

FOREWORD

In 1993, the Board of Directors of the Dane County Historical Society began thinking about the approach of the Wisconsin Sesqui-centennial and the new century. No histories and/or biographical reviews of Dane County had been published since 1906, and of course, a great deal had happened in the 20th Century that deserved to be recorded. Initially the Society considered updating earlier books but decided, after much discussion, that a completely new county history, starting from the beginning and extending up to the present day was needed. The goal was to record the significant forces and events that shaped our county's past, and explain how those things affected the people who called Dane County home.

The Board appointed six of its members to a Book Committee with the responsibility of soliciting funds, engaging writers, editors, designers and illustrators and finally, a publisher. With an initial \$10,000 gift from the estate of Suzanne Ames, a former Board member, the Committee began fund-raising with an appeal to its own members and later extended the effort to foundations and the public.

The Society accepted Allen Ruff and Tracy Will's proposal for writing a Dane County history submitted on February 24, 1995. In March of that year, then County Executive Richard Phelps signed a proclamation declaring that the publication of "The History of Dane County" constituted Dane County's official participation in the observance of the 150th anniversary of Wisconsin statehood in 1998. The proclamation stated in part, "all the residents of Dane County will benefit from the availability of a new history of the County."

At the same time, the Dane County Board adopted a resolution recognizing the importance of a new county history, stating, "The Dane County Historical Society should be recognized for its service to the citizens of Dane County in preserving history and educating citizens about our rich heritage."

I consider myself fortunate to have been chosen to serve on the Book Committee. My grandparents and great-grandparents, like thousands of others, came from Western Europe to Dane County in the late 1800s. My father, the oldest of ten children, was born in 1879 in a log house in the Town of Springfield on what is now the Koch farm. My father told me that he quit school after the fourth grade to help his father clear the family woodlot so that more land would be available

for planting. My mother, the fifth of ten Vitense children, was born in 1882 in the Town of Berry.

My three sisters and I were born on a 100-acre farm at the end of Old Sauk Road in the Town of Middleton that my father had purchased in 1906 for \$6000. Today, that is the location of the Pheasant Point and Buena Vista housing developments. I attended Cleveland School, a one-room stone building. When I was about to enter eighth grade in 1927, my parents moved to the City of Madison, where I attended Draper School, on the corner of West Johnson and North Park Streets. I entered Central High School and transferred to West High School when it opened in September 1930. Since little employment was available when I graduated in the midst of the Depression, I attended the University of Wisconsin.

When I became a payroll clerk in the office of the Dane County Highway Department in 1939, I did not realize that Dane County would be my employer for the next 41 years. In 1940, I went to the County Clerk's Office, first as assistant bookkeeper, then bookkeeper and in 1943, chief accountant. When County Clerk Otto Festge was elected Mayor of Madison in 1965, the County Board appointed me County Clerk and three years later, County Administrator. After a public referendum in 1972, I became Dane County's first elected County Executive and was re-elected for a second four-year term in 1977.

I witnessed many changes during my years in county employment, including important employee benefit programs: AFSME Union recognition, a retirement program, civil service, social security and longevity pay. Other highlights of these years include construction of the new County Home in 1951, the County Hospital in 1953, the City-County Building in 1957, the parking ramp in 1958 and the Memorial Coliseum in 1966. The County had originally acquired the land used for the Exposition Center for \$11,000 in 1941. Lake View Sanatorium, built in 1929 for tuberculosis patients, closed as a hospital in 1966 after the discovery of new drugs all but wiped out the disease. The building was converted to county office space. Dane County entered the computer age in 1969, with the hiring of its first systems analyst, Alan Larson.

I think that the most significant change in county government during the 20th Century was reapportionment in 1965, in response to a federal law that required supervisory districts in all of the nation's 3100 counties to have roughly equal population within each county. At that time, the Dane County Board had 90 supervisors, one repre-