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Delegates to the League Convention, Marinette, Wisconsin, 1909.
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Following page: Milwaukee's Grand Avenue, about 1887. (H.H. Bennett Studio Foundation)
Introduction

This book got started because it seemed appropriate—after one hundred years—to record the League's story for ourselves and for posterity. It seemed a suitable way to mark a major milestone in the life of the League. The book does contain a wealth of information about the League—its conventions, officers, publications and programs. The League has a rich history, and we are proud to exhibit that history in this publication.

In a larger sense, however, the real story told in these pages is far more than a mere history of the League. This volume celebrates the achievements of all municipal officials in Wisconsin, both past and present. Thousands of officials have served in hundreds of communities across the state. The results of their hard work and their dedication to community-building are portrayed here. The story in these pages reminds us of the enormous debt we owe to the municipal leaders who preceded us. We are the fortunate heirs of the cities and villages they built for themselves and for us.

In the words of Jacob Bronowski, the past "has not simply disappeared in the wastes of time." The past is alive around us in the communities that have evolved, and our communities did not evolve by accident. Someone put them there.

Obviously, the full history of community-building in Wisconsin is far too massive to be captured in one small volume. A hundred volumes wouldn't be enough. We offer this one small book not as a comprehensive history, but as a symbolic tribute to all the municipal leaders of the past hundred years who built our wonderful communities. And we hope that the leaders of tomorrow will find in these pages inspiration and courage.

Michael Miller
Dan Thompson
June, 1998

Foreword

The League of Wisconsin Municipalities was organized by perceptive, public-spirited local officials who realized that they could best serve their communities by learning from and working with each other.

They lived in exciting times, these mayors and council members, most of whom hailed from small cities in southern and central Wisconsin. The two decades in which the 19th Century turned into the 20th Century were among the most dynamic in American history. Advances in technology, education, political thought and communication were changing virtually every feature of American life.

The development of wood-pulp papermaking and the "linotype" automatic typesetting machine expedited print production and spawned what historians call the "golden age" of the newspaper. With cheap paper and quick production, general newspapers, specialty publications and newsletters proliferated, including the League's own Municipality. Milwaukee, population 288,923, had over one hundred publications, including eleven daily newspapers. La Crosse, Wisconsin's fourth-largest city with 28,895 people, had fourteen dailies and weeklies, while tiny Barron, population 1,493, had three weekly papers.

They all had readers, too. For in the last half of the 19th Century the public school system had turned a nation of immigrants, most of whom lived in rural areas, into literate Americans well aware of the world beyond the fence row. Wisconsin was a leader in both primary and secondary education, becoming the third state to establish a public high school system in 1875. By 1900, Wisconsin had 221 high schools, each one ultimately supervised by a city or village board. The graduates they produced supplied a literate readership for newspapers and magazines. They read of politics and culture, the prosperous and the poor, the old world and the new.

The new world they read of was increasingly urban. By 1890, as noted by the federal census and Wisconsin's most distinguished historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, the frontier had closed. No longer could a continuous line separating the unsettled territory from the settled be drawn on American maps. In Wisconsin, the process of settlement was well-advanced, with the southern two-thirds of the state firmly under the plow for nearly fifty years. Even in northern Wisconsin, where lumbermen were busy cleaning up the last parcels of virgin timber, cities were growing. In 1900, Superior was Wisconsin's second-largest city. Marinette was number ten, larger than Appleton, Fond du Lac and Janesville, while Ashland surpassed Wausau, Kenosha and Beloit.

Cities, both old and new, offered at least two basic incentives to residents and newcomers alike—employment and a higher standard of living. The experience of Winnebago County and Oshkosh was typical. Known as Wisconsin's "other" urban county after Milwaukee, Winnebago's largest city—Oshkosh—had been the second largest city in the state throughout the 1880s and early 1890s. Although its rate of growth was surpassed by other cities in the late 1890s, Oshkosh was still growing and taking in newcomers. At the same time, the purely agricultural towns of Winnebago County were losing population. Farmsteads occupied every forty-acre plot in the county, leaving young people with little opportunity on the land. Their options were to strike out for the new ground in the north and west or to move to the city. Oshkosh obliged by advertising in village newspapers that "5,000 Jobs" were available. The sons and daughters of the pioneers, joined by new immigrants from Europe, left their home farms to take them.

The Oshkosh-Winnebago County experience was duplicated throughout the state. Rural populations stagnated or declined, while cities and villages grew. The population of cities and villages in Wisconsin increased by about twenty-five per cent in the 1890s. By 1900, 969,334 people—about 47% of the state total—lived within corporate boundaries. In another twenty years, Wisconsin became an urban state with the majority of its people living within city and village limits.

In addition to employment, cities and villages offered a higher standard of living than farms. Electrical lighting, which was swiftly replacing gas and kerosene in the 1900s, was one of the most obvious improvements. Telephones, running water,
paved streets, public libraries, sewers and mass transit also made cities more desirable. Recreation was important, whether in the form of pick-up and professional baseball games at the park, live musical shows, or the new "moving pictures" in the theaters. Even the humble neighborhood tavern, with its local brew and card playing regulars at the corner table, contributed to the city's appeal. Churches for the pious, colleges for the studious, lodges for the sociable, stores for the acquisition, dives for the disreputable—all helped make the growing cities attractive places. Farmers were "hicks," rural life was backwards. The city was the future.

By 1900, the city of the future had to face the consequences of the past. Wisconsin's cities and villages had developed in the typically unrestrained American fashion. Some began as natural harbors—Green Bay, Sheboygan, Racine, Kenosha, Milwaukee. Others grew around water power sites—Janesville, Neenah, Menasha, Eau Claire, Wisconsu, Chippewa Falls. The railroads dictated the location of many cities—Manshild, Sparta, Park Falls—and stimulated others that were still hamlets to swell into cities—Banboss, Watertown, Monroe, Stevens Point. Some places were a combination of power, port and depot—La Crosse, Ashland, Manitowoc, Superior—while Milwaukee was the sum of all—a major harbor, industrial hub, rail center and home to one out of every eight Wisconsin residents. Madison was the exception to the development rule, since it was designed to be the state capital from the day of its first platting.

Villages grew, became cities, and grew some more, with little thought given to the consequences of growth. Riverbanks and lakefronts were industrial sites, with the waterway providing powerplant and waste disposal. Rail yards and sidetracks followed shore lines and ran directly to mill sites, carving up communities, fouling the air and creating safety hazards. Most streets were unpaved, undrained and unclean in the age of the horse and buggy. Commercial districts, residential areas, schools, churches and factories tended to crowd together to fit the sizes on the standard grid pattern drawn by pioneer platmakers with little regard to present topography or future development.

"There were no other city for which nature had done so much and for which man had done so little," wrote park booster Charles Brown of Madison in a 1909 issue of The Municipality. What Brown said of Madison could be applied to virtually every other city and village in the state.

Copying with the consequences of urban growth was the responsibility of local elected officials. Some work had begun, usually in the realm of fire protection. Indeed, for many smaller communities the first and sole reason for incorporating was to provide fire protection—often after a disastrous fire had leveled the business district. Of Wisconsin's larger cities, twenty-two had full-time professional fire departments in 1900, ranging in size from Milwaukee's 337-man corps to Marquette's three.

In fire protection and other municipal services, Milwaukee was well ahead of the game. It inaugurated a full-time fire department, snow removal service, garbage collection, ambulance service and a municipal water system in the 1870s, while the number one item on most other municipal agendas was the cow curfew. Milwaukee had also started to build parks, improve drainage, pave streets and even build the state's first zoo. Other communities were catching up, if for no reason other than necessity.

Board sidewalks and wooden bridges collapsed but concrete and cast iron were available to replace them. Poorly-drained dirt streets became mudholes after a rain but road graders, gravel and clay pipe could be purchased to improve them. Backyard privies and trash heaps were health hazards—as local doctors, themselves newly-aware of the value of hygiene, were quick to point out—but water mains, sewer lines and municipal "dumps" could be built to move the waste farther away. Undeveloped wetlands were a nuisance and vacant lots unsightly, but they could be filled, cleaned up and landscaped into parks. The means were available to improve Wisconsin's cities and villages. What was required was the knowledge and the will.

The will came from a number of sources. The idea of "Progress" was in the air, and many believed that the people who had subdued the continent, built the world's mightiest industrial nation and heard regular announcements of the latest invention of Thomas Edison, Henry Ford and other geniuses, could create healthful, pleasant, efficient cities and villages. It was the modern, "progressive" 20th Century thing to do.

Women were another source of civic will. While denied voting rights in all but school district elections, Wisconsin women had been politically active for decades. The state's public library system was largely the creation of local women's groups who sought out wealthy patrons, raised funds themselves, and lobbied with local officials to build and maintain libraries. They were also advocates of compulsory education laws that, for example, required children to stay in school until age 14 and of laws that prohibited children younger than age 14 from working in factories and shops.

Women also gained political experience as leaders in the movement to prohibit alcohol abuse. The arguments they used against alcohol in the 1890s are very similar to those used by anti-drug abuse activists in the 1990s. Women also organized public health education campaigns that taught basic nutrition, health and hygiene to parents and children. Finally, women worked on "beautification" projects. Public garden plots, street tree plantings and municipal parks were all "women's issues" and municipal issues as well.

Some of the will for civic improvement also came from the Progressive Movement, which was launched in Wisconsin by Robert M. La Follette and many others in the 1890s. The Progressives called for the reinvention of government, including honest, efficient administration at all levels. A magnificent orator and passionate advocate of his ideas, La Follette split the Republican Party that had dominated Wisconsin politics since the Civil War into Progressive and "Stalwart" or conservative wings. They battled bitterly until the 1940s, with partisans of both sides angrily denouncing each other both politically and personally.

Socialist thought was also a contributing factor, especially in Milwaukee but also in other Wisconsin cities. Hardly revolutionaries, Wisconsin's socialists were of the "gas and water" variety. They believed that all municipal services should be owned and managed by local government. Although municipal ownership is commonly accepted today, it was not in the late 1900s, when water works, horse-drawn street railroads, gas lighting plants, libraries and parks were often privately owned. The socialists and many others were particularly interested in municipal ownership of the new services provided by new technology—the telephone, electricity for light and power, and electrically-powered transit lines both in and between cities.

The University of Wisconsin, with many faculty members and students active in the Progressive Movement, was also a force for civic improvement. While the University Extension Division was not formally organized until 1906, university people were already implementing what came to be known as the Wisconsin Idea, i.e. that the boundaries of the university were the boundaries of the state. Led by professors such as Richard Ely and John Commons, as well as the League's own Albert Spaulding, the university reached out to state and local government. It provided knowledge and ideas but, more importantly, acted as the facilitator for municipal officials to learn from experts in many fields and from each other.

Into this atmosphere of technological and industrial progress, of political activism and Progressive agitation, the League of Municipalities was born. In 1898, the mayors of cities in southern Wisconsin invited their colleagues to the capital city to meet, learn from each other and organize for the "general improvement and facilitation of every branch of municipal administration."

It was an organization that focused on the nuts and bolts of municipal government, and well it had to be. Partisan Republican politics were so bitter in Wisconsin during the Progressive era that any advocacy on either side would have doomed the League to failure. Over and again, League members emphasized that they were not partisan or factional, were not "shouters for reform" but interested only in making local government work better. Progressives met with Stalwarts and men who would not tolerate dissenting political views elsewhere, set their differences aside in the interest of civic improvement.

So it has remained for a century. The Progressives, the Stalwarts and the Socialists have passed, replaced by Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives. The League remains what it always has been, an educational, informational, advocacy group "organized for the purpose of bringing together those interested in the practical reformation of municipal business."

Michael J. Goc
June, 1998
The City As The Future

John Nolen's plan for the city of Madison, 1910. Although justly famous for its parks and greenbelts, Nolen's Madison plan was also an attempt to organize and thereby improve city life. Since the automobile had yet to dominate American life, Nolen outlined corridors for rail transportation. He also wanted to clean up ramshackle lakefront development, improve residential neighborhoods and redesign the State Street commercial district between the Capitol and the campus of the University of Wisconsin. He proposed a "Capitol Mall" boulevard lined by city, county and federal government buildings stretching south from the Capitol to a "Terrace" overlooking a park with formal gardens fronting on Lake Monona. Nolen's ideas were indicative of the period that saw the birth of the League of Wisconsin Municipalities. Professional people of 'vision' like Nolen and local officials alike now recognized that the United States was becoming an urban nation. The rural republic of small farmers represented the past. Cities and villages were the future. In little more than a decade after the publication of Nolen's Madison plan in 1910, census takers reported that a majority of Americans, including Wisconsinans, lived in cities and villages. These growing communities had to provide new services on a larger scale. They had to be run efficiently and managed with a combination of vision and practicality. John Nolen and others like him could supply the vision. The founders of the League of Municipalities concentrated on the practical. Together they built the cities and villages of Wisconsin's present.
Above: A horse-drawn bus on Milwaukee's Grand Avenue, 1880s. Reminiscent of a European boulevard, Grand Avenue was Milwaukee's most impressive roadway. Below: Wausau's new library and park opened in 1908. (H.H. Bennett Studio Foundation and Marathon County Historical Society)

Above: La Crosse transformed an unsightly stretch of riverfront into "Levee Park" in 1912. It was an early attempt to call attention to and preserve a part of the city's natural setting between bluffs and river. Left: In the 1910s, planners for the Kohler Company's village of Kohler broke out of the traditional grid pattern to lay out a community of winding streets with schools, parks, shopping, municipal offices and the work place nearby. Kohler's single-family bungalows anticipated the housing style of the middle-class subdivisions of the post World War II years. (Murphy Library, UW-La Crosse and Kohler Company Archives)
League of Wisconsin Municipalities.

To The Honorable Mayor and Common Council:

Gentlemen—You are earnestly requested to attend a meeting of Mayors and members of Common Councils of the state, to be held at Madison, December 14th, 1898, 2 P.M.,

for the purpose of perfecting the organization of the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, by the Election of Officers, adoption of Constitution, appointment of Committees, etc.

The objects of this organization as set forth in Article I, Section 1, of the proposed Constitution, are as follows:

SECTION 1. The objects of this organization, which shall be known as the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, shall be the general improvement and facilitation of every branch of municipal administration by the following means: First, the perpetuation of the organization as an agency for the co-operation of American cities in the practical study of all questions pertaining to municipal administration. Second, the holding of annual conventions for the discussion of contemporaneous municipal affairs. Third, the establishment and maintenance of a central bureau of information for the collection, compilation and dissemination of statistics, reports and all kinds of information relative to municipal government. Fourth, to secure such legislation as may be beneficial to the municipalities of the state and the tax payers thereof, and to oppose and prevent such as may be injurious thereto.

The necessity of this movement must be apparent to you, and we trust you will not fail in having your municipality properly represented at the above meeting.

Cordially Yours,

A. S. Douglas, of Monroe.
Chas. E. Whelan, of Madison.
Jas. E. Malone, of Juneau.
W. C. Leitsch, of Columbus.

W. C. Leitsch,
Secretary.
Senator Robert M. La Follette and the first issue of The Municipality. La Follette was the most prominent, eloquent and popular of the "many reformers shouting all over" in the 1900s. His impassioned advocacy of "Progressive" principles of honest, efficient and responsive government often ran parallel to the pragmatic philosophy of the League. (State Historical Society of Wisconsin)

1899
- Within a year, the second convention, at Fond du Lac, under League President and Columbus Mayor W.C. Leitsch, is attended by representatives from the southern part of the state.
- At convention number three, at Monroe at the City Opera House, in December, 1899, Leitsch claims, "we are not to be classed with the many reformers shouting all over our broad country. We are not advocating political reform, dress reform, or prohibition... We are organized for the purpose of bringing together all those interested in the practical reformation of municipal business."
- Third League President, Mayor A.S. Douglas of Monroe, introduces what will become a chronic complaint against the "heavy hand" of the state in municipal affairs. "We are all conscious that the present is an era of progress and improvement... In the awakening that has come, it is discovered that our municipalities are not altogether based upon the proposition that all men are created free and equal, nor upon the proposition that governments derive all their just powers from the consent of the governed. On the contrary, we, as communities, are required to receive from the state a charter, which contains an enumeration of powers we may exercise, and a provision that all others not so enumerated, or fairly implied, are retained by and reserved to the sovereign head."

1900
- The first issue of the League journal, The Municipality, edited by Samuel Edwin Sparling, Secretary, discusses "those problems which are of daily concern to the officers of the state." The first story: "Construction and Maintenance of Streets In Wisconsin Cities." Also of great interest is "innocuous disposition of human and other organic wastes." No longer is it acceptable to run sewage into the nearest river.
- The "question of the hour" is public ownership of water, gas and electric utilities. Public ownership is promoted to end corrupt methods of private corporations in influencing legislation. Judge John A. Gaupor of Grand Rapids (later Wisconsin Rapids) writes, "What shall we do to control the great monopolies that are every year becoming more numerous and powerful and which are more than ever concentrating wealth? Wealth is a power, and the accumulation of great power in the hands of a few is generally dangerous to the welfare of the many."
- Charles E. Monroe, secretary of the Municipal League of Milwaukee: "The relative number of those who live in cities, as against the dwellers in the country, are constantly increasing, and so rapidly that we do not have time to recover from the shock of one year's statistics before we are still more startled by those of the next."
- Population reported: Milwaukee 285,315; Superior: 31,091; Racine: 29,202; La Crosse 28,885; Oshkosh: 28,284; Sheboygan: 22,962; Madison: 19,164; Green Bay: 18,684; Eau Claire: 17,517; Marinette: 16,195.
- It is believed that civic action can improve human behavior. For example, rest rooms will keep visitors out of saloons. Instead of jails and alms houses, cities should provide an opportunity for young people to learn a livelihood, thus keeping them "from that demon despair that points the road to ruin."
- Among the suggestions of the League: that mayors begin to receive salaries.
- At the Janesville convention, League President and Janesville Mayor V.P. Richardson predicts the power of state government will diminish. "We will eventually have two controlling political forces, the nation and the municipality."
1901

- Theodore Roosevelt becomes President of the U.S. and Robert M. La Follette governor of Wisconsin.
- Many cities consider purchases of local lighting plants, an outgrowth of scandals involving public service corporations.
- "Liquor traffic" is seen by many as "vile." Leading in the ratio of saloons to population: Manitowoc, 1:139; Marshfield 1:150; Kaukauna 1:150; Oconto 1:166.
- Even a prisoner can be reformed, according to John Gardner, ex-sheriff of Green County, if an effort is made "to return him to society reclaimed from his evil ways." Kenosha introduces a resolution requiring all able male paupers receiving support from the city to be employed cleaning the streets.
- U.W. professor Joseph Jastrow declares the municipality the most important patron of art—through parks, public buildings, schoolhouses, and, "that most valued ally of the cause of popular education—the public library." Wisconsin is home to 101 public libraries and 302 free traveling libraries. Housing libraries in new city halls are Marshfield, Stoughton, Antigo, Portage, Whitewater and Sun Prairie. Andrew Carnegie offers Neenah $10,000 and Madison $75,000 if they will furnish sites and operating funds.
- The functions of cities are extended through fire protection, paved streets, sewage and garbage plants and sometimes free water, street cars, lighting, heating, telephone systems, public hospitals, dispensaries, baths, concerts, and old age pensions.
- The state legislature considers allowing city councils tocompensate mayors.
- Inter-urban railways, according to W.E. Clinton, Janesville, will allow "People of the busy bustling city to "gladly live in the suburb, the smaller city, or even the village, in order that they may have the advantages of country life, if the members of the family, who must attend to business in the city, can have cheap and paid transportation to and from their homes."
- At the Viroqua convention, held at the Fortney Hotel, League President and Viroqua Mayor L.C. Boyle: "Our League was organized ... with a membership of eleven municipalities. Today we have nearly 100 and it is our desire to ... embrace every city and village within the borders of our great state. We are not here as municipal reformers; neither are we politicians."

1902

- Under the guidance of Dr. Spaulding, the Woman's Club of Madison strives for a "city beautiful," in part by devising a garbage system to replace a "heir or miss caravan ... conspicuous by its cholera-breeding wagons." Trees are planted, boulevards graded, grass sewed and weeds cleared. The public rest room is promoted as "a town club house for our home women; we are a noon resort for business women... a resting place for tired women.... a nursery for babies...."
- Andrew Carnegie funds 38 new libraries in Wisconsin. He says, "I choose free libraries as the best agencies for improving the masses of the people, because they give nothing for nothing. They only help those who help themselves. Carnegie's gifts are supplemented by Isaac Stephenson's in Marinette, George Farnsworth's in Oconto and L.D. Fargo's in Lake Mills.
- The Municipality now includes "official" publications of the Free Library Commission, the State Board of Control and the State Board of Health. At the Grand Rapids convention, Governor Robert M. La Follette tells the League: "That you should be represented by an ably edited magazine, strong and conservative, yet progressive, is proof of the high character of the work you are doing through the state."
- "One of the most encouraging results of the work of municipal leagues and civic federations is that men of high character are no longer shirking municipal responsibility," says La Follette. Yet, he continues, "Our great cities are the worst examples of corruption and municipal rottenness known to civilization...It is because of the crookedness and jugglery of machine manipulation in politics, and especially in the selection of candidates through caucuses and conventions, that it has been so difficult to move the masses...to take an active interest in righting the long-recognized evils of city government."
- Through mail delivery, traveling libraries, macadamized highways, township schools, telephone exchanges, electric lights and electric car service, says La Follette, "The time is not far distant when the old barriers that have divided the city and country will be broken down, for the distinctions which have existed between country and city life, between the urban and the rustic are rapidly disappearing." Already, urban workers are "seeking country homes just as fast as rapid transportation and the extension of city conveniences will permit."
- League President: Ashland Mayor Burt Williams. For the convention, Grand Rapids is chosen because of the "Grand Rapids Plan," a cooperative system for ownership of utilities.
Electric trolley car: Eau Claire about 1900. As hydroelectric generating plants were installed on Wisconsin rivers, one of the first uses for the power was commuter rail. Municipal ownership of the "electric railroads" and other public services was a hot item of debate in the early years of the League. (State Historical Society of Wisconsin)

1903
- According to The Municipality, 37.3 per cent of the U.S. population reside in cities, 51.9 per cent in the country and 10.8 percent in suburbs.
- Upon the opening of the new University of Wisconsin School of Domestic Science, Honora McCue summarizes the female role. "Be she three times a B.L. and five times an M.D., let her cover it with a thousand isms, the simple truth remains that her primal instinct is the same, she is the home maker."
- Because of the rapid increase in the use of "soft" bituminous coal, abatement of "the smoke nuisance" attracts civic interest. Attempts are also made to eliminate privies in urban areas, where water pollution and typhoid fever are major problems.
- Because of modern inter-urban railways, "Men need not live in the heart of the city, but can go a distance of twenty or more miles each day to their place of business. What is accomplished by the trolley is to permit the country life, with its cheaper rents, its freedom and healthfulness, and without the attending social and business stagnation... The trolley makes the city the workshop; the country the home."
- Six League propositions are outlined by The Municipality: uniform biennial municipal elections; two-year terms for mayors; a two-, four- or six-year term for aldermen; salary for the mayor; nominations of municipal officers by primary or petition; making the general charter "more desirable" for adoption.
- At the Oshkosh convention, League President and Ashland Mayor, Burt Williams: "When one considers that half a century ago, within the memory here, Oshkosh was a typical frontier village... one stands amazed at such a march of progress and surely marvels at the relationship." Most flourishing are those in California, Michigan, Iowa and Wisconsin, where membership is 100 cities and villages.
- The Municipality, first established as a bulletin, then a quarterly bulletin, then a bi-monthly, then a monthly publication (burdensome in summer months) is reduced to nine issues. The League's two traveling libraries of books and reports have been on the road several years.

1904
- "The most advanced nations have never experienced such far reaching changes in their environment as the more recent ones have brought about through the widespread growth of urban population," says League secretary Sparling, "in all countries where industrialism has gained a foothold this 'silent tragedy' goes on. The hamlet of yesterday is the metropolis of today, and great emporiums of wealth and power are scattered over the land."
- At the same time trolley lines and the rapidly increasing use of the automobile threaten small towns with practical extinction, some believe cities are losing their prestige. According to Industrial Age: "Now a modern industrial organizer chooses the small town and the merchant again takes heart."
- In 1881, one central electric light and power station in the U.S. was owned by a municipality. There are now 815.
- By now, a number of state municipal leagues have been organized "in order that the problems of our smaller cities might be better understood and their officials brought into closer relationship." Most flourishing are those in California, Michigan, Iowa and Wisconsin, where membership is 100 cities and villages.
- The Municipality, first established as a bulletin, then a quarterly bulletin, then a bi-monthly, then a monthly publication (burdensome in summer months) is reduced to nine issues. The League's two traveling libraries of books and reports have been on the road several years.
- With Reedsburg Mayor W. A. Wyse as president, the convention is held in Appleton, with sessions held in the assembly room of the city hall.
- The now annual event had began with two yearly conferences but it was soon decided that public sentiment would induce more city officers to cooperate, if the meetings were held more frequently in different parts of the state. Later, it was found advisable to hold one conference of a longer session with a more varied program and to urge the cities to pay the expenses of delegates. Typical programs bear upon practical problems of city government: sewage disposal, construction and maintenance of streets and gutters, garbage disposal, public utilities and legislative needs.
Four good horses, a crew of men, a surveyor's transit and a few sidewalk superintendents helped level the bricks in downtown Neenah, about 1900. (Neenah Historical Society)

1905
- Pavement: cedar blocks, concrete, stone, brick, asphalt, macadam, or bituminous macadam?
- Cities and villages statewide experiment with various materials to improve drainage and surface streets.
- Where tramps have become troublesome, reports The Municipality, city councils distribute lunch tickets. "When Mr. 'Do Little' presents himself at the house in search of a hand-out he is given one of these tickets and told to present it at the mayor's office. The city official gives him some public work to do."
- At the Racine convention, held at the city hall, League President and Berlin Mayor H.C. Truesdell offers the thought that: "A mayor is supposed to know...something of sociology, political economy, chemistry, engineering, medicine, education, the law, sanitation, finance, philanthropy—and furthermore, all the people are permitted to tell their troubles to the policeman, and the mayor is the man that has poured into his ear all the troubles of the policeman."

1906
- "Municipal ownership means, carried to its ultimate fruiting, a better citizenship, the elimination of class distinctions, cleaner politics, elections to office based on merit, economical government, and a civic pride," writes R.E. Powers, former Wausau alderman in an article in The Municipality.
- "In this age of material growth we have been too prone to view the city as an accumulation of factories, warehouses and shops," says secretary Sparling, calling for more parks. "The great cities of the past are recalled more often as the centers of art and the beautiful, than as the centers of power and wealth."
- National organizations that have arisen in the previous decade include the National League of Municipalities, National Municipal League, National Municipal Improvement Association, National Civic Federation, "all the state and municipal organizations working on these problems...an immense army of men and women engaged in the effort, not to make the cities larger in population, overflowing in wealth, but to make the city, be it large or small, a better and more desirable one to live in."
- Ashland mayor Burt Williams says the curse of municipal government in the smaller cities is partisan politics. More importantly, "How does the candidate stand upon the question of police and fire protection, public health, and upon all those things that go to make life happy and comfortable in the city?"
- At the Ashland convention, League President and Racine Mayor Peter B. Nelson: "Our League is weak in one respect, and it is because it has not come to its manhood. It is not recognized in this state as a force, as it ought to be...Each one of our bills were so mutilated that you could not recognize them. Why? Because they [state legislators] did not think that the League of Municipalities amounted to anything."
1907

- The "Back to the People" ideology to increase the power of the cities is shown in demand for election of senators by a popular vote, primary nomination bills, demand for municipal ownership and greater use of the referendum.
- When secretary Dr. S.E. Sparling of Madison resigns, he is credited with the organization of the Wisconsin League and in its early days it was kept alive by his energetic and persistent efforts. W.G. Kirchoffer, consulting engineer of Madison, is elected to succeed Sparling.
- At the La Crosse convention, held at the city hall, League President and Green Bay Mayor R.E. Minnihan reflects on the state of public affairs: "The rapid growth in population, the marvelous increase in wealth, the great encroachments of public utility corporations, the personal and private advantages of vicious legislation, the common acceptance of treating public plunder more as a commendable cunning than as a sin or crime, the susceptibility of legislators to the purchasing power of money, and the apathy of a credulous public have gone on until our people stand aghast at the possibility of the final triumph of corruption with the destruction of the character of man."

1908

- The amount of horse manure produced in Milwaukee is estimated at 267,000 pounds per day, based on an average 21.5 pounds per horse.
- In fifteen years, the state has gone from a handful to 152 public libraries in Wisconsin, 61 in their own buildings and 28 in public buildings, "modern up-to-date public libraries in charge of alert, trained, interested librarians." Additional gifts have come from Wisconsin citizens named Williams, Simmons, Washburn, Tainter, Sawyer, Smith and White.
- W.G. Kirchoffer, editor and publisher of The Municipality says the paper will not discuss religion, politics or the saloon. It will publish the proceedings of the League and promote good municipal government, devoting attention to streets, sewers, waterworks, electric light plants, public parks, public utility corporations and police and fire departments.
- At the Oconomowoc convention, League President and Two Rivers Mayor Dr. J.R. Currens: "Our secretary notified me that he had heard, while we held our session at Ashland two years ago, a number of our delegates did not get around to the meeting one morning on account of staying out to an entertainment till the small hours...If we should find anybody absent in the morning, we will blame it to being over-entertained and not look for a tramp station, for as a rule, aldermen and city officials are men of better morals than postmasters." The final program is held at the Oconomowoc Country Club.
The romanticized view of the new Wisconsin Capitol appeared in John Nolen's 1910 plan for Madison. The new Capitol was designed to be a proud expression of confidence in representative government.

Memorial Library, UW-Madison

1909

- John M. Olin terms Madison, population 26,000, a model of city-planning mistakes. Most great injury has been done, he says, in the platting of outlying property. Writes Charles N. Brown, Secretary of the Madison Park & Pleasure Drive Assoc.: "It used to be said of Madison, by way of reproach, that there was no other city for which nature had done so much and for which man had done so little." Now, he says, Madison has acquired numerous parks through popular subscriptions. "All this is substantially the work of one man. From the time Mr. John M. Olin took charge of the work, sixteen years ago, the work has been Mr. Olin's work."
- Madison employs a landscape architect of national reputation, John Nolen "of Cambridge, Mass." The Park and Pleasure Drive Association prepares a city plan using the zone system including restrictions on buildings, main and secondary streets, improvement of adjacent territory, adequate means of transportation, parks and playgrounds, improvement of the water front and acquisition of land by the city.
- "City governments and city fathers must everywhere awaken to the real needs of our less fortunate brothers, and let that word 'brothers' grow in your minds into that Brotherhood—Justice, Humanity and Freedom," charges Mrs. A.W. Bartholomew, Supt. of Associated Charities, Racine, "Every dollar invested for human betterment in any municipality along these lines will mean less money for asylums, jails, almshouses later on."
- At the Marinette convention, League President and Port Washington Mayor H.W. Bolens introduces speakers John Nolen, Landscape Architect, and blind Senator Albert Gore, from Oklahoma. The convention is held at the Opera House.

1910

- Burt Williams, ex-mayor of Ashland, calls for "home rule." "Wisconsin is trailing sadly in the rear of progressive states, for municipal government in Wisconsin is undemocratic, the legislature of the state arbitrarily governing the city." General F.C. Winkler, Milwaukee: "The village or city knows better what it wants than the representatives of the state at large can know, and this principle should be made a cardinal point in our legislation."
- Wisconsin cities, with the exception of Milwaukee, are still small, and elastic; you can do almost anything you want with them, says planner Nolen. "The cities should not be allowed to drift, the future should not be taken at haphazard."
- With the rise of the automobile, concrete, the "coming building material," emerges as a favored pavement for streets.
- Convention: Fond du Lac. The convention headquarters are at the Elks Club House with sessions at the Palmer House, Erving Hotel, Forest Avenue Hotel, Lewis House and Weber Hotel. League President, Madison Mayor J.C. Schubert.

1911

- "We can never have the city beautiful until we have it so platted that the business of life may be conducted without the waste. This is the object of city planning," says C.B. Whittall. "Why do we not establish our areas for manufactures and storage, our residence areas, our retail shopping districts, rendering plants ... a well constructed frame work of railroads with the efficient system of park ways in connection?" All in the progressive spirit: "The only way to make people good is to have them happy."
- Convention: Superior, with sessions being held in the Sons of Norway Hall. League President, Oconomowoc Mayor B.G. Edgerton.
- W.G. Kirchoffer, retiring as League secretary and The Municipality editor, is replaced by Ford H. MacGregor, from the Municipal Reference Bureau at the University of Wisconsin, who celebrates the annual gathering: "It infuses a courage, inspires a determination, and creates a point of view and grasp of municipal problems that cannot be gained elsewhere."
“Buehler’s Sidewalk Machine” Wisconsin Dells, about 1900. The wooden sidewalks of the pioneer era were replaced with concrete in the 1900s. Buehler’s machine was an advancement over the earlier method of mixing concrete by hand. A gasoline engine turned the mixing drum and the water was automatically added to the mix from the barrel alongside. Below: Workers spreading limestone for the subgrade on Michigan Avenue in Sheboygan, 1903. With curbs, gutters, drains and a graded pavement, Michigan Avenue was as modern as any in Wisconsin. Following page: Milwaukee’s North Point water tower was part of the largest public water system in Wisconsin. (H.H. Bennett Studio Foundation and State Historical Society of Wisconsin.)
Above: Levee Park at La Crosse was built with materials dredged from the Mississippi, faced with concrete, covered with topsoil and planted with grass and trees. Later renamed Riverside Park, Levee Park was an ambitious project for the city. Right: Built in 1888, Neenah's stone and brick City Hall was the typical one-stop municipal building found throughout Wisconsin. It housed city offices, the police and fire departments, a lock-up and a meeting hall, plus a clock tower and a fire bell. Below: With easy access to water power, Wausau lit its streets early in the 1900s. The service was provided by an investor-owned utility.

1912

- "The Wisconsin Idea" uses the state as a laboratory for legislation combining popular control of governmental policies with scientific administration, aiming toward general social and political betterment.
- Many cities investigate public markets, which are opposed by retailers.
- Garbage disposal methods range from deposit on vacant lots and town dumps to organized private and municipal collection.
- Convention: Wausau. Sessions for the convention are held in the Elks Hall. League President, Superior Mayor F.R. Crumpton.

1913

- Superior terms itself Wisconsin's Second City, with aspirations of becoming one of the nation's great centers of industry. Green Bay, "Wisconsin's Oldest Community," counters that it is the true Second City.
- Fond du Lac claims to be the "concrete city" with its many miles of automobile-friendly pavement.
- Oshkosh and Wausau place women on school boards.
This fanciful sketch of "Telephone City," which illustrated the cities served by Wisconsin Telephone instead of by municipally-owned utilities appeared in the program of the League convention of 1916. (League of Wisconsin Municipalities)

1914
- E.P. Arpin, Grand Rapids, predicts "no state in the Union will increase so rapidly in population in its rural districts, as the state of Wisconsin will within the next two or three years with such a large acreage of good land now on the market." The Municipality features, from the "cut-over" Marinette, Ashland County ("great agricultural possibilities"), Vilas County, "Wisconsin's Wonderful Lake Region," Rusk County and Douglas County ("will become the most important county ... the city of Superior ... will become one of the great metropoles of the world.")
- Convention: Madison. The convention is held in the Capitol Assembly Chamber and the high school auditorium. League President, La Crosse Mayor O.J. Sorenson.

1915
- Secretary MacGregor determines the League is made up of "decidedly practical" city officials—not visionary "citizens."
- At the Green Bay convention, League President and Fond du Lac Mayor F.J. Wolff joins in viewing moving pictures of several cities. "This method of advertising is coming to be a favorite method of town promotion and civic advancement." The convention headquarters are in the Assembly Room of the Court House with meetings held in the Circuit Court Room.

1916
- Wisconsin senator Robert M. La Follette unsuccessfully introduces a bill in the U.S. Senate that would require a referendum before the country can go to war.
- Twelve cities with the commission form of government are listed. Eau Claire has had it the longest, since 1910.
- "Factories, shops, and offices ... women have walked out from home life into city life in such numbers and with such evident intention to remain that their position in public life is assured." Racine is the only city with a regularly-appointed policewoman. It is believed Officer Rose Weber can handle women and children better than a man can.
- Madison's City Garden Association joins a national Clean Up and Paint Up Campaign in connection with the "City Beautiful."
- "Kenosha is not building houses, it is manufacturing houses." John Nolen is retained to help develop 400 homes for workingmen.
- Questions confronting Wisconsin cities: streets and roads; semi-annual payment of taxes; public rest rooms; commission legislation; compulsory military training; legislation to recognize the League of Wisconsin Municipalities; "Preparedness" for the "terrible conflict raging in Europe."
- Convention: Oshkosh. The banquet is held at the Hotel Atcham. League President, Neenah Mayor C.B. Clark.
The League of Wisconsin Municipalities

Former President Theodore Roosevelt addressed the League convention in 1917. Although not in office at the time, Roosevelt was the only President to address a League convention. The "Huns" he spoke of were not German-Americans, but anyone who failed to wholeheartedly support the war effort. The League was as enthusiastic as Roosevelt, as were most local officials in Wisconsin. They sat on draft boards, supervised rationing, managed bond drives and organized local "Councils of Defense," to coordinate support for the war. Many served as "Four-Minute Men," who volunteered to attend public gatherings, including motion picture shows, and speak for four minutes in support of the war.

THE HUN WITHIN OUR GATES


FIGHT! On back the boys in France. Buy Liberty Bonds.

Vol. XVIII, February 1918. No. 2

War to End War

1917

- The Municipality reports there are two million automobiles in the United States, with six million predicted within four years. Even hired men are rapidly providing themselves with automobiles. In Wisconsin there are 173,000 registered vehicles.
- Several cities are providing municipal swimming pools.
- Ordinances are urged, requiring separation of inorganic trash from vegetable material, meat scraps or bones.
- "In such matters as the care of the poor, the safe-guarding of children, the giving of assistance to mothers and, in general, the welfare of the people, Moscow is well to the fore among the progressive cities of Europe," observes one writer.
- On April 6: the U.S. declares war on Germany. The mobilization for the war effort includes gardens on vacant city lots.
- At the Racine convention, with headquarters at the Elks Club, League President and Beloit Mayor H.W. Adams welcomes former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, who warns the assemblage, "The ear-marks of the 'Hun within our gates' are his shrieking for peace without victory — without victory for the right; his screaming to know why we are at war ... his mendacious and malicious attacks on the Allies of the United States ... slanderously and falsely assailing our own country ... and I speak with historic exactness when I say that Mr. La Follette and his allies are the most sinister foes of democracy in the United States today."

1918

- Vehicle registration in Wisconsin increases dramatically: 189,900 autos, 6,800 trucks, 7,200 motorcycles.
- Every department of municipal government is affected by the war: costs of labor and materials greatly increase; public improvements are abandoned or greatly curtailed; crime and municipal relief increase.
- The City Manager form of city administration is considered by some members of the League.
- The 1913 Huber Law is used to employ jail prisoners, their earnings going to their dependents. Some want vagrants and idlers put to work for the war effort. A Janesville tailor is arrested and sent to work for his own wife.
- "God hates a coward, and so do the American people. May your children never have as a heritage that their father, while holding a political position in his community, failed to be an American citizen because of cowardice during this great war for the salvation of humanity," says Martin J. Gillin in his convention address. "You men who represent your communities, be real men. Don't be like the Congressman from this district, and like one of our Senators—political hucksters, playing for their future political positions, holding back because of the fear of the German-American vote in this state ... Woe to the William Hale Thompson's, or the Robert M. La Follette's or any other craven political hucksters of their ilk, who hold high political positions and assume to speak for, and decry the pure Americanism of the children of Karl Schurz."
- At the Rhinelander convention, League President and Beloit Mayor H.W. Adams celebrates the League's 20 years. During that time, he says, city governments have utilized modern new methods of street paving and cleaning, sewers and sewage disposal plants, street lighting and water purification, in addition to motorized fire equipment and a great reorganization in the form of government.
The League of Wisconsin Municipalities

Rellis Conant, Curtiss "Canuck" airplane and crew, Westfield, 1920. World War I stimulated interest in aviation and gave politicians a new promotional tool. Eau Claire's Roy Wilcox, who addressed the League Convention in 1918, enlisted the aid of aviator Conant in his 1920 gubernatorial race. Despite the aerial blitz, Wilcox was defeated. (Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame)

1919
- The Volstead Act prohibits manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. Breweries and saloons close, while municipal governments that depend heavily on tavern license sales search for alternative sources of revenue.
- "Nearly every city wishes to erect a memorial of some kind to its soldiers and sailors in the great war, and towns that are about to become dry for the first time feel the need of providing a social substitute for the saloon." Loss of revenue from tavern licenses nearly provides a knock out blow to the city of Hurley. The Iron county city is the nightspot of the north woods for miners, loggers and tourists in Wisconsin.
- Still taken up with wartime fervor and succumbing to the "Red Scare" prompted by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the League calls for the passage of a law to eliminate the teaching of foreign languages from the graded schools of the state.
- Regulation or censorship of motion pictures is discussed. "Its appeal to children is directly the result either of the indifference of parents or their willingness to allow their children to see thrilling and attractive stories because they are so cheap."
- "During the 1919 session of the state legislature, the League employs William Ryan, City Attorney of Madison, as a "legislative representative."

1920
- Though Progressive James J. Blaine is elected Wisconsin governor, Progressivism is considered dead by most.
- Publication of The Municipality is suspended October 1920—December 1921.
- Women are allowed to vote for President. Warren G. Harding is elected.

1921
- In part through the efforts of the League legislative committee, all special city charters except that of Milwaukee are repealed and those cities brought under the general city charter law. This "home rule amendment" to the Wisconsin constitution empowers cities and villages to determine their local affairs of government, subject only to the constitution and to such acts of legislation as shall with uniformity affect every city and village. The amendment is expected to relieve the legislature of a multitude of bills relevant only to particular communities.
- At the Janesville convention League President and La Crosse Mayor A.A. Bentley: "As your president for the past year my report will be brief. It might be summed up in a very few sentences. We did the best we could to serve you with the finances available. Without funds we could not do as much as we would like to have done."

Return to Normalcy

Racine women voting for the first time in a state election, 1920. (State Historical Society of Wisconsin)
Telephone and power lines sagged to the breaking point and Main Street, Friendship, was covered by a sheet of ice after the great ice storm of 2/22/22. The Washington Birthday's storm shut down communities in a wide band from La Crosse to Sheboygan. With phone lines down and streets treacherous, enterprising students in the Fox Valley, turned to "high-tech" in order to communicate. They used the "wireless telephone", better known as the radio. (Adams County Historical Society)

1922
- Publication of the Municipality is suspended in February.
- Property taxes are seen as oppressive.
- Cemeteries are seen as a municipal burden and are discontinued in almost every city.
- Control of automobile traffic is a major topic.
- Convention: Appleton. League President, La Crosse Mayor A.A. Bentley.

1923
- The Municipality is not published.
- Convention: Stevens Point. League President, Stevens Point Mayor John N. Welsby.

1924
- November, 1924: publication of The Municipality resumes.
- The power of cities to enact local legislation, extended by the recent home rule amendment to the state constitution, proves to be not widely used because of legal uncertainties.
- Due in part to increasing collisions with street cars, regulation of automobile traffic becomes one of the most important municipal problems as deaths increase tenfold in a decade.
- John Stutz, executive director of the Kansas league, calls a meeting in Lawrence to form a national association of state leagues; this is the birth of the American Municipal Association.
- At the Eau Claire convention, League President and Stevens Point Mayor John N. Welsby cautions cities to compel fairness in the Wisconsin legislature. The League needs more life, he says, including re-establishment and publication of an official organ, an exchange bureau, a paid secretary and a legislative bureau.

1925
- The revived Municipality publishes convention material, special articles by municipal officials, reports of the information bureau, reviews of books and publications and similar subjects helpful in municipal administration.
- The purpose of the League, says Secretary Ford MacGregor, is to improve local government and to promote the interests of the municipalities. It is not a reform organization, citizen organization nor municipal league. "Such organizations are usually made up of business men, lawyers, doctors, educators, and others associated for civic purposes, and whose aims are usually to investigate and reform city government. Their work is largely critical or even destructive." This is a league of city and village officials; only cities, villages or counties may become members. It endeavors, by employing special legislative representatives, to secure the passage of legislation that will benefit cities and defeat those that will affect cities and villages adversely. MacGregor continues, "City officials have brought their problems to its conferences and have gone home with a new inspiration, a new enthusiasm, and a new determination to do things in a new way, to make their city government better and their cities better places in which to live. They have bought and improved parks; provided playgrounds; built boathouses, bathhouses, and swimming pools; built and operated municipal theaters; established zones; adopted city plans; and constructed municipal golf links and tennis courts."
- Governor John J. Blaine addresses the Madison convention with Shorewood Village Attorney Charles E. Hammersley as League President.

Milwaukee's up-to-date "activated sludge" sewage treatment plant began operation in 1925. (State Historical Society of Wisconsin)
Shorewood attorney Charles Hammersley served as League president longer than anyone else. He guided the organization through a tough period in which the initial "progressive" enthusiasm for civic improvement had waned. He insisted that the League stand on its own and severed its old connection with the University of Wisconsin. At the same time the business of local government went on, including the paving of streets to accommodate the postwar boom in automobile ownership. Before the growth of the automobile, cities could build macadam pavements at 75¢ to $1 a yard that would last ten years. "Under present day motor traffic such pavements would not last a month."

1926
- Municipal ownership wanes as large utility interests purchase local power plants.
- City planning and zoning continue to be promoted by the League.
- Motor vehicle use adds enormously to the cost of local government. Before the growth of the automobile, cities could build macadam pavements at 75¢ to $1 a yard that would last ten years.

1927
- Many subdivisions are described as badly designed both for their own purposes and for general city development.
- Sewage disposal and water supply quality are linked as the standards of civilization increase and the effect of contaminants is realized.
- At the Sheboygan convention, the League celebrates its 30th anniversary, on the basis that it was organized in 1897 and the first conference or convention held in 1898. League President and Shorewood Village Attorney Charles E. Hammersley: "The day and time is at hand when the public not only expects but demands from its municipal bodies the installation of water and sewerage systems, the paving of streets, the construction of sidewalks, the establishment of parks and amusement places for its citizens, the planting of trees on its streets, the collection of garbage and ashes and innumerable other services which make life the more worth living."

The convention headquarters are in the Eagles auditorium with some sessions being held in Kohler.

1928
- The rise and decline since 1890 of municipal ownership in the electric light and power industry of Wisconsin is seen as a case study in progressivism.
- Tourist automobile camps are maintained by 250 municipalities.
- The second annual conference of the Wisconsin City and Regional Planning association is held.
- Kohler is built as a planned industrial village.
- "Piggeries." City fathers try to turn garbage to gold by feeding it to hogs. But the only sanitary methods of disposal are considered to be incineration and reduction. Cities and villages proceed gradually to eliminate the outdoor toilet in districts where water and sewers are available.
- The 30th annual convention, in the Schroeder Hotel at Milwaukee, is addressed by U.W. president Glenn Frank. League President, Shorewood Village Attorney C. E. Hammersley.
Charles Lindbergh's Spirit of St. Louis airplane at Milwaukee County Airport, 1927. Lindbergh's flight ignited interest in aviation and encouraged cities to build airports. Although most Wisconsin airports were still privately-funded, a few cities—Appleton, Superior, La Crosse, Marquette, Wausau—provided some public support. (Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame)

1929
• Numerous airports are built both to serve local owners and as "way stops" for air mail, transport lines and private aircraft.
• Community recreational program are urged. "The great amount of leisure time that people have today calls for new means of expressing their desires. Unless these desires are directed into channels of wholesome activity, they become a community menace."
• The League expands services with the appointment of a full-time secretary, Frederick N. MacMillin, who has edited The Municipality since 1927 without compensation, while serving as municipal reference librarian for the city of Milwaukee. Independent headquarters are established for the first time, at 119 Monona Avenue, Madison.
• At the Watertown convention, League President and Shorewood Village Attorney Charles E. Hammersley defends ownership and operation of public service utilities. "The most important issue before the people of the state and the nation, for that matter, is freeing the people from the bondage of the Power Trust. The Power Trust has its hands in everybody's pocket until throughout the land a hue and cry has arisen against the action of this monster ... The extreme conservative wants the city to do nothing, and the extreme socialist wants the city to do everything." The convention headquarters are at Turner Hall.

The Great Depression
1930
• It has become essential that police departments be provided with adequate motor vehicle equipment. Amended condemnation laws allow "super-highways necessary to take care of the changed conditions brought about by the automobile." Some cities handle tourist traffic by diverting it to poorly-paved back streets.
• Much time and money is wasted because of unsystematic naming of streets and complicated numbering of streets and buildings. The need to install uniform systems confronts municipalities.
• Charles E. Brown, Director, State Historical Museum, says other museums are coming out of basements and back rooms of libraries and creating modern facilities.
• For many years golf was considered a rich man's sport; now the municipal or public course brings the sport to the average citizen. Municipal officials face the problem of regulating miniature golf.
• Relief for the homeowner from exorbitant taxation is sought.
• League plans include long-term financial planning for prosperity and growth.
• At the Marinette convention, Shorewood Village Attorney Hammersley says that, during his six years as League President, "municipal administration and municipal government have been revolutionized ... Municipal government today is a means for expressing public opinion and satisfying public wants." The convention is held at the Hotel Marinette.
• But with the collapse of the world economy, suddenly large numbers of citizens unable to find jobs turn to relief organizations. Taking advantage of lower costs, cities rush major projects. Additional municipal projects are conceived to give jobs to the greatest number of individuals. The Depression has begun.
1931

- The city of Oshkosh provides employment by widening streets, installing curbing, improving shorelines, removing trees and improving street signs. In Superior, work is provided through construction of a municipal golf course. "As soon as we began to present work cards to the men, instead of grocery orders," reports Stevens Point, "demands on us for relief dropped approximately fifty per cent."
- One of the by-products of modern industrial development is the smoke nuisance, which not only causes property damage, but has been found to be injurious to health. The phenomenal development of industry and the output of industrial wastes disrupts operation of municipal sewage treatment.
- Professor Harvey Walker: "The need for freedom from legislative domination and the hopelessness of attacking the situation alone led the cities of Indiana (1891) and California, Iowa and Wisconsin (1898) to form state municipal leagues, followed by others." Actual accomplishments of the state leagues lie principally in securing legislation as needed by the cities and defeating unwise legislation put forth in state assemblies still dominated by rural interests. Walker emphasizes that "The Wisconsin league was an important influence in securing constitutional home rule for cities in that state."
- At the Marshfield convention, League President and Wisconsin Rapids Mayor George W. Mead recognizes Frederick N. MacMillin, Executive Director of the league since 1927 and editor of The Municipality. The convention headquarters are at the Purdy School.
- Mead says there are 346 municipally-owned electric light-and-water plants in the state compared to 228 ten years earlier; 260 are water plants. "Let our League not only continue to fight for the principle of public ownership of local utilities in Wisconsin, but to create new and growing support for this principle in the minds of people everywhere by giving honest official control and conscientious, efficient administration."
- MacMillin reports the most important activity of the League during the past year has been guarding the interests of cities and villages before the legislature. Twenty-seven new members in 1931 make a total membership of 278.
- Of the 145 cities, 129 operate under mayor-council form with only a few under a city manager or variations of the commission form. 126 cities have a sewer system. All have public water systems. Increasing numbers of cities collect garbage from homes. Many provide building inspection. 48 cities own a municipal electric utility. 30 cities have zoning ordinances.
- "City populations: Milwaukee, 578,000; Racine, 67,542; Madison, 57,899; Kenosha, 50,262; La Crosse, 39,614; Sheboygan, 39,251; Superior, 36,113."

1932

- In the midst of the "economic storm" in the larger industrial centers, one in five of the population is being fed by the other four—and municipal government plunges "headlong" into the "relief business." In Kenosha, garden plots, plowing and seeds are provided to the needy. Fort Atkinson establishes a free station for unemployed persons passing through the city.
- Of the ensuing taxpayers' revolt, Prof. William Anderson writes, "Whole counties are aflame with it. Great crowds are being hurriedly mustered to march upon county courthouses, city, village, and town halls, and even on the district school meetings. Budgets are being slashed in every hand. County nurses, agricultural agents, and many other once respected and desirable public employees are falling to right and to left."
- City officials believe the increase of government services to be an inevitable result of higher living standards. "Why should we bewail the increased expenditures on education and boast of the relatively great increase in expenditure on cigarettes? Does the fact that the latter is a so-called 'voluntary' expenditure on goods made by private business, make it any more socially useful?"
- "Depression hysteria often turns that good citizen, Dr. Jekyll, into a ruthless and selfish Mr. Hyde who thinks only of his tax bill, not at all of what he gets from it." What he gets, since the turn of the century, are playgrounds, evening school, comfort stations, branch libraries, public health and nursing, traffic control, technical high schools, junior colleges, public golf courses, water filtration, mosquito control and airports.
- At the Menasha convention, headquartered at St. Mary's School, a moving picture is shown celebrating city planning in Germany. League President and Wisconsin Rapids Mayor George W. Mead questions the demand that government be reduced. "Wisconsin is spending twice as much for its automobiles as it is for all municipal government and public schools."
Happy days were here again when the election of Franklin Roosevelt brought about the repeal of Prohibition in 1933. Wisconsin's brewers had been campaigning against the ban for many years. They hired Milwaukee's Midwest Airways to promote the legalization of low-alcohol "3.2%" beer. (Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame)

New Deal

1933
- League executive director Frederick MacMillan is elected president of the American Municipal Association.
- As every governmental unit faces a financial crisis, it becomes fashionable to decry government and taxes. Calls are made for indiscriminate budget-slashing to drive public employees "from the public trough."
- The burden of public relief is shifted from city to state to federal government and back to the cities, many of which are in default. Almost 5 million families are on the relief rolls nationally. Of Janesville's 22,000 families, 1,200 are supported by relief. Municipalities take out loans because of heavy unemployment relief and large tax delinquencies. "We are at war with the most vicious and insidious enemy this civilization has encountered but neither individuals nor the government have yet been willing to treat it as war," says Clifford W. Ham, Field Consultant, American Municipal Association. Threatened financial chaos arouses sentiment for dictators such as those in Russia and Italy.
- Convention: Waukesha, with headquarters at Waukesha High School. League President, Little Chute Mayor Anton Jansen.

1934
- A "contra government movement," aided by lawsuits from disgruntled individuals, contributes to a financial crisis and breakdown in government activities. Departments are cut, schools and libraries closed, public health units curtailed, police protection reduced, fire stations consolidated and protection impaired, salaries of municipal employees slashed almost below a level of sustenance, maintenance and construction work stopped, and—in some places—payments on bonds and other debts allowed to lapse.
- Federal public works programs in Wisconsin involve sewage plants, buildings, streets, bridges and waterworks.
- Democratic, Progressive, Republican and Socialist candidates for the state legislature comment for The Municipality on home rule, mandatory municipal expenditures and financing of city and village government.
- Unless a vigorous program removes and burns every infected tree, it is predicted that elms will follow the American chestnut to almost complete destruction. The cause is the imported "Dutch elm disease."
- Convention: Green Bay. Convention meetings are held at the Columbus Community Club. The Beaumont Hotel and Hotel Northland provide accommodations. League President, Little Chute Village President Anton Jansen.

Early in 1934, the notorious outlaw John Dillinger escaped from an FBI ambush in Manitowish, Wisconsin. He was later "sighted" in dozens of cities throughout the state. Had he come to Appleton, the police force was ready, having just purchased a new "armored car" that was "entirely bulletproof at the front." (Appleton Police Force Museum)
Coping With The Depression

Previous page: Building a new bridge on Main Street, Fort Atkinson. Above: At Saukville workers floated the pipes for the city's first water system across the Milwaukee River. Below: Baraboo's first sewage treatment plant. Depression-era public works made jobs for the unemployed and also provided much-needed municipal services. Water and sewer systems, streets and bridges, schools and courthouses, parks and swimming pools, as well as many other projects improved city and village life in the 1930s. (Hoard Historical Museum, City of Saukville, Mead & Hunt)
Federal projects, such as the NRA, WPA and PWA, attempt to deal with the 3.5 million employees now on relief rolls.

- The move from cities "back to the land" is expected to be temporary.
- To fight an attempt by real estate promoters to limit property taxes, the League hires an assistant to secretary Frederick N. MacMillin.
- Twenty years previous, a land owner could erect any building anywhere for any purpose. Before the end of 1926, more than 500 U.S. cities had zoning ordinances; now there are more than 1,000.
- With a shorter working day and week, recreation is promoted as anti-crime insurance.
- In Stevens Point, all school children have their teeth examined and cleaned. Ashland provides tonsil operations for 50 children during the Christmas holidays.
- At the Kenosha convention, headquartered at the Eagles' Club, League President and Milwaukee mayor D.W. Hoan reviews the 26 years since he began attending the event. "In the beginning the organization was under the control of university professors who were well-intentioned, but gradually the municipal officials realized that because of the growing importance of municipal government they must get together in an effective effort to solve their problems ... Now that the League is no longer under the tutelage of the university, it provides a medium for the real expression of the sentiments of the city and village officials throughout the state. Beginning with the regime of President Hammersley there has been a marked growth in the representation of villages and each year the League has increased in size and influence ... The League is now generally recognized as the responsible mouthpiece for Wisconsin cities and villages. This enviable position has been attained because the League has been careful to avoid taking part in any partisan political activities."
The men and equipment of the Hartford Fire Department, 1936. (City of Hartford)

1936
- Termination of federal appropriations for direct relief creates a financial crisis in Wisconsin. The state, under Gov. Philip F. La Follette, seems to make matters worse by imposing financial burdens on municipalities. Local welfare costs and property tax burdens mount rapidly. Despite an economic recovery, more persons receive public assistance in Wisconsin than at any previous time.
- Harry Hopkins, Works Progress Administration administrator, tells the League the emergency phase of the Depression is passing with industry recovering and employment rising—but an indefinite continuation of public works will be necessary through "reconstruction." "There are plenty of business men who realize that when millions are in actual need it is stupid for the top one-tenth of one per cent of the people to be getting as much income as the entire bottom forty per cent."
- New marketing organizations and chain stores threaten the existence of independent shops and stores.
- At the Manitowoc convention, with headquarters at the Elks Club, League President and Milwaukee Mayor D.W. Hoan says the Depression is the most profound economic crisis that ever visited the United States. As machinery displaces laborers, five or six million able-bodied persons will never again have a chance to enter private employment. Therefore, jobs must be invented so that when millions are in actual need it is stupid for the top one-tenth of one per cent of the people to be getting as much income as the entire bottom forty per cent."
- With limited revenues, local governments attempt to reduce the cost of public welfare, schools and local streets, arguing that the state and federal governments should assume more responsibility. Municipalities court private industry through tax exemptions and subsidies.
- Many Wisconsin communities secure swimming facilities under the federal work program. They are often not gambling devices; when you gamble you have a chance, but in pinball there is no gamble; you are sure to lose."
- Vacation cities welcome the new "trailer park" movement; others are concerned. Water systems begin to be burdened by air-conditioning machines.
- A model ordinance establishes a civil service system for city employees. The League acquires a building in Madison, two blocks from the capitol. A record 421 municipalities become members, including every city over 2,500. At the Fond du Lac convention, held at the Hotel Retlaw, Executive Director MacMillin reports to League President and Rice Lake Mayor J.H. Wallis. "Eight years ago the basis of this League's operations was changed and a full time secretary was employed and League headquarters were opened for the first time. During the intervening period the municipal officials of Wisconsin have been faced with many vexing problems largely arising out of the depression. It is satisfying to know that the local officials of our state have met that test and that city and village government today rests on a sounder basis than before."
1938
- Depression-induced high property taxes provoke the tax limitation movement, taxpayers leagues, large tax delinquencies, homestead exemption schemes, political parties promising relief during campaigns, and calls by the President and Governor for relief. The elderly cannot "afford the taxes" on their older houses while younger people leave "high tax areas" of cities and move to the adjacent countryside.
- Federal services to municipalities grow after the acute financial conditions following 1929 and the massive increase in urban dwellers. Emergency agencies become permanent.
- Ground is broken in May, 1938, for Greendale, a federally-sponsored resettlement administration project. It is one of three original Greenbelt towns in the U.S.
- New driver's license regulations: beginners must get a permit to drive. All new drivers must pass an oral and driving test.
- Convention: Madison, held at the Hotel Loraine. League President and Rice Lake Mayor, H. Wells.

World War Again
1939
- World War II begins in Europe.
- Despite increased services and population, the cost of functions over which local officials have complete control has been reduced 29% during the past ten years.
- At the Wausau convention, held at the Elks Club, League President and Madison Mayor James R. Law: "To an increasing extent Wisconsin cities are confronted with the question of having their citizens move outside their boundaries ... fringes of urban development are springing up ... the entire economic community comprising the municipality is no longer contained within its boundaries and this has resulted in many problems."
1940

- Lack of adequate state aid forces the highest local expenditure in history, practically all the burden falling "progressively" on real estate taxpayers. The League contends that local governments bear the brunt of financing welfare while the state shifts its duty for relief and social security, upkeep of schools, highways and sundry mandatory costs of state legislation.
- The 1940 census shows population growth has slowed and, by 1975 or 1980, it will be static. "Fewer people are being born each year, yet medical science is giving a longer span of life to those already here. This tends, in coming years, toward a larger number of older people and relatively fewer young, vigorous workers to support them. In the old days, a man could pick up his tools and move—go West. Today, great industries can pick up and move, leaving the workers behind, and one city's loss is another city's gain," reports Vergil D. Reed, Assistant Director, Bureau of the Census.
- Roy H. Owlsley, of the American Municipal Association about the League of Wisconsin Municipalities: "You have grown from a loosely-knit, 'paper' organization to this present active, highly efficient, comprehensive, influential association of cities and villages. We need only read the headlines of our daily papers to realize that in most of what we like to think of as the civilized world today the spirit of cooperation and united effort, such as this meeting exemplifies, has been drowned out by the horror of exploding bombs or crushed under the feet of marching armies. We need only listen to our radios to learn that every idea and ideal represented by such a conference of honest, sincere public officials are now dead objectives in much of the world today."
- At the Milwaukee convention, League President and Madison Mayor James R. Law leads a discussion of the probable effect of the national defense program on municipal government. The convention is held at the Hotel Schroeder.
The war period is an era of retrenchment during which municipal services are restricted, tax delinquency is reduced, revenue collections improved and debt reduced.

- Memories of dark days after the previous world war and of the Depression cause escalating concern about public works programs for demobilized veterans. Janesville City Manager Henry Traxler cautions against, "A sort of mass-hysteria borne by a fear that somehow or other we don’t know what’s going to happen to us after this war is over... For the past year practically every technical magazine, every newspaper, every radio station and everybody you meet has been talking postwar planning until I have to frankly admit that if the general public is as confused as I have been then we certainly have a muddled idea of what this is all about."

- League of Wisconsin Municipalities ad: First, Win The War! But Let’s Be Prepared To Win The Peace; advance planning now.

- Stevens Point area filed Main Street with scrap tires collected for the war effort at the going rate of one penny a pound. (Portage County Historical Society)
1944

- Some believe juvenile delinquency has increased due to absent working mothers in defense factories and drinking and entertainment by newly-employed parents.
- "So much has been said and written about postwar planning in general that many municipal officials are skeptical as to the practical value of some of the discussion and vague generalities. On the other hand they realize that their municipal governments will have to face certain postwar problems, and they welcome concrete suggestions that can be applied locally," says The Municipality.
- Local property taxes decrease as state income taxes increase.
- City populations: Milwaukee 590,000; Racine 67,200; Madison, 67,400, followed by Green Bay, Kenosha, La Crosse, Sheboygan, all over 40,000, and Oshkosh, 39,000.
- League members include 162 cities and 252 villages.
- At the convention, held at Milwaukee Hotel Schroeder, League President and Janesville City Manager Henry Traxler says that, after cancelling the 1943 convention, "it became self-evident the exchange of ideas... has become so important that these annual conventions have become a prime necessity."
- In discussing moves of the state to provide commissions or boards to do the jobs of city councils, Traxler says, "Their arguments were always the same and can be briefly summed up in one sentence. The average council did not possess the brains or the ability to operate these various governmental services so the best way to do it was appoint a board or commission... utility plants, health departments, fire and police commission, park board, vocational school board, sewage commission, board of public works, library board, a planning commission and maybe a few more that I can't remember."

1945

- Carlos M. Moran calls this the Golden Age of Cities. "Perhaps since the days of ancient Greece, cities have not enjoyed the stature they are achieving today."
- Earl J. Reeder, traffic engineer, for the National Safety Council. "We can be sure that when the patriotic appeal to conserve our vehicles for increased war power vanishes, we shall have as rapid an increase in traffic as the availability of vehicles, tires, and gasoline will permit."
- The Wisconsin State Dental Society and Wisconsin State Board of Health encourage adding fluorides to public drinking water.
- The controversy over municipally-owned utilities is portrayed in ads from electric companies. The Wisconsin Dental Society and Wisconsin State Board of Health encourage adding fluorides to public drinking water.
- "Every time the Government goes into business it costs the taxpayer money, because Government-owned power service pays no Federal taxes of any kind."
- During and immediately after World War II, municipally-owned power companies waged an aggressive campaign against municipal and cooperative utility ownership. This 1945 ad played on concern over jobs for the millions of veterans returning from military service. League of Wisconsin Municipalities...
Baby Boom

1946

- The end of the war brings millions of families searching for vacant houses which do not exist. Postwar problems and plans include aid to disabled veterans, revenue sources, unemployment relief, capital improvements, unemployment during reconversion to civilian production, urban redevelopment, elimination of slums. Some worry that around the corner may be another depression.
- Wisconsin local governments fear the financial load may soon again fall upon the same agencies if legislation is not enacted to shift it to the state or federal governments or to the unemployment compensation fund. The decades-old complaint: the burden falls on the property tax, the most burdensome and regressive of all taxes, bearing on small incomes of the aged and unemployed who may have no income whatsoever.
- "Putting all your eggs in one basket": 31 communities have combined charity fund-raising into one campaign called The Community Chest.
- The number of municipally-operated cemeteries steadily increases.
- The City of Sheboygan begins adding fluoride to drinking water.
- League President, West Bend Mayor C.J. Schoemer. Convention, at Fond du Lac's Hotel Retlaw.

1947

- The Federal Airport Act provides funds to Wisconsin communities, ranging from $2,000 to Neillsville to $523,000 for Green Bay.
- The "$64 question" is, "Where are cities going to secure the revenues necessary to finance the expansion in municipal costs occasioned by post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction?"
- As always, it seems, local financing problems are becoming more acute. In the postwar period, budgets have increased due to higher wages and decreased working hours of municipal workers, higher prices for items needed, deferred maintenance coming due, replacement of mechanical equipment that was not replaced during the war, population increases, erection of new homes and demands for modern improvements. Too much of the burden, once again, falls on the property tax payer.
- General property tax levies in cities: 1930: $77.4 million; 1945: $80.5 million; 1946: $95.8 million, mostly due to increases for schools and counties.
- The state makes available its microfilming lab to duplicate records, saving at least 95% of the storage space and depriving future historians of the original sources.
- Zoning to provide off street parking is recommended to alleviate congestion in downtown areas.
- Approximately 100 Wisconsin municipalities have created city plan commissions.
- Relief and welfare officials are urged to prosecute nonsupport, abandonment and illegitimacy cases to obtain fullest possible financial benefit.
- League membership is 413: 152 cities and 261 villages. Convention: Green Bay. The convention is held at Hotel Northland. League President, Cassville Village President R.J. Eckstein.
In the years after World War II a growing number of urbanites found the mix of industry, railyards, commercial and residential districts common in most cities less desirable than new developments in the suburbs. (State Historical Society of Wisconsin)

1948

- Parking becomes more important with increases in population and traffic. "Because the American way of life includes an auto, safe parking areas, convenient to the places our people want to patronize and use, will be necessary in the planning of any new community and the saving of the old," says The Municipality.

- Mosquito abatement is accomplished by applying fuel oil, Paris Green, pyrethrum and DDT to breeding places. "The effectiveness even extended to occasional rain pools in which the DDT seemed to remain when the pool dried up and again became effective when again flooded."

- "This expansion and spreading out of the urban areas brings us face to face with the problem of what to do with the abandoned areas, and as long as people can, without much trouble, move out into the outskirts where all modern conveniences are available, just so long will the problem of blighted areas be with us," writes J.M. Albers of the State Planning Board.

- League membership consists of 157 cities and 258 villages—98% of the population of incorporated municipalities. Increased revenues of the League make possible a qualified, paid staff. A League library is organized.

- Officials complain that home rule has been whittled away by the state supreme court "until no one knows what it means."


1949

- Psychological tests are used for hiring police and fire personnel. "In fire-fighting a man with an intelligence quotient of 125-130 would find the lack of challenging intellectual problems disconcerting."

- Port Edwards' new partially-enclosed shopping center and municipal building is touted as the most modern structure of its kind in any comparable community in the country. Other business buildings on Market Street will be removed as part of the beautification program.

- The Dutch elm disease has not yet reached Wisconsin. If it does, experts predict, "the Wisconsin cities that have relied on the American elm almost entirely for street embellishment will be struck a cruel and expensive blow."

- The convention is at Madison's Hotel Loraine. League President, Menasha Mayor John R.Scanlon.
Civil Defense

1950

- Taxes collected in Wisconsin: In 1929, they were 56% local, 19% federal; in 1949—17% local, 67% federal.
- The opening meeting of the convention at Fond du Lac's Hotel Retlaw features a film on the atomic age, entitled, "Where will you hide?" In his remarks, League President and Menasha Mayor John R. Scanlon says, "For some strange reason while citizens seem to turn first to their municipal government, they have paid little attention to the problem of providing the necessary sources of revenue to pay the bill." A serious problem has arisen in the tendency for people to move just outside the city limits, according to Scanlon, as a means of escaping the municipal tax burden and becoming parasites on the community as a whole.

1951

- "To you, the world is in a pretty sorry state. But not to a boy ... Perhaps you ought to remind him that many precious things may be taken from him, temporarily. Many prized American freedoms, rights and opportunities must be suspended for a while, as the price of arming the nation against aggression." But, the ad for investor-owned Wisconsin Electric Companies warns, there is a danger of losing those rights permanently; that would be "socialism."
- At the Milwaukee convention, held at the Hotel Schroeder, topics are inflation and the national emergency involving Korea. League President and Menasha Mayor John R. Scanlon also berates state government. "Municipal officials of Wisconsin are getting quite fed up with the constant repetition of the bunk relating to the so-called generous state aids to local government. About half of this represents the state's share of the cost of the social security program. Most of the rest of these so-called state aids are for schools."

1952

- Civil defense planning is seen as a must in every community. "There would be thousands of casualties, thousands of homeless, thousands of fires."
- A survey of libraries show 28% located in a separate room of a municipal building, 17% in the town hall, 5% over fire halls and 37% in separate buildings.
- School reorganization, its progress and problems: "Our present-day education needs cannot be served by the one-room school. The traditional curriculum of reading, 'ritin' and 'arithmatic cannot adequately equip the pupil for today's standards of employment or for higher education."
- The city of Wisconsin Rapids broadcasts its council meetings directly from the council chamber over radio stations WTHR and WTHR-FM as a public service, believed to be the first such broadcast in the United States.
- Executive Director MacMillin explains that city and village officials have been discouraged in the use of the 1924 constitutional home rule authority because of several decisions of the state supreme court. "Particularly the one holding that the control over the salaries of city policemen was a matter to be determined by the legislature."
- Spread of a little known hog disease may ultimately cause cities and villages feeding garbage to hogs to adopt new methods of disposal.
- The village of Shorewood Hills installs domestic garbage grinders in all village homes.
- Convention: at the Hotel Northland in Green Bay, League President, Green Bay Mayor Dominic Olejniczak.

A city building provides fallout protection

After a nuclear attack, a call on commercial buildings 10 miles or more from the explosion could be one of the first things. In this drawing, the people have taken shelter from radioactive fallout in an office building.

Because the gamma rays given off by fallout penetrate much like X-rays, the people taking shelter in the building shown on the opposite page have put as much means of material as possible between themselves and the particles which have settled on the roof, ground, and other surfaces. Above ground, they have gone to the middle of the building; below ground, they have found shelter in a basement corner. Those in the main building are shielded from radiation by the surrounding earth; by partitions; and by the whole mass of the building earth. In the upper floors, people have shielded themselves in the "core" of the building. They have avoided the floor with the aircraft and severe amount of radiation from the fallout piling up there. (For better protection on any floor, it is advisable to keep below the window sill level.) Because the wall building shields lower floors less from some radiation, people have taken shelter in more rooms on this side. But no one has taken cover on the ground and top floors because the shielding there is inadequate.

Municipalities throughout Wisconsin will be among the first to adopt new methods of disposal of hogs to adopt new methods of disposal.
1953
- In 1945, there were 27 publicly-owned and 33 privately-owned airports in Wisconsin. Now: 63 and 83. In 1945, there were five paved airports, three of which were lighted. Now, there are 14 paved airports and 15 lighted fields. In 1945, two communities had regular airline service, now there are 12. In 1945, there were 660 privately-owned airplanes in Wisconsin, now there are over 2,000.
- South Milwaukee makes its first radar-checked traffic arrests.
- The Madison convention, held at Hotel Loraine, opens with the movie, "One Bomb—One City." League President and Green Bay Mayor Dominic Olejniczak worries about financial difficulties caused by people, businesses and industry locating just beyond the corporate limits of the municipality.

1954
- More and costlier homes are built in the postwar period than in any comparable timespan.
- Federal highway aids are increased under a new program including federal urban aid.
- Reflecting the larger role of federal legislation in urban policy, the American Municipal Association moves its headquarters from Chicago to Washington, D.C.
- David Rowlands, City Manager, Eau Claire: "Most cities are confronted with a rapidly growing school population on one hand and the demands of the citizens for street, sewer and water improvements on the other. Since World War II, the number of children under five years of age in Wisconsin has increased by half. It is obvious that the demands for additional school-houses and teachers will be a growing problem for most municipalities."
- The convention is held at the Hotel Schroeder, Milwaukee. League President, Menomonee Falls Village President Henry F. Stark.

1955
- Joseph Lustig, Director of Public Works, Janesville, says that the transition to pavement from mud or gravel followed the advent of the automobile which required a hard surface and curb and gutter.
- Noting the trend toward ranch style homes, wider lots and the ever-increasing use of the automobile, West Bend attempts subdivision control. "Proper land subdivision is an important factor in the development of any community."
- DDT is recommended for the control of mosquitoes and other urban pests such as the common house fly although use is not recommended on game fish water.
- Red stop signs are approved for Wisconsin by the State Highway Commission.
- At the Madison Convention, held at Hotel Loraine, movies on Civil Defense are shown and urban renewal is a topic. League President and Milwaukee tax commissioner Thomas A. Byrne says the League represents 98% of the population of Wisconsin living in cities and 64% of the population of Wisconsin. "What I have observed ... is that too many participate too little in League affairs. In fact, too few know enough about the actual organization and operation of the League. So instead of reciting some pretty platitudes about the exalted responsibilities of local governing officials and instead of indulging in any flights of fanciful speculation about the future problems of cities and villages I am going to talk frankly and factually about the League itself...The fact is that for many the only contact with the League is the annual convention."
1956

- Cities and villages are urged to establish Municipal Civil Defense organizations. "Enemy attack anywhere in Wisconsin will affect every municipality and every person, no matter where he lives." This attack may come from atomic and thermo-nuclear weapons, high explosive and incendiary bombs "delivered by an aerial armada," sabotage or biological, chemical warfare, and psychological warfare.
- The number of live births increases substantially while the aged population also increases because of the lengthening of the average life span, causing pressure on school and public welfare programs. With increases in enrollment, school operating costs are expected to increase more than one-third by 1965.
- During the past ten years, the total number of motor vehicles registered in Wisconsin increased from 840,000 to 1,386,000.
- Dutch elm disease is found in southeast Wisconsin.
- At the Green Bay convention, held at the Hotel Northland, League President and Milwaukee Tax Commissioner, Thomas A. Byrne states, "While going through some old files recently, we found a brochure dated January, 1925, entitled "The League of Wisconsin Municipalities, Its History, Activities and Accomplishments." The pamphlet, written by Ford H. MacGregor, who was League secretary at that time, reported on the 27-year history of the League and placed special emphasis on the 'purposes of the League.' It was extremely interesting to read these 'purposes' 31 years later and find that they are stated practically word for word as a similar statement of purposes would read if written today." "Purposes" included improving government, cooperation among municipalities, discussing common problems at conventions, sharing information, promoting legislation, promoting home rule and controlling taxes.
- Byrne says it has been a good year. The League has its largest membership, collects its greatest dues and has had more meetings than ever. There has been peace, "a cold peace perhaps...fought with the danger of war... At home we have had prosperity—a mortgaged prosperity, perhaps, prosperity marked with the evidences of inflation, prosperity predicated on the sale of more gross national products on leaner terms for longer times, prosperity in which expansion is difficult and expensive—but prosperity, nevertheless."

1957

- New perspectives on the public retirement system include use of optional variable annuities and group life insurance.
- An increasing number of Wisconsin cities and villages establish municipally-owned and operated off-street parking facilities.
- At the Milwaukee convention, held at the Hotel Schroeder, League President and Shorewood Village Attorney H.O. Wolfe: "Our American people in their daily affairs of life want the best of everything—radio, television, the newest and most modern automobile. This also applies to municipal services." With the dramatic growth in urban areas and school population, "It is no wonder that many of our municipal officials are walking around with wrinkled brows, mumbling to themselves, and wondering where the money is coming from to finance all of these necessary municipal operations." Belt tightening is seen as the end of flush times may mean less income and less tax revenue.
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1958

- 1,832 cases of Dutch elm disease are diagnosed.
- Half of Wisconsin cities levy a parking permit fee on house trailers or "mobile homes.
- An ad for the Portland Cement Association, Milwaukee, features a huge, 5,000 car, 40-acre parking lot built of soil cement. It serves the 70-store Southdale Shopping Center near Minneapolis, one of the largest enclosed shopping centers in America.
- Instead of installing meters on the streets, some communities attempted to control parking and keep shoppers downtown with municipal lots. (State Historical Society of Wisconsin)
The Suburban Challenge

Above: A new row of ranches on the edge of Sheboygan, 1954. Below: The new sewage treatment plant at Marshall, late 1940s, with cows grazing nearby. Suburban growth shifted homes, jobs and citizens away from older city centers and required that even small villages provide modern municipal services. (State Historical Society of Wisconsin and Mead & Hunt.)

Lambeau Field, mid-1990s, and no longer on the edge of the developed part of Green Bay. Compare this scene with the open spaces surrounding the stadium as depicted on page 74. (Green Bay Packers Hall of Fame)

The headquarters of the Wausau Insurance Company off of Highway 29/51 on the edge of the city. Business and industry followed residential development to the suburbs. (Wisconsin Department of Tourism)
City Stadium, constructed by the city of Green Bay and the Packers on the edge of Green Bay in 1956-57. It was renamed in honor of Packers' founder Curly Lambeau in 1965 but is still wholly owned by the city. (Green Bay Packers Hall of Fame)

1959
- The addition of fluorides to water supplies to reduce tooth decay in children sparks continued controversy. Sheboygan reports startling positive results after 12 years of use.
- "It is sad but it is true, you can improve your popularity rating in some social circles these days simply by becoming an outspoken and unflinching critic of our elected representatives, our aldermen, mayors, state legislators, congressmen, and administrative executives," says The Municipality.
- Wisconsin counts 70 public airports.
- More than 100 US cities participate in town affiliations, sister cities or "twinning" with foreign cities.
- The St. Lawrence Seaway is completed, connecting the Great Lakes with the Atlantic Ocean.
- Wisconsin population increases 60,000 per year since 1950. Rapid growth in the suburbs has established unprecedented needs for utilities and capital improvements. The city of Brookfield grew from 8,000 in 1954 at the time of its incorporation to 18,000 in 1959. Governing bodies increasingly require developers to install facilities such as sewers and water systems.
- Ninety Wisconsin cities and villages now use meters to control parking. At least 155 Wisconsin municipalities use electric or radar speed-timing devices.
- To accompany publicity about the Green Bay convention, The Municipality includes a photo of that city's new football stadium, completed in 1957. The convention is held at the Hotel Northland. League President, Sturgeon Bay Mayor Stanley R. Greene.

1960
- $385,000 is spent for Dutch elm disease control by 28 Wisconsin communities.
- League Assistant Director Ernest A. Mosher resigns to become executive director of the Kansas League of Municipalities; he will hold the post until retiring in 1991.
- More than half the U.S. urban population lives in cities with urban renewal programs.
- In order to survive, small towns compete for new industries. Many develop as "bedroom" centers for commuters. Others, in rural areas, are not expected to thrive.
- Candidate for Governor Gaylord Nelson: "The governor has an unequivocal responsibility to see to it that legislation, policy decisions and state administrative decisions take into account the fact that Wisconsin is an urban state."
- At the Milwaukee convention, held at the Hotel Schroeder, League President and Randolph Village President AP. Horkheimer defines "The Challenge of the 60's," as lessening the burden on the property taxpayer.

1961
- The challenge of the "Sixties" for some, includes survival as fear of World War III, this time with the Soviet Union, causes a continued emphasis on civil defense.
- Convention: Hotel Lomine in Madison. League President, Randolph Village President A.P. Horkheimer. Gov. Gaylord Nelson considers "Wisconsin's Urban Horizon." "The management of our cities has become a job of almost total frustration: traffic jams, polluted air and water, overcrowded schools, inadequate housing, antiquated sewage systems, and the biggest problem of all—urban sprawl ... Here in Wisconsin we are doing vastly better than most. Our second largest city, Madison, has earned praise from a national magazine as the 'most beautiful American city.' Our only real metropolis, Milwaukee, is the cleanest, most efficient, most honest big city in the world."
1962

- Twenty cities and villages are included under the state group health insurance program established by the 1961 session of the Wisconsin Legislature.
- For cities over 10,000, mayors employed on a part-time basis in 17 cities receive an average annual salary of $4,218. Full-time mayors in 15 municipalities average $10,242 per year.
- Seven cities or village managers average $13,737.

- “Today, as never before, there is an abundance of tools available to the small community for both comprehensive planning and urban renewal. When Congress passed and President Kennedy signed the Housing Act of 1961, a new era of opportunity began for urban America,” reports Howard J. Wharton, Deputy Commissioner, Urban Renewal Administration Housing and Home Finance Agency.
- Convention: at Green Bay's Hotel Northland. League President, West Allis Mayor Arnold H. Klentz.

1963

- Primarily initiated since World War II, there are 59 federal aid programs to state, counties, school and municipalities, administered by 10 separate federal agencies.
- It is suggested that the time has come for the federal government to provide aid in the fight against Dutch elm disease.
- December: “As this is being written, all of our sorrowful thoughts are of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, our deepest sympathies are with his family, and our fervent prayers are with our new President, Lyndon B. Johnson ... It strikes this writer that probably only in the United States could such a monstrous act result in a strengthening of our resolve to make this country and the world a better place in which to live,” writes Ed Johnson.
- At the Milwaukee convention, held at the Hotel Schroeder, League President and West Alls Mayor Arnold H. Klentz recalls the founding, 65 years previous, at a time when the national spotlight was on the Spanish American war. “Although similar organizations now exist in 45 states, none has been operating longer than the League of Wisconsin Municipalities. Many of the villages and cities which rank with the leading communities of our state today were not in existence until long after the turn of the century. The senior municipalities, completely revitalized with courage and determination, have led the march of progress.”

The Great Society

1964

Lyndon Johnson, on the rise of the cities: “Local government—municipal government—is well on the way toward becoming, by many measures, the second most important level of government in the United States. Already, I would remind you, there are five local employees for every two federal employees. The payroll of local government is nearly half a billion dollars larger annually than the total federal payroll. Local government spends more tax dollars than does state government. Only the federal government borrows more, owes more, and retires more debt than city government. More and more, the cities are coming to Washington in a by-pass of the states, seeking in Washington what they have despaired of obtaining at the statehouse.”

- 136 of the 182 cities and 99 of 383 villages in Wisconsin have established planning agencies. “Some of the practical results of planning are: a factory will not be erected next to a home; a building will not be condemned a few years after it is constructed because the city needs the land for a park; a house will not be constructed below the level of the street; and a new subdivision will meet city requirements as to street width, setback of the houses from the street and installations of water and sewer services.”

- The American Municipal Association is renamed the National League of Cities.
- At the Madison convention, held at the Hotel Loraine, League President and Fennimore City Attorney John N. Kramer: “Until about 1930 the League operated as sort of an adjunct of the extension division of the University of Wisconsin. The League’s secretariat was filled by university professors and included Mr. Sparling, who served until 1911 and was succeeded by Mr. Ford H. MacGregor of the Municipal Information Bureau of the University Extension Division. In late 1929 the League moved into a small office in downtown Madison, thus separating itself formally from the university.” During the first half century, according to Kramer’s address, the League dealt with “internal” problems such as improving organization and administrative procedures: accounting, assessing, purchasing, zoning and other day-to-day operations. Much attention now is devoted to “external” matters such as intergovernmental relations with other municipalities, counties, states and the federal government.
1965

- "Main Street, USA, is in trouble. In the tug-of-war between central city downtown areas and highway regional shopping centers, Main Street as a shopping area in a small city, furnishes neither the intensity of excitement and diversity of services that can be found in the big city nor does it have the convenience, attractiveness and facilities for the shopper offered by the highway center ... the Main Street areas of our smaller cities ... are almost uniformly characterized by obsolescent layout, deteriorated buildings, apathetic property ownership, traffic congestion and parking problems." Isadore Candeub, of Candeub, Fleisig and Associate, Newark, N.J.
- The War Against Poverty includes the President's Task Force, Community Action, Job Corps, Work-Training, Work-Study, VISTA, Adult Basic Education.
- Planning consultants are employed by many Wisconsin communities to provide technical assistance outlining development plans and framing development ordinances and advising local officials "concerning the application of these planning tools to the day-to-day problems encountered in our growing and changing communities."
- League headquarters move from 30 East Johnson to 433 West Washington Avenue in a "new and attractive building" with, for the first time in League history, ample parking. After a raise in dues, the League can now hire a field consultant.
- Milwaukee Mayor Henry Maier is elected president of the National League of Cities.
- At the Green Bay convention, at the Hotel Northland, a special program is prepared for the wives of delegates, with plenty of opportunities for shopping. League President and Fennimore City Attorney John N. Kramer declares that "Green Bay should be well known throughout our land for reasons other than the autumnal activities of Vince Lombardi and his stalwarts."

1966

- A score of Wisconsin cities attract "community antenna television," CATV, or "cable."
- "The average town council meeting is about as interesting as a monotone recitation of all the water meter serial numbers since the town's incorporation," writes Park Rinard, Executive Director, League of Iowa Municipalities. "But is the ponderous, bumbling, eternal, deadly monotony that characterizes so many council sessions and other municipal meetings really necessary?"
- "Block grants" make non-earmarked federal funds available to states and localities.
- The Convention is held at at Milwaukee's Sheraton-Schoedler Hotel. League President, Milwaukee Mayor Martin E. Schreiber.

1967

- Data processing for property tax administration is already established in several Wisconsin municipalities. The terms Automatic Data Processing (ADP) or Electronic Data Processing (EDP) are the names given to a 'system' of manipulating small pieces of information such as names, addresses, assessed values, and other data by special mechanical and electronic machines, each performing a different function. The information is fed from one machine to the next until the information is added, multiplied or rearranged in the desired, usable form. In the midst of it all is a new device called a "computer."
- The Department of Local Affairs and Development, a state agency charged with strengthening local government, is established.
- Convention: in Madison at the Park Motor Inn. League President, Black Earth Village President Roy A. Sarbacan.

1968

- After initial success in southeastern Wisconsin and the Fox River Valley, regional planning commissions come into vogue as area-wide planning agencies throughout the state.
- Prompted by an increase in striking teachers strike idleness of government employees doubles since 1966.
- At the Green Bay convention, held at the Hotel Northland, League President, Merrill Mayor Ralph F.J. Voigt states, "In order to eliminate ghettos, upgrade our poor and underprivileged and eradicate the reasons for riots and terror in our streets, we must make all of the resources of our national, state and local governments, as well as those of the private sector, available to fight these extremely complex problems."
The Age of Aquarius

1969
- The spread of Dutch elm disease is seen as a parallel for the cities in which the cost of doing nothing is greater than the cost of control programs. This is the same attitude state legislatures have toward deteriorating cities and towns, according to Perk Rinard, Iowa.
- "We all realize that the overriding domestic problem of America today is the problem of our cities," writes Spiro T. Agnew, Vice President Elect.
- At the Milwaukee convention, held at the Sheraton Schroeder Hotel, League President and Winneconne Village President James P. Coughlin: "In preparing for the 1970s it is essential that we try to improve all our efforts at cooperation among all levels of government. We cannot compartmentalize government. All governments affect the same people."

1970
- Snowmobile numbers increase nationally from 250,000 in 1968-69 to 600,000 in 69-70, including 40,000 in Wisconsin.
- The preliminary report on the 1970 census shows an increase of 10.5% during the decade, bringing the state population to 4,366,766. A total of 214 municipalities gained population; 58 lost.
- 1970s growth is predicted for Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee-Sheboygan: 60%, Madison-Janesville-Beloit: 25%, Green Bay-Appleton Oshkosh: 14%. "In fact, Wisconsin may well become an extension of a giant "Great Lakes Megalopolis," stretching from Green Bay to Milwaukee and Chicago and on to Detroit, Cleveland and Pittsburgh."
- Employment increases are expected in the services industry, in government and in retail and wholesale trades. Agricultural jobs will continue to diminish and farm land will be developed. There will be great increases in population yet fewer elementary and school aged children. Problems will increase for young and old left in non-metropolitan Wisconsin and those in the central city.

1971
- The responsibility of cities over cable television receives much scrutiny.
- Experiments are underway in Madison to recycle paper trash.
- Mobile homes: instant suburbia?
- Home rule for cities is challenged by the 92nd Congress as bills are introduced to establish federal controls, independent of federal grant programs, including Fair Labor Standards Amendments, Equal Employment Opportunities Enforcement Act and the Equal Employees Benefits Security Act.
- Although a popular song has dubbed this the "Dawning of the Age of Aquarius," a more appropriate title might be the "Age of Upbraiouneness." And somehow, amidst the clamor and the din of airplanes, motor vehicles, power lawn mowers, clanging garbage cans, small home appliances and stereos, a pitiful cry of help is now being heard. The cry is for "Quiet Please!" writes R.J. Brumbaugh.
- At the Green Bay convention, held at the Hotel Northland, League President and Mt. Horeb Village President Curtis G. Witte describes concerns over drugs, "ecology" and taxes. The convention is held at the Hotel Northland.

Energy Crisis

1972
- Winnebago County, the Oshkosh Board of Education and the City of Oshkosh establish a data processing center employing a newly-acquired UNIVAC 9300 computer system.
- A transportation "squeeze" is caused by a rapid increase in the number of vehicles and double the miles driven in 1961. Needed: more highways and more money to build them. The general trend in mass transit is toward decreased ridership, increased cost and greater need for public assistance.
- Local regulation of snowmobiles is encouraged.
- Municipal golf courses increase by 11 since 1960 but more are called for. Golf has become "everyman's" game.
- Ed Johnson appears in Washington to oppose new federal public employee legislation to regulate the relationships between state and local governments and their employees.
- "Revenue sharing" is passed by the U.S. Congress through the State and Local Fiscal Assistance Act of 1972. A provision states that local governments may not discriminate because of race, color, sex or national origin in the use of any funds. How the federal tax money is spent is left to state and local officials.
- At the Milwaukee convention, held at the Marc Plaza Hotel, Amery Mayor George F. Griffin is unable to attend due to ill health and the address is delivered by 1st vice president and Port Edwards Village President Carl W. Guelder.
Improving the drainage on the west side of Madison in front of a sign advertising pre-energy crisis fuel prices (Mead & Hunt Inc.)

1973

• Local governments attempt to cope with shortages during the "energy crisis."
  • The Madison Area Police System, funded by a federal revenue-sharing program in the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, implements a totally integrated management system for law enforcement, interfacing with automated reporting systems: computers.
  • At the Madison convention, held at the Park Motor Inn, Port Edwards Village President Carl Guelcher says that home rule may be at its lowest since a point prior to the adoption of the 1973 constitutional amendment. Authority continues to be centralized at higher levels of government and the state government involves itself more and more in activities traditionally considered primarily of local concern: land use planning, solid waste disposal and taxing.

1974

• A 55 mph speed limit is imposed in all Wisconsin highways during the "energy emergency."
  • "Hordes" of new golfers overtax Wisconsin courses; the number of courses nationally increases by 50 percent while the number of players doubles in ten years.
  • The League opposes a proposition to permit the legislature to define agricultural and undeveloped land for preferential tax treatment—a boon to farmers but a bane to city and village property taxpayers.
  • Affirmative action is explained in relation to local communities by Marie B. Rosenberg-Dishman, Ph.D., as women provide increasing input to Wisconsin politicians.
  • Experts agree that 75% of household waste is recyclable. The Wisconsin Solid Waste Recycling authority is created to help alleviate stress on landfills.
  • Convention: Green Bay, at the Port Plaza Inn. League President, Wausau Mayor John L. Kannenberg.

1975

• "For decades the phrase 'home rule' had the status of shibboleth in the vocabulary of Wisconsin politicians. It was virtually impossible for most candidates and others involved in state political affairs to avoid treading in the idea of the superiority of local government responsibility and independence, together with the scornful diatribe about the machinations of the more distant and nameless 'bureaucrats' of Madison and Washington."
• New regulations require training and registration of emergency medical technicians (EMTs).
• Attempts are made to restrict salt use on winter streets.
• The Municipality marks 75 years of publication.
• "If your community has not organized to celebrate the 200th Anniversary of America's beginning, the time is now or never."
• Under Tax Incremental Financing (TIFs), a city or village develops a plan aimed at improving property values in a defined district, then uses taxes from the increased property values to pay project costs.
• At the Milwaukee convention, held at the Marc Plaza Hotel, League President and Combined Locks Village President Marvin H. Schumacher counts membership at 517. Over 99% of the residents of Wisconsin cities and villages live in member municipalities.

The perennial issue of home rule was discussed once again in the 1970s. As a new feature, the Newsletter incorporated the newsletter of the then new Department of Local Affairs and Development (League of Wisconsin Municipalities)
The Manitowoc Maritime Museum preserves the city’s shipbuilding and sailing heritage. The celebration of the United States Bicentennial encouraged a greater awareness of community history and a statewide movement to preserve it. (Wisconsin Department of Tourism)

1976
- U.S. Bicentennial.
- Municipalities discuss how to cut budgets in hard times.
- At the Madison convention, held at the Concourse Hotel, League President and Wisconsin Rapids Mayor Donald F. Penza: “Mandated costs, required programs, restrictions on elected local government officials, have all resulted in a reaction on the part of local officials and the electorate that I believe will eventually strengthen the role of cities, villages, counties, etc., even though we have had to go through this hectic period when higher levels of government have tried to interfere in how we run our local affairs.”

1977
- The number of lawsuits against elected and appointed public officials and the dollar amount of damages both increase.
- Psychologist columnists stress the importance of communication. “The reason that no one listens usually is that our egos get in the way in a sense that we’re mentally formulating what we’re going to say when the other person gets through speaking.”
- Hayward adopts an ordinance limiting the manner in which go-go girls may perform within the city.
- At the Milwaukee convention, held at the Marc Plaza Hotel, the incumbent League president fails to be reelected, elevating 1st Vice President and Muscoda Village President B.J. Schwingle to the office. When “Bun” Schwingle dies unexpectedly, Neenah Mayor Roman V. Hauser becomes League President. Hauser is then elected to a full term.

1978
- Wisconsin’s solid waste headache: What to do with 30 million pounds of junk per day? By 1980, the volume of solid waste generated annually in Wisconsin will be 5 times as great as it was in 1930.
- According to James R. Morgan of the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance, local governments have been losing the power struggle with the state. “The ultimate blow ... was the laws enacted during the early 1970s which limited the increase in property taxes for towns, villages, cities and counties ... and limited the increase in costs for school districts. These actions were a direct assault on the traditional concept of local home rule.”
- At the Green Bay convention, Black Earth Village President Jack H. Curtis becomes League President because incumbent Roman V. Hauser is not reelected Neenah Mayor. Banquet speaker: Packer defensive tackle Dave Roller. The convention is held at the Port Plaza Inn.

1979
- With the state treasury overflowing, politicians concentrate on cutting taxes and getting the surplus back to taxpayers.
- Nobody wants to live next to a sanitary landfill, as any public official who has tried to site a new one can readily attest, writes Cynthia Sampson, Environmental Mediation Project Coordinator, in The Municipality.
- Local, state and federal resources combine to combat elm disease in urban areas.
- Over $200 million has been awarded to cities and villages in Wisconsin since the beginning of the community development block grant program in 1975.

30 Million Pounds of Junk

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Managing solid waste at Janesville, 1950s. Much progress has been made since the early 1980s, but solid waste continues to generate “headaches” for local government today. (City of Janesville)
Grantsmanship

1980
- "Municipal government is becoming more complex and many forces such as tax limitation movements, the expanding presence of federal and state agencies in local affairs, rising citizen expectations, and the growth of professional management cadres in municipal government are focusing sharp attention on the role and performance of councils, boards and administrative staffs," state Carl H. Neau and Lyle J. Sumek.
- Municipalities attempt to deal with regulations based on the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973: no otherwise qualified handicapped individual shall be discriminated against under any program receiving federal financial assistance.
- "Grantsmanship, then, could mean the ability to apply many small actions which, in combination, allow for the accomplishment of a much larger purpose: that of successfully securing a grant," writes Ralph Whiting, Instructional Media and Technology Supervisor, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Madison.
- Honored: Frederick N. MacMillin, League Executive Director 1929-1955, by the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letter. MacMillin, as executive director of the Wisconsin Retirement Fund, he made the Wisconsin Investment Board a national model for public employee retirement programs.
- "The word 'mandates' has long had the same type of negative reaction from local government officials as other buzz words such as 'skimoffs,' 'cutbacks,' 'tax exemption,' etc. Numerous local officials feel that many of the financial problems cities and villages face today can be traced back to state and federal actions which require municipalities to perform specific functions or to provide services in certain ways," states an article in The Municipality.
- Convention: Milwaukee, Marc Plaza Hotel. League President, Cumberland Mayor Albert B. Skinner.

1981
- Eau Claire reacts to a tornado that damages 20,000 boulevard trees and causes $60 million of uninsured property damage.
- Executive Director Ed Johnson reviews 40 years of League protests against mandates.
- Infrared cameras pinpoint areas of home heat loss in a continuing quest for energy efficiency.
- At the Stevens Point convention, held at the Holiday Inn, League President and Greendale Village Manager Donald Fieldstad, Jr.: "Some things that are happening in Washington are going to make life more difficult for you and me in our roles as municipal officials. There have been cutbacks made in federal spending already which are going to be felt in our city and village halls ... in mass transit funds ... for sewer plant construction [and] social service mandates than cities can manage.
- At the Madison convention, held at the Concourse Hotel, League President and Madison Mayor Richard W. Suscha sounds the annual theme of change, this time with a national administration cutting back on programs, the state in a financial crunch, a slow economy, unemployment high, and reapportionment causing changes in the legislature. What will be the impact on local governments and their property taxpayers?

1983
- Wisconsin's Public Records Law guarantees public access in most cases.
- Larry A. Reed, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, says a landmarks commission and ordinance "makes economic sense."
- League of Wisconsin Municipalities Insurance Trust is formed to provide insurance coverage for member municipalities.
- Balancing budgets becomes difficult as the public's expectations rise and tax dollars fall due to the economic recession. Reduced costs, increased productivity and new revenue sources are a way of life for local government.
- At the Milwaukee convention, held at the Marc Plaza, League President and West Salem Village President Martin W. Hass describes lean years in which taxes must increase.

1984
- The Cable Communications Policy Act is passed by Congress, the culmination of over five years of industry attempts at federal preemption of local authority and two years of often bitter negotiations between the major cable trade associations and local government representatives.
- Ed Johnson, executive director since 1955, resigns. The Baltimore native had come to Wisconsin from the Maryland League of Municipalities. He is "roasted" at the convention. The new director, Stanley York, was the first director of the state energy office and chairman of the negotiations between the major cable trade associations and local government representatives.
- At the La Crosse convention, held at the La Crosse Center, League President and Marshfield Mayor Marilyn Hardacre: "It's been 30 years since a League President has presided over choosing a new executive director. Before that it had been 25 years since it had happened. So one might say that my term was unusual, to say the least." Her term also is only eleven months, as the next annual meeting is to be held in September instead of October. "I have been repeatedly assured by everyone that this shortened term has nothing to do with the fact that I am a woman and being discriminated against." The concluding segment of the conference is canceled when it is learned that Ed Johnson's wife, Marie, has succumbed to a heart attack.
1985

- Executive Director Stan York declares March to be "Foot Your Municipal Horn Month." "It is rapidly becoming apparent that the best kept secret in the entire state is the fact that municipalities are doing a good job of providing municipal services at levels demanded by their citizens and at reasonable cost."
- New executive director York protests state cuts in the shared revenue fund, recalling 1911, when "the state took away funding sources with the left hand (personal property tax on intangibles, etc.) and substituted other funding sources with the right hand (state shared revenues) for good public policy reasons." The original concept was to provide local units of government with revenue lost when the state enacted a property tax exemption for intangibles (stocks, bonds, mortgages, bank accounts) and household furnishings. Later, utility property and motor vehicles were exempted.
- Much attention is given to explaining the open meeting law, in effect since 1976, in which every meeting of a governmental body must be preceded by public notice.
- Convention: at the Concourse Hotel in Madison. League President, Ashwaubenon Village President Tony J. Frigo.

1986

- "The legislature should quit picking at the picky details and stay with issues of statewide concern," writes Stan York.
- In response to a 1984 chemical leak that killed 3,000 in Bhopal, India, Congress enacts the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 (SARA) including an act providing the public's right to know about chemicals used in their communities.
- The League initiates an intensive program to protect shared revenue.
- Governing a municipality in these times is tough, says York, noting that it has become a cliché to say that citizens want more services and lower taxes. " Shrinking resources demand hard decisions, and yet the snow must be plowed and fires fought."
- At the Green Bay convention, held at the Embassy Suites and Regency Center Hotels, Plainfield Village President Max W. Harrington is propelled into office by the home defeat of the previously elected president. Gubernatorial candidate Tommy Thompson promises to give back cuts in shared revenue if elected. "In the 20 years that I have been in the legislature, I have never seen the relationships as strained as they currently are between local units of government and state government."

1987

- The Wisconsin Investment Trust is established to provide member cities and villages with a new investment resource through a mutual fund in federal securities.
- " Mandates, are still a dirty word because of the costs they impose and because they limit the ability of local officials to do their job," states Stan York.
- Larry A Reed, State Historical Society of Wisconsin discusses rehabilitation tax credit for historic buildings. "Preserving the special character and the unique heritage of a community and building upon those historic assets to attract shoppers, visitors and new businesses, as well as to retain old businesses, has proven a viable, sensible, low-cost way to achieve economic prosperity."
- At the Milwaukee convention, held at the Hyatt Regency, outgoing League President and Plainfield Village President Max Harrington presents new president and Madison Mayor F. Joseph Sensenbrenner with a gavel Harrington made from a black walnut tree on his family's property. Governor Thompson announces a communications link with local government leaders: the Bureau of Intergovernmental Relations within the Department of Administration.

1988

- Community foundations are an increasingly popular means to continue services cut by federal, state and local governments.
- Qualification Based Selection, a program of the Wisconsin Society of Architects, will help municipal officials select professionals based on qualifications rather than solely low bid.
- At a Binding Arbitration Rally held in Madison, 1,500 local officials seek to change the 10-year-old binding arbitration law.
- The League now has a staff of nine: including an executive director, an associate director, two full-time attorneys, a legislative coordinator, and a publishing coordinator.
- The State Assembly sustains the Governor's veto of a cost control bill opposed by the League.
- "What can a city or village do when there is work to be done and no money to pay someone? Find a Volunteer!" Traditionally, firemen, more recently EMTs, according to Robert N. Dick, Professor, UWEX, Community Dynamics Institute.
- The October issue of The Municipality notes 90 years of League service with photos of the founding fathers of the organization. "Skimming the 1988 Annual Conference program indicates that in 90 years these same municipal topics are still a major concern. Modern technology has not erased the issues. On one hand the problems are now more complex while on the other Wisconsin's municipal leaders have more sophisticated tools to work with in 'Preparing for the Years Ahead…' as local government faces the 21st century."
- Stan York resigns to become Executive Assistant, Department of Health and Social Services.
- Convention: at the Holiday Inn in Stevens Point. League President, Madison Mayor F. Joseph Sensenbrenner, Jr.
1989
- Frederick Nelson MacMillin, “diminutive dynamo,” dies at age 89.
- “Is Your Municipality Using a Camcorder?” asks The Municipality.
- Interim director Bob Tevik is replaced by Daniel R. Thompson, the fourth person to serve as League Executive Director. The Iowa native had been Fond du Lac city manager and a member of the League board of directors. Thompson writes that, after speaking to the Committee on Urban and Local Affairs, he whispers to former executive director Ed Johnson, who had stopped by to watch, “Some issues never go away, do they?” Johnson says, “Do you want my notes from 25 years ago?”
- At the Madison convention, held at the Concourse Hotel, League President and Little Chute Village President Donald H. De Groot defines major problems facing the League: shared revenue, mediation/arbitration changes, property tax relief, nonpoint source pollution, annexation and solid waste issues. “For many years the League and the Legislature have maintained adversary roles. It was always "US" against "THEM" type of situation. More recently those of us with municipal legislative concerns were looked upon as being members of a 'special interest' group.

1990
- League President and Oconomowoc Mayor Florence Whalen writes a regular column in The Municipality. Drug abuse heads her list of concerns. She also describes the “pernicious problem” of urban sprawl. “A hedge-hog of development chews up Wisconsin, causing inappropriate land use, encroachment upon prime agricultural lands long before the population growth warrants, inefficient services, air, ground and water pollution, traffic problems and inequitable taxing policies.”
- In a Department of Transportation pilot program, clubs and organizations are invited to adopt a two mile segment of state highway and keep it clean.
- Convention: at the Oshkosh Centre and Hilton Hotel in Oshkosh.

1991
- A lot of municipal officials are rushing off to do surveys, asking questions to which they already know the answers,” says Robert N. Dick, Professor.
- The Municipality sends a reader’s survey to 10% of its readers.
- The state budget bill creates the Council on State-Local Relations.
- Questions arise concerning municipal employees called to active duty in the military reserve or National Guard as a result of the conflict in the Persian Gulf.
- “Artificial levy limits imposed by the state just get in the way of the local democratic process that already works in our cities and villages. That’s why state-imposed levy limits were a mistake in 1975. That’s why they would be a mistake in 1991,” writes Dan Thompson prior to the state’s imposition of levy limits.

1992
- Plans for complying with the Americans With Disabilities Act must be submitted.
- UW-Extension opens a Local Government Center.
- The Municipality publishes newspaper editorials attacking the state for demanding cost controls on local governments.
- Maintaining a workplace free from harassment and discrimination, particularly sexual, becomes a priority.
- Court decisions reinforce the need to separate municipalities from religious endorsements, such as corporate seals and festivals.
- At the convention at the La Crosse Center, League President and Stevens Point Mayor Scott Schultz says, “While state officials cling to their belief that they are providing property tax relief and we are mindlessly undermining their efforts, the truth is that state policies continue to make the property tax disparity problem worse.”
1993
- There is no end in sight for big increases in Medicaid; prison spending and school enrollments will grow about 1% annually. "It appears as if the states will be increasingly tempted to avoid raising their own taxes while encouraging cities and villages to do so," writes Steven D. Gold, New York.
- Governor Tommy Thompson: "We have worked hard on the state level to hold the line on taxes and spending, to make the tough decisions during tough times. We have learned to live within our means. It is time for the local governments to do the same." Dan Thompson responds: "City and village officials make tough decisions all the time — and they live within their means. The Governor should praise municipal officials for their hard work and selfless dedication. He shouldn’t bash them in his budget message."
- Don’t waste time producing plans that will gather dust, says Tom Capp, Madison Planner.
- As a fund raiser, De Pere Mayor Nancy Nusbaum and West De Pere barber Jim Gevers skydive from Pulaski’s Carter Airport and live to joke about it.
- "Many things change in this world," writes Dan Thompson, but I believe that some basic patterns remain constant. People always dislike property taxes, of course, but their resistance gets really nasty when the rate hits about 30 mills," which it does in 1993.
- The new Wisconsin Award for Municipal Excellence is designed to encourage and recognize municipal excellence among Wisconsin’s cities and villages.
- The Eau Claire Fire Department designs the Hmong Fire Safety packet for a non-literate immigrant population.
- League offices move to 202 State Street, Madison.
- The League convention at Middleton, held at the Holiday Inn West, is dedicated to the memory of former Associate Director Bob Tevik, who died May 23, 1993. League President and Darlington Mayor Beverly Anderson, who had moved into the presidency when Dennis Behling was defeated for office, comments. "It’s ironic how many past issues parallel those of today. For example, in the 1930s some municipal concerns were: Municipal responsibility for reducing traffic accidents, regulation of overhanging signs, a "Pay Your Taxes" campaign, eminent domain laws, home rule, and development of good municipal financing."

1994
- Municipalities are encouraged to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the federal Community Development Block Grant Program, providing grants to states and municipalities to improve conditions in low- and moderate-income communities.
- The information superhighway will "make it possible for a councilmember to meet directly with constituents at a community center from city hall...or for a consumer to look at and ask questions to a merchant without ever leaving home."
- As local officials become concerned about rising juvenile and gang-related crime, a large number of municipalities enact juvenile curfew ordinances.
- New federal regulations require large municipalities to test employees for drug and alcohol use, beginning January 1, 1995.
- "The reason that taxes are high in Wisconsin is because Wisconsin has a history of buying the good life with public money: good schools, good roads, good air, good water, good health, good law enforcement, a lot of good stuff," says Madison’s Bill Kraus. "It is far from the "Tax Hell," some call it.
- Convention: Embassy Suites, Green Bay, League President, Darlington Mayor Beverly Anderson.

1995
- At the annual conference, the Board of Directors announce a new Strategic Action Plan for the League. In addition to a Vision Statement and a Mission Statement, the plan includes a Strategic Action Agenda with six specific items to be completed in 1996 and 1997: Increase Access to Vital Information Through Technology; Strengthen the League’s Lobbying Activity; Develop a Strong Network of Regional Meetings to Increase Communication Between Municipal Officials; Expand Training Programs for Local Officials; Create Programs to Increase Participation in League Events and Activities and Awareness of League Services; Develop More Aggressive Role in Educating the Public About Local Government.
- Convention: Pfister Hotel, Milwaukee, League President, Black Earth Village President, Ron Norris.
The League of Wisconsin Municipalities
delegates doing what they have done for a century, coming together to "meet in closer cooperation in the solution of the many problems," they shared. (League of Wisconsin Municipalities) 1996

• Dan Thompson: "The decision by the Board to accept the recommendations of the Strategic Plan Task Force will cause a dramatic and positive change in the way the League provides services to cities and villages across Wisconsin." Thompson refers to the Technology Team, Lobbying Action Team, Regional Association Task Force, Training Team and Citizenship Team

• Convention: Stevens Point. League President, Chippewa Falls Mayor Virginia Smith.

1997

• Convention topics are: land use policies, master plans, alcoholic beverage licenses, assessment of agricultural land, wireless facilities siting, government on the Net and "citizenship."
• For sale: aeration diffuser, computer, fire pagers, fire truck tanker, mailing machine, pumper, radar units, sewer cleaning equipment, sludge truck
• The millenium, a ticking time bomb as computers miscalculate dates in millions of time-sensitive computer records? New Year's 2,000 could be a bad day.
• Report from Kathy Arciszewski of the Citizenship Team: "A citizen has the right and responsibility to be involved in government; a tax payer merely contributes to the system. As elected officials it is our responsibility to ensure that our taxpayers have the opportunity to become citizens. Most solutions involve increasing communication with citizens whether it is through newsletters, committees, or school visits."
• Convention: Paper Valley Hotel, Appleton. League President, Kimberly Village President, James Siebers.

1998

• The League of Wisconsin Municipalities celebrates its centennial.
• Convention: Marriott West, Middleton. League President, West Bend Mayor, Michael Miller.
Above: Martin Luther King Day observance, Madison; the Peshtigo Museum, 1890s. Below: the nationally-recognized, historically preserved downtown of Sheboygan Falls. Wisconsin cities are ethnically diverse and centers for culture and living history. (Wisconsin Department of Tourism and the Main Street Program)

Below: the nationally-recognized, historically preserved downtown of Sheboygan Falls.

Wisconsin cities are ethnically diverse and centers for culture and living history. (Wisconsin Department of Tourism and the Main Street Program)

Above: Lake Michigan marina at Racine; Left: an old tractor leading the parade at Sturgeon Bay; Below: park garden and pond, Milwaukee. Cities are places for commerce, industry and for recreation and relaxation. (Wisconsin Department of Tourism)
Presidents
