



Middleton Area Historical Society Newsletter

March 2016

Number 166

Middleton, Wisconsin

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

Depression Glass

Perhaps you have inherited some from a relative or have started your own collection. It is hard to resist the deep colors or interesting diverse styles of Depression Glass.

Depression Glass was an American machine manufactured glass produced from the 1920s through the 1940s and distributed in the United States and Canada. It was used to introduce cheap and often free colored glass as an incentive to patronize a company and allowed formerly unattainable glassware to be collected by the average person. Dish nights were popular at the movies, where glassware would be put out, with new pieces each week. Boxes of cereal and laundry soap often contained Depression glass pieces with the product. More pieces could be bought in the same pattern at your local grocery store.

The Skinner Depression-Era Glass Collection housed at the Rowley House Museum in Middleton, Wisconsin was created by Jean C. Skinner (1923-2011), a founding member and a long-time volunteer at the Middleton Area Historical Society. In addition to her passions for genealogy, poultry, and collecting Christmas decorations, Jean recognized the importance of the affordable glassware associated with the hard economic times of the 1930s, and she added Depression glass to her collecting interests. The collection she gave to MAHS has been enlarged by her friends and by the Depression Era Glass Society of Wisconsin. The collection now includes examples of over 150 patterns, and it is widely recognized as one of the best such collections in the Upper Midwest.



Shirley Temple cup

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED ■

If you would like to learn more about the history of the Middleton area and if you enjoy meeting people, please consider joining the Middleton Area Historical Society's group of volunteers. A program for those interested in volunteer opportunities will be held Saturday, April 9, 10 a.m. at The Rowley House Museum located at 7410 Hubbard Avenue.

Volunteers are needed to greet visitors to the Rowley House Museum, which will be opening Saturday, April 16, and be open Tuesdays and Saturdays from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. through Saturday, October 15. Times for volunteering are flexible. School tours are scheduled during the spring and fall months and people are also needed to be stationed in rooms when the students visit.

a quick look at **dates to remember.....**

April 9 - Volunteer Meeting at Rowley House - 10 a.m.

April 16 - Rowley House opens for the season

June 15 - Pie and Ice Cream Social - 5-8 p.m.

Sept. (date to be announced) Fund-raiser at the Stamm House

Dec. 2 - Annual Meeting and Holiday Party

Thank You So Much.....

We would like to thank Steven Neumaier and Springs Window Fashions for their generous donation of window shades for the Rowley House.

From Our New PRESIDENT

Dear MAHS Members and Friends:

As the new President of your Middleton Area Historical Society, I would like to introduce myself. I'm a native of Michigan, but I've been a Middleton resident for almost 33 years. I retired from UW-Madison in 1999, where I had been a Dept. of Forestry faculty member and also Wisconsin's Extension Forester. My wife Jan and I currently have a photography business that we pursued in our retirement years.

I'm privileged to work with a dedicated group of volunteers who serve as your MAHS Board of Directors: Ruth Bachmeier (Vice President), Sandy Lewis (Secretary), Edith Ersland (Treasurer), Mike Davis (Past President), Carol Burger, Jessica Contreras, Steven Drake, Mel Krc, Carolyn Mattern, Donna Parks, William Reinke and Duane Van Haren. We are all very enthusiastic about "keeping history alive" in the Middleton area!

What's Ahead For 2016 ...

The MAHS Board is very active on a variety of fronts as we head into 2016. As you know, we take great pride in our Rowley House and Depot Museums, and it will soon be time to "tidy up" and open the former for what we hope is another busy visitor season. In 2015, we had 157 visitors sign our Guest Registry at Rowley House and were visited by nearly 400 young students and their teachers. The Depot Museum was also a very popular stop for Middleton visitors with over 200 signing our Middleton Area Historical Society Guestbook.

We plan to change our Depot displays this year ... switching the focus from WWII to the history of Middleton businesses. A major project starting in the fall of 2016 will involve our Carriage House. The upstairs will be insulated and drywalled so heating and AC can be added. This will give us additional storage space that meets the environmental standards for properly preserving historic artifacts. As you know, our Rowley House rooms (and closets) are full and we really need more and better storage options.

How YOU Can Be More Involved ...

Since MAHS is a volunteer organization with several projects and events underway or planned we invite you to get more involved with these activities. Serving as a volunteer Docent at Rowley House is a great way to learn about Middleton history as you welcome visitors and show them around ... and no, you don't need to be a local history expert to fill this important role and have lots of fun doing so! We have materials that provide helpful information to you and our guests ... and, we will host an orientation

workshop for volunteers on April 9. Please plan to join us for one or more "afternoons at Rowley" (Tuesday or Saturday, 1:00 to 4:00, mid-April to mid-October). Sign-up information is on our website (middletonhistory.org)... or you can call or send an email.

If you think of stories, etc. that ought to be featured in the Newsletter or on our website, don't hesitate to tell us ... we are always looking for new ideas! Please visit our website often ... if you think of things to add (or correct) please let me know.

We also have other Society opportunities that you may enjoy. We currently have several Committees that can always use some help and this is a terrific way to learn more about Middleton's past while working on a project or event. I will briefly list the committees here: (1) Membership, (2) Building and Design, (3) Collections, (4) Education/Programs/Outreach, and (5) Pie & Ice Cream Social. You can learn more about their mission and activities by visiting our website and clicking on the "Volunteering/Committee Opportunities" Tab.

Lastly, another opportunity awaits if you would like to join the MAHS Board of Directors. We had two recent resignations from our Board and therefore are looking to fill these positions. If you would like to join the Board and help steer our projects and events please let me know. The Board meets on the first Thursday of the month and we would welcome your participation to help us "keep history alive" in the Middleton area.

Sincerely,
Jeff Martin, President
Middleton Area Historical Society
(608) 836-7614 (608) 836-4578 (home)
middletonhistory@gmail.com



*Photo courtesy of the
Wisconsin State Journal*

The Middleton Area Historical Society has lost a dear friend and tireless volunteer. Vera Bauman died on Monday, February 22, 2016. She will greatly be missed and remembered for her dedication to the Society, her wealth of knowledge and her willingness to share her memories of Middleton.

THE MYSTERIES OF PHEASANT BRANCH-part 3

by Anita Taylor Doering

Pheasant Branch School

By and large the earliest Town of Middleton schoolhouses were one room rural buildings, generally of frame construction. While the costs varied, these first generation facilities generally cost less than \$300 to build (often about \$270), the land for this purpose either donated or sold at a very small amount. As time went on and the population of some districts grew faster, these were replaced by schoolhouses of two or more rooms, and the number of teachers and helpers also increased correspondingly.

Before consolidation of schools rapidly affected the structure and governance of school districts in the Town of Middleton, the locally elected district school board hired and fired the teacher(s), set salaries, arranged for the purchase of wood for the wood shed, purchased furnishings, equipment and materials, bid out painting and other building repairs when necessary, set the school calendar and hours of operation, levied taxes, and the like. It was a very local concern.

In April 1852 a meeting was called to organize the first public school district within the Town of Middleton. It was a joint district with the towns of Madison, Springfield and Middleton, and included sections 11 (Peatville or what would become the city of Middleton), 12 and 13; the north half of section 14, and the south west quarter of section 1 (most of Pheasant Branch), totalling 2400 acres.

The first officers were Thomas W. Whittlesey, William Darling and Elisha Whittlesey. The first public school

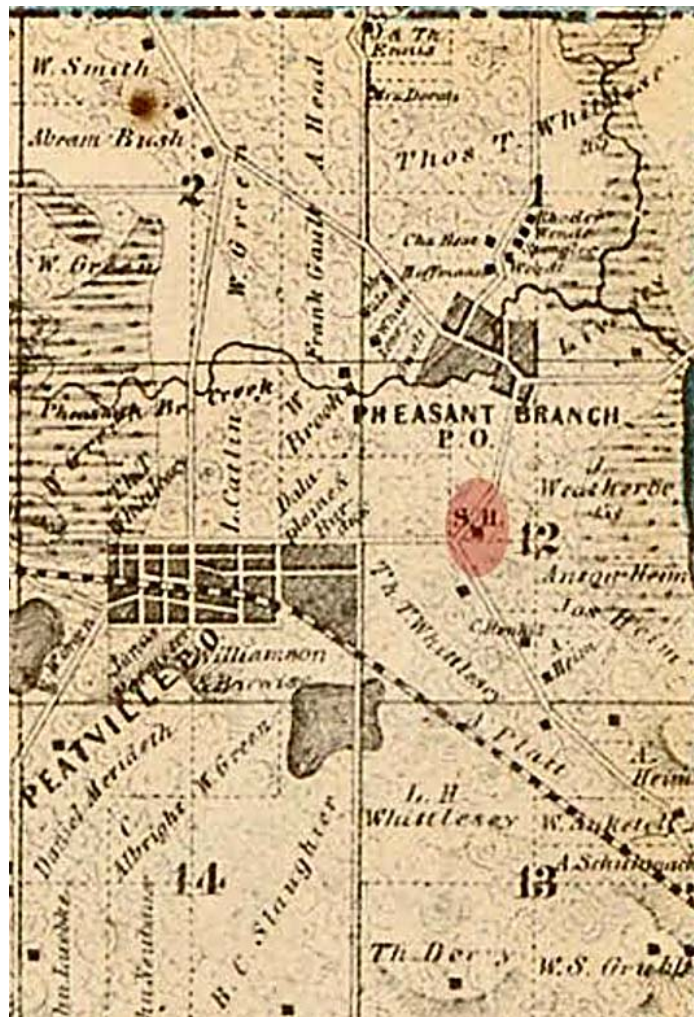
building was constructed by District #6 or the Pheasant Branch School District. A committee of three was charged with locating a site for a school building 18 x 28 feet "on [the] Junction of State and Sauk roads on the east side of the road." The site was located on the east side of what is now Branch Street, on or near the current location of St. Bernard Catholic Church Cemetery.

The schoolhouse was built of oak and the total cost was \$257. The winter term was Nov. 1 to May 1 and the first teacher was Julia C. Durbon. A summer term of four months, May 1 to Sept. 1, was added by a board vote in

May 1853. The winter term was shortened to Nov. 1 to March 1. Female teachers garnered fewer wages than men, and Miss Durbon accepted a wage of \$14 per month, and she had to board herself.

In March 1861, the board decided to divide the district and have a Pheasant Branch School while the Peatville community would construct their own schoolhouse. The original school building was moved from the Branch Street site to a site on Century Avenue. The first school built in the present location [on Century Ave.] was constructed in 1863, at a cost of \$269. There were 79 eligible children in the district, and 69 attended one or both terms. Teacher's wages had risen to \$28 for females and \$32 per month for males.

The Pheasant Branch School Board decided to build a new schoolhouse on



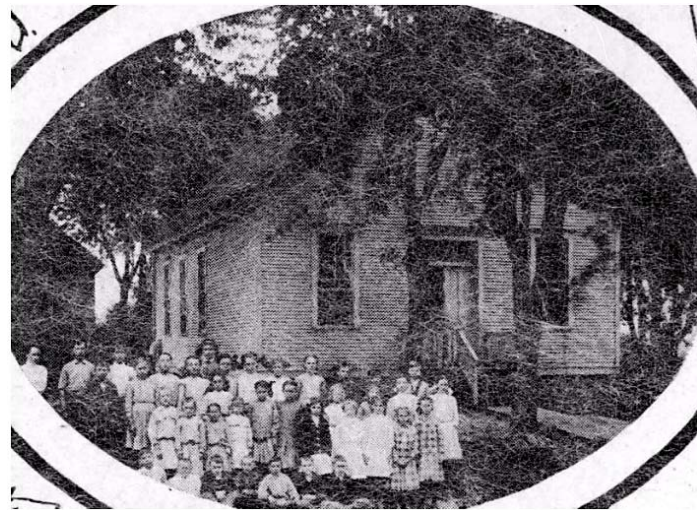
Map of Dane Count (1861) by Mendel showing the school house location and the section numbers included in the Jt. District #6 territory.

the same site, so the board sold the old building to Middletonian businessmen Ibenthal and Darling for \$24.25. To move the schoolhouse to the rear of William Ibenthals' home now at 7417 South Ave., horsepower and large rollers were used. The former frame schoolhouse was presumably used in the Middleton Bottling Works business that made soda pop.

The final Pheasant Branch schoolhouse was constructed in 1896 for \$828 [by Henry Haberland according to Zentner] and it was the second graded school in area. The building was divided into two rooms in 1912, and there were four grades in one room until a 3rd classroom was added in the basement in 1943.

Generally the school day started at 9 a.m. and dismissal was at 4 p.m. An hour for lunch and two 15 minute recess periods allowed for children to take a break from school and relax and get some physical exercise.

Nell (Ziegler) Bowar lived across the street from the school in the Palmer-Gault House at 6707 Century Avenue which served as the farmhouse for the George & Anna Ziegler family from 1914-1948. Nell attended the Pheasant Branch Schoolhouse for eight years and remembers that the milk



District 4, 5 & 6 (Pheasant Branch) School as it looked in 1911 (WHI 98484)

truck would bring kids into Pheasant Branch from the area farms and drop them off at the Ziegler house before school started at 9 a.m. She remembers the playground and ball teams. There were two outdoor toilets and no running water and no library. As a solid reader and good student, the lack of reading material was particularly disturbing to Nell – what were kids to do in between lessons?

All 8th graders had to pass a comprehensive examination by the County Superintendent of Schools in order to graduate. Upon graduation, parents had the choice of having their student continue their public schooling at the high school

in Middleton or end their formal education. However, even if the student did not pursue a high school education, it did not mean that they wouldn't one day earn their Certificate of High School Equivalency (GED) through self-discipline and desire.



Teacher Julia Zillier pictured above, ca. 1940s (MAHS P93 14 1b)

The building closed in 1950 when the District was consolidated with the State Graded School District of Middleton. Since 1954, the building has served as the home of the William "Sonny" Simon VFW Post 8216.

Early Businesses

Before the railroad line came through south of the Pheasant Branch community, the small community grew rapidly, populated by "Yankees" from the eastern U.S. In 1849, Thomas T. Whittlesey, the community's founder, built the first saw mill in the Town of Middleton. It ran by steam and boasted a sash saw and twelve horse power and was located across Century Avenue from the Stamm House. Frank Gault ran it for about three years and then it was sold to a Madison partnership of Ilsley & Son in 1853. As soon as it was announced that the railroad line would bypass Pheasant Branch and go south of the small hamlet, Ilsley & Co. tried to sell the mill the following year.

Whittlesey again gained control of the mill in 1861 then sold it to Alexander Worth who "wore out the mill." By

Steam Mill for Sale.

THE SAWMILL AT PHEASANT BRANCH, seven miles from Madison, commonly known as WHITTLESEY'S MILL, will be sold at a bargain, and on easy and accommodating terms. Any one acquainted with the business can, by personal attention, make it a very profitable concern. **E. D. ILSLEY & CO.**
 July 3, 1864. dwtf

1868, the "mill reservation" lot was worth \$500, only half of its value in 1853. The lumber was used to build the fledgling communities of Pheasant Branch, East and West Middleton, as well as Madison.

Jerry Schara recalled in 1999 that the mill "was steam powered and drew water from the Crick. This area was later the location of the house I grew up in. The ground where we had our garden contained an abundance of brick fragments. They may have been part of the mill foundation, some of the buildings, or even part of the building materials that were sold along with the wood."

James Dohr, a German immigrant from Mecklenburg, arrived in 1851 and established a wagon shop by 1853 just to the east of the Stamm House on Century Avenue. He, along with a fellow Mecklenburger Henry Prien, a blacksmith, offered their trade skills to the growing community and the needs of travelers on the Old Sauk Trail. Prien built his blacksmith shop about 1853 on what was Water Street. Today the Pheasant Branch historical marker at the entrance to the Conservancy stands near where Prien's property was located. Neither Dohr's nor Prien's structures stand today.

Another German immigrant, this one from Württemberg, Karl Strohecker, also plied his trade as a blacksmith at The Branch. His shop was located southeast of the Branch Street/Century Avenue intersection and still stands today.



Above: Karl Strohecker's old blacksmith shop, 2645 Branch Street, 1925 (WHi39374);

Below: in 2012 taken by the author.



Karl and his wife Katharina owned this lot and an adjacent lot from 1857 to 1916 when Karl died. The building likely obtained its stone veneer in 1867 as the tax valuation tripled then. Jerry Schara recalls as he was growing up that the building was used as a storehouse and it "was filled with old store showcases, boxes of junk, and all sorts of things that attracted young boys" By 1999 it was a pre-school and now houses a non-profit organization.

In the 1850s and 1860s in Wisconsin, wheat was king. It was a cash crop that brought stability and wealth to many farmers until the cinch bug destroyed crops and the soil became depleted of needed nutrients to grow wheat.

A prosperous flour mill was constructed in 1852-53 by William A. Wheeler and Frank Gault southwest of the bridge. This large 4-story building was 34 feet by 40 feet in area and was built of stone on an oak foundation. The mill could grind five barrels of wheat a day. It was said to be so busy that it often

ran day and night. A forty-horse power engine ran the grist mill and Wheeler & Gault owned the business about ten years. They sold it to John Campbell and after about four years, it was idle. By 1868 the mill had rotted down, its machinery being "sold for a song."

While the school and the community of Pheasant Branch was growing, one landmark that tired travelers along the stagecoach line between Milwaukee and Minneapolis sought in the early 1850s and that continues to stand today is the Stamm House at 6625 Century Avenue. Built in 1847 by two gentlemen Milo K. Cody and Horace A. Winston, the store quickly grew into the Pheasant Branch Hotel and tavern. According to historian Jack Holzhuetter, the stone veneered building we see today was likely built in 1858 by John A. Roloff. Holzhuetter's research was based on tax records, looking for a significant increase in the valuation of a lot. He points out that stone was a difficult and expensive material to use in building in the early 1850s and much "too permanent" for a fledging community. However, one could also point out that the railroad was

To Farmers and the Public Generally
MENDOTA STEAM MILL,
 SITUATED AT PHEASANT BRANCH,
 Seven miles west of Madison on the Sauk Road.
THE subscribers have just completed and have in effectual operation their new and splendid
STEAM GRIST MILL.
 The Mendota Steam Mill offers inducements unsurpassed by any mill in the state, both for
Flouring and custom Work.
 Its machinery being of the most approved kinds, and propelled by one of the Messrs. Turtan & Searcomb's
IMPROVED ENGINES,
 manufactured at the Eagle Foundry Milwaukee—the proprietors being both practical men, and the long experience of one of them in the milling business, enables them to say with confidence that they intend not to be outdone.
WE HAVE ESTABLISHED
AN AGENCY
—AT—
JOHN WRIGHT'S DRUG STORE,
 Where at all times may be found a superior article of
Superfine Flour, Corn Meal, Buckwheat, Rye, and Graham Flour (if wanted.)
 N. B.—All Flour marked with their brand may be relied on as being genuine.
WHEELER & GAULT.
 December 13, 1853. dwf

well under construction south of Pheasant Branch which would have also made building with stone not only an expensive but riskier endeavor. Several fires were said to have wiped out many residences and buildings in Pheasant Branch, so stone as building material was likely seen as a way to slow devastating fires from spreading throughout the community.

Regardless of the age of the building, the store stocked provisions needed by local residents and travelers, and from 1852-1859 is thought to have contained the post office for Pheasant Branch. John A. Roloff purchased the business and re-established the post office on this spot in November 1860 likely after completion of his new building and called it the Travelers' Home. After his death in 1873, his widow Fredericka was appointed post mistress, the first woman in the Town of Middleton to hold the title.

Otto Burmeister reminisced at a Pheasant Branch reunion in 1947 that his family in 1878 travelled all the way from Mt. Horeb by wagon to attend a dance there that lasted from 7pm to 7am. The following morning when a hearty breakfast was served. The dance hall had a reputation for a "springy" floor which dancers liked to help soften their landing. At this same reunion, Walter Bubbert recalled that his father Gustave was born in the part of the building reserved for a family residence in 1881. Walter's grandmother, Mrs. Mary (Roembach) Bubbert operated Bubbert's General Store and served as the postmistress. John Youngblood Jr. bought the place in 1902 from Bubbert and operated a dance hall and maintained the post office.

The name became Stamm House at some point which is a German word for gathering place, and it was used in newspaper ads by the 1930s. In a 1972 newspaper interview, Theodore J. Hilgers recalled, "I used to walk to a grocery store in the old Stamm House when I was a boy," in the 1880s. The hotel room partitions were removed in the 1920s and the upstairs room served as a meeting hall.



Photo courtesy of 1847 at the Stamm House

Dances, social events and box socials were held there. For many years it served a bar and restaurant known for its Friday fish-fry. John Howard Landl recalled on social media, "My father remodeled the upstairs into a dining-room during the late 1950s. He cut through the second

floor ceiling and found it insulated with red horse hair and 'residue' of the bat. I remember our first dinner upstairs; it was on a Wednesday night and the chicken and dumplings were wonderful. At that time, Heinie [Herbert] and Marie [Mary] Fuller were the owners. Heinie was a WWI German aircraft mechanic (Fokker) not a pilot. They built a panorama of Wisconsin wildlife and foliage along the ceiling above the bar on the east wall and around to the south wall. I remember their faces, voices and mannerisms along with an occasional grenadine-laced Coca Cola with clear ice."

Fish fry was another noted meal and by the 1970s the Old Stamm House advertised itself as "Dane County's Oldest Tavern," and buses were run to the UW Badger football games on weekends. It is thought to be the oldest continuous bar establishment in Dane County. Jim and Mary Sweeney's St. Patrick's Day meals also became legendary.

Other owners of the establishment have been Lester Moller, Francis and Mary Pohlkamp, Donna Small and her husband Jeff Bunge. After sitting vacant since 2010, Troy Rost has painstakingly restored, remodeled and revived it as a restaurant called 1847 at the Stamm House.

Prior to the Civil War the Stamm House business supposedly served as a station on the "Underground Railroad," offering refuge to former slaves seeking freedom in the North but this has never been documented and rumor seems to have started a considerable time after the Civil War. Of course, the Underground Railroad was just that – a clandestine and secret operation.

However, some residents think this story was fabricated and that the tunnel leading to the creek was simply an easy way to stock the Stamm House cellar with beer from the brewery on the other side of the creek. While no longer in existence today, the Pheasant Branch Brewery was located just to the southeast of the Stamm House, across the creek, facing Branch Street (then called Broad Street).

Middleton resident Betty (Roth) Krause never had heard the Underground Railroad story but does recall being led through the tunnel from McSherry's Tavern by John McSherry, the owner of the Stamm House building at the time, to the former brewery which had become the Branch Locker Plant. The tunnel is now walled off and the meat locker plant was torn down in 1949.

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 or (608) 784-2492.

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

by Mary Lamm Felton and
Jeannie Sakrison Velarde

"Glow little glowworm glimmer, glimmer. I could see that she was thinner her. Her teeth were false and her hair peroxide, I could see that she was cross-eyed. Listen to the rustle of her skirt in the breezes caused by the sandpaper on her knees. These are the things that women do to lead men onto love"! (sing to the tune Glow Little Glowworm)

If you recognized the song above, you most likely were a student of Mrs. Gurske's. She started teaching in the Middleton/Cross Plains School District in 1951 and retired in 1988, having spent 40 years in music education. Mrs. Gurske believed that every child has talent and always worked toward that goal. She touched thousand of lives and many of these people posted comments about Mrs. Gurske. These are just a few of those comments:



- That amazing Lady started me on trombone... And quickly figured out the tone kind of fell out of the bell of the horn when I played. She switched me to Tuba... And started me on an artistic journey that included playing professionally with the Original Salty Dogs among others. I owe her a lot!

- At church tonight, singing Silent Night, I was thinking about Mrs. Gurske and the descant she wrote for it and we all sang. It was beautiful. (many people commented on this about Mrs. Gurske's descant and how beautiful it is)
- Even though music class was at/near the bottom of my list of valuable subjects, I still have very clear and good memories of Lois. Her enthusiasm was amazing, and I, too, recall her voice leading her remix of Silent Night in the Parkside Heights Christmas Program.
- Me: "I want to play drums." Mrs. Gurske: (To my parents.) "Do you have any instruments at home?"
My Mom: "Yes, we have a cornet."
Mrs. Gurske: (To Me.) "You're a cornet player."
Me: (To myself as an adult.) "Did you even look at my lips Lois?"
- Mrs. Gurske used to make all wannabe drummers play a year of another instrument before playing drums. I too wanted to play drums but played cornet also because we had one at home. Then after a year, I switched to drums and never looked back!
- Mrs. Gurske asked me what I wanted to play. I told her drums. She said, "We don't start drummers in my band." She promptly put a tuba mouthpiece in my face. "Wow, that's a beautiful tone". I promptly said "noway." So, after probably 15 minutes of negotiation, I agreed on F Horn. To seal the deal, she said, "You know, your grandfather played French Horn."
- Mrs. Gurske put me on the tenor saxophone when I was a fourth grader! I stayed in band right through high school. I was never very good but I learned to appreciate the miracle of music AND I learned the importance of teamwork!
- I can still see her marching with the EG Kromrey band during good neighbor fest.
- She introduced us to all kinds of music – I adored her! Wish I hadn't had to play my brother's clarinet though – I always wanted to play the flute.
- Mrs. Gurske gave me the nickname NIB because I showed up with No Instrument or Book 1.

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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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Mail to:

Middleton Area Historical Society
7410 Hubbard Avenue
Middleton, Wisconsin 53562-3118

For those who itemize their taxes:
The Middleton Area Historical Society is a
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To update your contact information or to receive this newsletter
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