



Sherman Avenue bridge over the Yahara River. The old malt house is in the background. Photograph taken about 1904 by Charles N. Brown. WHi(X3)31127

it; some of the other owners were Thomas Reynolds, N.W. Dean, M. Roth, J.G. Dengel, B. Veerhusen, and Governor Leonard J. Farwell. Farwell also owned land on the north side of the lake—hence Governor’s Island.

Industrial developments along the Yahara River

Leonard Farwell had come to Madison from Milwaukee in 1847, attracted by the beauty and business potential of the region. He purchased an extensive tract on the east side, comprising a part of the city and a part of McBride’s estate. In addition, he obtained rights to the unimproved water power of the Catfish (Yahara) River at the outlet of Lake Mendota. To harness the water power, he hired a crew which straightened the channel of the Yahara River and dammed Lake Mendota, raising its level two feet and lowering the level of Lake Monona one foot. In the summer of 1849 a saw mill was erected, and the following year a grist mill. At the same time, a brewery was begun, purchased in 1852 by John Rodermund and gradually enlarged. Industrial development flourished at the outlet of Lake Mendota into the 20th century. After Rodermund’s business failed, the brewery was purchased by another local brewer, Joseph Hausmann (whose main brewery was at the corner of State and Gorham Streets).

In addition to his industrial developments, Farwell had the forest cleared for city streets (including East Washington Avenue and Williamson Street), laid roads out to the

surrounding countryside (including the Lodi Road, that later became Sherman Avenue), graveled and graded the city streets, began the drainage of the low lands between Lake Mendota and Lake Monona, built sidewalks, started the first woolen factory, started the first machine shop and foundry, and built the first bridge over the Yahara River.

Before this Yahara River bridge was erected, it had been extremely difficult to travel between Madison and the farms on the east and north side. However, even with the bridge the Maple Bluff area remained remote from Madison in the days when only horse-drawn vehicles were available.

Late 19th century developments

By 1873 there were more than a dozen individuals with holdings in the Maple Bluff area. Farwell had lost all his property in the Panic of 1857, and Alexander McBride had sold most of his land to the William Woodward, Sr. family, who also lived for a while in the McBride house. Some of the other land holders in Maple Bluff in the early 1870’s were H. Sachtjen, B. Veerhusen, D. Nicholson, H. Steensland, and J.G. Dengel (for whom Dengel’s Bay in Lakewood is named).

According to William Woodward, Jr., the land was poor for farming so that grazing was the best use. However:

Sometimes the cows wandered too close to the edge of the bluff and fell off into the lake. If you could get a rope there soon enough, and [the rope was] long enough, and if the cow didn’t break a leg, maybe you could save it.

Woodward also told of an incident that occurred after the death of "Uncle" John McBride shortly after the Civil War. When he died, it was rumored that he had buried his wealth on his estate in Fuller's Woods. Many Madisonians came out at night and dug up the ground around his cabin.

One morning the imprint of a three-legged iron pot was found in a hole that had been dug the night before. Who got it, and what was in it, nobody ever found out.

In 1871 the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad built a line between Madison and the Twin Cities. Out of Madison, the tracks curved north and northwest around Lake Mendota in the direction of Waunakee. Today, these tracks form part of the northern and eastern boundaries of the village of Maple Bluff.

Two men associated with the railroad, Alder Ellis and George Dunlap, also owned land in Maple Bluff. They intended to make McBride's Point a summer resort for Chicago people, but left the railroad before the project materialized. (Instead, Lake Geneva became the summer haven for wealthy Chicago businessmen.)

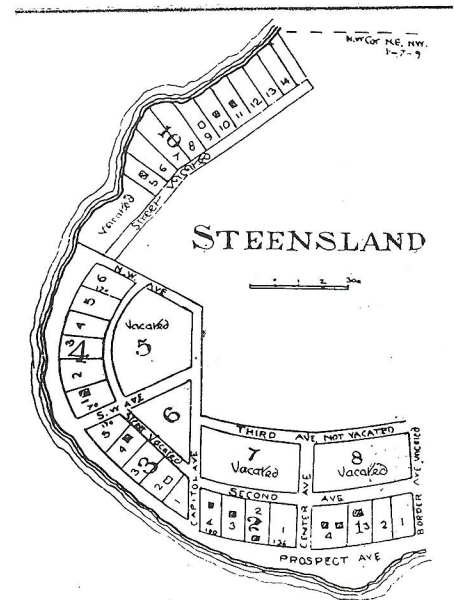
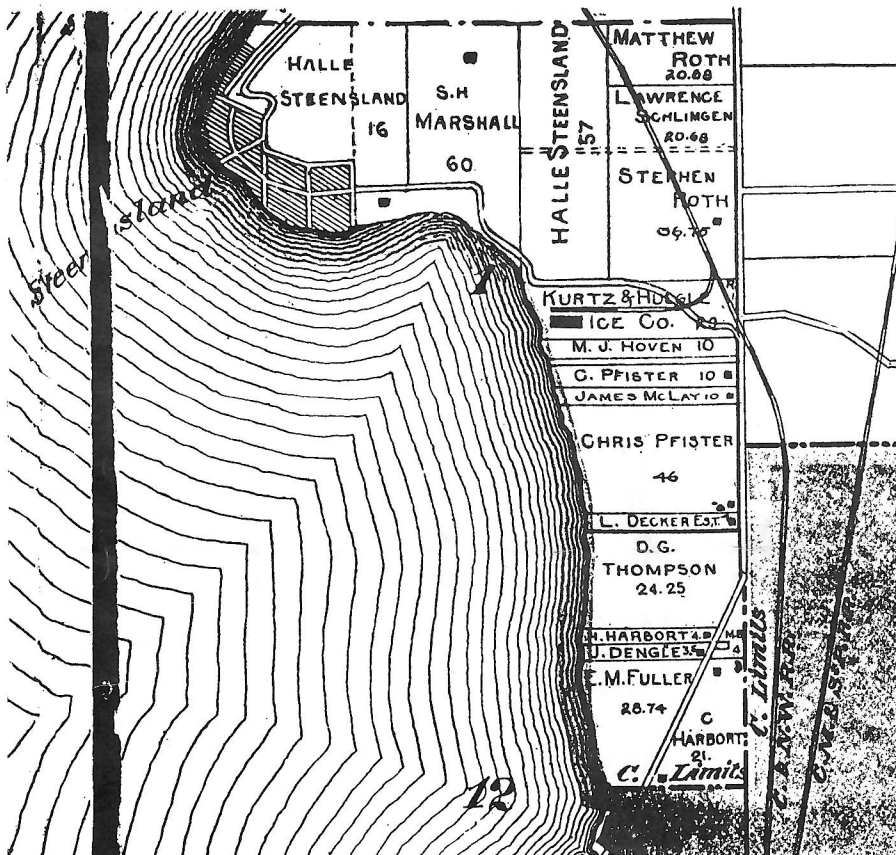
Another industry located in what would become Maple Bluff was the Kurtz and Huegel Ice Company, built near 309 Lakewood Boulevard (site of the present Maple Bluff

beach). A railroad spur from the Chicago and Northwestern was run down to the lake and the harvested ice was shipped all over the Midwest and as far away as St. Louis and New Orleans.

Next to the ice company was a slaughterhouse run by M.J. Hoven, whose specialty was sausage. Undoubtedly one of the reasons for locating here was to obtain ice for chilling the meat for shipping. The cattle were grazed on the high ground of what is now the Lakewood region of Maple Bluff. When Stanley Hanks built a house at 315 Lakewood about 30 years later, his construction crew dug up large numbers of bones, remains of the slaughter operation. Both the ice company and the slaughterhouse were gone by the beginning of the 20th century, but the railroad spur remained until the late 1920's.

Halle Steensland

A major land owner in the Maple Bluff area was Halle Steensland, a prominent Norwegian immigrant who was vice-consul of Sweden and Norway for many years. Steensland came to America from Norway in 1854; in 1855 he came to Madison where he clerked in a store, studied briefly at the University of



Left: An 1899 map showing the Steensland plat along the Upper Bluff, and the ownership of the other land in the Maple Bluff region. Right: The lots for the Steensland plat as they were arranged in 1926. Some of the interior lots had been vacated and the land attached to the lakeshore lots. Several streets had also been eliminated.

Wisconsin, and then went into business for himself. Steensland helped organize the Hekla Fire Insurance Company, became its president, and in 1890 organized the Savings Loan and Trust Company (later part of the Bank of Madison), of which he was the president and treasurer.

In 1863 Steensland purchased 175 acres of farm and timber land in an area that would later become part of Maple Bluff. In 1868 he added to his holdings by purchasing the McBride house and surrounding acreage, to which the family moved in 1872. His daughter, Helen Steensland Nielson, later related:

It was a happy playground for us children. We early learned to manage a rowboat...My father allowed the older boys to have a sailboat on Lake Mendota and on moonlight nights, he went with them to troll for bass. There were berries in great profusion in the nearby woods...and two orchards with both summer and winter apples...My father kept bees one year and they were his sole responsibility...During our early years at Maple Bluff, my father transplanted saplings of maple, linden, and elm to the city streets so that in years to come Madison streets bore witness to his forethought and civic pride. [Helen Amalie Steensland Nielson, "Notes from the Past," 1950, unpublished manuscript]

About 1880, Steensland bought an additional 64 acres from D. Nicholson; his holdings included most of McBride's Point as well as what is now the southern half of

the Maple Bluff Country Club.

In 1887 Steensland platted the outer rim of McBride's point with the intention of selling lots for summer cottages; the plat was called "Steensland" on the maps.

A few lots were purchased, and several cottages were erected through the last decade of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th century. Most of these were not typical summer cottages; they were large and more closely resembled houses. By 1920 many had been winterized and were year-long dwellings.

As a matter of convenience for his business, Steensland moved back into the city of Madison. In 1892, he built a large brick house at 146 Langdon Street and in 1896 he moved into his last house, at 315 N. Carroll Street, where he lived until he died in 1910. In 1897 he sold the Maple Bluff house and 66 acres of land to Samuel Marshall; a few years later Marshall purchased an additional 57 acres. Marshall lived in the McBride/Steensland House and cultivated the estate as a fruit farm, raising cherries, apples, grapes, and other fruits.

The LaFollettes of Maple Bluff

In 1906 Samuel Marshall sold his house and 60 acres of the farm to Robert M. LaFollette (the rest was sold to the Maple



The Robert M. LaFollette house in Maple Bluff, about 1906. The front porch had been rebuilt since Halle Steensland had owned the house. WHi(L51)15. The Maple Bluff Farm was a grand home for the LaFollette's. Belle Case LaFollette has written: "There is a great comfort and peace in just thinking about the farm and when the stress and strain are hardest, though a thousand miles is between, it is easy to stand on the porch and feel the influence of the great old grape vine that covers it, and of the nearby basswood and the noble maples just far enough away, and the little grove on the other side and of the distant view between." (Quotation found in a LaFollette photo album at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.)

Bluff Golf Club). Young Philip LaFollette has described the day his father bought the farm:

In the fall of 1905, Mother and Father had ridden horseback over the countryside around Madison looking for a desirable farm. They decided that when we left the Executive Residence we would move to a farm. The place they liked above all was a 60 acre farm 3 1/2 miles from the Capitol Square, with 1200 feet of shoreline. The price, \$30,000, seemed awfully high. Nevertheless, when I came home from school one afternoon, Mother was on the phone. She hung up with a wonderful smile and said: "Daddy has just signed the papers, and we have bought Maple Bluff Farm."

Enlarged several times over its distinguished life, the house is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

McBride's Point

Some of those living on or owning lots in Steensland (McBride's Point) in 1890 were George Burrows, Major D.C. Poole, F.M. Brown, F.G. Brown, Professor D.B. Frankenburger, Carl and Hobart Johnson, and Amos P. Wilder.

Amos Wilder, the editor (1894-1904) of the Wisconsin State Journal, had a cottage on Maple Bluff. He was the

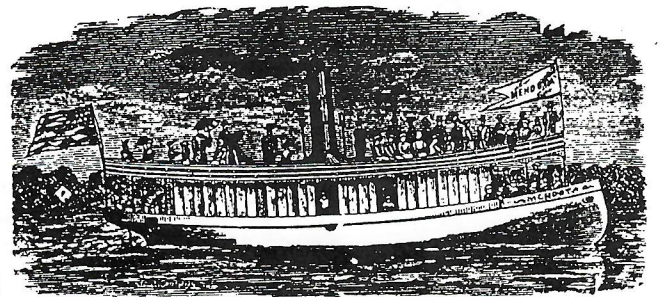
...beyond the turn of the lake shore to the north...we came upon Maple Bluff, or MacBride's Point, one of the best picnic sites ever placed by nature within convenient reach of a town. Now it is occupied by homes, but then its use was as free as the air, and no college boy or girl ever thought or cared who owned it. It rose precipitously from the surface of the waters about 80 feet, with one or two places where it was possible to ascend from the lake to the summit of the bluff. There a plateau, two or three acres in extent, was covered by a beautiful grove, clear of underbrush and shading a fine green sod. The prospect across the blue waters of the lake toward the city and the University...presented scenes of exceptional interest and beauty.... With such scenic background, the memories of a student of Wisconsin in the 'Eighties are filled with incidents of picnic adventure. [pp. 190-191 in Frederic A. Pike, A Student at Wisconsin, Fifty Years Ago. 1935. Democrat Printing Co., Madison.]

father of the playwright Thornton Wilder, and the latter spent his boyhood days playing in the woods of McBride's Point. In 1906 Amos Wilder was appointed U.S. Consul at Hong Kong by President Theodore Roosevelt and left Madison for good.

In the early 1900's it was easier to travel between McBride's Point and Madison by water than by land. The area was a popular picnicking area as well as a growing cottage area. In the early 1880's the Point was regularly visited by the steam yacht "Mendota" that had been launched in 1877 by E.H. Freeman. One of the boat landings was located where 531 Farwell Drive is today. The fare for the ride to Maple Bluff was \$0.25. It was to E.H. Freeman and his brother that William Woodward, Sr. sold his estate (about 30 acres) for \$6,000.

The Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association

The first permanent road running through the village was Farwell Drive, completed in 1897 by the Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association. This road was one of a series of "pleasure drives" built by this association in the late 19th century. At this time, Halle Steensland still had extensive land holdings in the Bluff, and donated land to use as the Farwell Drive right of way.



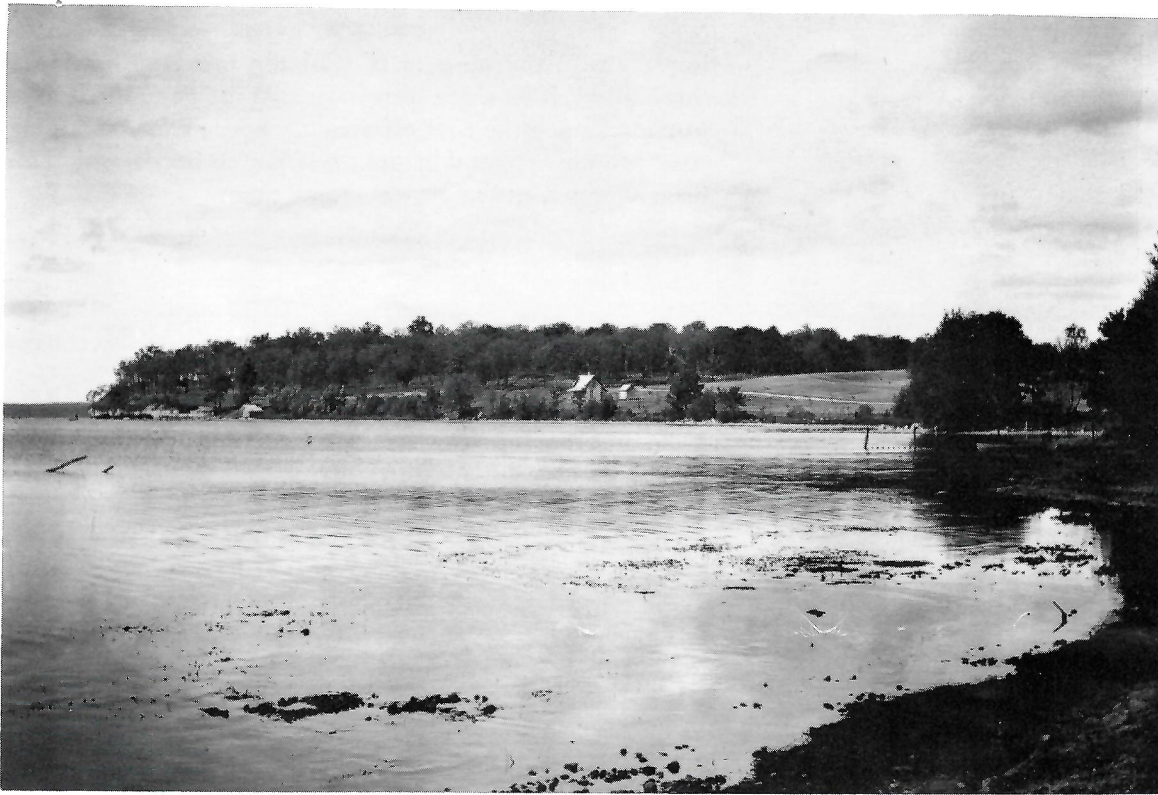
The Steam Yacht Mendota

Makes Regular Trips to the Insane Asylum and McBride's Point,

(HUBBARD, HOSMER & CO. Picnic Ground.)

Trips Around the Lake Each Day and Sunday Excursion Trips.

Sail, Row and Fishing Boats furnished at all times, and Light Row Boats especially for ladies.
* TELEPHONE COMMUNICATION. For further particulars see daily papers and time cards.
Boat Yard and Office—408 E. Gorham. HUBBARD, HOSMER & CO.



A photograph of Farwell Drive taken around 1900 by the Madison photographer Blanchard Harper. The view is across the bay looking north. State Historical Society of Wisconsin WHi (H3) 216.

Farwell Drive entered the present Maple Bluff where Roxbury Road is today and followed the course of what is presently Lakewood Boulevard until it reached the area of the LaFollette house and farm. The road ran through the extensive cherry orchard which Samuel Marshall had developed near the lake. From there the road followed the present course of Farwell Drive over the Bluff and north along the lake (now Warner Beach) until it reached the Mendota State Hospital and Governor's Island.

Around 1905 another road was built by the Association connecting Farwell Drive with Sherman Avenue; this was built across the northern section of McBride's Point through the Woodward Estate. In the mid-1960's, this road was removed by the Maple Bluff Country Club up to the tracks of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad and the bridge spanning the tracks was also removed. These were the only two roads in Maple Bluff up until the time the land was platted by the Lakewood Land Company in 1915.

In 1899 the Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association also began the construction of Tenney Park and in 1903 the Yahara Parkway connecting Lake Mendota and Lake Monona. These two developments greatly enhanced the value of property east and north of Madison.

In 1905, to commemorate his 50 years of residence in Madison, Halle Steensland donated \$10,000 to the Park and

Pleasure Drive Association for the construction of a bridge across the Yahara River at East Washington Avenue. Although not directly associated with Maple Bluff, this bridge was a major contribution to the opening up of Madison's east side. In 1906, the city council named it "Steensland Bridge", and a plaque is on the bridge commemorating this event.

In 1909, real estate developer George B. Burrows bequeathed 12 acres of lakeshore to the Park and Pleasure Drive Association which became Burrows Park. When the land holdings of the Pleasure Drive Association were transferred to the Madison Park Commission in 1937, Burrows Park became incorporated into the city of Madison, explaining how this "island" of city of Madison property sits within the village of Maple Bluff.

Maple Bluff Golf Club

The Maple Bluff Golf Club was the first golf course in the Madison area, being established in 1899. The cottagers on McBride's Point rented a field from Samuel Marshall (at that time the owner of the LaFollette property) that was between the Bluff and the railroad tracks. The first course had five holes, but in 1900 a 40 acre tract was purchased and the course



improved. In the summer of 1901 the first club house was finished; by 1902 there were over 200 members. In 1921 a tornado ripped the roof off the club house and the original structure was replaced by the present club house, which has been enlarged and improved several times.

Lakewood Land Company

The Lakewood Land Company was incorporated about 1909, and the principal stockholders were members of the John A. Johnson family. John A. Johnson had immigrated from Norway in 1844 and had arrived in Madison in 1861. He participated with Halle Steensland in the organization of the Hekla Fire Insurance Company. In 1881 he joined E.M. Fuller in the organization of the Fuller and Johnson Manufacturing Company and was soon its president and a major stock holder. (Fuller lived in the area now called Fuller's Woods; he also



The first golf course in Dane County was built in Maple Bluff in 1899. The club house shown was destroyed in a tornado in 1921 and was rebuilt. WHi(X3)34475. The larger photo shows a distant view of the clubhouse, about 1915. Halberta Steensland and her sister are shown playing on the grass in front of the Morten Steensland house, which had been built on part of the original Steensland property. Lakewood Boulevard had not yet been built to this point. WHi(X3)40055



The Lakewood bus was an added attraction for early residents. Shown are two different models used in the early years. It went summer and winter and took one right to the door. Photos from the Lucien S. Hanks Collection M85-57.

LAKEWOOD BUS SCHEDULE

LEAVE CITY HALL

*7:30 A. M.
12:00 M.
1:30 P. M.
2:30 P. M.
4:00 P. M.
5:00 P. M.
6:00 P. M.

*9:30 on Sunday

LEAVE LAKEWOOD

8:00 A. M.
12:50 P. M.
2:00 P. M.
3:00 P. M.
4:30 P. M.
5:30 P. M.
6:30 P. M.

FARES: TO TENNEY PARK 5 CTS; LAKEWOOD 10 CTS; GOLF CLUB 15 CTS; CHILDREN 5 CTS; 5 CT. FARE FOR RESIDENTS OF LAKEWOOD

THE FOREGOING IS THE SCHEDULE FOR THE PRESENT. SOON THIS WILL BE INCREASED SO THAT THE SERVICE WILL CONTINUE UNTIL 10 P. M. AND MORE MORNING TRIPS WILL BE ADDED. AS DEMANDED, THE TRIPS WILL BE INCREASED SO THAT THERE WILL BE A STILL BETTER SERVICE. THE SCHEDULE HAS BEEN FOUND AMPLE TO CARE FOR THE NEEDS OF LAKEWOOD UNDER THE PRESENT CONDITIONS. WITH THE UP-BUILDING OF THE PLAT, THERE WILL, OF COURSE, BE A MORE EXTENDED SERVICE.

of their village—roads were paved; a storm sewer system was constructed; sidewalks were laid; and streets lights were installed.

Lakewood School

Even before incorporation, a resident donated a large tract of land to the village for construction of Lakewood School, with the stipulation that the land could never be used for any purpose other than educational. This school provided the elementary grades, but the pupils attended junior and senior high school at Central High (and later East High) on a tuition basis.

In 1962, the Maple Bluff school district was required by state law to join a district with high school facilities and the County School Board (which had authority in this matter) mandated the attachment of Maple Bluff (for school purposes only) to the Madison Metropolitan School District. At this time, Lakewood School came under the ownership of the Madison school district. With changing demographics, Lakewood School was no longer deemed practical and its use was discontinued. After standing empty for several years, the Lakewood School building was demolished by the Madison school district in 1986. The grounds on which the school stood are now maintained as a village park called Johnson Park.

Lakewood Bluff. However, this somewhat infelicitous name was later dropped, and in 1931 the area was officially incorporated as the Village of Maple Bluff. Without aid from the city, the residents of Maple Bluff financed the development



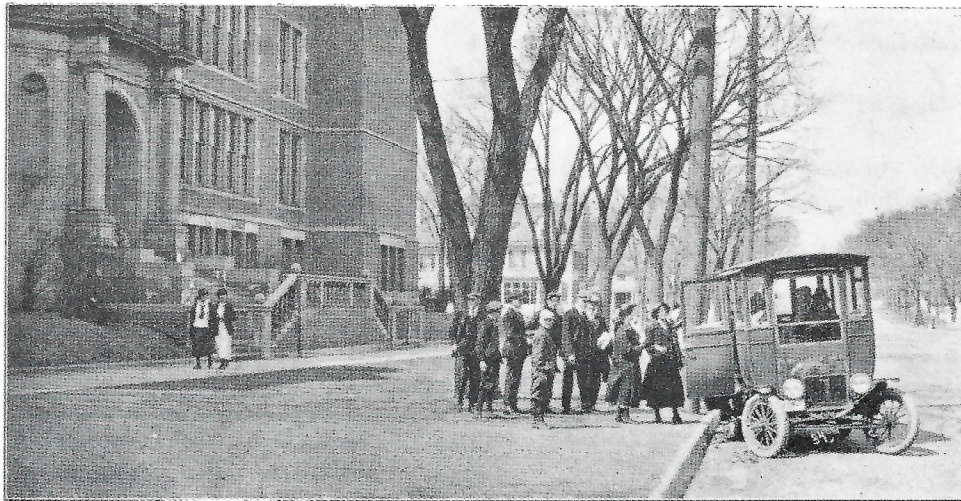
Street construction about 1915 in Lakewood. Photos from the Lucien S. Hanks Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, M85-57.



The early years of development of Lakewood saw the transition from horse-drawn vehicles to the automobile. It was not until autos had become widespread that house construction in Lakewood really took off. Photos from the Lucien S. Hanks Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, M85-57.



The original Lakewood School was situated at the entrance to the Lakewood plat, near the intersection of Lakewood Boulevard and Sherman Avenue. It was demolished by the Madison Metropolitan School District in 1986 and the land is now a park.



In addition to its regular runs, the Lakewood bus made special school trips. Here it is picking up students at Central High around 1915. Some younger students took the bus to Lincoln school on Sherman Avenue, which was just new at that time.

Later developments of the Village of Maple Bluff

The combination of the easing Depression, lowered lot prices, and incorporation as a village caused many buyers to obtain lots in Maple Bluff. In the mid-1930's and early 1940's, Neal Stoddard, a Madison realtor, bought many lots at rock-bottom prices plus most of the LaFollette farm. He built many houses and laid out several streets, including Woodland Circle and the portion of Lakewood Boulevard above the LaFollette farm. The LaFollette house remained in the family.

Most of the lots in the "Lower Bluff" and Fuller's Woods were sold by World War II and by the mid-1960's houses had been built on most of the open areas of the village. Today,

the village of Maple Bluff is at about 95% capacity. It exists as a residential community of single-family homes, with no industry and little commercial activity. It is an exceedingly stable community, with a population of 1351 at the 1980 census and with 1352 people at the 1990 census. It has one of the highest assessed valuations in the Madison area.

Fire Department

From the time of its incorporation in 1931 until 1948, Maple Bluff received fire protection under an agreement with the Madison Fire Department. Fire hazard was low, and the arrangement was considered an advantage to both the village and the city (which was reimbursed for its services).



The Stanley Hanks house, built in 1929 at 315 Lakewood Boulevard. Architect, Frank Riley. Excavation for this home uncovered large numbers of bones that had been buried by the sausage company that had occupied this land. Photo from the Lucien S. Hanks Collection. WHi M85-57.

In 1948, a city alderman mounted a campaign to annex Maple Bluff to the city of Madison. When the village resisted, the alderman convinced the City Council to terminate the fire protection agreement, with the intent of forcing the village to annex.

The village counteracted by quickly establishing a volunteer fire department under the direction and training of Chief Larry Nielson, a retired Chicago Fire Department official. Residents rose to the challenge, volunteered for fire

duty, and a well-staffed and well-equipped fire department resulted, a department which still exists.

The Governor's Executive Mansion

The Carl Johnson mansion (99 Cambridge Road), completed in 1927-28, was sold to Madison banker Thomas R. Hefty in 1932. The state purchased this house from Hefty in



The Governor's Executive Mansion at 99 Cambridge road, originally the Carl Johnson mansion. Photo by Michael M. Stark, State of Wisconsin, Department of Administration.

1949 for \$47,500 for use as a residence for the Governor. The Executive Mansion has 344 feet of lake frontage and 4 1/2 acres of grounds.

During the administration of Governor Warren P. Knowles in 1965, the State Legislature appropriated funds for major repairs and modernization of the Executive Mansion. At the same time, the Wisconsin Executive Residence Foundation was formed to oversee the remodeling project and to solicit funds for expanding and completing the remodeling and redecorating project. With the Foundation's funds, the house was furnished with proper antiques and appointments, under the supervision of Mrs. Warren P. Knowles, a professional interior decorator. More than just a home for the Governor, the Executive Mansion stands as a symbol of a way of life that is now gradually disappearing. It is one of the major attractions of the Four Lakes area, and is an appealing feature of the village of Maple Bluff.

References

This article has been based on interviews by the author with early residents conducted in 1973-74, on archival material in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and on newspaper articles from the Wisconsin State Journal and Capital Times. Citations can be found in the original publication: *The Story of Maple Bluff*, published by the village of Maple Bluff in 1974. The article has been updated to 1995 by the editor based in part on information obtained from George Hartung.

The material on Halle Steensland is based on personal communications to the editor from Halberta Steensland and on her article published in Volume VI of the *Journal of Historic Madison*, pp. 2-8, 1980-81.

The Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association and the Problem of Progressive Landscape Design in University Heights

Carolyn J. Mattern

Few areas in Madison have received as much scholarly investigation as the University Heights neighborhood on the city's near west side.¹ Unquestionably, much of this interest can be attributed to the architectural importance of the houses in the Heights. In the 29-block area are homes designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Sullivan, and George W. Maher as well as by Law, Law and Potter; Claude and Starck; Conover and Porter; Ferry and Clas; Frank Riley; George F. Keck; and other locally and regionally-prominent architects.

Attracted by the concentration of architecturally interesting residences, researchers subsequently observed that University Heights also represented Madison's first progressive, naturalistic street design.² Architectural historian Timothy Heggland captured the essence of the Heights' innovative design in the report he prepared to nominate University Heights to the National Register of Historic Places in 1981: "The plat plan of the Heights is superimposed over this steeply sloping hill....Streets and lots are laid out in a manner sensitive to the topography of the site, with rectilinear streets paralleling the perimeter of the plat at the base of the hill giving way to a more organic curvilinear plan as one approaches the summit."³

Because of its distinguished architectural background landscape historians have wanted to believe that the University Heights plat represented an equally important work of landscape design. They were willing to attribute some responsibility to McClellan Dodge, the surveyor and civil engineer whose name appeared on the official survey registered with the city on June 12, 1893, but landscape historians felt it unlikely that Dodge alone conceived the innovative Progressive aspects of the design.⁴ But if Dodge

was not responsible for the University Heights design, who was?

In 1981 landscape historian Lance Neckar attempted to tie the University Heights plat to some of the nation's leading landscape designers. While investigating the small archival collection of Breese J. Stevens, the owner of the property eventually purchased by the University Heights Company, Neckar noticed several printed plans of Frederick Law Olmstead, the best known proponent of naturalistic landscape design during the 19th century. The documents were unsupported by any other relevant material in the collection or elsewhere, but Neckar used them in an attempt to prove not only that Stevens was aware of Olmstead's work (which obviously he was) but also to suggest an Olmstedeian influence in the University Heights design: "It is possible on the basis of this evidence," Neckar theorized, "to imagine that Stevens simply wrote to Olmstead to see how a landscape architect might handle a topographically difficult site."⁵

Equally speculative is a connection to progressive landscape thought Neckar suggested via H.W.S. Cleveland, a leading Midwestern landscape architect. Neckar used a proven, but somewhat ambiguous contact between Cleveland and Richard T. Ely, the first purchaser of property in University Heights and a close friend of Stevens, to endow Ely with a broad familiarity with landscape architecture. Neckar then wondered if it was not "possible that Ely, upon making his investment in the Heights, persuaded his friend Stevens...to contact the Olmstead firm." Several years later historian Geoffrey Wexler reexamined the same evidence. He did not reject the connections made by Neckar, although he concluded that the University Heights design more likely derived from generally accepted aesthetic trends than from the specific ties cited by Neckar.⁶