

HOME SITES BEFORE 1873 WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF DONALD PARK, TOWN OF SPRINGDALE

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Donald Park was established in 1996. Through a board of directors, The Friends of Donald Park work closely with the Dane County Park Department to further the development of Donald Park. Under the guidance of county park personnel, many volunteers have established prairies, savannahs, picnic areas and trail. I am one of the volunteers.

Donald Park has much to interest outdoors people. Among these are the picnic area, the trout streams, prairies, mature woods, hills and rock outcrops. Also, there are three interesting springs, one to the north of Highway 92 across Town Hall Road from Donald Rock, the other two, roughly a half mile upstream from Mt. Vernon. It was near the upper of these latter two springs that a home site was depicted on the 1873 plat map for the Town of Springdale and on the earliest available plat map of 1861 shown without the springs. All that now remains there is a hole in the ground containing the rock foundation; three of the corners still exist. Corner-to-corner, the inside of the foundation was about 20 and feet by 14 and feet. There are several very large apple trees near the site.

On first seeing this cabin site, I and several others became interested in preserving it. Getting permission from the Board of Directors of The Friends of Donald Park, I contacted the Wisconsin State Historical Society in early October of 2002. John H. Broihahn, State Archeologist with the WSHS, visited the cabin site with me. He agreed that the site should be preserved and protected. Accordingly, he entered the site into the Archeological Site Inventory as the Foy Homestead site with state number DA-1188. It is up to The Friends to preserve the site, because the chance of any archeological digging in the near future is slim to none.

My interest has gone beyond preserving the Foy cabin site. I wanted to find out how early the cabin might have been built and ceased to be lived in, because John Broihahn said that the shorter the site occupancy, the closer that artifacts could be dated. Relevant to site occupancy, Mrs. Susan Marty in the booklet: Centennial History, Township of Springdale, Dane County, Wisconsin, 1848-1948, pp.27-28 related an interesting story. The Marty family had been living in the cabin when it was destroyed by fire. That day they had worked hard planting corn. Mrs. Marty had put three of her oldest children to bed in the loft. A hired man also slept there. Before retiring he dumped ashes from his pipe out the window of the loft, not realizing they would start a fire. Dry straw, which had been banked around the cabin over the winter, caught fire. All got out safely. The hired man retrieved a pair of shoes, thinking they were his. Instead, they belonged to Mr. Marty. Mrs. Marty did not tell the year of the fire; however, she did mention that Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Foye took the family in for two weeks, fixed up the granary for them to live in where her daughter, Rose, was born. Subsequently, a cabin, site unspecified, was built for the

Martys. (Matt Marty, grandson of Susan Marty and a county park volunteer, knows that the Marty family lived at the Foy cabin site before 1900 and thought that they were renters. He also knows that the Martys moved to northern Wisconsin before 1900.) The fire must have occurred in 1893, because a delayed birth record Rose Marty Genthe dated November 11, 1957 indicated that Rose was born July 17, 1893, the daughter of Mathias Marty and Susanna Schmid.

THE 1861 PLAT MAP FOR TOWN OF SPRINGDALE

In addition to the Foy cabin site, I discovered that two other old home sites were extant before 1861 on land within the borders of Donald Park and another one on the border. The Foy home site was plotted near the northeast corner of the Southwest Quarter of the Northeast Quarter of Section 33. The other one within the park boundary was plotted near the northwest corner of the Southwest Quarter of the Northwest Quarter, also in Section 33. That 40-acre parcel was showed as owned by Ch. Sommerlatt. Also, Christoph Sommerlatt was shown as the owner of the adjoining 80 acres consisting of the Eastern Half of the Northeast Quarter of Section 32, which contains Pat Hitchcock's home. The third home site was described in a deed to be discussed later. The park boundary home site shown on the 1861 plat map, was plotted directly on the north/south centerline of Section 28 immediately north of Messerschmit Road. That centerline is the eastern border of Donald Park on the north side of State Highway 92. That home site belonged to E. K. McCord who owned most of the western half of Section 28.

Now, I want to digress a little here. I spent many hours viewing land records at the Dane county Register of Deeds pertaining to some of the above home sites. Typically one searches indices of grantors and grantees to be able to find locations of the pertinent land records, including mortgages and others. Both Foy and Foye (the proper spelling) were indexed but Summerlatt and Sommerlade (the proper spelling) were not.

By mortgage the Foyes, John and Mary, along with Joseph Wright of Waukesha, Wisconsin, made their first purchase of land from Lawrence Smith and his wife on December 9, 1854. That purchase was for two parcels: one 40 acres, the other an adjoining 36 acres. The 40-acre parcel was the Southwest Quarter of the Northeast Quarter of Section 33, which contained the home site in 1861. The 36-acre parcel was vaguely described, but it consisted of The Northern Half of the Northeast Quarter of the Southwest Quarter and most of the Northern Half of the Northwest Quarter of the Southeast Quarter. A four-acre parcel that contained a house was exempted from the latter. Joseph and Sarah Wright sold their interest in the 76 acres to the Foyes on December 10, 1856. The Foyes later bought the exempted 4 acres with house from Alphonzo Byam November 30, 1859. Three Byam brothers including Alphonzo were forced to leave the Mt. Vernon area at that time because of shady land dealings. Anyway, the 4-acre land description indicates that an additional home site existed in Section 33 before 1861.

Concerning the Sommerlatt/Sommerlade home site, I much later discovered that Pat Hitchcock had obtained an Abstract of Title for her farm when she and her husband, John, bought it in 1967. Apparently, the first abstract was not made until January 15, 1923. The first record in that abstract indicated that Christian Sommerlade acquired the 40 acres in Section 33 from the United States October

7, 1854, and the second record that John C. Sommerlade similarly got the adjoining Eastern Half of the Northeast Quarter in Section 32 on the same day. The Sommerlades mortgaged those properties in 1859 and lost them by 1864.

Thus, there were three home sites in Section 33 prior to 1861. We know the location of the Foye site. According to the plotted position on the 1861 plat map, the Sommerlade site was probably located near the southeastern corner of the now existing prairie containing the butterfly garden. The Byam site was probably located near the southwestern corner of the four-acre parcel or near the southern edge of the overgrown field just to the west of the hay field that abuts the DNR land. It would be interesting to search for these old sites with a metal detector.

THE 1873 PLAT MAP FOR TOWN OF SPRINGDALE

The next available plat map was published in 1873. (The plat map attributed to 1868 in the Mt. Vernon sesquicentennial book, page 7, appears to be a copy of the 1861 plat map.) Several changes from 1861 are apparent. The Foyes still owned 110 acres, including the four-acre parcel that they bought from Alphonzo Byam. They had sold the 10 acres on the northeast side of State Highway 92 to their son, Stephen, who built a house in the southeastern corner of that parcel. (That is where the Martys stayed after the cabin they rented burn down.) Although the Foye cabin site was still shown in 1873, its location was placed about an eighth of a mile south of that for 1861. Mt. Vernon Creek and the springs are shown displaced south, too. (An aerial photograph taken in the 1970s or 1980s supports the 1861 location.)

In 1873 L. Severson was the owner of 60 acres that included the 40 acres owned by Ch. Sommerlatt in 1861. The Sommerlade home site was not plotted on the 1873 plat map. Chas Hebbe owned the 80 acres in Section 32 assigned to Christoph Sommerlatt in 1861. There appear to be two home sites on the 80 acres in 1873. One was positioned about one-eighth mile north of Pat Hitchcock's home, the other about one-tenth of a mile northwest of Pat's home. A road was shown connecting the first of those home sites to State Highway 92.

I. G. Brader was the owner of some of the McCord land. The McCord home site was gone by 1873, but a home site was placed between the spring and the town hall road just north of 92 on the Brader property.

One additional point of interest, but not involving a home site, was the millpond shown in 1873. It was on the southwestern edge of Mt. Vernon in Section 34 and covered what is now the low land just upstream of the bridge on County Highway G.

I was not able to determine the original builder of the Foye cabin. George Patchin was supposed to have built a cabin by the Big Spring in about 1848, according to the Springdale centennial book. Henry Hubbard, Jr. and his wife, Lousia D. (who executes this deed in token of the relinquishment of her right of dower in the herein after described premises), of Sullivan County, New Hampshire sold the 40 acres where the Foyes eventually lived on August 29, 1850 to Lawrence Smith, and Mr. Smith was listed as a

resident on the 1850 Springdale tax records. So, there must have been a cabin at that time. Mr. Smith was also taxed on the adjoining 40-acre parcel to the west. On October 6, 1853 Mr. Smith bought the adjoining 36-acre parcel to the south of his 80 acres from Martin Nash, who acquired it the month before from O. H. Byam. O. H. Byam sold the adjoining 4 acres with house to Alphonzo Byam June 14, 1858. These 36- and 4-acre parcels were part of the 120 acres (the East one-half of the Southwest Quarter and the Northwest Quarter of the Southeast Quarter of Section 33) that O. H. Byam bought from John and Clarisa Catlin of Milwaukee County, Wisconsin July 27, 1853. John Catlin seems to have been a land speculator He bought many parcels of land that were behind on taxes. (So did I. G. Brader.) The Byam house may have been built as early as 1853 and may have been abandoned shortly after 1858.

I will conclude by saying that the two mentioned home sites north of Highway 92 are not evident. The one centered on the park boundary has been farmed right to the existing fence line, the other was probably farmed also. The Foye site is known. The Sommerdale site may have been located more southwest than indicated on the 1861 plat map. Pat Hitchcock pointed out where an old spring well exists. Nearby, I found some rocks sort of in a line. It would be hard to imagine that they came to be there naturally. These rocks are across the field, west of where the horse trail comes out of the pines before heading to the southeast of that 40 acre parcel. The Byam site might be found with a metal detector. In the draw that runs down to the big spring, I found a large apple tree near where the Byam house may have been located.