

# THE RESEARCHER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE  
SHEBOYGAN COUNTY HISTORICAL RESEARCH CENTER

Volume XXXVI Number 5 June 2026

The Researcher is sponsored by Jay Christopher of Christopher Farm & Gardens.



## Did You Know?

The summer of 1937 witnessed the opening of Prange's new escalator, the only "moving stairway," as it was called at the time, in Wisconsin. Prange's escalator preceded those in Milwaukee by five years. The escalator took shoppers from the first floor to the second floor, but not back down. The escalator was electrically driven, running continuously and silently, and was capable of carrying as many as 6,000 people per hour. Situated at the rear of the store, the escalator could accommodate as many as 42 people at one time.



## Cold Hands Prompts New Invention

By Dan Buckman

Demge's Corner Groceries and fountain service held a 3-day grand opening in 1950. Located at 1745 Broadway Avenue, it was the newest business to open on the south side of Sheboygan. A grocery, soda fountain, and automobile service station were all located on the same corner.

Theodore Demge, known to many as Ted, had been a City of Sheboygan bus driver, and upon his retirement, built a store and added a service station as a rental opportunity.

The 24- by 29-foot store featured large windows for abundant natural light. In the retail space, a variety of food selections, cigarettes, tobacco, greeting cards, and school supplies were neatly displayed. Refrigerated cases were used to keep meat and dairy products cool, and fresh baked goods arrived every day.



Ted Demge is shown with the ice cream carton holder he invented and for which he was granted a patent.

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518 Water Street  
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9 am to 4 pm  
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*The Researcher* is the official newsletter of the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center, 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085.

It is published six times per year in August, October, December, February, April and June.

The Research Center is the local history archive for Sheboygan County and surrounding areas. It is a repository for documents and images.

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## **Program Schedule**

See [schrc.org](http://schrc.org) or Facebook for more details.

### **Book Club**

at the Research Center (upper level—no elevator access), 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls — 1 to 2:30 pm

**July 15** — *Hero of the Empire: The Boer War, a Daring Escape, and the Making of Winston Churchill* (2016) by Candice Millard.

### **History on the Move**

at Generations, 1500 Douglas Drive, Plymouth — 1:30 pm

**June 16** — Dan Buckman, president of the Plymouth Historical Society, will present “The History of the Mullet River.”

### **Gravestone Cleaning Workshops**

9 am to 10 am. Cleaning supplies are provided. Please bring your own waterproof gloves and/or kneeling pad.

**June 6** — Union Cemetery, Plymouth

**June 13** — Evergreen (Harmon) Cemetery, County Road U, south of Plymouth

**September 5** — Saron UCC Cemetery, County Road J, Sheboygan Falls

**September 26** — Salem Plank Road UCC Cemetery, County Road C, Sheboygan Falls

**October 3** — Town of Lyndon Cemetery, Highway 57, Waldo

## **Share Your Story with *The Researcher***

Do you have a family tale worth telling, a business history that deserves the spotlight, or a genealogy discovery that made you see your roots in a new way? We’d love to feature it in *The Researcher*.

Our members’ stories bring Sheboygan County’s past to life, and your experiences—big or small—help preserve the history that connects us all. If you have a story to share, please send it our way. Your voice might be the one that inspires someone else to explore their own history.

To share your story, call (920) 467-4667 or send an email to [katiereilly@schrc.org](mailto:katiereilly@schrc.org) or [maryparrish@schrc.org](mailto:maryparrish@schrc.org). Submissions may be edited for clarity and length.



## Oetking's Coal

In 1876, Fred Oetking started in the wood business with a yard located on the south side of Indiana Avenue between Eighth and Ninth streets. In 1882, he established a branch business on the northwest corner of Sixth Street and Center Avenue.

In 1883, Oetking's company was incorporated under the name Sheboygan Coal Company. The company leased the property and docks at the foot of North Seventh Street, owned by Saemann & Bentley with a later option to purchase.

Within two years Oetking purchased all the optioned land along with all the land owned by the Crocker Chair Company on the east side of Seventh Street between the alley and the river. A main office was built on Seventh Street, and the docks were rebuilt for the storage of wood and coal.

In 1900, the company acquired all the land south of Jefferson between Sixth and Seventh streets which included the old Holstein elevator which was purchased from Kohler & Hayssen.

The company motorized its fleet in 1929, putting five new trucks with conveyors into use to make delivery

faster and safer. In those days, one saw coal boats tied up on both sides of Franklin Street at Seventh Street at the Sheboygan Coal docks. Just to the south there were many fish shanties.

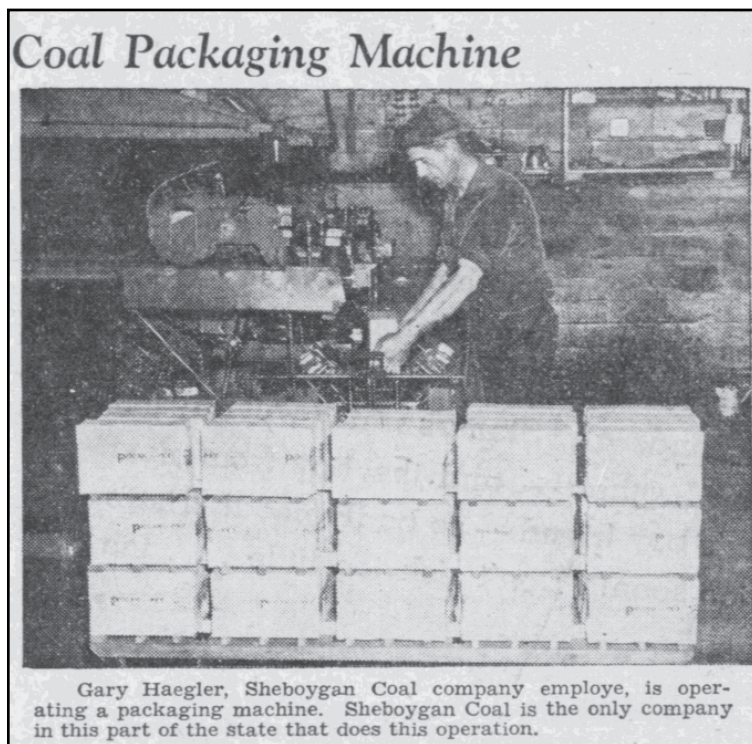
Fred Oetking, president of Sheboygan Coal Company, announced the purchase of the Goodrich property and docks in October of 1933.

Sheboygan had two coal companies in 1940, Oetking and Reiss, and both companies worked hard to grow the port, requesting dredging of the river and the creation of a long-term plan. The city was not willing to spend the money.



Fred Oetking

Fred and William Oetking sold Sheboygan Coal in 1945. 🍀



The Sheboygan Press, July 31, 1942

### Oetking's Service Introduced State To Packaged Cubed Coal

Three generations of Sheboygan families have been served with fuel by the Sheboygan Coal company, one of the community's pioneer business firms. In the early days, the founder of the business, the senior Fred Oetking, was engaged in the distribution of wood—that was about 70 years ago before the age of general coal consumption for residence heating in Sheboygan.

In 1883 the company was organized and incorporated under the name of The Sheboygan Coal company and the present property and docks at the foot of N. Seventh street were leased. Two years later this property was purchased by the company. Following a progressive policy, the company acquired additional property from time to time, rebuilt the docks, erected its office building and modernized its facilities to maintain "Oetking's Service—Like the Tick of a Clock".

The Sheboygan Coal company has introduced many new ideas

and methods in the burning of coal for home comfort, thereby offering its patrons better conveniences and greater economy.

Cubed coal in packages was introduced into Wisconsin by Oetking's Service and only the Sheboygan Coal company manufactures it in Sheboygan. "This is nature's finest fuel in its most convenient form for use—neat, clean, easy to handle and fire, economical and practical", states Fred C. Oetking, officer of the company.

Through the quality of its coal and its high type of service, the Oetking brothers—William F. Oetking and Fred C. Oetking—have been able to retain the good-will established among the company's pioneer customers, to the present day, when they are servicing these people's children and grandchildren. From them, newcomers to the city are learning to know Oetking's Service and the consideration which Oetking brothers extend to all their customers.

Packaged or cubed coal as it was known was one of the fastest growing industries in the U.S. in 1942. During the heating season of 1941-1942, production increased 34%. The industry has increased 754% since 1935 as wood has decreased in use for heating homes. The Sheboygan Press, July 31, 1942

A sleek soda fountain featuring a Formica countertop was installed on the store's east side. Six seats, upholstered in red, were available at the counter that contrasted well with the rose-and cream-colored walls and ceiling. Fluorescent lighting, an asphalt tile floor, and gas forced heat, made for comfortable shopping and soda fountain experiences.

A service station was constructed next to the store and leased to the Sinclair Oil Company. Robert Drollinger leased the property, providing a complete range of automobile services including washing, lubrication, tire changes, and minor repairs.

Ted Demge, a native of Lake Church in Ozaukee County, was born in 1897. After attending high school in Belgium, he worked on ranches in Montana and South Dakota harvesting grain. Upon his return home, he began to learn the cheese making trade while attending the University of Wisconsin dairy school in 1917.

In 1918, Ted married Miss Jeanette Allare at St. Mary's Catholic church at Lake Church. They had four daughters and one son, who passed away in infancy.

From 1918 to 1925 he operated his own cheese, butter, and ice cream factory in Oostburg while spending two years in the Army Air Force during WWI. He was employed by the City of Sheboygan operating a streetcar and later driving city buses for twenty-five years.

In 1950, Demge's Corner Groceries held a grand opening. Inside patrons found a full line of candy and gum, greeting cards, magazines, cold cuts, fruits and vegetables, cigarettes and tobacco. Borden's ice cream sold for 27 cents a pint, Mott's jelly 15 cents, Wunderbar brick cheese 45 cents per pound, and six cans of beer 90 cents. A special sundae for the day was offered at 11 cents.

While working in the soda fountain, Ted soon realized it was all but impossible to hold the ice cream carton still without using both hands, one to handle the carton and the other to scoop the ice cream out. Suffering from skinned knuckles and cold hands led him to sketching and devising an alternative. He took his plans to a local tinsmith who devised what resembled a square bucket with no sides. The bucket, slightly larger than the ice cream containers, fits into standard ice cream freezer compartments. This eliminated the need to hold the carton, freeing up one hand. Ted also realized there were other advantages than just saving his knuckles. After the ice cream containers were in the freezer for any length of time, they became soggy and would often tear apart from handling. With the container firmly in place by the holder, they did not come in contact with the sides of the freezer and the cardboard cartons no longer got wet.

There were also issues with bits of the damp cardboard paper breaking apart and from frost in the freezer. These bits would end up in the customers' ice cream,

not to mention the occasional thumb that got into the ice cream from the employee dipping it from the container. From a sanitary standpoint, Ted's idea eliminated that.

Ted's invention worked out so well he sought the advice of an attorney. A patent was granted and officially filed in Washington after several months of application review. Soon, multiple companies reached out to Ted seeking permission to produce the innovative ice cream bucket holders. Service Welding Co. of Cedar Grove, manufactured the holders, which were distributed across the country.

Ted's wife worked with him in the store. On a cold December day in 1964 while working, she complained of feeling ill and went to the rear of the building to lie down. Shortly after Ted found her on the floor and called for the city ambulance. She was quickly taken to St. Nicholas hospital where she died of an apparent heart attack.

Ted continued to operate the grocery and soda fountain, retiring in 1966. In 1973, he became a resident of Meadowview Manor where he died at the age of 78 in 1975. He rests with his wife at Holy Cross Cemetery.

The Demge ice cream carton holder, often used to prevent skinned knuckles and cold hands, remains common in various forms. Next time you're at an ice cream shop, pay attention to how the tubs of ice cream are kept behind the counter. 🍦

# YOU'RE INVITED . . . . GRAND OPENING

FRIDAY . . SATURDAY . . SUNDAY

## DEMGE'S CORNER GROCERIES FOUNTAIN SERVICE



Ed Demge, Proprietor

DEMGE'S GROCERY . . . 18th and BROADWAY . . . Dial 2-2990

What look for us . . . that this wonderfully stocked grocery opened in your neighborhood is a clean, modern store that offers a superb variety of items for your complete shopping convenience . . . and it's the only grocery store of its kind serving the business section of the city. So make one of its handy deliveries and enjoy the grand opening sales!

Featuring **BORDEN'S ICE CREAM**

Pint **27¢** 1/2 Gal. **\$1.05**  
Reg. 30¢ pt. Reg. 1.15

You'll enjoy, very sure, at this good time. With everything that Borden's Creamery has to offer. And, we offer it to you in Malted Milk, Ice Cream, Candy, Ice Cream Soda, Sundae, the Creamery and other Borden's. It's all here . . . every day!



When Stopping for Groceries, Fill Up That Gasoline Tank on Your Car . . . at the



Robert Drollinger, Manager

**DROLLINGER SERVICE STATION**  
18th and Broadway

**SINCLAIR GASOLINE PRODUCTS**



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- Checks
- Transmission
- Differential
- Air and Oil Filters
- Spark Plugs
- Battery
- Radiator
- Tires
- Auto Washing
- Auto Polishing



**FREE GIFTS** for all customers who buy over 2 gals. of gas

**GRAND OPENING Special SUNDAE 11¢**

A real treat treat . . . Borden's Creamery Ice Cream topped with fresh berries. Yours. Take advantage of this offer now! **REG. 20¢ VALUE.**

**Featuring . . .**

- Complete Candy
- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Comic Books
- Cigars
- Cigarettes
- Tobacco
- Fresh Bakery Daily
- Full Line of Candy and Gum
- Full Line of Cold Cut Meats
- Complete Line of Canned
- Fresh Fruits and Vegetables
- Snow Peas
- Canned
- Ham and the Soap
- Station

**Save Now on These Items . . .**

- MIRACLE WHIP **35¢**
- WENDYBARK BEAN BRICK CHEESE **45¢**
- AMER. BREVOLINE CHEESE **57¢**
- ORANGE JUICE **29¢**
- MAYO'S RASPBERRY or RASPBERRY JELLY **15¢**
- BARNARD'S TWO STEAK BEEF HAMBURGER **55¢**

- AMMONIA **15¢**
- FOOD KING PORK AND BEANS **19¢**
- RIVAL DOG FOOD **10¢**
- ALVIN JAYNE BROCK-BUSH DILL PICKLES **29¢**
- CRYSTAL BROS. BEER & PEAS **29¢**
- BARNARD'S TWO PORK BRATWURST **55¢**

All Popular Brands of **BEER** **6¢** **90¢**

**\$3.25** case of 12 bottles

Buy your beer bottles here, at our low prices! We've got the excellent varieties.

**SOFT DRINKS**

Price 10¢ per bottle. 10¢ per 12 bottle.

**The Following Firms Contributed to Our Success:**

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| ARMY BROS. CO., INC.<br>Distributors of Country Borden<br>Food, Candy, Meats<br>1812 Broadway St. Dial 4871 | WISCONSIN LIQUOR AND SUPPLY CO.<br>All Liquors and Meats<br>1712 N. 18th St. Dial 4334                | CARL MONROE and SON, CONTRACTORS<br>Electric, Carpentry, Wood<br>1114 Wisconsin Ave. Dial 3-2222 | YER BATH, MASON<br>All Mason Work for Stone and<br>Service Station<br>1712 N. 18th St. Dial 7274 | SOUTH WIS. HARDWARE and FLOORING CO.<br>Flooring, Heating, Painting and<br>Steel Sheet Work<br>1814 S. 18th St. Dial 7147 | SERVICE SALES CO.<br>Distributors All the Great<br>1421 Adams Ave. Dial 5981          |
| BURNER<br>Home, Store and Commercial<br>1701 N. 18th St. Dial 552   | J. P. & COMPANY<br>Canned and Grocery, Meats and<br>Dried Wildcat Peas<br>2212 Broadway St. Dial 4477 | OPPENHEIM IRON WORKS<br>Furnished Steel Boxes<br>1422 S. 7th St. Dial 4871                       | H. J. BARNER BROS. MEAT MARKET<br>To Supply All Meat<br>Products<br>1422 Jackson Ave. Dial 7721  | BENNING BAKRY<br>Meat, Sausage and<br>Candy Products<br>1422 S. 18th St. Dial 3-2222                                      | BRAMAN & WHEAT, INC. BIRD EGGERS<br>Big Outdoor Game Trap<br>102 N. 7th St. Dial 4924 |
| MARTINSON ELECTRIC CO.<br>All Electric Work and<br>Lighting Fixtures<br>1412 N. 20th St. Dial 4475          | LOUIS & NEHR DRUGMAN BROS. CO.<br>Cheapest Store for the<br>Business District                         | POPE, YOUNG EQUIPMENT CO.<br>New Trolley, Schoolbuses<br>and Machinery<br>Head to East 4th       |  |   | HAROLD E. WOLFE EDUCATION<br>All Bookkeeping Work<br>1711 Adams Ave. Dial 3-2222      |

Grand opening advertisement for Demge's Corner Groceries Fountain Service in The Sheboygan Press, September 28, 1950.

## The Golden Arches Arrival in 1958

Friday, June 19, 1958, brought the grand opening of Sheboygan County's very first McDonald's. George Tuttle, the local owner-manager of this pioneer McDonald's, built his "hamburger palace" on North Avenue just west of Calumet Drive in the city of Sheboygan.

The drive-in and walk-up, fast-food restaurant was the 121st McDonald's franchise granted in the United States and the third in Wisconsin. It offered only three food items that year: hamburgers with the works for fifteen cents, French fries for ten cents and cheeseburgers, also with the works, for twenty cents. Beverages on the menu included triple thick shakes, soda and coffee. No special orders for the first few years! And no tipping, a bonus for our ever-frugal local residents.

A family of five could eat for \$2.25 and enjoy America's favorite hamburger. The advertisement boasted "No dishes to wash. No mess to clean." The restaurant was also open on Sundays, something not commonly seen in the 1960s because of Blue Laws.

This dining brainchild took off when Richard and Maurice McDonald changed their successful

California drive-in to a more streamlined system with a simple menu of just hamburgers, cheeseburgers, French fries, shakes, soft drinks, and apple pie. Carhops were eliminated to make McDonald's a self-service operation. The brothers took great care in setting up their kitchen like an assembly line to ensure maximum efficiency. This new "McDonald's" opened on December 12, 1948.

The McDonald brothers crafted the golden arches outside of their building to look like a big "M" in 1952.

In 1954, Ray Kroc, a seller of Multimixer milkshake machines, learned that the McDonald brothers were using eight of his machines in their San Bernardino restaurant. His curiosity was piqued, and he went to take a look at their restaurant.

Believing the McDonalds' formula was sure to succeed, Kroc dreamed of franchises throughout the country. The brothers were skeptical, but Kroc offered to take the reins and the risk for setting up the new stores. A partnership was formed. Kroc's first restaurant opened on April 15, 1955, in Des Plaines, Illinois, but he eventually bought out the brothers.



*McDonald's on the north side of Sheboygan — 2307 North Avenue*

By 1961 the “Golden Arches” became part of Ray Kroc’s iconic McDonald’s logo.

In the 1960s, McDonald’s sought a menu item that would tackle the dilemma of lagging Friday sales. Back then, most American Catholics abstained from meat on Fridays throughout the year as a form of penance. As a result, McDonald’s was losing Friday customers to competitors like Big Boy, which served a fish sandwich. To boost Friday sales and cater to Catholics, Ray Kroc hoped to introduce the Hula Burger – grilled pineapple on a bun. But, in a test market run the Filet-o-Fish was the winner, far outpacing the Hula Burger. It was added to the original menu in 1962 and has been a hit ever since.

Perhaps, the most important new item introduced as the company grew was the Big Mac launched in 1967. This popular sandwich consists of, as the immortal jingle put it, “two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles, onions on a sesame-seed

bun,” a ditty every kid of the 1960s and 1970s knew by heart.

Fast food in America, was actually a turn of the 20th century concept. First seen in a cafeteria-style Automat in New York City, prepared foods were displayed behind small glass windows with coin operated slots. This launched the idea of “take-out” food. But, White Castle, home of the Slider hamburger, founded in 1921 in Kansas City, is generally considered to be the first “fast food” restaurant in the country.

As of 2025, McDonald’s has more than 45,350 restaurants in 120 countries. Sheboygan County now has six of its own, four in the city limits, one in Plymouth, and one in Sheboygan Falls.

Love it or hate it, McDonald’s will always be something of a cultural icon. 🍃

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### Saron UCC Church

The congregation of Saron Church located on County Trunk J in Sheboygan Falls began forming during a meeting on May 7, 1855, at the home of Fred Fasse. Three weeks later, potential members met to organize as a congregation and adopt a constitution. The congregation voted to affiliate with the German Reformed Church. A house of worship was constructed in 1857 at a cost of \$130 paid to the carpenter. The lumber was taken from the woods on the church property. A new 40– by 60–foot structure was completed in 1889 using lumber that was donated by elder Cord Boedecker and labor done by members of the congregation for a cost of \$4,500. In 1921, the parsonage, church, and school were wired for electricity. In 1935, a basement was added to the building. Stained glass windows were added in 1943. Many additions and updates have been completed since. The church became part of the United Church of Christ in 1957 when the Evangelical and Reformed church and the Congregational Christian churches merged. In keeping with the congregation’s long commitment to preserving its history, the Research Center will hold a gravestone cleaning workshop on September 5 at the Saron UCC cemetery. 🍃



ca. 1888–1906



Sheboygan County  
Historical Research Center  
518 Water Street  
Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085



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In 1948, workmen razing the old Park Hotel, which was adjacent to the Sheboygan Clinic on 8th Street, found posters of presidents and patent medicines from 1888. Underneath the tar paper and siding, the posters were remarkably well preserved on the north wall of the hotel. The stage play at the Opera House in November of 1888 was “Keep It Dark” featuring W.T. Bryant was advertised prominently.

Sheboygan’s Park hotel was a high-class summertime mecca for people from Chicago, St. Louis, Louisville and other points south. Those from the south came north to escape malaria season and to drink the mineral waters tapped at Fountain Park.

The building was razed for a parking lot as it was condemned as a fire trap years before.