

## History of Appleton

### Continued

Appleton traditionally has had a commitment to vocational education. The Vocational School was established in 1912, and the first facility in the United States to be built exclusively for this purpose was erected here in 1917. When the State of Wisconsin was divided into vocational, technical and adult education districts in 1965, the local program was expanded and the Fox Valley Technical College was established. Area business has been responsible for Appleton's economic prosperity and progressive attitude. The paper industry, beginning with the building of the first paper mill in the city in 1853, has been at the forefront of the development of Appleton. In order to provide electricity to this industry, the Vulcan Street Hydroelectric Central Station began operation on November 25, 1882 in Appleton. The Vulcan Street Plant represents an early use of hydropower to generate electricity and perhaps one of the earliest examples of a hydroelectric plant that sold electricity commercially and provided incandescent lighting service to the public. Not too long afterward, in August of 1886, Appleton was the site for another national first, the operation of a commercially successful electric streetcar company. Electric lights replaced gas lamps on College Avenue in 1912.

Our community also made history when Alfred Galpin put together his own telephone in 1877, connecting his bank and his residence. Later, a druggist installed several phones in his store, linking them with those in other offices. The Wisconsin Telephone Company purchased this exchange in 1881. Retail trade has also contributed to the area's progress. Because stores have always been concentrated on College Avenue, businessesmen actively cooperate with city government in downtown redevelopment. A major convention center, the Paper Valley Hotel, was opened in 1982 and a shopping complex, The Avenue, commenced operations in March of 1987.

Cultural growth was encouraged early in Appleton. Central to that development has been public library service. Beginning in a reading room above a grocery store on College Avenue, the Appleton Public Library has developed over the years into a gathering place that offers opportunities for the entire community to "Learn, Know, Gather and Grow". Today it is located at 225 North Oneida Street. In addition to materials, the library offers free computer access, notary service, meeting rooms for non-profits, study rooms and serves as a WIFI hotspot.

The Fox Cities Performing Arts Center attracts performing artists from all over the world. The \$45 million center features the 2,100-seat Thrivent Financial Hall and the smaller, multi-purpose Kimberly-Clark Theater. Its 5,000 square foot stage is the second-largest in Wisconsin. It opened in 2002 and has contributed significantly to revitalization of the downtown, as the centerpiece of an arts and entertainment district. The Fox Cities Building for the Arts was created in 2013 and is located in a 25,000 square foot building on College Avenue in downtown Appleton to reflect the diversity of programs and services being offered. The Trout Museum of Art is an important component complemented by the new Regional Artist Gallery and visual arts education programs. In addition, the building is home to several independent performing arts organizations.

The preservation of Appleton's history has been the work of the Outagamie County Historical Society. Its museum contains artifacts of Appleton's famous native son, escape artist Harry Houdini and author Edna Ferber, who grew up in Appleton. The museum showcases Appleton's heritage as a progressive, industrious community in Wisconsin's Fox River Valley. The residents of our community are proud of Appleton's past and present, and they manifest a great confidence in its future and a dedication to its ongoing betterment.

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Appleton shares its history with Lawrence University, for the two grew simultaneously. The close relationship established in the early years continues to exist.

Fur traders seeking to do business with Fox River Valley Indians were the first settlers in Appleton. Hippolyte Grignon built the White Heron in 1835 to house his family and serve as an inn and trading post.

With the financial backing of Amos Lawrence, the Lawrence Institute was chartered in 1847. Samuel Appleton donated \$10,000 to the newly founded college library, and in appreciation, his name was given to the community.

Appleton was incorporated first as a village in 1853 (John F. Johnston, the first resident, village president) and later as a city in 1857 (Amos Story, Mayor).

Lawrence University's 84 acre campus lies east of the city's attractive, lively downtown. Students and faculty members supply the community with an endless array of music, drama and sports activities.

For more information about the Historic Preservation Commission, contact the Community and Economic Development Department.

Phone: 920.832.6468  
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100 N. Appleton Street  
Appleton, WI 54911

For additional information, please visit <https://www.appleton.org/> or scan the QR code below with your smartphone:



## A Guide to the History of the City of Appleton

**City of Appleton  
Historic Preservation Commission**





216 E. North Street—Edna Ferber House

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Fox Cities Performing Arts Center

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MAP TO BE INSERTED



Vulcan Street Plant Replica

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