THE IRISH COLONY AND HISTORIC FARMSTEADS

The following information on the Irish Colony and accompanying families is taken in its entirety from pamphlet titled the same, produced by the Town of Menasha and written by Sylvia Martin.

Drawn by the accounts of the well publicized Fox-Wisconsin Waterway Project, many Irish headed west responding to the promises of jobs which included the opportunity to own land in Wisconsin. Work on the project began in DePere in 1839 and in the Menasha area about 1847. As early as 1838, Irishmen came to this area as the primary labor force for the construction of the dams, locks and canals. The State of Wisconsin had set aside land in certain sections along the river corridor for land grants in return for that work. Many of the Irish contractors and laborers received patent deeds for acreage in the area 3-4 miles west of Menasha. By about 1850, Irish families had begun settling, farming and building in this area. The Irish were the first significant ethnic group in the Fox Cities and by 1850 the largest foreign born group in Winnebago County. By 1857, the Irish settlement in west Menasha was referred to as the “Irish Colony.” The Irish Colony was at its strongest from 1850 to the turn of the century when many of the Irish farmsteads were bought by the new German and Scandinavian immigrants.

The Irish cousins and second generation immigrants, many of whom were becoming Americans, the Irish Colony settlers made significant contributions to the Fox Cities and helped open the way for development of the Fox River Valley. Among the settlers there was an abundance of craftsmen; carpenters, shoemakers, blacksmith and draymen. The skill of the Irish stonemason was common in Ireland, and many brought this ability to this country as well. After working on the canals and railroads, many young Irishmen gained experience in building and woodworking, and most built their own houses as well as those of others. These Irish pioneers settled the area, cleared woods for farmland, built churches and schools, contributed to the growth of business, and were active in local government. The early Irish Colony is also important for its cultural identity; for many of us our ethnic roots are found in the early Irish farmsteads.

In 1848, John Fitzgibbon was one of the many Irishmen who came to take up claims of government lands in Wisconsin in return for work on the Fox-Wisconsin Waterway Project. He came to Wisconsin through Canada and probably worked on the Enz Dam. Patrick O’Hara, Patrick Garvey, Michael Kerwin, and Daniel Nugent were his neighbors who also settled on land grant farms in the area west of Menasha. Many followed with the names of Taylor, McCash, Geary, Fogarty, Murphy, Grimes, McSween, Byrnes, McSparren, Quinn, Dunni, O’Dea, Flynn, Thompson, McGrath, Curry, Maloney, Quinn, Carey, O’Connell, O’Brien, Fanning, Hayes, Corbill, Kiley, O’Dowd, Burke, Sexton, Hughes, Corinell, McGrath, Hagan
In conjunction with the re-opening, plans were initiated to update the arena. The update, completed in 1988, involved the replacement of the ice refrigeration system and installation of concrete floors to better facilitate shows and conventions.

Groundbreaking for changing from a sand floor to a concrete floor. From left, Valerie Wylie, Paul Siewers, Mary Grandman, David Berner and Curry Azzi. Tri-County Arena.

The arena has grown and matured into a year-round enterprise which offers diverse ice recreation activities and is able to host virtually any show or convention. Given its multiple use, the arena's name has been changed to Tri-County Arena.

Photos from the TV-11 Super Stampede Sports Show held at the Tri-County Arena circa 1983. Clockwise from top left: "Big Al Sampson" sewer, "Lake 11" fishing pond, Green Bay Packers cheerleaders, and two enthusiastic fans. Tri-County Arena.
The Irish Colony and Historic Farmsteads

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The Irish who came to Wisconsin were from a mixture of first and second generation immigrants, most well into the process of becoming Americans. The Irish Colony settlers made many contributions to the Fox Cities and helped open the way for development of the Fox River Valley. Among the settlers there was an abundance of craftsmen, carpenters, shoemakers, blacksmith and drayman. The skill of the Irish stonemason was common in Ireland, and many brought this ability to this country as well. After working on the canals and railroads, many young Irishmen gained experience in building and woodworking, and most built their own houses as well as those of others. These Irish pioneers settled the area, cleared woods for farmland, built churches and schools, contributed to the growth of business and were active in local government. The early Irish Colony is also important for its cultural identity; for many of us, our ethnic roots are found in the early Irish farmsteads.

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Hannigan, etc. The boyhood homes of Dr. John B. Murphy, the famous Chicago surgeon, and Dr. Michael Kerwin and Judge James C. Kerwin, justice of the Wisconsin Supreme Court, were located in the Irish Colony.

Tracing the history of this area is difficult since the colony was originally in the Town of Neenah, but the Towns of Menasha and Clayton were formed from the original area. After a dispute over the site of general elections and taxes in 1854, the Town of Menasha was organized and the colony was then within the boundaries of the Towns of Menasha and Clayton. The colony was a community with disregard for political boundaries, bound instead by a common lifestyle, culture and religion.

Today, many of the farmsteads from the original Irish Colony era still stand in some form of the Town of Clayton and near the western boundary of the Town of Menasha. Most are well cared for by owners who appreciate the lasting beauty of the farmhouses, barns and outbuildings which reflect cultural, historic and social changes. Some are descendants of Irish families while others are descendants of early Yankee settlers or later Scandinavian, German and Belgian immigrants. Many of the remaining Irish Colony farmsteads are intact, that is the barns and outbuildings are still standing and reflect the transition of farming in the Irish Colony area from agrarian (raising grains such as wheat, oats and barley) to livestock, to dairy. This group of farmsteads taken as a whole reflects not only the settlement patterns but also the immigration patterns and farming patterns of the area.

**Century Heritage Marker Program**

The program was funded by an anonymous benefactor in 1996, with the support of the Town of Menasha, farmstead owners, and a community that believes in recognizing our local farming heritage and remembering that these centuries old sites are the symbols of the early settlers and a rich cultural heritage. No where else in the Fox Cities does such an intact group of farmsteads remain. These farmsteads allow us to appreciate the skill and knowledge, as well as the effort it took to produce houses and barns that were both functional and beautiful without the use of modern technology. They are an important element reflecting the history of the Irish who first settled this area. When Irish families moved into the surrounding cities, German, Belgian, and Scandinavian families moved in and added their own character to the farmsteads in the Irish Colony in the Town of Menasha.

The following couple of pages will tell the stories of some of these sites.
Grimes Farmstead
2054 Irish Rd.

In 1847, Mrs. Margaret Grimes, her daughter Ann, and six sons Tom, Pat, Mike, Jim, Mat and Martin, arrived in Boston from Ireland. They sent Tom, the oldest son to find a place to live. After being in Illinois and Indiana, Tom found a place in Wisconsin and sent for his family in 1848. Tom received the patent deed to 160 acres from the U.S. Government valued at $1.25 and acre. This quarter section was divided among the family. William P. Grimes, son of Pat and his wife Mary McGrath, was on the Winnebago County Board for


30 years, on the school board, and the County Board and Bridge Commission. The farmstead, after almost 130 years, is still in the Grimes family. The Grimes family also started a cheese factory on this location which still operates today on the farmstead.

Garvey – Koch – Foster Farmstead
2195 Irish Rd.

In 1850, for his labor on the Fox-Wisconsin Waterway Improvement, Edward Taylor received a patent deed for 160 acres in the southwest quarter of Section 5. In 1854 he sold the north 80 acres to Michael Garvey who settled it. The Garvey family owned the property until around the turn of the century when C. Jorgenson was the owner. Hans Koch bought it in the 1930s and farmed it until the 1980s, when it was sold to the Fosters. The names McCalin, McLane, Roberts, Kerwin, and Fогarty appear in the history of this farmstead. This farmhouse with the wrap around porch sits up on a ridge overlooking a winding stream. The owners, Claude and Christine Foster, currently farm on the land.
Mills – Tipler – Doberke
2530 Irish Rd.

A.J. Mills received 160 acres in the northeast quarter of Section 6. By 1889 J. Law owned the property. By 1909, the H. Schmidt family was farming the land. In 1950 he sold it to Howard and Amelia Doberke who have lived and farmed with his wife for close to 50 years. The Doberke’s farmstead includes a yellow brick house with a brown barn. Barns were typically painted brown by the Belginums.

Garvey – Carey – Mueller Farmstead
1741 County BB

In 1850, Patrick Garvey, who had come to Wisconsin through Ohio, settled on the northeast quarter of Section 6. By the turn of the century, Matthew Carey and his family owned the farmstead. By 1859 Chauncy Beckwith worked the farm and later sold it to Randy and Pam Mueller who farm it today. In 1996 this was one of only eight working farms in the town.

Barkhahn – Fahey – Grundy
9546 Clayton Ave.

Patrick and Michael Garvey received 160 acres which they divided into 80 acre parcels each. By 1873, L. Barkhahn owned 140 acres in the south part of the section. By the turn of the century, Frank Fahey was farming the land until the 1950’s when Reginald Grundy bought 60 acres in the south half of the quarter and farmed it until the 1990’s. Grundy’s grandson and his wife currently live in the house.
In 1850, Luther Harwood received 60 acres in Section 6 a part of the even numbered sections granted to Wisconsin by the United States and set aside by the State of Wisconsin for payment to those who worked on the dams, locks and canals of the Fox-Wisconsin Rivers. Patrick Garry was the last Irish owner in 1889. The farmstead was owned for a time by Ludwig and Dorthea Barkhahn.

**Bigalke farmstead. Author.**

and the Kaphingst family until 1919 when Frank and Elsie Westphall bought it. Moving from Weyauwega in 1948, Emil and Alma Prellitz Bigalke (parents of 13 children) purchased the farmstead. Currently, Emil's youngest son and his wife, Doris, own and farm the land. In 1996, it is one of only eight working farms in the town.

**Gurrey – Haase – Farmstead 9336 Clayton Ave.**

Although the first owner for this property was an Irishman named Gurrey, it was A. Haase who settled his family on this site to stay for more than 130 years. The 1895 census lists a Haase family of ten living on this farmstead. Of that, eight had been born in the United States and two in Germany. Currently, descendants farm the property and this is another of the eight working farms in the town in 1996.

Patty Haase, Enid Pansey, and Allen Haase receiving the Century Farm plaque at the Wisconsin State Fair, 1998. *Allen Haase.*
Garrey – Kruse – Stielow Farmstead
9120 Clayton Ave.

On June 14, 1849, Patrick Garrey entered a claim with Jedidiah Brown, register, for the NW ¼ of section 7 containing 136.36 acres at $1.25 an acre. Section 7 was identified in the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers List #1 as an odd-numbered section with tracts free from conflicts. In March of 1850, “full payment had been made” and Garrey received the patent deed from the State of Wisconsin. Owned by the Sperry family from New York until 1865, it was bought by Christoffer Kruse who farmed it until 1898 when his son, Wilhelm Kruse purchased it. This deed is “upon the condition that Christoffer will receive lodging, care and attendance as his life may require in sickness or health” and that Christoffer’s other children be paid for the land and sign a quit claim for the farm. This is an example of an Old Age Assistance Lien common to those days. In 1955 Gilbert and Mary Stielow bought the farmstead from Louis Kruse. The farmstead which sits back from the road on a high rise is currently farmed by Stielow descendants.

Clancy – Miller – Peapenburg Farmstead
8936 Clayton Ave.

In 1848, Michael Clancy received a quit claim deed for south half of the southeast quarter in Section 7 from John Fitzgibbon. The 1860 census tells us that Michael, age 40, and his wife Johanna, age 30, were living on the property with John Clancy, age 15, and two hired hands: Michael McGrath, age 50, and Patrick Corbil, age 35. By 1895 Michael along with his wife and two children were living on the farmstead. In 1900 C. Byrnes owned it, but only 10 years later the Gavin family was living there. After farming for many years, the Earl Miller family sold it to Dick and Pat Peapenburg who run a dairy on it today.
Fitzgibbon – Ihde – Stahl farmstead on Clayton Ave. This is also the area of the “lost” Fox-Irish cemetery. Author.

Fitzgibbon – Ihde – Stahl Farmstead
9088 Clayton Ave.

By 1848, John Fitzgibbon had claim on 135.16 acres in Section 7 for work on the Fox-Wisconsin Rivers Improvement Project. He and his wife Ellen settled on the farm and had three children. This is the only stone house in the Irish tradition in the area (Referred to in Ireland as a ‘daim liag’ or stone house) and the only saltbox barn with an English style foundation in the area. In 1883 John’s son, James H. Fitzgibbon, and his wife, Agnes, sold to Christian and Lena Krull Ihde who put a kitchen addition onto the stone house. By 1913 Herman and Bertha Stahl had title to the farmstead and their son Ernest and his wife Helene were the last owners to farm the property. The apple orchard in the front contains many old varieties, and the peonies in front of the house are shown in a photo from 1900.
McGhan – Johnson – Meyer Farmstead
8760 Clayton Ave.

On March 1, 1850, the United States government granted 160 acres to William McMillan. McMillan owned the land only long enough to sell to Richard (wife Eliza) and Peter McGhan, who after some tax problems early on, sold to James C. and Helen Kerwin in 1896. By 1902 the Albert and Helen Cook family owned the land until it was sold to F.S. and Mary Durham in 1925. Until 1953 it passed through many hands until Arnold and Hilma Meyer purchased it. The land at this time was only partially productive. There were many stone piles, holes and a wet weather creek running through that made planting and harvesting difficult. Arnold and Hilma had the land tilled by Rudolph Borchert, who brought one of the newest tilling machines to the area. When their son Ronald returned from the Korean War, he farmed the family land where he and his wife Virginia still live in and work.

Purrell – Stecker – Lehl Farmstead
1356 Irish Rd.

J. Purrell received 160 acres in Section 8. By 1873 M.J. Graedon (Creadon?) was farming the property. Around 1889 J. Stecker farmed 80 acres of the land with his brother H. Stecker who owned the 80 acres adjoining to the north. By 1909 C. Hillman owned the north 80 acres and A. Drewes owned the south 80. In the 1950s John Lehl and his wife moved to the farm with their five children from Neenah. John still owns the farm and the land and lives in the house that sits back from the road on a rise.

Kerwin – Schmidt – Grundman Farmstead
1444 Irish Rd.

Michael Kerwin had emigrated to Canada from Ireland in 1844 and remained there until 1848, when he returned to Ireland and married his sweetheart Mary Buckley. They returned to America where, after working on the Fox-Wisconsin Rivers Improvement, he received 160 acres in the southeast quarter of section 7. Michael and Mary had seven children born on their farmstead. One of their sons, James C. Kerwin, a foremost attorney, became Justice of the Wisconsin State Supreme Court. He was married to Helen Elizabeth Lawson. Another son, Dr. Michael H. Kerwin, was a prominent physician. Michael owned the farmstead until his death in 1902. J.C. Kerwin was then the owner. Currently the farmstead is owned and farmed by the Leon Grundman family.
Taylor – Fogarty – Hannigan – Reuss Farmstead
2097 Irish Rd.

In 1850, Edward Taylor received a patent deed for the southwest quarter of section 5. In 1854 he sold the north 80 acres to Michael Garvey. By 1873 A. Fogarty owned the land until the turn of the century when it was sold to the D.J. Hannigan family. The Hannigan family farmed the land for many years and was then sold to the Reuss family. This brick and wood addition house with barn sits back from the road on a rise. The land was most recently sold off to accommodate a new subdivision.

Carrall – Hogan – Keyes – Kevill – Flores Farmstead
1171 Irish Rd.

In 1850, Edward Carrall received 160 acres of land in the southwest quarter of section 17 for payment for work performed on the Fox-Wisconsin Waterways project. In 1858, Michael and Margaret Hogan owned 120 acres of the land with the southernmost 40 owned by the Colborne brothers. Michael Hogan was a member of the Wisconsin Legislature serving in the Assembly in 1862 and 1863. He was a trustee for the early Catholic church and in 1858 he and his wife purchased the land for St. Patrick’s ("the old Irish cemetery") on Green Bay Rd. In 1870 Michael Hogan along with J.A. Sanford, received a contract to repair the dam in Menasha. Hogan died in 1872, and the parcel was sold. By 1889 D.J. Sexton owned the land. A.E. Kevill was the last to farm the area before it was developed.
Buss Family

Richard Heinrich Johan Buss was born on December 9, 1892, on the Palisades Farm that was owned by his father Ferdinand Buss who arrived from Germany at the age of sixteen. Ferdinand was a farmer and fisherman who married Anna Behnke. They had four children: Lizzie (1886), Emil (1888), Richard (1892), and Erna (1895).

Richard and Lilly (Steltzer) Buss were married on June 27, 1917 and purchased the Palisades farm from Richard's Father Ferdinand while making monthly mortgage payments diligently to Ferdinand. Richard and Lilly were blessed with two children: Irene Lena Buss (1918) and Irving Buss (1923).

Richard and Lilly Buss, 1941. Dick Slattery.

Then in 1929, due to the impending threat of the Depression, Richard and Lilly sold the Palisades farm which was still in the Town of Menasha at that time, retired the existing mortgage to Father Ferdinand Buss and bought the 69.5 acre Town of Menasha Farm at 1428 Highway P (now 1428 Racine Road) from William Sturm. The farm was located from the East Shore of Little Lake Butte des Morts between Old Midway Road on the North and Gordon Street on the South and east across Racine Road to the railroad tracks.

Richard and Lilly Buss milked dairy cows and had a business of selling farm produce throughout the Menasha area. Richard also loved horses and used them to till and seed the soil until the 1950s when a Ford tractor took the place of his beloved horses.

Because of high water and erosion problems along Little Lake Butte des Morts—50 feet of land eroded away one year—Richard and Lilly began to sell lake lots. In 1934 Richard and Lilly bought a swath of land along the south of their farm from Amos Page in order to build a road from Highway P west to Little Lake Butte des Morts. (This road was eventually called Gordon Street.) The lake lots were then sold and each new lake lot owner stopped the erosion by placing rocks or cement walls along the water frontage lots.

In 1938, Irene Buss, daughter of Richard and Lilly, married Gordon E. Slattery of Appleton and for a wedding present received an acre of land on the corner of Highway P (1356 Racine Road) and Gordon Street which they owned and where they lived for sixty-six years until 2004.

In 1947, Irving Buss, son of Richard and Lilly Buss, married Lois Krueger, was given a lot adjacent to the farm house to the north as a wedding gift from Richard and Lilly, built their first house at 1442 Racine Road, later built their second house at 1366 Sunset Lane, and finally built their third house at 1414 Sunset Lane where Irving still resides and has lived on the 69.5 acre Town of Menasha Buss Farm all his life.

During the early 1950s, Richard and Lilly constructed roads east of Racine Road and named them Richard Drive and Lilly Street. Those lots were eventually sold. It was at that time that the milking cows were sold, and Richard and Lilly began to retire from farming.

Deer hunting on the Racine Rd. “back forty”, 1943. Dick Slattery

Shortly following the east development, additional roads were constructed by Richard and Lilly west of Racine Road: Dunning Street, Sunset Lane, and Lakeview Lane, and lots continued to be sold. The last lots sold were the ones between the Farm House at 1428 Racine Rd. and 1356 Racine Road.

Richard lived in the Town of Menasha until his death in 1973, and it wasn’t until after Lilly’s death in 1977 that the farmhouse at 1428 Racine Road was sold.
During the years following their retirement from farming, Richard spent much time pursuing activities he enjoyed: hunting pheasants, rabbits, and squirrels on the farm and surrounding area, fishing on Lake Winnebago and Lake Poygan, and deer hunting in Northern Wisconsin near his Cabin on King Lake near Wabeno. His favorite sport seemed to be spearing sturgeon. He always wanted to spear one over 100 pounds; however, of the many that he did spear, a ninety pounder was his biggest.


Lilly enjoyed gardening, growing vegetables which she often canned and picking wild blackberries near the cabin. At times she was also known to accompany Richard out on the ice during the sturgeon spearing season where she would crochet while waiting for Richard to spear one of those legendary and tasty fish. Lilly also enjoyed her kitchen, and she had quite the reputation as a gourmet cook.

SOURCES: Dick Slattery and Joan Lanphear (Grandson and Granddaughter of Richard and Lilly Buss)

Riding on plow with Grandpa Buss, May 1942. Dick Slattery
The Gear family's story of their arrival in the United States is an interesting one. Sometime around 1845, Hugh Gear, trying to escape wars in Ireland, stowed away on what he thought was a ship to Australia. It turned out to be a ship bound for Boston. Upon arriving in the United States, he worked his way west until he reached Wisconsin. In 1855, Hugh took a government grant farm in the Town of Menasha on what is now Plank Rd. Hugh and Sybil Gear had three children, Betsy, Charles, and William. William went out west in 1882 and spent five years working as a cowboy. William Gear was said to be pretty handy with the lasso and also was known to be friends with Buffalo Bill.

Another child of Hugh and Sybil Gear, Charles, took over the family farm along with his wife Catherine. They had seven children, Elizabeth, Henry, Sybil, Myrtle, Charles, Janette, and Haziel. Charles Gear. They purchased land across the street from his parent's farm and built a home there where he and his wife Irene raised their three girls: Sybil, Alice and Margaret.


Historically, the Gear name is synonymous with the dairy industry in Menasha and the surrounding area. Established in 1883, in the Town of Menasha by Charles Gear and joined by his brother William in 1893, the Gear Dairy had many "firsts in Menasha" in the dairy area. The Gear Dairy claimed the first house to house delivery service in 1883, the first bottling of milk, the first pasteurization process, the first homogenization, the first half and half cream, and the first to add vitamins A and D to its products. The milk was originally delivered via horse drawn wagons which would announce their coming with a bell so that housewives could ready pans or jars in which the milk would be poured. Milk sold for three to five cents a quart. In 1912, milk began to be bottled in round glass containers with capped paper plugs.

SOURCE: Charles Weber
Goss Family

Clarence and Betty Goss bought a small home, actually a double garage at the time, and one acre of land in 1933 at 1168 Manitowoc Rd. On August 15, 1945, the Goss’s purchase 50 acres of land and a farm from the Schmidt family, also on Manitowoc Rd. This day, August 15, 1945, is also known as "Victory in Japan" day or "VJ" day. The Goss farm, at the time, went between present day Bartleyn Ct. and Sterling Heights north of Manitowoc Rd.

The family maintained a small dairy farm on this land all the while Clarence worked at Banta Corporation. While Clarence worked at the mill, Betty would sell milk by the gallon.

Joe Goss on left, standing next to unknown man. Tim Goss.

The Goss’s had six children while they lived on the farm: Terry, Tim, Mary, Mickey, Kathleen and Marguerite. The Goss farm operated until the 1960s when most of the land was sold off to the growing subdivisions in the area.

Clarence Goss’s father, Joe, a streetcar conductor, stands in the doorway of No. 3, circa 1923. Tim Goss

Betty Goss was born and raised in Menasha and tells of the first time she met Clarence’s parents. Betty says that when she was introduced to Clarence’s father, "My jaw dropped a foot!" Clarence’s father was a conductor on the streetcar line that ran through the towns. Betty recalls that Clarence’s father was "such an old grouch." She admits that, for a little bit, she did have hesitations on marrying Clarence, as she was worried he’d turn out just like his father! Betty, however, went with her better judgment and they had a wonderful marriage and family together.

SOURCE: Betty Goss
Hesselman Family

As submitted by Mark C. Hesselman

The Hesselman Family emigrated from Holland in the fall of 1878. John Henry and Gertrude Hesselman came to Wisconsin via New York to DePere, then down to the Neenah area. They came with their eight (8) children: Peter, Herman, William, Theodore, Nell, Margaret, Annie and Charles.

Little is known about the seven other children; however Charles remained in the area and lived at 238 Chute St. in Menasha. Charles was born in Holland on 04-10-1878 and passed on in 1957 at the age of 79 years old. Charles married Mary Hahn on 12-03-1901, daughter to Wenzel and Mary Hahn.

Charles and Earl Hesselman, circa 1915. Hesselman family.

Charles and Mary had two children: Earl born in 1903 and Edna born in 1904. Charles purchased 43 acres of land between 1915 and 1920 in the current area of 898 Jacobsen Rd. where he started farming and working with the local Cheese Factory on East Shady Lane. Edna married into the Christoph family and moved to the Waupaca area. There she had two sons: Jack and Jim. Very little information is known beyond that about Edna and her family.

Earl was married on September 25, 1929 to Jane Sawicki in Oshkosh, WI. Earl and Jane had two children: John born in 1937 and Mary Jane born in 1931. Earl and Jane, after being married, move around for a bit, living in Racine and Oshkosh before moving back to the farmstead in the late 1930s. This was done mainly to take care of the Mary who was ill at the time. Earl and Jane took care of the Mary till she passed in 1942 at the age of 63. Earl then purchased the 43 acres of farm land from Charles in the early 1940s.
Hesselman family barn and binding hay on the farmland. Circa 1920. *Hesselman family.*

Earl and Jane moved out of the old farmhouse and had a local contractor Arvin and Palmer Sell build a smaller house near the farmhouse. Earl and Jane later sold the 35 acres of land with both houses, and built their second house at the current location of 898 Jacobsen Rd. which was on an 8 acre strip of land about 1953. Earl was very active in the town for the most of his life. In 1938, the town fire department was founded; four years later in 1942, Earl joined the department and proudly served on the department into the early 1970s. Also, Earl served as a Town Supervisor from 1950 to 1956. Then Earl served as town clerk from 1956 to 1962. The town board meetings where held at his home in the basement at 898 Jacobsen Rd.

Earl passed away in 1975 at the age of 73 years old, survived by his wife Jane and two children: John and Mary Jane. After high school John joined the US Army in 1955 and served over seas from 1956-1958. After high school Mary Jane attend Mercy Nursing School in Oshkosh. Mary Jane married Donald Yingling and moved to Kaukauna where they had three boys. John married Elgene Brodzinski in 1960 and had four children. Jane lived on Jacobsen Rd until the late 1980s before she moved to Oshkosh and then later closer to her daughter in northern Wisconsin. Jane passed way at the age of 89 in 1998.

John Hesselman and Elgene (Jean) moved in 1961 to Cold Spring Rd. and had the first of their four children, Cheryl. Earl was born in 1963 and Allen was born in 1964. In 1969, John and Jean bought property on Clayton Ave. and built a house at 8808 Clayton Ave. Mark was then born in 1974. John worked at American Can Corp. until 1978 in the research and development section. From 1978 to 1990, John and Jean owned and operated their business called John’s Saw Service. John passed way in 1990 at the age of 53. John’s son Earl took over the family business in 1990 and currently owns and operates the business with the aid of his brother Mark and mother Jean. Jean still lives in the Town of Menasha.
John, like his father, Earl was also active in the town. John was town constable from 1962 to 1965, and the civil defense director for the Town of Menasha from January 1963 to 1965. John joined the Winnebago County Sheriff’s Auxiliary Unit as a charter member in August 1966 to assist with crowd/riot control and traffic details. A few of these deployments involved the Oshkosh riots for St. Patrick’s Day, Presidential visits by Nixon and Johnson, and Civil Rights Leader Dr. M. L. King, Jr. John was an active member with the unit until September 1974. In September 1977 John joined the town fire department and achieved the rank of Lieutenant during his 13 years of service.

Of the four children, only three where active within the Town of Menasha. Cheryl was a town supervisor from 1987 to 1989 and also served on the park commission. Earl joined the fire department in 1981 in doing so he became the third generation in the family to serve on the fire department. Over his twenty-five years of service, Earl has achieved the ranks of lieutenant and captain with the Town of Menasha Fire Department. Mark joined the fire department in 1998 and has been active for the last eight years and the accreditation manager for the 2005 re-accreditation of the fire department. The family has over 60 years of combined service on the fire department.

The four children still live in the area. Cheryl married in 1989 and is living in Appleton with her husband. Earl married in 1993 and lives in the Town of Menasha with his wife Jodi and two children. Allen married in 1992 and currently lives in Appleton with his two children. Mark, who also still lives in the Town of Menasha spent two Antarctic summers at McMurdo Station, Antarctica from 2002-2004, working as a lieutenant firefighter at the station and spent a week working at the South Pole Station.

The Hesselman Family is proud to call the Town of Menasha “home” for over eight-five years, and we look forward to many more years of prosperity and commitment to the community.

SOURCE: Mark C. Hesselman
Zeno and Rose Nennig came to the Town of Menasha in 1925 when they purchased 40 acres of land from Arthur Schmidt. This land was situated between present day E. Shady Ln. and Kaufman St. and Tumblebrook Dr. and Coldspring Rd. Soon after arriving in the town, the Nennigs built a house and farm on the land. The original farmhouse stands today on the corner of Lynn Dr. and E. Shady Ln. In this farmhouse they raised their five children: Eileen, Jerome, Lyle, Allen, and Jacob.

Eileen Tews, the daughter, says that the farmhouse was decorated with "sunrays", which were wood carved decorations that adorned the side of the home near the roof line. During that time, homes had decorative scrolls around the porches and the sunrays went along with these scrolls. The old farmhouse was recently re-sided, however, the wood sunrays remain underneath the new siding.

Zeno Nennig continued farming the land until 1960, and passed away in 1963. The Nennigs sold off some of the land, with the first acre going to Harold Schettle. A road was constructed on the land to access the new Schettle property. This road, later named Lynn Dr., had the old farm silo situated in the middle of it. According to Arden and Eileen Tews, the construction company had to blast the old silo in order to remove it.

SOURCE: Eileen Tews

In 1848, Amos Page had come to Wisconsin from Maine for work, sawing lumber along the Fox River. In 1849 he overheard a man named Price say that he was going up to the Green Bay land office the following day to purchase some property in the Town of Menasha. Page set out that evening at 9 p.m. on foot and had the land purchased before this Price gentleman had even arrived on his team of horses! This was 175 acres of wooded land that ran along the east shore of Little Lake Butte des Morts in the area of present day Tayco St. and Lakeshore Dr. The purchase price for this property at the time was $535.

The Pages wanted to farm the land and had sold off ten acres of trees for $200 to help clear the land. The farm expanded over the years; and after the turn of the century, the farm consisted of two barns, a well-protected barnyard for cows and sheep, a well and a windmill.

The Page family has been involved in town politics for many years. The elder Amos Page was a trustee of the First Ward of the Village of Menasha and was elected town supervisor for the Town of Menasha six times between 1877 and 1884. He and Phillip Verbrick were the men who went to Madison to get the charter for the City of Menasha in 1874. Amos’s grandson, also named Amos Page, followed his grandfather’s footsteps and was elected town treasurer in 1932. He tells that he “did it for the money.” At the time the Pages had nothing but debts from farming and they used the extra money from the treasurer position to supplement the farming. He held this position for the next 16 years.
Left to right, Fred, Martha, Edward and Amos Page. *Martha Andrew.*

Page farmstead. *Martha Andrew.*
The younger Page was next elected town chairman in 1959, a position he held until 1965. The most important event of Page's time in office and a big event for the Town of Menasha, was the start of a sewage system. In 1959, the town received a letter from the State of Wisconsin Board of Health that a sewer system was long overdue. In some areas raw sewage was running through the ditches, and some wells were contaminated by sewage from malfunctioning septic tanks.

Amos Page, circa 1981.  
*Appleton Post-Crescent.*

The Town of Menasha researched the issue and approached the cities who only agreed to service the area if the cities could annex the land of service. Annexation at the time was a dirty word, and Amos would never agree to that. The issue was taken to a vote, and town residents voted for their own system. The system would include expansion of the current Sanitary District No. 4 which, at the time, only included the Valley Fair Mall and area immediately to the west.

Modernization and independence were themes under Amos' term. In addition to the sewage system, the town built a town office at Palisades Park and improved the park system. The town also began to look developing its own water system which occurred under Amos's successor, Roland Kampo's term. These improvements made the Town of Menasha attractive to industry and residents and led to the town's assessed value more than doubling during his term in office.

**SOURCES: Appleton Post-Crescent  
Martha Andrew**
Peapenburg Family

There have been four generations of the Peapenburg family to live in the Town of Menasha. Albert and Amanda Peapenburg had come to the Town of Menasha in 1877 and began a farming operation on what was soon to be 110 acres of land on E. Shady Ln. This area was from the present day E. Shady Ln. north to approximately Watermark Ct. and Arena Dr. west to almost Coldspring Rd.

Peapenburg farm, E. Shady Ln. 1935.

Peapenburg family

Dick Peapenburg recalls that the farm had remained in the family, being passed on to Herman and Anna Peapenburg, then to his parents, August and Rose Peapenburg and finally to himself and his wife, Pat. The Peapenburgs maintained a dairy operation with 100 dairy cows at one time, until they moved in 1992. They slowly began selling off parcels for development and soon became crowded out by the "urban sprawl".

Dick and Pat Peapenburg purchased a farm on Clayton Ave. in 1989, with a hired hand operating it until they moved there three years later. This home is noted earlier in this chapter as one of the Century Farmsteads in the Irish Colony.

Part of the current Peapenburg home served as the Valley Brook School in the early 1900s. The Peapenburg farm is the last operating dairy farm in the Town of Menasha, with approximately 50 cows.

SOURCE: Dick Peapenburg
Schumann Family

As written by Barb Genett

William and Alvina Schumann moved to their 80 acre farm in the Town of Menasha in 1916. After a few years of farming in the Readfield area, it was a pleasure to farm the fertile fields of Winnebago County.

The farm, located on what is now Coldspring Rd., also served as the interim schoolhouse. Springroad School was being relocated in the 1930’s for the construction of Highway 41, and classes were held in the front two rooms of the Schumann house for an entire school year.

Schumann farm, still standing today, just south of Kimberly Clark Coldspring Facility.
Barb Genett.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Wisconsin farmers joined together to hold back milk from the market. This was an effort to raise the price of milk products. Some farmers dumped their milk in open fields or fed it to their livestock. Many farmers, including the Schumann family, turned it into butter and such and gave it to the less fortunate family members in the area. They also raised more than needed in garden vegetables for families in need.

Farm tractor on Schumann farm, unknown date. Barb Genett.
The Schumann family hosted many church functions at their home. They also gathered with neighbors and friends for thrashing, quilting bees and barn raisings.

In 1955, with the death of the elderly Schumanns, the farm was bequeathed to their son Ervin. Another son Harvey Schumann and his wife Irene purchased a plot of land next to the farm and built a home. They lived in this home until they both passed away. Ervin Schumann farmed the property until Kimberly-Clark bought and built on the property adjoining the home. The home and out buildings remained in the Schumann family until 1995 with the death of Ervin.

The house and barn remain just south of the Kimberly-Clark plant. It is one of the few barns left in the area in the Town of Menasha.

SOURCE: Barb Genett

Schumann farm, 2006. Author.
Herman and Ella Sell settled in the Town of Menasha in 1916 with the purchase of 15 acres of farmland that ran along the railroad tracks near the present day intersection of American Dr. and Coldspring Rd. The farmhouse stood at that location until it was destroyed in a fire several years ago. The Sells had 3 children Palmer, Marguerite and Arvin.

Arvin Sell was drafted into World War II and had chosen the Navy over the Army. He served in WW II for 3 years as a Navy Seabee and when asked what he was in the Navy, Arvin replied, “A confused bastard!” Arvin returned to the Town of Menasha and purchased 67 acres of farmland from the Strohmeyer family that was located across the road from his parents.

Herman and Ella Sell. Arvin Sell.

Arvin tells that this land was originally owned by an Irishman named Pat Garrity in the late 1800s. He wasn’t too sure why an Irishman lived over here on Coldspring Rd. as “he belonged over on Irish Rd. with the rest of the Irish.” Arvin relays a story of Pat Garrity that he was told by several of his older relatives. Apparently Pat Garrity was known for fighting with his wife, and the others did not take to kindly to that. Rumor has it that they had “tar and feathered” him in the back field. Arvin says that there still is part of a flagstone walk in the back field that has some tar on it, and, he believes that this may be remnants of this episode. Arvin has never been able to verify this story as he tells that many people knew of it, but no one would ever claim to be actually involved.

Arvin and Dorothy Sell, along with their son James and his wife Lynda still live on the property.

SOURCE: Arvin Sell
Arvin and Dorothy Sell farm.  
*Arvin Sell.*

Herman and Ella Sell farm. *Arvin Sell.*

Arvin and Dorothy Sell farmhouse, 1953. *Arvin Sell.*
STROEBE’S ISLAND

The Stroebe family is of German heritage, and we can trace their arrival in the Town of Menasha to the island, that still bears their name, to Joseph Stroebe and his wife Frances in the mid 1800s. At the time, Joseph Stroebe was postmaster of Brown Deer and also owned a small shop. One day in 1865, Joseph overheard two men talking about the Lake Winnebago area and all the good hunting and fishing and nice towns that surround it. Theses men also praised the flows of the river, stating that it was good for industry.

Joseph, intrigued by this discussion and always the land seeker, set out to explore this area for himself. Joseph came across a nice-sized island in Little Lake Butte des Morts called Caldwell Island at the time. This island was owned by a Virginian, who operated a small trading post on the island, who retired in 1861. Joseph, without conferring with his wife, purchased this island. A few days later, he returned home, telling his wife Frances of the splendid area and passionately describing the island. Frances, who knew her husband quite well, asked if he purchased the island. Joseph never skipped a beat, continuing to describe the new area. Without a definite answer from Joseph, Frances knew that he, indeed, had purchased the land.

Joseph was soon replaced as postmaster in 1865 and began building his family’s home, a modest log cabin, on the island. A Milwaukee Journal article from August 1920 described the island, “The island was like a bit of a fairyland. Everywhere there were wild flowers and splendid old trees. A small band of Indians was camping there and welcomed them.

The Indians canoed them from the mainland to their new home. Outside, Mr. Stroebe built an oven of precious bricks carried from Milwaukee for that purpose. Inside, the big fireplace was fitted with hooks for kettles. Dishes, tables, and chairs were put in place, and a fragrant pine bed was built. Animal skins, trophies of Joseph’s skill as a marksman, were spread upon the floor; the spinning wheel, loom, and carding machines were set up…..”
To access the mainland from the island, Joseph constructed a floating bridge of sixty-foot stringers over which big logs ran crossways, and on top, a layer of other logs. All of this material came from the island. This raft-like bridge would hold the weight of a team of horses, but the balance was so destroyed that it always seemed as if the horses were always going up hill. The old bridge was converted later to a stationary bridge, which was on the current site as the roadway today.

"Floating bridge" constructed of logs. *Stroebe family.*

Joseph and France's sons, Harry and Frank, liked the island so much, they stayed and lived on the island in their adult years. Harry Stroebe worked on the riverboats from 1896 to 1911. People enjoyed visiting the island, and Harry built a small wharf so he could meet his boats there and receive small parties of visitors. This "resort" grew, and soon there were regular trips of people coming to island to for a day of picnicking, outdoor games and bowling-on-the-green which then was the great sport for gentlemen.

Harry Stroebe family in photo on left. Frank Stroebe family in photo on right. *Stroebe family*
About 1932 Harry and Frank divided the island, Frank established a resort of his own, Island Haven, on the south end, while Harry continued his operation on the north half. In 1941, Harry retired and leased his operation to John Gmeinweiser. Frank died in 1946, and his resort was turned over to his daughter and her husband, Clarence Doberstein. The island was then divided up and sold off into individual lots.

**SOURCE:** *The Stroebbe Story*

*Stroebbe’s Island, circa 1980. Clyde Stephenson.*
In 1947, George and Margaret Strohmeyer purchased a 34-acre dairy farm on Winchester Rd. in the Town of Menasha. They farmed that location until 1967 when George established Strohmeyer Excavating with his sons.

George got involved in Town of Menasha government when he was elected town chairman in 1973. At the time, he ousted Roland Kampo with 55% of the vote. Politics in the Town of Menasha had been quite contentious during this period. Roland Kampo was able to remain on the town board, occupying a vacant seat and continuing to be at odds with Strohmeyer.

Strohmeyer, however, had the support of Town residents and was re-elected in 1975, defeating James Greiner. Politics had taken its toll on George and he had enough of the politics and served out the remainder of his term.


The Strohmeyers raised four sons and a daughter on their dairy farm. The farm land was eventually sold off to developers, and only five acres remain where they kept some sheep and chickens.

George Strohmeyer was also co-founder of Suburban Athletics, a local athletic league for west side Town of Menasha children. Suburban Athletics has grown into a large athletic organization that maintains baseball and softball fields at several locations and serves, not only west side Town of Menasha residents, but also those of the outlying areas.

SOURCE: Strohmeyer family
WITTLENN FAMILY

Michael J. Wittmann purchased 93 acres of land in 1915 from Anna Fahrbach. This land as in the northwest corner of the present day Appleton Rd. and Airport Rd. intersection.

Michael and his wife Mary had farmed the land until 1928 when they leased the land to construct the Whiting Airport. After the airport's demise in 1930, they returned to farming the land. The Wittmann's maintained a dairy operation on the property until 1955.

Michael Wittmann farm and airport, circa 1928. Menasha Public Library.
Some of the farmland was donated to the Town of Menasha for the construction of Wittmann Park, and other areas were sold off to development. One of the Michael and Mary Wittmann’s children, Andrew, purchased some of the property from his parents and still resides on part of the farmland today. Andrew Wittmann has also operated Wittmann’s Funland, a long standing miniature golf and batting cages facility, on the northern-most part of the old farmland. Wittmann’s Funland has served many generations of families on the east side of the Town of Menasha.

SOURCE: Andy Wittmann

Michael and Mary Wittmann.
Andy Wittmann.

Wittmann’s Funland advertisement, circa 1965.
Andy Wittmann.
WITTMANN FAMILY

Some of the following was based on the Town of Michael Reimann's report of the Wittmann Family to the

This book,pavements, sidewalks and streets, is a part of the

One of the brightest stars in the Wittmann family is

Andreas, upon whose name the probate of his will was

Michael received a daily allowance of 50 cents for

the purchase of all the meat, eggs, and milk, and a

1920. Menasha Public