

HISTORIC WAUWATOSA

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Fields of Golden Grain

Wauwatosa was first known as Hart's Mills, a small settlement established in 1835 by Charles Hart five miles west of Milwaukee. Farmers came from miles around to grind wheat at Hart's gristmill beside the river, and the tiny village soon expanded with new shops that served the area's homesteaders. Hart's Mills was known as "Wauwatosa" by 1842.

Because of Wauwatosa's proximity to Milwaukee, wheat was the early farmers' most profitable crop. In the 1860s, the port of Milwaukee was the largest exporter of wheat in the world, and until about 1870, Wisconsin was second in the nation (behind Illinois) for wheat production.

Nonetheless, the region's wheat heyday was short-lived—monocropping depleted the soil of nitrogen, and insects and disease devastated the wheat fields.

Dairy Takes Its Turn

The move to dairying was a logical switch for many farmers who once depended on wheat to provide a steady income. Most farmers already owned some cows and planted a few acres with feed grains like corn, oats, and hay. Many Wauwatosa farmers came from New York or New England, where commercial dairying was widespread.

Although many Wauwatosans had dairy cows, none took their enterprise to the level of the Gridleys. Leander L. Gridley came to Wauwatosa in 1839 from Oneida County, New York. After farming grain for decades, he established a dairy operation in 1873. After Leander L. retired in 1894, his son Leander V. continued the business.

In 1919, the Gridley Dairy's receiving plant occupied the first floor and basement level of the brick building at 7711 W. Harwood Avenue -- now home to Be Spectacled. They soon outgrew that location, and in 1925, built a new Spanish Colonial Revival-style building, now occupied by St. Pius X at 2506 Wauwatosa Avenue. The building housed Gridley's offices, a cooling warehouse, and a stable for the 56 horses that pulled the milk delivery wagons. Gridley had several other plants and offices in Milwaukee. The Gridley Dairy eventually merged with the large Borden Company of New York.

Horses and Hops

Soon after Frederick Pabst married Phillips Best's daughter in

Famous Farms of Early Wauwatosa

BY CAROL ROSEN • WHS VOLUNTEER
ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE WHS RESEARCH LIBRARY

The 1876 farmstead of Charles T. Fisher was near the intersection of present-day Mayfair Road and North Avenue. Charles' father, William I. Fisher, a native of Massachusetts, was the first to farm the land in 1841. Charles T. Fisher was active in town and county politics and later became a state senator. The detailed atlas illustration (above) shows a large barn with a cupola, sheds, horse-drawn buggies, and wagons pulled by horses. A fence surrounds the tidy lawn. Surrounded by orchards, the large farmhouse features a porch and a bay window. Cattle graze on the hillside behind the house, and woodlots appear in the distance. A train chugs along the railroad tracks behind the orchards.

Fisher, Swan, Stickney, Warren, Rogers, Gridley, Lefeber—these names are familiar to us because they identify our streets, schools, and neighborhoods. Yet more than a century ago, they identified the farmers who tilled the land beneath our feet. Almost all of Wauwatosa's city blocks and subdivisions were once farm fields—acres of wheat, oats, corn, and hops covered what are now our lawns, driveways, and sidewalks.

See **Famous Farms**, page 3



The Wauwatosa Historical Society (WHS) collects, preserves and disseminates Wauwatosa history.

Founded in 1977, the society is a donor-supported non-profit organization with more than 600 individual, family and business members.

WHS is an affiliate of the Wisconsin Historical Society and is supported by individual gifts, membership fees, and foundation grants.

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Historic Wauwatosa welcomes submission of articles and photographs. WHS does not assume responsibility for statements made by contributors.

Going and Coming

Alissa Weber recently accepted a new opportunity in the community. While we're sorry to lose her energy and passion, we wish her best of luck as Marketing and Communications Director for Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts. We thank her especially for new programming, increased sponsorships, social media presence, her leadership and management of the organization and facilities these past 2 plus years.

We are excited to welcome our new Executive Director, Amy Gnadat who joined us on November 1st. Amy Gnadat is an archives and museum professional with years of experience with Harley-Davidson, Next Door Foundation and most recently as an Archivist at Northwestern Mutual. She has a Bachelor of Arts in History and Religion and a Master of Arts in Museum Studies. She also received the Governor's Archives Award in Archival Achievement in May 2019.

Amy's outside interests are hiking, bowling, and checking out more library books than she can possibly read. She tells us, "I'm really excited to join the Wauwatosa Historical Society. I look forward to meeting all our members, friends, and neighbors and sharing great stories about what makes the city special."



Summer Interns

We would like to thank our three summer interns for all their hard work with our photo collection. They identified photos that need to be scanned and indexed into our online catalog over many hours. Layla Allen, Leah Bjorgo and Tricia Kroll are all students at Wauwatosa West High School. We thank them for all their many volunteer hours.

**Annual Membership Meeting/
Board Nominations**

Stay tuned for notice of the annual membership meeting. Also if you are interested in serving on the Board of Directors please contact the Office for further details.

Tours

Remember that the Kneeland-Walker house is open for in-house tours again. Tours are usually available every Wednesday on the hour at 10:00, 11:00, and 12:00. Please check our website for available dates through the end of the year. We encourage you to book a tour in advance, either online through our website, by

emailing us at staff@wauwatosahistorical-society.org or by calling the office at 414-774-8672. Walk-ins will be accommodated if space is available. Admission is \$8, children 12 and under are free. We hope to have monthly evening tours set up soon. We recently had a fun tour with descendants of former Wauwatosa Mayor Ervin Meier. Some of them came from as far away as Atlanta to tour.

Upcoming Events

We are welcoming the community to a Holiday Open House and free tour of the Kneeland-Walker House on December 4 and 5 from 1-4. All are welcome.

We would also especially welcome volunteers to help with decorating the week of November 15, help with undecorating Jan. 10 and 11 and also as docents for the actual event. You can contact the office to volunteer or sign up at <https://www.signup-genius.com/go/8050E4FAFA72EA2F58-decorating> for decorating. Come for an hour or stay for the day. You can sign up to be a docent at <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/8050E4FAFA72EA2F58-holiday> and instructions will be provided.

Donations

Donations have slowed a bit over the summer months but we continued to receive some interesting things. The family history and photos of Johanna Schmidt Cook was a highlight. We got some memorabilia from McKinley School. Alvin Schaut continues to keep us in mind when he finds a postcard of the Wauwatosa area. Yvonne Locker donated some beautifully made bedding. Julie Peay donated biographical materials about her late husband, Father Steven Peay. Be sure and keep us in mind if you have anything related to Wauwatosa. We are always looking for photos, objects and archival material including family stories and house abstracts.

Wish List

We are still looking for a better digital camera than the 2003 one we are using as we continue to inventory all our objects and get them into our online catalog. Good at selling things online? We are looking for someone who would be willing to take charge of an EBay account to help sell some things that have been deaccessioned.

Firefly Art Fair

We were so pleased to be able to hold our annual Firefly Art Fair this past August. A huge thank you to our Presenting Sponsor, Firefly Real Estate, ridiculously talented artists, our attendees and of course our dedicated volunteers. In this pandemic year, we weren't sure we would be able to pull it off successfully this year but with over 500 attendees throughout the day we can confidently say that it was a job well done by all. Looking forward to continuing this Firefly Art Fair tradition in years to come.

Prosit

Prosit 2021 is in the books, and was a resounding success by all accounts. It was a beautiful day and it was so nice to see almost 600 people of all ages enjoying the grounds. We would like to

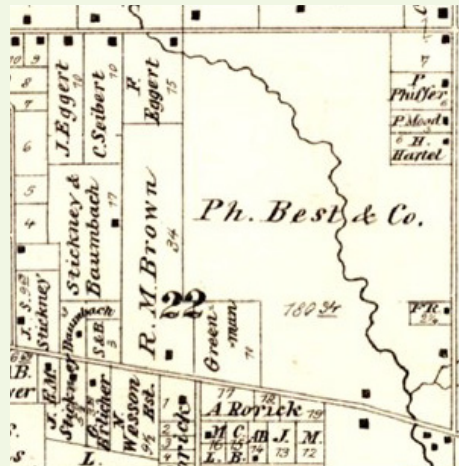
thank all of you, our members, for your support and we also want to thank our sponsors:

- Beth Jaworski of Shorewest Realtors - Platinum Sponsor
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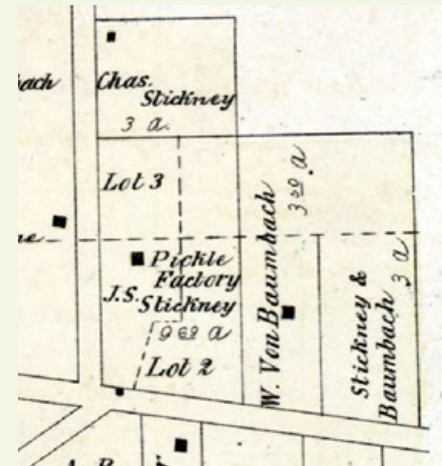
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Lastly, please mark your calendars for Firefly 2022 on August 6 and 7 and for Prosit 2022 on September 10th.



The 94-acre Gridley dairy farm was south of the Wauwatosa Village. The road that bisects the property is present-day Glenview Avenue, which appears to be well-traveled in 1876 when the artist rendered this sketch. Several cows graze behind the barn, and one large cow crosses the road.



Phillip Best and Company's land became the Pabst Farm. On the 1876 plat map, the property's southern boundary is Milwaukee Avenue, and the northern border is North Avenue. Sixtieth Street is on the eastern edge, and smaller farms border the west side.



A portion of the plat map from the 1876 Illustrated Atlas of Milwaukee County shows Stickney's Pickle Factory occupying Milwaukee Avenue and Hillcrest Drive between 71st and 73rd Streets.

1862, he joined his father-in-law's brewing enterprise; in 1889, the firm became Pabst Brewing Company. Pabst's Wauwatosa farm was a summer retreat for his family who lived on Grand Avenue (now Wisconsin Avenue) in Milwaukee. The property had a hilltop farmhouse, several barns, a vineyard, and an apple orchard.

Pabst bred and raised Percheron horses on the Wauwatosa farm. The award-winning horses pulled the company's beer wagons and marched in numerous parades in Milwaukee and Chicago.

Pabst also grew hops for the brewery on his land. Although the heyday of hops production for most Wisconsin farmers had ended by the 1870s, Pabst's acres remained productive until about 1910. According to a *Wauwatosa News* article (September 1910): "An army of 415 women and girls from Wauwatosa and vicinity are picking hops off the twenty-nine acres of the Pabst hops fields in this city."

The northern third of Pabst's farm was subdivided for residential development in 1892 and became the Pabst Park neighborhood. The southern two-thirds was developed into the Washington Highlands, beginning in 1916. An example of the Garden City Movement of planning and design, the Washington Highlands is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Pickles, Pickles, Smelly Pickles

Several Wauwatosa farmers expanded into market gardening before 1900. Orchard crops, vegetables, and nursery stock became increasingly profitable as the population of Milwaukee and its surrounding counties grew.

James S. Stickney, a native of New Hampshire, and his son Charles founded the Milwaukee Pickle Company in 1871. The Stickneys initially established a tree nursery but became more

successful in growing cucumbers for pickling. In addition to cucumbers, the Stickneys planted cauliflower and garden vegetables such as corn and green onions. Their pickle factory also produced vinegar and cider.

The Milwaukee Pickle Company contracted with farmers in the surrounding counties to ensure a continuous supply of cucumbers. According to some accounts, the deliveries entered the east side of Stickneys' property from the intersection of present-day 68th St. and Yale Place. A dirt road at that time, Yale Place thus became known as "Pickle Alley." Others maintain that a short portion of 73rd Street, near the west entry to Stickneys' farm, is the real "Pickle Alley," or "Pickle Lane."

An article in the *Wisconsin Horticulturist* (September 1900) reported that the Milwaukee Pickle Company received 900-1,500 bushels of cucumbers daily and planted eighty acres of cauliflower for pickling. According to the author, the land received "forty tons of well-rotted stable manure." It is no wonder that the neighbors found the smell too offensive and complained!

Ultimately, the Stickneys—like many other farmers of early Wauwatosa—sold their farmland for residential development and achieved a significant profit. By the turn of the last century, Wauwatosa was well on its way to becoming a bedroom suburb of Milwaukee.

Do you know who farmed the land beneath your feet? A reproduction of the Map of Wauwatosa Township in 1876, suitable for framing, is available for \$7.00 from the Wauwatosa Historical Society at 7406 Hillcrest Dr. Wauwatosa or at www.wauwatosahistoricalsociety.org/shop-our-store.



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Research Committee News

We had a fun visit from a descendant of Hendrick Gregg from Indiana. The Greggs were early settlers who in addition to owning the County grounds according to family lore may also have owned all of Elm Grove. We also had several other interesting research requests recently. ABC News Nightline contacted us about a program they are doing on restrictive zoning in the Milwaukee area. We shared a map that showed the location of the old Blue Mound Country Club when it was located on the old Wellauer property north of Wisconsin Ave and west of 72nd Street before they moved to their current location in the 1920s.

We also heard from great-granddaughters of Johanna Schmidt Cook who they say was a domestic in the Kneeland house sometime after it was built in the 1890s to the 1910s. They shared her story with us telling how she came to Wauwatosa when she was 14 to work as a domestic to earn money for the family on a farm in Cedarburg. According to their grandfather, a doctor performed surgery on Johanna on the family's dining room table, and something went terribly wrong. Johanna was left completely deaf. She would never regain her hearing, but she became so proficient at lip reading that most people didn't know that she was disabled. Johanna arrived in Wauwatosa the same year (1895) that she became deaf. Her great-granddaughter said, "I know that life was tough back then, but the idea of sending off a 14 year-old who just lost her hearing to fend for herself sounds a bit harsh, even for the late 1800s. Given that Wauwatosa has a long history of housing social services for Milwaukee County, I was wondering, (perhaps, hoping is a

better word) if Johanna might have been living in a place that provided her with support to deal with her hearing loss while working as a domestic." Johanna later became an early member and officer of the Milwaukee Society for the Deaf, later known as the Milwaukee Hearing Society and now HEAR Wisconsin.

We also welcome back Julie Peay, a long-time member, who is now helping out with research requests and our archives collection. Welcome Julie! Rose Gallenberger also did a terrific job as a speaker at a presentation of The Wisconsin Museum of Quilts and Fiber Arts about our Sarah Clapp Quilt which was part of an exhibit in the Museum.

HENDRICK GREGG

Hendrick Gregg and his wife Clarissa Leland came to Wauwatosa from Oneida County, New York, in 1836. They established a 160-acre farm along Watertown Plank Road on land that is now the Milwaukee County Institutions. Legend has it that Gregg traded his rifle for the property; other accounts say he received a federal land grant.

Gregg sold his property to Milwaukee County in 1852, and the County Poor Farm opened that year—the Gregg farmhouse sheltering the first residents. Gregg served on the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, and the County paid him \$5,000 for the property, a considerable amount of money in those days. After selling the farm, the Greggs moved to the Wauwatosa Village. From 1852-54, Hendrick served as Chairman of the Village Board, and the family was active in the First Congregational Church. The Greggs eventually moved to a 600-acre farm in Elm Grove.