



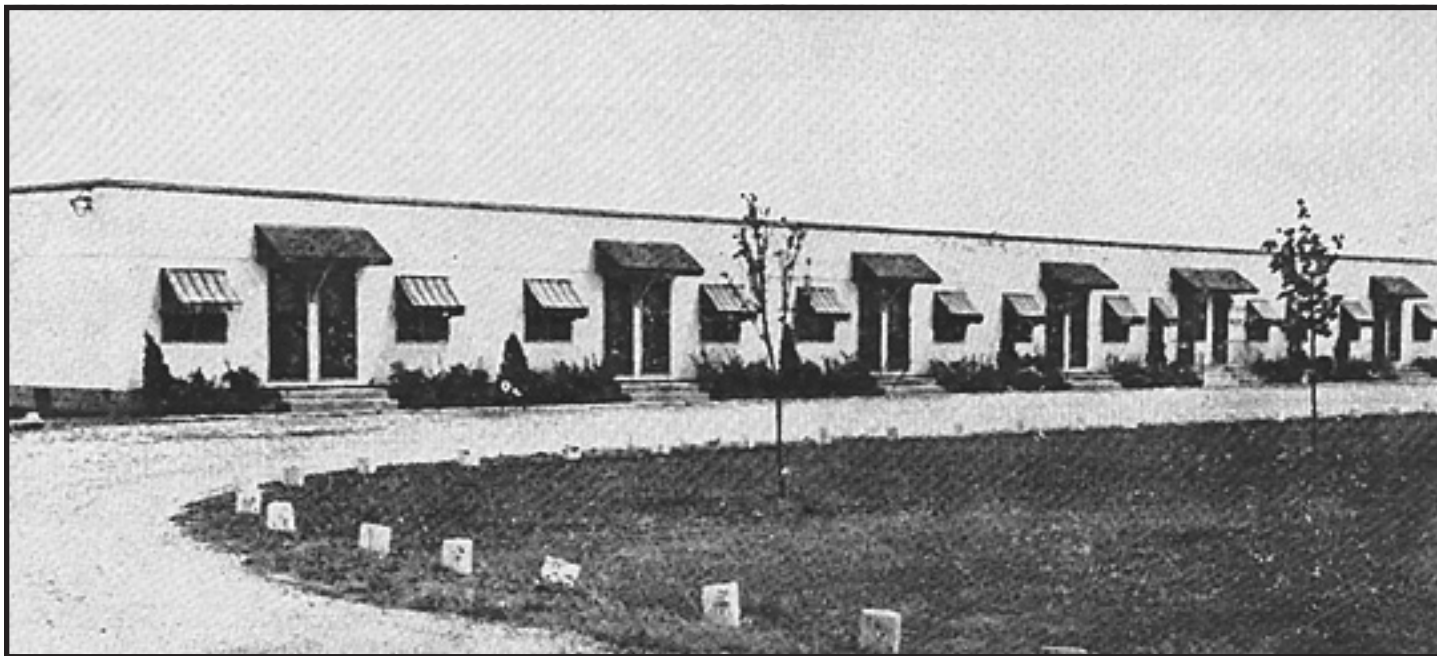
## Middleton Area Historical Society Newsletter

Sept. 2015

Number 165

Middleton, Wisconsin

OUR MISSION: TO PRESERVE AND PUBLICIZE THE HISTORY OF THE MIDDLETON AREA.



### Simon's Tourist Court

*Taken from the **Souvenir Veterans Centennial Book**  
Published by the Middleton Times-Tribune, August 27, 1948*

A comparatively new convenience for tourists is the erection of tourists cabins and courts in the smaller villages of the nation and at the outskirts of the larger cities.

People who are travelling do not want to be bothered with the large city traffic and parking problems and with the fancy dress up requirements of staying at the larger hotels. Still most tourists appreciate modern conveniences—hot and cold water, showers, electric lights and comfortable beds.

Outstanding among Wisconsin tourists stops must be listed the Simon's Tourist Court located at the north edge of Middleton on highways 12 and 13, which opened June 1, 1946.

It is but a few minutes drive from Madison, so that tourists planning to visit Wisconsin's capital city can get a good night's rest away from the noise of the city and still be in Madison in time to attend club meetings, or go on sight seeing trips in the morning.

The cabins are open all the year round, so that travellers can depend on them.

Hot water heat, electric lights, showers and comfortable beds and clean environment assure the tourists of comfort found only in the best hotels.

Roll-away beds enable families to stay in the same cabin which adds to the economy of the trip.

The Court is operated by Mr. and Mrs. Math Simon, who make pleasant hosts to the travelling public.

# PIE & ICE CREAM

Once again mother nature gifted us with a lovely evening for the annual Middleton Area Historical Society Ice Cream Social. A large crowd enjoyed numerous desserts and superb music. Thanks to all who donated the delicious goodies and attended the fund-raiser.



A special thank you to the following **PIE AND ICE CREAM SOCIAL SPONSORS:**

- CVS Pharmacy
- Starbucks
- Willy Street Co-op
- Scott's Pastry Shoppe
- Hubbard Avenue Diner
- Orchids Garden Center
- Bloom Bakery

## **MORE PEOPLE TO THANK.....**

The follow people have donated their time and materials free of charge to the Middleton Area Historical Society.

**Thank you** to Mary Ross of Mary Ross Expert Cleaning Service for volunteering to clean the Rowley House.

**Thank you** to Tim Burchard of Eclipse Window Film and Graphics, LLC for generously supplying us with solar film which protects our artifacts at the Rowley House.

**Thank you** to Bill Larson of Larson Floor Sanding for sanding the front porch floor that will soon get a new coat of paint.



# THE MYSTERIES OF PHEASANT BRANCH-part 2

by Anita Taylor Doering

"Yankees" is the term given to those born in America and who hailed from a state that was one of the original colonies in the northeast United States. The early censuses as well as biographical sketches in 19th century writings show that Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey topped the list of birthplaces of the early settlers in the Town of Middleton, an area 36 miles in width by 36 miles in length.

## Roads and Railroads

On the frontier, communities in the early days of permanent white settlement sprang up first around established transportation routes and were largely settled by Yankee immigrants starting in the 1840s which is exactly what transpired in the town of Middleton. Many of these folks were merchants and skilled craftsmen; although there were certainly a small group of "gentlemen farmers" who amassed wealth through the buying and selling of property holdings, particularly farm land.

Dividing the town diagonally was the military road linking Fort Blue Mounds in the southwest, the center of activity of lead miners in particular, to Fort Winnebago to the northeast, situated at the confluence of the Wisconsin and Fox rivers at Portage, which operated as a center of the fur trade.

In looking at various plat maps, censuses, and deed records, a basic pattern of growth in the town does emerge. Some parts of the town were purchased very early, in the 1830s and early 1840s, by capitalists and land speculators. These people simply purchased land cheaply at \$1.25 an acre from the government with little intention of developing it in any way, unless it happened to be on the railroad line that they owned, or they could sway other businessmen to buy shares in paper towns.

The Yankee migrants and English immigrants formed the Middleton Junction or East Middleton area first, followed by the Pheasant Branch area, both located on major state roads. By 1854 it was evident that the railroad line was going to progress west from Madison to connect to Prairie du Chien. Sure enough, the Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad came through in 1856 but choose an area that was known as "Peatville" and later "Middleton Station" in lieu of either of the two fledgling communities. As a result, the stage was set then for both communities to plateau or decline in population, while the new village of Middleton began to breathe life in 1856, the year in which

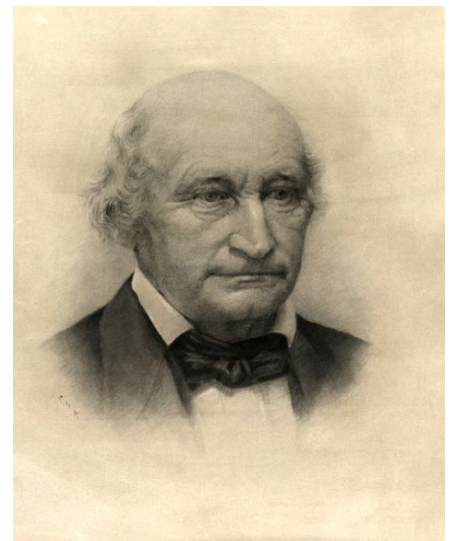


it was platted as "Middleton Station." As evidenced from the 1855 map, there was now a direct railroad link between the largely German immigrant city of Milwaukee and the rich farmland just west of the capitol city of Madison. By 1854, many German immigrants had begun to settle the area and the Yankee folk tended to push farther west past the Mississippi River.

## Platting of Pheasant Branch Village

The settlement of the area known as Pheasant Branch really got going when T. T. Whittlesey took a gamble and bought land sight unseen in 1838. As you may remember, Whittlesey had already purchased land in the Town of Middleton through land speculator Lucius Lyon in 1838.

Thomas T. Whittlesey (1789-1868) was a U. S. Representative from Connecticut, cousin of Elisha Whittlesey and Frederick Whittlesey. Born in Danbury, CT, Whittlesey attended the public schools and graduated from Yale College in 1817. He then attended Litchfield Law School, was admitted to the bar in

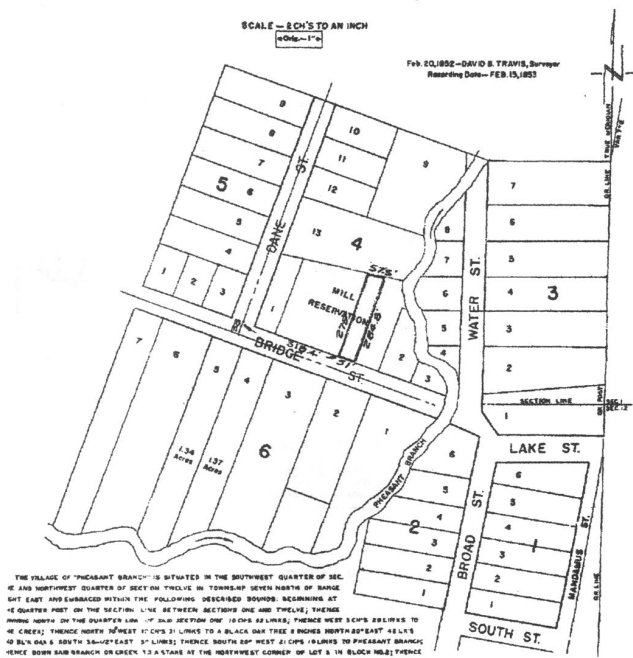


1818 and commenced his law practice in Danbury, CT. He served as probate judge.

Whittlesey was elected to Congress as a Jacksonian and was reelected as a Democrat the next term and served from April 29, 1836, to March 3, 1839. He was an unsuccessful candidate for reelection in 1838 to the Twenty-sixth Congress when his attention began to turn to the pioneering western edge of the United States like many other Yankees.

According to a few written sources, Whittlesey originally called the Pheasant Branch area "Mandamus," a legal term that basically is an order from a superior court to a lower court or public official to enforce a duty or law. Literally it means "we command." A map in 1839 shows this named as such. However, by the time Whittlesey had the village plated in 1853, the name had been changed to Pheasant Branch. Why the area was renamed this is a mystery. As mentioned previously, pheasants, a non-native game bird, were not introduced into Wisconsin as a game bird until the late 1890s. The original name of the area used by the Native Peoples was "Peenah" which means turkey. A 1973 "Pheasant Branch Marsh: Environmental Study" surmises that "this [Native name] was later expanded to 'Pheasant Branch' by [the] first settlers which ... kept the fact a bird was originally mentioned." Perhaps Whittlesey or some of the other Yankees thought to name the place after the "Old English Pheasant Fowl," a breed of chicken originating in England

## PLAT OF THE VILLAGE OF PHEASANT BRANCH

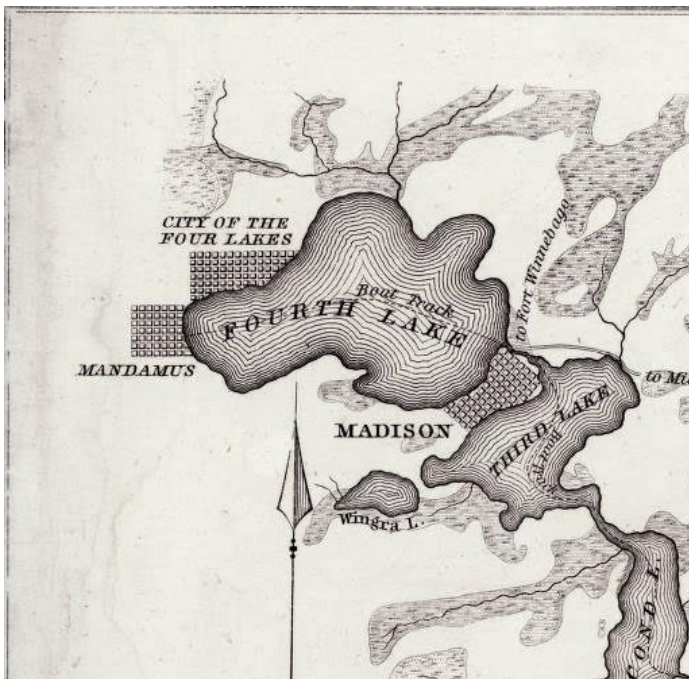


*Plat of the Village of Pheasant Branch, 1852, surveyed by David Travis and recorded 1853*

with a rufous color. Despite its name, it is not a species of pheasant, and was so named based merely on general appearance. Another mystery!

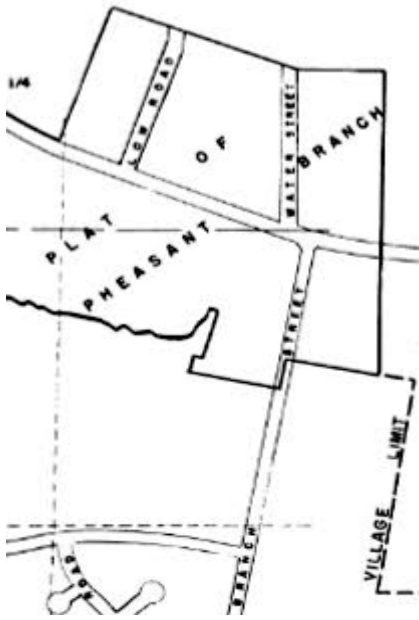
About eight years after his land transaction, Whittlesey gave up his life as an Easterner to pursue his desire to carve and develop "the Western frontier," and he moved to his property in the area that he would develop as Pheasant Branch in 1846, platting the village in 1853. He resumed the practice of law and also engaged in agricultural pursuits as a gentleman farmer. After a little time out of the state and national public eye, he served as member of the Wisconsin Senate in 1853 and 1854. He was elected the first town chairman in 1848 and was among the organizers of the Pheasant Branch School District in 1852 and of the Presbyterian Society in 1868. He built what is believed to be the oldest extant house in Middleton, located at 6517 Elmwood Avenue. He died at Pheasant Branch, Wisconsin, August 20, 1868, and was interred in Forest Hill Cemetery, Madison, Wisconsin.

Notice from the plat (on the following page) the names of the streets. Dane Street became Pheasant Branch Road (also known as "Low Road" the opposite of "High Road" which runs parallel to its west), Bridge Street became Century Avenue. The bend in the road where Broad Street (now Branch) and Water Street (now a walking trail in the Pheasant Branch Conservancy) wasn't straightened out until the early 1950s. Also notice that Amherst is labeled



*Map of the 4 Lakes and Their Outlet into Rock River : To Accompany the Report of Thos. J. Cram Capt. T.E. on the Reconnaissance Thereof*





Mandamus Street, the original name given to the area. These same street names are unchanged on official plats through 1954, except that what is now Century Avenue has been designated as part of County Hwy. M and Branch Street as part of County Hwy. Q. Where Branch and Century met, heading east Century Ave. also carried the County Hwy. Q designation. When the area was platted into the

Village of Middleton, the 1957 plat included the correct street names of Century Avenue, Branch Street, Water Street (abandoned shortly thereafter) and Low Road [Pheasant Branch Road] were noted.

The table below shows the height of the population of The Branch to be about 1870, the same time that Peatville became Middleton Station. The decline was sharp after this blow, but notice that the entire population of the town (rural as well as non-rural communities) did not substantially grow either. While the railroad line did stunt the growth of Pheasant Branch, it wasn't until the 1880s when the Village of Middleton had grown enough to make a large impact on where people choose to live and work. While Pheasant Branch had some basic necessities of a successful settlement, such as taverns, grocery / dry goods, a post office, a brewery, and a school, it lacked a cemetery and any organized religion. Generally, many ventured into Middleton for church and more substantial shopping.

Population of The Branch			
Year	Pheasant Branch	Middleton	Town Total
1860	126		1441
1870	288	285	1821
1880	93	293	1510
1885	83	253	1495
1895		285	1508

Next time we'll explore the school and businesses of Pheasant Branch.

**Note:** Anita Taylor Doering continues to do research on the Pheasant Branch area. She is attempting to collect more photos and stories of Pheasant Branch for the Society and bring the history up to current times, particularly from the 1920s/ 1930s to the 1980s. If you can help with any information, she can be reached at:

[abdoering@gmail.com](mailto:abdoering@gmail.com) or (608) 784-2492.

The **Oregon Area Historical Society** will be holding a Fall Festival and Open House on :

Sunday, September 20 from 12:00-3  
129 W. Lincoln Street

Activities include wagon rides, cake walk, food stand, silent auction, museum open house, fiddlers, old time photos, demonstrations and face painting.



## 1847 At The Stamm House

On Saturday, October 10, **1847 at The Stamm House** restaurant will donate 10% of their gross revenues for the evening to the Middleton Area Historical Society. This is a great opportunity to visit the newly renovated building at 6625 Century Avenue and also donate to the Middleton Area Historical Society.

The Stamm House, located in Pheasant Branch, was build in 1847 as a store, and soon after became an inn and tavern to serve travelers on the Old Sauk Trail which was a thoroughfare between Chicago and Minneapolis. It is the oldest tavern in Dane County.

For more info about **1847 at The Stamm House**, please visit their website at: <http://www.1847stammhouse.com>



## Thank You to Our Donors

Due to a shortage of storage space, The Middleton Area Historical Society is now concentrating on only collecting artifacts with a connection to the Middleton area. The following artifacts have recently been donated.

**Estelle Hanson** of Columbus donated a collection of Wittenburg photographs and family papers including financial records and a World War II era diary of Caroline Wittenburg.

**James Harloff**, raised in Madison, but now living in Peoria, Arizona, visited the Rowley House and donated two elaborately framed portraits of early settlers Joaquim and Dora Harloff who were among what he called the "Middleton 14."

**Kevin O'Connell** brought us a carton of early records of the Parent Teacher Association, as well as records of its predecessor organization the Mother's Club. A preliminary review of the records reveals an amusing reluctance of fathers to form the organization.

**Nancy Reiter Miller** donated an ornate German bowl (pictured above) and two matching water pitchers from an extensive set of china given to her grandparents as a wedding present. She had previously donated two beautiful German dolls that belonged to her mother Luella Reiter Goth and her aunt Olive M. Goth.



## CAN YOU HELP THE MIDDLETON FIRE DEPARTMENT????

The Middleton Fire Department is looking for historical information regarding a local building that once housed the fire department.

- Do you have any information or photos of Louis Kemmer and the veal, eggs and hides business he ran out of a building that was purchased from the fire department? It was located on the corner of Hubbard and Aurora in the early 1920s.

- They are also looking for any photos of the fire station/engine house taken prior to 1920.

If you have information about the above please email Eric Porter at: [porter.rides@gmail.com](mailto:porter.rides@gmail.com) or call Mary at 836-6776.

## Preserving the rowley house

Much work has been done this year at the Rowley House.

### INTERIOR WORK

- The unused and period inappropriate upstairs bathroom was removed. Old tile was replaced with drywall and painted and old trim put back. A new light fixture was installed and UV film placed on the window. A thermal window shade has been ordered and will be installed soon.

- In the living room, 2 layers of wallpaper were stripped off and the walls have been painted. The old carpeting was removed and the exposed oak floor was cleaned and polished.

### EXTERIOR WORK

- The damaged and worn siding on the west, north and east sides of the back kitchen addition was removed and replaced and then painted.

- Storm windows on West side were repaired and repainted.

- The back porch is currently being painted and a new step has been installed.

- This fall the front porch will be painted.

- October 13 will be last day the Rowley House will be open this season. **The Museum at the Depot** is open year around Mon.-Fri. from 9-5 except holidays.

# The Beginning of Sak's Woods

*By Jeanie Sakrison Velarde from a memoir by Robert Sakrison*

My father's family – Charles and Mira and their children, my father Robert and sister Phoebe – moved to Middleton from Nakoma in 1937 to be close to their newest enterprise – Madison Trailer Town. Charles had bought 48 acres of woodland owned by early settler Frank Coolidge. It was bounded on the north by Pheasant Branch creek, east by Pheasant Branch Road (Branch Street). South was pastureland and west was cornfield. The entire area was outside the Village of Middleton.

They formed and made concrete for the foundations of a lodge at the entrance on Pheasant Branch Road, for the two bathhouses in the woods, and a small cottage on the ridge above the lodge. They assembled a carpenter crew to build the buildings. They cut the entrance road with a tractor and drag scraper. And when the carpenters were out of the way they hauled limestone from Waunakee and laid up the fireplace and chimney of the cottage.

The cottage was 16 x 20, with a 4 x 8 kitchen, a 4 x 4 toilet and projecting shower room. Phoebe had a small bedroom off one corner. There were double bunks built in for Charles and Mira, and Robert's quarters were on a balcony at the back of the lodge.

Phoebe was horse-crazy and Charles figured horses would be an attraction for the trailer people so they bought four horses and cleared riding trails all through the woods.

Later Charles bought 10 more acres to the south all the way to University Avenue and opened Sak's Dairy Bar and Cheese House (the building still exists at 6670 University Avenue). A gravel road was built from the Dairy Bar to the cottage on the hill, roughly through the existing Wood Circle West and Wood Circle East.

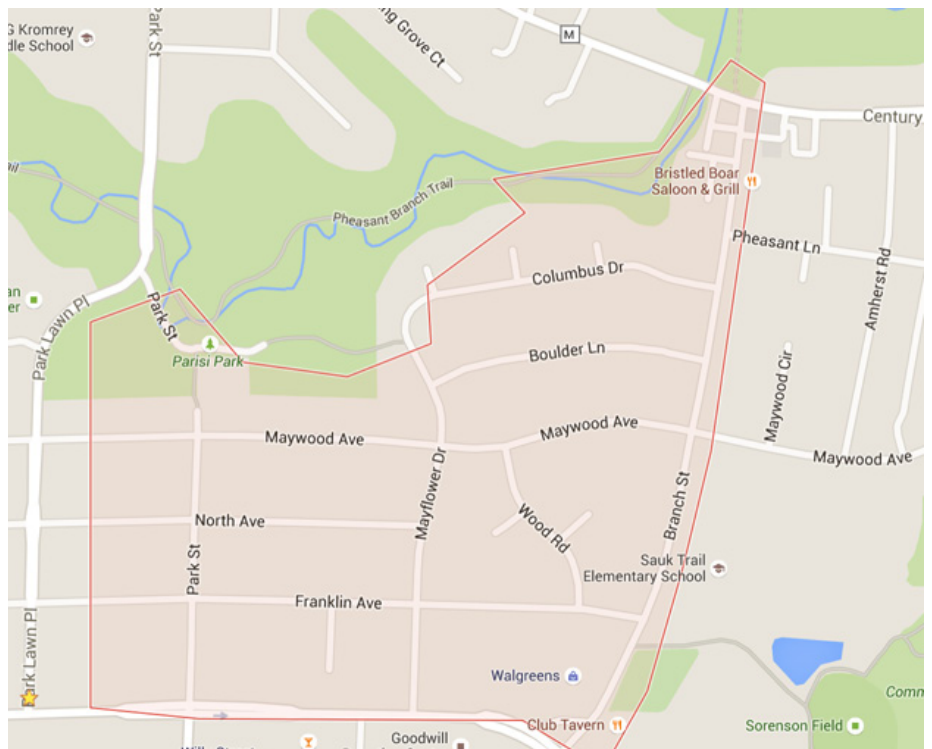
Because of wartime rationing they raised chickens for the restaurant. My cousin and I would feed them and gather eggs. The chicken coops were in the woods, somewhere

between Maywood Avenue and Wood Circle East. They processed up to 15,000 chickens every year.

At some point, Charles and Mira wanted to expand their living space so they moved the lodge building thru the woods and up onto a new foundation adjacent to the cabin and joined the two with new construction. This house still exists at 6613 Wood Circle East.

In 1947 Robert designed and built what my siblings and I have always referred to as "The Blue House" at 2130 Wood Road, the second house in Sak's Woods where I lived until I was 9. Amazingly for nearly 70 years and through several owners, it has always been blue.

When the decision was made to plat the land, Charles



*Outline of Sak's Woods location in Middleton*

hired an engineer who had done much platting in Madison in the days when sewer and water lines were dug by horses and drag scrapers. The lots were narrow!! And so was his design. So Robert spent one summer cutting thru brush while Charles surveyed and marked the woods. At least he got to know the terrain and they then had a topographic detail to work with. Robert laid out a completely different design, had the engineering done, and in 1952 the plat of Sak's Woods was developed from University north to Maywood Avenue. It was well received and they developed the second addition along the next blocks to the north.



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## We Value Your Membership

Already a member -- you will be contacted by mail or email when it is time to renew.

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Gift for Museum Restoration/Maintenance \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail to:**

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Middleton, Wisconsin 53562-3118

For those who itemize their taxes:  
The Middleton Area Historical Society is a  
not-for-profit 501 (c) (3) corporation

To update your contact information or to receive this newsletter  
via email, please contact Mary at 836-6776.