Pheasant Branch was an early settlement in Middleton Township, but its location is now within the City of Middleton (See map). Situated at the junction of a federal military road linking Chicago with Minneapolis, often called Old Sauk Trail and today Century Avenue, and the road connecting Fort Howard in Green Bay with Fort Crawford in Prairie du Chien, Pheasant Branch flourished in the mid-19th century with several business establishments and numerous homes. The settlement had a population over 200 and functioned as a travel stop during its short life span; it was even considered for Wisconsin's state capital in 1848, but lost by two votes! The first house, built around 1845 by M.K. Mc Cord in Section 2, also served as a tavern called the Eight Mile House (8 miles from Madison).

John Wolf House

Two early Pheasant Branch homes are still standing along Century Avenue. The Palmer-Gault House at 6707 Century Avenue, an 1869 renovation of a home built on this site in 1847 by Issac Palmer, is one of the oldest continuously occupied residential sites in Middleton (No. 2 on map). The Wolf House, built by John Wolf in the 1850's, is located at 6408 Century Avenue and although four additions were made over the years, the original part still remains (No. 5 on map).

Palmer-Gault House

The Pheasant Branch community grew rapidly, populated by "Yankees" from the eastern U.S. In 1849, Thomas T. Whittlesey built a saw mill which passed into several hands "until worn out." Blacksmith shops were soon built in Pheasant Branch by German immigrants Henry Prien and Karl Strohecker who arrived in the 1850s. Strohecker's Blacksmith Shop still stands just southeast of the Branch Street/Century Avenue intersection (No. 4 on map). James Dohr, a fellow German from Mecklenburg, arrived in 1851 and established a wagon shop. These men offered their skills to the growing community and the needs of travelers on the Old Sauk Trail. A flour mill was constructed in 1852 by Wheeler and Gault. This large 4-story building could grind 5 barrels a day and was so busy that it often ran day and night.

Strohecker Blacksmith Shop

Early photo of Old Stamm House

The Pheasant Branch Hotel and Tavern (present day Stamm House, 6625 Century Ave., No. 3 on map) was built in 1847 and first served as a store. It often stocked provisions needed by local residents and travelers, and for a time contained the Post Office for Pheasant Branch. Prior to the Civil War it supposedly served as a station on the "Underground Railroad," offering refuge to former slaves seeking freedom in the North. The Pheasant Branch Brewery was built nearby alongside the creek.

VFW - Pheasant Branch School

In 1852 the first district school was built near the present Catholic Cemetery and another Middleton Historic Landmark, The Club (Ye Old Tavern) on Branch Street, becoming just the second school house in the Town of Middleton. The first teacher was Julia C. Durbans. The old building was moved to the Century Avenue site in 1861, however, a new school was soon built to replace it in 1863.
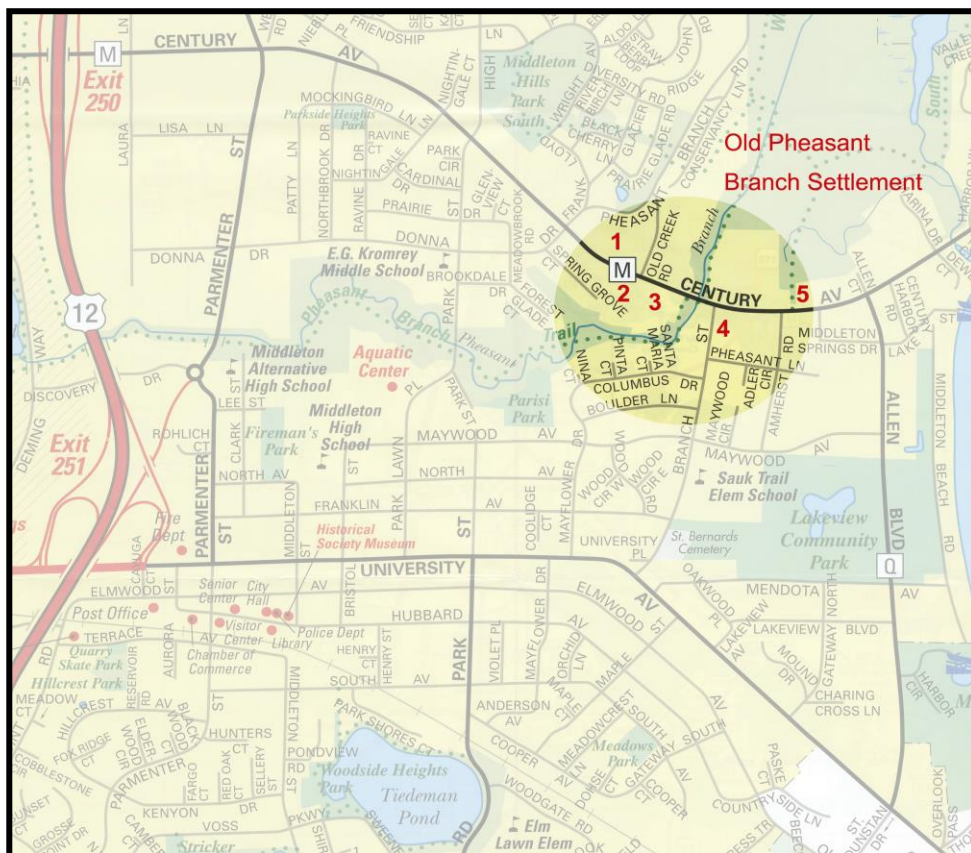
The Pheasant Branch School building that stands today, built in 1896 at a cost of $828, was the second state graded school to serve the area (No. 1 on map). It was divided into 2 rooms in 1912 and a 3rd classroom was added in the basement in 1943. No longer a school, the building still stands at 6710 Century Avenue and is now the meeting hall for Middleton's Veterans of Foreign Wars. The VFW acquired the facility in 1954.

The village, lying along Pheasant Branch Creek in the northwest quarter of Section 12 and part of Section 1 in Middleton Township, was platted by Thomas T. Whittlesey in 1853. During this mid-19th century decade, Pheasant Branch came close to being chosen as Wisconsin's state capital! Whittlesley, being one of the most influential men in the state at this time, promoted the idea in the State Senate after his election to this body in 1853. Whittlesley was from Connecticut and had served that state as a member of Congress from 1836 to 1839. Coming to Wisconsin in 1847, he became active in developing the young state after it was admitted to the union in 1848.   However, his valiant efforts to locate the state capital along Pheasant Branch Creek were unsuccessful; Madison, supported by James Doty won by two votes!

When the railroad advanced westward from Madison, Pheasant Branch was dealt another blow. The rail line passed south of the settlement in 1856. Soon a Depot was built and a new community arose; called Middleton Station for a while, the name was shortened to Middleton as the village (and now city) grew and prospered. By 1865, Pheasant Branch, on Lake Mendota's western shore, was a thriving community that had added a saw mill, brewery, two hotels and a store. Based on the census, Pheasant Branch's population likely peaked around 1870 with 295 individuals living within the settlement's postal district. The Pheasant Branch Post Office was active from 1850 to 1902 with William Darling the first Postmaster. Eventually, the Yankee founders moved farther west and Pheasant Branch became part of Middleton.

A few structures remain from the early days of Pheasant Branch; the map should help you find the "survivors."