

AN HISTORICAL, GEOGRAPHICAL LOOK AT

EAGLE, WISCONSIN

BY DAN BAKER

AUTHORS NOTES

This paper was written to fulfill an assignment for a class in historical geography. The purpose of this paper was to write a short paper using an historical and geographical approach on a small city or village in the area. I chose Eagle since most of my family on the Baker side comes from the area and because my father grew up here.

In researching and writing this paper, in the parameters and time allotted, I had to take several liberties. Because of this the paper is by no means a comprehensive history of Eagle. I must also admit that there may be misleading or perhaps inaccurate information contained within.

I have donated a copy of this paper to the Alice Baker Memorial Library for several reasons. First, because of the amount of time that I invested (I didn't want all of my hard work just sitting on a shelf collecting dust). Second, because of all the help I received from Betty Isleb, the head librarian, and Joanne Batzler, the assistant librarian. And third, to help someone in the future who may be doing a similar research project.

I have greatly enjoyed the time and effort put into this project and I hope that it will be read with interest by someone in the future.

DANIEL B. BAKER

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daniel B. Baker". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the printed name.

EAGLE

A huge bald eagle "hovering and curving over a large mound" east of here inspired prospectors to name this area Eagle in 1836.

Village of Eagle was platted at the coming of the Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad (1851) by Kline, Pitman, and Sprague. Business houses, schools, and a church sprang up here at Eagle Center.

By 1880, Eagle was third in commercial importance in the county with two drygoods stores (Combs Bros. & Lins), two clothing and tailor shops (Bessingham & Lins), two hardware stores (McWilliams & Lins), the Lins butcher shop, Bevens grocery, a harness shop, millinery shop, three saloons, a 10,000 bushel capacity elevator and warehouse (Clemens & Hall), Klines Hotel, a 2 story schoolhouse & Methodist church.

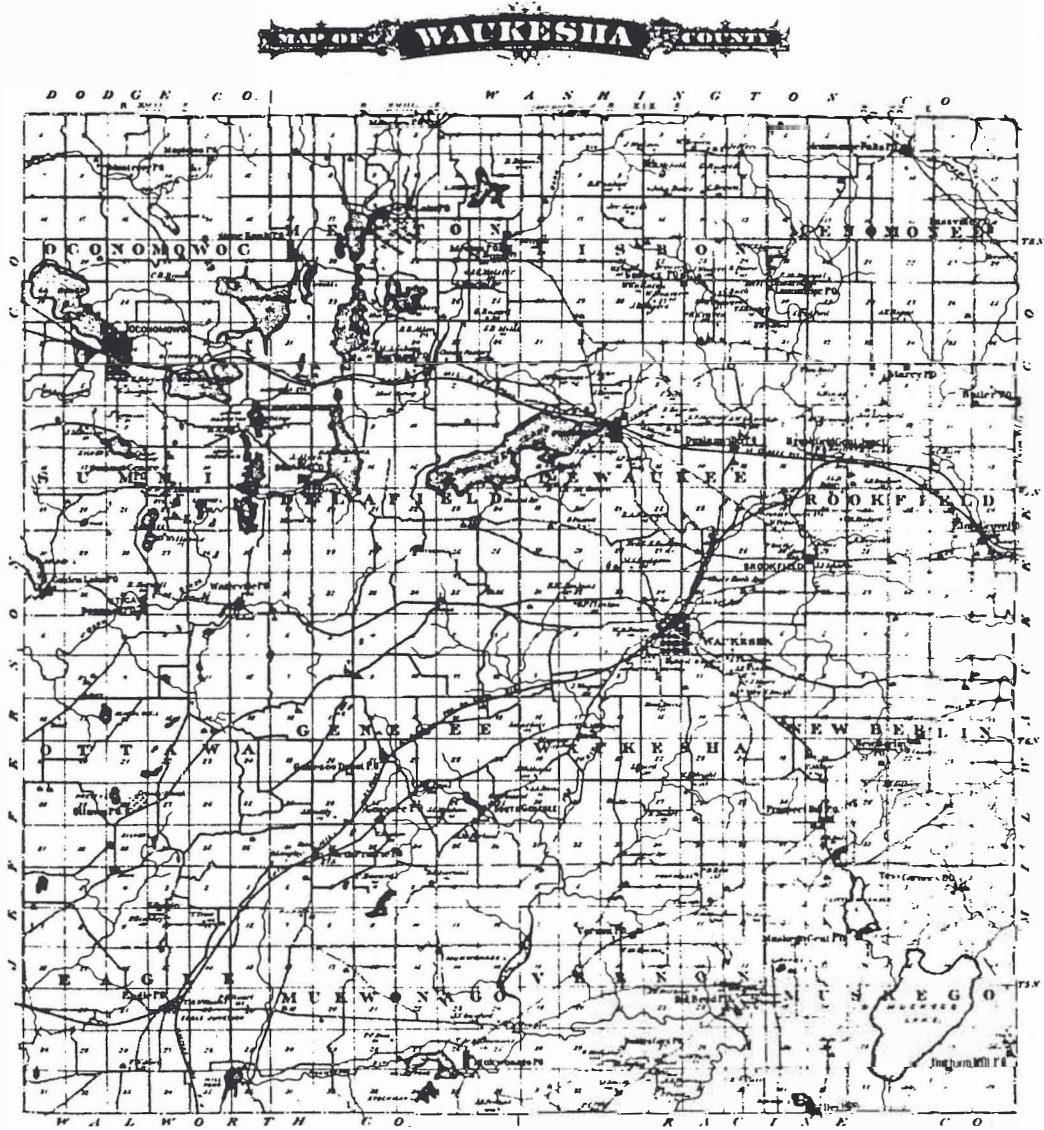
BIGGEST SENSATION, 1876 discovery of 16 karat diamond in Tom Devereaux well. After many lawsuits, false mines, and several years at Tiffanys in New York the stone, still uncut, was on display at the American Museum of Natural History until 1964 when it was stolen and never recovered.

Here the Hill was renamed "Diamond Hill" & Klines Hotel became "Diamond Hotel." A surveyor's bench mark is located at the site of the first depot that gave birth to Eagle.

Waukesha County Historical Society

1964

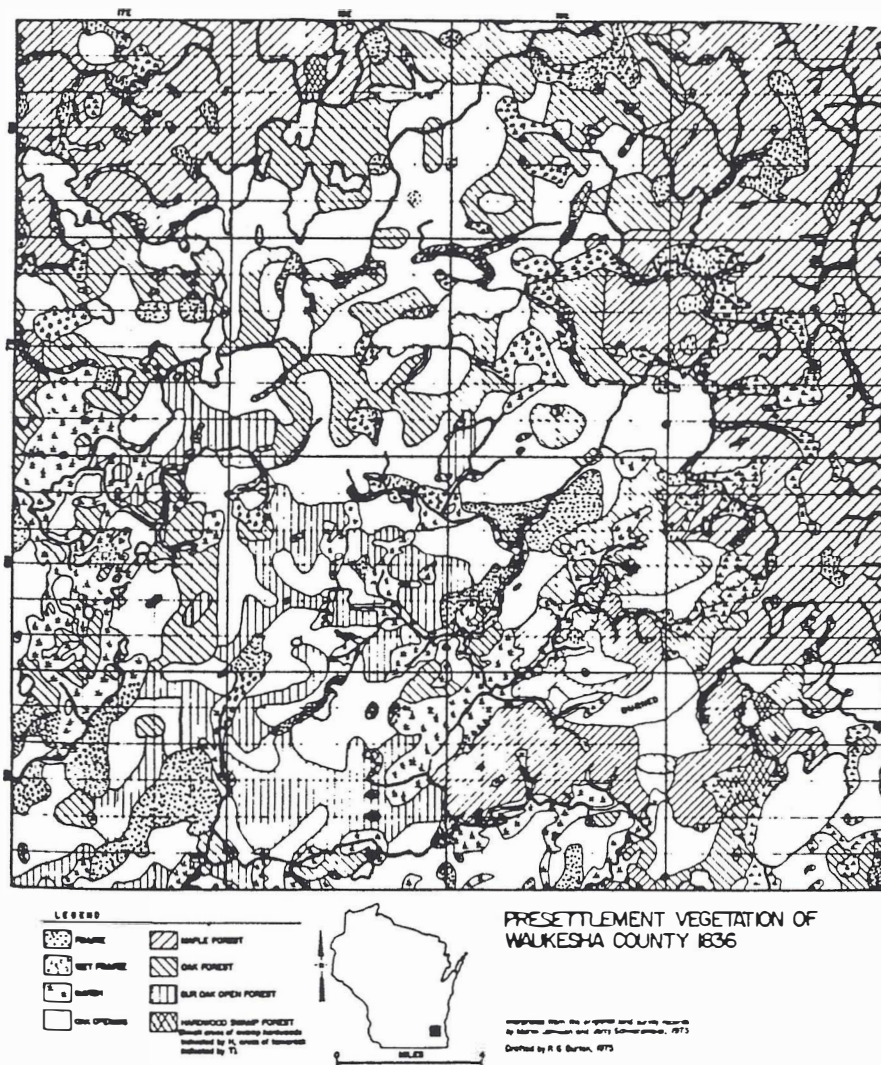
FIGURE 1



— Atlas of Wisconsin, 1878

copied from From Farmland to Freeways By Jean Penn Loerke

FIGURE 2



Presettlement Vegetation of Waukesha County 1836

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper takes a look at Eagle Wisconsin and how it has evolved using an historical geographical approach. This will be accomplished by looking at the landscape that the original settlers encountered, at how the original settlers lived, how Eagle had evolved by the 1880's, and what remains from these periods in the area today. As a background to this paper the map (fig. 1) shows where Eagle is located in Waukesha County.

II. THE LAND ENCOUNTERED BY ORIGINAL SETTLERS

The inhabitants of this area prior to the European and Yankee settlers were the Potawatomi Indians. According to some historians the Winnebagoes

were here prior to the Potawatomi, but this is a point under discussion. (1)

The Potawatomi would regularly burn the prairies to renew the plant growth and aid their hunting methods. This burning prevented the appearance of larger, older trees in the area at the time the settlers arrived. The lack of trees made the land easier to plow and therefore, more valuable to early settlers. (2)

The settlers came into the area looking for their own land to farm. The majority of early settlers came from the New England States and became known as Yankees. The major routes used by these settlers was by water through the Great Lakes and the port of Milwaukee, while some came overland following the National Road through Ohio and Indiana. Those coming overland often took many years or a generation to make the trip after unsuccessfully attempting life in other areas along the way. A few of the early settlers came directly from Europe, in particular the English and Welsh. (3) They entered the New World through either the New England ports, or the port of Quebec.(4)

The original settlers saw this area as having rich soil for farming with easy access to wood for

building and for fuel. The map of early vegetation (fig. 2) shows that the majority of the land consisted of prairie, wet prairie, bur oak open forest, and oak openings. As a settler observed upon moving through Waukesha County:

The oak opening impress me as the most beautiful landscape in the West. They present a beautiful panorama of green hills and grassy vales. You see straight, leafy oaks, grouped here and there like lanes in an English park, and between each row is an open grassy space bedecked with thousands of flowers.(5)

and as for the wildlife of the area:

Game was everywhere...and wild pigeons clouded the sky in the fall of the year. There was plenty of deer, wild geese, ducks, pigeons, and fish to be had at all times. Rabbits, deer, prairie hens, quail, and partridge were to be had for the hunting.(6)

III. EARLY SETTLEMENTS

A. R. Hinkley is considered to be the first settler of the area thanks to a 'quick knife'. Mr. Hinkley was looking for land to farm with: Henry, his brother; Andrew Scofield; and Charles Rayness:

This quartet left Milwaukee for Prairieville by ox team Aug. 18, 1836, reached the home of Davis Orendorf, remained there for two days, then left for the region ... designated as Eagle when they were on a previous prospecting tour.

As the four men came down a trail which is now Hy. NNN, they saw a beautiful spring. Farther south was a hill topped with big trees, and still farther south the prairie stretched out like the wings of a soaring eagle.

Always a decisive man, A. R. Hinkley reached for his knife and carved his name on one of the trees in the grove.... (7)

...at which Mr. Schofield, a Quacker, exclaimed, 'Ahira, thee is quick with thy knife!' on condition that Mr. Hinkley lend him 100 dollars he agreed to look further; thus was made the first claim by an actual settler...(8)

He came from the New England area and reached the Eagle area in late August of 1836. He erected the first log cabin in the area that fall and in 1848 he built the first house made of stone (which is still standing today).(9)

A typical home was described as:

...a log cabin with a loft, and a fireplace much like those in England except that it was much larger. The roof consisted of split shingles ... which would shed rain, but were not wind tight. The boys slept on the floor of the loft and I remember my father telling me that many a morning in winter he had found a considerable pile of dry snow on his bed-covers, snow had sifted between or under the shingles because of the force of the wind. The chimney of the fire-place was so large that a boy, lying on his back on the hearth, could see stars in the sky in the day time. And at night it was one of the pleasures of a small boy to push himself close enough to the fire so that he could see the sparks flying out into the dark. (10)

Life is not easy for a settler. They grew such crops as wheat, oats, corn, and barley. They also raised cattle, sheep, pigs, and chickens. A typical reporting of a settler written January 25, 1851 about the the preceeding two years:

I have had so much work to do. The first fall I put in 20 acres wheat that I have had to harvest. I had to plow sow and harrow in 16 acres of spring wheat, 11 acres of oats, 11 acres barley, 10 acres Indian corn with the plow twice and hoe it twice. I have had to now save 10 acres of hay before I had time to hoe my corn and turnips and my harvest come. All this I did with my two boys and one yoke of oxen with the exception of 3 or 4 days my neighbors helpt me....I hired Thomas Strike one month in harvest...and we cut and cased all except a few days I sowed by spring wheat the 15th of April and cut it later and July 1 thrashed all my grain in three days...I have fatted 11 pigs and I have three sows to keep over year I have two yoke oxen, 3 cows, 4 yearlings, 3 geese and gander and a bull dog winding machine, plows and harrows, but I have not things enough yet a good Yoke of oxen cost from 70 to 75 dollars, a good horse for 75 to 100 dollars, my taxes this year is between 6 and 6 dollars. We are going to build a new school house 250 dollars I shall have to pay more than 30 dollars. Wages are very high so we can find a way for all our money, thrashing and harvesting cost a great deal that is the greatest thing....the railroad is going mile and a half from my house this country is improving fast praps you would hear something about the climate last winter we had some cold days, but not much snow. A very moderate winter till spring then it came in dry and cold barron late spring, such a spring there was never known since our people came. The winter wheat when it ought to be shooting was not much higher than a mans hoe, my corn was five or six

weeks before we could see the rows, I thought I should have none. It was said we should have a famine through the land everything dried up by the dry cold winds and frosty mornings but just when the people thought it was a over with their crop it camme to beautiful warm rains and things grew at a wonderful rate... a very hot summer sickness and death has been very plenty, but thank God it hath not entered our house, I and my family have not had one sickness never since we came here.(sic) (11)

Cooking can be illustrated as follows:

We had a fireplace to cook and warm on. The cooking was done with a large kettle that hung on the fire, a long-handed spider, a bake-kettle to set in front of the fire with three legs about three inches long; a cover to put on top of the bake-kettle with legs around the top to put the coals on. The fireplace answered for light. The bake-kettle was for baking bread and meat. Afterwards we got a reflector to bake with, made of tin, to set in front of the fire. While we had a fireplace, the potatoes were frequently baked in the ashes. Besides the regular victuals, mother made cookies, fried cakes, and pumpkin pies and, as there were no apples then, we used onions instead. There were peaches one to two years before with seedlings 16 cents a dozen. Of course, we had rutabagas, melons, and tomatoes. (12)

The area was full of all kinds of danger, real and imagined:

But along the woodsy trail, dark came rather sooner than on Melindy's prairie, with dark came a strange sound. He had never heard the like of it before. He had heard tales of wolves, but no one had ever imitated their call. Perhaps this was a pack of wolves! So he cut a stout

stick before proceeding further. Walking rapidly and on tip-toes, he came round a bend in the road and suddenly encountered little specks of light -- the lights of their eyes? It must be wolves! And without a second thought he sprang up the trunk of the nearest tree and climbed to a comfortable limb. With a little looking around, he found such an arrangement of limbs that he could rest his back against the trunk and relax without danger of falling out of the tree. He had walked between fifty and sixty miles, he was tired, he was weak with hunger; the rest was so-o comforting. He fell asleep. He was awakened by the tweet of a small bird and, looking up he observed the gray twilight which precedes dawn. He was cold and stiff from his unusual exertion, the cold and his position in the tree. He had to move or get cramps. He could see no more "lights", the wolves had ceased howling. So, with some mis-giving he slid down the trunk of the tree, found his cudgel which had slipped from his hand relaxed in sleep, and carefully resumed his journey.

But what about the wolves? That afforded many a laugh -- in which Grandfather joined. Between Waukesha and Melindy's Prairie are many small lakes, margined by marshes in which frogs abound. These pipe an infernal racket during the early summer months, and frogs were what he heard. Close to these marshes "lightning" bugs are equally numerous and these provided the "lights in their eyes" which precipitated him into the tree.(13)

Garden plots were fenced by zig-zag rail fences; however, no fences divided the farms or the cultivated fields from the unplowed praries and forests. Children on the other-hand were plentiful and they either watched the fields or stayed with the farm animals to keep the animals from grazing in the

fields. The latter became the normal practice. As an example of how this experience was for the children:

This 'running with the cows' over the vast unfenced, varied areas of marsh, hills, and woods always appeared to me as a romantic occupation. But unless the herd joined that of some other friendly boy time could hang heavily on a boy's hands and the summer day be very long. Not all boys are friendly when herds are joined, some bulls fought, scaring the small boy not only by the passion of the struggle, but with the thought that he might be held responsible if a bull were killed. And so, much of the time he chose solitude....during the long afternoon there was nothing for the boy to do but learn the ways of the small animals, which are not shy at all if one remains motionless; to imitate the calls of birds and find their nests; to hunt flint arrow-heads where recent rains had laid bare the earth. At these pastimes the boy became proficient. In his mature years, he would generally come back with an arrow-head after a trip over the fields to observe the state of the 'fall seeding'. One winter night, while we were feeding the sheep, a tiny owl perched on a tall post ... and began to trill his call. I watched this former "cow-boy" carefully approach this post, answering the call so faithfully that the little owl was busy trying to locate his mate, or rival, when its toes were firmly pinned down by the gloved finger of my father.(14)

IV. EAGLE IN THE 1880'S

Eagle became a center of activity when the southern branch of the Milwaukee and St. Paul rail-

road was laid through the area in the early 1850's. William J. Kline, a land owner in the area, gave three acres to the railroad company for a depot and general use. He also laid out town lots as did several other land owners did the same and by the 1880's these lands were taken for business and residential use. The establishments included two dry-goods houses, two hardware stores and two clothing establishments; and a butcher shop, grocer, mill, cheese factory, grain hall, school house, and a Methodist Church.(15)

Eagle had grown to an excellent stand commercially speaking. "In point of commercial importance Eagle is claimed to take rank as third in the county..." (16) As an example of how active these business were, a newspaper article in 1878 pertaining to the cheese factory, "It is expected that the daily average of milk will be about 3,000 lbs."(17) In another newspaper article appearing in 1880 concerning the grain hall, Eagle is the "... biggest and most active buyer of grain in the area, even of the more populous towns."(18)

The railroads were also very busy in Eagle with "twelve trains a day, three men a day were needed to take care of the traffic."(19) In 1880 it was recorded that "Probably the largest shipment of salt

ever made to a country town was received at Eagle last week by Clemons & Hall. Seventeen car loads stood on the side track over Sunday. This salt, in all about 1,800 barrels is designed for salting wheat land."(20)

Eagle had gained national attention from the discovery of the Eagle diamond. The stone was found when a well was being dug on the property rented by the Charles Wood family in 1876. It stayed with the family for several years until Mrs. Wood sold the stone to Col. Samuel Boynton, a Milwaukee jeweler for a dollar in 1883. Col. Boynton discovered the stone was worth \$700 and with the expectation of finding more diamonds on the property he bought the land in 1884. News of the discovery brought fortune hunters into the area looking to get rich quick, but no more diamonds were discovered.

From the beauty of the Kettle Moraine, from the attraction of natural springs (which the Eagle area has several of), and from the attention due to the discovery of the diamond, Eagle began to grow as a resort area. J. A. Lins saw the potential of Eagle and capitalized on it. He built a general store in downtown Eagle and installed a fountain next to his store. He also built one in the park in the center of Eagle. Next he built a taylor shop and a phar-

macy. By the 1880's he'd built a large club house on one of the islands of Eagle Springs Lake and a small pavillion on one of the springs in the area now known as Paradise Springs. Paradise Springs which is now a park was owned by J. A. Lins at the time. To quote an article about Lins and his spring:

Lins was a builder, a vigorous, aggressive man who always wanted to improve things. He built the pavillion over the spring farther to the west, lined its margin with seats, railed the spring to insure safety to visitors and placed a dipper to provide an easy means of quenching thirst. In former years when boys and girls wanted a drink, they flattened themselves at the edge of the pool and lapped up the cool crystal water. Hospitable to the nth degree, Lins permitted people to enjoy the place, and many a picnic and Fourth of July celebration were held in its shaded acres.(21)

V. ECONOMIC REMENANCES FROM PRE 1890

The Eagle economy is still heavily reliant upon agriculture. The farmers still basically grow the same crops, with the exception of wheat, and raise the same farm animals. With the decline of railroads as a major transportation mode and with the rail lines through the area no longer being used, Eagle has lost its commercial importance.

The area never really materialized as a major resort area as hoped, but the possibility never completely died. Old World Wisconsin, Paradise Springs, and public hunting grounds are all tourist attractions nearby; and in Eagle there are establishments geared to these tourists. Because of these, Eagle may yet emerge as a major tourist attraction.

VI. STRUCTURES REMAINING FROM PRE 1890

The following pages contain pictures of many of the major buildings still standing in and near Eagle which have a direct or indirect relationship to this paper.



THE COBBLESTONE

70
Built in 1848 by Ahira Rockwell Hinkley, first settler in Eagle Township, who came here in 1836. This house is one of the best examples of cobblesetone work in Wisconsin. To insure uniformity in size, the stones were dropped through a hole in a board. The structure is architecturally unique in having no corner slabs, or quoins.

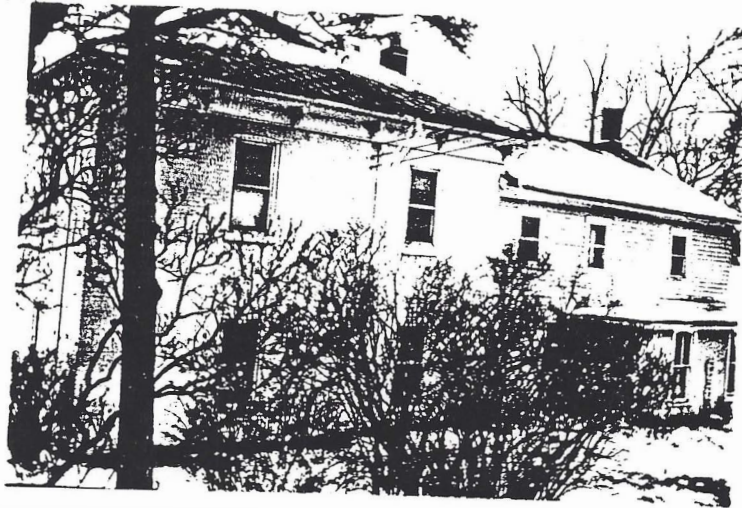
Stone house built by A. R. Hinkley.

70 Mrs. Jean Laetke

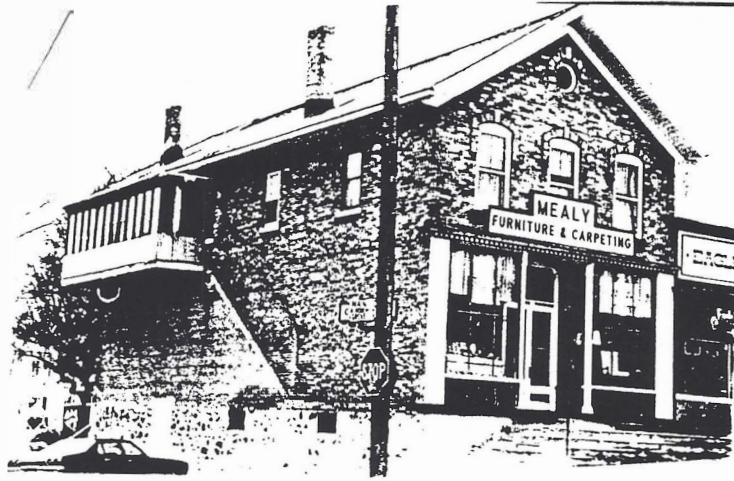
This is Jean Laetke's home

5167 access from the Catholic church & school

The Lins Home



Pharmacy



General Store

middle

Tailor shop

left

BUILDINGS BUILT BY J. A. LINS



Paradise Springs - top is the location of the first spring house built by J.A. Lins here. Bottom is a view of the lake with a typical spring house at the far end.



Sasso's - top is a view of what was originally Kline's hotel which was built in 1903. Today it part of a series of businesses tailored to tourists (bottom).

FOOTNOTES

1. cited from John G. Gregory, Southeastern Wisconsin: A History of Old Milwaukee County (Chicago: S. J. Clark Publishing Co., 1932) pp. 846-849.
2. cited from Richard Baker, A history on John Baker, 1974, p.30.
3. cited from Jean Penn Loeke, From Farmland to Freeways (Ellen D. Langill, Waukesha County Historical Society Inc., 1984) p.139.
4. Baker, p28.
5. Loeke, p.27.
6. Ibid, p.30.
7. from records at Alice Baker Memorial Library, Eagle Wisconsin
8. History of Waukesha County, Wisconsin, (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1880), p.897.
9. cited from records at Alice Baker Memorial Library.
10. Baker, p30.
11. Ibid, pp.52-53.
12. Edward P. Hinkley, "Hinkley, Aged Farmer, Writes of Early Days in Town of Eagle", Waukesha Freeman, Apr. 26, 1935.
13. Baker, p.33.
14. Baker, p.36.
15. cited from History of Waukesha County, Wisconsin.
16. Ibid, p.738.
17. "History in Review - 100 Years Ago - 1878", Waukesha Freeman, Apr. 25, 1978.
18. Alice Baker, "Eagle Was Thriving Village in 1884, According to Prospectors Letter", Waukesha Freeman, Feb. 5, 1966.
19. History of Waukesha County, Wisconsin, p.738.

20. "History in Review - 90 Years Ago - 1880", Waukesha Freeman, March 30, 1970.
21. from records at the Alice Baker Memorial Library.

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