



Jack London Jr. High School

Wheeling

In 1814, the elevation of the Territory of Illinois to statehood, heralded the end of the existence of the Indians in the state, including the Potawatomi in the area which is now known as Wheeling.

There have been many stories written about the methods used to induce the Indians to sign the treaties which deeded their land to the white man, but probably the most honest one is that the Indians were given large quantities of "fire-water" to cloud their judgment.

Whatever the reasons or methods used, one fact remains: The Indians did sign the treaties, and, in 1833, were ordered to leave the state.

Prior to the signing of the treaties, the first white man arrived in the Wheeling area. Little is known as to his background, in fact, there is no record of his first name. He is simply known in the records as "Mr. Sweet."

Mr. Sweet arrived in March of 1833, and built a cabin in which he lived for approximately six months. He was apparently on excellent terms with the Indians, because this was prior to the ratification of the treaties and it is known that the Indians were generally opposed to any white man settling on their lands.

George Strong moved into the Sweet cabin on the Second of September, after being advised by Col. Thomas Owen, the Indian agent in Chicago, not to do so. Mr. Strong was informed that should he attempt to occupy the land, the United States troops would have to defend the rights of the Indians if any trouble ensued.

Mr. Strong apparently figured that the treaty would soon be ratified and decided to take the risk. He bought the claim from Mr. Sweet in October, for the sum of Sixty Dollars, and thus became the first permanent white settler in the Wheeling area.

Shortly after taking possession of the cabin, Strong was surrounded by approximately a dozen Indians. He went outside and fought with them, knocking at least one Indian down, and somehow escaped with his life. It is thought that his lack of apparent fear was the thing that saved him.

This tenacity and strength of purpose was also present in the character of the other settlers who began to arrive in greater numbers after the ratification of the treaties. After the banishment of the Indians, the greatest danger faced by the settlers was that of claim-jumpers. This threat diminished when the legitimate settlers organized to fight the claim-jumpers who generally worked alone.

Joseph Filkins built the first residence in the vicinity of Wheeling proper in 1834, and as the surrounding area became more densely populated, a post office was established in 1836, with Mr. Filkins as the first postmaster. This increase in population also presented other problems such as the need for a store where items could be bought that could not be made in the home. Another need was for a meeting place where the men could gather and discuss problems, or just make small talk. Both of these requirements were met in 1837, when Mr. Filkins built the first commercial building, a tavern-hotel. In the same year, Russell Wheeler and Charles Daniels opened a general store.

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Wheeling's first Commercial Enterprise was this tavern-hotel, built by Joseph Filkins in 1837. Located on the Northwest corner of Milwaukee and Dundee, this building was the site to Wheeling's first Post Office and

served as a regular coach stop for the stage from Chicago to Milwaukee. This picture was taken in 1905. The building was demolished in 1918.

First Enterprise

Filkin's tavern-hotel was the fore-ordination of things to come for Wheeling, for in the ensuing years, the town's primary claim to fame was the many fine restaurants which grew up along Milwaukee Avenue.

Milwaukee Avenue was the main road from Chicago to the lands to the North of Wheeling. It was composed of the trails of Indians and paths beaten into the ground by herds of buffalo. In some places the feet of thousands of buffalo had beaten the trails down to a depth of six feet.

In 1836, a stage route was established on this road, and Filkin's tavern became a coach stop. Because of the difficulty of travel in those days, Wheeling was the natural stopping place for the weary travelers to refresh themselves with food and drink. This led to the growth of "Restaurant Row" along Milwaukee Avenue, and the fame of these fine eating places continued until the present day. The advent of the super highways in the 1950's caused a marked decrease in the amount of traffic through Wheeling, but the town is still remembered by most people as the place to go for a good meal.

By 1835, there were 18 log cabins in the area around Wheeling. The largest of these was a "mansion" built by Mr. William Hopps. It was in this house of the well-to-do Mr. Hopps that

Wheeling's first murder occurred. Mr. Hopps murdered his wife, but was acquitted through the exceptional ruling of Judge McAllister, on the plea of insanity. His freedom was short lived, and Mr. Hopps died in the poor house in Dunning in March, 1836.

As settlers continued to pour into the area, the growth of the village was also apparent. In 1838, two blacksmith shops were opened, one by Mr. Orestin Shepard, the other by Mr. Ascher Skinner.

Lumber for these projects was supplied by a mill owned by a Mr. Kenniscott. This mill was located on the Des Plaines River, about a mile South of what is now called "Half Day". It is said that this name "Half Day" was the result of an error. In 1836, a Mr. Gridly laid claim to a large section of land and was instrumental in the establishment of a Post Office which was to be called "Half Da" after an Indian who formerly lived in the area. However, the authorities in Washington assumed that some "foreigner" did not know how to spell, so they changed the name to "Half Day".

Adding to the "industry" of the area was a flour mill, located on the West side of the river, directly across from the saw mill.



Wheeling High School

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Other businesses followed in relatively quick succession. James Parker opened Wheeling's second hotel in 1840. By 1842, other additions included: A store owned by John Rothschild; another store owned by John M. Schaffer and still another by William Vogt; another blacksmith shop by E.K. Beach, and, in 1845, a hardware store was introduced by Mr. Albert Fassbender.

Also in 1845, Wheeling's first school was built. Being very small, this building was used only until 1861, when a second and larger school was erected. This second building was destroyed by fire in 1870. In 1871, a new two-story school was completed on the South side of Dundee Road, just West of Milwaukee Avenue, on the site now occupied by a shopping center.

This structure served the community until 1925, when the brick school on Wille Avenue was completed. There was, however, one change. The State authorities forced the Village to install additional windows in 1924. This allowed more light to penetrate the musty interior.

From this humble beginning, Wheeling's School system has grown, and today it boasts of having one of the country's finest and most progressive school districts, both at the primary and secondary levels.

• • •



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Picture taken on west side of old school after state school authorities forced the board to install more windows for light.





Wheeling Public School, erected in 1871, as a replacement for the second school which was destroyed by fire in 1870. It served the town for 54 years, until the completion of the modern brick building, pictured below, in 1925.



Now called Walt Whitman School, this building, renovated and expanded, is still serving the youth of Wheeling as an elementary school.

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Greatest Asset The People

Since George Strong's fight with the Indians in 1833, Wheeling's greatest asset has been the strength and character of its people. From its beginning as only a wide spot in the trail from Chicago to Milwaukee, to its present evolution into a bustling industrial and residential complex, one basic factor has proven to be the inspiration and fortitude of Wheeling - namely, its people.

Perhaps, the future of Wheeling could best be summarized, just as its past is exemplified, by its slogan: **WHEELING - WHERE PROGRESS IS BY THE PEOPLE.**

Editors Note:

Although the members of the Wheeling Historical Society have spent many hours in researching the foregoing information, the job is far from complete. There is much more to be written about our town, and to accomplish this, the Society earnestly requests that anyone having access to information concerning any phase of Wheeling's development please contact the Society.

The importance of history can not be over emphasized. Only by understanding the heritage of the past, can the youth of today comprehend and appreciate the depth of the miracle of our democratic society. Perhaps, through the proper use of history, we can teach them that the ideals for which they are fighting, are nothing more than an extension of the basic philosophy of our country, that is, the inalienable rights of the individual.



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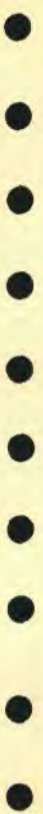
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Wheeling Public School as it looked prior to the remodeling and addition of new windows.

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The era centering around the 1920's was one of contrast and confusion to many people. The gas buggy was becoming more and more common, but the horse and buggy was still the main means of transportation.

The "Bussing" of students is nothing new to Wheeling. In the '20's, Mr. Frank Forke, owner of the town's first livery stable, transported Wheeling's high school students to Maine Township High School in Des Plaines.

In addition to transporting students, Mr. Forke made regularly scheduled trips to the Soo Line Depot in Wheeling, the Northwestern Station in Des Plaines and the Saint Paul Railroad in Northbrook. His was the fore-runner of the present day taxi business.

By 1925, Milwaukee Avenue had been paved, a new and modern brick school was completed, and the town had its first gasoline driven fire engine. In 1950, the population was 916.

Wheeling's geographic location made it the ideal site for its role as "Chicago's Breadbasket" for many years. This same factor delayed the industrial and commercial development of the town, until the advent of the automobile and the increasing pressures applied by the people of Chicago seeking more living space, pushed Wheeling into the role of a residential suburb. By a strange paradox, this same growth in population began to attract more and more industry, the new industry attracts more people, and so today, Wheeling is beginning to take a place of prominence among the important cities of Illinois.

Within the ten-year period from 1950 to 1960, Wheeling's population increased 683 per cent! The fact that the town was able to cope with this sudden population explosion was, in a great part, due to the solid foundation developed by Wheeling's pioneers, and the integrity of its subsequent citizens.

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Many Contributed to Growth

Growth continued through the 1850's, and many families who would contribute heavily to the development of the town, made their appearance. In 1849, Dr. Julius Permann came to Wheeling and practiced medicine until his death in 1856.

Dr. John George Schneider was the area's first Veterinarian, arriving here in 1853. Dr. Schneider served the community in various offices, including that of Township Assessor, in addition to his work as a Veterinary Surgeon. His more than a half-century of service was ended by death in 1909.

One son, Reinhold Schneider, followed the trade of harness maker in a shop adjoining the first Village Hall, which is now the site of the Historical Society Museum. He served as Village Clerk from 1900 until his death in 1927. Miss Adeline Schneider, daughter of Reinhold, was elected Village Clerk upon the death of her father in 1927. She was continuously re-elected to this office until her retirement in 1953. Thus, the office of Village Clerk remained in the hands of the Schneider family from 1900 until 1953.

Not content with retirement, Adeline and her Sister, Lucile, have been very active in the Historical Society, and much of the material in this narration is attributable to their efforts.

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Township Formed

Politically, the territory known as Wheeling Precinct, encompassed a part of Maine and Northfield Townships as well as the area now known as Wheeling Township. Prior to 1850, when any voting was necessary it was done at Wilcox's Tavern, which was located at the junction of Milwaukee Avenue and the Des Plaines River.

Wheeling Township was organized on April 2, 1850, at a meeting held in the hotel owned by James Parker. S. M. Salisbury was elected as the first Supervisor and during the years from 1851 to 1883, was superseded by other men, many of whose names are very familiar in the area. Some of these early Supervisors were Joseph Filkins, William Scoville, George Strong, William H. Dutton, Frederick Tesh and David Peters.

Three of these men, S. M. Salisbury, George Strong and Joseph Filkins also served the area on the Court of Appeals prior to the formation of the township. The ultimate decisions in cases of claim-jumping was one of the responsibilities of these men.

Wheeling Gets Brewery

One addition of note to Wheeling's growth, was the building of a brewery by Napoleon Periolat in 1850. This business was operated by him, and later by his sons, Henry and Robert, until 1905, at which time it was sold to new owners from Chicago. The building was demolished in 1910.

At the turn of the half-century, Wheeling was beginning to assume the characteristics of the typical American small town. With its brewery, blacksmith shops, restaurants, general stores, hotels and schools, more and more people were attracted to the immediate area, built their homes, and helped Wheeling to develop an air of permanence.

One of the traits of the Homo sapiens is their need for the companionship of their own kind. As soon as the immediate needs for the sustainment of life are settled, man's first thoughts seem to be that of finding the means and the opportunity to meet together. Some primarily for the worship of God, and secondly, just for the sake of meeting together in friendship.

The oldest fraternal organization in Wheeling, is Vitruvius Lodge No. 81, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons. Formation of the Lodge dates back to October 4, 1849, when W. C. Hobbs, the Grand Master of the State of Illinois, granted to brethren of Oriental and La Fayette Lodges a dispensation to form a Lodge at Dutchman's Point.

On October 10, 1850, the Charter was granted, and in 1851, dispensation was given to move the Lodge to Wheeling.

Vitruvius was known as a "Moon Lodge" because meetings were held on the Saturday before the full moon. This was done so that the members could have moon light to guide their way to the meetings.



Wheeling's first industry was this brewery built by Napoleon Periolat in 1850. After more than half a century of operation, it was razed in 1910.

1st Church Formed

The erection of Wheeling's first Church is a notable event, not only for the Church itself, but because of the record of service compiled by its early members.

The first organizational meeting was held on May 1, 1864. At this time, it was decided to organize a Church which was to be called, "The German Evangelical United Reformed and Lutheran Church". A twenty-five article constitution was drafted, and Reverend F. C. Schwartz was called as the first pastor.

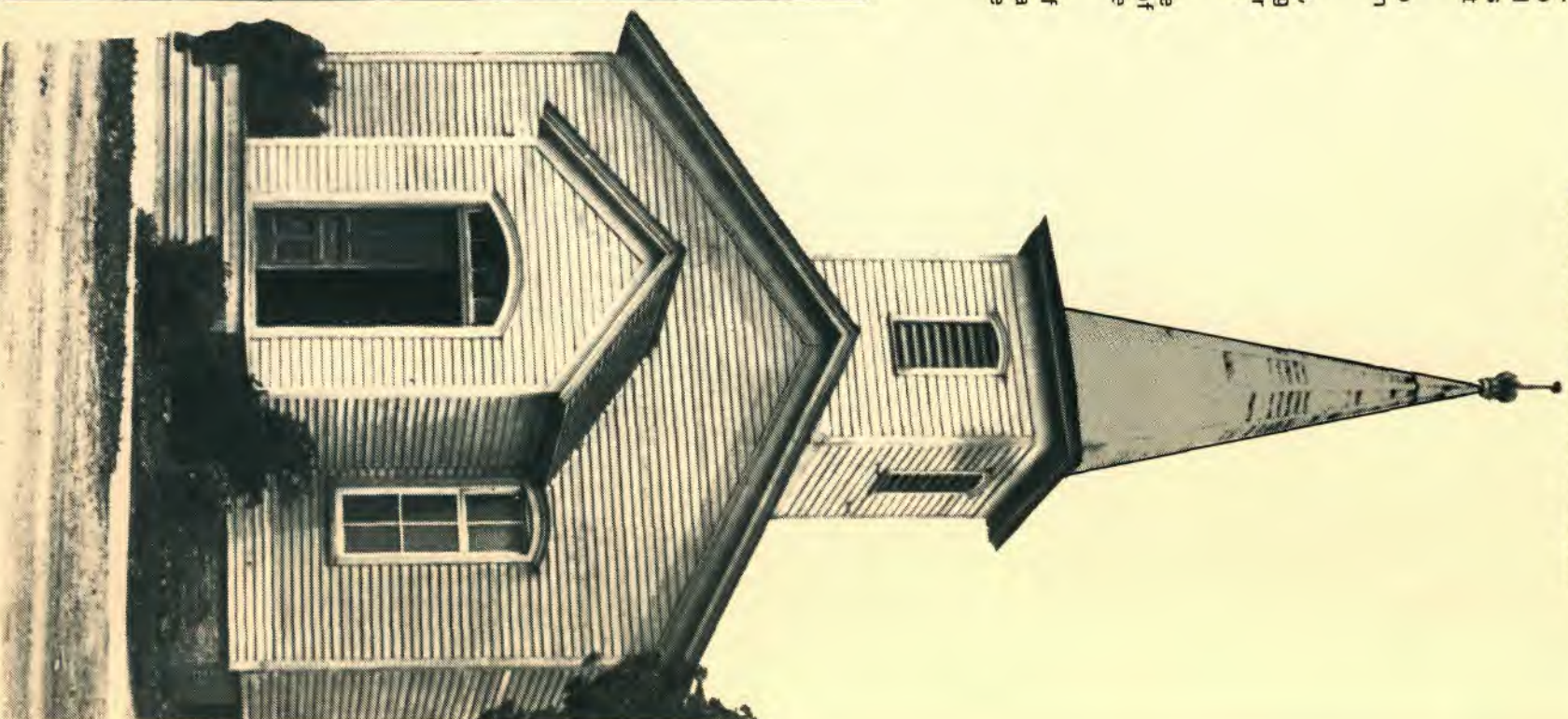
On October 8, 1864, the membership voted to apply to the Presbytery of Chicago to unite with the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A.

On the Second of November 1864, the new congregation, known as German Presbyterian Church, elected the following officers: William Vogt, Nicholas Bock, Werner Spengler and A. Fassbender as Elders; Jacob Zimmer and Conrad Baerthel, Deacons.

In the fall of 1865, they erected their Church on a site located on the North Side of Dundee Road and West of Milwaukee Avenue. The last worship services were held there on December 16, 1962.

The Church has since been moved to the Chamber of Commerce Park on Wolf Road, pending movement to a permanent site, where it is hoped that the building will be preserved as a link to the proud history of the town.

This Church served its members from 1865, until December 16, 1962, almost a century of constant use. Concerned citizens are at present working to preserve this historical reminder of the past.



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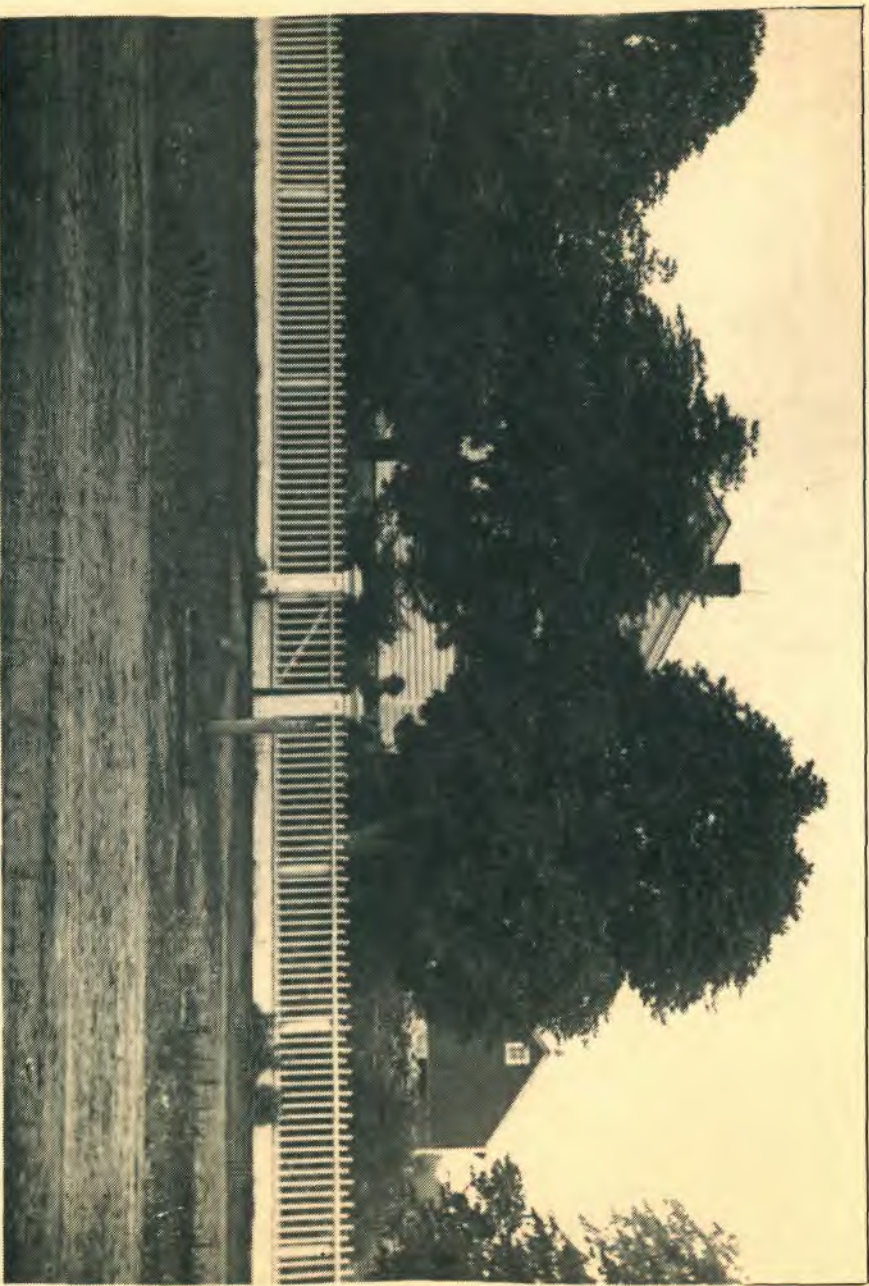
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During the years from 1850 through 1890, other business and professional people made their appearance. Many of them were destined to have their names and those of their descendants woven into the history of Wheeling.

Jacob Hunsinger opened a hotel in 1856, William Metz, a blacksmith shop in 1865, and in the same year, Samuel Reese opened a wagonshop, which he sold to Louis Fischer three years later.

In 1873, Fred Stryker opened a store, Martin Armbruster another hotel, and in 1874, C. Welflin opened a harness shop. This was the shop which Reinhold Schneider purchased in 1885.

John Behn's hotel was opened in 1877, and John Schminkie's store in 1878. Henry Boehmer, who was to become Wheeling's first President, started a creamery in 1880, which Jacob P. Hausam superintended for eleven years. Another store was opened by Sigwalt and Bollenback in 1888.

Dr. M. Moffat practiced medicine here from 1876 to 1890, in which year Dr. Henry Benz made his appearance.

Wheeling's railroad station was built in 1886, one mile west of the village, at the Wisconsin Central Railway.



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Old photo of the homes of Sicks and Benz, which were located on the north side of Dundee Road, west of Milwaukee Avenue.

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Decorations which were displayed for a street dance arranged by Wheeling's business men, in celebration of the paving of Milwaukee Avenue in August of 1923.

Gay Nineties

The 1890's, or as they are more generally called, the "Gay Nineties", were years that have captured the hearts of all romanticists. They were years when the pace of living was leisurely; Canoe rides on the river, Sunday picnics in the park, bicycle races, croquet matches and many other activities in which the entire family participated.

Every community had its "Town Square" or meeting place where the leading citizens could make speeches on the Fourth of July and other occasions of importance. Wheeling possessed one of the better sites for this type of activity - the grassy meadows along the Des Plaines River. There, on any sunny Sunday afternoon, could be heard the music of the Wheeling Cornet Band (organized in 1877), the shrill laughter of children and the mellow sounds of barbershop quartets, their voices made even more mellow by kegs of beer which were set up under the trees, and of course off-limits to the youngsters.

This area became so popular that people would travel all the way from Chicago just to enjoy it. Bicycle races from Wheeling to Chicago became quite an event. It was not at all unusual for 100 participants to start the race.

As a result of this activity, the restaurants and taverns of Wheeling enjoyed a great popularity. So much so, that they were probably one of the greatest reasons for the village's incorporation.

A certain "lawless element", composed primarily of the rough and ready railroad laborers who were imported into the area to maintain the Northwestern and St. Paul Railroads of the prosperous North Shore area of Lake Michigan, began to frequent Wheeling's taverns. Their conduct was so wild and bawdy, that when word reached the town of their coming, merchants closed their stores and women and children were kept off of the streets.

Realizing that something had to be done to control these and other illegal activities, the leading citizens of the area began campaigning for formal incorporation. A petition was circulated, and with the signatures of 42 registered voters, was sent to the Hon. Frank Scales, County Judge, Chicago, Illinois.

On June 18, 1894, a special election was held in the Union Hall. The results were: 43 for Village organization and 3 votes against it. After the returns had been canvassed by the County Clerk, an election was ordered for the 17th of July, 1894, for the purpose of electing the following officials: A Village President, Six trustees, A Village Clerk and a Police Magistrate.

Henry Boehmer was elected President; John Forke, Jacob Schwingel, Emil Sigwalt, Reinhold Schneider, William Fassbender, and J.A. Schminke were elected as trustees; Police Magistrate was Louis Fischer and Village Clerk, W. R. Munkhenke.

The Articles of Incorporation were approved by the State on August 26. The first Village Ordinance drafted by the new Village Fathers was one which pertained to the licensing of dram shops. Among the first licenses issued were those to the following applicants: The Chicago House, Columbia Hotel, Jacob Schwingel at His House, John Behm at the Union Hotel, Wheeling House, and the Wisconsin Central Hotel.

Wheeling was paralyzed by these ruffians as they became liquored up and roamed the town from one end to the other, looking for local residents to bully. When this occurred, nothing could be done until they had drunk their fill, at which time they would be thrown in jail until they sobered up.



Since the citizens of Wheeling lined the sides of "Milwaukee Road" in 1861, to cheer the Volunteers marching to join the Union Army at Camp Fry, the people of Wheeling have enjoyed a deep feeling of patriotism. Portrayed above is Mrs. Ed Wehlin posing with a car decorated to observe the signing of the armistice on Nov. 11, 1918.

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Wheeling Station as it appeared around 1910.



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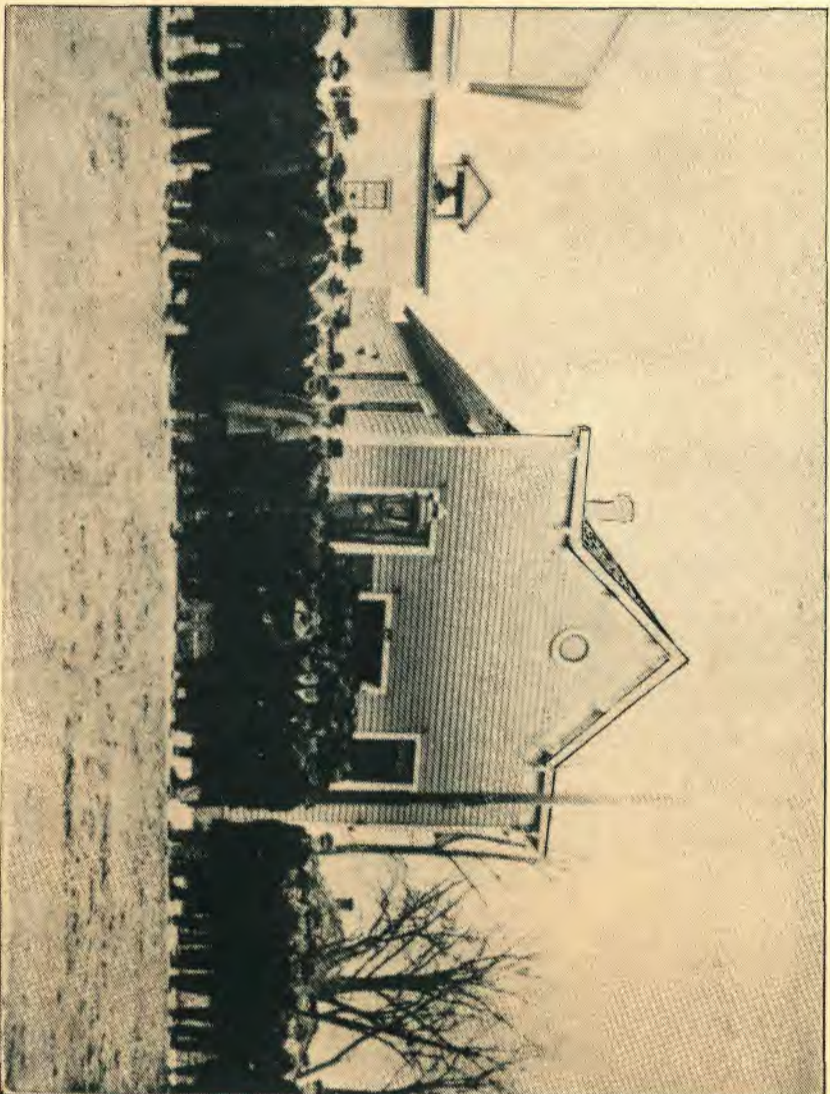
for Village Hall

As the needs of the Village grew, the necessity for a Village Hall became acute. Land was purchased for \$150.00, and sealed bids were taken for the erection of a building "20 by 30 by 12 feet, with two cells in the western end, 7½ by 9 feet each".

The contract for the building was granted to Mr. H. P. Mentzer of Shermerville (Northbrook), Ill., who advertised, "Undertaker, Contractor and Builder, Ice Box and Hearse Furnished when Desired, House Raising a Specialty".

On January 12, 1895, Mr. Mentzer presented the Village a statement totalling \$553.26. Following this, many items had to be purchased to furnish the new building. Among the more notable items were: two slop pails, a broom, two jail locks, two small spittoons and two large spittoons, A Gold Coin Ventiduct No. 19 Stove, one dozen chairs, two Rochester lamps, one table and a business desk. Also, a bill for fifty cents was presented by Mrs. Henry Hipp, for sewing two cell mattresses.

This original Village Hall has been refurbished and made into the headquarters for the Wheeling Historical Society and also serves as a museum. The museum is open to the public from 12 noon to 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, with group tours by appointment. Many items of interest have been donated by the citizens of the area and the museum has become the center of attraction and welcome addition to the cultural aspect of the town.



Wheeling's original Village Hall, erected in 1894, now serving as the headquarters and Museum of the Wheeling Historical Society.

Jensen's Ice Cream Parlor, Wheeling, Ill. 49724-r



(Top) Building constructed in 1914 with blocks from the Utpadel plant which was located on Wolf Road, North of Dundee Road. This building is now a tavern and is located on the East side of Milwaukee Avenue, across the street from the old Village Hall. (Below) Looking South on Milwaukee Avenue around 1915.



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Wheeling Township Regular Republican Organization



SHIRLEY MIHALEK
COMMITTEEWOMAN

RICHARD COWEN
COMMITTEEMAN



Two of Wheeling's early businesses, the Chicago House (above), and the Columbia Hotel (below), which also housed a bowling alley.



Fire Department

According to information researched and compiled by Joan Heuer, and presented by the Wheeling Independent in a series called, "The Infant Wheeling", the first move toward fire protection was made on April 6, 1896.

On that date, a committee of three was appointed to investigate the subject of fire protection and its estimated cost. This committee had accomplished nothing by June, so another committee of three was selected to investigate various chemical and other fire extinguishers and report at the next meeting of the Village Board. The committee consisted of Mr. Metz, John Forke, and Wm. Fassbender. Following the recommendations of these men, the Board ordered certain equipment, and on September 11, 1896, it was delivered at the Wisconsin Central Railway freight office.

The Fire Department was to be allowed the use of the Village Hall for their meetings, and a fire bell was purchased from Fassbender and Arnold for \$27.40.

The Constitution and By-laws of the Wheeling Fire Department, as adopted on September 30, 1896, allowed for the following fire bell signals: Regular or Special Meetings - ringing of bell and three strikes of alarm hammer; Company's practice - ringing of bell and five strikes of alarm hammer; Fire alarm - continuous fast rapping of the bell, then signal for the division of the Village.

The Divisions of the Village and signals were: From the Southern line to crossing of Mr. E. Wagner's residence - ringing of bell and one strike of alarm hammer; From center of Village to corner of Dundee Road - ringing of bell and two strikes of alarm hammer; From corner of Dundee Road to Northern line - three strikes of alarm hammer; From corner of Dundee Road West - four strikes of alarm hammer.

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Pictured below are Wheeling's Finest in 1949. Edward Gieseke, Jr., front row - right, was Fire Chief.



(Above) View of North Milwaukee Avenue as it appeared from Dundee Road intersection. (Below) View looking South on Milwaukee Avenue from the same intersection. These pictures were taken around 1910. In the top picture, the building in the left foreground is the tavern-hotel built by Joseph Filkins in 1837.





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Photo (taken about 1910) showing the bridge across the Des Plaines River.



A portable saw-mill in a field North of Wheeling along Milwaukee Avenue.

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Oliver, Jacob and Chester Wolf, and Sylvester Miller, pose with steam-operated threshing machine, typical of the kind used in the late 1800's and early 1900's.

Andrea's History of Cook County, published in 1894, said of Wheeling: "The chief events of importance in the recent history of the place have been the prosecution of various parties for the illegal selling of intoxicating drinks by George Strong, one of the oldest settlers of the town, and a strong foe of intemperance". This quotation evidently referred to the Township of Wheeling, rather than to the town itself.

The above statement may have been true when considered in the context of world affairs, but the slow progress of the town proved to be an asset in the long run. This slowness of growth allowed for the building of a very stable base upon which the building boom of the 1950's would depend for its strength and guidance.

During the years around the turn of the century, Wheeling would have to be considered as the typical country town; however, building did continue, and in the surrounding countryside, the farmers were using "modern" equipment to raise the foodstuffs which helped to sustain the burgeoning metropolis of Chicago.

Thus Wheeling's income was derived from the purveying of raw products to the city, and the catering of the finished product to travelers, through the facilities of its many fine restaurants.

• • •

The first Officers of The Wheeling Volunteer Fire Department consisted of the following: Mr. Christ F. Metz, Fire Marshall; J. A. Schminke, Asst. Fire Marshall; Frank Forke, Second Asst. Fire Marshall; W. R. Munhenke, Secretary; W. Riswig, Wm. Fassbender and Tony Behm, Foremen of



Wheeling's first police car. (1925)

the various companies. According to the record of minutes of the meetings of the Department, Mr. Reinhold Schneider assumed the duties of Secretary at the meeting of April 23, 1900, and held the post until the 8th of August, 1927.

In 1904, a hand pumper was purchased to augment the fire fighting equipment. This pumper has been preserved and is on display in the Historical Society Museum

At the inception of the Fire Department most of the towns prominent citizens participated as Volunteers. The tradition has continued throughout the years and into the present. Wheeling's Volunteer Fire Department has the reputation of being one of the best in the country.

The present Fire Chief, Mr. Bernie Koeppen, is a descendant of one of Wheeling's Pioneers, Mr. Friedrich Koeppen.

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