

La Crosse & Chamber's History Intertwined

The La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce is in the early stages of research for our 150th anniversary to be celebrated at our annual meeting on March 5, 2018. We are pleased to share our work so far. Input, feedback and photos are appreciated!



City of La Crosse Incorporated
nicknamed "Gateway City"

1854

1868

**Board of Trade Formed
(became the Chamber of Commerce)**

The Board, concerned about connecting North La Crosse with Downtown, extended the trolley tracks to the North side with the city providing \$20,000 to the Chamber.



1871-1872

La Crosse annexes North La Crosse, creating one mayor, with considerable opposition.

The Chamber writes the Secretary of War requesting he withhold approval of a Mississippi Bridge until the citizens of La Crosse make their wishes known.

The Chamber's Transportation Committee insisted the St. Paul railroad extend its route two miles further south to go through the center of La Crosse, at great expense to the railroad but of commercial benefit to La Crosse.

1900-1917

Current Chamber Members that Formed & Still Exist: in 1911 Dahl Automotive opens in La Crosse, in 1913 La Crosse Trust Co. (now Trust Point Inc), in 1913 Trane Company, in 1914 Viterbo by the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration*

1912-1916

As the US Chamber of Commerce is formed (1912), the Board of Trade begins transitioning to a Chamber. The Chamber of Commerce of La Crosse become the 186th Chamber in the nation.



The Chamber raised funds to create the Hiawatha statue in La Crosse, installing the steam locomotive in Copeland Park, fixed the municipal boat dock, purchased

Christmas street lights, and for ongoing downtown beautification.

As an early form our Chamber Ambassadors who greet and welcome members at our ribbon cuttings and events, the Chamber worked hand in hand with The Plugs to welcome businesses and get them connected to each other.

1954

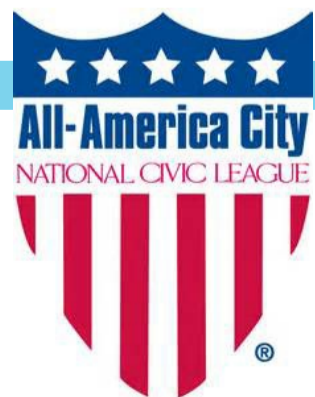
The Chamber advocated and ultimately succeeded in creating the first parking ramp at Market Street by surveying and researching how it would encourage people to shop and work downtown.

1960s

The Chamber lobbied against bills in Madison and D.C. that would impact businesses. This effort allows them to thrive. We advocated successfully for the first shoplifting law, allowing for more safe and profitable retail shopping. It began a long petition to create a parking ramp to encourage people to shop and work downtown, ultimately succeeding.



of the brewery and the area, and the scenic beauty." The event began transitioning to being independent in 1964.

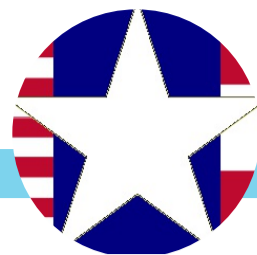


1966

The Chamber wins the prestigious "All American City" status by the National Civic League in recognition of citizens working together to identify and tackle community-wide challenges and achieve uncommon results.

1866

Civil War Ends



1868-1899

Current Chamber Members that Formed & Still Exist: in 1868 W.A. Roosevelt (now DSG-Dakota Supply Group), in 1883 St. Francis Hospital by the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, in 1884 State Bank, in 1888 Leitholds Music, in 1898 La Crosse Plumbing (now First Supply), in 1898 English Lutheran Church*



The legendary Dr. Frank Powell "White Beaver" served as Mayor of La Crosse.

1887

Incandescent lighting installed in homes and businesses, amid skepticism. As the city achieved the status of being the second largest in the state, its lighting became a source of pride and symbol of modernism.

1891

Wagon Bridge financed charging 25-cents per horse/team, 5-cents/passenger (under 12 free), 5-10 cents for animals. Free crossing on the ice in the winter.



1905

Board of Trade (now Chamber) joins the Mayor's push in Madison to create a Normal School, succeeding, to create what is now the University of Wisconsin - La Crosse's Main Hall.

1940s+

The Retailers Committee of the Chamber

united downtown shop owners to set shopping hours, plan the Christmas parade, purchase Christmas Lights, coordinated sales, etc. This included the controversial addition of Sunday store hours in the mid-1950s. This committee later became Downtown Mainstreet.



1953+

The City-County Publicity Committee opened a seasonal tourism booth and was highly successful, building the tourism attraction each year, leading to the eventual creation of the tourism bureau.



1955

The Chamber recognized the need for a convention center and successfully lobbied for, then helped manage, the Mary E. Sawyer Auditorium. This facility was later replaced by the La Crosse Center.

1960

Upon seeing many businesses relocate outside the area, the Chamber's Industrial Development Committee formed the La Crosse Area Development Corporation to work on attracting businesses to the area. It continued to operate under the Chamber until June 1965 when it became its own organization.

The Chamber of Commerce of La Crosse changed its name to Greater La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce to better reflect is business membership.



1965

Historic flood impacts La Crosse for three weeks. Area teenagers are credited with saving substantial damage to the city by filling and creating sandbag dams.

At the request of the La Crosse mayor, the Chamber encouraged its business members to paint "Thank You Teenagers" on their windows and ask for donations for a special dance recognizing volunteers.

by the mid-1970s

The Chamber created many spin-off organizations (Jaycees, Oktoberfest and more), but three remain our close partners due to their specific work of helping grow businesses: La Crosse County Development Corporation (LADCO) - business attraction, Downtown Mainstreet (a thriving downtown) and the La Crosse County Convention & Visitor's Bureau / Explore La Crosse (tourism).

* Contact us to be a Chamber member added to this list