WELCOME TO WHITEWATER

A community rich in history and steeped in beauty, Whitewater has always been known for its charm and ideal location. Nestled within the forest, lakes, prairies, and hills of the Kettle Moraine State Forest in southeastern Wisconsin, Whitewater is the perfect choice for biking, hiking, fishing, cross country skiing, or just exploring! We look forward to showing you our city and thank you for visiting.

THE HISTORY OF WHITEWATER

Whitewater received its name from a tribe of Potawatomi Native Americans that settled along the Whitewater River (known today as the Whitewater Creek). The name Wau-be-gan-naw-po-cat, meaning "white water", was given due to the white sands that lay at the bottom of the creek.

The area was first settled in 1836, when Alvin Foster made his stake on the land by marking his name on a tree. At that time, that was all that was needed to make a legal claim on a piece of land. In 1837, Samuel Prince built the first log cabin near the current site of Whitewater's Indian Mounds Park. After a six-day trip on foot, 20 settlers arrived here from Milwaukee and started the early makings of Whitewater. Other early settlers who arrived that first year were Johnson, Hamilton, Brewer, Collins, and Nichols. It was not until 1839, with Dr. Trippe's donation of money for the Old Stone Mill, that Whitewater started to grow. The mill helped to create the new industrial hub of Whitewater.

By 1840, three main arteries were laid out: Whitewater, Main and Center Streets. The town had a mill, blacksmith shop, store, hotel, and school, with a post office on the way. By 1844 Whitewater had grown to six stores, one grocery, two hotels, three blacksmith shops, a tailor, two cabinet shops, a cooper, a gristmill, and twenty-nine recorded homes.

In 1852, the first railway to cross Wisconsin laid its tracks through Whitewater, spurring industrial growth. Winchester and DeWolf Plow Factory (1850) Esterly Reaper Works (1857), and Winchester and Partridge Wagon Works (1860) were some of Walworth County's first and largest industries. In 1855 the population of Whitewater was 2,224. By 1888 it had grown to 3,621. Esterly Reaper Works was the largest employer in the 1880s, employing 525. Esterly employees built homes close to the factory on the east side of the city; hence the surrounding area became known as "Reaperville". Various industries fueled Whitewater's growth until 1892, when the Esterly Reaper Works moved to Minnesota and the Wagon Works shut down, thus marking the end of Whitewater's first industrial era.

With the loss of two major industries, Whitewater lost one quarter of its population and did not regain its 1890 population level until 1950. During the world wars and the Great Depression, Whitewater relied on small trade and light industries to sustain its economy. Agricultural products, including eggs, farm produce, cheese, dairy products, livestock and small game made up 66% of Whitewater's trade at the time. Meanwhile, the Whitewater Normal School (which later evolved into the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater) went about its business of training teachers. The school made several changes through the years, including diversifying its studies. After World War II, veterans returning from war boosted enrollment, sending the school well on its way to becoming the university it is today. Between the university and the manufacturing and service industries we have today, Whitewater has seen many changes. This community looks forward to this century and what the future has in store.

25. Territorial Oak
West Main St. & Franklin St.

1836 • LL 3/7/2019

The site includes a burr oak tree dating to 1800 or before that was used as a fixed point from which U.S. federal land surveyors platted the village of Whitewater in 1836. Known as a survey or witness tree, it marks Whitewater's point of beginning. The city council nominated the territorial oak an historic State of Wisconsin tree on February 1981 adding to its significance.

LANDMARKS COMMISSION

In 1982, the Whitewater Common Council approved the Landmarks Ordinance that created the Whitewater Landmarks Commission. The intent of the Commission includes protection, enhancement, perpetuation and use of archeological sites, geological formations, structures and city-owned historically significant personal property of special character or special historical interest or value. The primary duties of the Commission include identifying and designating landmarks and historic districts, and promoting preservation and protection of all historic resources in the city.

The city of Whitewater has 25 locally designated landmarks. It has one historic district:

Whitewater Local Landmark (LL)
In order to be designated a Whitewater Landmark, a building, structure or archeological site must either represent an individual or on-going historical event that is significant at the local, state or national level; or be identified with an historic person or persons significant in local state or national history; or embody the distinctive characteristics of an architectural style or form or be the work of a master architect.

Main Street Historic District (MSHD)
The Main Street Historic District was the most prestigious residential neighborhood in nineteenth and early twentieth century Whitewater. The buildings constructed in the district between 1855 and 1935, include fine Italianate, Second Empire, and Queen Anne style homes, several outstanding Gothic and Romanesque Revival style churches and a fine Classical Revival library. Collectively the buildings form a neighborhood of religious, educational, and social activity. In 1988, the Whitewater Landmarks Commission completed the nomination of the Main Street Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places. The district runs along Main Street roughly between Fremont and Prairie Streets and along a portion of North Street and south down Church street to Center Street.

National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)
The National Register of Historic Places is the official national list of historic properties in America worthy of preservation. Through the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service's NRHP is part of a national program