



# The Old Bandshell



*Shown above - the Middleton Girl Scouts holding their first Court of Honor on June 4, 1950.*

**B**andshells were made of a curved hard surface material designed to reflect sound (usually music) back toward the audience. Often bandshells were a gathering place in a community and offered performances by local talent.

Such a bandshell was located in a small area at 7459 Hubbard Avenue, behind what is currently the Mustard Museum. It was located in a park known as the Civic Club Park. In 1935 the Lions Club constructed a bandshell at the back of the lot. Concerts were played there on Thursday evenings,

Often bandshells were a gathering place in a community and offered performances by local talent.

during warm summer weather, sometimes accompanied by the rumble of a passing train.

Ice cream socials were held on the lawn in front of the bandstand. Seats situated in front of the bandstand were available for the free concerts.

Memorial Day ceremonies were held there until 1955. From 1940 to 1953, the annual community carnival for children was held on Halloween night.

The building was removed in 1955.

We would like to thank **Middleton Power Center** for their generous donation of a lawnmower to the Middleton Area Historical Society. It was very much appreciated and will help keep the Rowley House lawn looking beautiful for years to come.

# THE MYSTERIES OF PHEASANT BRANCH

by Anita Taylor Doering

The history of the Pheasant Branch settlement started long before the first white settler arrived. In fact, Pheasant Branch's history starts just to



*Dane County Map [1861] WHI 6230*

*Courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society*

the east of the Middleton township. Along Lake Mendota's northwestern shore, Native Peoples gathered near the spot where the Pheasant Branch Creek empties into Lake Mendota, along a Native American trail referred to by whites as the Old Sauk Trail.

Pheasant Branch was an early settlement in Middleton Township, but its location is now within the City of Middleton. 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 of over 200 and functioned as a travel stop during its short life span. An area just to its east was even considered for Wisconsin's state capital in 1848.

## Native People Activity

For twelve thousand years before the first whites came to the Madison area, Pheasant Branch Creek marsh and springs as well as Frederick's Hill were sacred places for the Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) and their ancestors, the Mound Builders. Effigy mounds near Frederick's Hill (older references call this Pheasant Branch Hill) were diagrammed by Charles E. Brown of the Wisconsin Historical Society. The springs were called Belle Fontaine by the French Canadian fur-traders. Today you can check out the Pheasant Branch Conservancy trails and hike up Frederick's Hill.



*Frederick's Hill and Pheasant Branch marsh and springs as seen from the air [1996] Courtesy of Louis J. Maher*

By the 1750s, the Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) were the dominant ethnic group in the area that became Dane County and called the Pheasant Branch area "Peenah" which has been translated to mean "turkey." Somehow, turkey was likened

to pheasant when the area was named, even though it wasn't until the late 1800s when the ring-necked pheasant was introduced successfully as a game bird to Wisconsin and to the United States.

## Fur, Rice and Whiskey

A Ho-Chunk village led by Chief White Crow was situated at the mouth of the Pheasant Branch Creek and Lake Mendota (referred to as the 4th Lake in old documents and maps). The marsh was a fruitful place for the indigenous people to grow wild rice, a staple in their diet, plant corn and other crops such as squash, potatoes and pumpkins. The land provided fish, shellfish, tubers, nuts, berries, reeds and clay for pottery, as well as animals for harvesting.

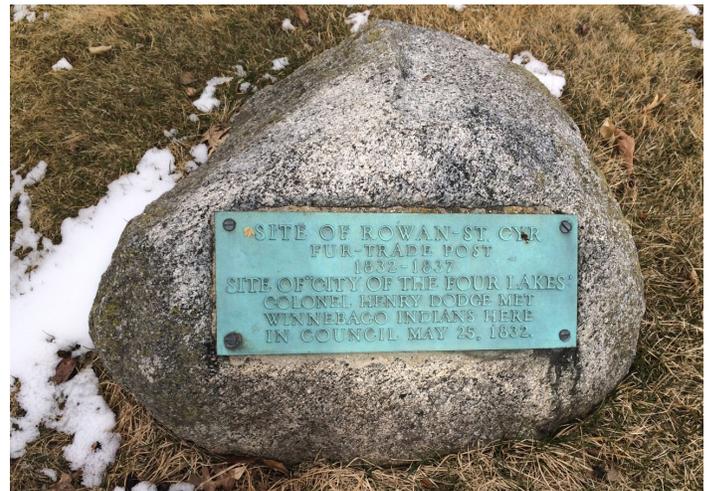
From 1833-1837, fur trader Michel St. Cyr took over a trading post just west of Mendota County Park on Hwy. M from Kentuckian Wallace Rowan. St. Cyr was a Canadian, the son of a French Canadian trader



*Winnebago Wigwam by Seth Eastman [1852 drawing], (WHi 10001) Courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society*

and a Ho-Chunk mother. St. Cyr traded alcohol and tobacco for fur pelts that were desired in the Eastern United States and Europe. The crude log cabin, roughly a 12' x 12' square with a dirt floor, was the only permanent shelter in the vicinity between Fort Winnebago (present day Portage, Wisconsin) and the lead region (Mineral Point). St. Cyr raised corn, oats, potatoes and vegetables, and provided such hospitality as he could to the occasional visitor. A muskrat pot pie of sorts was a common meal.

A marker was placed at 5101 St. Cyr Road to commemorate the spot of not only the post, but as the site where war was postponed. Called Council Rock, "It was here on May 25, 1832, [that] Col. [Henry] Dodge and [Henry] Gratiot met with the Winnebago Indians [Ho-Chunk]



*Council Rock - Courtesy of Sarah Salzwedel [2015]*

in an attempt to prevent an Indian uprising." Of course, the native Ho-Chunk Nation has a completely different view of these events, saying that coercion rather than negotiation was the tool Dodge used.

By 1837 St. Cyr, like the other fur traders in the "four lakes area" sensed that there would soon be an onslaught of white people settling the area when it was proposed that the area that was to become Madison was a candidate for the territorial capital. St. Cyr, like Ammel and Rowan, left the area as it began to be populated. In 1838



*Cottage on Lake Mendota [1925]; site of the Rowan/St. Cyr trading post and cabin (WHi 65302) Courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical*

he moved further west to Minnesota and died among the Ho-Chunk in Iowa in 1864.

## Landscape Prepared for White Settlement

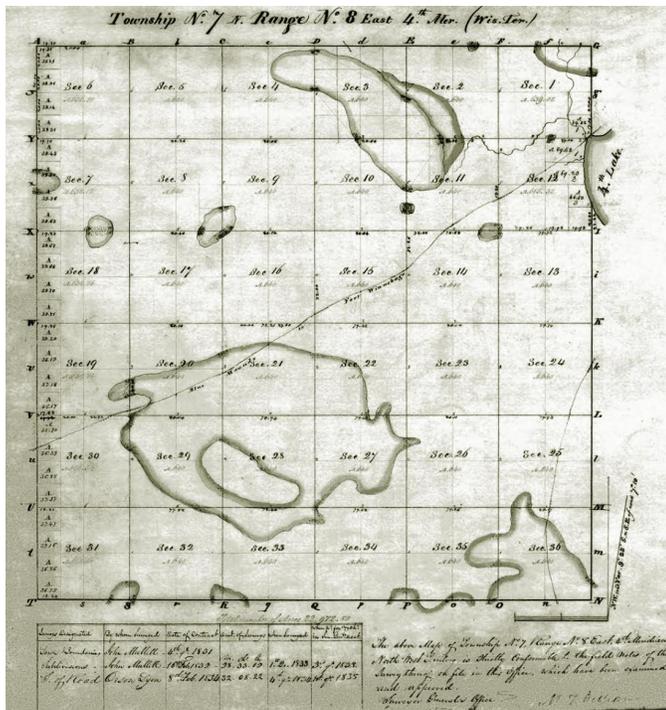
A land surveyor's job in the early history of the Northwest was a key factor in any geographical area that hoped to attract settlers. Entirely a male occupation, the surveyor would endure all kinds of arduous travel and weather conditions, as well as the occasional hostile party, while being on the lookout for natural resources that would attract various forms of business, industry and

white settlers – such as agriculture, forestry, mineral deposits to name a few – and the area would be readied for occupation and then purchased from the federal government.

Essentially, the land surveyor was the one who set the scene for potential economic and population gain, both of which were essential to the creation of an independent state. These saleable lands provided income to the federal government.

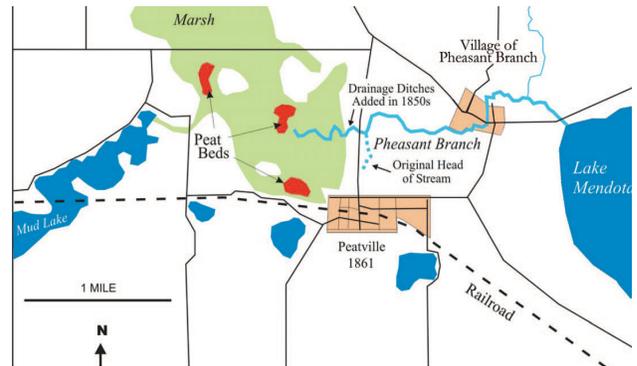
The surveyor was an early promoter of the area in which he worked and would sometimes procure the best tracts of land for himself. It was common for the surveyor to hire his own team of helpers, usually two chainsmen and an axman. Together the surveying troupe chartered the vastly unknown territory and laid out the townships and sections ready for initial sale or land patent by the federal government land office.

Lucius Lyon and John H. Mullett were contracted as Deputy Surveyors in 1831 to begin the survey of townships lying west and east of the Fourth Principal Meridian but some of this work



*Wisconsin Public Land Survey Records: Original Field Notes and Plat Maps [1834] for Township 7 North, Range 8 East of the 4th Principal Meridian*

was delayed with the Black Hawk War. Once this threat had passed for the surveyors, they again took up compass and chain and headed out into what they perceived as pristine wilderness.



*Map by Louis J. Maher [1996] showing the agricultural drainage ditches created in the mid 1800s to drain the peat bogs. This greatly increased the amount of land run-off that drained into the Pheasant Branch watershed – Courtesy of Louis J. Maher*

As part of the public land survey, Mullett in 1832 described the land at the Township 7 North, Range 8 East that was to become the Town of Middleton as largely prairie with timber oak and burr oak, and some rolling land. Other tree species beyond burr oak that Mullett mentioned are white oak, black oak, and to a lesser extent, maple, ash, elm, hickory, willow thorn and yellow oak.

Mullett noted the peat bogs in the northeastern portion of the town associated with the Pheasant Branch watershed as well as a few “prairie pot hole” sized lakes associated with the Black Earth watershed (Mud Lake) on the northwestern part. Before 1850 the peat bogs had been opened north of the Pheasant Branch Creek and drained for harvest in the northeast by William B. Slaughter and Frank Gault. However, the process proved too expensive for any further pursuit of using the peat for fuel after the bogs were drained.

Lucius Lyon procured 1120 acres of land in sections 1, 12 and 13 of Township 7N Range 8E in October 1838 as an assignee of Thomas T. Whittlesey, as well as many other tracts of land in Dane County from 1837-1843

for himself and on behalf of others. It was at St. Cyr's cabin where most white travelers stayed in the Middleton/Madison area. Most traffic came from the west from the Blue Mounds and lead region.

Once it became apparent that the area was to become the new territorial capital, St. Cyr, like the other fur trappers in the Madison area, left for points west and north. St. Cyr sold the title to his land for \$100 to William B. Slaughter when talk of a state capital at the Four Lakes was first floated, yet St. Cyr was quoted by Alexander Pratt, a visitor in 1837, as having said, "The lands which [St. Cyr] had cultivated had been sold without his knowledge." In any event, Slaughter got a good deal on the land to which he held legal title.

### City of the Four Lakes is Born

Besides acquiring the St. Cyr property, Slaughter, along with land speculator and judge James Duane Doty, and frontier lawyer, speculator and politician Morgan L. Martin, put forward the City of Four Lakes initially. Slaughter, the Registrar at the Green Bay land office, purchased in this area land patents totaling 229 acres as soon as it became available on the market; Doty 240 acres and Martin 30 acres. Slaughter conveyed an undivided interest to Doty on December 20, 1835, with the understanding that Doty would have the town laid out as a prospective capital site. Doty had Green



*James Duane Doty [ca. 1858] as photographed by John S. Fuller (WHi 11337) - Courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society*



*Plat of the City of the Four Lakes: Section Six, Township Seven, Range Nine (WHi 98676)- Courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society*

Bay surveyor John Bannister lay out the City of Four Lakes, certifying the plat on July 7, 1836, ironically recorded one week after Doty had filed the plat for the City of Madison.

But in the end, for whatever reasons, Doty decided to abandon his partners and independently lobbied the territorial legislature for a different location that he also controlled with two partners – that of the isthmus area between the Third (Monona) and Fourth (Mendota) lakes.

On November 23, 1836, the delegates began to debate nineteen possible sites, each of which had advocates like Doty who hoped to get rich quick. Doty lobbied aggressively for votes and apparently promised choice Madison lots to undecided voters at discount prices. Madison's uncontroversial location coupled with Doty's attractive map of a modern city also helped attract votes. When the dust settled on November 28, the territorial legislature had chosen Madison for its capital.

Because of the City of Four Lakes' proximity to valuable land transportation routes, the investors apparently convinced some easterners to buy lots and build homes. The promoters again tried to persuade the legislature to have the City of the Four Lakes become the site of the state university during the 1837-38 session held in Burlington, Iowa. In an effort to legitimize their paper town, a post office was established February 16, 1837, with Josiah A. Noonan as postmaster only to be discontinued the following August 9. Noonan was editor of the first newspaper to be published in



*Josiah A. Noonan [1856] as photographed by Fuller & Johnson (WHi 27653) - Courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society*

Madison, called the Wisconsin Enquirer. Unfortunately for the town promoters, the bill naming the location for the university was amended to

read "in the vicinity of Madison."

Despite a short revival of its post office that was re-established November 14, 1839, with George Anderson as postmaster, the site was discontinued permanently February 25, 1841 as a mail stop. With this move, the final chapter on the City of the Four Lakes was quietly closed on April 5, 1843, as the legislature authorized the land within the town plat to be taxed as farmland. Despite the losses, Slaughter kept his homestead and farm in this area until 1845 when he returned to his native Virginia. By the beginning of the Civil War, Slaughter returned to Dane County, settling on a farm in section 14 in the town of Middleton by 1861. He served one year as an appointee of President Abraham Lincoln as Commissary and Quarter Master before resigning to private life. He is buried at Forest Hill Cemetery in Madison.

**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 Middleton Area Historical Society **Pie and Ice Cream Social**

Wednesday, June 17

5 - 8 pm

Lakeview Park, Middleton

New Horizons Band 6:30 - 7:30

The annual **Pie and Ice Cream Social** is coming up soon! Please plan on joining us for an evening of desserts, camaraderie and music.

Someone will be at the Lakeview shelter to accept donated pies and desserts starting at 3:00, June 17th. Due to lack of refrigeration space we are requesting no cream pies. A donation of a dessert is very much appreciated.

# If You Grew Up In Middleton Do You Remember...?

by Mary Lamm Felton and Jeannie Sakrison Velarde

**Minnick's Top Hat** was one of many Supper Clubs in the Middleton area. This Middleton Facebook topic brought lots comments and 99 "Likes." Some Middleton High School students worked at the Top Hat and many of these kids had kind things to say about Mr. and Mrs. Minnick when they were the owners. We remember when Mrs. Minnick wouldn't give you a table unless all the men in your group were wearing a tie. Things have certainly changed!

- My parents owned the Top Hat before I was born. They were the owners when Chicago thugs burned it down in 1947. They were Martin & Marcella Kink
- I had my wedding reception there in 1971
- Their dessert table was legendary. Lots of old-school pies, pastries, cookies, etc. Really good.
- I worked for Minnick's when they did catering. After every thing was cleaned up, Mr. Minnick would grill steaks for all of us.



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TOP HAT**

University Ave. — Middleton  
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Serving noon lunches 11:30-2

master charge  
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WISCONSIN RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION

- My mom would take me there for special occasions.
- Loved that place.
- Grandpa Herman Simons all time favorite!! Mr. Minnick would cut him an extra large piece cause he knew how much Grandpa loved it!!
- My first job washing dishes \$1.45/hour. I would get checks for 2 weekends of work for \$35.
- My mom and I both worked there. I did dishes and eventually bussed tables. She was a waitress. I think most of us kids in Middleton worked there at some point.
- After dark, I used to love to see that sign with the girl kicking her leg & removing her top hat! Following prom, Alice Minnick would feed us all after hours at the restaurant! My mom said Alice was the nicest person she ever worked for!
- If you worked at The Top Hat or went there often, you surely would remember this wonderful lady, Ruth Davis.

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