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HISTORY OF
THE GROWTH OF THE MOBILE HOME INDUSTRY IN WISCONSIN

A Seminar Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of History

Wisconsin State University at La Crosse

In Partial Fulfillment

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Seminar in History and Social Science 761

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by

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ABSTRACT

The History of the Growth of the Mobile Home Industry in Wisconsin is a seminar paper written as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a masters degree at Wisconsin State University at La Crosse.

The manufacture of mobile homes in Wisconsin has a short history of just over twenty years. The growth of the industry in the state has been substantial and by all indications the future appears bright. Although Wisconsin is not among the leading producers in the country, its production and sales growth have compared favorably with those in other states. State manufacturers and dealers have experienced few problems, with the exception of image and organization. These problems, however, are minor and are slowly being remedied.

This is the first written history of the mobile home industry in Wisconsin. Some facts about Elmer W. Frey, a major contributor to this paper, have been printed in the Marshfield News-Herald, but they do not include most of the information covered in the succeeding pages.

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PREFACE

Historically, man has been an extremely restless and mobile creature. With the fast-paced life that he is living today, he is more transient than at any time in history, especially with the rapid advancement of transportation and world-wide occupational opportunity only hours distant from the farthest points on the globe.

It nearly goes without saying that America was born mobile. Almost from the moment the first settlers landed at Jamestown, Plymouth, and Massachusetts Bay, they began to expand and move westward; this movement never ceased. Today it is possible to see people moving not only westward, but toward all points on the compass, both within and beyond the boundaries of the United States.

Mobility has presented a number of problems to the wanderer. Chief among these are the transporting of possessions acquired over a period of time, along with the re-establishing of housing. Another major problem is the location of housing while on extended trips, or when residency is to be of short duration, especially when one's financial resources are limited.

Mobile housing has been a part of American life, dating back almost to the establishment of the colonies. Conestoga wagons, carrying pioneers and their possessions

into the wilderness, traversed the first rough-hewn roads. These wagons also served as a means of shelter while the travelers were enroute and until they could set up permanent housing.

Since the mobility of American society has not diminished, it seems logical that modern industry and ingenuity should find new, inexpensive, and improved methods of supplying the needs of a restless population. American industry appears to have done this in a number of ways. The most flexible mode of housing available on the market today is the mobile home--the modern successor of the covered wagon.

Relatively little has been written in the way of an historical study of the mobile home industry, and nothing on its development in Wisconsin. This paper treats an activity which is now a significant part of the historical, economic, social, and cultural background of Wisconsin. In all likelihood, it will continue to play an important role in the state's industrial development. The personal experiences of the investigator with the mobile home industry may add substantial validity to the paper.

In succeeding chapters the author will explore the background of mobile homes, the growth and expansion in Wisconsin, and the condition of the mobile home industry in the state.

Some phases of the mobile home industry are somewhat loosely drawn together. This condition is probably due to a great extent to the relative newness of the business. One example of this, which will be substantiated at a later point in this paper, is the area of mobile home law. Such legislation is very loosely constructed at the local level of government. This is particularly true in most rural communities and counties.

The author chose this topic because he had moved into the Central Wisconsin area where mobile home manufacturing is located. Secondary sources containing information on the topic were limited, although those dealing with aspects outside of Wisconsin are ample. Primary sources are abundant.

Sources of information on the mobile home industry at large include a wide variety of periodicals, some state statute books, and a selection of local newspapers. The investigator did research in the State Historical Society Library, the library at the University of Wisconsin, the library at Wisconsin State University at Stevens Point, and the public library at Wisconsin Rapids. He found additional secondary information in publications of the Mobile Home-Travel Trailer Dealer Magazine in Chicago.

The author obtained primary source materials from personal papers of Elmer W. Frey, president of Marshfield Homes Incorporated in Marshfield, Wisconsin. Personal

interviews with leading officers of mobile home manufacturing firms, mobile home dealers, and members of the city council of Wisconsin Rapids, and a questionnaire to the executive-secretary of the Wisconsin Mobile Home Association provided additional information of major importance.

Most contacts, both for gathering secondary information and for arranging personal interviews, were made by personal letters. Some contacts, however, were made by telephone. Most of the individuals approached were truly helpful and were able to supply pertinent information. However, the newspapers had no available files on data relating to the topic of the paper, with the exception of the Marshfield News-Herald.

The function of the selected topic is to show the growth and influence of the mobile home industry in Wisconsin. An additional function will be to relate the problems caused as well as those faced by this new industry.

Acknowledgments are due Mr. Elmer Frey and Mr. Floyd Hibbard for their expert opinions on the mobile home industry. A special debt of gratitude is due to Dr. Stanley Rolnick for his concise editing of this paper and to my wife, Karen, for her typing skills. Finally, a thank you to all of those people whose names appear in the footnotes of this paper for volunteering information used herein.

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CHAPTER I

Early Achievements

Early accounts of mobile home development do not establish the exact dates of the first construction. Mobile homes are known to have been built, however, in the early to mid-nineteen thirties. They are descended from the camping trailers which developed only a few years previously. Strangely enough, even though mobile homes were born out of necessity during the Depression, the industry did not gain its greatest impetus during this period, primarily because of a shortage of credit. It was not until the war period and post-war years of the middle and late-nineteen forties that the mobile home market really opened up.[1]

Some of the earliest endeavors in mobile housing appear to have occurred in 1934, when a Denver, Colorado architect, T. H. Buell, planned to mass produce low cost three-unit homes which could be hauled on the back end of a truck. The self-contained ten foot by nineteen foot units were to be financed in much the same way as an automobile, at a cost of "$1,200, delivered to the site."[2] Another early

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[1]Ralph M. Natale, Mobile Home Financing (Charlotteville: Consumer Bankers Association, University of Virginia, 1955) p. 1-2.

[2]Temple H. Buell, "Community Planning With Transportable Houses," Architectural Record, 75:11-13 (January, 1934).

development of 1934 was the production of a self-contained, portable hut, nine feet wide by thirteen feet long by seven feet high, for Admiral Richard E. Byrd's expedition to Antarctica.[3] Both of these experiments are unique, but they indicate the early trends and functions of mobile housing. There was one other development in 1934, but it deals with Wisconsin and will be dealt with in a succeeding chapter.

Other developments of record occurred in 1936, in California and Michigan. The National Lumber Manufacturers displayed in California a portable prefabricated house which could be hauled on a truck. This house, made primarily of plywood, with floor measurements of thirteen feet wide, twenty-six feet long, and eight feet high, had two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, and a bathroom. The " . . . cost estimated for Washington D. C., $1,240; with electric range, washing machine and refrigerator, screens and flagged walk, landscaping, $1,600."[4] Another contribution, probably the most significant of the mid-nineteen thirties, was made by William B. Stout, president of Stout Engineering Laboratories of Dearborn, Michigan. His innovation was an expandable

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[3]Victor Czegka, "Headquarters Hut For Admiral Byrd In Antarctica," Architectural Record, 76:54-55 (July, 1934).

[4]"National Lumber Manufacturers Portable House," Architectural Record, 79:170 (February, 1936).

trailer which could be towed behind a car. The Stout trailer, ranging in cost from "$1,200 to $2,500," expanded from sixteen feet in length by six feet six inches in width to twenty feet by fourteen feet of floor space. Stout predicted the appearance of completely self-contained trailers which could be moved from one trailer city to another.[5]

Growth and Development

No one has demonstrated exactly where the mobile home industry truly established itself. On the basis of sources consulted and according to present day centers of construction, one can only make an educated estimate. Michigan and California appear to have the most established centers of manufacturing mobile housing, while Florida and California, for obvious reasons, appear to have been centers of occupancy. "One trailer city in Florida last year had over 1,000 trailers in its little community, and will probably have over 1,500 this season."

The mobile home industry did begin to catch on in the late nineteen thirties. There is no way of determining exactly what the growth was in terms of dollars and cents,

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[5]"Structural Mobility: Mobile Houses," Architectural Record, 79:332 (April, 1936).

but there is evidence of growth in the number of units owned and purchased during this period. However, the vast majority of units at this time were still in the category of camping trailers and were lacking in most of the modern conveniences of present mobile homes. The low cost of mobile housing made it a leader among rapidly expanding industries in the recovery stages of the Depression. The American Petroleum Institute analyzed the nature of the mobile housing business:

> Early in 1937 there were about 150,000 coach trailers. By the end of 1938, nearly 300,000 trailers were rolling over the highways. More than half of them were built by regular manufacturers. Home-built jobs accounted for the balance . . . Growing appreciation of trailer dollars can be seen in the improved facilities provided for trailer use.[6]

The mobile home industry received its first significant stimulation during the nineteen-forties from the need for immediate temporary housing near isolated military bases and defense plants. The industry filled part of the housing shortage created by the war. The lack of housing, however, was to continue following the end of World War II. The war situation itself proved to be a good testing ground to iron out the problems, and served as a good public relations device by introducing large masses of the public to mobile

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[6]"Trailer Business Builder and Civic Problem," American City, 54:67 (August, 1939).

housing. Not all of the publicity was good, but it was a means of breaking down barriers. A year before the United States became an active belligerent, a leading business publication declared:

> Best indication of how important an adjunct to defense-plant housing the tourist trailer has become is that last week 600 worker-owned trailers were already parked alongside the powder plant being built at Charlestown . . . Still sleeping in their automobiles, and awaiting delivery of trailers that they have on order, were 1,100 other workers.[7]

While World War II served as a great impetus to the mobile home industry, the post-war era has proved to be of even greater significance to its growth. The sales, both in terms of number of units sold and gross income, have multiplied at a rapid rate. According to Elmer W. Frey, president of Marshfield Homes Incorporated of Marshfield, Wisconsin, the mobile home industry "captured one house out of every ten sold in 1960." "In 1967 the mobile home industry captured one out of every five houses sold," and they will "capture one in every four in 1968." The executive added that "there is no telling where it will end."[8] The following data substantiate his statements.[9]

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[7]"Homes On Wheels," Business Week, (December 7, 1940), pp. 46-48.

[8]Statement by Elmer W. Frey, personal interview, April 13, 1968.

[9]Data taken from a brochure published by Marshfield Homes Incorporated, Marshfield, Wisconsin (April, 1966). Source of Statistics-Elick and Lavadge, Chicago, Illinois.

TABLE 1.

Year	Total Stationary Housing Starts	Total Wheeled Housing Units
1947	899,000	60,000 - 1 in 16
1957	1,041,900	143,500 - 1 in 8
1965	1,540,700	324,050 - 1 in 6

There is no way of knowing exactly how many mobile home parks there are in the United States because not all parks are members of the Mobile Home Associations in their respective states.

Another factor which makes it extremely difficult to determine exactly how many people reside in mobile home parks is the fact that many people set up their homes on private lake, farm, and personally owned properties. It is safe to assume, however, that several new parks are started in each state every year, while old parks are expanding to meet the growing demands of the new mobile home owners. Even with constant park expansion, there is still a shortage of adequate parking facilities for such people.[10]

In spite of the rapid growth of the mobile home industry in the past twenty years, it has not been without its problems. There is, for example, the matter of public

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[10]Statements by Arnold Fraedrich, personal interview, June 22, 1968.

image. Charges of "unreliable transients" leveled against the occupants, and the lack of aesthetic beauty of the structures themselves are the most prominent complaints. Real estate interests have lobbied long and hard against a grave opponent, using many stereotypes to win their point.[11]

One of the major problems faced by the mobile home industry was in the area of finance. Some bankers refused to have anything to do with either the manufacturer or the consumer in the years immediately following World War II. Those few banks and finance companies which would finance mobile housing required co-responsibility, in case home owners were unable to meet the mortgage, either on the part of the manufacturer or the dealer. Financiers cannot really be blamed, because in the early years of mobile homes manufacturers operated on short capital, and the people who first bought the homes were not financially stable. However, once bankers and real estate men discovered what an overwhelming success mobile homes were, they entered into mobile home financing with a great deal of zest. Bankers dropped recourse*and even began to finance some customers directly. Real estate men began to sell mobile homes exclusively.[12]

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[11]Frey, op. cit.

[12]Natale, op. cit., pp. 23-30. *(see p. 26 for explanation of recourse).

Major Changes in Mobile Housing

The mobile home has served a wide variety of functions and is serving as a shelter for many people. Both the function of the unit and the type of occupant are changing, as this sort of housing becomes more widely accepted. Increased size and the use of more durable and attractive materials in the home have been responsible for increased consumer interest. The low cost of mass produced housing is another major asset.

Early mobile homes, single unit trailers, were approximately eight feet wide and twenty-four feet long on the average.[13] They have changed so drastically that it is now possible to purchase a single unit fourteen feet wide by sixty-eight feet long, which contains three bedrooms, a living room, kitchen and bath, all separate. Some mobile home manufacturers have even expanded into permanent housing which has a total floor area of fifty-two feet long by twenty-four feet wide, with predictions of twenty-eight feet in width.[14]

The use of new types of materials now available in mobile homes has created a very attractive product. In the

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[13]Floyd E. Hibbard, personal interview, November 27, 1967.

[14]Personal observations of the investigator.

early days, sheet steel, plywood or even painted canvas was used on the exterior. Such materials, of course, were not very durable and did not withstand the elements of nature very well. Plywood was used for the interior walls. This was found to be cumbersome, unattractive, and hard to maintain. The life of such units was discovered to be very short, a fact which did not enhance public opinion. Modern materials such as baked enamel sheet aluminum, a variety of wood veneer paneling, and plastics have made mobile homes cheaper, more attractive and much more durable.[15]

Contrary to popular belief, the mobile home owner represents a good cross section of American life. He tends to move a little more often than people occupying stationary homes. A survey conducted by Consumer Bulletin, pointed out that:

> Typical mobile home owners are about as follows: married, 90 per cent; some college training, 30 per cent; 25-65 years old, 85 per cent; professional and self-employed, 25 per cent. Families with two voters, 75 per cent; wives working, 40 per cent; belonging to community groups, 65 per cent; small families of one to three persons (children or in-laws), 75 per cent. Owners have a median income over $6200, with most between $3500 and $9000.[16]

People choose to reside in mobile homes rather than conventional housing for a variety of reasons, such as

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[15]Frey, op. cit.

[16]"Mobile Homes," Consumer Bulletin, 47:6-12 (June, 1964).

minimal upkeep, mobility and compactness. The chief reason, however, is cost: the cost of property tax, the cost of rent, and the cost of high monthly installments which is applied to stationary housing. Depending upon whether a mobile home is new or used, the cost today ranges from $2,500 for economy models to approximately $11,000 for the most deluxe styles. The cost of renting a lot on which to park the home ranges from approximately twenty-five to fifty-five dollars per month, which includes such items as water, hidden property taxes, and street and garbage disposal services. The cost of heating a well-constructed mobile home is about the same as for a stationary house, but repairs and upkeep are almost non-existent. The fact that mobile homes have reduced cleaning chores is another point in their favor.[17]

Mobile homes now serve a wide variety of functions, besides the obvious one of housing. Many people are now purchasing small second-hand models for permanent cottages in recreation areas. The investigator has observed them being used for retirement housing, construction housing, college dormitories, and offices for business concerns. They will soon be entering into more innovative functions as well, but this will be discussed in a succeeding chapter.

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[17]Ethel T. Kienz, "Mobile Living," Consumer Bulletin, 46:2 (September, 1963).

The main purpose of this chapter is to serve as background material for the next two chapters which will deal with the growth of the mobile home industry in Wisconsin. It would not be possible to write about Wisconsin's mobile home industry without this material because of an inability to make comparisons of the growth factor and because of a shortage of some historical data on Wisconsin.

CHAPTER II

GROWTH AND EXPANSION IN WISCONSIN

Pioneer Efforts

It is ironical that, while the mobile home industry was late to arrive in Wisconsin, it should be among the very first to make a contribution to the national growth of the business. In 1934 Stanley Nicholson of Milwaukee designed and tested a self-contained two-room unit selling for $220. This unit, which could be collapsed and pulled on a trailer, weighed only 370 pounds. It had hot and cold running water, with bathroom facilities. This house consisted of a wooden frame with inner and outer layers of cotton fabric covered with airplane dope. A light insulation material lay between the wall layers.[1]

In the spring of 1942, the investigator had an opportunity to view a major, but temporary, entrance of mobile homes into Wisconsin. During the years of World War II, a large trailer camp rose on the west edge of Prairie du Sac, Wisconsin to accommodate some of the employees of the Badger Ordnance Works, which was located between Baraboo and Prairie du Sac. This camp disappeared

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[1]"Portable House Located Near Milwaukee Designed by S. W. Nicholson," Architectural Record, 75:34 (January, 1934).

immediately after the war. Another such experience occurred when a mobile home was set up in the back yard of the investigator's parents, to house Badger Ordnance employees. Platteville State College erected a trailer camp for housing married war veterans immediately after World War II--as did many other state colleges and universities. Dormitories replaced it in the late nineteen-fifties.[2]

The first manufacturers in the state of Wisconsin started production shortly after World War II. These early producers were Saukville Industries of Saukville, located near Milwaukee; the Rayline Company of Baraboo; and Roland Sharrett of Chilo, near Marshfield. These concerns, all of which are now defunct, built only one unit at a time. Once they sold their product they would build another. None of them operated on an assembly line basis.[3]

The oldest operating manufacturer in Wisconsin today is the Rollohome Corporation of Marshfield. Rollohome is also the largest company in terms of units manufactured and gross income. The business started as a single unit operation in the barn of George Frey, the father of Elmer W. Frey in 1947. Elmer Frey had struck upon the idea when he

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[2] Platteville State University Catalog, 1946.

[3] Statements by Elmer W. Frey, personal interview, April 13, 1968, (Frey could not remember the brand name of Sharrett's product).

lived in a mobile home earlier. He effected a partnership when he took his brothers, Roland, Norman, and Harold (now deceased), into the business in 1947. Later, Frey added his brother-in-law, John Bertschie, as a partner. In May, 1947, Rollohome was incorporated. Frey left Rollohome in 1960 to found Marshfield Homes Incorporated, the second largest mobile home manufacturer in Wisconsin today.[4]

Numerous changes have occurred in the manufacture of mobile homes. The first Rollohome units were eight feet wide and twenty-eight feet long. In the mid-nineteen fifties, they were increased to ten feet wide by forty feet in length. Rollohome was the first manufacturer in the nation to build mobile homes twelve feet in width, in 1959. By 1960, they had reached a length of sixty-four feet. Those in Wisconsin were further increased to a width of fourteen feet and a length of sixty-eight feet in 1967. Manufacturers in the state were among the first to go into the construction of permanent housing, in 1963, when they set up subsidiary factories, both at Rollohome and Marshfield Homes. Their products now come in a maximum size of twenty-four feet in width and fifty-two feet in length.[5]

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

Problems

As in other parts of the nation, public image has been a problem for the industry in Wisconsin. Many people feel that mobile homes spoil the aesthetic beauty of the neighborhood, and that their occupants are neither reliable nor good credit risks. Moreover, this mode of living has created competition for the real estate interests. Finally, according to both dealers and manufacturers, the mobile home industry has been fighting an uphill battle in trying to shed the trailer image, because the general public still views the more permanent, larger, and more luxurious mobile home in terms of the cramped trailers of earlier years. The vast majority of the public still refer to the mobile home as a "trailer," a term which raises the ire of dedicated manufacturers, dealers, and occupants.[6]

Mobile home parks are the most openly discriminated against aspect of the industry. This fact is made evident, in large part, by the location of the parks. They appear near highways, railroad tracks, factories, and junk yards. In addition to being located in undesirable areas, mobile home sites are scarce, a condition which causes overcrowding of existing ones. New owners often have trouble locating

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[6]Ibid.

desirable parking space. Some communities require parks to have high wooden fences or evergreen fences all the way around them. They are sometimes in danger of being zoned out of existence so that the property can be used for purposes which will create more tax revenues for the community. This situation occurred in West Allis in 1965. Recently, a similar development took place in Mosinee, where the town board tabled a park proposal because the "opposition to the development, generally from residents in the area, is based on the argument that the town territory in question should be zoned for residential purposes only."[7]

One dealer tried to put a mobile home park and sales lot in the Town of Rib Mountain in Marathon County. Officials approved the former but not the latter. The town board gave the reason that the area was not zoned for industry. The dealer found later that a number of residents, led by a Wausau banker's wife, had circulated a petition against the sales lot.[8]

Many places have ordinances against mobile homes within city limits. Elmer Frey thinks that this is the result

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[7]News item in the Mosinee Times (Wisconsin), May 2, 1968.

[8]Hibbard, op. cit.

of pressure from real estate interests.[9] Many communities allow only those mobile homes which are located in parks within the city limits. Others, such as Wisconsin Rapids, permit no more mobile homes to be located within their boundaries than those that are already there. Much of this opposition comes from residents in the vicinity of the mobile homes.[10]

The permanent pre-built house appeared in Wisconsin in 1963. Many communities banned the erection of these structures until they established that the homes conformed to Federal Housing Administration (F. H. A.) codes. Stevens Point still does not allow this type of housing. There was no real opposition to pre-constructed homes according to Alderman Darrell Saeger of Wisconsin Rapids, "although I don't know that I would care to have one next to me," he said.[11]

One major reason that people choose to live in mobile homes is to avoid high property taxes. However, such residents do not escape taxation altogether. One way that park owners transfer their tax burden is by including

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[9]Frey, op. cit.

[10]Statements by Orville Marti, personal interview, April 10, 1968.

[11]Statements by Darrell Saeger, personal interview, April 13, 1968, (He did not clarify this statement).

it as a part of the lot rent fee. In other words, the mobile home owner pays the tax in a hidden form. In some cases he must pay a parking fee administered by a city and commonly known as a school tax. West Allis, for instance, charges all mobile home owners $13.50 per month regardless of the value of their property.[12]

In some instances, the industry creates problems for itself. A mobile home dealer in Wisconsin Rapids told the investigator that one of the companies, whose product he sells, is placing undue pressure on its dealers by setting up too many sales lots in one area. This company is also trying to reduce consumers' prices by setting up a factory wholesale outlet and selling its own product. This type of procedure creates disgruntled dealers, as well as poor public relations.[13]

One of the major weaknesses of the business in Wisconsin is its lack of public relations and information services. Very little is done except for general advertising and an occasional special supplement in the Marshfield News-Herald. The managing editor of that newspaper told the investigator that "these people, the mobile home manufacturers

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[12] General Ordinances of the city of West Allis, 21.23-Mobile Home Parks, August, 1965, p. 79.

[13] Statements by Robert Crotteau, personal interview, May 5, 1968.

in Marshfield, should get themselves a public relations man to supply us with some facts about Wisconsin."[14] Arnold Fraedrich, executive secretary of the Wisconsin Mobile Home Association, stated, "for the lack of finance, staff, and difficulty in taking a complete survey of the mobile home industry in the state of Wisconsin, there are very few accurate statistics available, except on a national basis."[15]

Growth

Wisconsin is not among the leaders in terms of the total number of mobile home units manufactured nor gross sales in dollars. One reason is that the state has only seven manufacturing corporations, six of which are located in a twenty-five mile radius within central Wisconsin. Only two of the Wisconsin companies have a net value of more than $1,000,000, the Rollohome Corporation and Marshfield Homes Incorporated. These concerns are the only ones employing more than two hundred persons.[16]

Despite its relatively low position, Wisconsin is enjoying a substantial increase. According to the estimates

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[14]Statement by Howard Quirt, personal interview, April 13, 1968.

[15]Statement by Arnold Fraedrich, personal interview, June 27, 1968.

[16]Classified Directory of Wisconsin Manufacturers, 1967, (see appendix A).

of Arnold Fraedrich, Wisconsin manufactured 1300 mobile homes in 1950, with a gross sales of $4,000,000; in 1960, 3000 homes were produced, with $10,000,000 gross sales; and in 1967, an estimated 6500 homes were sold, with gross estimated sales of $20,000,000.[17] According to a national survey of mobile home manufacturers conducted by the Mobile Home-Travel Trailer Dealer Magazine in 1966, Wisconsin manufactured 4,706 mobile homes and pre-built houses for a wholesale value of $22,929,264. Paradoxically while Wisconsin ranked fourteenth nationally in number of mobile homes produced, the state was eleventh in their wholesale value. Adding to its mobile home sales were 4,881 units that were shipped in from manufacturers outside of the state. This was an increase of 32.49% over the previous year. In fact, Wisconsin imports more mobile homes than are manufactured in the state.[18]

Statistics supplied by John Bertschie, president of the Rollohome Corporation, reveal the rate of growth in terms of gross income of Wisconsin's largest manufacturer. In 1958, the corporation had a gross income of $6,870,397. In 1967, Rollohome showed nearly a million dollar increase

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[17] Fraedrich, op. cit.

[18] "A Market Study," Mobile Home-Travel Trailer Dealer Magazine (supplement), Chicago, August, 1967, pp. 7-13.

over 1958 with a gross of $7,741,481.[19]

According to Arnold Fraedrich, Wisconsin has two hundred and thirty-two mobile home parks registered in Woodall's Travel Trailer-Mobile Home Park Guide. He further estimates that there are another thirty parks not registered. There are apparently more than 20,000 mobile homes in parks and on private property.[20]

Another indication of the growth of the industry in Wisconsin is the expanding variety of uses to which mobile homes are being put in the state. They are now leased to construction workers, sold as offices to construction companies and dentists, used as portable classrooms (W. S. U.-LaCrosse has two for music rooms and three for audio-visual rooms), and used for college housing; Wisconsin's history-mobiles are mobile homes. Pre-built permanent houses are now set up in retirement villages near Land O' Lakes in northern Wisconsin. One of the latest uses for both the pre-built house and the mobile home is as a cottage, because of the low investment, avoidance of the inconvenience of construction, and the low cost of upkeep.[21]

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[19]John G. Bertschie, personal interview, December 4, 1967.

[20]Fraedrich, op. cit.

[21]Hibbard, op. cit.

Elmer Frey of Marshfield Homes Incorporated, a leading innovator in the mobile home industry, is in the process of selling stocks to raise capital for a high rise parking structure, to be set up either in Milwaukee or Minneapolis. This open circular structure will accommodate five hundred and four mobile homes, each twelve feet wide and sixty-eight feet long. Frey has currently raised over $60,000 for his project, approximately half of what he needs in order to obtain a loan to build the structure. If the venture is successful, he hopes to construct similar facilities in the heart of several other major mid-western and western cities. He also plans to set up a two-story, four unit prototype in a Minneapolis suburb next year, at an expense of $20,000.[22]

Mobile Home Law

Mobile home law in Wisconsin is disorganized and is not up-to-date. Most laws governing these dwellings are generated at the local level by city, town, and county governments. These laws are essentially the same, with minor exceptions in the larger cities. In rural areas, the ordinances are lax compared to those of the cities. State codes governing mobile homes deal with transportation, dealer licenses, and mobile home parks.

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[22]"High Rise Structure is Devised for Mobile Home," op. cit.

The legal definitions of mobile homes appear in State Statute 66.058:

> (e) that which is or was originally constructed designed to be transported by any motor vehicle upon a public highway and designed, equipped and used primarily for sleeping, eating and living quarters.
>
> (f) "Dependent mobile home" means a mobile home which does not have complete bathroom facilities.
>
> (g) "Nondependent mobile home" means a mobile home equipped with complete bath and toilet facilities, all furniture, cooking, heating, appliances and complete year round facilities.[23]

Most local ordinances and codes refer to mobile homes as trailers, or use the two terms interchangeably. The city of Fond du Lac's ordinances on "trailer and trailer camps" define a trailer as "any coach, cabin, mobile home, house car, or other vehicle or structure capable of human dwelling or sleeping purposes, mounted upon wheels or supports."[24]

As in the state statutes, local regulations place no restrictions upon the mobile home units. Rather, they impose limitations upon the mobile home parks for the protection of their residents or of people in adjoining neighborhood. Some city ordinances, such as Madison's for example, allow no "structures to be erected or altered within the trailer court district." Most municipal codes

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[23] Wisconsin Statutes, 66.058 Municipal Law, 1965, pp. 1273-1274.

[24] General Ordinances of the city of Fond du Lac, 17.09-Trailer Parks, 1960, p. 61.

do not contain regulations in regard to plumbing, sanitation, or electrical wiring, but do have explicit ones for the parks. These in turn have restrictions, either posted or written into leases, which govern the residents. Madison's ordinances exemplify restrictions generally placed on parks by municipal codes. Section 16-Clause 12 of the Madison Code states that the camp site shall:

> II. B. 1. be at least 44,000 sq. ft. 2. Average lot to be at least 2,000 sq. ft. excluding roadways.
>
> III. Front yard-60 feet in depth . . .
>
> VI. Spacing units-shall not be closer from the nearest adjoining trailer.
>
> VII. Access and Parking- . . . B. There shall be one parking place for each trailer.[24]

As an example of a local code found in one community and not in another, Mayville's ordinance 7.06-5 (e) states that "within 6 months after the issue of the permit for the location of such park, the following plantings shall be made: A temporary planting of fast growing material capable of reaching a height of fifteen feet or more."[26] Pond du Lac's ordinance 12.31-4 (b) does not permit "the removal of wheels except for temporary purposes of repair, or other action to attach the trailer to the ground by means of

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[25] General Ordinances, City of Madison, 16:12 Zoning and City Planning, 1955.

[26] General Ordinances, City of Mayville, 7.06-Multiple Family Residence District, 1965, p. 56.

posts, piers or foundations shall subject the trailer to requirements of the building code as well as this section."[27] When wheels are removed from mobile homes, they are generally considered to be permanent housing. West Allis does not allow the bottoms of mobile homes to be enclosed because of fire safety regulations.[28]

Many local governments now have, or are in the process of legislating, codes which ban mobile homes from being parked on private property. This change has resulted from the objections of private citizens to the appearance of mobile homes and the difficulty in collecting taxes.[29]

This section on mobile home law in Wisconsin gives the reader a general view of how that law is organized, not an all-inclusive account which could easily be a topic in itself.

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[27] General Ordinances of the city of Fond du Lac, op. cit.

[28] General Ordinances of the city of West Allis, op. cit., p. 80.

[29] Crotteau, op. cit.

CHAPTER III

STATE OF THE MOBILE HOME INDUSTRY IN WISCONSIN

The best criteria for judging the growth of the mobile home industry in Wisconsin is its progress financially. As pointed out in CHAPTER II, this has been steady and substantial. Another factor of importance pointing to the growing stature of the business is the attitude of lending institutions. In the early days of the Rollohome Corporation, for example, the company was hard-pressed to borrow enough money to operate. Loans had to be obtained through private investors.[1] In order to help dealers set up businesses, Rollohome had to go to loan companies and sign full recourse (guarantee to pay in full if the dealer went bankrupt) so that they would have enough money to purchase mobile homes for display. Today, most banks will make loans to dealers and customers without either the manufacturer or dealer signing recourse.[2] However, it has only been in the past three years that dealers in central Wisconsin enjoyed this privilege.[3]

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[1]Frey, op. cit.

[2]Bertschie, op. cit.

[3]Hibbard, op. cit.

The number of mobile homes manufactured in Wisconsin has seen a substantial increase since the industry began to stabilize following World War II. From 1950 to 1967 the production rate has increased almost fivefold. The rate of production growth is equivalent to that of the rest of the manufacturers in the nation, but is well down the list in terms of total units produced.

Wisconsin's mobile home industry has experienced few difficult problems. Its biggest is its public image, due in part to resistance from real estate interests and also from its failure to develop a good public relations program. Real estate men have become involved in the sale of mobile homes, however, and public relations is partially taken care of by advertising. Opposition is minimal and is diminishing in the state.

Mobile home manufacturers and their subsidiaries (pre-built houses) appear to have a good future in Wisconsin. First, the industry has a contribution to make in low cost, low upkeep housing in the face of rising prices and taxes in the general economic picture. Second, the industry increases income to local and state businesses which supply a wide assortment of materials used in construction of the units. Third, Wisconsin has an expanding economy as well as a growing population, which will further increase

the need for convenient, low cost housing. Finally, on the basis of substantially increased sales in the first quarter of 1968 as compared to 1967, the mobile home industry appears to have a bright future.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

Mobile Home Manufacturing Firms in Wisconsin (according to the 1967 Classified Directory of Wisconsin Manufacturers).

Friendship Mobile Homes, Incorporated

301 Main Street
Adams, Wisconsin

Herbert M. Sueoka, president

House of Harmony

Reedsburg, Wisconsin

Kenwood Homes, Incorporated

North Street P. O. Box 85
Stratford, Wisconsin

Richard Jones, president
Guy Rustad, vice president

Employment - 15

Marshfield Homes Incorporated

2301 East 4th Street
Marshfield, Wisconsin

Elmer W. Frey, president

Employment - 430 men 60 women
Parent company - Wick Building System, Mazomanie, Wisconsin

Northern Star Mobile Homes, Incorporated

Stratford, Wisconsin

D. W. Perring, president
Dean H. Wieland, vice president

Employment - 58 men 2 women
Net worth - $450,000

Pathfinder Mobile Homes, Incorporated

Spencer, Wisconsin

Leo Van Ert, president
Edward O. Dickman, vice president

Employment - 150 men 11 women
Net worth - $500,000

Rollohome Corporation

115 East Upham Street
Marshfield, Wisconsin

John G. Bertschie, president
Roland Frey, vice president
Norman Frey, vice president

Employment - 278 men 16 women
Net worth - $1,000,500

Subsidiary - Wisconsin Homes

APPENDIX B

Sales Volume Report supplied by the Rollohome Corporation, Marshfield, Wisconsin (1958-1967).

Year	Gross Sales
1958	$6,870,397
1959	$8,955,318
1960	$6,760,616
1961	$5,832,033
1962	$6,203,937
1963	$6,372,651
1964	$6,448,781
1965	$7,460,007
1966	$7,696,836
1967	$7,741,481

APPENDIX C

Sales volume report supplied by Kenwood Homes, Incorporated (manufacturers), Stratford, Wisconsin. Kenwood Homes, Incorporated was incorporated in October, 1966 and made its first sale in January, 1967.

Year	Gross Sales
1967	$828,935
1968 (through June)	$808,000

APPENDIX D

Sales volume of Suburban Mobile Home Sales, Town of Grand Rapids, Wisconsin.

Year	Gross Sales
1966	$232,000
1967	$287,000

AAA Homes Incorporated of Schofield stated that they sold twenty-five mobile homes in their first year of operation (1958) and in a ten year period have sold in excess of 3000 units.