

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN WISCONSIN.¹

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The form of local government is of importance both as educating the whole people in public affairs and as affecting the purity and economy of local administration. The town-meeting in New England, and later in the whole Northwest, has performed a very important office in developing intelligence and interest in political affairs. Again, purity and economy in local administration depend upon the degree in which small communities control their own special financial concerns.

The same natural and social forces which developed the political tendencies of North and South so diversely, also produced in the two sections very different types of local government. And, by a curious train of events, these opposite systems have contended for mastery on the soil of Wisconsin.

There are in the United States three general types of local government — the town, the county, and the mixed system — represented respectively by New England, Virginia, and New York. The causes which developed such different institutions are to be found partly in the natural conditions of climate, soil, and industry, and partly in the character of the early colonists.

In Massachusetts,² the town is the only local division for administrative purposes aside from the school district. The county is but an aggregation of towns for judicial purposes,

¹ Annotated by the author.—Ed.

² This brief outline of the local institutions of New England, Virginia and New York is introduced for the purpose of showing the significance of the changes in town and county government that have taken place in Wisconsin. The materials for this preliminary sketch have been drawn mainly from the *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*.