacated site of St. Michael's Home, at 2902 East Avenue S. Today St. Joseph's Rehabilitation Center has an 80-bed skilled nursing facility plus assisted living apartments next to the center.

St. Ann's was a maternity ward connected to St. Francis Hospital beginning in 1927. The lower floors of this five-story building were turned into a 45-bed nursing home between 1963 and 1965. The upper floors were still being used for living quarters for Sisters, and by 1968, the building was converted to a 95-bed skilled-care facility, St. Francis Nursing Home. It was licensed by the State and met the standards set by the Social Security Act of 1967. Today, Franciscan Skemp Healthcare Elder Services offers a Senior Resource Center, senior help-line, Lifeline emergency systems, comprehensive assessments, peer support and housing options.

The Eleanor Gund Nurses Home of the La Crosse Hospital was converted to a residence for the elderly in 1956. Licensed for 20 people, it provided maintenance, maid and laundry service, and special care. One registered nurse lived there and supervised care. Located at 410 N. 13th Street, it expanded to 60 beds in 1961. Staff made about $2 per hour. In 1974, claiming union rejection of a three-year contract as the key reason, directors of the La Crosse Hospital Association unanimously voted to close Eleanor Gund Nursing Home and prepared to declare bankruptcy.

Park Terrace Nursing Home was completed in 1976 for about $2 million by the Hiawatha Health Care Centers of California. In order to buy this 226-bed home at 2501 Shelby Road, two local agencies formed a corporation. Comprising 37 Lutheran and Protestant churches that also owned Bethany Homes, plus the
Catholic Diocese of La Crosse, which also owned St. Joseph’s Home, they completed this joint operation in 1977. They bought the Park Terrace Nursing Home for $4.2 million and renamed it Bethany-St. Joseph Health Care Center. La Crosse Diocese Bishop Frederick Freking said, “This is the first ecumenical project of this type in the United States.” In 1978, it started the first adult day care, and in 1979 admitted the first ventilator-assisted patient. Today, it has two state-certified adult daycare facilities, five housing options in and around La Crosse, plus Preference In-Home Care. Tom Rand, administrator of Bethany-St. Joseph Home since 1977, said, “The biggest challenges for nursing homes has stemmed from increased regulation, decreased reimbursement and increased acuity.”

Other services for the elderly include home-delivered meals — begun in 1971 with volunteers helping. Meals were prepared first at St. Francis Hospital, then at Lutheran Hospital and Szabo Food Service at Viterbo College. Today, six facilities provide home-delivered meals and two facilities offer adult day-care. Five in-home care agencies also continue, despite recent cutbacks in government funding for non-skilled nursing services, which affect 170 residents. Four facilities offer respite care for the elderly or handicapped. There are 29 housing alternatives in La Crosse, with another 13 in nearby cities.

Hospitals and Clinics Thrive
By Doris Kirkeeng

On January 1, 1931, La Crosse became noted as “Hospital City,” with four hospitals and five clinics serving the community at various times since then. These institutions struggled through a Depression, bankruptcy, mergers, fire, war and changing times.

The first private hospital was begun by the Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, encouraged by the La Crosse Board of Trade, Bishop Kilian C. Flasch, and Archbishop Michael Heiss of Milwaukee. The land was purchased from Joseph Leinfelder. The hospital opened on January 1, 1884, with 35 beds, five nuns as nurses, and was located at 10th and Market Street. Sr. Rose Francois, FSPA, was its first administrator, with Sisters holding that position until 1974. Then Stewart Laird took over. Pioneer doctors included H. Leinfelder, Chas. Ottilie, P.S. McArthur, and J.A. Ringlet. Surgery was started on February 13, 1884 by Dr. Hoegh.

St. Francis grew physically and intellectually, opening a cardio-respiratory unit on August 29, 1984, and a psychiatric unit in 1993. By 1994 St. Francis Medical Center, at 700 West Avenue S., included 150 physicians and 1,200 employees. St.

St. Ann’s Maternity Hospital opened in 1927. The first baby born there was Haines Sidney Anderson, son of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Anderson, Houston, Minnesota. The total number of births for 1927 was 533, increasing to 1,776 by 1947. In 1963 the obstetrical department moved to the fourth floor at St. Francis Hospital. St. Ann’s first and second floors were renovated for the elderly, and renamed St. Francis Extended Care by 1966.

In 1891 Dr. Adolf Gundersen graduated from a Norwegian medical school. On vacation, he noted that Christian Christensen of La Crosse was looking for a partner. He went to La Crosse to pursue the notice. He returned to Norway, married Helga, and returned again to the United States. He joined Dr. Christensen in clinic practice at Third and Pearl Street.

Lutheran Hospital was incorporated in 1890 by members of the Lutheran Church, and its building was completed in 1901. By 1904 Drs. Christensen and Gundersen associated themselves with this new hospital and were responsible for importing revolutionary equipment from Germany and Denmark. The hospital received a “Marine Hospital Service Award.” They treated 23 river-men as in-patients and 177 as out-patients. Dr. Adolf Gundersen worked with Dr. C. Christiansen until his death in 1919. Gundersen engaged in general practice, specializing in appendectomies, saving many lives. In 1914 he became surgeon-in-chief of La Crosse Lutheran Hospital.

Of the seven sons of Dr. Adolf Gundersen, five were practicing physicians and three — Sigurd B., Gunnar, and Alf — worked with their father in La Crosse at 1836 South Avenue. Fourth generation Gundersen physicians still serve in 1999. They are Lincoln (radiologist), Alf Erik (cardiac surgeon), and Sigurd III (surgeon).

Additions to the hospital were completed in 1917, 1927, 1952, 1959, 1962, and 1979. The 1962 wing replaced the original wing, destroyed by fire in 1961, during which 121 patients were evacuated within five minutes in blustery 10-degree temperatures. In 1977, a $2 million fund drive to help finance the hospital’s building projects was created, with Philip S. Davy as chairman. Many area people worked diligently and contributed generously to this cause. The Ford Foundation also donated generously to the hospital.

Lutheran Hospital, currently called Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center (GLMC), serves more than 363,000 patients annually. The medical staff of 180 offer 92 medical-surgical services. The hospital has 42 support services and 51 specialty clinics. In 1989, more than 18,000 persons were admitted to the hospital, with another 25,680 persons treated in the Trauma Emergency Center. Helicopter services are also available. At its Regional Center for Chemical Dependency, a wide range of programs are offered.

In 1984, GLMC and FSH operated a joint project called PreHospital
Advanced Care and Education involving EMTs (Emergency Medical Technicians) giving treatment in ambulances.

Grandview Hospital was incorporated on June 27, 1914 as a private institution. It was organized for benevolent and charitable purposes exclusively by its founder, Dr. William A. Henke. Its superintendent was Louise F. Arenz, R.N., and its nursing superintendent was Marie C. Gobel, R.N. Henke moved his clinic to the hospital in 1926 and named it Grandview Hospital. Medical staff members in 1933 were Drs. W.A. Henke, B.W. Mast, R.L. Eagan, Nels P. Anderson, F.N. Nimz, J.M. Casterline, and L.W. Ender, DDS. The hospital closed on July 17, 1969, and was taken over by St. Francis Hospital.

By 1906, La Crosse Hospital, located between 13th and Oakland streets, had 10 nurses and nine other employees. Miss Ella C. Ingwersen was superintendent of this hospital for 41 years. From 1915 to 1925 it was operated by the Methodist Church Conference. Miss Martha Horn was the La Crosse administrator in 1956. It closed in November 1971.

Gundersen Clinic began in 1929 adjacent to Gundersen Hospital with 35 physicians. Dr. Adolf Gundersen was crucial in beginning the era of clinic and hospital staff working together. By 1999 Gundersen Clinic had branched out to 14 clinics in Wisconsin, two in Minnesota, and 11 in Iowa.

La Crosse Clinic was started in 1945 in the Batavian Bank Building by Drs. Joseph Eagan and James McLoche. In 1969 a new building was completed, with 15 physicians.

The private Medical Clinic, located at 10th and Market Street, was begun by Drs. Leo Simones, Gallagher, Doyle and E.H. Townsend in 1925. It was purchased, added onto, and dedicated on November 15, 1979 as the Family Health Center.

The Skemp Clinic was founded in 1923 by Drs. Archie and George Skemp, sons of a locomotive engineer. It operated with Saint Francis Medical Center staff, including three generations of Skemps. It grew by building and merging with Grandview Clinic in 1969, and the La Crosse Clinic 10 years later. In 1995 the merger of Skemp, Saint Francis Medical Center, and the Mayo Clinic occurred. The merger is called Franciscan Skemp Healthcare. By 1997 it had seven branch clinics.

St. Clare Health Mission, a clinic for the poor and uninsured, opened on June 24, 1993, at 916 Ferry Street. Its medical professionals volunteer. Follow-up services are on a rotating basis between Gundersen Lutheran and Franciscan Skemp, with no charge.

Hospitals needed nurses, but the La Crosse Hospital School of Nursing, 1901-25, Grandview Hospital School of Nursing, 1919-34, and Lutheran Hospital School of Nursing, 1901-33, all terminated. Because of a State ultimatum that
students must be in one supervised location or close to the school, St. Francis built a school that operated until 1970, when most three-year diploma R.N. programs changed to bachelor of science programs in nursing. The student nurses transferred to Viterbo College. Lutheran Hospital attempted to reopen by affiliating with UW-L, couldn’t, and approached WWTC for an L.P.N. program. Approved and accepted, it ran from 1964 to 1988, and restarted in 1990 until 1993.

Over 100,000 nurses served in World War II, when the hospital census was high. Cadet Nurse Corps and Candy Stripers were then organized to supplement regular nurses.

Changes in technology continue. Diagnostic procedures, including computerization, radiography and nuclear medicine, reveal problems not detected earlier in medical history. Laparoscopes and lasers promote shorter hospital stays. Laser technology, relying on tiny openings and no blood spill, has created exciting advancements.

Scientific research has advanced cures and treatments for cancer, multiple sclerosis, diabetes, arthritis and other ailments. The Lyme Disease research laboratory at GLMC is directed by Dr. Steve Callister. Dr. Alf Erik Gundersen excels in cardiac surgery. The transplanting of organs such as hearts, kidneys, lungs, and pancreases has enhanced the quality and length of life.

Prevention today includes routine visits to physicians, dentists, chiropractors, and ophthalmologists, plus inoculations that have helped to eliminate dreaded diseases like smallpox, scarlet fever, poliomyelitis and diphtheria, and prevent those still active, like hepatitis, pneumonia and numerous viral diseases.
Top: Looking north along the riverfront in early August 1912, with the steamboat G.W. Hill moored near the foot of Pearl Street. In the background, workmen can be seen constructing the Riverside Park area.  
(Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)

Bottom: Earliest known street photo of city, looking west on Main Street from 4th Street, circa 1870.  
(Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)
Map: 1891 street map of La Crosse.  
(Courtesy La Crosse Public Library)

Top: Horse-wagons of Jefferson School students at Rose and St. Cloud Street, circa 1890.  
(Courtesy La Crosse County Historical Society)

Bottom: Frank Strupp and Anna Sexauer sit in the front of an auto coming north on Losey Boulevard in 1916. This spot is now the 200 block of Losey Boulevard South, near present-day Blessed Sacrament School.  
(Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)
Top: A “Happy Farmer” tractor, made by La Crosse Tractor Co., is loaded for shipment. They were once built at the rate of 25 a day. Begun in 1917, La Crosse Tractor was bought by Oshkosh Tractor Co. in 1921. Photo taken in 1917. (Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)

Bottom: Patients and staff, including Franciscan Sisters, in St. Francis Hospital, circa 1900. (Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)
Marcus “Brick” Pomeroy was La Crosse’s most notorious journalist. During the Civil War, he and his *La Crosse Democrat* aimed vicious Copperhead tirades at President Lincoln and the Union war effort.

*(Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)*

Mark Kellogg shared the fate of General George Custer at the battle of the Little Big Horn. A La Crosse resident circa 1851 to 1867, Kellogg worked as a telegrapher, journalist and grocer before joining Custer and the 7th Cavalry’s epic defeat by the Sioux on June 25, 1876, when the cavalry unit was annihilated.

*(Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)*

Portraits, by unknown artist, of Rebecca and Nathan Myrick, hung in the Swarthout Museum, 2000.

*(By David J. Marcou)*
Top: Women dipping chocolates at the Funke Candy Company, circa 1900.  
(Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)

Middle: Small neighborhood grocery stores were once common here. This photo was made in Lokken Grocery at 1300 Caledonia Street, circa 1919.  
(Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)

Bottom: Swiss and German woodcarvers ply their trade at the E. Hackner Company factory, 124 Division Street, in 1927. The firm, which operated here from 1881 to 1965, was nationally known for its work in church furnishings.  
(Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)
Numerous parades have been held in La Crosse over the years. This view, looking east on Pearl Street from Front Street, is of a “Patriot’s Day” parade held on April 21, 1917, during World War I. (Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)
Flyer Hugh Robinson brings airmail to La Crosse early in aviation history. (No date)
(Courtesy Cathedral School Library)

Old Post Office Building shortly before it was razed, 1960s.
(Courtesy Preservation Alliance of La Crosse)
La Crosse’s old public library at 800 Main Street in a winter scene, circa 1915. It opened in 1888 and served the reading public until October 1965, when a new library replaced it at the same site.

(Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)
Top: The La Crosse Tribune moved to this 201 South Fifth Street location in about 1909. This photo shows the newspaper’s employees, including the army of newsboys and some of their bicycles, circa 1920.  
(Courtesy La Crosse County Historical Society)

Bottom: Northern Engraving Company Building at 200-204 Main Street, circa 1928, the site of present-day Powell Place.  
(Courtesy La Crosse County Historical Society)
Top: Directors of then-La Crosse Vocational and Adult School. A.P. Funk is in the middle; Ray Bice is third from right; and John Coleman, school head, is first on the right. The painting on the wall, “When Parents Fail,” is by Sr. M. Marietta Hackner, FSPA, who painted a copy of it for Boys Town’s Father Flanagan. Circa 1940s. (Courtesy WWTC)

Bottom: La Crosse High School Lincoln-Douglas Debate Team with female friends on a picnic at “The Cottages,” circa 1908. (Courtesy La Crosse County Historical Society)
Top: Alvin Blackdeer, Nellie Red Cloud, and Bill Koch presenting notice of name change of park once known as Indian Hill to Red Cloud Park, named for Nellie’s son, Korean War Medal of Honor winner Mitchell Red Cloud. (No date)  (Courtesy Muriel J. Blackdeer)

Bottom: Alvin and Wilbur Blackdeer presenting presidential candidate John F. Kennedy with war bonnet, necklace, and name, Cho Ni Ga (“Leader”), in ceremony making him an honorary chief of the Winnebago Nation, 1959-60.  (Courtesy Muriel J. Blackdeer)
**Top left:** A crowd gathered on the 500 block of Main Street on April 17, 1952, to watch firemen battle a blaze that almost destroyed a menswear annex to the then-S & L Department Store.  
(Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)

**Top right:** County’s first woman, first Hispanic judge, Ramona Gonzalez, standing by photo of her and Pope John Paul II, 1997.  
(By David J. Marcou)

**Bottom left:** City Police Officer T.P. Gates, killed in the line of duty on September 8, 1900.  
(Courtesy La Crosse Police Department)

**Bottom right:** Line of policemen wearing 1960s-style gas masks during Coon Creek riot. Book-contributor, then-Sgt. Dan Marcou is on the far right side of the picture. April 1991.  
(Courtesy La Crosse Police Department)
The team photo from Roger Harring’s first UW-L team. Harring’s Indians-Screaming Eagles had only one losing season in his 31 years as head football coach there, winning three national titles, 1969.

(Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)

Pictures of Jesse Owens, one signed for UW-L Coach Bill Otto and the other for future city long jump star Jeff Kaufman. They met Owens when he spoke at a UW-L athletic function, circa 1968.

(Courtesy Mr & Mrs. Wm. Otto and Mr. & Mrs. Wayne Kaufman)
(By David J. Marcou)

European-style Maple Leaf Parade members, Oktoberfest, 1992-98.  
(By David J. Marcou)

Night lights on 3rd Street, 2000.  
(By Mark Michaelson)
(By Doris Kirkeeng)

Elmer Petersen’s eagle statue at Riverside Park, 1999.
(By Doris Kirkeeng)
Top: Canadian-Pacific crossing railroad bridge between La Crosse and La Crescent, Minnesota, 1999.  
(By David Larsen)

Bottom: Looking north on Rose Street starting with the 700 block, August 1991. 
(Courtesy Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse)
The first general law pertaining to public schools was passed in 1839, stating the availability of free education for all children. Education was not totally free in principle, because maintenance for programs came from taxes and public collections. During the first town election in 1851, Lorenzo Lewis was elected superintendent of schools of La Crosse. The first public school was held in the new courthouse. Abner S. Goddard was the first public school teacher in District One. The first annual report of the district clerk, dated September 1852, indicated that 109 students were attending school. By 1870 it was compulsory for children between the ages of seven and 15 to attend school at least 12 weeks of each school year. The period 1848 to 1870 firmly established the principle of free education and a state university. From 1873 to 1877, under the direction of superintendent J.W. Weston, a series of regulations and guidelines governing teachers, as well as primary and secondary education standards, were established.

On December 5, 1870, a resolution was adopted by the Board of Education of the City of La Crosse to open a high school. La Crosse had a population of 8,000 and a total of four wards at the time. In 1870 the first high school was held in the second ward building located at the corner of Fourth and King Street. M.F. Varney, principal of the Third Ward School, was elected the first high school principal here. The course of studies included physical geography, general history, physiology, Latin and German. A new high school building was completed and
occupied by January 1907. The enrollment was small, attended by students whose parents could afford a college education for their children.

In 1885, a bill was introduced to permit public education for the deaf. Medical inspections of public schools were initiated in 1903. In 1912 the concept of summer school was introduced. It was an opportunity for students who failed to be promoted to make up credits.

The German Lutheran School in La Crosse was one of the first church schools in the area. One male teacher was employed to teach more than 60 students. With the influx of German and Norwegian immigrants early on, it was common practice to build their own church schools.

The First Evangelical Lutheran School, which opened in 1859, is probably one of the oldest continuously operating schools in the area. The curriculum at First Lutheran and other Wisconsin Synod schools is similar to that of public schools, but all subjects are taught from a Christian point of view.

Immanuel Lutheran Church School had its beginning in the church basement in 1888, with students being taught by the pastor. Textbooks were in German until 1904, when they were replaced by ones in English. The first teacher was hired in 1902, but the school did not have a separate building until 1930. This building would be replaced in 1981 by the present structure at 806 St. Paul Street.

The formation of Cathedral School dates back to the 1800s, because it was a consolidation of four schools within the city of La Crosse. The first school was St. Mary’s, which opened in 1857 under the School Sisters of Notre Dame. St. Joseph School opened in 1872, with the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration as teachers. St. Wenceslaus School opened in 1874 and Holy Cross opened around 1885. Both schools were staffed by the FSPAs. Holy Cross School closed in 1960.

The new Cathedral-St. Wenceslaus was constructed on Holy Cross property and opened in 1969 under the direction of the Franciscans. The first principal was Sister Bernadette Prochaska. The official name of the school was changed to “Cathedral Grade School,” which currently offers a preschool through grade 6 program.

In May 1887 Bishop Michael Heiss said there was a need for an additional Southside parish. Holy Trinity had two stories with a full basement. The first story was the school and the second was reserved for church services. The building was dedicated on October 30, 1887, and Holy Trinity School opened with 72 students directed by the FSPAs.

Planning was initiated in 1904 for a new school. A new brick school with six classrooms, a chapel, library and basement opened in 1915. Until Aquinas High opened in 1928, Holy Trinity included two years of high school.

At one time, there was a plan to consolidate La Crosse’s Catholic schools. The plan was to change St. Pius X elementary school to a middle school for grades 6
to 8, and the remaining Catholic schools were to house kindergarten through 5th grade. Since Holy Trinity was one of the older buildings and had no gym, it was targeted for closing. This raised great opposition by many parishioners, and the school remained in operation in early 2000, serving preschool to sixth grade, with an enrollment of about 150. A new plan for consolidating the city’s Catholic schools will be put into effect July 1, 2000, and the unified system will be called Coulee Catholic Schools. St. Thomas More will become a center for child care, preschool and kindergarten, while grades one through six will attend St. Pius X.

The La Crosse Montessori Preschool was founded in September 1966. Classes were first held in Marian Hall on the Viterbo University Campus. Some key figures responsible for the founding were Terry Gillette, Mrs. R.N. Trane and Sister Theodine Sebold, director of education at Viterbo. The school’s principal philosophy was adopted from Dr. Maria Montessori, who believed that children become more creative and better learners if introduced to a self-motivating discovery approach to learning early in their student careers.

The school relocated twice before moving to its permanent location in 1974. It is now located at 1818 Redfield Street in Asbury Methodist Church. The school has always endorsed parental involvement in every phase of its organization and operation, including the board of directors. The school served 16 families per year initially. In 1999, the school accommodated 45 to 50 families from the Tri-State region.

Harriet Leonard was the first school director in 1966. She was succeeded by Georgia Maas in 1971. The Karl Orff music program was introduced in 1972 and continues to be incorporated as part of the music curriculum today. In 1978 two new programs were added: lunchroom and extended day. In 1979 the school became officially affiliated with the American Montessori Society.

In 1999 the school operated with a full-time staff of five members, who managed morning and afternoon classes with two extended day sections, a lunchroom program and a music program. The school is currently licensed to accommodate 28 children per session.

In 1997, a “School Within a School” opened at Logan High School to help teenagers who are at risk of dropping out. Many of the alternative or leadership school students have had problems with truancy, academic failure, deficient academic skills, classroom misbehavior, and problems at home or in the community. The program has so far proven itself, and gives students an opportunity for success and to feel better about themselves.

Other alternative educational experiments here include the Three Rivers School, a Waldorf Initiative.

The instruction of children by one or both parents at home — home schooling — is a growing trend in La Crosse County as well as throughout the state and
nation. In 1996–97, nearly 200 students were home-schooled in the county, 113 of those living in the city of La Crosse. Parents are required to provide 875 hours of instruction in six core areas of curriculum, but there’s no testing or monitoring of the pupil’s progress by the state. Many parents decide to home-school because they want more control over their children’s education.

Elementary Education in the Twentieth Century

By Helen Bolterman

The first public schools in La Crosse had meager accommodations and were housed in warehouses, private residences, fire stations, or any other space that was available. By 1900, La Crosse had ten public schools, plus one that would be abandoned. As the city grew, it became the practice of the Board of Education to build one-story frame buildings for primary grades in newly formed residential districts. These schools were named and numbered for the wards they represented. The Second Ward School was abandoned for school purposes in 1907. When the Northside was annexed in 1871, the school was known as the Fifth School District.

In 1909, the names of the public schools were changed to names of famous persons — like Washington, Washburn, Jefferson, Lincoln, Hamilton, Franklin and Webster. Hogan School, built in 1900 and located on Eighth Street between Winnebago and Mississippi Streets, was named for J.J. Hogan, a well-known businessman here, who donated land for the school. Hogan School was destroyed by fire in June 1920, when it was struck by lightning.

Medical inspections of pupils began in 1903. The work was done by local physicians at no cost to the school. Also that year, the state legislature passed a law requiring that all children between the ages of seven and 14 be in school for a period of 32 weeks each year. To cut down on truancy, the La Crosse Board of Education employed two part-time truant officers, which helped greatly.

Schools didn’t cost much in 1906, at least in modern terms. A La Crosse budget of that year showed receipts of $158,368, and expenditures of $111,609, yielding a surplus of $46,759. Teacher salaries totaled $77,417; janitor salaries $9,728; fuel, furniture, equipment and books $24,463; superintendent’s salary $2,300; and high school principal $1,700. Students weren’t too concerned then about the kind of equipment or books that they used. They used what was given to them. Playground equipment was nonexistent, but there were games of pom pom pull-away, hopscotch, etc.
Mrs. Agnes Van Tassel, a veteran teacher at Washington and Emerson schools, remembered some of the rules teachers went by in the first half of the twentieth century: “You were expected to be home on school nights. You didn’t smoke or drink alcohol. For women, marriage wasn’t permitted if she wanted to continue teaching.”

Before 1900, teachers were paid poorly. Also, records indicate that salaries increased by grade, such as an eighth grade teacher getting about $150 a year more than a first grade teacher. In the modern era of teacher unions and collective bargaining, teachers negotiate salaries and fringe benefits. Today, in all Coulee Region public schools, pay differences are determined by teachers’ college credits and years of experience, not by the grade level being taught.

Until 1968, members of the La Crosse Board of Education were appointed by the La Crosse Common Council. Since then, the Board of Education has been directly elected, with three posts being up for election each year.

Howard Voss, who served the La Crosse School District from 1958 to 1974 as principal, as well as teacher and school district supervisor of student affairs, reported on some of the changes he had seen over time. He said that the basic three R’s that were the backbone of curriculum for so many years were broadened in the 1960s, since the highly structured curriculum was no longer meeting student needs. In a world that was fast becoming more diversified due to rapidly developing technology, students needed a more extensive, less strictly structured curriculum.

Equal rights legislation ruled out specifying courses or sports as “boys’” or “girls’.” Sports, at one time dominated by the male sector, have in more recent years been made available to female students, as well.

Dress codes were less liberal prior to the 1970s. For example, in 1969, during an interview, the late John Coleman, longtime director of what is now Western Wisconsin Technical College, recalled an incident wherein he sent two girls home for being “over-rouged.” Judge John W. Brindley at that time supported Coleman, and reprimanded the girls prior to their being reinstated.

As the City of La Crosse expanded in the latter part of the twentieth century and the student population increased, more modern elementary schools were built, adding Emerson, Hintgen, Spence, State Road, and Summit. Two more schools were added in the 1990s, North Woods and Southern Bluffs Elementary.

Roosevelt Elementary School houses a charter school called the School of Technology and Arts I (SOTA I ), and is at its maximum capacity with 92 students ranging in ages five to ten. SOTA II is housed in Longfellow Middle School, currently has 41 students, and was founded in 1997. The public school district’s newest charter school is Coulee Montessori, housed in Jefferson Elementary, and includes grades 1 through 3. Charter schools receive most of their financial support through grants for such programs.
Parochial school education has been around a long time, and these schools have played an important part in the city’s educational mix. Parochial schools were usually built in conjunction with their church’s start. Schools were supported by their congregations, plus for some, students paid tuition. In the early twentieth century, private schools, in addition to Christian training, offered “extras” that the public schools could not furnish.

The Seventh Day Adventist School on upper French Island opened in 1955 for grades 1 through 8. The school is totally supported by its church members.

Faith Christian School, under the jurisdiction of the Faith Baptist Church, started with 65 students for grades 1 through 8 in 1973. Educational excellence, moral responsibility, and old-fashioned discipline were emphasized.

Mount Calvary School, 16th Street and Park Avenue, was built in 1957, but has had two additions through the years, once in the fall of 1983 and again in 1991.

St. James and St. John’s schools were established on the Northside near the end of the nineteenth century, and staffed by FSPAs then. In 1975, after the two parishes merged in 1970, St. John’s School closed. Today, lay teachers teach students at St. James School, which covers grades kindergarten through sixth grade, and it is located at 716 Windsor Street.

St. Thomas More School opened in 1948. It had eight classrooms with an enrollment of 271 students. The school was staffed by the Benedictine Sisters of Eau Claire. In 1956 another six classrooms were added to the school due to increased student enrollment. It became the largest parochial grade school in the city at that time. In 1957, it had 16 classrooms and an enrollment of 789.

The philosophy of the St. Thomas More School is based on the Christian belief that every child is created in the image of God, each possessing unique gifts and great potential. Parents as well as instructors in the school system have a moral duty to guide and assist in the holistic development of children. There were 187 students attending kindergarten through sixth grade in 1999. In the fall of 2000, St. Thomas More was scheduled to become an early child care and education center, while St. Pius X School was scheduled to take on the older students.

Blessed Sacrament School, founded in 1937, is located at 2404 King Street. A second addition to the school was built in 1956. This occurred during the pastorate of Monsignor Thomas O’Shaughnessy (1952–64). By 1967, under the pastorate of Father Leroy Keegan, the gym-auditorium and the final addition to the school were completed. By 1993 Blessed Sacrament School was able to accommodate students in kindergarten through sixth grade. In 1995 a music room, multi-media center and library were added to the building. In 1999 the school served 295 students from 195 families, with a permanent staff of 20 teachers, a school secretary and a principal.
St. Pius X School was founded in 1962. Its location was 4439 Mormon Coulee Road. In 1973 the parish and school moved to its present facility, then known as the Holy Cross Seminary, at 3710 East Avenue. It abides by the same philosophy as all Catholic schools, that is, to provide a learning environment for the educational, spiritual, social and physical growth of children. Present enrollment from kindergarten through sixth grade is 95.

In the fall of 1969, a new $800,000 St. Joseph the Workman's Cathedral School opened and replaced St. Wenceslaus and St. Joseph schools. This school, built around two instructional material centers, gave students access to up-to-date audiovisual materials such as tape recorders, books, and film strips. Students were given freedom to work independently at their own level.

In conclusion, Mrs. Helen Nicols, a retiree, who taught at Jefferson School for 19 years and Washburn for three years, expressed it well: “Education in the Coulee Region has changed — but . . . one thing is the same. That is the love a teacher has for her children. If you're a born teacher, that will never change.”

### High Schools in the Twentieth Century

By Ursula Chiu

Since earliest times in La Crosse, residents have shown a lively interest in quality education for their children. Evidence for this is the admission of the first high school, opened in 1870, the Second Ward School, to the distinguished North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in 1878. La Crosse High School was one of five in the state to earn this honor.

From this successful, rudimentary beginning in the nineteenth century, developed three new high schools and three junior high schools during the twentieth century.

The first of these, La Crosse High School, later Central High, opened its doors in 1907 to 360 students. The new school offered a four-year curriculum geared to prepare students for college entrance. Educators soon realized that not all students aspired to this goal, and decided to add commercial subjects, home economics, and manual arts to the curriculum. The Hixon Annex to Central High, built in 1913, accommodated some of these needs — with shops, a gym, and a program of physical culture for girls.

Following a system practiced in Germany, an independent continuation school was started in 1912 for students leaving after eighth grade. In this school, students attended courses for five hours each week over a period of eight months while
working in their jobs the rest of the time. All students terminating public education after eighth grade had to attend this part-time school.

By 1920 the needs of non-college-bound students at Central High called for the introduction of so-called A and B courses, with A courses leading to a high school diploma, and B courses covering material for college entrance.

Logan Junior High School, on the Northside, was constructed in 1921, as the first of its kind in the city. But without a senior high level, students had to be transported to Central High to complete the last two years of their education. In 1928, after Logan Senior High was built, Northside students could remain in that part of the city to graduate.

The first Logan schools were named after the street of their location, which, in turn, had been named after John Alexander Logan, a famous Civil War Union general.

In 1937 La Crosse schools were placed under the jurisdiction of the Wisconsin State Department. This made increased funds available, but also set new rules for curriculum and administration. At that time, the state required students to prove their citizenship to gain high school admittance.

For students choosing private education, the Catholic Aquinas High School was available. Established by the Diocese of La Crosse, it grew out of a two-year high school opened in 1915 at Holy Trinity. When the old building was replaced in 1928 by a four-year Aquinas High School, 127 students began classes.

Teaching duties and administration were originally done by Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and diocesan priests. The school became known for its well-rounded curriculum and a faculty that added to the moral and character formation of their students, based on religious faith. With the decline of religious vocations, Sisters gradually were replaced by lay teachers. In 1930 the school had only one lay teacher, but by 1998 the lay teaching staff had increased to 57 in the now-combined Aquinas high and middle schools.

As the Aquinas student body kept growing, the building was expanded in 1931 and again in 1936, adding more classrooms, a food lab, and a chapel, plus guidance offices, a gym, library, and commons. Later, Aquinas Middle School was accommodated in the building in 1992. With extensive donations by several benefactors, Bishop Burke Hall was added in 1998. Ten new classrooms, a gym, music hall, and science and computer labs became available. Students also found space to extend their “Impact” program of service to different community needs.

Throughout the school’s life, Aquinas curriculum, guided by the directives of the North Central Association for High Schools and Colleges, has offered students the same body of knowledge and skills as the public schools, but presented these “in the context of their faith in God and in the Church,” according to Bishop Raymond Burke.
Over the years, two Southside junior high schools, Lincoln (1923) and Longfellow (1940), contributed to the student population at Central.

In 1967 a growing student body was given a new Central High building, on Losey Boulevard. Besides sports fields, an expanded gym, an auditorium, and a larger library became part of the new school. The building was to accommodate 1,500 students. Logan High also expanded, with a new building being opened at a new location in 1979, featuring a swimming pool, a greenhouse for biology classes, modernized shops, and an aerospace department.

Times changed, and so did the high school. During the World War II years, students participated in paper and metal salvage drives. The High School Victory Corps helped high school youth to make the best start in their participation in the all-out war effort.

On-the-job training for seniors in commercial courses was made available in the early 1950s. When this decade brought more international cultural and business contacts, educators introduced teacher and student exchanges. Since then, teachers from China, Japan, Russia and other European countries have been invited, and many students have exchanged study places. Local high school foreign language curriculum has embraced the Chinese, Japanese and Russian languages, in addition to the “old standards.”

In the early 1960s, programs in remedial reading and make-up English courses became available through a Summer School program. So did typing, behind-the-wheel driving, and instrumental music programs. A Junior Great Books program was started in cooperation with the public library and became an enrichment opportunity for gifted children.

Under the National Education Defense Act in 1971-72, extended teacher training was paid for by government grants, strengthening programs in foreign languages and sciences. Also, during the 1970s, new special education programs for handicapped students were federally mandated. Both Central and Logan introduced teachers with special training and programs for these needs, serving the students within regular classrooms. For students with special giftedness, advanced courses, college courses, and enrichment projects were offered.

Beginning with the 1970s, the threat of drugs to students became a major issue for teachers and administrators. The DARE Program (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) taught by city police officers, trained students how to resist drug dealers and student abusers. Students also were shown how to help dependent peers via support groups.

Although the dropout rate in La Crosse high schools decreased to three percent in 1990, the fate of non-graduating students has remained a constant district concern. Through the “Leadership Program,” which is an alternative school with-
in the high school setting, attempts were made to guide problem students toward graduation.

The present lack of structure in many students’ homes and the resulting increase of uncooperative student behaviors makes us ask: How can we guide students to be cooperative and caring about their fellow human beings? No longer does the “Blue Book,” a register of misdeeds in the 1879 first school, scare students into cooperation. No longer is rubbing Limburger cheese over the heat registers a crime punishable by detention and memorizing “Blue Book” rules. The recent use of weapons and violence by students is more dangerous, and has necessitated monitoring by in-school police, who are now on the district payroll. The “Diversity Club” has become a significant means to increase humanity-awareness among students.

Meanwhile, the expansion of alternative schools for students at risk of failure is under continued discussion for the new millennium; so is the motivating force of increased availability of computers in high school labs and classrooms. A plan to introduce a high school for technology and arts hopefully will inspire students with different talents.

Whatever new challenges the 2000s will bring, La Crosse high school curricula, teachers and administrators will follow the same spirit of dedication to young people and learning that was initiated more than 130 years ago with the first high school, when this city was still in its infancy.

**Colleges in the Twentieth Century**

*By Anna Motivans*

The establishment of schools in La Crosse was greatly influenced by economics and politics. Tribute should be paid to those people who had educational idealism at heart, and who worked to bring about change when it was needed, and to teachers who chose teaching as their life’s work.

The aspiration for higher education here was discussed as early as 1855 by the local physicians who began the La Crosse County Medical Society. In 1864 a state law granted a charter to the La Crosse Medical College. The college granted only three diplomas, and closed in 1881.

Around that time, several privately owned colleges opened. Among these was the La Crosse Academy and Normal School, which was established in 1866, but soon closed. Others included the Keefe Business College and the La Crosse School of Music. The La Crosse Business School was bought out in 1891 by F.J.
Toland, and had some staying power. Toland began the Wisconsin Business University, which published an annual and sponsored basketball teams, dramatic clubs, student councils, glee clubs, and Greek letter organizations. In less than 50 years, the W.B.U. graduated more than 10,000 students.

Viterbo University today is a Catholic, Franciscan liberal arts college. “The seed of Viterbo College was planted in the first teacher-training efforts begun by Mother Antonia in 1863,” according to Sr. M. Mileta Ludwig’s centennial history of the FSPAs in 1949. The further development of Viterbo followed closely the establishment of St. Rose Convent and motherhouse in La Crosse. In keeping with Franciscan traditions, the education of children and caring for the sick were major works for them. From the FSPAs’ beginning, the Sisters provided teachers for the missions and parochial elementary schools. By 1890 the St. Rose Normal Training School was in session, achieved via Sister Seraphine Kraus.

In 1923 collegiate courses were introduced at St. Rose Normal School. Eight years later, the college won recognition by UW-Madison as a junior college. In 1937, St. Rose Junior College’s name was changed to Viterbo College. Sister Rose Kreibich negotiated with UW-Madison, and in late 1939 the college was approved as a four-year, degree-granting institution for elementary school teacher training. In 1940, the first graduates from the program were certified by the State Department of Public Instruction. In 1942 the new college building was opened, and the following year lay women were admitted.

Then, in 1944, the St. Rose College of Music and the St. Francis School of Nursing became integral parts of Viterbo College. In 1946 Sister Rose was elected superior general of the order, and Sister Josina was named president of Viterbo. In 1947, Sister Theodine Sebold held the latter title.

In order to prepare teachers for secondary schools, Viterbo expanded its program in liberal arts. In 1952 that program was also approved by the UW Committee on College Accreditation. Status as a four-year liberal arts college was achieved in 1954, when Viterbo received accreditation by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. In 1970 the college became co-educational. After the Class of 1979 graduated, the records of the three-year program of St. Francis School of Nursing were transferred to Viterbo.

Currently Viterbo University holds many accreditations. In 1986 Viterbo started graduate courses in education leading to a master’s in Education, and in 1998, a master’s in Nursing. Also, Viterbo offers nine majors via evening studies. The university now is run by a board of directors consisting of Sisters and lay people. The current president is Dr. William J. Medland. Viterbo acquired university status in 2000.

Before 1894, public elementary schools provided seven-year training. The need for good teachers, especially in rural areas, was critical during the nineteenth century. Although formal training was not required to become an elementary teacher
in La Crosse, attendance of one year at a normal school resulted in an additional $100 in annual salary. The local and state leaders, influenced by the educational systems of the East Coast, began establishing and building normal schools or teacher training institutions. Politics and economics influenced the Board of Regents regarding each school's location. La Crosse Normal School was the eighth school to be founded of the nine in the state normal school system.

La Crosse made its bid for a normal school in 1871, followed by another serious attempt in 1893. In 1905 a Common Council resolution authorized the appointment of a Normal School Committee, with Mayor William Torrance as chairman. A bill introduced by Senator Thomas Morris became law in April 1905, directing the Board of Regents of Normal Schools to locate a school in La Crosse. Morris was largely responsible for founding the Normal School and the selection of its first faculty. From 1908 to 1909, Main Hall was built, at a cost of $260,000. It also housed the "Model School." It was a department of the Normal School that included kindergarten through eighth grades with 140 to 160 students. The first student entered on September 7, 1909. At its dedication on November 10, 1909, Senator Morris addressed the gathered dignitaries. Thomas Morris served as regent of the Normal School (1905-13) and as president of the board of Regents of Normal Schools (1908-09). Fassett A. Cotton served as the first president of the La Crosse Normal School (1909-24), and he introduced physical education as a special field of teacher training at the school, hired capable faculty, and eventually built the physical education building, Wittich Hall.

Under George M. Snodgrass, the third president (1927-36), the Normal School achieved teacher college status and the ability to grant four-year degrees, and thus the new name became La Crosse State Teachers College in 1927. More buildings were built and the new laboratory or training school started.

Under President Rexford Samuel Mitchell (1939-79), the regents authorized the La Crosse Teachers College to offer graduate courses leading to a Master of Education degree in Physical Education. While Mitchell led the school, the college became La Crosse State University (1964). About 13 new buildings were added to the campus then. Changes included additions to the Letters and Science program, including the offering of B.S. degrees.

After the passage of a law merging state teachers colleges and UW-affiliated universities, President Kenneth E. Lindner (1970-79) became the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse's first chancellor, on July 9, 1974. Lindner is credited with weathering a financial crunch and not laying off tenured faculty. Enrollment increased by 1973. The laboratory school (Campus School) was closed on May 17, 1973, and the building was later renamed Morris Hall.

By 1991, the UW-L had hired its first female chancellor, Judith Kuipers (1991-2000). Kuipers led the school into the 21st century, emphasizing diversity, global-
ism, healthcare, and community. She resigned in the summer of 2000 to accept a job as head of the Fielding Institute in California.

As of 1999, UW-L offered 69 undergraduate majors in 33 disciplines and 21 graduate programs in 12 disciplines. In 1997, enrollment stood at 9,048 (8,473 undergraduates, 575 graduate students). Students came from 40 states and 36 foreign countries.

In 1911 the State of Wisconsin passed a law that created public-supported vocational education. The first director was Thomas Sutherland (1911-16). When the city's vocational school opened in 1912 in two rooms of the old First Ward School, 800 students enrolled. It was one of the first vocational schools in the history of technical education. At that time, the school offered training in basic education, vocational and hobby courses. In 1916 John B. Coleman was appointed director, and held that post until 1963. During the 1950s, two-year associate degree programs were offered, thus establishing technical education as true post-secondary education. Under Coleman's leadership, a new building was completed at Sixth and Vine Street. In 1924 many new programs started.

The next director, Arthur B. Jordan (1963-65), was credited with having the school evaluated by the State Department of Vocational, Technical and Adult Education (VTAE). The fourth director was Charles G. Richardson (1965-86). In 1965 state legislation divided Wisconsin into 16 VTAE districts, and the La Crosse Vocational School was chosen as a center for the Western Wisconsin district. The school's name was soon changed to Western Wisconsin Technical Institute. An article in 1987 stated that WWTI offered some 30 associate degrees and vocational evening courses. The college's name was also changed to Western Wisconsin Technical College (WWTC), and Beverly Simone was appointed director.

The present director, Lee Rasch, was appointed in 1989. In 1992 the school received reaccreditation by the North Central Association for the maximum of 10 years. In 1996 the Interactive Television System linked all six campuses. In March, 1996, district residents voted to approve funds for WWTC to build a new Allied Health Building. It is an outgrowth of a community consortium comprising UW-L, Viterbo, Franciscan Skemp Healthcare, Gundersen Lutheran Health-Care Systems, and WWTC. It was completed in 2000 and houses health programs for all three post-secondary institutions, plus it provides space for medical research.

WWTC is governed by a nine-member district board. The school offers various programs to enable students to gain the occupational skills needed for employment. It offers 60 programs leading to associate degrees and technical diplomas. Most importantly, it offers affordable education. It has an enrollment of 4,910. More than half of WWTC students take not-for-credit courses for career and life enhancement. There are educational services for adults to complete their high school education, and for international students to learn English.
Libraries: Paying Education Its Dues

By Katherine Arenz

La Crosse dedicated its first public library on November 20, 1888. As early as 1852, several private lyceum, literary and/or library associations had existed. Most notable was the La Crosse Young Men’s Library Association (YMLA), a substantial contributor to the original public library.

In 1882 former Wisconsin governor and long-time YMLA member Cadwallader Washburn died and left $50,000 to the city for a library, to be called the La Crosse Public Library. Land was acquired at the corner of Eighth and Main Street, site of the present Main Library, and a castle-like building was constructed.

Annie Hanscome, a teacher and the first librarian, was replaced in 1904 by Mary Alice Smith, a professionally trained librarian, who served until 1915. Significant events during Smith’s administration were the opening of the children’s room on the second floor in 1905, the establishment of a Northside branch in 1906, and an addition to the Main Library in 1909.

Lilly M.E. Borresen became head librarian in 1915 and served for 31 years. She founded the South Branch Library, which moved several times before settling in 1924 at West Avenue and Johnson Street in an old barracks building with Nellie MacDonald as librarian.

By the 1930s it was obvious that both branches needed new facilities. Citizens approved bond issues for construction, but problems with land acquisition and other legalities caused delays. Only the North Branch was begun before U.S. entry into World War II. The building, at Kane and Gillette Street, was completed in May 1942. Anna B. Pederson was the North Branch librarian for 61 years, serving from 1911 to 1972.

Muriel Fuller became head librarian when Borresen retired in 1946. Fuller supervised the construction of the new South Branch, at 16th and Farnam Street. The new building opened May 25, 1952. She was also responsible for the library’s participation in a nationwide pilot program, the American Heritage Project, sponsored by the American Library Association.

Gertrude Thurow, who succeeded Fuller, led the library’s campaign for a new Main Library, replacing the historic, but by then cramped and outdated 1888 structure. Since Eighth and Main was deemed the best possible location, the collection had to be moved, the old building razed, and business carried on elsewhere during construction. A former pastor’s study and chapel a block away, at 712 Main Street, became the temporary location. The chapel had been given to the First Congregational Church by Annie Hanscome, the first librarian.
Just before the bond referendum, the library received a $300,000 grant from the federal government for development of area-wide library services. The LALD (La Crosse Area Library Development) project, with headquarters in the Main Library, operated bookmobile service to neighboring counties. It is now the Winding Rivers Library System.

Much credit for the new library, which opened October 2, 1967, belongs to a group of local citizens: La Crosse Public Library Friends, now Friends of the La Crosse Public Library.

On January 1, 1976, James W. White became director. His tenure, which ended in 1998, was marked by two major building projects at Main Library: in 1979, the Swarthout Memorial Addition, and in 1995–96, another addition and complete remodeling. Meanwhile, both branches were renovated and renamed, becoming the South and North Community Libraries.

Computer technology invaded LPL in 1985 when circulation procedures were automated. The card catalog went online in March 1992, and Internet access and CD-ROM tower resources were added in 1997.

On August 3, 1998, Thomas Strange, who has a strong background in library technology, became director. He views the library as the institution that can best provide “information access to all people.” In 1999 the library he directs was, for the second time, named “Library of the Year” by the Wisconsin Library Association; only one other library in the state has been selected twice for this honor.

The La Crosse County Library, which for many years had its headquarters in downtown La Crosse, was officially established in 1923. It traces its origins to the La Crosse County Traveling Library. Started in 1898 by Mrs. Frank Tiffany of the Fortnightly Club, the County Library serves the people of La Crosse County outside the city, and is a member of the Winding Rivers Library System.

Edna Schaller was on the first board of the County Library, and was succeeded by Emma Smith as librarian in 1931. She was succeeded by Leila Showers, followed by Chester Oien and Mary Lindsay Adams. In 1983 Marcia Matheson, the present librarian, took over.

In 1985 it was decided to move the collection to a location outside the city limits of La Crosse. Leaving the basement of the County Courthouse, it settled first at the Lakeview Health Center in West Salem, then in a former grocery store in Holmen. The County Library headquarters remain in Holmen in a library building constructed for that purpose, with branches in Bangor, Onalaska, West Salem and the Town of Campbell.

Largest of the city’s academic libraries is Murphy Library Resource Center at the UW-La Crosse. It is named for prominent local businessman Eugene W. Murphy, who served on the UW Board of Regents and the Coordinating Council.
for Higher Education. When the university, then the La Crosse Normal School, opened in 1909, the library was housed in the main building. Florence Sherwood Wing, the first librarian, was a member of the original faculty. She retired in 1951.

The library outgrew its quarters on the second floor of Main Hall, and in 1957, a new building, the Florence Wing Library, was built next door. Martha Skaar, who had succeeded Wing, supervised the move. She retired in 1964.

Dr. Roy Nelson Van Note was director when the library made its next move, in 1969. Relocation from Wing to the new Murphy Library was done during spring break. Instead of the human chain used in the move from Main to Wing, beer cartons were used. Books packed into the cartons were trucked two blocks north to the new building.

For the next 20 years, collections and services grew rapidly and technology had a major impact. In 1989, when the conversion of the catalog from cards to computer was completed, 1,500 drawers of cards were replaced and recycled. In the early 1990s, more space was needed and plans made for an addition and remodeling. Dr. Dale Montgomery supervised this $7.6 million project, which was dedicated September 17, 1995. The facility was renamed the Murphy Library Resource Center. On July 1, 1999, Anita Evans became director.

Western Wisconsin Technical College’s library started as a one-room facility in the basement of the Coleman Building. The school was then the Coleman Technical Institute. In 1966 Annette Niederkorn was hired to collect the school’s resources into a core collection. In 1970, the collection was moved to the Roy E. Kumm Building and a new head librarian, Thuan Tran (later Pham), was hired.

An expansion and renovation projection in 1970 added 3,000 square feet of floor space, and soon afterward, Pham began studying automated library systems. She retired in 1991 and her successor, Patrick J. Brunet, carried on the automation effort. By May 1993, the public catalog was online and by August the circulation system was up and running. A district-wide referendum in 1993 approved a bond issue for a new building, the Academic Resource Center (ARC). In 1995, the library moved to the ARC and occupies much of the second floor.

In an interview, Brunet voiced eagerness for full use of the resources, not only by WWTC students but by students of others colleges and by the local citizenry. WWTC, Viterbo and UW-L have an agreement allowing each other’s students to use their libraries.

The Todd Wehr Memorial Library of Viterbo University is located on the first floor and part of the second in the school’s Murphy Center. John Hempstead, who became its director in 1990, is the first layman to hold this position. Previous directors and much of the library staff had been members of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. Sister Frances Claire Mezera, whose term as director spanned from 1955 to 1988, now serves as volunteer archivist.
St. Rose Convent was the library’s home from 1893 to 1941. In 1941, with the help of nuns and students, a book brigade moved the collection to the third floor of Viterbo College. In 1990 the Curriculum and Fine Arts libraries were merged with the main collection to form the Todd Wehr Library. Wehr, a Wisconsin industrialist, made generous contributions to this and other private colleges.

Both major medical centers in the city have Health Science Libraries. Although designed primarily for use by the health systems staffs, they are open to the public.

The library of the St. Francis Medical Center is located on the third floor of the Professional Arts Building, with Patrick Flannery as librarian. Originally housed in the hospital’s main building, it moved to its present site in 1972, the same year the libraries of St. Francis School of Nursing and the hospital merged. The hospital library dates back to 1919. Minutes of a staff meeting read: “Each staff member will contribute $5 annually toward the maintenance of the hospital library.” By 1982, this assessment had grown to $2,500. Sister Regina Lang, who wrote a history of the hospital, as well as Sisters Louise Therese Lotze and Audrey Frendl, served as librarians.

Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center has two libraries, one on the second floor of the hospital intended primarily for use by the medical staff but open to the public, and the other, a 1998 addition, in the first floor lobby of the clinic, the John and Nettie Mooney Health Resource Center. The latter offers a wide variety of information to patients, their families and the public. LaVerne Samb was the first librarian, serving for 28 years; she was followed by Kay Wagner and recently by Melinda Orebaugh, newly appointed director.

A spirit of cooperation and an eagerness to serve the public pervade all of these fine institutions. La Crosse has come a long way library-wise since the 1850s, when libraries were private associations with privileges solely for paying members.
RELIGION IN LA CROSSE

Bringing Good Tidings:
Nineteenth Century Churches and Religious Life

By Father Bernard McGarty

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings.

ISAIAH, 52:7.1

In chronicling the formal worship of God in Prairie La Crosse and North La Crosse in the nineteenth century, one must begin by recognizing Native American religion. Migrant tribes visited Prairie La Crosse, present site of Riverside Park, for games and tribal councils. Liturgy was as normal as gathering, hunting and fishing. The indigenous people were the Winnebago (now called Ho-Chunk). Their recognition of Manitou corresponds to the European concept of God. Dance, song and prayers were combined for adoration of the “Great Spirit.”

Mormons were among the first people of European descent in La Crosse, and “Mormon Coulee” continues their memory. Lumber for a temple in Nauvoo, Illinois, cut from forests near Black River Falls, was floated down the Black River to La Crosse. In 1844 the Mormons left for Nauvoo. There is no record of a Mormon structure in the city then.

Itinerant Christian clergy passed through the hamlet of Prairie La Crosse in its infant years, meeting believers in clapboard homes or log cabins. Methodists were visited by the Reverend George Chester and Reverend George Tasker. Baptists were assembled by William Card, an interested layman. Father Lucian Galtier, pastor of St. Gabriel’s in Prairie du Chien, met with Catholics. The Reverend John
Religion in La Crosse

Sherwin sought out Congregationalists and Presbyterians. The Reverend Spencer Carr, a Baptist, gave this summary of the population in 1853: “Heads of families, 301; Single men over 21, 78; Single ladies over 18, 38; Children, 325. The total number of potential church members was 745.”

The first formal service in a public place was on Grandad’s Bluff, two years after Wisconsin became a state. The records of Christ Episcopal Church read: “On Saturday, late in June of 1850, a party consisting of two priests, one deacon and a young layman stopped at the tiny hamlet of Prairie La Crosse to spend the weekend. One of the priests, James Lloyd Brick, was leader of the group. Although the entire settlement of 15 or 20 homes was at the riverside early Sunday morning, the Fourth Sunday after Trinity, June 23, 1850, Brick led his party to the top of Grandad Bluff, and there celebrated Holy Communion.”

Ethnicity, with choice of language for worship and denomination, determined subsequent growth of Christian and Jewish congregations. Germans were the largest national group, followed by Norwegians, Bohemians, Irish, English and Swedes. Yankees came from the New England states. Census figures draw a distinction between native-born and foreign-born.

In 1852 three English-speaking congregations were formally organized by Baptist, Methodist and Congregational clergy and laity. Each emphasized the primacy of their denomination as “First.” First Baptist obtained land at 128 South Sixth Street, and built a structure on the site ten years later. First Methodist Episcopal Church began the same year and promptly built a wood-frame building at 427 Fourth Street. First Congregational gathered members at a location on Fourth Street and later built a brick structure at Seventh and Main Street.

The second wave of organization and building saw German-speaking units: First German Baptist, 1893; St. Joseph Catholic, 1870; St. Nicholas/Holy Trinity Catholic, 1887; First Evangelical Lutheran, 1859; St. John’s Reformed, 1889; St. John’s Catholic, 1887; Immanuel Lutheran, 1888; and Second German Methodist, 1883. German-speaking settlers, particularly those from Bavaria, wanted qualities similar to their homeland: rolling fields, rivers and woodlands.

Norwegian-speaking congregations developed on the North and South sides of La Crosse: Scandinavian Baptist, 1859, becoming Calvary Baptist, 1895; Our Savior’s Lutheran, 1861; St. Paul’s Lutheran, 1870; First Norwegian Methodist, 1890; Tabernacle Baptist, 1869; Scandinavian Baptist, 1869; Trinity Lutheran, 1875; Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran, 1875; Bethel Evangelical Lutheran, 1886; first Scandinavian Methodist, 1883. Norwegian immigrants were attracted to Wisconsin by lumbering opportunities and the similarity of Wisconsin to their homeland.

Jewish settlers worshipped in Hebrew at the Ansche Chesh Congregation beginning in 1886. John Levy, a prominent businessman and three-term mayor,
was a synagogue member. Bohemian-speaking people attended St. Wenceslaus Catholic, 1873; French-speaking worshiped at St. Mary's Catholic, 1855; and Polish-speaking Catholics met at Holy Cross, 1885.

English-speaking congregations also attended St. Mary's, 1855. The first Catholic Church, under the direction of the Reverend Henry Tabbert, was erected at Seventh and Division Street. The Reverend Fayette Darlene, assisted by seven vestrymen, organized Christ Episcopal, 1887. The First Church of Christ Scientist, under the leadership of Mary Baker Eddy's student from Chicago, assembled in 1886. English Lutheran, with a Swedish core of followers and Dr. E.A. Trapert, formed in 1898. St. Paul's Universalist, under the guidance of E.A. Tienny, president, M.T. Burke, secretary, and Gilbert Van Tinny, treasurer, began in 1860. First Presbyterian Church was organized by the Reverend J. Irwin Smith in 1866, and North Presbyterian Church in 1870. West Avenue Methodist Church, under the leadership of the Reverend L.E. Born, was built in 1887; and St. Luke's United Methodist Church came to life in 1856.

Catholics welcomed their first bishop, Michael Heiss, in 1868, and St. Joseph Church was designated the Cathedral. Christ Episcopal was part of the Milwaukee Synod; Lutheran bodies were connected to synods in Milwaukee or St. Paul that continued a German, Norwegian or Swedish heritage. Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Universalists received direction and assistance from sister bodies in the East. Yankees from Vermont and New York formed their constituency. Their churches were autonomous.

The census of 1870 showed this distinction: “Native-born, 7,785; foreign-born, 3,449.” La Crosse was becoming more American and less European. Yet all of the churches had distinctly European roots. Keeping the faith of one’s ancestors was enhanced by a religious school operated by the parish. Baptists, Lutherans and Catholics were zealous to preserve language and faith through secular and catechism instruction.

By 1900 the city of La Crosse counted 37 churches, serving a population of 21,673 native-born and 7,222 foreign-born. In Europe, the faith had been established centuries earlier by king and bishop. Church and State were one. Religion came from the authorities on top to the people below. In the new world, a reverse order was taking place. Religion was springing out of the grass roots. Impetus was from the people, who exercised free choice relative to which congregation they would join. A second phenomenon different from Europe was that a husband might worship at one congregation and his wife at another. A third difference was that an interested citizen from one tradition might assist another group. John Levy, a Jew, participated in the organization of Christ Episcopal Church and Wesley Methodist Church. Such democratic crossover would have astounded ancestors who died in religious wars. A fourth difference from Europe, where a
single state religion was the norm, was that clergy began competing for members. Some called it “sheep stealing,” others called it zeal. A fifth difference in the new cities of the United States was that congregations were supported by free-will offerings. With no tax or government support, parishes had to provide their worth or perish. A similarity to Europe was that wealthy individuals gave large sums, and their names were remembered in stained glass or chapel. Nixon and Cameron are names at the Episcopal Church. But ordinary laborers contributed their share.

Separation of Church and State witnessed a vitality in the frontier river towns in the second half of the nineteenth century. The American experiment demonstrated that in a free society, citizens freely sought religion. The 37 churches and synagogue for 28,000 people is a ratio of one church for each 786 individuals. Not everyone attended church, but many did. La Crosse valued religion, a free choice in a free society.

Sent by God: Churches in the Twentieth Century

By Father Bernard McGarty

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
"Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"
"Here I am Lord," I said, “Send me.”

In 1900, 37 congregations served La Crosse, from a humble beginning of three churches in 1852. Twenty-five years later, 34 parishes were listed. This does not mean church membership decreased, rather that mergers of parishes occurred and existing congregations grew. If two small congregations of similar belief examined their resources, combining income enabled them to erect better building and hire a full-time pastor. In other instances, a church that began with 30 members might now have 150 or 300 communicants. The mainline Christian faiths and the synagogue were well-established in 1900. In the next 25 years, denominations not previously represented were St. Elias Syrian Orthodox and the fundamentalist Church of Christ.

The city directory of 1925 listed churches by category in alphabetical order. There were three Baptist, seven Catholic, one Syrian Orthodox, one Christian Scientist, one Congregational, one Episcopal, one Evangelical, seven Lutheran, five Methodist Episcopal, three Presbyterian, one Reformed, one Universalist, one Church of Christ, and one synagogue.
There has long been strong religious identification with ethnic origin; the dictum “Language saves faith” was widely observed. Norwegian was featured in three Lutheran, one Baptist and one Methodist congregations. German was spoken in three Catholic, three Lutheran, a Baptist and Methodist churches. Bohemian, French, Hebrew, Latin, Polish and Syrian were found in the worship and preaching of La Crosse churches. Clapboard structures gave way to brick and stone edifices.

The geniality that existed in the 1850s, where one infant faith assisted another, gave way to tension at the time of marriage and baptism. In the “old country,” a single faith existed in town or countryside. In America, people living in a neighborhood might represent five different faith traditions. As adolescents of different faiths dated during high school years, or became engaged and contemplated marriage, a contentious situation resulted. In which church will the bride and groom be united? In what faith will the children be baptized and raised? Jews, Catholics, Orthodox, Lutherans and Evangelical were adamant, saying it must be “one way” — their way. As a result, bitter feelings arose between pastors and within families. Other faiths were more accommodating on the issue of “mixed religion.” Intermarriages existed between Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, Congregational, Presbyterian and Christian Scientist church members.

Two political issues affected the churches during the first quarter of the century: World War I and Prohibition. After a German submarine sank the liner *Lusitania* in 1916, the United States was catapulted into a war with Germany. The fever pitch of patriotism ran high as young men enlisted and were drafted “to save the world for democracy.” As La Crosse’s Berlin Street was changed to Liberty Street, some Germans joined English-speaking congregations of the same faith. An emphasis on being “American” attached a stigma to the use of the rich and beautiful German language. Prohibition was a different matter. Beer and wine were an integral part of the culture of La Crosse’s Jews, Germans, Norwegians, Swedes, Bohemians, Poles, Irish, French and Syrians. But a counterculture came from the Methodist circuit riders and the charismatic dramas of Carry Nation. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League found followers among Methodists. There was also a Catholic temperance movement fostered by Irish Catholic clergy. The Volstead Act introduced Prohibition in 1919.

A spirit of prejudice flickered in 1928 when Al Smith ran for president. Fear that the pope would exert undue influence was felt by some Protestants. That same year, Catholic parishes, under the direction of Bishop Alexander McGavick, joined in building Aquinas High School. There were four Lutheran grade schools in 1929. Sunday School was the medium for teaching in most Protestant churches, while Hebrew School was held after public school on weekdays.

The stock market crash of 1929 inaugurated the Great Depression. As people lost jobs and fortunes, parish building projects came to a halt, and pastors had to
forego salaries. Some parishes supported clergy by gifts of garden produce and poultry. Language such as “convert” and “fallen away” designated one who changed to another faith or abandoned a previous affiliation. In 1937 the first Catholic territorial parish, Blessed Sacrament, was established. Parishes identified with pastors of strong personality and authority.

Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, was called “The Day of Infamy” by President Franklin Roosevelt. Women and men from all the La Crosse churches and the synagogue were enlisting in the Army, Navy or Marines. As patriotism soared, so did church attendance and income. Defense spending brought employment and a wave of women replaced men in factory jobs. Everyone prayed at his or her church for those overseas. During the first year of war, casualties were announced on the front page of the La Crosse Tribune. When a death occurred, a flag hung in one’s window, telling neighbors that a “Gold Star Mother” lived there. The anti-Semitism of Hitler and dictatorial treatment of conquered nations prompted all La Crosse churches to see this as a “just war.” Quakers were not in evidence in La Crosse. A conscientious objector was rare. Church requirements for publishing marriage banns and pre-marriage instruction were waived.

In 1946 Bishop John Treacy became leader of La Crosse Catholics, and a building boom began. With construction as well as prosperity halted during the war, it was time for expansion at all La Crosse churches after the war. Classrooms, social halls, and new churches were appearing all over town. In 1948 the World Council of Churches was established in Amsterdam, endorsed by Protestant congregations, ignored by Catholics.

The yellow pages of the La Crosse telephone directories from 1950 to 1975 listed new faith communities during this quarter-century. They were Seventh Day Adventist, Assembly of God, First Evangelical Free, Jehovah’s Witness, Latter Day Saints, Nazarene, Unitarian Universalist, United Church of Christ and United Pentecostal. An alphabetical list reports four Baptist churches, seven Catholic churches, 13 Lutheran churches representing the Missouri Synod, Wisconsin Synod, ALC and LCA. Luther High opened in 1957, located in Onalaska supported by 17 Wisconsin Synod congregations. Four Methodist churches were in operation.

John Kennedy was elected president in 1960 as prejudice evaporated. Pope John XXIII launched Vatican II, putting a new face on Catholicism, and lending dynamism to ecumenism. Vietnam challenged all congregations to evaluate the morality of that war. Some pastors and members emphasized patriotism and obedience. Other clergy and parishioners questioned our government. Hippies and flower children rebuked traditional Christian sexual morality. “Don’t trust anyone over 30” became a mantra. Church authority was questioned. Attendance at mainstream Protestant and Catholic churches declined. Fundamentalist congregations
grew. At this time, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church was a territorial parish, under Pastor Mattis.

By 1975, ecumenism was a byword among the long-established Christian faiths. Episcopal, Lutheran, Congregational, Presbyterian and Catholic entered into dialogue. The anniversary of the Augsburg Confession and Martin Luther’s protest was the occasion for a re-evaluation of history without acrimony. The agreed statement between Lutheran and Catholic scholars on “Justification” in 1983 was examined by pastors and laity in La Crosse with international scholars. The Lutheran Church in America, American Lutheran Church and Seminex joined nationally to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. The Reverend Steve Guttormson, former pastor of English Lutheran, was elected first bishop of the La Crosse Synod; he was succeeded by Bishop April Larson three years later. Clergy of all faiths offered congratulations. In 1991 Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie, invited by Episcopal Bishop William Wantland, visited Christ Episcopal Church; leaders from other faiths attended. When Bishop Raymond Burke succeeded Catholic Bishop John Paul in 1996, clergy from every local church and synagogue were invited, and most attended the ceremony. Among those attending were many FSPAs, who have been so influential in ecumenical projects worldwide.

Today in La Crosse, long-established Catholic and Protestant churches take their places alongside the Jewish synagogue, Congregation Sons of Abraham, and independents like the 28th Street Church of Christ, which is administered solely by its minister and elders. Someday, there may also be a Muslim mosque or two in this city, because there are Muslims living here now.

On the eve of the third millennium, the landscape of La Crosse was dotted with outstanding church buildings too numerous to mention. At the La Crosse Center on December 31, 1999, an ecumenical prayer service joined all faiths and all local leaders. Respect for another person’s belief, yet dedication to one’s parish, is a dual hallmark of La Crosse’s religious life.
The 1999 telephone directory listed 93 restaurants in the city of La Crosse. New restaurants have opened since that book was published, and some, like long-time favorite New Villa, have closed, but obviously the city has an abundance of places for dining out. The variety is vast — Chinese, Mexican, German, Italian, fast food, steak house, pizza or just plain American meat and potatoes. The same directory lists only 21 retail grocers in the city, nine of which are Kwik Trips.

Sixty years ago, the phone book listed 33 restaurants and 121 retail grocery stores. Family-owned grocery stores were scattered throughout the city. Then corporate supermarkets moved in, first A&P and National Tea, followed by K-Mart, Piggly Wiggly, Red Owl, Super Valu and Krogers. Now Quillins and Our Town IGA, supplied by giant wholesaler Fleming, dominate the field. Today’s major downtown grocery is the People’s Food Co-op at 315 Fifth Avenue South. Started in the 1970s, it operated first on the Northside and then in two locations on Adams Street before moving to its present location. Just outside the city limits are Cub Foods, Woodman’s and Festival Foods.

Fleming Co., Inc. was purchased in 1994 from Scrivner, an Oklahoma-based company, which had five years before acquired Gateway Foods, a local company. Gateway was founded in 1922 by Leo H. Bruha and four others, all employees of pioneer wholesaler J.J. Hogan. In the following years, Gateway acquired several other wholesale houses, including those of Hogan and Frank Sisson. In 1956, D.B. Reinhart and David Nudd bought Gateway, and in 1976, Reinhart became sole...
owner. When he sold to Scrivner ten years later, Gateway was the largest privately-owned corporation in Wisconsin.

From 1929 to 1992, Selrite, a smaller wholesale business, operated in a 50-mile radius of La Crosse. Vince Roth was its first manager and Bob Fehring its last. Pat Moore, *La Crosse Tribune* reporter, described its history in the paper’s January 11, 1992, issue: “Wholesale goes the way of mom and pop stores.” Also gone are wholesalers such as Cash & Carry and Rice Grocery.

Space won’t permit chronicling all the early stores, but here are a few. In 1875, Franz Heinrich, a benevolent stepfather, bought the Third and Division Street grocery from the Lepsa family, a gift to the Grams brothers. Catherine Lepsa married August Grams, cementing the relationship. Because the Gramses lived above the store, neighbors could quickly summon them if they needed to buy groceries when unexpected company came. In the 1870s, grocery stores like theirs were augmented by beer and sandwiches. Tables were provided for those bringing their own lunches from the farm. The Grams family, under Wenzel Grams’ direction, operated their store until 1940.

Dvorak’s opened in 1882 at 1422 South Seventh, serving the neighborhood for 55 years. Brewery families lived on $12 a week and sawmill families on $8. Sample prices were five cents for a bar of “Petunia Soap,” manufactured in La Crosse, 85 cents for a barrel for apples, and 15 cents for a dozen oranges; flour, sugar, and spices came in barrels to be sold in paper cornucopias — sacks were too expensive. Farmers got lunches and candy with every purchase. Indians traded mud hens or fish, and if they had no money, they left their guns until they could pay.

John Wiggert’s grocery turned into a hardware store for several generations. Ikert’s lasted three generations, lastly called Rich’s Super Market. It was run by Rich Carr until 1978. Smale’s Dairy Store operated from 1916 to 1975.

In 1926 there were 118 groceries, but when K-Mart opened as a discount food house in 1965, there were only 70 left. Skogens bought the Birnbaum grocery store at George and Gillette Street in 1974. Skogens was then supplying groceries just north of La Crosse. Later, that store became Our Town IGA.

Numerous Mom and Pop groceries thrived for a time. Boma’s, at 1015 Pine, was run by Martin and Caroline and their children. When Martin and son George died in 1928, Caroline closed the doors. Bob and Lila Neuhaus, 1514 Vine, catered to the university crowd and school children. “Bob’s Confectionary” served a full meal for 25 cents in 1942. Charles Bruha & Sons, later just Bruha’s, had a life span of 96 years. Bruha was in the Selrite chain, a cooperative of independent grocers. Marcou’s Market, on the Northside, owned by David A. Marcou Sr., and for a while by his sons, Jim and David A. Marcou Jr. (David J. Marcou’s father), lasted from the mid-1940s to 1968, and Jim’s IGA Market, owned by Jim Marcou, also on the Northside, operated for 30 years, until about 1990.
In 1926 three A&P stores opened, this being the advent of chain stores in La Crosse. The stores used the managers’ names; best known was Emmet Sheehan. In 1945, four IGA’s opened. Rudy Pralle opened in 1945 next door to Sheehan on Main; Pralle had worked for Sheehan and the competition was brisk.

Ed and Greta Quillin opened on 11th and La Crosse in 1944; later the Quillin family had six local stores and three in surrounding areas. Another busy IGA store for many years was Boulevard Foods, run by Al and Dorothy Sciborski.

One of the last independents to close, after 45 years, was Freddie’s Market on the Northside. It was sorely missed by residents of Sauber Manor, a nearby senior housing complex.

Bob and Verna Burgmaier started their cash-and-carry in 1943. They catered to the university crowd and even kept a small banking system for students. Muehr’s Grocery, still in existence at 1316 Farnam, was opened by father Bernard Muehr and is now operated by daughters Mary and Grace, who started work there when they were 11 and 12 years old.

Along with the city’s many grocery stores, there were specialty shops. In 1941 there were 11 bakeries, at least one of which, Reget’s, delivered to homes. There were nine dairies that brought milk to the doorstep, and in 1936 there were 30 meat markets. Best known were Pinkers’, Schuberts’, Farley’s, Bakalars’, Breidel’s, and Schams’. Bakalars’ and Breidel’s are still open. Consumer’s Market, at 133 S. Fourth, was a grocery store but is now a bakery, run by Bob and Kay Riel.

While the number of grocery stores dwindled, the restaurant count rose. Of course, the locals had been “eating out” all along. As noted earlier, some groceries served lunches, as did taverns. Downtown stores like Grants and Woolworths had lunch counters and Doerflingers had the Half-way Lunch.

A notable tradition in La Crosse has been the Friday night fish fry. Pat Pitz tells about Friday nights at her father’s tavern, Your Uncle’s Place at West Avenue and Adams. Opened in the mid-1930s by William Pitz, it was a favorite hangout for “war widows” during World War II and a gathering place for their returning husbands after the war. The double-fish plate consisted of two pieces of pike (hand-peeled), french fries (hand-cut), two pieces of bread and cole slaw, all for 35 cents. The family closed the tavern when William died in 1954. Fish fries are still favorite dining-out experiences in La Crosse, but prices range from $5 upwards.

A summertime variation for dining is the chickenque, which organizations sponsor as fund raisers. Half a chicken barbecued on an outside grill, potato, cole slaw, beans, and roll are packaged in foam carry-out containers. The meal costs five to six dollars.

Landmark restaurants now open in the city include the Elite, owned by the Pappas family since 1903; Bodega Brew and Pub, owned for many years by the Bonadurer family; and Coney Island, on Fourth Street and now in other locations
also. Fayze’s on Fourth opened in 1972 as a pool hall-bar-restaurant, and became Fayze’s in 1987. The Freighthouse at 107 Vine is a national historic site; Piggy’s on Front has as its motto “Overlooks nothing but the Mississippi.” Schmidty’s, which features “home cooking,” is now a second generation family business; opened in 1955 by Arlene and Norbert Schmidt, it is run by their son.

Gone are the New Villa, Club 14, Chateau, and Stephan family restaurants, and others. A favorite for years was the Cerise, which was started in “speakeasy days” by Carl Gegenfurtner, then at 32nd and Fairchild; in the 1950s and ’60s, it was run by Gerald (Jerry) Heberlein. When it burned to the ground in 1962, Heberlein rebuilt at 1815 Ward Avenue. When he retired, it became Michael’s and then a Chinese restaurant. At present it is a Hmong Memorial Center owned by Dickinson Funeral Homes.

Also gone is Walt’s, which was located at Third and Mississippi Street on land once owned by Nathan Myrick. During the mid-twentieth century, it was known throughout the Midwest as a fine dining spot. Its history extends from 1866, when Julius Rossberg bought the property and built a grocery and saloon, through various ownerships and uses — lunchroom, speakeasy, and fine dining — until it closed in 1982. It became a hospitality center for Heileman’s Brewery next door until Heileman’s closed in 1999.

Though many old favorites, both food stores and restaurants, have closed, La Crosse seems to attract new ones in their place. Eating well in La Crosse is not a problem!

**Can-Do Arts**

*By Doris Kirkeeng*

Pioneer women were eager to decorate their homes and make them becoming. They decorated their walls and furniture with needlework, sketchings, artificial flowers, ribbons, scarves and bows. Painting on silk, satin, and velvet was a fad. Picture frames, rolling pins, milkstools, piano tops and bedsteads were decorated.

Charles Eastlake’s book, *Hints on Household Taste*, went through three editions. It dictated the hanging of curtains and pictures, carpets, color of walls, hinges on doors, and arrangements of furniture and china. Pioneers brought a mixture of ideas from their native countries, which sometimes helped.

Professor Knowles began the La Crosse Art School in 1883. The subjects were figure, landscape, flower painting, crayon, and India Ink portraits. F. Imer, a watch
repairer and a self-made painter, put on canvas a few scenes of actual persons and places in the city that have historical interest. Miss Annette Curtis taught large classes of drawing and painting among the “best families.” Frank C. Peyraud taught sketching classes, with his paintings hanging in some La Crosse homes. And in 1886, a Ladies Art Class Society studied famous paintings.

Sandor Landeau exhibited large collections of his paintings in the late 1890s. “The Remorse of Judas” and “The Village Teller” were approved in Paris Salons. “The Halt On the Mesa” was hung in the La Crosse Public Library in 1951.

Church art was carved from wood and marble by architect Egid Hackner and employees. In 1884 he supplied furniture and altars to many cities, large and small.

Franz Holzhuber painted scenes like logging, fur trading, railroad builders and surveyors laying out new towns, including La Crosse. From these, we can reconstruct visually the virgin beauty that once bordered Wisconsin on the west.

Map-making was both an art and a science in La Crosse’s early days. Most of the maps were surveyed, drawn and published by Henry Bliss and W.M. Spear.

Men’s and Women’s Sketch Clubs were formed in the 1930s. Local artists exhibited at the Vocational School. Carl Rau, originally from Germany, was a friend of artists and their cause. He was acquainted with great artists and made use of teachers who resided in La Crosse. He did some symbolic biblical scenes, figure painting, and landscapes. Arthur N. Colt, a student of famous artists and graduate of the Chicago Art Institute, taught painting at UW-Madison and founded the Colt School of Arts in that city. Area students took part in the Colt workshops.

The La Crosse Society of Arts and Crafts (LSAC) began meeting in 1961. In the late 1950s, one of the groups directed by Frances Burgess met in the bank building at Third and Main Street. The LSAC, incorporated by Attorney Alex Cameron, held its first show, at the Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium, on a rainy day with thousands attending. Since 1961, it has given scholarships to high school art students interested in advanced studies. The organization’s desire has always been to encourage the amateur, hobbyist, and handicapped. The latest annual shows have been held at the Southside Oktoberfest Grounds.

Sister Mary Margaret Schlosser has been teaching classes since 1982 and served on the LSAC board of directors. She excels, with work displayed in many galleries. Art G. Anderson is nationally known for the painted image for the Wisconsin State Wild Turkey Stamp in 1995 and the Federal Duck Stamp. His excellent paintings are exhibited in the Wilde’s Art Gallery. Peggy Baumgaertner, nationally recognized for her work in portrait painting, gives workshops internationally and receives at least $1,000 per painting. An example of her lifelike paintings is one of Dr. Frank Furlano on the second floor of the Gundersen Clinic. Her
portrait of Julie Mannion was entered into a contest of 123 paintings with 93 other artists, and won the honor of being reproduced on the cover of *Best of Portrait Painting* magazine.

In September of 1993, Art Hebberd received the John Stuart Curry Medal of Honor from Wisconsin Regional Arts Association, their highest award medal. Art’s contributions to the furthering of art on a volunteer basis led to this award, and La Vonne Mainz, LSAC president and state board member, presented it to him.

Eastbank is a group of artists that is an LSAC offshoot. For many years this group had the largest display area in the Pump House Regional Art Center, which serves as an exhibition center and showplace for regional participants. The group has held shows in private homes with excellent results. They try to keep their shows on a juried basis.

The AAUW has sponsored juried Art Fairs on the Green since 1959, on the UW-L campus. Also, scenery painting has been included in all La Crosse theaters through the years.

Weaver Sister Carlene Unser used a Guatemalan backstrap loom to do her work. She studied at Illinois State University and at San Jose State. Gretchen Zachel created weavings that reflect her personality, including blankets, rugs, table runners, place mats, wall hangings, and wildlife art.

In another area, Ann Kuehmichel works with wheel and kiln, creating pottery. Coletta Wais, a retired registered nurse, spent ten years doing ceramics. Keeping busy with molding, painting, cleaning, and firing products in her kiln, Wais produces exquisite ceramic pieces.

Andy Elmer traveled to the Rocky Mountains in Montana for cottonwood bark. He creates beautiful, detailed wood carvings. Albert Swartz accompanies his pencil and ink sketches of historic buildings with wood carvings made from wood pile scraps. Malcolm Clark displays art in wood carvings of birds selling at $150 to $2,000.

Dan Marcou studied jewelry-making under Bill Fiorini, who was famous for creating Damascus steel knives. Marcou displayed the results of metal working and rock carving as finished jewelry on September 28, 1996 at the Pump House.

The fountain, “Point of Origin,” in front of St. Francis Medical Center, was created by David Klahn, an art professor. The piece is an expression of love for the people he cherished in the community.

Mike Martino sculpted “Fledgling,” a fictional child with wings and a skateboard on North Fourth Street. “Hang On Dad,” a snow sculpture of a man and boy sledding, once graced Riverside Park. Martino, with Milwaukeeans Mike Sponlotz and Tom Queoff, working as a team, received a bronze medal for ice sculpting at the Winter Olympics Festival of the Arts at Nagano, Japan in 1998.

Paul T. Granlund, famous Minnesota bronze sculptor, has given us “Dancing St. Francis” on the Viterbo University campus, “Ascendance” and “Reflections III” at the La Crosse Public Library; and “Damascus Illumination” (Acts 9:3) at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, 520 West Avenue.

Sculptor Elmer Petersen has given La Crosse “The Good Shepherd,” at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church on Mormon Coulee Road; “Family,” in front of Gundersen Clinic; “La Crosse Players,” at the west end of Main Street; “Gambrinus,” at Heileman Corporate Headquarters, State and Second Street; “Eagle” at Riverside Park, which cost $55,000 in 1978; and “Woman,” in the lobby of Lutheran Hospital.

Numerous others have contributed to and are enjoying the beautiful world of art in La Crosse.

**Dance Away the Livelong Day**

*By Doris Kirkeeng*

La Crosse pioneers formed many clubs to satisfy their social needs. Even the militia companies, the temperance societies, and the fireman companies had their dances. Dancing clubs were numerous. One of the best known social centers was Germania Hall, built by members of the Deutscher Verein and other German culture societies. In 1891 Old Germania Hall was decorated for a ball to be held in the evening, but burned down at noon. It was rebuilt in 1892 at 720 Fifth Avenue South. The annual charity ball was held there with participants dancing to Langstadt’s “full orchestra.” The hacks were polished and lighted, pulled by prancing steeds. Those less prosperous but still of social status came by streetcar.

Women’s fine attire was described in the dancing section of the paper. Women were decked out in brocaded satin, silks with veiled chiffon, reception bonnets decorated with roses, toile of blue embroidered silk, while wearing ornaments of diamonds. Mrs. John (Mattie MacDonald) Bayer was general chairman of the Charity Ball for several years, and Mrs. Brindley was chairman from 1908 to 1911. A highlight was when $800 was raised for charity on November 14, 1903, from 500 guests.

The balls typically were comprised of 18 dances: waltz (four), quadrille and
waltz quadrille (three), lancers and polka (two each), Virginia Reel and Prairie Queen (one each). Other programs included the Galop and the Newport.

Along with the dance, those attending often had a very nice dinner and sometimes played cards. In 1897, the Rev. Dr. Harry W. Reed of First Baptist Church, and other ministers, felt “Charity” was a cloak for worldly pleasures. The following year, the orchestra played a concert before dancing, and the Young Ladies’ Mission Band led the Grand March. The last of the 40 annual charity balls was held in 1890. The Hall was renamed Pioneer, for patriotic reasons, during World War I and was razed in 1966 to make way for a new Number One Fire Station, which remains on the site.

Indmann Marking, a former NSP employee, was first manager of the Avalon Ballroom, located at 206 Copeland Avenue. He and his brothers, Vernon and Clifford, had managed the Old Rainbow Gardens dance spot, located in north La Crosse, which burned. Avalon stockholders comprised nine men, including Theodore Jankowski, who had retired after 30 years in the grocery and meat business.

The Avalon, once arguably the state’s greatest ballroom, had its first dance in December of 1927, and held its grand opening on April 18, 1928. Admission was $1 for gentlemen and 50 cents for ladies. Ideas for the pavilion were derived from dance spots in California by Marking. Spanish architecture, graceful arches, with cozy nooks and stars sparkling in blue sky ceilings, accompanied by enchanting orchestra music, were enjoyed by the dancers. Waltzes, polkas, fox-trots, two-step, variations of the schottische, and the Flying Dutchman were danced. When Archie Neuman was manager, from 1935 to 1940, members were required to wear ties and “Zoot Suiters” weren’t allowed. Underage beer drinkers were also forbidden. Mame McHugh, Neuman’s sister, was a ticket seller for 30 years. Guy Lombardo, Les Brown, Harry James, Sammy Kaye, Lawrence Welk, Louis Armstrong, Dick Jurgens and Ted Weems brought their bands to the Avalon for dancing and listening for crowds of up to 2,400.

Dock Lawson, from Iowa City, entertained on March 20, 1937, until 2:30 a.m. Jacob Zimmer discovered the Avalon on fire. Charles McInnes called the central fire station and three companies responded. The floor was warped, walls were blistered, instruments ruined, and a musical library destroyed. Nevertheless, the Avalon was restored soon after, in a modernistic way with blue mirrors behind the orchestra.

The building was used for conventions, banquets and wrestling shows in 1948. Its doors closed on June 30, 1968. It next was home to Nino’s Steak House until 1980, then the House of China Restaurant. Avalon II was established by Louis Ferris in a room next to the restaurant. It could hold 300 people, who danced to live music or records from the 1930s, ‘40s, and ’50s. The spirit, if not the size, of the old Avalon was duplicated. Ferris said it lasted about four months.
Ballrooms and beer gardens served as social centers for local German-Americans. Concordia Ballroom, 1129 La Crosse Street, was smaller but was another place where people celebrated weddings and danced to their favorite music. It was built in 1872 as a German singing society hall with Carl Ahrens serving as president. In 1876 it was called the Concordia Aid Society. It was closed on June 30, 1995, as 200 people danced the last dance. Shareholders pursued its designation as a historic site. Bernie Duerkop was instrumental in the reopening of the ballroom on September 30, 1995, with 100 loyal supporters.

In the early 1960s, an official proclamation by Mayor Milo Knutson and a resolution by the Greater La Crosse Chamber of Commerce named the city, “The Square Dance Capital of the World.” Outstanding groups were the “Happy Twirlers” and “Coulee Promenaders.” Five or six clubs had 200 members altogether. Sometimes meetings began with a potluck. Lessons were given, with the first one being free. On April 26, 1965, the first “Spring Fling” Festival was held, which brought dancers from eight Midwestern states. They met at the Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium and were sponsored by the Happy Twirlers.

Lorayne Fought, a 17-year-old high school student, played piano and accompanied the “Kiddie’s Hour” radio show six days a week at 5 p.m. She also played above the Majestic Theater in 1935 for Irene Nelson’s Dancing School, which began in 1930. She studied dance in Chicago and then took over Nelson’s dancing school. She taught there for 48 years. Then, Kim Faas, of La Crosse, took over and changed the name to the “Creative Dance Center.” In 1987, Tony and Colleen Balsamo became its owners. It is now the La Crosse Dance Center. Kathy Gorman, the Center’s artistic director and Viterbo dance instructor, has pleased the community with many fine dance programs, especially her annual production of the “Nutcracker.”

Kim Faas held the Mandala Dance Program at the Pump House Regional Art Center in 1988.

Sylvia Cobb began her school of dance in 1944 and sold it to Marilyn Wood in 1955, who taught for 35 years. Eight thousand students passed through her doors. She hung up her ballet slippers on June 15, 1996. Her school was purchased by Suzanne Swanson Wagner, who has had international experience. She also teaches ballroom dancing.

“Clog Day” was proclaimed on September 12, 1994, by Mayor Patrick Zielke. Teacher Jim Blumentritt says, “Clogging is not a plumbing problem,” rather it’s a combination of tap dancing, square dancing, and line dancing. Clogging, a folk dance, began 150 years ago in the “stomping grounds” of Appalachia. Blumentritt first became interested in clog dancing when he was a student at UW-L and was a five-year member of a campus folk dance group, the “L Bar,” performing with them on two tours of Europe.
The Arthur Murray Dance Studio was open for ballroom dancing lessons in the 1950s. Swing, tango and rumba were taught there. It was located above Soell's on Main Street.

On March 21, 1990, youngsters were offered fill-in parts when the Hartford Ballet Company performed *Romeo and Juliet* at Viterbo College. They included Chris Collins, McKinzie Sagelmayer and Sara Ziegler of La Crosse, Heidi Blihovde of Westby, and Rusty King of La Crescent, Minnesota.

The tenth annual local performance of the *Nutcracker Ballet* was performed at Viterbo College in December of 1999. The production was sponsored by the La Crosse Dance Center, with Katie Connelly starring as Maria.

In 1993 a group including senior citizens was pictured in the local news, tap-dancing their way to preservation at the Harry J. Olson Senior Center, proving that dancing provides enjoyment, good fellowship and exercise.

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**Theater and Vaudeville Stay Alive**

*By Joyce Beilke*

Since La Crosse is located on the banks of the Mississippi River, showboats played a preliminary role in the development of theater in La Crosse. There are three recorded occasions of showboat theatricals being performed here early on. The first occurred on August 3 and 4, 1857, on the Spalding–Rogers Steamer Banjo. The entertainment presented was Davis’ Oleo Minstrels. The Spalding–Rogers also docked in June 1858, but without minstrels. Instead there was an exhibition of trained monkeys, dogs, goats, a bearded woman, giants, the Italian bird warbler, the steam calliope, and a ladies’ saxophone band. The next showboat was Eugene Robinson’s Three Mammoth Floating Palaces, and it docked here on July 11, 1889. One place was a museum, one an exposition of wonders, and one the grand opera house. The showboats docked at the foot of Main Street and charged 50 cents admission for adults and 25 cents for children.

The La Crosse Opera House was the city’s first notable building dedicated to public amusement. Marcus M. Pomeroy built it in 1867 at the corner of Fourth and Main Street; it cost $80,000. Not called the La Crosse Opera House at first, the theater was lighted with gas and its stage was 24 by 32 feet, and according to Benjamin F. Bryant, in his *Memoirs of La Crosse County*, had all the furnishings needed for a modern theater. The *La Crosse Democrat* stated, “It is a fact not generally known that this city has the finest opera house, erected by M.M. Pomeroy that there is in the state.” (Admittedly, this statement was probably biased since
Pomeroy owned both the Democrat and the theater). According to Pomeroy’s account, the main floor seated 1,000 people and the circular balcony seated 400. Private boxes at each side of the proscenium were carpeted and furnished in what Pomeroy called “good style.” The opera house was not a success and was sold for $14,000. In 1879, it was remodeled and renamed the La Crosse Opera House.

According to the Chronicle, Mr. W.J. Gunning painted entirely new sets of scenery. The drop curtain was very picturesque, one the public would not soon grow weary of. The Chronicle continued by describing nine additional scenes, the first representing rocks piled in confusion in the foreground, a hill bare of trees, a waterfall, and a mountain over which white clouds were flying. The article described in similar detail the horizon, palace interior, dark wood, the garden, the street house, the fancy chamber, the kitchen and the prison. All of these scenes had the necessary wings, which were first-class, modern, and very elegant.

Another theater, Germania Hall, at Fifth and Market Street, was used primarily for amateur productions. The stage was 82 feet deep and 52 feet wide. The hall held 500 people, plus 250 in the gallery.

A third theater building, the La Crosse Theater, opened on January 11, 1889, where the Hoeschler Building, now the Schneider Building, stands. The stage was 74 by 45 feet and had a proscenium 36 feet wide. The stage had six traps, one extending its entire width. There were 14 dressing rooms, seven on each side of the stage. Under the stage, separate dressing rooms for black minstrel groups were available. The drape curtain was 30 by 36 feet and a scene of Jerusalem was painted on it. The stage was equipped with 20 sets of scenery. The Chronicle told of electric lights used to illuminate the theater, with a total of 16 candlepower lamps. There were 128 stage lamps, 28 foot lamps, and four of the borders had 32 lamps with reflectors and dimmers. Colored lights were used for creating moods. Lights in the auditorium were fitted with gas in case something went wrong with the electric ones.

At the opening, the president of the theater company, J.W. Losey, stepped in front of the curtain and addressed a house of 1,200 people. An opening was an event, and the audience was dressed in good style. The house was well protected from fire. Water was stored on the roof, and there was a pipe and hose on each side of the backstage area as well as one front stage. Fires were fairly common in the nineteenth century. The La Crosse Theater was much better equipped than most in comparably-sized (20,000 population) cities.

Losey made a point of stressing the strong structure of the theater, for he said the foundation’s walls were two feet thick, laid on a footing of stone four to six feet wide, and well embedded in the sand. The lower floor rested on 50 stone piers surrounded by concrete. The upper floor rested on pillars supported by piers not
connected to the lower floor. Talk had it that Hoeschler only had to remodel the old structure because it was so well-built.

On January 3, 1910, for its opening, it was possible for 1,000 people in the new Majestic Theater to have an excellent view of the stage. No two seats were directly in line, and the floor was raised so that there was no difficulty seeing over those in front. The Italian Nightingale was the opening performance. Denis L. Palmer noted that the Majestic’s stage was 63 feet wide and 38 feet deep.

The Majestic booked headline plays and Orpheum circuit vaudeville acts. Among the many stock companies that played there were the city favorites, Guy and Eloda Beach. Appearing with them were Jack and Tiny Martin. It later became the Wisconsin Theater.

Until 1908, when the Rosenthal Company opened the Bijou as a vaudeville house, the La Crosse Theater was the only one in town offering live entertainment on its stage. The Bijou was a small house with a capacity of about 400, located at 111 S. Third Street, halfway between Main and Pearl streets on the east side of the street.

The Constantine Brothers bought the Bijou in 1909 and converted it to a combination movie and vaudeville operation, showing a reel of film before each five-act vaudeville show and another reel immediately after. During its heyday, the Bijou presented such greats as Will Rogers doing his gum-chewing monologue and rope-twirling act; Al Jolson, in black face, also appeared at the old Bijou, as did Buster Keaton and his mother and father — as acrobats!

Phil Dyer, writing in the May 16, 1979 La Crosse Tribune, remembered La Crosse’s high-class vaudeville acts and full orchestras appearing at the Riviera Theater at 1215 Caledonia Street.

The Fifth Avenue Theater became a supper club adjoining the Cavalier Inn. In 1968, it was converted to theatrical use and has been the home of the very popular La Crosse Community Theater ever since. It seats 297 people and presents seven plays per season.

La Crosse no longer has a theater solely dedicated to professional entertainment. Viterbo Theater presents its Bright Star program, bringing seasonal plays and musical entertainment. Both UW-L and Viterbo University present performances by their drama departments. The La Crosse Civic Center books road shows and sometimes attracts crowds of 8,000 for big-name rock and country performers. But gone are the days when going to the theater was a gala event, with its patrons dressing in all their finery. Those days of innocence and total awe occurred when the magic flicker of the gaslights and the subtle flutter of the parting curtain made audiences gasp with anticipation.

Now — on with the show!
Keeping in Step with the Music

By La Vonne Mainz

Webster’s Dictionary defines music as any sweet, pleasing, or harmonious sounds or sound. Music has the ability to soothe, relax and inspire the listener. According to one historian, La Crosse first heard music on Christmas Day, 1851, at founder Nathan Myrick’s home. J.B. Brisbois of Prairie du Chien played the violin while the settlers danced. Many German settlers came to La Crosse in the 1850s, bringing a love of music and singing. Ernest Blashek, a German violinist, came to the city in 1859, giving music lessons to Losey family members for nine years.

John Ulrich and August Steinlein formed a society for singing on August 11, 1856, called the La Crosse Maennerchor, later known as Liederkranz. June 1869 marked an important month in La Crosse musical activities. The Normanna Sengerkor was organized then, the oldest Norwegian singing society in the United States. The Concordia Singing Society was organized in 1870. Years later it was renamed The Concordia Aid Society.

In June 1855 the first local band, called the La Crosse Saxe Horn Band, was organized. By 1858 or 1859 there were two bands going, a German band and the Light Guard Band. The German band continued to provide music for civic affairs into the 1870s. The Light Guard Band, inactive during the Civil War, was reorganized in 1872 and renamed the Silver Band.

The first orchestra in La Crosse, formed in 1873 by E.E. Blashek, lasted only one year. It remained for Professor Isidor Tippmann, a local music teacher, to give La Crosse its first real orchestra in the mid-1880s.

Moritz Langstadt started another orchestra in 1889 and was hired for balls, cotillions, and Sunday afternoon concerts at Germania Hall. They rehearsed every Sunday at the home of John M. Levy. Both Tippmann’s and Langstad’s orchestras had steady engagements in the local theaters. Langstadt left La Crosse in 1904 and his organization came under the direction of Rudolph Kreutz until 1910. Another name that appeared in the 1890s was Marcellus Greenwood. He organized a brass band and gave public concerts in 1898 and 1899, but his band died out when he left town.

The La Crosse Musicians Union Local No. 201 was chartered on June 19, 1902; it was one of the earliest musicians locals in the country. On May 6, 1914, there was another attempt to form a symphony orchestra. It gave only four concerts, the last on February 3, 1916. U.S. entry into World War I contributed to its demise.

In 1927 Father Oscar Cramer formed the Cathedral orchestra. He invited non-Catholics to join. When he left La Crosse, Rudolph Kreutz took over and
changed the name to the La Crosse Symphony Orchestra. They had their first concert in the Rivoli Theater at Easter, 1928, and their final concert in April 1933.

The La Crosse City Band, later renamed the La Crosse Concert Band, was subsidized by the city council and organized in 1931 in conjunction with the completion of the Wendell Anderson Memorial Bandshell at Riverside Park. Although the city no longer is a major sponsor of the Concert Band, the band continues to present concerts in parks during the summer season.

In 1941, a 50-piece symphony orchestra, directed by Leigh Elder, was formed here under the sponsorship of the Vocational Adult School and John Coleman, who gave the orchestra a home and financial support. The orchestra was incorporated in 1947 and has continued to provide the city with performances ever year. Amy Mills is the present conductor.

Music has been taught in La Crosse schools since Ella Doty was hired as a music teacher (1881-87). Early yearbooks of the high schools — Central, Logan and Aquinas — show photos of their bands, orchestras, glee clubs, and choirs. Show choirs are now popular at the high schools. The La Crosse Teachers College, the present-day UW-La Crosse, has always had music and bands as part of its curriculum. John Alexander directed the UW-La Crosse Marching Band for more than 25 years. Viterbo University is also noted for its fine music department.

During World War II, as a morale booster, Trane Company workers formed a men’s glee club, singing patriotic and spiritual songs directed by Walter Albrecht. Motor-Meter Gauge Company workers and their families formed a concert band directed by Russell Wartinbee, giving concerts in Pioneer Hall.

In the 1950s, music for young people was headed for a big change as we entered the rock ‘n’ roll era, and Lindy Shannon helped to shape the music scene locally. The T-J’s were the city first rock band to make a recording. Their record, “Party, Party” and “Take My Love” was distributed in 1957. Another group, Dave Kennedy and the Ambassadors, made the national market. Their song, “Wooden Heart,” sold about 32,000 records.

In 1968 another local rock group, the Unchained Mynds, recorded their single-record hit, “We Can’t Go On This Way,” which sold more than 130,000 copies. Its record was introduced and played by Dick Clark on his American Bandstand show and was the “Spotlight Pick of the Week” in Billboard Magazine, according to Lindy Shannon’s September 30, 1989, article in the La Crosse Tribune.

Some of the other bands and rock groups begun in the 1970s included The Misfits, Easy Street, Changing Times, Townsmen, Cicero Park, Wet Behind the Ears, The Great River Big Band (led by Greg Balfany), and the River City Blue Grass Band. Jazz bands included Dick Chaffee’s River City Jazz Band, Bob Hirsch’s Jazz All Stars, and Al Townsend and his Wonderful World Jazz Band.
The Blue Stars Drum and Bugle Corps began in 1964 as a parade corps under the guidance of Jim Sturgis, Ron Moriarity, and Frank Van Voorhis, with Dave Dummer as director. It has always scored high in competition. In 1989 and 1993, it was world champion in Division III Drum Corps International. The Warriors Baton and Drum Corps was organized in 1965. Director Gail Zahn has been involved with the corps since its inception. It, too, has placed high in competition, winning U.S. Twirling Association titles in several years.

The history of music in La Crosse would be amiss if the name Frank Italiano were left out. In 1960, Italiano put together a group of 60 musicians to present “Music Under the Stars” concerts. From that modest beginning grew the Great River Symphony and the Symphony School of America, involving direct instruction of young hopefuls by masters in their field. Italiano’s Da Capo Concert Band was formed in 1984 and has performed many concerts here. It is now directed by his son-in-law, Paul Boarman. In 1974, Italiano received the Governor’s Award in the Arts for his outstanding work.

Juanita Beck (1910-93) gave piano lessons when she was 16. In 1946, she and her husband “Brownie” purchased a 1920s-era calliope and rebuilt it. Over the years she was the mainstay in countless community events and parades. She pumped out lively tunes in her bright red circus-wagon calliope that was pulled by six midget mules.

Songs have been written about La Crosse. Mrs. J. Kerr wrote “La Crosse the Beautiful” in 1920. In 1960 Mrs. Melvin (Joyce Anderson) Beilke, a popular child singer and entertainer in the Tri-State Area, wrote and recorded new lyrics to “It’s De-lovely” to go with the slogan “Lovely, Lively, La Crosse.” In 1966, music professor Dr. Truman Hayes wrote the words and music for “Ballad of La Crosse.” Haye’s composition, “Orchestral Suite,” was performed by the city’s symphony.

The Variety Singers, organized in 1977 by Art Lappin, bring a bit of sunshine, singing mostly at nursing homes and hospitals. Directed by Joye Burand with Elizabeth Bulger, as pianist, they rehearse at the Harry J. Olson Senior Center.

In 1947, the Coulee Chordsmen Chorus, La Crosse’s chapter of the Society for the Preservation of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America, Inc., directed by Alvin Mikelson, began weekly rehearsals. Present director is Mike Hengelsberg. The chorus competes regionally and internationally, and gives an annual show in the spring.

Finally, Daniel Johnson-Wilmot chartered the La Crosse Boychoir in 1974 with 25 members. In 1986, he also began the Three Rivers Chorus, the female counterpart to the Boychoir. Johnson-Wilmot gave up his Three Rivers directorship in 1997. Both choirs have toured internationally and set high standards for musical performances.
La Crosse, with its beautiful setting between the Mississippi River and lush green hills and valleys, is a great inspiration for writers. When the village of La Crosse became the city of La Crosse in 1856, the population of this fledgling city was about 1,637 people. Interest in literary and intellectual matters was evident in the several literary clubs formed in the second half of the nineteenth century.

An early La Crosse author was Marcus Mills “Brick” Pomeroy (1833-96), who came to La Crosse in 1860 and published a newspaper, the Democrat. The first two of his six books were published in 1868: Sense, an advice book on honesty, business, courtship, marriage, etc., and Nonsense, a narrative book describing parties, picnics, sleigh rides and other social events.

Lute A. Taylor (1835-73), another author of that period, wrote a book called Lute Taylor’s Chip Basket. In that book he made the following observation: “Dress is to a woman what the binding is to a book — it may improve the appearance, but cannot give increased value to the worth or worthlessness of that which it adorns.”

Hardware businessman Walter Brown (1826-1901) authored several books after he retired. The most popular was Mitylene, published in 1887. He wrote it in the manner of a Robinson Crusoe novel about shipwrecked people on a tropical island.

George W. Peck (1840-1916) came to La Crosse in 1871. He purchased Pomeroy’s Democrat in 1872 and renamed it the Liberal Democrat. Two years later he started a paper called Peck’s Sun. Peck later became governor of Wisconsin, serving from 1893 to 1897. He authored several books, including the popular Peck’s Bad Boy series (1883-1912).


Albert Hart Sanford co-authored with Dr. J.A. James several textbooks on American history and government. He also compiled a series of wall maps for American history classes and wrote articles in the Wisconsin Magazine of History and the La Crosse County Historical Sketches. He co-authored with Harry J. Hirshheimer and Robert F. Fries The History of La Crosse, Wisconsin 1841-1900, published in 1951.

Robert F. Fries wrote Empire in Pine, the Story of Lumbering in Wisconsin 1830-1900. Fries was awarded the David Clark Everest Prize in Wisconsin Economic History in 1949.
Some other early La Crosse authors were Rockwell E. Osborne, Harry Bigelow, Stephen Southwick Heberd, Joseph Petty, Augustus Steinlein, Blanche Tucker Roosevelt, Mary E. Tucker, and Bella French Swisher. Later authors of note included Grant Hyde Code, Leslie Gorer, and Helen Ferris.

Helen J. Ferris (1890-1969) lived in La Crosse as a young girl. She wrote ten books and edited 17 others for young readers. Her first publication was in the Wisconsin Audubon Magazine when she was 11. The New York Times ran an article about her when she died.

Three writers from La Crosse and one who grew up on the outskirts of La Crosse have won the nationally prestigious Pulitzer Prize. They are Howard Mumford Jones, John Willard Toland, William Mullen, and Hamlin Garland. Although Garland never lived in the city of La Crosse, he grew up just a few miles to the north, in Green's Coulee near Onalaska, later buying a house in West Salem.

Howard Mumford Jones was born in Saginaw, Michigan, in 1892. In 1901 his family moved to 1632 Ferry Street in La Crosse. He graduated from Central High School and received his bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1914 and a master's degree from the University of Chicago in 1915. Of the 30-odd books Mumford authored or edited, some significant titles are Ideas in America, The Frontier in American Fiction, and One Great Society: Humane Learning in the United States. It was for his 1964 study of early American influences, O Strange New World, that he won the Pulitzer Prize in nonfiction. Significantly, Howard Jones worked as Hamlin Garland's secretary during the summer of 1912.

John Willard Toland was born in La Crosse in 1912. He attended Philips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, graduating in 1932, and received his bachelor's degree from Williams College in Massachusetts in 1936. By age 42 he had written 12 plays, five novels, and more than 100 short stories, all unpublished. His first published book, Ships in the Sky, appeared in 1967. Battle: The Story of the Bulge, The Flying Tigers, and The Last 100 Days are among the several books he wrote using factual accounts of World War II. In 1970, his book on Japan's role in that war, The Rising Sun, won the Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction.

William Mullen was born in La Crosse on October 9, 1944, and graduated from Central High School in 1962. He then attended the UW-La Crosse, and the UW-Madison, where he graduated with a journalism degree in 1967. Mullen, a special assignment writer for the Chicago Tribune, was a summer journalism intern for the La Crosse Tribune in 1966. He won his first Pulitzer Prize in 1973 for his work as an undercover reporter in the Chicago Board of Election commissioner's office. William Mullen received his second Pulitzer in 1975, for international reporting.

Raymond Curtis Bice (1896-1994) shared his memories in newspaper articles he wrote for the Tribune and in three books, A Century to Remember (1993), Years
to Remember (1985), and Treasures of the Forest (1945). He built more than 400 homes in La Crosse, and served in the Wisconsin Legislature for 22 years. At his death, Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson said of him, “His word was his bond. His integrity was beyond reproach.”

Myer Katz (1921-93) wrote about La Crosse history. His book, Echoes of the Past: Vignettes of Historic La Crosse, was published by the La Crosse and Washburn Foundations in 1985. He won several awards, including the award of merit from the Wisconsin Council for Local History.

La Crosse Tribune staff book authors include Jerome Felsheim, Robert S. Gallagher, Ken Brown, Earl Voss, and E. Louise Miller.

In the medical profession, Drs. C. Frederick Midelfort, C. Norman Shealy, and William A. Henke are among those who have authored books.

Academics have made many literary contributions locally. Among them is Richard Boudreau, an associate professor of English at the UW-La Crosse. He wrote a book about Hamlin Garland and published articles in several newspapers. He has also authored The Literary Heritage of Wisconsin, Vol. 1 (1986) and Vol. II (1995), Juniper Press.

Mauree Applegate Clack wrote six books on children and writing, and also hosted a Madison radio program called The Wisconsin School of the Air. Other UW-L faculty authors are Barry Clark, Political Economy: A Comparative Approach; Joyce Grill, The Accompanist: Yes, It Really Happened; Tess Hollenback, Mysticism: Experience, Response & Empowerment; and Kent Koppelman, The Fall of a Sparrow, which was inspired by the death of his son.

William Pemberton, another UW-L faculty member, has penned several books. His latest is titled Ronald Reagan: A Conservative For All Seasons (Sharpe, 1997). UW-L faculty member Paul Theobold wrote, Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride and the Renewal of Community. Professor Annette White-Parks has contributed three books. Her latest is Tricksterism in Turn of Century Literature. Other academic authors included Mary Hebberd, John Judson, Ferdinand Lipovetz, Hans Reuter, and Charley Swayne, all past or present UW-L faculty members.


Muriel J. Blackdeer, who lived in La Crosse at one time, wrote a book about her husband, Alvin Blackdeer. His Native American heritage is described in her book, An Eagle Blessed Our Home (Skandisk, Inc. 1994).

La Crosse is home to several literary groups. Among them are the Coulee Region Scribes, organized in 1972 as the La Crosse Writers Club; Word Weavers
Revisited, organized in 1997 at Red Oak Books; and the Barnes and Noble Writers Group, started in 1998. Other groups that celebrate literature also exist in the city, such as the former Bookfellows Club of the American Association of University Women, Friends of Libraries groups and Campus Dames.

Photography: Recording Time

By Edwin Hill

We will probably never know the name of the first photographer, or daguerreotypist, who took pictures in La Crosse. Louis Daguerre's invention came to the United States in late 1839, but it was probably was not used in the La Crosse area until the mid or late 1840s. There were few residents here in those years, and this itinerant photographer wouldn't have stayed long. We not only don't know his name, but also don't have any known examples of his work.

The first resident daguerreotypist was probably Augustus Wilcox in 1853. He set up shop at the corner of Fourth and Main Street in June of that year, and seems to have disappeared by the end of that same year. We don’t have any known examples of his work either, although one correspondent reported seeing a Wilcox daguerreotype at an auction in Minnesota in 1976 or 1977.

James Mohr arrived next, in late 1853, and he may have used Wilcox's rooms. He was a First Ward alderman in 1856, but disappeared from records after that. J.S. Patten, another photographer, succeeded Mohr at the same address. Then came James Boycott, Mr. Summerhayes, and Henry Heath, and La Crosse has never been without resident commercial photographers since those meager mid-nineteenth century years.

The 1850s saw the first real population growth in the city, and photography paralleled that growth. Photography in La Crosse was often a part-time occupation, coupled perhaps with another trade of an artistic or technical nature. These occupations typically included painting, engraving, printing, picture-framing, or decorating.

Locally, the chronology of photographic processes looks something like this: the daguerreotype was produced from the mid-1840s to about 1856; the ambrotype from 1855 to about 1870; the dry collodion plate from 1860 to the 1880s; the gelatin emulsion process from the 1880s to the present; the tintype from 1858 to the early 1900s; and the nitrate negative from 1890 to 1934. These dates lag somewhat from those published in photo histories, which are based on historical records in major metropolitan cities. It was common for photographers to use more than one process as technology and demand evolved.
Nearly all of the surviving early photographs were studio portraits. The more prosperous early studios had a selection of backdrops from which a customer could choose. These were often classical scenes, gardens, outdoor panoramas, or vaguely occupational settings. More modest studios had little selection, resulting in sometimes odd, indistinct, or just plain awful portrait settings. There were floating photographic galleries on the river, going from town to town, as well as galleries in railroad cars, and these often used sections of old carpet nailed to a wall as backdrops.

Among early known local photographs is an ambrotype, taken in about 1856, of a musical group called the Bingo Club. There are also some fine tintypes of Sunday school children and their teachers taken in 1860, and the La Crosse County Historical Society has tintypes of Civil War soldiers and units taken in the early 1860s. This writer has seen no local street scenes or outdoor views from the daguerreian or ambrotype period.

The earliest surviving views of downtown La Crosse are stereoviews, appearing first in the 1860s and continuing into the 1880s, with a few in the 1890s. The stereoview, taken with a special double-lensed camera, was a card-mounted pair of photos which, when used with a viewer, produced a three-dimensional effect. Among local stereographers were Charles Bayley, James Boycott, Henry Heath, and W.H. Lathrop. Some of the best local stereoviews were taken by the Winona, Minnesota, firm of Elmer and Tenney.

Of passing interest is Mark Kellogg, 1833-76, a local telegrapher, newspaperman, and photographer, who died with Custer at the Battle of the Little Big Horn. His last-known written words were, “I go with Custer and will be at the death.” Mark’s father, Simeon, was La Crosse’s postmaster for a time and owned a hotel at Second and Pearl Street.

As processes and tastes evolved, more candid photographs were produced, and more outdoor scenes. The first portraits tended to be stiffly formal. The subjects did not smile. Photography was a significant event in those early days, and the portraits reflect these solemn occasions. It was not until the 1880s locally that photography became inexpensive enough to become common. By this time, a family could buy a dozen copies of a photo for two dollars. In 1888, Eastman Kodak produced the first commercially successful roll-film camera, and amateur photography became immensely popular. With faster processing, cheaper film and cameras, and the popularity of candid photography, the quality of these images declined. This situation still prevails today, as the taking of pictures reaches billions of images per year, while the comparative historical and artistic quality has proportionately declined.

Amateur photography still plays an important role in our lives, of course. In earlier years, such amateurs as George Mariner took pictures that commercial
photographers were not taking. Mariner produced some fine local scenes in about 1895. He understood the value of documenting houses and their interiors. He was a pharmacist, and his Mariner’s Drug Store at 425 Main Street carried a line of Kodak products and supplies. The drugstore disappears from city directories in 1917. The photo archives at the La Crosse County Historical Society and at Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse, contain thousands of excellent photos taken by talented amateurs, and by newspaper photographers whose assignments brought them into contact with many aspects of community and personal life.

While some of La Crosse’s commercial photographers joined trade associations and sometimes enjoyed commercial and award successes outside the city, the amateurs were also interested in becoming better photographers. The La Crosse Camera Club was organized in 1938, with Art Hebberd, Victor Shimanski and John Freisinger in founding roles. This club has continued its activities without interruption for more than 60 years, holding its meetings in various places in the city. It usually has 30-some members, and holds monthly as well as year-end competitions. Members’ photographs are often placed in publications and regional contests. The camera club concept is based in part on the philosophy that the taking of pictures requires serious intellectual attention. The club’s exhibitions demonstrate the importance and success of that philosophy.

A lesser-known aspect of local photographic history is the manufacture of cameras. The first such production locally was the Comet Camera, manufactured by Eugene Gleason in about 1893 in Onalaska. The firm moved that year, or early the next year, to La Crosse. It was incorporated as the Aiken-Gleason Company in 1896, then changed its name to the Imperial Camera and Manufacturing Company early in 1901. The first was bought out by the Century Camera Company in early 1903 and moved to Rochester, New York. Century was purchased by Eastman Kodak, which continued to use the Century name for a line of cameras. The Imperial cameras included both box and folding plate models in varying sizes, and these turn up occasionally in the collectible and antique market.

Another interesting sidelight is the Phototake Camera, patented by Henry Wilsie of La Crosse in 1895. This camera was manufactured in Chicago. It was a five-exposure unit with provision for five two inch-by-two inch glass plates in a cylindrical drum. An outer drum was rotated to bring each of the plates into line behind a simple lens. The camera kit sold for $2.50 in 1896 and 1897, then disappeared from the market.

As the twenty-first century begins, the role of photography and the photographic image seems secure. It has been estimated that the average citizen sees tens of thousands of images each day, coming from every direction. The technology of images is changing so rapidly that to predict anything seems foolish. Newspapers, traditionally massive users of images, employ photographers less
often, and digital images more often. The ability to alter and manipulate images presents serious ethical problems as well as creative possibilities. Still, the capacity of a single image to inform, startle, illuminate, and to stir memory, will endure. We owe much to the men and women whose photographic contributions help inform and delight our world.

Radio, TV, and Movies: Mainly Entertainment

By David Marcou

Radio got its start in La Crosse in about 1923, when Ben Ott founded a station — the Ott Radio Company’s WABN. The station had its tower on the northwest corner of 17th and State Street. After several moves and sales, a new building housed the reorganized station in 1933 — WKBH, Inc.

This city has heard many local radio personalities on air over time. Jack Martin, for one, who was born in Kentucky in 1892 and died in 1979, began at WKBH in the 1930s. He had done a stint in vaudeville, and later also worked with WKBT-TV. He was still active at WKBH when it became WIZM in 1971. Martin gained fame as the “Iron Man of Radio” after working 5,000 days straight at WKBH.

Another such personality was Charlie Kearns, who broadcast sports for WKTY for more than 30 years. His daily Lead Balloon Show was among the station’s oldest and most popular. Station general manager Bob Topinka told the La Crosse Tribune in 1979, “WKTY and Charlie Kearns are sometimes considered one and the same.”

Kearns was at WKTY when it was bought from the Tribune in 1954 by Herbert H. Lee. The newspaper owners were forced by FCC rules to sell the station if they wanted to buy into the then-newly established TV station, WKBT, an investment the newspaper owners later disposed of. After graduating from high school in Minnesota, Lee took a correspondence course in radio, then worked summers as a radio engineer and a self-employed used-radio salesman. He eventually graduated with a bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Minnesota in 1945.

Lee worked on one project for a U.S. Navy research laboratory. Then in 1947, he and two other partners began a station in Faribault, Minnesota. In 1954 Lee sold his share to buy WKTY, and offered future five-term mayor Milo G. Knutson the job of news director at WKTY. During this time, there were some sensational murder cases, plus the disappearance of Evelyn Hartley, and the two men made
the most of them. Knutson ran for mayor and won, and eventually became a state senator and gubernatorial candidate — all the while continuing as news director. Knutson’s daily newscast from Madison also helped WKTY.

Jean Gitz Bassett and Joe Rohrer were two of three partners (the other was Roy Phillipe) who bought WLCX in 1957, becoming the station’s fifth set of owners. Bill Bruring, who got his start at WKBH in 1945 and later began WWLA-FM, said about Rohrer, “There I was, beginning a station that would be more competition for him, and he was helping me. He would do anything for anybody.”

Born in Illinois in 1924, Bassett worked in Colorado and New York City radio, and became the first woman president in the then-109-year history of the La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce. Rohrer said, “There isn’t a job in the station she can’t handle . . . [and she] can go down and work the board and do a better job than most men.”

Other local radio stars have included Alma Burns Zahn, best known for her Party Line morning show on WLCX, and Martin “Brucie Bumchuckles” Severson, a Vietnam vet-deejay for Magic 105-FM (WLXR), a light rock station.

A Tribune story by Mike Starling in 1996 noted, “With about a dozen commercial stations in the La Crosse listening market, the area is already competitive. Dick Record, president of Family Radio, Inc., said that La Crosse County is the fourth most competitive market in the United States, based on number of stations per capita.” Originally, all local radio stations carried AM programs; but by 1999, FM was more popular. WIZM has both AM and FM programming.

WKBT-Channel 8 was La Crosse’s first TV station when it signed on the air in 1954. That pioneer station has always emphasized strong local news and weather coverage. In its early years, WKBT was affiliated with the CBS, NBC and DuMont networks. In 1957 the station began broadcasting CBS programs exclusively. First owned by local businessmen, it was sold to Gross Telecasting in 1969 and then to Backe Communications in 1983. Young Broadcasting, Inc. bought WKBT in 1986. The station is now located at the corner of Sixth and King Street in La Crosse. Key personnel include news director Anne Paape and reporters Jennifer Livingston, Alexandra Renslo, Lisa Klein, Dan Clouse, Cory Malles and Bryan Ekern.

La Crosse’s WXOW-Channel 19 was founded in 1970 and has been an ABC affiliate ever since. In January 1995, Tak Communications, an owner of stations in Madison, Wausau and Eau Claire, as well as La Crosse, sold its Wisconsin stations to Shockley Communications Corp. Key personnel for WXOW include news director Sean Dwyer and reporters Scott Hackworth, Dave Solie, Martha Koloski, Marla Cichowski, Sarah Carlson, Kristy Blasey, Chris Stauffer, Dan Breeden, and Scott Emerich.

In 1986, WLAX-Channel 25, now a Fox affiliate, signed on the air as an independent station. Its original lineup comprised old movies and sitcom reruns —
like *I Love Lucy* and *The Beverly Hillbillies*. In 1999, sitcoms like *Seinfeld* and *M*A*S*H*, professional wrestling, and science fiction shows like *The X-Files* drew the most viewers.

In 1994, another local TV station opened — KQEG-Channel 50. Billing itself as a “family station,” as co-owner Perry St. John said that year, “Eagle TV” had a community television license, which allowed it to broadcast up to 10,000 watts of power, transmitting a signal 20 miles in any direction. At that time, old movies, including black-and-white classics, were broadcast by KQEG in addition to series like the 1960s *Ozzie and Harriet Show*. In 1999, children’s shows like *Doug* and *Recess* also were popular.

Channels 8 and 19 have competed head-to-head since 1970, but in recent years, the birth of numerous new cable channels has spread out the competitive commitment of both. Cable brought in dozens of other channels to La Crosse, and the use of satellite dishes brought in hundreds of channels to those who could afford those services.

An educational alternative TV station, WHLA-Channel 31, La Crosse, went on the air on December 3, 1973. Part of the six-station Wisconsin Educational Television Network, which is now the Wisconsin Public Television system, WHLA has had its share of technical and financial problems over time, but maintains a loyal audience. In 1979, more than half of public TV’s programming was devoted to instructional use. In 1999, programs like *Sesame Street* and *Get Real* for youngsters, and *Mystery* and *Masterpiece Theater* for adults, kept thousands of statewide viewers and corporations contributing funds.

In 1916, La Crosse’s first building constructed solely for the showing of movies was opened. The Strand was built by the American Amusement Company. It had 400 seats and was located at 1113 Jackson Street, one mile from downtown. In 1919 A.J. Cooper came to this city and bought The Strand, along with the downtown Casino (at 303 Main Street) and the Dome (on Rose Street in north La Crosse, and later named the Rialto). Then, in 1920, the Cooper Amusement Company was begun, with officers of the La Crosse Theaters Company involved. The latter company would eventually take over many of the local Cooper chain theaters. The Strand operated until the building was razed in 1955.

In the early 1920s, when good vaudeville acts became scarce, La Crosse’s theaters began showing silent movies. Smaller, less successful theaters operating around that time included the Unique and the Star, both located downtown. More successful venues were the Majestic, located where the Cathedral parking lot is today, which burned on December 28, 1952; the Bijou, at 111 S. Third Street; the Lyric, where Lynne Tower is today; the Riviera, at 1215 Caledonia Street; Dreamland, where Community Loan and Finance Co. later was located (at 111 Caldeonia Street); the 960-seat Hollywood, still on the northeast corner of South
Fifth Avenue and Jay Street; the Fifth Avenue, located in the same building that the Community Theater uses today, and, like the Hollywood, begun by the Welworth Co. of Minneapolis; Cinema I and Cinema II, at 2032 Ward Avenue; and King Cinemas I and II, at 216 S. 7th Street; the last four all owned by the Marcus theater chain; and the Valley Square Theaters, at the Valley View Mall. The city’s two drive-ins, no longer in operation, also were popular for many years — the North Star and the Starlite.

However, one movie theater, the Rivoli, at 117 N. Fourth Street, has stood out over time in La Crosse. With a seating capacity of 1,025, the Rivoli is the largest and oldest of the remaining film houses here, and also houses several offices. Designed by local architects Parkinson & Dockendorff, it was built for the La Crosse Theaters Company by F.R. Schwalbe & Sons, who also constructed the Majestic Theater for Koppelberger and Rosenstein in 1910.


“The silent feature that afternoon was Yes or No, which starred Norma Talmadge. . . . It was preceded by The Great Mirror — a scenic travelogue — and then Four Times Foiled — a Christie comedy which featured a chimpanzee.

“Matinee prices were 11 [cents] for children, 28 [cents] for adults. Evening prices were 11 [cents] and 33 [cents]. . . .”

From the 1930s on, the Rivoli booked all the big pictures, including films from MGM, R.K.O Paramount and Fox. When the Hollywood opened in 1936, the Rivoli lost some of its Paramount and Fox features, but it has continued to be a discriminating venue for feature films here. Although it has closed periodically for many reasons, in 1999 it was showing fine movies again.

In the end, La Crosse residents can be proud to have just as many good theaters today as it did in 1920. Whether it’s Yes or No, or the recent blockbuster Saving Private Ryan, this city has seen its fair share of good films over the years.

Radio, TV and movies have all done well in La Crosse, having been backed selectively but extensively. They will continue to be backed as long as citizens have money and media professionals feel the need to please their listening and viewing customers.
Celebrate 2000!:
Favorite Festivals and other Good Things

By Pamela Shipstone

Oktoberfest, U.S.A. is celebrated the first few days of October each year in La Crosse, as well as in Munich, Germany, where the festival originated.

In early 1960, two employees of German origin at the La Crosse-based G. Heileman Brewing Company suggested an autumn festival similar to the Oktoberfest held in Munich as a promotional idea for the company. The suggestion was implemented in 1961 as an autumn festival marking the end of harvest, an ideal time to make merry.

An autumn festival was accepted for two primary reasons. First, October is very picturesque, with all the fall colors in full bloom. Second, planning a winter festival is more problematic because Wisconsin’s weather is difficult to predict.

The Chamber of Commerce became the sponsoring organization, and a committee was established. The main purposes of this celebration were to promote local pride, to obtain national publicity for La Crosse, to promote tourism and to involve the entire community.

The first Oktoberfest was held October 13, 14 and 15, 1961. In 1962, the name “Oktoberfest” was registered with the State of Wisconsin. In 1963, “Oktoberfest, U.S.A.” was listed as a trademark with the federal government. In 1965, La Crosse Festivals, Inc. became the sponsoring organization. The festival involves parades, carnival rides, arts and crafts, ethnic foods such as brew and bratwurst, as well as authentic German entertainment. Each year, local industries and volunteers work together to present the Midwest’s largest German fall festival.

Oktoberfest is one of the few authentic Old World folk festivals held annually in the United States. The year 1999 marked the 39th celebration of Oktoberfest, U.S.A. La Crosse was given the All-American City award in 1961 because it was made famous by the celebration of this Old World folk festival.

In 1999, Oktoberfest was held from October 1 to October 7 at the Northside and Southside Oktoberfest grounds. The Maple Leaf Parade, musical entertainment, carnivals, crafts, sporting events and authentic German cuisine highlighted the seven days of festivities.

The Great River Jazz Festival started 15 years ago to promote local pride in La Crosse, appreciation for jazz music and community involvement. It is a summer festival taking place the second week of August. The festival involves at least 100 nationally and internationally known musicians as well as about 15 bands. There are three stages upon which the bands perform the various styles of Jazz. The 1999 Jazz Fest took place August 5–8 at the La Crosse Southside festgrounds.
Riverfest was first celebrated in 1982 over the July 4th weekend. The tradition has continued to this day. It is a five-day family festival offering entertainment, children’s activities, and fireworks. A major focus of the festival is environmental awareness, with an emphasis on the importance of the Mississippi River system on which La Crosse is situated. This festival is sponsored by local businesses and volunteers. The 2000 Riverfest was held from June 30 to July 4 at Riverside Park.

The first African-American Fest was held at Copeland Park at the end of August in 1998. It was sponsored by the Committee for Preservation of African-American Culture. As a common theme to all festivals in La Crosse, there were children's games, musical entertainment, sports, and plenty of food. The main idea in presenting this festival was to increase awareness and appreciation of different cultures, as well as to help ease the transition for people who arrive in La Crosse from predominantly African-American urban communities.

Art Fair on the Green is a summer celebration taking place the first week of August. It has been celebrated for at least 31 years, and gives local artists, as well as those associated with UW-La Crosse, an opportunity to proudly display their artwork to a large and diverse audience. It also gives local residents and visitors the opportunity to buy locally produced art work. The idea behind this festival originates in the need for all societies to increase their knowledge, appreciation and awareness of art in all its diverse forms. Proceeds go to the AAUW Scholarship funds.

La Crosse hosts another annual event called the Creative Arts Festival, formerly referred to as Great Taste of La Crosse. The festival originated in 1988 and was sponsored by the La Crosse Lions Club as the city's prime showcase for student art. It takes place in June, with several hundred Coulee Region students, as well as regionally and nationally known artists, participating in the display of their artwork. There is always musical entertainment adding to the enjoyment and appreciation of the arts.

The sixth annual Angel Fest took place at the Days Inn on French Island, October 10, 1999. There was an arts and crafts display as well as some interesting speakers. Angel Fest celebrates angels without associating with any specific religious denominations.

Rotary Lights has been a holiday season tradition for many years in La Crosse. It was especially significant in 1999 because the lights symbolized the hopes and dreams of the millennium. The lights add to the celebration of Christmas as well as the holiday season. A 140-foot Christmas tree and more than 350 lighted areas illuminate La Crosse’s Riverside Park. Some of the events taking place from November through December 24 are lighted vehicle parades, a live reindeer display, a live Nativity scene, hay rides, a decorated home contest, and an ecumenical service on December 24.
A festival that began in 1992 as a way to commemorate La Crosse’s Sesquicentennial was the *Mississippi River Log Boom*, the brainchild of Judy Hoeschler. Hoeschler, a competitor in the log rolling event and a La Crosse resident, was instrumental in organizing the festival, which gained national attention for its professional lumberjack competition. Attendance peaked in 1996 with 17,000 attendees. The event was last held in La Crosse in 1997.

La Crosse is fortunate to have a group called *Skyrockers*, which organizes and produces fireworks shows at Riverfest for the 4th of July and the annual New Year’s Eve celebration. The New Year’s Eve event began in 1929 when 10 La Crosse businessmen, nicknamed “Chieftains,” began calling themselves the Grandad Sky Rockers and invited the public to view their “aerial pyrotechnics” from Grandad’s Bluff. It has been an annual event ever since, and the fireworks are produced by the Bonadurer family.

Carrying on the tradition of featuring “old-fashioned” crafts and folk music is what the *Great River Traditional Music & Crafts Festival* is about. It has been held in the late summer or early fall on the UW-La Crosse campus since 1975. Ethnic musical performances are popular. Since 1997, the name has been shortened to Great River Folk Festival.

Two other festivals that have gained greater recognition in recent years are the *Three Rivers Intertribal Powwow* and the *Hmong New Year* celebration. The Powwow usually takes place in La Crosse in the spring each year. It features Native American song, dance, food and drink, and draws in people from all over the Midwest. The Hmong New Year celebration occurs in October or November each year in La Crosse and/or the surrounding area, at about the same time as the Lunar New Year is celebrated in Laos, from whose people the Hmong trace their descent. This celebration features booths with Hmong food, jewelry, clothing and toys; sports like soccer, volleyball and koto (a combination of the two other sports); and guest speakers.
Nineteenth Century Sports: A Future for Lacrosse

By Ty Webster

The history of sports in La Crosse is long, rich and colorful. In fact, La Crosse's sports history is inseparable from the most essential piece of the city's origin: that of how it acquired its name.

When in 1805 U.S. Army Lieutenant Zebulon Pike and his men rowed upon the Mighty Mississippi on orders from President Jefferson to explore the region, they found a place where the Sioux Indians played a game with a ball that was thrown and caught with the aid of a long, curved stick with a sack of skin on one end. The game was played on a vast stretch of flat land that ran from the shore of the big river all the way to high, steep bluffs some three miles away.

The game reminded Pike and his cohorts of the French game lacrosse, which is also played with a ball that is caught, passed and shot at a goal with the aid of a pole-like racquet with a pouch on the end. As such, the explorers decided to name the place “prairie La Crosse.” When a settlement was later established on this former massive native playing field, it took the name Prairie La Crosse. The (possibly overworked) first postmaster of the town, Nathan Myrick, later had the name shortened.

As Jay Loeffler, writing for the La Crosse Tribune in 1979 pointed out, the actual Indian name for the game was Baggataway. If Pike had taken a little more time to get to know the locals, La Crosse natives might be calling themselves Baggatawayans, or perhaps Bagatans, once Myrick had finished with his scissors.

As Loeffler went on to point out, Baggataway was quite an epic contest: “The game was started by either throwing the ball vertically in the air or by letting it lie
on the ground. Each side tries to get possession of the ball and advance it as far as possible in the opponent’s direction past posts at the end of the field.

“The game was meant to be non-violent, but often injuries and deaths would result, especially when different tribes played each other. Sometimes there were as many as 1,000 players participating in one game.”

Sports played an important role in La Crosse’s history after the settlers established a municipality here, as well. In its early days, La Crosse was but a small break amid a vast stretch of untamed woodland and waterway, so it is no surprise that the area was a veritable paradise to hunters and fishers.

Albert H. Sanford and H.J. Hirshheimer spoke of the prominence of these outdoor sports during the 1800s in their book, *A History of La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1841-1900*. “Occasionally prairie chickens and pheasants could be shot within the city limits. In the seventies bears and deer were killed in the rural areas in all directions near La Crosse. . . .

“The varieties of fish caught in the early days were the same as those now angled for, but of course the catches were generally larger in the number and size of the fish. . . . Besides in 1882 the state planted 95,000 trout in the creeks of La Crosse County, so there were plenty to be caught. . . .”

Another excerpt hints at the need for wildlife management in those early days, recounting the tragic plight of the passenger pigeon. “Because they flew and alighted in flocks, they were easy prey for guns and nets. Those slaughtered were dressed and sent to Chicago and Eastern cities. One La Crosse shipper sent from 2,000 to 4,000 pounds daily for a time in 1871. Fifteen years later, this species of pigeon was very scarce, and it soon became extinct.”

As La Crosse grew and developed, so did the city’s sports legacy. The people of La Crosse indulged in numerous recreational pursuits later in the nineteenth century, including target shooting, archery, bicycling, roller skating and croquet, with sledding and skiing popular in the winter months. A ski club organized in 1886 used a slope at the end of North 10th Street for a run. Indian Hill served as another ski slope.

Competitive and team sports also started to develop in the city in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As Sanford and Hirshheimer relate, bowling was one of the earliest competitive sports to catch on in La Crosse. They quote a biography by postmaster Myrick that tells of the first alley built, on Front Street near what is now State Street. The pioneers used a large pine knot as a ball until a proper set could be acquired from St. Louis.

La Crosse has long had a reputation as a baseball town, so it is no surprise that the diamond sport was the first team sport to take hold in La Crosse. It did so very early on, with the first game being played in 1853. A historical article in the July 21, 1938 edition of the *La Crosse Tribune and Leader Press* spoke of the game:
“According to old reports, the first ball game played in La Crosse was at the foot of Main Street in July of 1853. Leonard Lottridge, captain of the first organized team in the city, stated in a review for the *La Crosse Tribune* in 1919, ‘There was quite a high bank between Front Street and the river. Some half dozen games were played.’ Evidently, the bank was used as a backstop. The rules and equipment used in those games was different than in traditional baseball, but the sport had taken root in the city.

Baseball continued to develop in La Crosse through the 1860s and ’70s, and by the 1880s, the sport was very popular and quite well organized, with a number of teams playing ball. A team called the Fruiters, organized by Burns Fruit House proprietor John C. Burns, and including his brothers Chris, Will and Pat, was a perennial powerhouse. Other teams at the time had names such as the Browns, the Clippers, the Badgers, the Black Caps, the Jewels and the Fat Men.

The game had a lot of character, and of course, its fair share of characters. One such was George H. Atkinson, who sponsored the Fat Men’s club in those years. As his granddaughter, Mrs. Geneva Ragland, related in a *La Crosse Tribune* article in 1960, Atkinson was an early pioneer of the incentive clause. “An incentive for high batting averages was his standing offer of a free suit of clothes to any of his players making a home run. . . . The suit offer was canceled when my grandmother put her foot down on ‘such tomfoolery as giving anyone a suit of clothes for hitting a baseball.’”

Professional baseball made its debut in the city when La Crosse fielded a team in the new Northwestern Baseball League in 1887. The locals opened the season at home on April 30, with 3,000 spectators on hand for the game. Managed by Chicago major leaguer Bill Harrington, La Crosse finished sixth out of the eight-team league, with 45 wins against 77 losses in the season. They never got a chance to improve on the mark, though, as financial squabbling doomed the league after the initial season.

High school sports debuted in La Crosse in the mid-1890s. In 1895 La Crosse High School fielded a baseball team coached by Ted Hardy and a football team coached by George Bunge. The ’95 football team played four games. They lost to Winona twice, beat Sparta, and saw a second match against Sparta end in a dispute after the referees, apparently as controversial as ever, allowed Sparta to return a successful La Crosse field goal for a touchdown.

The high school also had a track and field team in the late 1890s, and one team member went on to world fame. George Poage, an 1899 graduate, who won many 50-, 100- and 200-yard dashes for La Crosse, later became the first black athlete to compete in the Olympic Games. Poage qualified for the 1904 Olympics in St. Louis, Missouri, in the 200- and 400-meter hurdles, and won bronze medals in both events.
La Crosse saw many changes in the twentieth century. But one thing stayed constant in the city: love of sports. From the early 1900s forward, amateur, high school, collegiate and professional sports have contributed a wealth of city history.

One of the first amateur sports popular here was 10-pin bowling. The Arcade Alleys, a 10-alley facility between Fourth and Fifth streets, where the post office now stands, was founded right after the turn of the century. A superb local bowler early on was Will Ott, who rolled a 753 three-game series in 1908, the second highest 700 series in the world then. The sport experienced a heyday in the 1960s and '70s with many keglers striking in local leagues. Today, there are numerous members in the many leagues for men, women and youth at La Crosse’s four alleys. And the city’s record for a series continues to be challenged and reset.

Two groups instrumental in recreational sports are the YWCA and YMCA, both of which embody the physical as well as mental, social and spiritual health of a person. Volleyball, basketball, gymnastics, aerobics and swimming are important activities for all ages at the YW and YMCA.

Another sport played throughout the century here is golf. In 1900, locals Frank Hixon, J.M. Hixon and George H. Gordon consulted with a golf expert from St. Paul, Minnesota, and laid out a course beneath Grandad’s Bluff named Schagticoke (pronounced skaticoke) Country Club, and it became the first La Crosse Country Club when members tired of ridicule of the first name. The land was given to the City but leased by the club for most of the century. In the late 1990s, the City opted not to renew the club’s lease, the course became public and was renamed The Bluffs Country Club and now is Forest Hills.

The main event for top area golfers has long been the County Amateur Golf Tournament, which began in 1932. It was discontinued in 1976 but was resurrected by the La Crosse Tribune in 1991. A women’s tournament was added in 1996, and in 1997 competition was added for youths.

Outdoor sports have been very popular here. The Mississippi River provides excellent opportunities for area fishers, with walleye and northern pike, bass and catfish among the favorite fish here. Hunting is popular, too, with the two-week whitetail deer gun season in November being very big. The kill in La Crosse County typically ranges from 2,500 to 5,000, with a record take of 4,713 in 1996.

Winter sports are loved, too. One of the first big ski hills in the state was developed in the late 1930s by the La Crosse Ski Club. The Snow Bowl was located on 350 acres adjoining the Charles Haas farm, one mile east of the city on Highway 33. It had two 15-foot-wide trails and a slalom course. Its gas-powered tow rope
was one of the first in the state, and it was the first Wisconsin hill to offer night skiing. The *La Crosse Tribune* in 1949 reported that trainloads of skiers rolled in from Chicago and the Twin Cities.

A few lean snow years doomed the Snow Bowl, but La Crosse again had a top-notch ski facility when Ted and Sue Motschman opened Mt. La Crosse in 1960. Initially the Mount had only three runs, but over the years that number has increased to 17. A 516-foot drop on one of the runs is the steepest trail in the Midwest, and a 5,300-foot run is the longest trail in Wisconsin. The hill has averaged 500 skiers daily over the winters, with a record one-day turnout of 1,896.

Speedskating and curling have provided La Crosse with great fame. Pettibone Island’s Lagoon Rink was the site of the 1939 National Amateur Outdoor Ice Speed Skating Championships. La Crosse’s Frank Kaufman, who later was an alderman here, dominated the sport, setting a long-standing world record of 2:58 for the mile.

A city curling team, captained by Harry Watkins, won the national curling title at Utica, New York, in January 1948. A *Tribune* article rejoiced, “Now La Crosse has made curling history with a Grand National Bonspiel championship tucked securely under its belt.”

But of all the amateur sports in the city, softball and baseball have been the most popular. Fast pitch softball was hugely popular in the first half of the twentieth century. One of the best teams here was the Bodega team that captured the 1932 National Softball Championship by defeating the Sather Team of Minneapolis 2-1.

In a 1979 *La Crosse Tribune* article, Clarence “Swish” Beranek, a famed pitcher for the Bodega team, recalled: “We always had 2,000-3,000 fans at our games — we had 1,000 at practice. Those were the years when people were hungry for entertainment, before television.”

In a separate article, Huzzy Wohlhoefer, an outfielder for the legendary Ed’s Tavern teams in the 1940s, told of the huge crowds of 1,000-plus that would watch his games at the West Avenue Field. “They surrounded the field. People stood four deep in the outfield. . . . When somebody hit the ball you’d have to holler at the people to get out of your way.”

Softball — fast pitch, slow pitch and 16-inch (pumpkin ball) — remained popular, albeit with fewer spectators, to century’s end. In 1985 more than 3,000 players on 260 teams hit the city’s 14 ball diamonds. The City Park and Recreation Department’s 1999 rec participation summary log listed more than 4,000 adult softball league participants and a further 496 players in youth leagues.

Meanwhile, amateur baseball in La Crosse centers around the grandaddy of city baseball diamonds, Copeland Park. Built on land donated to the city in 1909 by
former mayor Colonel Fred Copeland, the ballfield was dedicated on July 19, 1911. In its early days the park served as home field for the Nelson Clothing Company team, a leading amateur team formed in 1911. The park was the magnet of the city on Sunday afternoons. A crowd of about 10,000 spectators watched Nelson's players battle their top rivals, the Montagues, one day there in 1922.

More recently the park has hosted the famous Stars of Tomorrow youth baseball tournaments. Started by city baseball and softball legend Robert "Kootch" Carroll in 1967 as a 16-team, 14-year-old-and-under tourney called the 13th Ward Warriors Tournament, it took on its present name in 1968. Over the years, it has grown in size and stature; now more than 200 teams from around the nation compete every summer in one girls’ softball and five baseball divisions, with championships decided on the grand grounds of Copeland Park. The Boys and Girls Club of La Crosse has had the best record over time among local teams in that tournament.

The La Crosse Legion baseball team has the longest and richest history of local amateur teams. Since 1933 the cream of La Crosse’s high school baseball talent has come together to play quality American Legion-sponsored summer ball. The teams have claimed many regional and state titles, and in August 1982, long-time coach Jim Coonan led his charges to a 20-11 victory over Oshkosh in a state title game, giving La Crosse its third straight championship.

La Crosse’s three high schools, Central, Logan and Aquinas, have produced some fine sports teams in this century. There have been many conference champions and much success in statewide, post-season action. And teams from all three schools have won Wisconsin state high school championships.


The Central cross-country teams have won six state championships. Scott Anderson coached the girls’ team to titles in 1985 and 1988-90. Richard Mitchell coached the boys to state titles in 1977 and 1990. Mitchell also led the 1963 boys’ track team to a state championship.

Central ski teams have won four state crowns. The girls won in 1994. John Pollack coached the girls’ gymnastics team to glory in 1984. The 1925 boys’ basketball team, coached by “Doc” Finley, beat Shawano 14-4 in the state title game. And in 1969, Central’s John Ford set a 3-year city scoring record in basketball; Central’s Kelley Paulus set a girls’ 4-year basketball scoring record before she went on to start for the UW-Madison women’s team. Also, Millard Scherich coached the boys golf team to a state title in 1939.
Central's baseball team won two state titles under coach Frank Thornton. He guided his team to a state crown in 1978, and capped a perfect 23-0 season in 1986 with a 7-1 championship over Neenah. Thornton retired in 1999 after 30 seasons with an overall record of 459-131-1.

Aquinas High's teams have captured 37 Wisconsin Independent Schools Athletic Association team state championships. Track and Field Coach Phil Hahn produced eight of them. His girls' teams won state titles in 1976-78, '81 and '83. He coached state-winning boys' teams three times, from 1980 to 1982.

Aquinas wrestlers have won state team titles 10 times. Dave English coached championship teams in 1967 and '68. Randy Dammon produced a mat dynasty, leading the Blugold grapplers to titles in 1983 and '85 to '90, and John Wissing led a championship effort in 1997.

John Michuta coached the boys' golf team to four state titles in the 1970s, and Joe Gaspard did the same in 1995. Jim Prudhome coached two boys' teams and three girls' cross-country teams to state titles. Dan Coughlin directed the football team to state titles in 1993 and 95, and baseball coach Mike Dee produced a quartet of state champs from 1984 to 1987. And back in 1961, Blugold Dave Gagermeier set a city four-year boys' scoring record, which stood until Blugold Jeff LeClaire broke it in 1993. Girls' basketball teams won consecutive state titles in 1996 and 97 under Joe Gaspard, and Barb Stanke coached the girls' volleyball team to a perfect 84-0 record and a state championship in 1984.

Logan High School has produced quality teams over time, too. Logan captured its first team state title in baseball under Coach Bill Leonard, as the Rangers pulled off a Cinderella story to win the WIAA Class A state spring baseball championship in 1971. Following a 4-7 regular season, the team took off in the playoffs, won its semifinal game over Beloit Memorial 9-8, after trailing 8-3 going into the bottom of the seventh inning, and beat Chippewa Falls for the title. Also, Coach Bill Patz led the ski team to a state championship in 1989.

La Crosse also has a rich collegiate sports history. The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (a.k.a. La Crosse State Teachers College, Wisconsin State College at La Crosse and La Crosse State), Viterbo University and Western Wisconsin Technical College all field athletic teams.

To be sure, the UW-La Crosse has a storied athletics history, and its teams have repeatedly brought La Crosse national fame by winning bowl games and national championships in many sports. Coach Clark Van Galder guided the 1950 football team to a 9-0 regular season record and the school's first bowl game appearance. Fullback Ace Loomis then rushed for 260 yards and five touchdowns as La Crosse topped Valparaiso 47-14 in the Shrine Cigar Bowl in Tampa, Florida, on January 1, 1951. In 1953, Bill Vickroy went 9-0-1, with a 12-12 tie against Missouri Valley College in the Cigar Bowl in Tampa on January 1, 1954.
UW-L footballers have grabbed three national titles under Roger Harring, who took over the program in 1969. In 1985 he led the Indians to an 11-1-2 record and a 24-7 victory over Pacific Lutheran in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics Division II title game. In 1992 he led a 12-0-1 Eagle (new mascot) team that beat Washington and Jefferson of Pennsylvania 16-12 for the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division III title. The third championship came in 1995 when Harring's Eagles had a 14-0 mark and scored a 36-7 romp over Rowan (New Jersey) in the NCAA D-III title game. Harring won more than 250 games at UW-L, ranking him in the top 12 for all collegiate coaches.

The men's track and field program has won most of UW-L's national titles. Joe Thompson coached the men's team to the NCAA D-III outdoor track and field crown in 1987. Mark Guthrie took over the program in 1988 and led it to national titles, both indoor and outdoor that year, from 1991 to 1993, and again in 1997, and an indoor crown in 1994. Phil Esten coached the men's harriers to a national title in 1997.

The UW-L women's track and field program garnered national fame with NCAA D-III outdoor crowns from 1982 to 1984. Track Coach Gary Wilson also coached the women's cross-country team to a national title in 1983.

UW-L's women's gymnastics teams have won seven titles. Teams won NAIA national championships from 1975 to 1976 under coach Jim Howard and in 1977 under Chuck Smith. Subsequently, Barbara Gibson led teams to four national titles.

In 1981 the UW-L women's basketball team netted top honors. Coach Mary Hansen led the Roonies to a 25-6 record and a 79-71 victory over Mount Mercy College in the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women's title game at UW-L's Mitchell Hall.

Viterbo University began intercollegiate play in 1972 with its men's basketball team. In 1973 a women's basketball team began play with Britta Johnson as coach. Johnson was also at the helm of Viterbo's first volleyball team in 1974.

Men's baseball and soccer teams and women's soccer and softball teams have since been added to Viterbo's intercollegiate line-up. The V-Hawks men's basketball teams have known great success in recent years, winning 20 or more games nine times, capturing seven conference championships and making three national tournament appearances from 1986 to 1990.

Professional sports have also made their mark here. The Wisconsin State Baseball League was organized in 1904, and play began in 1905, with former major leaguer E.P. “Pink” Hawley as manager and future major leaguer Eddie Konetchy on the roster. The locals won the league championship in 1905 and 1906, finished third after Konetchy was sold to the St. Louis Cardinals for $1,000 in 1907, and won the title again in 1908.
Another minor league try fizzled, but pro baseball made another appearance in the city in the 1940s with the emergence of a Wisconsin State League team, the Blackhawks. Konetchy, back in town after a storied major league career, was hired to manage the team, and he led La Crosse to the championship in their first season, 1940. The Blackhawks finished second the following year, but struggled in their final season, 1942.

La Crosse’s pro baseball saga in the late 20th century is mainly non-history. A proposal to bring a Midwest League, Class A team to town in the 1980s fell through, and in the 1990s, a Northern League team, the La Crosse Firedogs, never got started. The culprit both times was gridlock over stadium funding.

Semi-pro football had a run here, from 1929 to 1937. A team called the Howards was formed. In 1930 the name was changed to the Bodegas. No team played in 1931, but the 1932 squad was called the Trojans, and the team that played from 1933 to 1937 was sponsored by the G. Heileman Brewing Company — i.e., the Old Style Lagers. The teams all played excellent football. Coached by local attorney Thomas Skemp, they amassed a 59-17-3 record over the years, outscoring their opponents by a 1,363-453 margin.

These teams often encountered National Football League teams. In 1934 they lost to George Halas’s Chicago Bears. In 1935, losses to the St. Louis Cardinals and Curly Lambeau’s Green Bay Packers were the only defeats in a 9-2-1 season. The Lagers won league championships from 1933-36, but a second place finish in 1937 prompted Heileman to pull out, and that doomed the team.

The players did not get rich from gridiron efforts. In a 1986 *La Crosse Tribune* article, former player Ed “Bucko” Lynch recalled his salary: “I can remember once receiving $10 for each game after the season ended. . . . That was about average for my Lager pay.”

Pro football returned here in 1988 when the NFL’s New Orleans Saints moved their pre-season training camp to La Crosse. The team trained at UW-L’s Memorial Field in July and August annually until the 2000 pre-season. But also in 2000, the city Indoor Football League franchise, the La Crosse River Rats, began play.

Professional basketball came to La Crosse in 1985 when area businessmen bought a Continental Basketball Association team. Phillip Gelatt, Donald “Sandy” Gordon, Norman Gillette, and D.B. Reinhart purchased the Louisville (Kentucky) Catbirds in July of 1985. The following November the La Crosse Catbirds, coached by Ron Ekker, played their first game, a home contest at the La Crosse Center.

The team won two league crowns under coach Flip Saunders. The 1989-90 Catbirds defeated the Rapid City (South Dakota) Thrillers four games to one in the championship series. Catbirds guard Andre Turner scored 20 points in the fifth game and was named series MVP. The 1991-92 Catbirds beat Rapid City 4-3 in
the championship series, winning game seven 101-98, thanks to Derrick Gervin’s 29 points, David Rivers’ 23, and Mark Davis’ 21. The Catbirds’ attendance average at home dropped from a high of 5,149 fans per game in 1987-88 to 3,661 in 1993-94, and in May of 1994 the Catbirds were sold, and relocated to Pittsburgh.

CBA ball returned to La Crosse in 1996 when owners led by Chris Devine bought the Chicago Rockers, brought them here and renamed them the La Crosse Bobcats. The team has not had a winning season during its four years, but it did reach the league playoff finals in 1999-2000.

A number of individuals with city ties have played pro spots. Many played for teams at the UW-La Crosse. About 35 former UW-L football players have been signed by pro teams. Three notables are Joel Williams (UW-L 1974-78), a linebacker for the NFL’s Atlanta Falcons and Philadelphia Eagles for 11 years; Tom Newberry (UW-L, 1981-86), who was an all-pro lineman twice with the Los Angeles Rams and a member of the 1995 Pittsburgh Steelers Super Bowl XXX team; and Bill Schroeder (UW-L, 1990-94), a starting wide receiver for the 1999 Green Bay Packers.


Several city natives have played pro baseball. Konetchy (1910-20), Walter Meiner (1913), Bob Fitzke (1924), Francis Skaff (1935, 1943), Tony Ghelfi (1983), and George Williams (1990s). Konetchy had the most storied career. In a 14-year tenure with St. Louis, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Boston, the slugging first baseman collected 2,141 hits to post a .281 career batting average with 74 home runs, 971 runs and 992 RBIs. “Big Eddie” set a National League record with hits in ten consecutive at-bats in 1919.

In other sports, Don Iverson, of La Crosse Central (1963) and UW-L (1968), graduated and played for nine years on the Professional Golf Association tour (1971-79). He managed two pro wins, at the Shreveport Open in 1972 and the B.C. Open in 1975. And La Crosse’s Mike Alfieri bowled on the Professional Bowler Association tour during the 1970s.

Finally, the Special Olympics movement was begun in 1968 by the Kennedy family. Since then, thousands of disabled athletes, including La Crosse athletes, have taken part in the quadrennial Summer and Winter Special Olympics. Medals are awarded to all competitors — as athlete Dan March says, “I want to be a winner.” Torch relays and polar bear plunges have helped raise money for the athletes, and keep up the good spirits of all.
Historic Preservation: Telling It Like It Was and Is

By Sean Niestrath

So much of history has to do with what is written. And what is written usually derives from a particular perspective. Even this attempt at retelling the story of La Crosse contains varying degrees of professional expertise and creative ability. Some of the contributors have more obvious agendas, others mainly enjoy researching a subject and writing it up. But there is something different about those things which we preserve that we see every day. A building from a different era tells a story that comes not from a particular perspective (save the architect’s), but from the point of view of a population. Thus, it is quite literally “cast in stone.”

Historic preservation is a relatively modern invention. There are Biblical accounts of piles of rocks, or altars, that were specifically used for recounting great events. Burial grounds of many cultures are considered sacred to those people, and have been for millennia. But the preservation of those sites is only important if the present population sees it as part of their story, too, and if they have the insight and resources to preserve what is deemed important. The preservation of historic buildings has been a much more recent development in human history, although Europeans and a few subcultures on other continents pride themselves today on retaining some structures that predate the start of the last millennium.

Preservation of important sites and buildings in the city of La Crosse closely corresponds to a nationwide movement that gathered steam in the 1960s. On a national level, the Housing and Urban Development Department in Washington, D.C., began a program of renewal of many of our larger cities then. That phenomenon, combined with the demolition of much of the nation’s cities for the inter-
state highway project, generated a flurry of activity to preserve some of the buildings that would otherwise would have been destroyed. This activity increased through the 1970s, and in many mid-sized cities official groups organized around the bicentennial of our nation in 1976. La Crosse was part of this movement.

The preservation movement in La Crosse gained momentum in the midst of controversy. In the mid-1970s the U.S. Post Office decided to build a new facility here, hoping it could be on the same site as the old one. To do this required the demolition of much of the building erected in the 1890s. It was also the last remaining public building of that era here. In architectural terms, the old Post Office was built in the Romanesque Revival style. This motivated a few citizens to form a committee, and on December 18, 1975, Ed Hill announced at a meeting of the La Crosse Area Bicentennial Commission that a meeting in this connection would be held.

In subsequent meetings, it became clear that the primary agenda was to save the old Post Office Building. The La Crosse Area Society for Historical Preservation (LASHP) was incorporated on May 27, 1976. Its stated purpose was to “Promote the appreciation and preservation of structures, artifacts and sites having architectural, aesthetic, scientific or historic significance.” The first public appeal by the society to save the Post Office was submitted by Keith Kube to the La Crosse Tribune and ran on May 30, 1976.

Looking back on that specific preservation effort, it seems to have been too little, too late, but the effort was not in vain. The Society for Historical Preservation survived and has played a key grass roots role in preservation efforts and, thus, in recognizing historic homes and other buildings in La Crosse. On July 6, 1983, the name of the organization was changed to the Preservation Alliance of La Crosse (PAL).

There had been no organization in place to attempt to save many other historic treasures, like the old Public Library and a County Courthouse of great beauty, size, and usefulness. And public sentiment wasn’t strong enough to prevent the razing of the Stoddard Hotel either, which was lost in 1982. Apparently, not enough people realized then just how much was being lost by those demolitions.

Public museums had begun taking on stronger educational roles in the 1960s, including the La Crosse County Historical Society’s Swarthout Museum, and PAL soon learned to focus on educational and public awareness campaigns. If the public is motivated to preserve historic sites, buildings and other structures, they are much more likely to remain in place.

Key historic sites in this area include the graves of Native Americans. The Mississippi Valley Archeology Center, on the UW-L campus and directed by Jim Gallagher, has done a lot to preserve those burial sites in the last three decades. Whenever a new building is to be erected in a place that may contain Native American graves, Dr. Gallagher, his associates, and students go to work research-
ing the area. Sometimes they dig at the site to ensure that no Indian remains are located there.

Historic buildings that are to be restored also require careful treatment. The Hixon House, built circa 1858 by Gideon Hixon, a local lumber baron, is now owned by the La Crosse County Historical Society. It is just one example of what can be done to preserve key historic structures if community will and money stand behind these efforts. The Hixon House, located on 7th Street adjacent to the WWTC Campus, has been turned into a museum. And just behind it stands one of PAL’s great victories. It is called the Greek Revival House, and it may be the oldest residential structure still standing in the city, dating to the 1850s. It is significant, because it is the house of an average citizen of La Crosse in the first decades of its existence as a town.

Every year since 1976, the LASHP/PAL has presented recognition awards for homes, businesses and other structures that have been restored. For example, in 1981 awards were presented for a home built in the prairie-school style of architecture (first owned by Ed Bartl), a commercial structure (built in 1892 as a wholesale house, now home of the Black Rose Brewhaus), two school buildings (Smith Valley School and UW-L’s Main Hall), and a chapel (the FSPA’s Maria Angelorum Chapel).

It was not until 1994, though, that the city attained Certified Local Government status awarded by the State Historic Commission. This action allows funds to be approved to restore and maintain buildings on the Register of Historic Buildings through the La Crosse Historic Commission. Of course, because various governments become involved in the placing of an Historic Building on that Register, church groups sometimes take offense when their property is to be so designated. Two cases in point were the potential designations of Holy Trinity Church and the Maria Angelorum Chapel. Bishop Raymond L. Burke of the Catholic Diocese of La Crosse objected to these listings, because he does not want to see Catholic properties here under any sort of governmental direction. The cause of designation of Historic Buildings has many supporters, and for many reasons, quite a few opponents, too.

Perhaps the greatest motivator for historic preservation in this city, and nationwide, was the explosion of shopping malls, which drew most of the anchor stores out of downtown areas across America. Shops were left standing empty, and downtown La Crosse was left with little else but taverns full of college students. There was nothing to do there on a Saturday morning except pick up the debris from the revelry of the night before. Restoring the character of the old buildings downtown, and filling them with merchants who also had a unique character, saved downtown La Crosse, as it has the downtown areas of many midsize American cities. Today, a big part of this city’s downtown is designated as an Historic District and is listed
on the National Register of such districts. Downtown Mainstreet Inc. played a key role in this designation (see next chapter).

Due to the ability of local citizens to adapt to and appreciate their architectural, transportation and economic heritage, downtown La Crosse is a wonderful mix of past, present, and future today. The same can also be said for many other parts of the city. History truly does come alive in La Crosse these days, and people think more often about their past now here, in order that their future will be brighter in a region that is still called God’s Country.

**Millennial Prospects: Realizing the Spirit of La Crosse**

*John Medinger, Honorable Mayor of La Crosse*

*Larry Kirch, La Crosse City Planner*

The city of La Crosse has had many titles over the years, including “Gateway City,” “All-America City,” and “God’s Country.” La Crosse, as the heart of the Coulee Region and once the second largest city in Wisconsin, has long been the leader of western Wisconsin. We have a great history, and because of our past actions, we have an outstanding future to look forward to. The city is fortunate to have had a long line of outstanding civic leaders. These leaders have positioned La Crosse to excel as we enter the unknown future.

La Crosse has many outstanding assets, such as our historic downtown and Northside shopping and commerce districts. La Crosse has been the leader in industrial development, business retention and expansion opportunities over time, and continues to grow. Our oldest neighborhoods are experiencing a renaissance, and they continue to be safe and interesting. The city offers a wide array of cultural opportunities for our ever-diverse population. The city now hosts seven museums, a regional arts center, outstanding recreational opportunities, and over 2,000 acres of park lands. Our community has always had a energized economy, with the help of our prominent health care facilities and excellent institutions of higher learning. All in all, La Crosse has grown up to be a fine community, and has come a long way since Nathan Myrick settled on the banks of the Mighty Mississippi River.

What follows is a brief summary of our neighborhoods, our commercial base, our industrial development, our cultural and recreational opportunities, our educational, medical and religious institutions, and their prospects for the next 100 years.
La Crosse's Neighborhoods — La Crosse's population grew rapidly during the late 1800s and early 1900s. The city developed east from the Mississippi River toward the bluffs. Our oldest neighborhoods are found west of West Avenue, and our newer neighborhoods are close to Grandad's Bluff and then south from there.

The majority of the city's housing developed before 1940, and the population has been fairly steady since then, hovering around 50,000. Many older homes have been restored, and the City government has begun proactive neighborhood planning within three of our oldest neighborhoods. With the age of the housing stocks, the City has, over the past 20 years, rehabilitated more than 900 homes through its federally funded Housing Rehabilitation Program. In 1998, the City began a program to construct new homes in these older neighborhoods. The City purchased six dilapidated homes, demolished them, and offered them as sites for new construction. Two homes have been built by private individuals, two by the Community Action Program, one by Habitat for Humanity, and one by the City. The City is beginning the new century by building two homes in the Hamilton School neighborhood in 2000.

The City began in earnest to stabilize and restore its neighborhoods in 1989, when it created a single-family zoning district. Previously, a duplex could be built in any residential area here. Residents began to feel that duplexes, particularly college rental units, had a destabilizing effect on housing values and neighborhood cohesiveness. The City, in 1995 and 1996, took the next step in revitalization by further restricting zoning for multiple-family dwellings, conducting comprehensive rezoning of the entire city. The Northside rezoning was completed in 1995, and the Southside in 1996. With over 50 percent of the city’s residential dwellings classified as rental units, the City wanted to reverse that trend and promote home ownership as a key to neighborhood revitalization. The City rezoned many parts that had been zoned for multiple-dwelling back to single family and duplex districts.

Since then, the City has collaborated with two neighborhood groups and completed two neighborhood plans, the first being the Hood-Powell, Hamilton Neighborhood Plan. The second neighborhood plan was completed in the Amtrak station area, coined “the Lower Northside.” Both plans are strategic to identify the problem areas and find solutions, with the City and neighbors partnering for positive change. The City and the “Goosetown and Campus neighborhood” are now teaming up to complete yet another such plan. It is evident that several problems that have been identified are occurring in all three neighborhoods, and a concerted effort to make changes at the City government level is called for.

Through these efforts, the city’s short- and long-range prospects for strong, clean, safe neighborhoods are favorable. The City must work with the neighbor-
hood residents to protect and nurture the community’s fundamental building block — its neighborhoods.

**Downtown Revitalization** — Downtown La Crosse has seen many changes over the years, and not all for the better. The city’s downtown commercial area had long been the heart of the community and region. With the advent of the automobile and the demise of the streetcar, the city’s long-held monopoly as the center of commerce faded in the 1970s. The completion of the Interstate system directed traffic to the north of the city, and provided another option for crossing the Mississippi River three miles north of downtown. In 1980, a regional mall was opened near Interstate 90, and it became the regional center of commerce rather than the Mississippi River area. La Crosse fought a bitter battle to have the mall built within the city, because city fathers felt it was bad enough to have the mall harm downtown businesses, but it would be worse to lose the needed tax base.

Along with the private sector, the City began to pump millions of dollars into the downtown area. Between 1978 and 1993, the City spent over $30 million in local and federal funds. Since then, the City and an organization of downtown interests have invested in human capital and planning for the downtown's future. In 1989, Downtown Mainstreet Incorporated was formed by downtown merchants to fight the decline of the central business district. The City and Downtown Mainstreet have since collaborated on the preparation of a master redevelopment plan for downtown, the creation of a Tax Incremental Finance District to fund downtown improvements, and several planning and implementation activities. Through these joint efforts, the central business district’s declining tax base has rebounded. Public and private investment in La Crosse’s historic downtown area exceeded $80 million dollars from 1995 to 1999. New hotels, an expanded convention center, the creation of 160 downtown housing units, the CenturyTel expansion, and the return of the Delta Queen Steam Boat Company’s flagships, are just some of the remarkable stories of a resurgent and vibrant downtown.

The historic downtown area is now the regional center for government, entertainment, conventions, festivals, tourism, banking and office uses. This broadening of the downtown economy from that of a shopping district to a multi-purpose economic powerhouse fosters yet more potential. The prospects for La Crosse’s historic downtown are excellent, but it took a comprehensive approach to problem-solving, new partnerships, and a look back to our past — a focus on the Mississippi River — to position downtown La Crosse as the place to do business in western Wisconsin.

**Industrial Development** — La Crosse has long been a leader in industrial jobs, mainly due to our skilled workforce and lower-than-average wage structure. In the global economy, La Crosse has held onto manufacturing jobs longer than most communities, and continues to have a solid workforce. The Information Age and
the global economy have been felt in La Crosse, though, and the trend toward mergers and acquisitions has impacted the local economy, both positively and negatively. The closing of major manufacturing plants in the city and the temporary loss of our brewery have been more than mere bumps in the road. But La Crosse’s economy is quite diversified, helping the city through tough times. The educational and medical institutions, the tourism industry and government job sectors have helped to stabilize the economy. The disturbing trend toward low-paying “service sector” jobs affects all economies, and not just La Crosse’s.

The City of La Crosse has been the leader in industrial development in the area, and has fostered construction of three industrial parks, with a fourth one to be developed in late 2000. The 103-acre Airport Industrial Park, the 30-acre Airport Interchange Industrial Park, and the 79-acre Interstate Industrial Park, set the city apart in its proactive approach to protecting and creating jobs. The city is fast running out of suitable land for industrial sites for new companies and local companies seeking to expand, and over time, the era of leading the way in creating industrial park opportunities may fade. Of course, we will stay active in brownfield redevelopment.

Business Opportunities — The city’s business climate has never been better. This is part of the “longest peacetime economic expansion in the country’s history.” Economic prosperity has not trickled down to every community and region in the country. In La Crosse, a concerted effort by the City and private sector have helped the city’s businesses flourish in recent years. As noted, the City’s strong encouragement of the downtown, attention to infrastructure, and emphasis on quality of life have made La Crosse a good place to do business. La Crosse is the county seat, and until recently had more than 50 percent of La Crosse County’s population. These two factors, along with having three institutions of higher learning and top-notch health care, have driven the economy. A major step forward was the expansion of the municipal airport and terminal to create a regional airport. This effort by the city, at the request of major corporate leaders like Trane Company, is essential for the long-term economic growth and survival of the city and region. The city can take great pride in its cooperative and entrepreneurial spirit.

Areas of Future Growth — As La Crosse has struggled with its growth, decisions have been made that affect the city’s development. Most of these deal with annexation issues. The first major boundary dispute was the consolidation with the village of North La Crosse. Over the years, the City fought a pitched battle for control of the mall site, and more recently, an eight-year battle to build the region’s next top-flight industrial business park. Some say that early city fathers didn’t see the forthcoming boom in the Highway 16-Interstate 90 area and thought it would remain farms forever, and therefore the city lost out on this
“gravy” tax base. Others who now look back knowing that La Crosse could have had the entire mall area and not just part of it, suggest that former leaders had a shortsighted view of what La Crosse’s boundary would look like. The area would probably look the same, but it would have been in the city of La Crosse.

Despite our growing pains and being landlocked, our future lies in three geographic areas. First is the redevelopment of our existing territory. This is now manifest in the redevelopment in or near the downtown area — especially of the CenturyTel headquarters, a new office building and hotel in the shadow of the Cass Street Bridge, the EDS building, and the future development of the Mobil Oil Company oil tank farm. The City government must first look within for growth opportunities, because these opportunities are important to the city’s future prosperity. We must be much smarter. We can no longer decimate our great buildings in the name of progress. La Crosse is known as a leader in redeveloping vacant and underutilized properties, and must continue to be.

Our other areas of crucial growth are to the northeast and southeast. The area along County Highway B and Smith Valley has great potential for development. The other area is east along the U.S. Highway 14 corridor in Mormon Coulee. The city really has only these two options for significant growth, and this expansion should be encouraged. By encouraging growth adjacent to the existing city limits via City infrastructure and services, the City is doing the larger La Crosse community a great service. Urban scale development, within cities, is critical to saving the countryside. The city has great potential for residential growth in these areas, but it would be wrong to have these areas develop in a sprawling fashion.

There is much to celebrate when we review the history, the present, and the future of La Crosse. And if we go forward in a new era of cooperation with our neighboring communities, there is plenty of room for optimism that our children and grandchildren will be able to realize and enjoy, at the very least, the same great quality of life that is ours today. God has been good to the city and people of La Crosse. His encouragement of our best efforts helps us all. With His good grace, then—May the Spirit of La Crosse Live Forever!
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— djm

COLOPHON

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This book is a popular history, which does not contain footnotes. In addition to our contributors’ abundant use of the La Crosse Tribune clipping files of the La Crosse Public Library Archives, dozens of other, unnamed newspapers were utilized here, many being local publications. Magazines used were often local (or regional) publications, too. Reports, theses, dissertations and books were also consulted, as were many other expert and community sources via interviews, etc. The following book-length accounts were used, among many:


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La Crosse Leaders Press...
Katherine (Kay) Arenz, a long-time La Crosse resident, credits her early interest in local history to a class project celebrating the city’s centennial in 1941. Her knowledge of La Crosse libraries is the result of nearly 35 years spent on the staffs of the city library and that of UW-La Crosse. Kay retired in 1987, and has traveled extensively with her husband, Herb. She has two children and three grandchildren.

Joyce Anderson Beilke loves being a wife, mom and grandmother. And she still enjoys singing old tunes, working in sales, collecting Oriental primitives and copper stuff, too. Her stage name was “Baby Joyce Anderson,” when she was a very young professional singer. Joyce is working on her memoirs.

Helen Bolterman, now retired, was employed as an administrative assistant for the Onalaska Public School District for 21 years. Born in Omaha, Nebraska, but having lived most of her life in the La Crosse area, Helen recalls that, due to constant family moves, she attended nearly all the public schools on La Crosse’s Southside. Helen and husband Wesley have three living children: Rodney, Janet and Jean.

Patrick Brunet was born in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, and graduated from Campion High School there. He also graduated from UW-La Crosse, University of Hawaii, and University of Texas-Austin, including master’s degrees in American History and Library Science. He is director of the WWTC Library and lives in La Crosse. Pat has seen many of his local history articles and book reviews published.

Ursula E. Chiu is an immigrant from Germany, who married Alec Chiu, an immigrant from China, with whom she reared three children. She studied at the University of Cologne and taught high school English and French. In America, Ursula has taught in the Chicago and La Crosse school systems.

Jo Clumpner was born in Long Lake, Wisconsin and graduated from Rice Lake (Wisconsin) High School and Barron County (Wisconsin) Normal School. She worked as a medical secretary for the VA hospitals in Tomah and Minneapolis. Retired now, she lives in La Crosse. Jo has three living children, 10 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. She plans to write about her family’s history in the future.

Michael A. Daigle was born in New Brunswick, Canada, in 1959, and enlisted in the U.S. Army (1976-97), where he was an airplane mechanic, pilot and airfield commander. He graduated from Wayland Baptist University with a bachelor’s degree in Aeronautics and from the University of Phoenix with a master’s in Organizational Management, and has been manager of the La Crosse Municipal Airport since 1997. Mike is married to Marian, and they have a 15-year-old son, Michael E. Daigle.

Anita Taylor Doering, who grew up in Middleton, Wisconsin, has served as Archivist at the La Crosse Public Library since 1989, and worked first in a similar capacity at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and DePauw University. She graduated from UW-Madison with a bachelor’s degree in History and French Area Studies, and a master’s degree in Library and
Information Studies. Anita is very interested in local history, and lives here with husband Bill and a black-and-white cat named Valentine.

Bridget Flood was born into and raised in a large family in La Crosse. She attended Holy Trinity Grade School and Aquinas High School. She works for La Crosse County in the area of juvenile detention. Bridget enjoys writing and spending free time with her two grown children and one grandson.

Bob Floyd has lived and worked in the La Crosse area for 22 years. He was born and raised in Kansas, and lived in Springfield, Missouri, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, before coming north. Bob is retired from Allied Signal Laminates, and resides with his wife, Sibyl, in Caledonia, Minnesota. They have two grown children.

Mary Gagermeier was born in Canada and moved to Winona, Minnesota, at age 11. She edited the Winona Hi Spots, then went on to La Crosse and the Aquinas News. After raising eight children, her career at Doerflinger's and Herberger's kindled her interest in writing about the world of retail. Also, she and her sister, Kay Arenz, wrote the grocery and restaurant chapter; their family ran Grams Grocery.

Gordon Hampel was born and raised in Milwaukee and graduated from UW-Madison. He is retired, but still writes, oil paints, designs, makes miniatures, rides trains with wife Elizabeth, and has a 10-room Victorian doll house displayed at the House on the Rock and a 13-room Palladian doll house privately owned in a Chicago suburb. Daughter Roberta and granddaughters Kim and Kari live in the Phoenix suburbs. Daughter Louise is married and teaches in the Melrose-Mindoro, Wisconsin, area.

Patricia Heller grew up on a small dairy farm near Hokah, Minnesota. Her childhood proved lively, with six brothers and one sister in an old farmhouse. Patricia is now married to Cole Heller and farming in the Melrose, Wisconsin, area. They are raising their three children: Holly, Marcus and Lisa. The family is animal-crazed and has horses, cats, dogs and rabbits, along with their herd of dairy cows.

Edwin Hill, who spent his early years on an Iowa farm, is retired. Formerly, he was Special Collections Librarian at UW-La Crosse's Murphy Library. He worked as a firefighter and fire dispatcher for the U.S. Forest Service in Oregon, New Mexico and Arizona, and served with the U.S. Army in West Germany before graduating with an English degree from Northern Arizona University. He also holds master's degrees from Rutgers and UW-L, and is particularly interested in steamboats and in the use of and interpretation of historical photographs. Ed moved to La Crosse in 1968, and lives here with wife Nancy.

Elizabeth (Betty) Holey has always been a storyteller. She took a year of Creative Writing at the University of North Carolina, and earned two university degrees. She planned to write professionally, but instead got married and raised a family with husband Jim, and worked as a nutritionist. Betty still likes writing, but as a retired person.

Stanton M. Jorgens was born in 1935 in Elbow Lake, Minnesota. He graduated from the University of Minnesota with a bachelor's degree in Economics, and began his career in 1957 with the First National Bank of Minneapolis. In 1978, he became president of First Bank La Crosse (now U.S. Bank), and retired in 1993. Formerly, Stanton was head of the Greater La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce, of the local United Way, and of the United Fund for the Arts and Humanities. He and wife Corrita have six grown children.

Patricia Kendhammer was born on an Air Force base in Biloxi, Mississippi. She graduated from Aquinas High School and UW-La Crosse (1967) with a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. She is married to Peter, and they have four daughters — Maria, Paula, Laura and Audra — and one granddaughter, Ta Lea. In addition to being at home, Patricia has worked in factories and restaurants.

Larry Kirch was born and raised in Scottsdale, Arizona, and graduated from Gerard Catholic High School in Phoenix. He holds a bachelor's degree in Geology from Winona State University and a master's degree from UW-Milwaukee in Urban Planning. He has been La
Crosse’s city planner for six years, and previously worked as a city planner in Muskego, Wisconsin, and in Florida. Larry and wife Susan have two daughters, Helen and Allison.

Doris Kirkeeng was born in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, and graduated from Horicon (Wisconsin) High School and St. Mary’s School of Nursing in Milwaukee, and completed some graduate courses at UW-La Crosse. She has traveled to Guam, the Philippines and Europe. Her hobbies are coin and plate collecting, oil painting, and writing. Doris has four children and 11 grandchildren.

Yvonne Klinkenberg was born in Rochester, Minnesota, quit school at age 16, and married Amos Klinkenberg in 1947. She has six boys and three girls. At age 64, she received her GED, and at 71, she still loves to learn. Best known as a poet, Yvonne enjoyed writing about La Crosse’s brewing industry here because one of her sons was in charge of security at the former G. Heileman Brewing Company.

Mel Loftus was born and raised in San Francisco, and graduated from the Universities of San Francisco and Utah. He earned an M.S. degree at Utah in Management. He’s written for comedians Joan Rivers and Phyllis Diller, plus the Wall Street Journal, Saturday Evening Post, and Reader’s Digest, and has published the book You Know You’re a Workaholic If . . . . Mel is married to Sheila, a Viterbo University graduate. They have two grown children, both living near Washington, D.C.

La Vonne Mainz lives in Onalaska, Wisconsin Her husband, John, was a music instructor and band director in area schools. She is an artist, writer, published poet, and she creates family stories and children’s books for her grandchildren. La Vonne’s first novel, The Pinkleton Girls, will be published soon.

Daniel J. Marcou was born and raised in La Crosse. He graduated from Aquinas High School in 1971, and later from Madison Area Technical College with a Police Science degree. Currently in charge of training for the La Crosse Police Department, he is a highly decorated officer of 26 years, and he wrote a history of the department at 120 years. Dan lives with wife Vicki in Holmen, Wisconsin, and they have two grown children — Nathan (married to Anne) and Christa, who are college-educated.

David J. Marcou was born and raised in La Crosse. He graduated from Aquinas High School in 1968, UW-Madison, the University of Iowa, and the Missouri School of Journalism. He worked as a journalist in Seoul, Korea, from 1984 to 1987, and his 13-year-old son, Matthew, also born in La Crosse, is half-Korean. They published a photo book, Images: The Body of Christ, Matthew and Me — Or a Little Bit of Creation in 1995. David has taught writing and photography for WWTC since 1991, and his classes have created and published five books. He is also a freelance journalist and a seasonal employee for UW-La Crosse. Dan and he are brothers.

Mary Marsh was born in La Crosse and graduated from Aquinas High School. She is married, with three children and two grandchildren. Mary holds an associate degree in Marketing from WWTC and lives in La Crosse.

Father Bernard McGarty, S.T.D., who grew up in La Crosse, recently celebrated his 50th anniversary of ordination, and is currently Visiting Scholar for Ecumenical Studies at Viterbo University here. He is the author of three books: Meditations for Lenten Weekdays, John Donne as a Persuasive Preacher, and Biking and Canoeing in Western Wisconsin. Father McGarty received his Ph.D. in theology from the Angelicum University in Rome.

Sam McKay has lived in the La Crosse area for 26 years, retiring to Chaseburg 12 years ago. Born in Massachusetts, he came west to attend UW-Madison, where he graduated in 1954. Sam’s paternal grandfather was from Hokah, Minnesota, and worked for the railroad in La Crosse in the 1870s.

John Medinger has been La Crosse’s mayor since 1997. He was born and raised here, and graduated from Aquinas High School and UW-La Crosse, with a bachelor’s degree in Political Science and History, and a master’s in Education. Previously, he served for 16 years in the State Assembly, and later as an aide to U.S. Senator Russ Feingold. Mayor Medinger is married to Dee, and they have two children.
Anna Muktupavels-Motivans was born in Latvia and first educated there, then in Germany (in a Displaced Persons Camp) and at Butler University School of Pharmacy in Indiana, where she received her bachelor's degree. She has worked as a chemist and hospital pharmacist in this area. In 1992, she taught at the Medical Academy, Pharmacy Department, in Riga, Latvia. Anna retired when her husband was dying of cancer. After his death, she returned to a life of learning, traveling and writing. Her husband and she have six children and 10 grandchildren. She is working on her memoir, Anna's Story.

Sean Niestrath was born in Paducah, Kentucky, and graduated from Oklahoma Christian College with a bachelor's degree in Biology/Chemistry, and Abilene Christian University with a Master of Divinity degree as well as a master's in Ancient Church History. He works as a minister for the 28th Street Church of Christ, and is also very interested in book publishing as director of Speranza Publishing. In fact, he published this book, which is no small feat. Sean lives in La Crosse with wife Rebecca, their twins Stefan and Gabriella, and young son Hans. They moved here after six years in England and Italy.

James M. Ritter, P.E., was born in La Crosse and graduated from Aquinas High School in 1949. He earned his bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering from UW-Madison, and worked for Northern States Power Company for 30 years before retiring. He is a member of both WSPE and ASHRAE. Jim is married to Neva, and has six children, 11 grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

Jerry Severson was born and raised in La Crosse, and graduated from Logan High School. He served in the National Guard, 32nd Division, and worked for Trane Company for 43 years. After joining the WWTC Writing for Publication class, he published his novella, Crazy Horse Betrayed, about the demise of that Native American leader. He is now at work on a collection of stories covering America's wars. Jerry lives with wife Lorraine on their farm near West Salem, Wisconsin, near their four sons' homes.

Pamela Shipstone was born in Punjab, India, and graduated from the University of Alberta (Canada) with a bachelor's degree in Physical Science and Education. She taught in Alberta for 13 years, and now lives in Holmen, Wisconsin, with husband Ash. They have a son, Emmanuel. Pam likes to attend multicultural events and write about education.

Roberta Stevens was born in Augusta, Georgia, and holds Registered Nursing and Business Administration degrees. She is married to Mark, a neurosurgeon, and the couple has three children: Anthony Michael, an orthopedic resident; Mark Kenneth, a high school junior; and Marissa Paige, a first grader. Roberta has had a lifelong interest in minorities, and hopes to publish a mystery novel.

Ty Webster was born in Larned, Kansas. He graduated from Melrose-Mindoro (Wisconsin) High School, and Carroll College in Waukesha, Wisconsin, with a bachelor's in Communications. Ty lives in Trempealeau, likes to write about sports and his travels, and takes pictures, too. He has visited Ireland, Germany, Spain, Greece, Australia and New Zealand, with the Emerald Isle being his favorite place.

Belinda Weinberg is a wife and the mother of two college students. She has lived and worked in the La Crosse area since 1976. She has taught and practiced as a registered nurse at Lakeview Health Center, St. Francis Health Care, Gundersen Lutheran Health Care and WWTC in the specialty areas of Behavioral Medicine, Elder Care, and Obstetrics & Gynecology. Belinda hopes to write a book about health care.

Patrick Zielke was born and raised in Breidel Coulee, then a German-American area south of La Crosse, and attended grade school in the Town of Onalaska. He graduated from Logan High School and attended La Crosse State Teachers College. He has been married to the former Bea Forer for 51 years, and they have six children and 14 grandchildren. He was mayor of La Crosse from 1975 to 1997. When he retired, Pat said, “I’m like the cowboy who rides into the setting sun. He’s not going into the bunk house. He’s going into town because it’s party time.” That’s a fitting sentiment to end on, so we will.
Since our successful publication of the original edition of *Spirit of La Crosse* in 2000, our unique snapshot of this city's past at the turn of the millennium — and the first complete history of La Crosse — we have seen more of our city’s story unfold.

The downtown district has experienced a huge commercial rebirth, led by Logistics Health Inc. and its founder, Don Weber; Mr. Weber sponsored the building of a new community theatre building, too. And the La Crosse Center close by hosts many big state and national conferences as well as athletic and entertainment events. The Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association continues to hold its annual state track and field meet at UW-La Crosse’s Memorial Stadium, now a refurbished, Veterans-friendly venue. The La Crosse Loggers baseball team, begun and owned by Dan Kapanke, won a league championship recently. Two of the team's former pitchers are Major League Baseball All-Stars, one a Cy Young Award winner.

In 2014 the Pump House Regional Arts Center, directed by Toni Asher, commissioned “Confluence,” a large-scale city history mural by artist John Pugh and his assistants. John Medinger, mayor in 2000, is now a special assistant to U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin (he earlier filled that role for Sen. Herb Kohl). Tim Kabat now ably serves La Crosse as mayor. Robin Moses directs Downtown Mainstreet Inc. (DMI), boosting city businesses and consumers. Western Wisconsin Technical College, where I taught adult writing and photo classes during the buildup to this book's first edition, has morphed into Western Technical College.

When Barack Obama, the first African American president, campaigned here in 2008, I photographed him. My best photo of the president-to-be with a crowd
was displayed with one of my photos of Mike Huckabee at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History Archives Center in its group-show “Gift of the Artist.” Viterbo University has sponsored a holocaust survivors’ series here for years, and in 2006 I was official event photographer for its visit from Nobel Peace Laureate Elie Wiesel.

Great traditions like Oktoberfest and Riverfest continue, including the Miss and Mrs. La Crosse/Oktoberfest contests. This city now has many sister cities globally, and our three colleges host many international students. Gundersen Medical System and Mayo Clinic Health System–Franciscan Healthcare, the La Crosse Housing Authority, and other government agencies and care providers stand tall.

Staff changes: LaVonne Mainz is no longer our publicity director; Steve Kiedrowski now does some of that. The first edition's printer was La Crosse Graphics; printing is now being done by the superb staff of DigiCOPY in La

Dan Kapanke, founder/owner of La Crosse Loggers Summer College Baseball Team, wearing We the People tie, La Crosse, Oct. 2012.

(By David J. Marcou)
Crosse. Sue Knopf has returned as our book designer. Anita T. Doering aided research for this second edition; she and her public library archives staff provided many crucial assists for our first edition too, and Anita wrote the groundbreaking chapter “Celebrities Who Have Visited Here.”

I’ve directed-edited 13 group-books, including our award-winning *Spirit of America* series; I’ve authored more than 60 personal books too. Twice my works have been nominated for Pulitzer Prizes and twice for POYi (Pictures of the Year

The Funk Family (former owners of La Crosse Rubber Mills/La Crosse Footwear) with NFL Hall of Famer and former Packer quarterback/coach Bart Starr (tall man near left edge), who used to be the Funk company’s official spokesperson, La Crosse Center, May 2003.

*(By David J. Marcou)*
International) awards. And my son, now married, served in the Army four years before returning to college.

Raymond Burke, bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of La Crosse in 2000, is now a cardinal and the first American to lead the Vatican Supreme Court. Current Diocesan Bishop William Callahan, Msgr. Bernard McGarty (one of our co-authors), and former Bishop Jerome Listecki have helped sponsor many of our projects.

We’re very grateful to all of our sponsors (also including over time Tom and Joy Marcou, Don and LaVonne Zietlow, Charles Gelatt, Don Weber, John Hansen, Ron Wanek, Charles and Christine Freiberg, and David Johns) as we are to our creative contributors, subjects, sellers/buyers/readers, media (including the La Crosse Tribune), printers, and many helpful archivists.

We’re grateful to many. The final words of this book’s closing chapter, “Millennial Prospects: Realizing the Spirit of La Crosse,” penned in 2000 by then-Mayor John Medinger and City Planner Larry Kirch, still are true: “God has been good to the city and people of La Crosse… With His good grace — May the spirit of La Crosse live forever?” As the Beatles sang, “Let It Be.”

—djm, July 2014