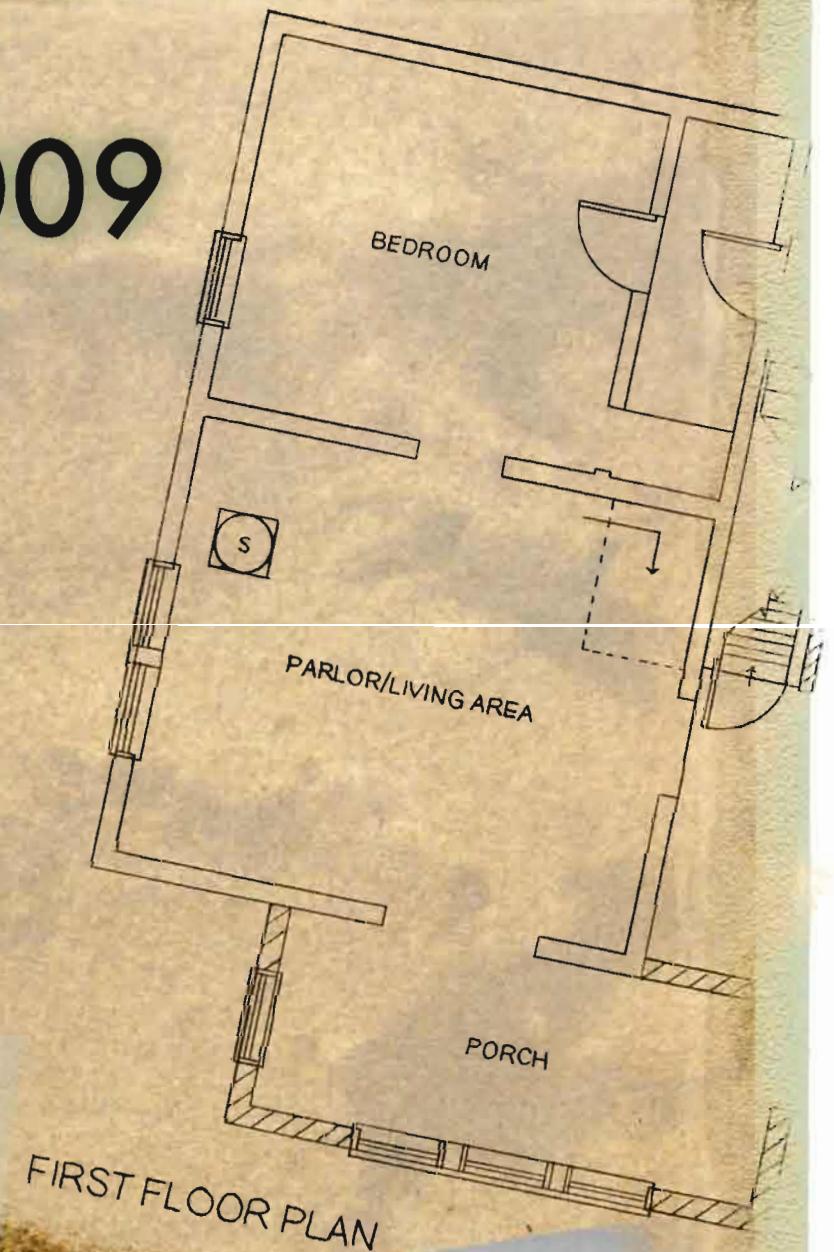


Summer Field School 2009 in Wiota, Wisconsin

Lafayette County
Southwestern Wisconsin



Front Cover: Photos and illustration by Dee Finnegan

Upper: Field School student Gabe Crilley ponders Holstein heifers in Fort Hamilton meadow

Lower: (Left) Folklorist Tom Carter reviews drawing details with student Travis Olson at first measuring and drawing session in the field

(Center) Wiota resident Dorothy Johnson shares her personal trove of historical Wiota documents with students Tom Hopfensperger, Katie Ryan, and Ye-Gee Kwon at the Wiota Lutheran Church

(Right) Elegant Georgian-style rock house in steamy summer morning mist, Jenkynsville area, southwestern Lafayette County

Title Page: Driftless Region map adapted from Wisconsin DNR, July 15, 2010 (<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/wlip/driftless.htm>)

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**Summer Field School 2009
in Wiota
Lafayette County
Southwestern Wisconsin**



**University of Wisconsin-Madison
in partnership with the Lead Region Historic Trust
and the Lafayette County Historical Society**

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We owe our fieldwork in Wiota to Dana Duppler and the people of Wiota, and we dedicate this booklet to them. We could not have done this work without their generosity and support and their continuity with Wiota's buildings and history. Our research also could not have happened without Duppler's long and passionate devotion to research and preservation of southwestern Wisconsin's early lead mining architecture, his Wiota community ties, and the support of his preservation colleagues throughout the region.

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Students and faculty gratefully acknowledge the hospitality and generosity of many Wiota and Lafayette County proprietors and residents, without whose help this project would have been impossible. We invite readers to remind us of others who we may have inadvertently left out below.

Barbara Seffrood Cecil

Bob Cooper

Pat Cooper

Cottonwood Dairy

Crossroads Bar and Grill

Dana Duppler

Dorothy Johnson

Fuller's Nixon House, Gratiot

Rich and Deb Hall-Reppen

Helen Johnson

Ralph "Sonny" Johnson

Lorraine Keister

Lafayette County Courthouse

Lafayette County Historical Society

Brian Larson

Randy Larson

Donna Scott McDermott

Hector Mendez

Gayle Monson

Paul Monson

Risken-Lee Holiday House, Shullsburg

James Ronnerud

Bruce Ruegsegger

LaVerne Seffrood

Kim Tschudy

Jim Winn

University of Wisconsin Archives (especially Troy Reeves)

Wiota Lumber Company

Wiota Lutheran Church

Wisconsin Historical Society Archives (especially archivists)

Harry Miller and Dee Grimsrud)

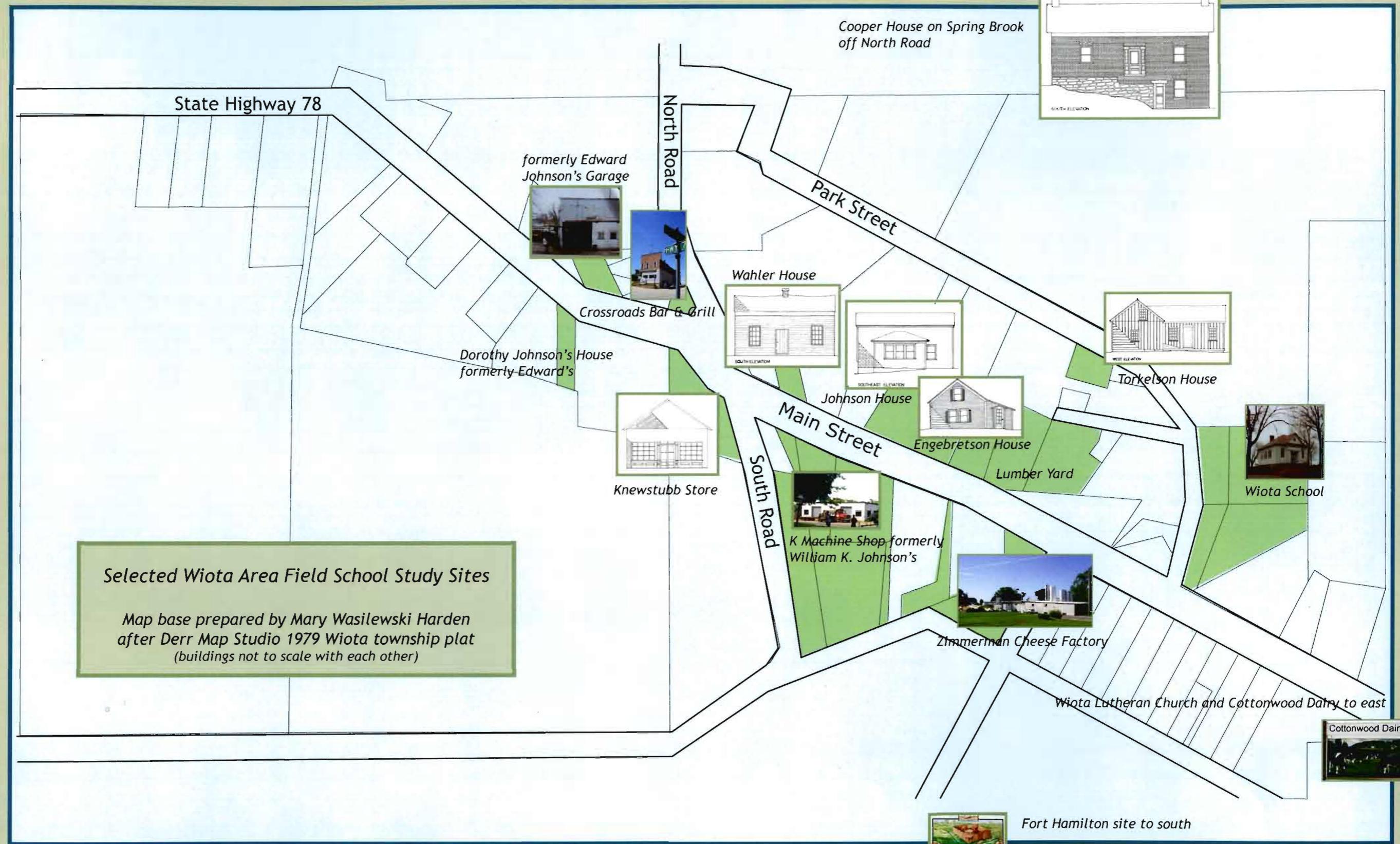
Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office (especially

Daina Penkiunas and Joe DeRose)

Zimmerman Cheese Factory

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THE TRAVELER'S PATH THROUGH WIOTA



Wiota at the crossroads, looking north

Highway 78 winds its way from the Wisconsin River to the Illinois border in a northeast-southwest direction, flirting with the eastern edge of the Upper Midwest's famous unglaciated Driftless Region. It meanders in fits and starts along the characteristic creek bottoms set among the deeply rolling hills, climbing to the spine of Military Ridge, and then plunging south into the Pecatonica rivershed. It meets the Pec itself as it enters Lafayette County's northeasternmost corner at Blanchardville, and then moves on to Argyle, Wiota, and Gratiot before leaving Wisconsin.

Highway 78 passes through Wiota halfway between Argyle and Gratiot in east central Lafayette County. As the road winds south and west from Argyle, it follows Cherry Branch right before it emerges from the bottom to a ridge crest where Cottonwood Dairy's expansive modern milking parlor lies just to the left (south), a modern Wiota Lutheran Church ahead to the right, and Wiota beyond, with its "Wiota" water tower to the north. The highway sweeps in a southeast to northwest direction through Wiota, in a linear Main Street strip pattern that is characteristic of small settlements dating to the lead mining era. It dips across a broad open space at its center, the intersection with North and South



Mailboxes along highway at the crossroads
PHOTO: Gabe Crilley



Aerial view of Wiota on Google Earth (2007)

roads. At this important node, a significant bank of mailboxes edges the highway. A large Berget Family Farms feed mill bounds the western edge of Wiota's main street, before 78 moves on to outlying farmsteads common to the mid-20th century, while North and South roads also pass through active farm fields.

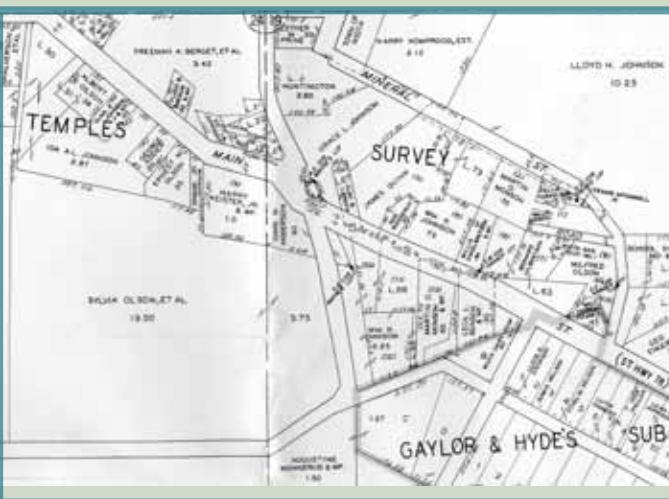
A mix of 50 some homes, businesses, and social centers stretch along both sides of this route, forming the main extent of the settlement. Most are one- or two-story buildings, separated on individual lots of varied expanses, and surrounded with plenty of neatly kept open space—lawns, mature specimen trees, and shrubs that dress property lines and foundations. While the settlement clearly is a significant cluster of habitation, social life, and commerce, few buildings or public spaces along this path today invite travelers and strangers to stop for sustenance, gas, restroom, or groceries. The Wiota Recreation Park shelter, with water and rest-

THE TRAVELER'S PATH THROUGH WIOTA

rooms, sits back from the old “one-room” schoolhouse, which is now used for family reunions and community events. The Wiota Lumber Yard and local information source sits up off the highway. The Zimmerman Cheese Factory across the highway sells cheese in its entry space if you holler for help. And the tavern at the crossroads very modestly looks its part in a state where crossroads often mean “get your beer here,” no matter the character of the building. The place has an inwardly directed, private sense, as if it caters mostly to locals.



Wiota's central node, or "town square" space, at the crossroads, looking southeast



1979 Wiota Township map, copyright Derr Map Studio, Rockford, Illinois

Yet to observers who “read the landscape,” this settlement’s location, place names, signs, buildings, lot sizes and layouts, plantings, and circulatory features suggest an intriguing story of development from older to modern times. Legendry about the agedness of some Wiota buildings, and their connections with Wisconsin’s early lead mining history, drew a University of Wisconsin-Madison Field School to investigate during the Summer of 2009. (JCG)

WHY WIOTA?

In the late 1960s, Professor Arnold Alanen first experienced Wiota and its neighboring farming landscape. As a cultural geographer and landscape historian, he found some of Wiota’s smallest buildings and surrounding farmscapes intriguing. Over the years, as faculty in the Department of Landscape Architecture in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he and colleague William Tishler followed Dana Duppler’s preservation efforts with interest as Duppler also began a decades-long relationship with Wiota’s oldest buildings in the 1980s.



Field School 2009 instructors (L to R) Tom Carter, Janet Gilmore, Dana Duppler, and Anna Andrzejewski

When Professor Anna Andrzejewski began team-teaching a vernacular architecture course in the Department of Art History at UW-Madison in 2001, she and Alanen developed a vernacular architectural tour to enhance their students’ learning experience. The tour included Mineral Point, New Glarus, Grandview (Hollandale), the Hauge Log Church (Daleyville), and Wiota. Since then, Andrzejewski and Alanen have brought their students to Wiota, looping through the town to see the older, smaller buildings that Dana Duppler has helped conserve since the 1980s. They also stop at the new Cottonwood mega-dairy, to contemplate the evolving character of the region’s cultural landscape and built environment.

WHY WIOTA?

Inspired by the age, size, and clustering of Wiota's smallest and oldest buildings, as well as their legendary historical background, Andrzejewski was eager to focus a summer vernacular architecture fieldwork class on them. While there was no documentation of them in the State Historic Preservation Office's Architectural History Inventory, Dana Duppler hypothesized that these were potentially some of the Wisconsin lead region's earliest remaining buildings. The buildings were also small and manageable for beginning building documentation students, while also complex enough with their "layers" to make for intriguing research. Folklorist and vernacular architectural expert Professor Tom Carter of the University of Utah School of Architecture was eager to contribute, by guiding students in measuring and evaluating the buildings in the field, in order to prepare scaled drawings as historical records. Students would also practice building documentation through photography, archival research, and oral history. Andrzejewski obtained summer funding for the venture through the Chipstone Foundation in Milwaukee. Professor Janet Gilmore in Landscape Architecture and Folklore at UW-Madison joined the team and obtained summer funding from the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. Besides coordinating a digital repository of student documentation, she was interested in encouraging student reconnaissance of the broader area and interviews with the buildings' owners, former inhabitants, renters, and other knowledgeable community members. Because of Wiota's history of cultural succession and pluralism, she was curious about Cottonwood Dairy and some of Wisconsin's newest Latino/a immigrants who work there.

Dana Duppler of the Lead Region Historic Trust encouraged Andrzejewski's interest, and graciously helped line up access to Wiota's historic buildings and coordinate lodging for students in Jenkynsville and Gratiot. James Ronnerud of the Lafayette County Historical Society helped with records access and arrangements for oral history interviews.

FIELD SCHOOL & A VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE APPROACH

FIELD SCHOOL

Vernacular architecture and folklore field schools at the University of Wisconsin-Madison date back to the late 1960s, when Professor William Tishler in the Department of Landscape Architecture began taking student teams into the field to investigate ethnic immigrant farmsteads. Generally offered every other summer into the 1980s, these field teaching experiences contributed to the recreation of relocated farmscapes at Old World Wisconsin, creation of the rural historic district category for the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places, and development of National Register Bulletin 30, "Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Rural Historic Landscapes." After the UW-Madison Folklore Program emerged in the 1980s, it also began offering field schools, focused initially on Wisconsin community festivals in the 1990s, southwestern Wisconsin folklife in 2000, new immigrant cultural landscape adaptations in Eau Claire County in 2005, and Wiota in 2009. The Department of Art History offered its first vernacular architecture field school in 2006, its second with Landscape Architecture and Folklore in Wiota in 2009, and a third in Mineral Point in 2010.



Tom Carter advises April Braden as she works out a drawing dilemma

These short, intensive university classes generally have occurred during three- and four-week early summer sessions. The format affords an immersion learning experience in off-campus environments, where students can explore, research, and practice methodologies in a focused, hands-on manner that is often impossible during regular fall and spring semesters.

FIELD SCHOOL & A VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE APPROACH

FIELD SCHOOL

This work “in the field,” often called “fieldwork,” places students in face-to-face contact with contemporary communities and public and private non-profit organizations involved in community heritage-making, history, and preservation. The format intertwines the application of documentary techniques—including interviewing, photography, measuring and drawing—with issues of organizational practice and curatorship, and the ethical co-creation of ethnographic and historical evidence.

The documentation produced, with community participation, becomes part of the historical record itself, and is used in combination with existing historical sources to create new syntheses that benefit all participants.

Importantly, the Field School gives students a taste of “real world” experience, and places off-campus communities in faculty roles—momentarily bridging the “town and gown” divide. It also fulfills the University of Wisconsin’s mission of the “Wisconsin Idea.”



Katie Ryan interviews Ralph and Helen Johnson about the Engebretson House while April Braden and Travis Olson continue to measure and draw



James Ronnerud lectures group

THE SUMMER FIELD SCHOOL 2009 focused on four of Wiota’s houses to explore contentions that they are some of the oldest remaining everyday buildings from Wisconsin’s lead mining period. Besides examining these buildings through measured drawings and discussions with architectural experts, students considered their historical and cultural dimensions through archival research as well as interviews with local residents. They ascertained building histories, landscape and construction details, the nature of rural community life over time, and identified family land records, photographs, and written family histories. Anna Andrzejewski and Tom Carter explore this vernacular architecture approach and elaborate some findings in the first part of this booklet.



Heyl et al. 1959 map inset of “Upper Mississippi Valley lead mining district in contemporary political context,” in Freudenburg and Frickel 1994

During the first class week in Madison (June 15-18) students reviewed documentary research methodologies in vernacular architecture, landscape history, and folklore, and became familiar with Wiota, Lafayette County, and southwestern Wisconsin through preliminary research.

Overarching Questions: Before going into the field, the class brainstormed a series of questions to frame their study. In particular, questions about labor intrigued the class; students were interested in how mining shifted to dairying and how this trans-

FIELD SCHOOL & A VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE APPROACH

FIELD SCHOOL

formation was expressed through the landscape. Participants also wished to consider the shifting ethnic makeup of the region's occupants from indigenous peoples through early Euro-American settlement and up to the present Latino/a presence. The class wished to learn about how these issues manifested themselves in the built environment as well as in individual and collective memory. The class crafted the following question to help guide their study:

What is the relationship of present-day Wiota to the development of the region and its past as revealed in tangible and intangible expressions of culture?

Although this question seems vague, it summed up the class's interest in change and how it was communicated in material culture and oral tradition. We continually revisited this question to help guide our interpretation of the evidence we gathered in the field.

The second week (June 22-25) was spent in Wiota. Tom Carter led the measuring and drawing component. Dana Duppler and James Ronnerud oriented us to the buildings, town, and key contacts, and Duppler regularly advised and reviewed findings. Fifteen students teamed into five field research groups, each assigned to a differ-



Ye-Gee Kwon reviews historical documents with Wiota old-timers Dorothy Johnson and Gayle Monson

ent building. They conducted interviews with local residents and searched archival records. Many toured the nearby Fort Hamilton site with Barbara Cecil as our guide. Janet Gilmore provides syntheses from interviews and a Fort Hamilton tour account toward the end of this booklet.

During the last two weeks (June 29-July 12) in Madison, students and faculty discussed and consolidated field data and prepared finished pencil drawings. Jaclyn Binder later completed inked versions on mylar for long-term archival preservation. Binder, Caitlyn Boyle, April Braden, Gabe Crilley, Tom Hopfensperger, and Nate Millington prepared first drafts of each team's building report, which form the heart of this booklet. April also catalogued the class's drawings, interview recordings, reports, photography, videography, and primary and secondary sources used, which are summarized at the end of this booklet.



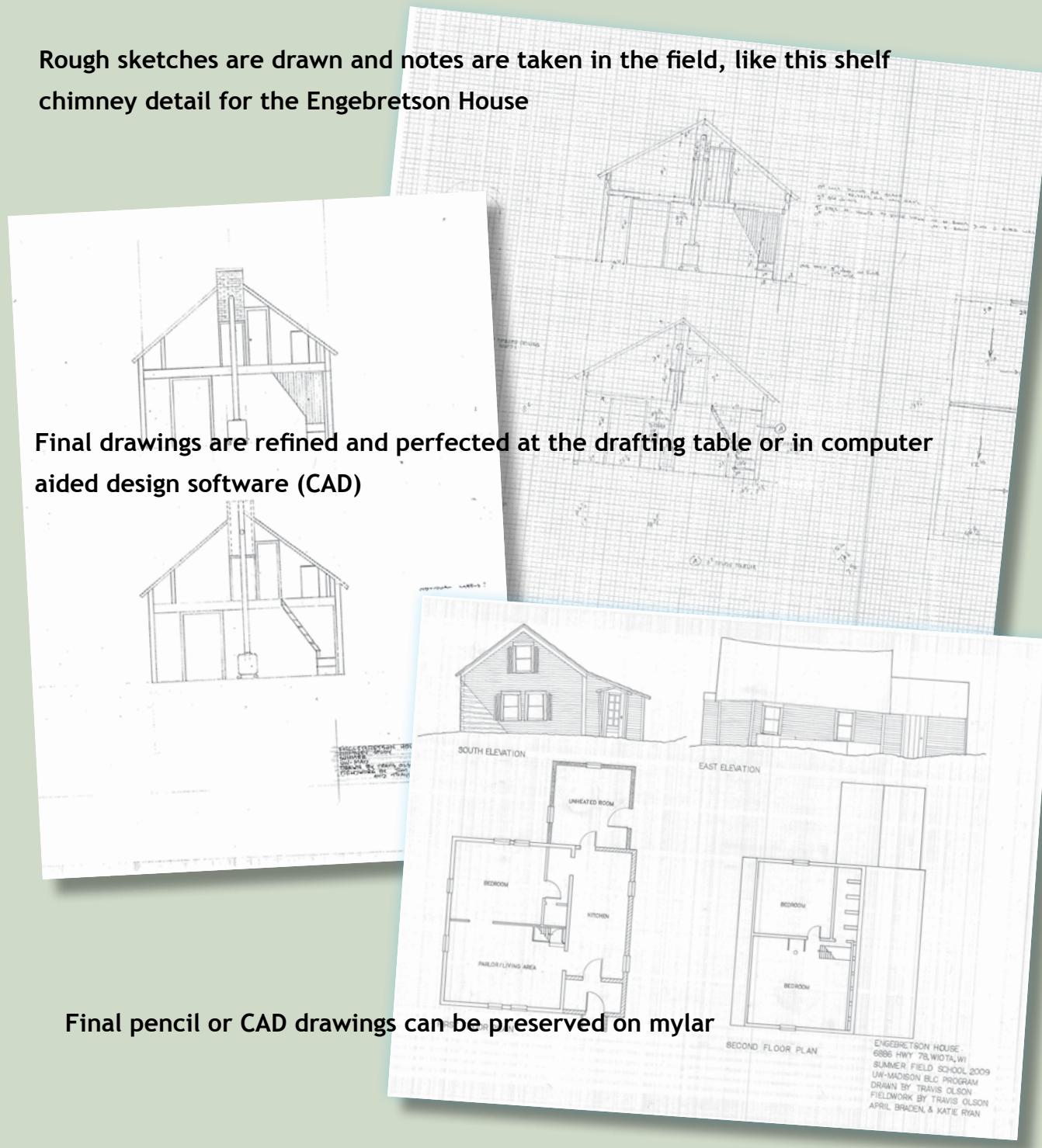
Tom Carter teaches Travis Olson new drawing skills in the field

The drawings, field notes, recordings, collections of documentation, and final site reports now form a digital archives to share with the Lead Region Historic Trust and the Lafayette County Historical Society. The work will contribute to Vernacular Architecture Forum's June 2012 meeting in Madison, which will feature a southwestern Wisconsin tour. We offer this booklet as a summary to share for review and refinement with our gracious Wiota partners. (AVA & JCG)

FIELD SCHOOL & A VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE APPROACH

FROM FIELDWORK TO FINISHED DRAWINGS

Rough sketches are drawn and notes are taken in the field, like this shelf chimney detail for the Engebretson House



Final pencil or CAD drawings can be preserved on mylar

A VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE APPROACH

The chief method in vernacular architecture studies is the “in place” documentation and analysis of buildings and the landscapes they inhabit. The main reason for such “out of the library” study is that vernacular architecture most often has been overlooked and undocumented in the written record. If you want to understand these buildings or the people who lived in them, then you have to go to them, in the field, whether it be in cities, towns, or the countryside.

Architectural fieldwork for our class consisted of documenting four houses and a former grocery store in the small village of Wiota, and a larger brick house about a mile away. We classify the four Wiota houses as “first period” buildings, by which we mean ones that survive from the area’s first generation of European-American settlers, which date to the 1830s and early 1840s. The brick building outside of town likely represents an early “second period” phase because of its apparent permanence, and the grocery dates from a later period near the beginning of the 20th century.



Dana Duppler points out some unique characteristics of Wiota's vernacular architecture

Teams of students were each assigned a building that they were in charge of documenting. Architectural recordation was a major task, in which students created detailed, scaled representations of each of the six buildings. The teams



Dana Duppler points out some unique characteristics of Wiota's vernacular architecture

FIELD SCHOOL & A VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE APPROACH

A VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE APPROACH

measured each building to the half inch, and translated that to 1/4 inch =1 foot scale on 18-inch x 24-inch graph paper. They then created scaled representations of the buildings in the field. They drew plans of the main and second floors, and also drew front and side elevations, as well as details of interior and exterior features (including framing members, mantelpieces, doors, windows, and shelf chimneys). Armed with tape measures, level lines, levels, leveling rods, large drawing boards, rulers, drawing pencils and erasers, the students in Field School 2009—many of whom had no previous drafting experience—all gained experience such that they could, without much assistance from the professors, put pencil to paper and draw from scratch by the end of the field week.

Through this process, students became intimately acquainted with their buildings' features while also creating representations like floor plans that cannot be captured or visualized in other ways. Thus the process of drawing served as a tool for learning at the same time that it also provided key evidence in its own right. Along

with other forms of evidence gathered in the course of the field school, including from interviews, measured drawings can help us tell the kinds of everyday stories that the documents do not tell. One can learn about paths of movement—between spaces in the house and from house to house in a landscape—as well as the ways in which shared building features (such as shelf chimneys) show a regional and economical solution to the need for heating. Field drawings can be paired with documentation on the buildings' residents and of Wiota in general to help tell the history of how this community thrived as it initially organized around lead mining during the 1830s and 1840s. (AVA)



Caitlin Boyle draws Cooper House interior details

WIOTA'S EARLY VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

Our efforts in Wiota were part of a larger effort to learn more about the vernacular building traditions of the “Wisconsin lead mining region,” which encompassed much of Lafayette, Iowa, and Grant counties. A quick search of the existing literature showed that outside of Richard Perrin’s early interest in the stone buildings of Mineral Point, and a few drawings of housing associated with Cornish immigrants produced by a Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) team in the 1930s, little was known about the southwestern mining region’s architecture. Focusing on the set of small houses in Wiota made available by Dana Duppler and others was ideal; they were relatively small buildings and therefore manageable in size and scale for the students, and yet appeared to have enough character to hold our attention. The larger, less threatened buildings in Mineral Point thus became the subject of the 2010 field school.

Originally known as “Hamilton’s Diggings,” Wiota was the site where William S. Hamilton, son of former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury and legendary ill-fated duelist Alexander Hamilton, opened one of the state’s first lead mines in 1828. Our initial research showed that the houses we would be drawing probably dated to the town’s initial boom period in the late 1830s and 1840s. Wiota, originally reputed to be a crossroads and Indian settlement, transformed into a mining “camp” with a series of tents and small log houses scattered over the uneven terrain surrounding the mine sites. The richness of the lead deposit, said to be the purest in the state, drew miners in from mines extending south into Illinois and Iowa along either side of the Mississippi River. People aiming to settle came mainly as families, so houses rather than bunkhouses or tenements appear to have been the main residential type.

By the mid-1830s Wiota was established as a linear village. A main street running roughly east-west formed the spine of the community (see Wiota map, page 2) and

WIOTA'S EARLY VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

houses were arranged along each side in a rather random fashion consistent with early land claims before lots were platted. Not until 1858 was a formal grid plat surveyed to the east on the highest ground at the site. Newspaper reports indicate that Wiota was “thriving” by the 1840s, and contained “seven stores, various shops, and two hotels.” As we worked, it became apparent that we needed to know more about how Wiota fit into the systemic nature of lead mining in the region: How was the lead mined and smelted? How was it transported to the Mississippi River? What markets existed for it? The Fort Hamilton site, local community history, and interviews helped us imagine how this system may have operated in the Wiota area, how it was spatially oriented, and what questions we might bring to further research.

Some demographic observations based on the 1850 census also framed our work in Wiota. The settlement of the lead mining region was generally from the south, in the area around Galena, Illinois, and the Mississippi River corridor. Miners moved up the Mississippi and then spread out to the north and east through northern Illinois and southwestern Wisconsin. Like the area’s indigenous populations, Wiota’s first Euro-American residents were American-born. Apparently the largest number came from the northeastern and mid-Atlantic states, principally New York and Pennsylvania. Southerners were also present, with a number of families coming from Virginia, North Carolina, and Kentucky. By 1850 there were 721 people in town living in 124 separate houses. Single-family houses were the rule, though several boarding house arrangements do appear (with single male occupants) and a good number of households contained boarders, who were usually male laborers of some kind, as was common among later immigrants up into the 20th century (Ralph Johnson KR interview). By 1850 there were sizeable contingents of both Irish

and Norwegian immigrants as well as a smattering of English. It is noteworthy that Cornish, long associated with Wisconsin lead mining, were among early miners in the Wiota area, but they were in a small minority and many moved on. It is also of note that mining made up only one facet of Wiota’s economy. In addition to the usual number of merchants and professionals (there were two doctors in 1850), farming was the principal occupation given in the 1850 census records, suggesting that many worked as “miner-farmers,” as historians have noted.

Fieldwork conducted in Wiota served as important evidence to elaborate on these stories in these written records. Despite the diversity of the community, which included Americans from nearly every state in the union as well as a healthy number of English, Irish, and after 1840, Norwegian immigrants and later, Swiss, our fieldwork revealed that the houses followed fairly closely the vernacular building tradition found throughout the Upper Midwest during the Antebellum Period. All are examples of a rectilinear system of building where house plans consist of one or two square or nearly square rooms. Such houses may be one, one-and-a-half, or two stories in height, and the gable roofs parallel or perpendicular to the community’s public space, which in Wiota was Main Street. Symmetry was at the time much admired as an aesthetic principle and Wiota’s builders achieved it by placing the front door between two windows in the usual “window-door-window” pattern. Service rooms were often attached to the rear (or side if the gable faced



Wahler House front elevation symmetry

WIOTA'S EARLY VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

forward, as in the Engebretson House), and in the largest, most prestigious, full two-story examples, a hallway or passage can be inserted in the middle to provide a degree of privacy for the inhabitants. In Wisconsin, as in other sections of the Midwest, stove flues rather than fireplaces appear to be standard in the smaller houses. In these examples, stovepipes run from the ground floor up through the attic or second story floor into a small brick flue that sits on a “shelf” supported by wooden posts.



Engebretson House gable front
PHOTO: Nate Millington

Torkelson and Engebretson houses are good examples of such buildings. Both are associated with Norwegian families later in their history, though the construction itself appears more in the American “frontier-style” than the more sophisticated kind found in Scandinavia. Rather than having tightly fit “grooved” logs and intricate corner notching, these houses have chinked walls and rough square or “V” notch corners. It appears that the logs were initially left exposed and then covered at a later date with either clapboard or board-and-batten siding. The other building method found in Wiota houses is a lightweight version of timber-frame construction.

In terms of their construction, Wiota houses may be considered typical of “first period” houses in the region (those dating to the time of initial Euro-American settlement). Written sources suggest that horizontal log construction was a favored early building method largely because timber was abundant and the technology rather uncomplicated. The

The Johnson and Wahler houses are built in this fashion. Walls consist of two-by-four inch studs mortised into top plate and ground sills, with slightly larger four-by-four inch corner posts—which are typical of timber framing where principal members at the corners and intermittently along the exterior walls provide structural support. The gaps between the studs appear to be empty, though locally there are examples of brick infilling being used as insulation. Again, clapboards were the preferred material for finished wall coverings.

Professor Carter concludes that the Wiota houses are significant in two main areas. First, they show how working-class families in the lead mining region lived in the first half of the nineteenth century. The houses average about 500 square feet in size on the ground floor. Including usual attic space, the number goes up to about 700 square feet of livable space. The rectilinear plans contain rooms of uncertain use, though traditionally on the ground floor you would find a living room, kitchen, and main bedroom, while upstairs there were extra bedrooms and workspaces. Small cottages like these would have been found during the early nineteenth century throughout the United States (both north and south), in Ireland and Cornwall, England, and in Norway. In the end they help us understand issues of class (and gender) more than those associated with ethnicity and national identity.

Second, like buildings found in most frontier areas, the Wiota houses exhibit an additive quality: as a family’s resources increased, so did the size of the dwelling. Both the Torkelson and Johnson houses began small and then grew considerably as new sections were added. The one-room Torkelson House got a rear frame kitchen ell. The Johnson House was unusual because it was originally only a single room wide but nevertheless had a real kitchen contained under a sloping shed roof. When the Johnson House was enlarged, the builder just added another set of rooms to the side, increasing considerably the size of the kitchen and giving the family separate downstairs living and sleeping rooms.

WIOTA'S EARLY VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

The Wahler House, meanwhile, seems curious, because even though it looks larger than the others, in fact it originally had only a single ground floor room, since the side room, called the “rough room,” was unfinished. Expansion in the Wahler House was to the rear and gave the family a “best” bedroom and a kitchen. The Wahler House is unusual in that it is said to have been partly “public,” with a tavern in the cellar; a door leading into the “rough room” from the east suggests that this room too might have been public; and some oral sources indicate that this may have been a “sleeping room” for boarders.

Again, the Engebretson House exhibits several stages of growth. As originally constructed, it had no real “social façade,” since the main door was located on the south and not facing the street. In gable-front houses, such side entrances are not uncommon, especially given the small size of the house. This door led into what was probably the original kitchen/living room, with a bedroom to the rear. A new kitchen was added to the side, which also had a new front-facing door. Additions, and the conservative retention of existing buildings, then, are very much part of the Wiota building tradition. Within such small houses, thus, we find families operating within limited interior spaces that included, downstairs, a living room, kitchen, and bedroom, and then upstairs sleeping rooms. Such was the rhythm of life for most working-class families in nineteenth-century America.

The Cooper House, in contrast, shows that “common” experience can only be understood by looking at more exceptional structures. To understand Wiota and how it works necessitates looking at a broader landscape that includes all sizes and scales of structures, as well as those constructed in later periods. The Cooper

House likely dates somewhat later than the small, nearby Wiota houses – probably to the early 1840s. Its brick building material suggests a degree of permanency on the landscape that the Wiota buildings did not have, perhaps because by the 1840s, permanent settlement was becoming more likely. The location of the Cooper House about a mile outside of Wiota suggests a largely agricultural function for its early occupants, as opposed to the mining preoccupations of Wiota’s earliest settlers. The Cooper House also had a degree of specialization in its domestic spaces that suggests affluence, at one level, and at another, reinforces that sense of permanence. It may have had a formal stair-hall on the first floor at one time (though this is now absent), a sign of ritualized and polite behavior appropriate for an aspiring middle class (and seen in nearby Mineral Point at this time). The rooms also exhibit a hierarchy of finish as one moves between the bedrooms at the front of the house to the rear. There is also specialization in the cooking spaces at the rear, including a built-in beehive oven in the downstairs back room.

Collectively, then, evidence from the buildings complicates our understanding of Wiota’s history and challenges us with further questions. The challenge, as with all fieldwork of this sort, is what to do with the evidence. For us, it continues to be a process of taking the data gathered and putting it in broader terms – taking it alongside the conventional histories of Wiota as well as putting it in the context of Upper Midwestern and “frontier” building traditions. Ultimately, then, it is an on-going process of synthesis that helps us draw conclusions, taking evidence from the building fabric and other forms of evidence, and bringing this together to help enrich the collective history of Wiota. (TC & AVA)

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

AT THE CROSSROADS

The Wahler House

Gabe Crilley, Susan Bostian Young, and Rebecca Wangard

Located on the northeast corner of Wiota's crossroads adjacent to the town's public and commercial "square" is a small building known locally as the Wahler House. The house, measuring 28 feet across its façade (and roughly the same on the side elevation), is set back on a low, open lot a considerable distance from the highway, and seems to align more with the North-South road axis. One-and-a-half stories in height, the house is constructed of timber frame and sided with clapboards. The slightly sagging roofline is off-parallel from the main street, Highway 78, and is bisected by a brick chimney flue. A walkway behind a bank of mailboxes leads back to a rear door along the eastern gable side, which serves today as the chief entry. An apparently original front door on the front



Front elevation and surrounding landscape
PHOTO: Nate Millington



Back elevation
PHOTO: Gabe Crilley



SOUTH ELEVATION



EAST ELEVATION

façade is slightly off-center, though windows have been placed to each side to create an overall balance—the impression of symmetry. Local tradition holds that for many years the building served as a store, telephone exchange, post office, tavern, and boarding house, and only later a single-family residence. The building's location within the clustering of shops that comprised the town's "business district" as well as a number of its distinctive architectural features suggest that sometime in its history it served a public function.

From the outside, the Wahler House appears to be a typical example of the hall-parlor residential building type found throughout North America during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The type is characterized by a basic two-room plan consisting of a square "hall," which functioned as a multi-purpose living room, dining room, and kitchen, and a smaller parlor, which was commonly used as a bedroom and not a formal sitting space. This parlor/bedroom is characteristically smaller, usually three-quarters or two-thirds the size of the hall. If possible, a kitchen wing was attached to the rear of the house during initial construction, though it was often the case that these rear service areas were added later after a family's resources increased.

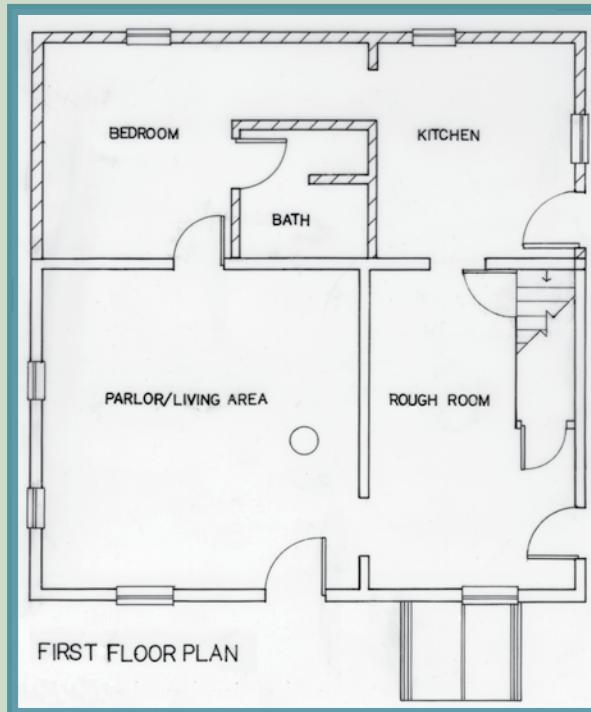
WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

AT THE CROSSROADS

The Wahler House

Gabe Crilley, Susan Bostian Young, and Rebecca Wangard

Closer inspection of the building reveals some interesting variations. For one, there is a large cellar door on the front that faces the highway, a curious placement because cellar entrances are customarily located unobtrusively to the side or rear. Also the hall is slightly larger than the normal pattern, and the “parlor” room smaller, making it unlikely that it was used as a bedroom. Another peculiarity is that the inside walls of the smaller room were never finished with plaster like the rest of the house. Local residents maintain that this space was called the “rough room,” and that it served as a sleeping



area for boarders. That the room was unheated (the stove was located in the main room), has its own entrance (on the east gable end of the house), and contains the staircase (leading both to the upstairs bedrooms and the basement cellar) suggests that it may have also been something of a passage, from which people entering from the outside could access other rooms in the house.

Similarly, several features of the larger room indicate that it was used for non-residential purposes. Normally, the wall separating the two downstairs rooms is aligned with the one on the upper floor. Here, however, to expand the larger room, it has been moved over several feet, and replaced with a post that helps support the upper floor and roof. Unless more room was needed, say for instance for a store space, there would have been no reason to go to such trouble. The presence of a wood paneled ceiling and “ghosting” on the walls where shelves were once attached all lend credence to the idea that the space was a store, or perhaps a small tavern. Town residents point out that the cellar, with its front entrance and whitewashed interior, was the tavern and this may be. Headroom in the cellar is not great—about 7 feet—so it would not have been a luxurious watering hole, in keeping with many a Wisconsin crossroads tavern serving workers after a day in the mines or fields.

The rear rooms containing a kitchen and bathroom are later additions. It could be that the house was originally built in the 1830s as a “public house” or tavern, and then converted, perhaps in the later part of the century, into a dwelling. Older Wiota area residents remember the building when it was a telephone exchange, when “the side door was used for customers to come in through and pay their bills,” recalls Gayle Monson (KR interview). Monson added that the couple who

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

AT THE CROSSROADS

The Wahler House

Gabe Crilley, Susan Bostian Young, and Rebecca Wangard

lived there and ran the phone switchboards, Lena and Chris Wahler, lived in a room in the back of the store (cf. BBH: 58-59). Moreover, the location of the Wahler House near the town “square” suggests it formed part of what could aptly be described as the village “business district.” The number, orientation and placement of the structures that surround the crossroads indicate that this was the site and epicenter of commercial, civic, and social activity in the village.

THE WAHLER HOUSE TEAM

The Wahler House team consisted of a very diverse group of highly motivated undergraduate students. Susan Bostian Young was working towards a Gender and Women’s Studies major. She came to the field school as part of her pursuance of a certificate in material culture. Susan has been researching women’s domestic spaces in the nineteenth century, so was very interested in exploring how this house functioned as a work site. Gabe Crilley took the course to complete his major in Geography. With little experience in material culture, Gabe took to the fieldwork with real passion, and found himself intrigued by the



Wahler House Team: Rebecca Wangard (standing), Susan Bostian Young, and Gabe Crilley (R)

relationship of the house to the landscape and also the collective memory of residents in Wiota. Rebecca Wangard had just completed her major in Geography and joined us in the field to nurture her longstanding interests in preservation and architectural history before she went on to graduate school in Museum Studies at SUNY-Oneonta (Cooperstown Graduate Program). Already familiar with dating buildings and historical research through classes and work at Wisconsin’s State Historic Preservation Office at the Wisconsin Historical Society, Rebecca wanted hands-on experience with drawing and learning what that could teach her about building research.



East elevation and main entrance with surrounding landscape
PHOTO: Gabe Crilley

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

AT THE CROSSROADS

The Knewstubb Store

Caitlin Boyle and Jaclyn Binder, with Adam Childers

The early twentieth century Knewstubb Store fronts the intersection of Highway 78 at the North-South Road at the heart of what was once a bustling intersection in Wiota. The store is a vestige of a formerly more diverse commercial landscape. Even in its abandoned state, the building, which is currently used for storage, stands as a reminder of the prosperity of Wiota as a commercial crossroads for a bustling agricultural landscape.



The Knewstubb Store on the southwest corner at Wiota's crossroads

The one-story frame building measures approximately 24 feet wide and 60 feet long. The one story structure is capped by a front-facing gable roof that measures about 20 feet from foundation to peak. Although many aspects of the structure have changed, the first floor façade layout of commercial shop windows flanking a central entry door remains relatively intact.

These features make the building representative of what architectural historian Richard Longstreth has called a “one-part commercial block”—a ubiquitous commercial building type built throughout the United States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Standing one story in height, such structures serve solely commercial functions because of their limited size, although the particular purpose could vary considerably. Indeed,



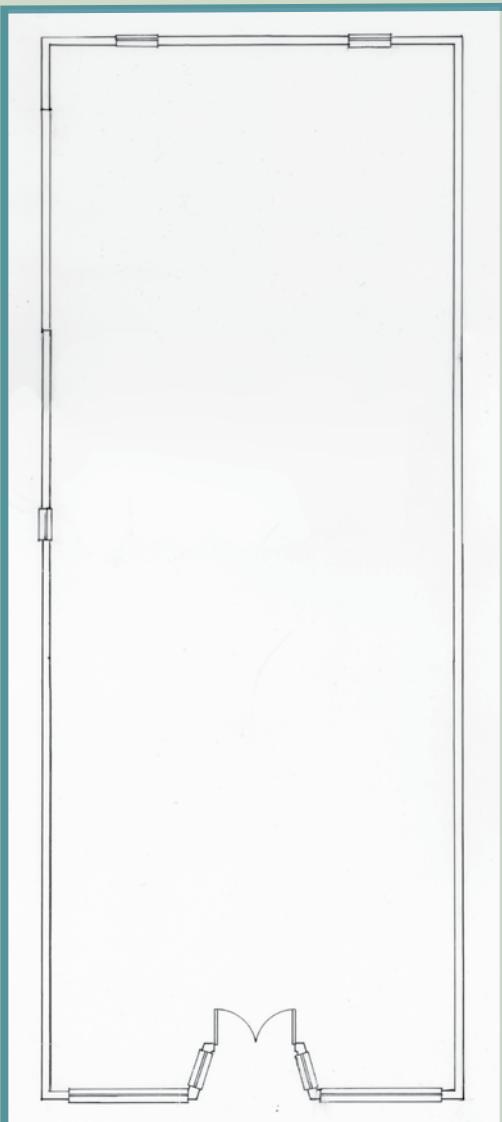
Reconstructed front gable elevation



Current front gable elevation

the Knewstubb Store served multiple functions across its history. Built during the first decade of the twentieth century, it originally was used as a general store for the community. Over time, it also functioned as a jewelry store and an implement shop. Historic photographs and newspaper clippings feature the building as a central facet of the Wiota community, belying its contemporary appearance where it seems a strange isolated anomaly within a cluster of residences.

Local resident Dorothy Johnson’s testimony confirms the local importance of the Knewstubb location at the intersection during her father Edward Johnson’s boyhood in the late 1800s, as “they used to play a lot of croquet in Wiota, I guess, when he was a young boy, in that lot down there by the Knewstubb Store. And, that was a Sunday afternoon pastime, he said.” She also confirms the competition



Floor plan

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

AT THE CROSSROADS

The Knewstubb Store

Caitlin Boyle and Jaclyn Binder, with Adam Childers

that local stores like Knewstubb's experienced from bigger ones in adjacent larger towns, even when they offered services that lured in auto travelers:

Well, I think, like for grocery stores, they couldn't compete with the big [companies] . . . and people would just buy here what they needed for today. . . and go to Monroe to A&P or whatever, Kroger's or something like that, to buy all their groceries, and they had to charge more.

I think . . . the one little store that we had, the last people that had it had a lunch counter in there that was popular, a lot of people if they were going through Wiota, they'd stop there for coffee, and pie, she had home-made pie, and that was after I retired . . . so it was sometime in the early '90s that that store probably closed. But after that couple was no longer there, I don't think people could afford to run a business there. (WLV Interview)

THE KNEWSTUBB STORE TEAM

This enterprising team of two graduate students, Jaclyn Binder and Caitlyn Boyle, was the most flexible of our teams. Initially, they began working on a large, imposing Greek Revival house in Wiota before Professor Carter advised them to move on to the Knewstubb Store, which he felt had more of its original historic



(L-R) Caitlin, Anna, Adam, and Jaclyn confer over Knewstubb measuring

fabric intact. This suited the two women, who both had an interest in commercial architecture. Caitlin was then moving into her third year of graduate study at UW-Milwaukee, where she studies commercial landscapes of America's cities. Jaclyn, meanwhile, was headed for her second year of a master's program in Art History at UW-Madison. Although focused on classical archaeology, Jaci has an abiding interest in historic preservation and the cultural landscape of nineteenth century American buildings in towns in the Upper Midwest, and thus the store fit their interests perfectly.

The main challenge for this team lay in drafting itself. Although both students had experience with drafting, the nuances of the details on the commercial storefront—and how to render this in elevation—left them at times baffled. They struggled with how to render the three dimensional moldings on the door in two dimensions and at such a small scale. With the assistance of Tom Carter and Adam Childers, an undergraduate Real Estate student and a drafting veteran who joined us for several days in the field, they worked through these challenges to produce a nice set of drawings. Their other challenge, as a team, lay with developing research questions around their building. At one level, the store presented itself as straightforward—a vestige of a past commercial landscape. However, as the team proceeded through historical documentation, they discovered more and more evidence of the changing uses of the store and where it fit within the on-going broader patterns of the town.



Turn of the century photo of the Knewstubb Store

PHOTO: Courtesy of Dorothy Johnson

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

MAIN STREET UP FROM THE CROSSROADS

The Johnson House

Dee Finnegan, Tom Hopfensperger, and Ye-Gee Kwon

The Johnson House is located centrally in Wiota at 6926 Highway 78, just up the hill to the east of the crossroads. It sits up from this small town's primary artery, on the north side of the road, facing south, surrounded by a large, grassy lot and other sparsely placed residential buildings that give a rural, open feel to the village neighborhood. A few large specimen trees offer shade—at least one planted by Ralph Johnson's mother and his son over 50 years ago—while more trees and mid-story shrubs define the back property line. Wild rose bushes and daylilies are planted along the house's foundation. At one time a barn, outhouse, and well shared the lot, as did a large vegetable garden where Ralph Johnson's family grew potatoes, tomatoes, cabbage, radishes, carrots, beets, and “everything else.”



Johnson House, front elevation from Main Street (Highway 78)



SOUTHEAST ELEVATION

Dana Duppler estimates that the Johnson House was constructed in the 1830s and updated later with additions. The timber-framed house appears from the outside to be a one-and-one-half story dwelling with a rear sloping roofline. Its “saltbox” appearance suggests two smallish rooms over four, as in a saltbox style common to New England, but we suspect that the expansion of the house “accidentally” resulted in this roof shape. Whereas there are two rooms upstairs, downstairs there are only three. The two on the west side (bedroom, north; living area, south) are thought to have been built first in an original unit, with a central front door. The large room on the east side (kitchen) was built as an adjoining unit, in a first addition. Questions remain as to whether the addition off the back, which provides a back entry and “cloak room,” “wash room,” and pantry, was integral to each unit, or built separately from them. Stairs to the upstairs rise between the two units, yet there is evidence of a prior stairway in the northeast corner of the western upstairs room. In this room a stove pipe collar is also built into the floor which we conjecture linked the heating stove in the living room, perhaps the “Round Oak wood burning stove” that Ralph Johnson mentions, to a shelf chimney as in the Engebretson House. There are also signs of another chimney shelf for the wood-fired cookstove, with reservoir, in the kitchen.

The main structure approximately measures 23 feet by 27 feet on the first floor with the shorter side facing the street (south), and the longer gable elevations and sides perpendicular to the street (east and west). A rough basement lies underneath



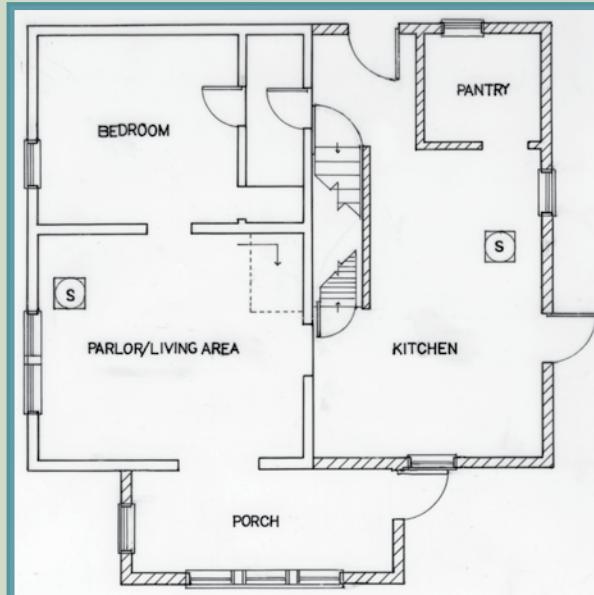
NORTHEAST ELEVATION

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

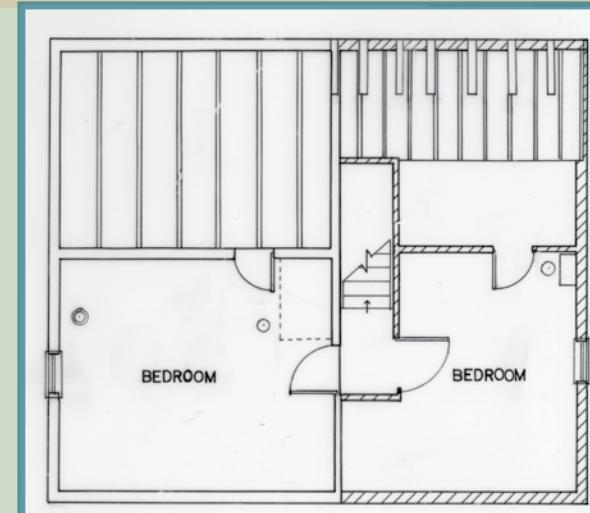
MAIN STREET UP FROM THE CROSSROADS

The Johnson House

Dee Finnegan, Tom Hopfensperger, and Ye-Gee Kwon



First floor plan



Second floor plan

with a stone foundation and dirt floor accessible from exterior cellar stairs on the west side, and from steps down from the first floor; split logs support the floors above. A 6 feet by 15 feet enclosed porch extension is attached to the front of the house, with an apparent front entry on its short, east side that was rarely used. Currently, the main entry to the house is through the back (north side) on the left (east), where there still is a cistern pump set on a concrete slab.



Ye-Gee Kwon and Tom Hopfensperger measure west side of house above cellar door

Covered with layers and layers of siding, from wood to asphalt, the house makes “a good study house . . . with nothing on the outside very apparent,” according to Tom Carter.

THE JOHNSON HOUSE TEAM

The adventurous and out-going Johnson House team remarkably complemented our one study house where a long-time former resident, Ralph Johnson, was readily available to interpret its former social life. Dee Finnegan, who was completing an undergraduate design degree in Landscape Architecture at UW-Madison, and continuing on in Landscape’s master’s program, was eager to experience fieldwork where she could apply seasoned skills as a news videographer and photographer. Tom Hopfensperger, who was also completing his undergraduate degree at UW-Madison but in Communication Arts, was a veteran radio programmer and interviewer; he was intrigued to learn about Folklore through fieldwork. Ye-Gee Kwon, a master’s student in Art History at UW-Madison familiar with the study of folk architecture, hoped to learn the documentary process of measuring and drawing a building in the field.

During the measuring and drawing phase of the investigation, Dee and Tom generally took the overall measurements, while Ye-Gee recorded the dimensions, drew the plans and details, and completed the finished pencil drawings back in Madison. With their experience in commercial communications, Dee and Tom were



Johnson House Team: Tom Hopfensperger (top), Ye-Gee Kwon (center), Dee Finnegan (R)
PHOTO: Tom Carter

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

MAIN STREET UP FROM THE CROSSROADS

The Johnson House

Dee Finnegan, Tom Hopfensperger, and Ye-Gee Kwon



heavily involved in documenting Ralph and Helen Johnson's experiences with the building through video, still photography, and sound recordings. Dee additionally scanned relevant historic documents, especially from Dorothy Johnson, while Tom and Ye-Gee interviewed the various Johnsons and organized materials. As a consequence, the team was able to compare the current state of the

house and Wiota's related "downtown" context with depictions from several different time periods, in a classic cultural landscape historical research approach.

Dee and Tom also were active in interviewing and recording images of other Wiota locations and residents, including Cottonwood Dairy and its owners, and Dee in particular photographed many of the Field School teams, buildings, their documentary progressions, Wiota environs, and other Field School activities. In turn, back in Madison, while Ye-Gee worked on drawings, Tom and Dee indexed their interviews and various recordings, and edited video, stills, and sound into a short DVD production about Wiota's history based on class findings. Many of the documentary materials they copied and recorded aided other Field School researchers as they completed their building research and reports.



West bedroom upstairs in the Johnson House

A Johnson Social Center for 100 Years

The Johnson House's position, in the heart of the community, played an important social role for its occupants, which is reflected in our recent interviews with past inhabitants. Present Wiota residents Ralph Johnson and Dorothy Johnson confirm that the residence housed several large, sociable families from before 1899 when Dorothy's great-grandmother Berte purchased it from John Colling[s]worth, up into the 1950s when Ralph married. Ralph and Dorothy are members of unrelated Norwegian Johnson immigrant families now five, six, and even seven generations deep here. Card-playing was a common pastime over the years, from back when the Milbo[u]rn family lived in the house and lost their cow to the Collingsworths over a card game, up into the late 1930s when Dorothy and her sisters played cards with Ralph's sisters when they were in high school together. During Dorothy's great-grandmother's and grandparents' tenure in the house (1899-1914), nine children eventually resided there with their parents (there were seven inhabitants until 1905, four more by 1912). After Ralph's family moved in in 1914, eventually eleven children lived there with their parents. So dense was the habitation, Ralph reports that childhood diseases would quickly sweep through the family when they hit, and his mother kept a stack of quarantine signs handy to post when they did. Besides family members, Ralph's family at one time also accommodated his blacksmith father's apprentice, and later, when Ralph was building his own house next door, his carpenter enjoyed a noon meal at his mother's.

By today's standards, the c. 900 square foot usable space of this residence is small, even for a family of four. Certainly the 7+ foot ceiling height and shorter door lin-

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

MAIN STREET UP FROM THE CROSSROADS

A Johnson Social Center for 100 Years

tels are diminutive. The lower door lintels, however, allowed rambunctious boys to swing from them—or crack their heads on them, as Ralph reports—and low ceilings contributed to less space to heat in winter. But even in winter-time, inhabitants were often outside, fetching water, chopping wood, visiting the outhouse, hanging out laundry, or getting soaked sledding, skiing, and playing in the snow.

Ralph Johnson's walk-through interview with the Johnson House Team (VR) about his experiences in the house revealed how his family used and expanded the house during his childhood, roughly 1930-50, when water still had to be brought inside from the cistern and well, and heat generated by wood stoves. He began in the pantry in the northeastern back corner, which he claims his dad walled in from its original shed construction off the back. Besides storage for dishes, ingredients, medicines, and fresh water fetched from outside, the space afforded an interior wash room for dishes, before plumbing was added (after 1949; BBH: 65). The relatively large, open kitchen-dining area was where he remembered his mother preparing generous batches of lefse, the Norwegian delicacy, standing for hours over the wood cookstove, finishing 40 to 50 of the flatbreads before escaping the kitchen in exhaustion. Ralph's mother used a three-burner kerosene stove for summer cooking—and lighting sparklers on 4th



Cistern pump outside northeast corner

of July—in the back entry area. The family also rolled the One Minute ringer washing machine beside the wood cookstove reservoir on Sunday nights to warm up cistern water for Monday's laundry. Through the door to the cellar in this room, his older sisters threatened to toss him to the “booger man” when Ralph did not eat all the food he took for meals. The steep steps required backing down, and down there, milk was kept cool in a two-gallon crock on the “rock floor.” Ralph carved his initials into the rock wall down there.



Cellar steps

Moving into the western half of the downstairs, Ralph talked about how the south-western room was used as drying space around the wood heating stove for wet winter clothes, but also as general social space. He particularly recalled listening to radio shows like “Captain Midnight” and “Sky King” (once the house received electricity after 1927; BBH: 61) in the front porch area that his dad had walled in for better heat retention—no doubt light too—in the winter. This enclosed porch also housed the sewing machine and a writing desk. Before the porch became interior space, he recalled moving a mattress out where he and siblings could lie and enjoy the breeze during the summer. Back in the northwest room, Ralph as a younger child shared one bed with up to three other siblings, while his parents shared another—and there was still room for a couple of dressers and a linen chest.

Winding up the narrow steps between the southwest and southeast rooms to the

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

MAIN STREET UP FROM THE CROSSROADS

A Johnson Social Center for 100 Years

second floor where older children (mostly Ralph's seven sisters) slept, worn steps and paint along the west side show uneven use and confirm that the eastern third of the steps served as storage for irons and table leaves. One room upstairs was for boys, the other for girls, as is still common in large families. Furnishings included beds—kept level from the sloping floor in the eastern room with blocks—trunks, orange crates converted with wallpaper and curtains for shelves, and hooks for hanging clothes on the walls and backs of the doors. The “cubbyhole” storage space under the back eaves in the eastern room housed old clothes put to use as winter julebukking costumery in the Norwegian “ragamuffin” mumming tradition, while hooks over the windows revealed where the family stretched two clothes lines across the entire upstairs for drying wash in the winter after it had frozen first on outdoor lines.

Besides revealing the intimate social and functional relationships in this interior cultural landscape, Ralph's testimony also tells how proximate the house was to the outer, public, downtown social spaces of his youth. In the wide open lot west of the Johnson House, not 30 feet from the residence, rested the vibrant Monson-Ronnerud establishment (1925-85, BBH: 60-61), a multi-function building with apartments and rooms to let upstairs, a restaurant, grocery, creamery, or tavern



Worn steps reveal patterns of use

downstairs at various times, a barber shop, and a pool hall-performance space, whether for old-time fiddle playing and social dancing, touring vaudeville acts, or movies. In a town where July 4 is the biggest public celebration of the year, the festivities were so raucous on the day Ralph was born at home in 1930, his father had to ask the “pretty lively bunch down there . . . to kinda be a little more quiet ‘cause they had a new baby up there in that house.” (TH) As Ralph grew up, he so constantly ran across the busy downtown Main Street to his dad's blacksmith shop at another multipurpose spot, the Mayne Hotel (c. 1845-1950, BBH: 43-44; dance hall, barber shop, Modern Woodsmen of America Insurance Company, KR), his parents took out a youth life insurance policy on him!

While Wiota today may not seem quite as bustling, our interviews outside the Johnson House and Ralph's home next door recorded plenty of truck and farm equipment regularly heading out of town, only to return, sometimes stopping by the machine shop at the crossroads en route to the cheese factory or local farms. Ralph's dad had built the shop to replace his Mayne Hotel blacksmith shop. The July 4th celebrations last over three days still today and draw former and contemporary residents alike to the community homecoming, with plenty of fireworks and a big parade that takes over Main Street. The Johnson House is still right in the center of it all, although Ralph's brother Herb was the last Johnson, and the last person, to live there until he passed away in 2003. The big multipurpose social and business buildings and their boisterous activities are mostly gone too. (JCG)



K Machine Shop viewed from Wahler House across Highway 78
PHOTO: Gabe Crilley

WIOTA BUILDINGS & STUDENT TEAMS

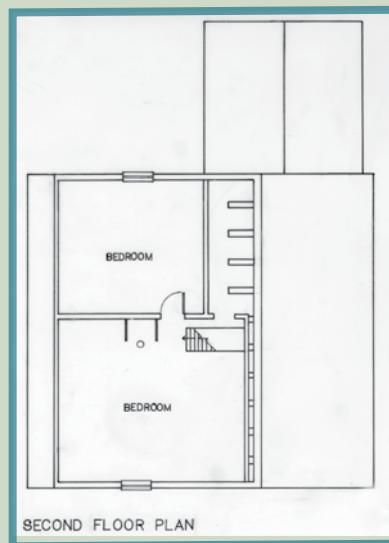
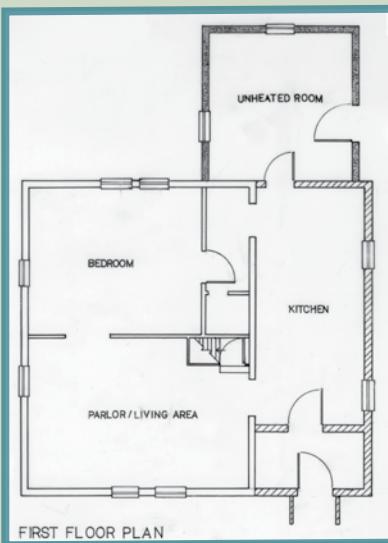
MAIN STREET UP FROM THE CROSSROADS

The Engebretson House

April Braden, Travis Olson, and Katie Ryan

The Engebretson House is located on the north side of Highway 78, just east of Wiota's crossroads. Facing south at 6886, it sits up from the highway on a large, flat, sparsely landscaped open lot. Its poplar log and frame construction suggests the auspicious beginnings of this small town in the lead region's mining boom in the early 1800s. Since "the house hasn't really changed that much" over time, as local resident Gayle Monson says, it has remained frozen in time, reflecting a frugal, "conservationist" approach to modernization, and offering historic preservationists a fascinating subject of study.

The original portion of the house is a rectangular building, one-and-a-half stories tall with a front-gabled roof. To the east of the original structure is a one room



shed addition which formally housed the kitchen and served as the front entry. A second addition was added to the back (north) facade of the house. It is the only part of the structure that sits on a full foundation, of cement.

The present owner, Ralph

Johnson, says this "shanty" addition had been added before his time (1930s). The house has a small hand-dug root cellar, no larger than 6 foot by 6 foot, located under the southwest quadrant of the house. Johnson filled in a soft water cistern that was located outside, near the house. He noted that the house never had any plumbing.

The original house features log construction while the first and second additions were both built using a frame method. The entire house was coated in wood siding to protect the structure underneath; Johnsons now keep the structure painted.

The house has several double-hung windows that seem to be original to the time of construction. After he purchased the house from Julia Fields Engebretson in 1979,



Front gable elevation faces Highway 78
PHOTO: April Braden



SOUTH ELEVATION

Johnson removed the central brick shelf chimney, above the roofline. The chimney had risen only from the second story, and a stove pipe formerly passed through the floor to a heating stove in the downstairs living area; Engebretson had heated with an oil burner instead of the original wood stove. Johnson roofed over the opening, and has roofed the house three times since. He also tried

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

MAIN STREET UP FROM THE CROSSROADS

The Engebretson House

April Braden, Travis Olson, and Katie Ryan



to shore up the roofline, which sags from a deteriorating sill over no foundation.

The layout of the original structure consisted of four rooms, two upstairs, and two down. On the ground floor the front room (south) was used as a living area and the back room (north) was used as a bedroom. The two upstairs rooms were used as sleeping areas. The first addition functioned as a kitchen and the second unheated addition was used mainly for storage—Johnson says that Engebretson used a small trash burner there. Since they bought it, Helen and Ralph Johnson use the building for storage.

Local lore has it that the house, built circa 1830, was constructed for a blacksmith by the town's founder, William S. Hamilton. While we have not yet found evidence



to support or refute this claim, we have learned from land and census records, and the testimony of present owners and community residents, that the house was occupied by members of the Andrew and Anna Fields family for around 100 years, since at least 1875; Anna happens to have been Ralph Johnson's great aunt on his father's side, and she "kept school" in Wiota. During Andrew's tenure in the home, he took on several occupations from stone mason to auto salesman. His daughter Julia later married Willis Engebretson and raised her family of four boys in the house, giving the structure its current name.

After further study of Wiota's history, one notices that the Engebretson House is emblematic of the town's rise and fall. The lack of foundation denotes a quick construction and ephemeral purpose typical of a mining boom, but its one-and-a-half stories suggest that the original builder anticipated a great deal of wealth to be made, and chose to show the anticipated wealth in a larger building. Much like the town, the house has endured, remaining useful long after the dreams of prosperity from lead faded.

THE ENGBRETSON HOUSE “MACGYVER TEAM”

The Engebretson House team represented a diverse group of students whose interests ranged across many fields. April Braden is a graduate student from Loyola University (Chicago), where she is pursuing a Master's degree in History. She came to



WIOTA BUILDINGS & STUDENT TEAMS

MAIN STREET UP FROM THE CROSSROADS

The Engebretson House

April Braden, Travis Olson, and Katie Ryan



Nate, Katie, and Travis measuring inside Engebretson House
PHOTO: April Braden

new passion for him. For Katie Ryan, the Field School was her last class to complete her undergraduate degree in Communication Arts. She brought energy, interest and experience in interviewing people, and many questions about Wiota's history, to documenting the house and the greater community's social and commercial life.



Upstairs room, south, finished with boards
PHOTO: April Braden

the Field School eager to pursue her long-time interest in material culture, which was not part of her graduate program. Travis Olson, meanwhile, was an undergraduate with a diverse set of interests. A triple major (Psychology, Art History, and Theater and Drama), Travis came to the Field School eager to apply his drafting knowledge from set design to vernacular architecture, which had recently become a



North elevation, showing back addition
PHOTO: April Braden

This team gelled exceptionally well, a fortunate feat because of the particular challenges this building posed. It was, quite literally, sinking into the ground, standing on no foundation. The team was particularly resourceful and creative in trying to find "level lines" from which to get their measurements. In fact they re-created the fuller measuring system, using a vertical besides a horizontal datum, followed by

professional delineators in Europe and for the Historic American Buildings Survey and Historic American Engineering Record (HABS and HAER). Once they arrived at this system, they worked speedily and efficiently to everyone's amazement, producing a beautiful set of field notes that Professor Carter said were amongst the best he'd seen. This team also struggled to maneuver around in the interior of their building, which was used for storage. Once again, this "MacGyver" team, as they dubbed themselves, rose to the challenge. They accomplished this all while gathering evidence from local residents of Wiota, who stopped by to chat, especially with Katie, about the history of the building. Travis excelled in details of the house, especially the "shelf chimneys," which he drew while Katie and April were busy gathering archival and oral historical evidence.



Pipe collar decoration
PHOTO: April Braden

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

OFF MAIN STREET

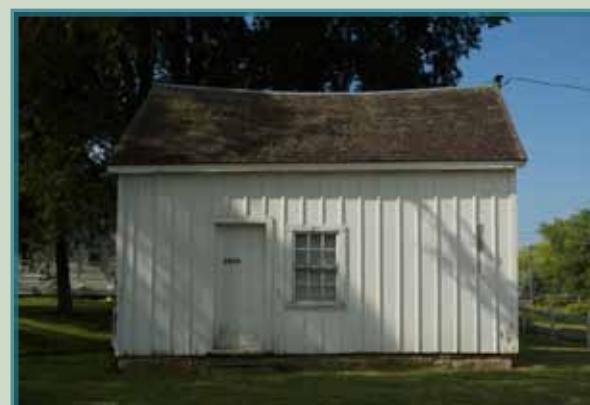
The Torkelson House

Adam Mandelman, Nate Millington, and Sigrid Peterson



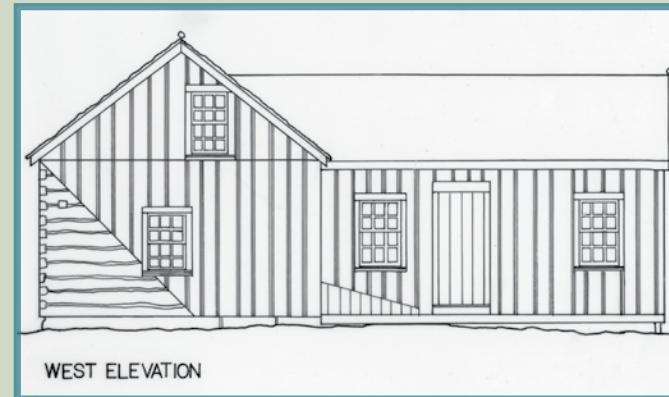
West elevation showing extension (R)
PHOTO: Adam Mandelman

Off-parallel to the street, the house is a one-and-a-half story side-gabled structure. A one-story extension extends from its south side, giving the overall structure an L shape. The original structure, built prior to the extension, measures roughly 20 feet long by 16 feet wide, and 16 feet high from the foundation to the peak of the roof. The extension is approximately 15 feet wide by 20 feet long, with a 13.9 foot expanse between foundation and peak of the roof; a porch extends along the west side. Walls of



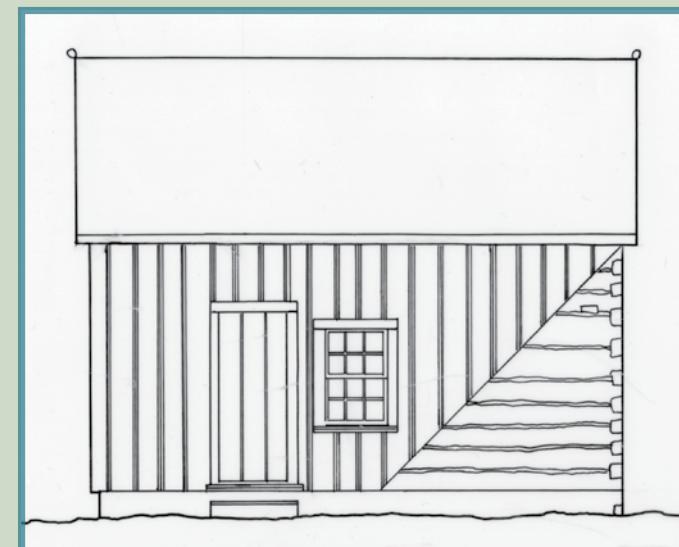
Front elevation (north)
PHOTO: Adam Mandelman

The Torkelson House lies on Park Street, one street north of Wiota's main street, Highway 78. Just west of the Recreation Park, the house rests on the south side of Park, facing north. Its open lawn is separated by a rail fence from a mowed field to the west, by a neighbor's garage at the back, and from neighbors on the east by mature shade trees.



Given the harsh regional climatic conditions, it is reasonable to speculate that this siding actually aided in the preservation of the structure over time, albeit accidentally. Evidence that Dana Duppler has reviewed suggests that the house was built in the 1820s or 1830s.

Stepping inside the Torkelson House, our team could see that the interior is divided into the original structure and the extension. The original structure presently is a one-room rectangular space with a staircase on its eastern side. The stairs ascend to a loft that is also open the full length of the building. Early timbers are exposed as a result of recent renovations; otherwise the house is decorated by its current occupants.



Front elevation (north), showing log structure underneath

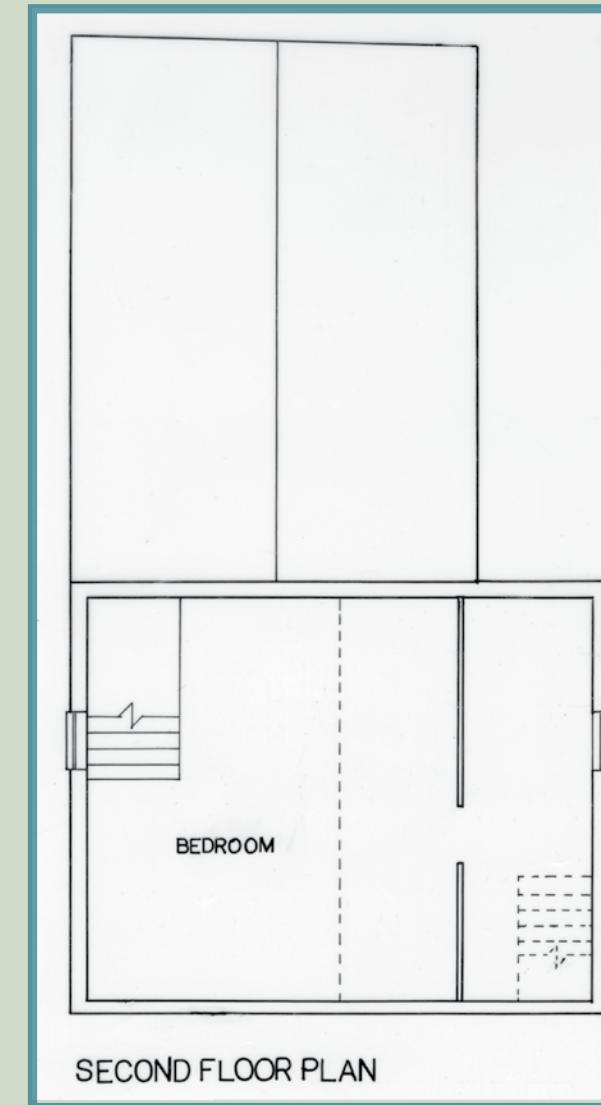
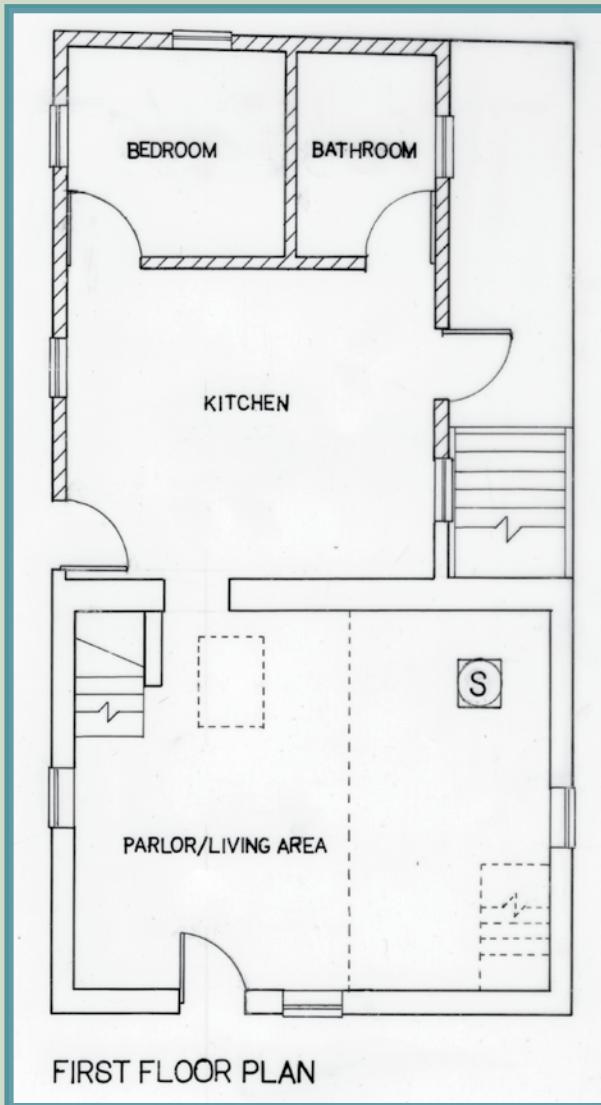
the earlier structure are built of roughly hewn square logs that Dana Duppler says are of poplar. They are corner-notched using an alternating tier square notching technique. Currently the house is sheathed in board and battens that are painted white; the decorative battens have been placed at eleven-inch intervals.

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

OFF MAIN STREET

The Torkelson House

Adam Mandelman, Nate Millington and Sigrid Peterson



The Torkelson House today provides housing for three of Cottonwood Dairy's Latino employees, while the Lead Region Historic Trust manages the house and property. Thus this house illustrates a substantial piece of the region's immigrant and labor history, and unites a distinct set of Wiota narratives. It moves from the free enterprise lead mining boom of the early 1800s to the overlapping rise of agriculture and European immigrant settlement that became exclusively prominent after 1860. Recognized and conserved as a historic property that records Wiota's early histories, the house continued into the rise of dairy farming and subsequent agricultural restructuring from the late twentieth century through today, where now it houses new immigrant workers.

We view the present use of the Torkelson House as evidence of an ever-changing rural Wisconsin, with a dairy industry that has relied on new immigrant workers during several periods of history. Today, as expanding dairy footprints and new immigrant workers alter the cultural contours of an older immigrant landscape, the trends raise important questions about cultural identity in the context of changing relationships between city and country, and about how we, as preservationists, vernacular historians, and folklorists, commemorate everyday spaces without stripping them of their succession of vernacular identities through time.

TORKELSON HOUSE TEAM

The Torkelson House team consisted of three graduate students in UW-Madison's Geography



*Nate Millington, Adam Mandelman, and Sigrid Peterson
PHOTO: Tom Carter*

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

OFF MAIN STREET

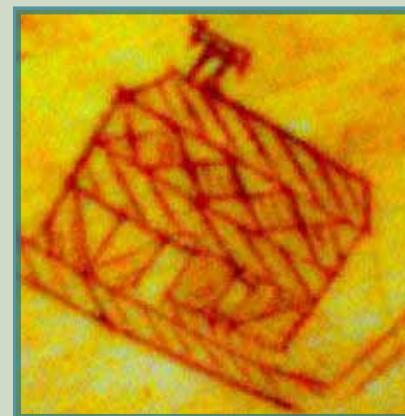
The Torkelson House

Adam Mandelman, Nate Millington and Sigrid Peterson

Department. Adam Mandelman was then readying for his third year of graduate study working towards a Ph.D. His research interests lay with cultural heritage landscapes, and he plans to write a dissertation on the Mississippi River corridor.

Hailing from Virginia, Nate Millington was working towards his Master's in Geography. Nate's research focuses on preservation and historical memory in Detroit. Sigrid Peterson worked for several years as a planner in New York City before returning to graduate school, where she is now working towards her Master's on New York City perceptions of rural organic farmers.

The diverse interests of this group, their background in geography, and their focus on landscape questions, made them fascinating to watch as they wrestled with teasing out questions the Torkelson House raised. For them, the connections of this house with the broader landscape—physical as well as cultural—largely drove their investigative process. Of particular interest was how the Torkelson House fit into the shifting labor landscape. They spoke with present



*Suggestive log cabin sketch on William S. Hamilton's powder-horn
PHOTO: Courtesy of Lead Region Historic Trust*

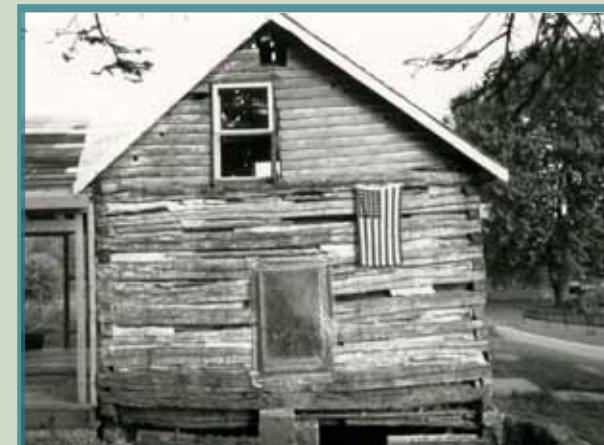


*View of east end of loft, likely from when Dupper began restoring it in the 1980s
PHOTO: Courtesy of Lead Region Historic Trust*



*View of earlier interior log wall
PHOTO: Courtesy of Lead Region Historic Trust*

Latino workers occupying the structure, and contemplated how changes to this house may relate to the changing work force. The team also explored more conceptual questions related to methodology—and how the study of the “micro” (the single artifact) related to broader “macro” questions of that elusive thing we call culture. In the end, the team seemed content to realize that fieldwork of this sort has great utility for geographers and landscape historians since it raises questions that often remain inaccessible through the written record.



*East elevation exterior exposed, showing log construction and corner-notching
PHOTO: Courtesy of Lead Region Historic Trust*

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

NEAR TOWN

The Cooper House on Spring Brook Road

Jaclyn Binder, Caitlin Boyle, Travis Olson, Gabe Crilley, Susan Bostian Young, Nate Millington, Adam Mandelman, Rebecca Wangard, and Tom Carter



Cooper's dairy sign
PHOTO: Janet Gilmore

The Cooper House stands about a mile northeast of Wio-ta, at 6018 Spring Brook Road, said to be a former stagecoach route.

Currently owned by Bob and Pat Cooper, the imposing

brick house faces due south and sits approximately 50 yards from the edge of the road while banked partially into a slope to the west. While the house is currently unoccupied, it is situated on a contemporary Holstein farm that also includes the Cooper family's current residence, built a few years ago, and numerous dairy farm outbuildings of varied vintages.

The Cooper House is two-and-one-half stories tall. It is built of brick, laid out in five-course common bond. Although altered on the first floor, the main section



Cooper House, east elevation as teams measure and draw
PHOTO: Janet Gilmore



East elevation

of the house was likely two rooms wide (with a central hallway) and two rooms deep. A rear kitchen contains an original (or very early) bake oven. The second floor plan and room details are more intact. The main section of the second floor contained four rooms—two with ornate mantelpieces of black walnut. One of the mantels in the front room is very highly finished, suggesting it may have served as the formal parlor. Original two panel doors, also of black walnut, also survive on the second floor. The attic consists of two small rooms, and seems to have been used for storage. Of interest in the attic, however, is evidence of original roof rafters and also changes made to the front two-story porch, likely rebuilt during the 1920s.

The Cooper House was most likely constructed in the late 1830s or early 1840s. Local residents believe that it once functioned as a stagecoach inn but there is not enough evidence yet to confirm or deny this. Nevertheless, the size of



Beehive oven
PHOTO: Jaclyn Binder



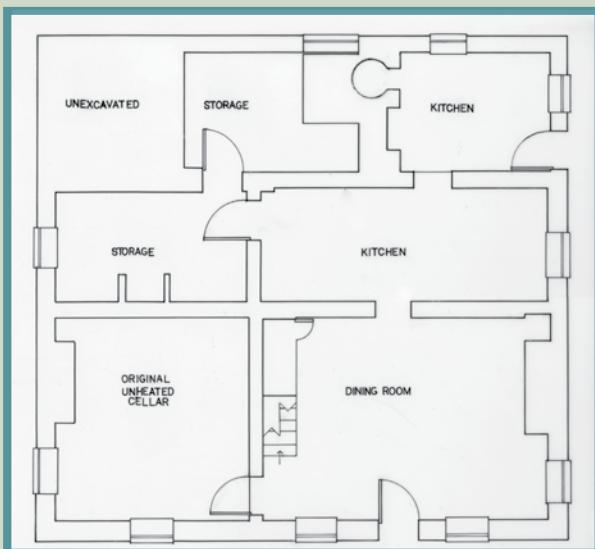
Historic east view of farm
PHOTO: Courtesy of Bob and Pat Cooper

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

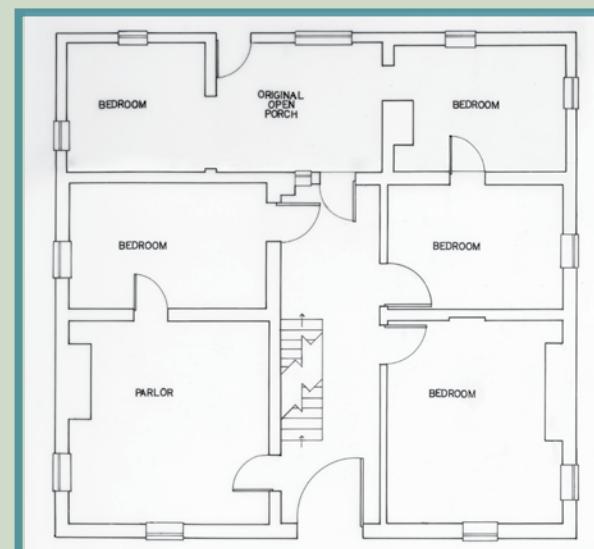
NEAR TOWN

The Cooper House on Spring Brook Road

Jaclyn Binder, Caitlin Boyle, Travis Olson, Gabe Crilley, Susan Bostian Young, Nate Millington, Adam Mandelman, Rebecca Wangard, and Tom Carter



First floor plan



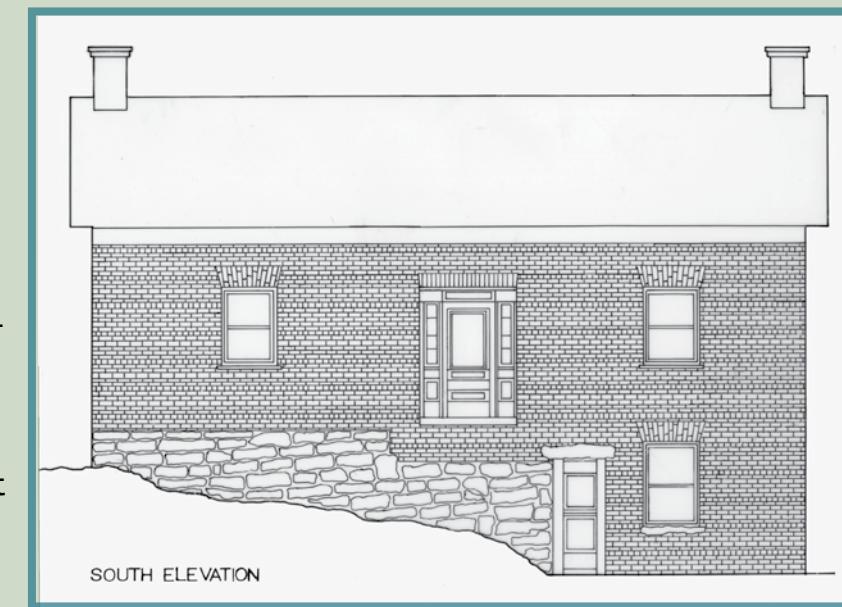
Second floor plan

the building and quality of construction and materials cause this building to stand out amongst the smaller contemporary buildings in nearby Wiota as a symbol of settlement, permanence, social importance, and wealth. It also is distinguished from other historic farmhouses lining Spring Brook Road in its early date, its large size, and the fact it was built of brick (most of the other historic houses are of log or frame construction).

The team's interest in the Cooper House largely stemmed from the mysteries the house's building fabric presented to us. We were interested in the large, two-story porch, for example, which looks like a curiously southern feature in a northern climate. Although

it was determined this porch dates to the 1920s, an early door on the second floor to a balcony suggests that something like this was probably built early in the dwelling's construction. Another mystery lay in trying to decode a section of stone on the westernmost end of the house. The team determined (after much debate) that this was "banked" into the hill more than it appears to be now. Thus the westernmost front room on the ground floor, now unexcavated, was likely a cold storage room at one point. This raised questions about the function of rooms—on the first and second floor—and led to the team nearly concluding that the formal parlor was likely on the second floor (the mantelpiece confirming this). Other questions the house raised related to an in-filled porch on the second floor; the relationship of the house to the rest of the farm landscape (no original outbuildings remain); and how some of the back second floor rooms were heated.

Because of its size and level of detail, the Cooper House was a good project for the majority of Field School attendees to cooperate in documenting, after they completed their work in Wiota. On the first day, two teams began measuring and drawing plans. Jaclyn Binder, Caitlin Boyle, and Travis Olson worked on the first floor, with Caitlin focusing additionally on the



SOUTH ELEVATION

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

NEAR TOWN

The Cooper House on Spring Brook Road

Jaclyn Binder, Caitlin Boyle, Travis Olson, Gabe Crilley, Susan Bostian Young, Nate Millington, Adam Mandelman, Rebecca Wangard, and Tom Carter

two-panel and other doors throughout the house, Jaclyn investigating details of the back kitchen and understory that is built into the hill, and Travis recording mantelpiece details. The second team of Gabe Crilley, Susan Bostian Young, and Rebecca Wangard worked on the second floor, with Gabe and Rebecca focusing on the floor

plan and Susan on one of the mantels. On the second day, Tom Carter joined Caitlin, Gabe, Travis, and Susan, as well as Adam Mandelman and Nate Millington, as they made elevations of the house's exterior. Janet Gilmore and Dee Finnegan photographed the building, site, and process, while Jaclyn revisited later for another round of photography. Jaclyn drew the final pencil drafts and ink-on-mylar drawings for the entire structure and prepared the initial summary description on which this one is based.



Gabe Crilley measuring Cooper House east elevation
PHOTO: Nate Millington



Front elevation from Spring Brook Road (south)
PHOTO: Jaclyn Binder

COOPER HOUSE TEAMWORK

Because this house was taken up several days into the Field School, the students brought a new confidence with them to this project. With minimal guidance from the faculty, the two students originally assigned to this house, Caitlyn Boyle and Jaclyn Binder, laid out the footprint and commenced drawing floor plans of the first and second floor. They faced a lot of challenges with measuring and, for several hours, were "two feet off" on the first floor until they discovered their measurement error. Part of the issue lay with changes on the first floor which they were trying to decode while drafting, such as where the original walls were and how the kitchen had been changed. This led the two to talk with Professor Carter about the value of doing "reconstructed" plans versus "as is" plans. It was decided eventually to do a reconstructed view of the front elevation that would show its original "banked" configuration—because the twentieth century changes had greatly obscured the original, fascinating features of the dwelling.

WIOTA BUILDINGS & THE STUDENT TEAMS

NEAR TOWN

The Cooper House on Spring Brook Road

Jaclyn Binder, Caitlin Boyle, Travis Olson, Gabe Crilley, Susan Bostian Young, Nate Millington, Adam Mandelman, Rebecca Wangard, and Tom Carter

The other challenges the team faced here related to access. The attic floor plan proved very difficult because the shallow roof and the way it was framed, especially to the front porch, made getting measurements extremely difficult. Stifling heat in the attic during the 90+ degree days made this even more challenging. Another measurement struggle lay with elevations. The team stood around for about an hour trying to figure out how to get the peak measurement; the ladders simply didn't reach. With the aid of owner Bob Cooper, Professor Carter eventually got on top of the roof (with protests of Pat Cooper who worried about insurance) and dropped a measuring tape to get the needed number. Finally, the stifling heat made some students' diligence learned during the week give way. One student

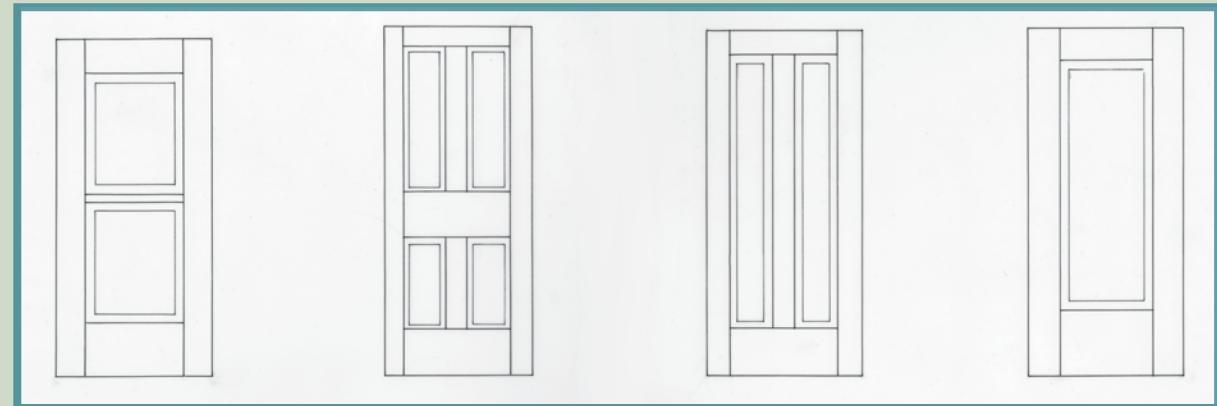


Farm outbuildings just north of Cooper House
PHOTO: Nate Millington

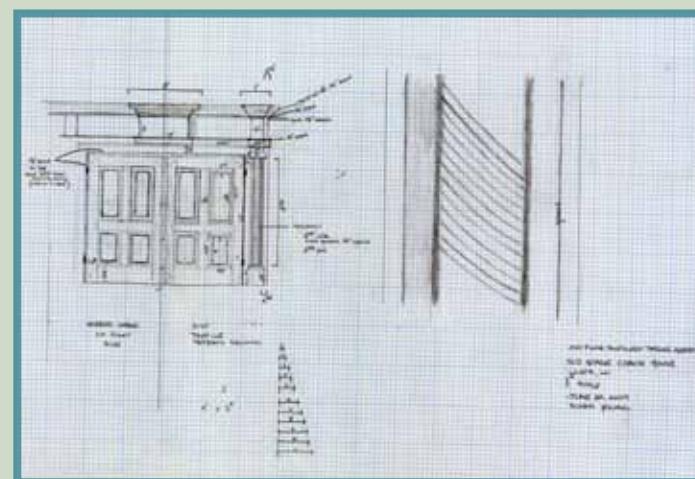


West elevation
PHOTO: Janet Gilmore

confessed to approximating measurements at one point. The lively debate that ensued about "what does an inch matter" made for a very interesting discussion to close the session on the last day of fieldwork.



Cooper House door study by Caitlin Boyle



Second floor southwest parlor mantelpiece field drawings
by Susan Bostian Young

FIELD TRIP TO FORT HAMILTON

As far as down at Fort Hamilton, when we were kids, we probably didn't even know it was there . . . and then across the creek up towards the farm buildings, there used to be a big oak tree. . . . my brothers, older ones and friends, they had drove drag teeth into this tree, and they'd crawl up that tree, see, and they always called that "the lookout tree." You know it was kind of a high point there and a big oak. I remember crawling up in there and playing

Ralph Johnson (TH)

A fort, encircled in a wooden palisade, is pictured on the façade of Zimmerman's Cheese Factory that faces Highway 78 as it passes through Wiota. What does a fort have to do with Zimmerman's, cheesemaking, or Wiota, we wondered. We were fascinated to learn that just back of Zimmerman's, down the hill to the south of Wiota's main street, lay the remains of a fort. Along what is now named Feather Branch there, lead prospector William S. Hamilton had excavated for lead and set up a lead ore smelting operation. We learned from Wiota's community history that Hamilton had built a stockaded fort at the spot, to protect the enterprise from local unrest at the time (BBH: 6). We also learned that the location presently is in pri-

ate hands, owned by a local farm family. Curious, we asked Barbara Cecil at Wiota Lumber Company whether we could visit this site, and who we needed to ask for permission. Barb offered to check with the owners and guide us through the site.



Fort Hamilton mural and memorial fronting Zimmerman Cheese Factory

On the afternoon of our third hot and humid day of documenting several Wiota buildings, a good share of the class packed into vehicles and headed shortly down South Road, with Barb in the lead. While we could have walked, we hoped to save ourselves from some of the heat by driving. Barb led us off the road, past a marker designating an old graveyard for former local residents, and along a corn field. From our vantage point, we could see the back side of buildings positioned along Wiota's main street, the land sloping down to a very small creek that we looked down upon from a ridge opposite. Barb led us on foot down toward the creek bed, pointing out a slight promontory to our left (north), evidence of lead extraction, whose entrance was now deliberately obstructed by piles of tree branches and brush. The landscape was mostly clear of trees on the northern end of the small valley toward downtown, but it was knee deep in summer grasses. As we angled down toward the creek and to the south, we encountered cow paths and islands of cultivated plants gone wild, like lilac bushes and apple trees. We also could see a trench laid out in an expansive rectangular footprint that Barb said marked the location of the former fort, perhaps representing the "deep ditch, or moat" said to have been built just outside the stockade (BBH: 6, 183-84). The longest, deepest trench roughly paralleled the creek bottom, on the west side of the creek.



The entourage breaks from the sun as Barb orients us to the site on the way down to the creek

FIELD TRIP TO FORT HAMILTON

Somewhere in the grasses, Barb said, there was an old headstone. Because of the summer vegetation, it was difficult to find, so students began crisscrossing the terrain with her, trying to locate it. Gabe Crilley tested his geographical skills by crossing on a grid, suggesting that if all of us formed a line, we could find the landmark. Eventually we found the headstone lying on its side in a ditch, as Barb said it should be. The Schellenger name suggests German-American heritage, and the 1882 death date for the infant son Eugene followed the fort's heyday by roughly 50 years. We wondered how it related to the prior installation or even the cemetery remains on the ridge top, but the child likely was the grandson, or great grandson, of one of the earliest miners identified as settling in the area, a George Schellenger. (cf. BBH: 4)

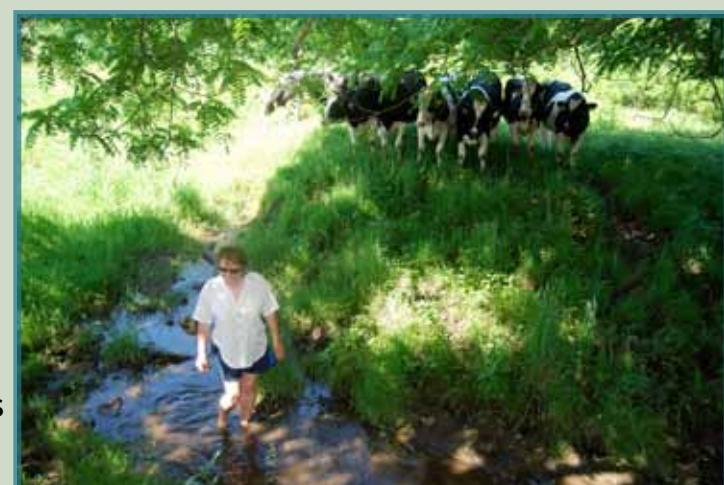


The infant Schellenger headstone

We continued southeast to where the creek passes under a canopy of mature trees offering shade; Barb pointed out where the lead smelting had been located at this spot, but there was little evidence visible. Barb was eager to take off her shoes and put her feet in the cool water, where local children sometimes used to cool off during the summer. A few of us followed suit, while a pack of young Holstein heifers hovered on the east side of the creek, watching us intently, advancing with curiosity. We joked about a "Black Cow War."

Even though we thought the worst of the day's heat was past, the open landscape literally radiated heat and humidity after absorbing the hot sun all day. We, in turn, absorbed the heat. The shallow, narrow, creek afforded little respite for feet and brow. We slowly headed back to the vehicles, following the cow path and gradually climbing from the creek bottom up the hill to the ridge top. Barb stopped us periodically in the shade of the apple tree and lilac bush copses to recuperate before progressing further. From the creek bottom vantage point, the ridge horizon to the west looked strategically vulnerable to attack. Notably, the fort had been positioned halfway between the creek bed and the ridge top, a familiar pattern to avoid bottom humors and ridge-top buffeting. Its southeastern corner had sheltered the smelting location where the creek pooled the most, under the trees. It was hard to imagine the creek being strong enough to support a water-powered industrial process, but summer was likely the time of lowest water, and we had learned through Sigrid Peterson's research that the subsequent development of agricultural lands had lowered the region's water table. Thus perhaps in the past, Feather Branch, even in summer, had had greater volume and flow.

A future visit when vegetation is scarcer, and water runoff is more plentiful, would be useful. The site begs for further inquiry, both of the historical archeological kind and the oral historical that records childhood and community memories of the spot. (JCG)



Cottonwood Dairy heifers wonder what Barb is doing in their creek, where a lead smelting installation once sat

INTERVIEWS

OUR INTERVIEW PROCESS

While the fieldwork experience in Wiota emphasized measurement of historic buildings and preparation of documentary drawings, many students also participated in interviewing area residents. Through interviews, they could ascertain building histories and construction details, learn about the nature of Wiota's community life in the past and present, record oral versions of family histories, and begin to identify and elaborate a wealth of primary records in private hands, including family land records, photographs, and written family histories. Through the interviews, students could people Wiota in the past and the present and get a sense of their place, how and why they live there. They also could see how buildings and building histories were intertwined in family, social, and occupational relationships. They could thus enliven the most tangible of cultural heritage with the intangible and fleeting, in turn building a stronger documentary record through triangulation with primary archival sources in public repositories, and published (secondary) historical works.

Roughly a third of the Field School students became directly involved in interviewing during the week in Wiota, chiefly Johnson House team members Dee Finnegan, Tom Hopfensperger, and Ye-Gee Kwon, and Engebretson House teammates April Braden and Katie Ryan. They orchestrated interviews with Ralph "Sonny" and Helen Johnson, Dana Duppler, and Gayle and Paul Monson, and they participated in others with field advisor Janet Gilmore, notably those with Dorothy Johnson at Wiota Lutheran Church and the three Cottonwood Dairy partners, Jim Winn, Randy Larson, and Brian Larson. Tom and Katie tested the ornery new digital recording equipment, Dee ran the video



Dee videotaping Ralph Johnson as Tom interviews him
PHOTO: Ye-Gee Kwon

camera and her photo/document scanner, and most, including Adam Mandelman of the Torkelson House team, indexed the content of the varied recordings, upon their return to campus. Jaclyn Binder and Caitlyn Boyle also recorded information from conversations with Lorraine Keister and Bob Cooper.

Professor Janet Gilmore encouraged student interviewing through note-taking and sound recordings especially. She set up and led the most formal interviews, tempering student excitement, and attempting to mentor through thorough investigative techniques. Several students had already experienced interviewing in faster-paced journalistic settings. They were often eager to ask questions about what it was like to attend school in a one-room schoolhouse, how Wiotans connected with the community's mining history, what they thought about the community's ups and downs over time, what they liked about living in the small community today, and what they thought about preserving historic structures for posterity.

Questions asking for clarification of building details often resulted in stories and anecdotes about how people lived in and around the houses in the past, especially the Johnson House, and we have presented some of this information in the Johnson House description as well as in syntheses of Ralph, Helen, and Dorothy Johnsons' testimonies. Questions asked while viewing photos and documents with members of the community were especially rewarding, as folks like Dorothy Johnson and Gayle Monson identified people, places, and dates, providing insights and further ideas to investigate—but here we just barely got started inventorying and interpreting documents and linking them to other primary and secondary sources besides individual testimonies. In the Dorothy Johnson segment that follows, we explain how we began to tackle the challenges of recording oral histories and personal archives. Finally, questions asked of the Cottonwood Dairy owners aimed to understand how such a big dairying enterprise works, how a trio of local farmers moved to this model, and how the migrant worker segment of the labor force fit. We were grateful for Spanish speakers who are better at English than we are at Spanish.

INTERVIEWS

DOROTHY JOHNSON & PERSONAL ARCHIVES

Because Dorothy Johnson has taken a keen interest over the years in her family and community histories, she has accumulated various ephemeral literature, like news clippings, photos, legal documents, and personal writings. We found a 1949 news clipping from the *Wisconsin State Journal* on the Wahler House when it was a telephone post useful for our research, as well as her cousin Harriet Olson Halloran's 1972 "Footsteps in the Past" family history. Vintage photographs of Main Street businesses like the Knewstubb Store, events like the 1957 Knewstubb auction, and residences with their inhabitants (for the Johnson House and the Benson House across the street) were fascinating, as were records of real estate transactions, especially for the Johnson House. As relatives have passed away, and friends like descendants of the combined Collingsworth and Milbourn families have moved away but stayed in touch, they have left her with documents that she has in turn treasured, preserved, and shared with others, as she did in a schoolhouse display during Wiota's 175th anniversary celebration.

James Ronnerud directed us to meet with Dorothy about her historical records, and so we set up a group endeavor at the Wiota Lutheran Church on June 24, where we could review, copy, and inventory materials, discuss their contents and origins, and record Dorothy's Wiota-related personal history and stories. She had selected material especially relevant to the Wiota buildings we were



Janet Gilmore sets up interview with Dorothy Johnson near the Wahler House

studying. Gayle Monson joined us for part of the event, and students conducted a second meeting of this sort on June 25.

To get a handle on the materials Dorothy provided, we first tried to capture a thumbnail biography to set her testimony in time and space and establish her relationships to the documents she provided. From this baseline, we could then inventory her documents, which she let us scan or photocopy for our research. We could then contrast and compare them with archival sources found elsewhere, and understand Dorothy's sense of how her records related to her history and Wiota's—as the character, origins, and content of each document and bit of testimony must be carefully established, compared, and verified.

As we recorded Dorothy's personal history and commentary on the documents, we also heard and sometimes recorded stories about her family's relatives and Wiota area living circumstances from before her birth. She had heard these as she was growing up in the area, and many were variations of stories her cousin Harriet Olson Halloran recorded in the family history (HOH) and Wiota's 175th anniversary community history (BBH). For example, she confirmed Ralph Johnson's testimony that there once were five separate Johnson families living in Wiota at one time, all with Norwegian roots. Dorothy's Johnsons were qualified as "Brud(h)alen Johnsons" (pronounced "Brudarn"), after the name of the first Johnson immigrant in her family—whose earliest name was written as Ole Jensen Brudhalen (HOH:4-7).



Ye-Gee Kwon and Tom Hopfensperger review Dorothy Johnson's historical documents with her at Wiota Lutheran Church

INTERVIEWS

DOROTHY JOHNSON & PERSONAL ARCHIVES

A good next step, especially for a folklorist, would be to identify and compare the stories Dorothy told us with the ones printed in the family and community histories.

It would also be useful to capture and compare yet more stories like these from Dorothy and others, old-timers and younger residents alike. This kind of analysis can suggest themes and ideas that are especially important to particular individuals as well as community residents collectively, providing insights about their senses of time and place.

While we are far from completing the steps we identify above, we report a synopsis of Dorothy Johnson's biography here. Her testimony joins Ralph and Helen Johnson's in a later segment, to gain a sense of Wiota's cultural landscape.

Dorothy's family history and community archival repository helped us get a feel for how complexly interwoven the community's people, businesses, and buildings are. Of particular note was how land records and photographs in her possession for the Johnson House showed at least four separate periods of ownership from the late 1800s, from before Dorothy's great-grandmother and paternal grandparents resided there, to when Ralph's parents assumed it in 1914. They connected the house to former owners and inhabitants of several other Wiota locations, especially the Benson House across the highway; and they indicated how some of the oldest Wiota families, Collingsworths, Milbourns, Olsons, Winns, and various Johnson families, were interconnected by friendship and marriage before and after the turn of the twentieth century.

(JCG)

Dorothy Johnson

Born in 1922 in Wiota, Dorothy Johnson, the second of four sisters, figures she must be the oldest person now living in Wiota who was actually born there. Her memories of Wiota date especially from her youth in the 1920s and '30s, when she attended her first eight grades in the Wiota School, including the first couple of years when the well-respected Jesse Holmen began teaching there (c. 1934-75 until the school closed; cf. BBH: 85, 92). She then had to drive with her sister in the family car to high school in Argyle, before there was a school bus available her senior year, in 1940. Since Ralph Johnson's sisters were close in age, Dorothy and her Johnson sisters often played with Ralph's sisters, and offered them rides to high school:

. . .there was a lot of play back and forth, because they had girls our age, and we were always good friends, in fact they usually rode with us to high school when my sister drove, and when I drove . . . So we had a lot of fun together, we'd play cards . . . we were in grade school and high school all together.

Dorothy left Wiota to attend college in Milwaukee for a few years, beginning in 1940. By 1947, she settled in Monroe for the duration of her career, most of it working at the Monroe Clinic. During that time, she continued to attend Wiota Lutheran Church services on Sunday and participated in important Wiota community celebrations, like the 150th and 175th anniversaries (besides the 100th in her youth). When she retired in 1987, she returned to her family home in Wiota, one house west of the Keister house above the former Knewstubb grocery at the southwest corner of the crossroads. "I kind of enjoy living here," she says, "It's inexpensive, and I've always gone to church out here and, it's just kind of nice, as long as I can drive."

Her home is across Highway 78 from her father-mechanic Edward Johnson's former car and farm machinery repair garage, where "he was a good mechanic and then he did a lot of farm machinery work too, in a rural area like this." Johnson had grown up in the Johnson House, 1899-1914, and when his parents sold the house to Ralph Johnson's parents, Ralph's father also obtained Ed's father Minick's blacksmith shop at the Mayne Hotel.

Ed Johnson's garage, 1978
PHOTO: Courtesy of Dorothy Johnson



JOHNSON VIEWS OF WIOTA'S CULTURAL LANDSCAPE



Ralph "Sonny" and Helen Johnson look over family photographs

Ralph "Sonny" and Helen Johnson live at 6904 Highway 78, between the Johnson House, to their west, and the Engebretson House, to their east. Johnsons presently own and maintain the Engebretson House (which they use for storage), and they have lived next door to the building since Ralph finished building their present house, c. 1962, where there once was a hay field. But

Ralph has lived next door to this house most of his life, since he was born next door in 1930 in the Johnson House, before his parents sold him the piece of land to build his current home.

Ralph's testimony about living and working in the Wiota area his whole life lays out a distinctive cultural landscape in place names, land features, industry, and community and family relationships. When he began explaining the richness of the area for agricultural use, he situated Wiota "on the dividing ridge between the East and the West Pecatonica River. This water here runs down [south] to the West Pecatonica and, that over on the other side of the hill here and the ball diamond [northeast], it runs down to the East. . . they join down by Browntown, South Wayne. That's where the railroads used to cross." (KR) While he revealed that Wiota, "our little town," was fortunate compared to "a lot of bigger towns around here" in receiving a natural gas line (thanks to the local cheese factory), he also likened the village to its neighbors, conveying a landscape dotted every six to

eight miles with "your smaller towns." He related this dispersed pattern in turn to a prior network where "there used to be a cheese factory every square mile, purt near, you know, smaller ones." (KR) Indeed the eastern portion of Lafayette County shows as dense a distribution of cheese factories as in adjoining Green County in the early 1900s, ranging from three to under two miles apart (Moffett 2000 sources: 66, 67, 82)

Besides the sense of geography and commercial history, Johnson also articulated a characteristic network of communities that mingled at places like Turner Hall in Monroe to enjoy live entertainment, big bands, and Old-Time music, on Saturday and Sunday nights. Ralph and Helen met there around 1950, as the polka, waltz, schottische, and jitterbug dances attracted folks from "Argyle, Blanchardville, Fayette, Lamont, Wiota, South Wayne, Gratiot, Darlington, Brodhead, and Juda," according to the pair. (TH) While mingling people geographically, the big town events also mixed people from different ethnic backgrounds, especially Norwegian-, Swiss-, and Irish-Americans. While "Sonny" emphasizes that Wiota still has "a lot of Norskies here yet"—and there were so many William Johnsons that differing middle initials had to be used—he and Helen note "It's getting mixed up a little," (KR) as they, like Dorothy Johnson, joke about "mixed marriages" between people of Swiss, Norwegian, Irish, and other backgrounds: "We always kid about the combinations, you know," says Ralph. (TH)

Ralph's family experience links him north of Wiota, where his dad's grandparents farmed on a "little bitty farm . . . log cabin, down in Cherry Branch Valley" and his dad William K. "went to Cherry Branch School, down by the East Wiota Church there." (TH) His dad (1888-c.1972) was born on Cherry Branch, and later apprenticed in blacksmithing to a Larson in Lamont. His mother, Inga Berget, also came from a large family "about three miles down there." (KR; east and southeast

JOHNSON VIEWS OF WIOTA'S CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

of Wiota?, cf. BBH: 163) Helen, a Swiss-Irish mix, grew up a little to the east, in the Yellowstone and Blanchardville areas.

When Ralph's parents moved "down" to Wiota, they purchased the Johnson House in 1914 from Dorothy Johnson's paternal grandparents, Minick and Augusta (Foslin) Johnson. Even though the families had the same last name, they were not related. Yet their histories intertwine further, as Ralph's father also took over Dorothy's grandfather Minick Johnson's blacksmithing business (in the Mayne Hotel at that time) where he (William K.) "shod horses, fixed wagon wheels, pounded out plow lathes and corn shocking shovels," (KR) repaired farm machinery, "and later on added on a lean-to and made a garage in which he'd overhaul cars." (TH) "Dad was very handy he could, make about anything . . . you could buy. . . . Even made a set of artificial legs for a guy in Lamont. He said they were pretty heavy, but they got him around."(KR) In turn, Dorothy's father Ed Johnson, when he returned to the Wiota area c. 1920, practiced farm machinery repair and eventually auto repair, running his own garage. Reinforcing the critical role that mechanics still play in Wiota's rural farming community, Dorothy also confirms her father mechanic's resourcefulness, an ability that has remained important to the village's self-sufficiency and economic viability. Her brother-in-law would say of her father, "If there's something I want and I can't find it, I'll come down to Grandpa and tell him what I want and, he chews his cigar for a few minutes and then he goes out to his junk pile, gets something, and makes exactly what I want." Dorothy adds, "And he would do that, they made a lot of their tools for the garage, couldn't afford it probably. . ." (WLC)

So integral to farming were these businesses, Dorothy recalls that "one farmer said 'When Ed Johnson [her father] and Herbie Johnson [Ralph's brother] quit there working, I'm going to have to quit.'" (WLC)

Ralph formally worked for his dad in the shop when he was in high school, while his brother Herbert "went in the service, around '44." But by 1948, he began another line of local work that remains integral to the community and has uncannily linked him to the community's history and landscape. He began working in a rock quarry, crushing lime and gravel, where he "drove gravel truck," graduating to backhoe work. At first working for Augie Ronnerud, of the Ronnerud-Monson building, he began his own business. Involved in digging, filling, and moving, Ralph is intimately knowledgeable of the land and the built environment. He has found chunks and veins of lead while excavating, besides keeping an eye out for pieces of lead that sometimes emerge from quarrying or dug out ore piles after it rains. With a friend, he persistently fills old sink holes and mine openings in the area, where lead was once removed (KR); and he is familiar with local knowledge like, "Some claim there's still the tracks and the tools in the shaft over here from the K shop up to North Road, you know, and they're carts, ore carts and everything. They claim they're in there, I don't know, . . . a lot of that is hearsay." (TH)

Besides his intimacy with the land through his own experience since the 1930s, he also recounts one of the better-known "badger state" origin stories, heard from his



Helen Johnson's display represents her Swiss heritage

JOHNSON VIEWS OF WIOTA'S CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

dad, which also imagines elements of the Fort Hamilton site:

My dad said, and his little land he's got down in there [Ft. Hamilton ravine behind cheese factory] this side of the crick, hillside, he said there were thirteen huts there, those people. Well they used to call them badgers because, they dig these holes and then they'd put a roof over it and they'd live in there. Badgers, they dug in, see. (KR)

Historical publications and community recounts have also merged to convey information about some of Wiota's earliest buildings, like those possibly moved from Wiota's earlier site to the present ridge-top setting. The Mayne Hotel was moved from the west side of South Road, back behind Knewstubb's, to the east side, where Minick Johnson and then William K. Johnson kept their blacksmith shops—before the hotel was razed in 1950 and replaced with the current cement block K machine shop and garage. Ralph witnessed the destruction of the Mayne, and has participated in the destruction of other historic buildings—becoming a mental record-keeper of their locations, builds, characters, and uses—even though he “kinda got jacked up a couple times about destroying a historic thing, you know.” One of these sat close to North Road on the northeast corner of the crossroads:

... it was rock. And that had a fireplace in it and one room. And then they had added onto that with a woodshed later years and stuff, but. Neil's dad [Swiggum], he wanted that out of there and. So I tore it down . . . they say that was an old miner's, house, you know. One room with the fireplace in it. (TH)

While Ralph does not relay what happened to the rock, he reflects a parallel ongoing community trend of frugality and conservatism with buildings and building materials in the deconstruction of the 1896 cheese factory. His pay for this job was

retention of the timbers, which he used to rough out his present house over a five-year period in the 1950s and early '60s.

Along with these kinds of traditional and informal work exchanges in the community, local working relationships also survived on trust and fair exchange. As part of his arrangement with local carpenter Pete Larson to “put the finishing touches” on his current house, Ralph and his mother “told him he could eat meals with us every day. ‘Well, that'd be fine,’ but he said ‘I'll pay for it.’ Well Ma said, ‘you won't pay for it.’ When we come to settle up, why, he'd taken off for every meal, he'd kept track.” Larson was especially fond of Ralph's mother's preparation of liver and onions. But Ralph adds, “I used to help him when I didn't have work for the backhoe . . . I'd help him and then he'd collect the money, and then when he'd come work for me, I'd just take it off the bill. That worked out good.” (KR)

Dorothy Johnson's father Ed also relied on this kind of collegial trust, leaving his garage open for business even when he was not present. Since “He liked to fish. . .” Dorothy explains, “he'd leave a note on his little desk in the garage with a piece of paper there and it says, ‘If you get anything, write it down here,’ ‘cause he'd leave the garage open when he went, you know, out in the country, or went to Monroe for parts, or whatever.” (WLC)

Through Ralph, Helen, and Dorothy Johnson's testimony, we



Ralph and Helen's current home built from 1896 cheese factory tear down
PHOTO: April Braden

JOHNSON VIEWS OF WIOTA'S CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

can understand more fully the nature of life in this tight-knit community in the past that has transformed from indigenous subsistence to mining extraction to dairying, all periods subject to human restlessness, resourcefulness, and intercultural dynamics. But their narratives also convey important messages about knowing the landscape, surviving on the land, and relying on others and a small community as times change. Like Ralph tells us, “people find work, they start up anything, you know, to get a job, you know.” (KR) Perhaps like for Ralph, the area is “home to me, and I guess that’s why we ended up staying here, and I guess we’ll die here.” (TH) He adds:

We always talked about farming, years ago: If you had a farm, and a place to live and sleep, and you had chickens, and you had, maybe sheep, and you had hogs, and you had beef, or cows and stuff, you had stuff you could live on the farm. You didn’t have to go to town and buy.

“But now,” he continues, “you either milk cows, or raise hogs, and that’s it, you know. You want eggs, you got to go to town and buy ‘em. . . .” But to bring home how times change and old models sometimes persist, he suggests:

That’s why [the] farmer’s market, I think, in Madison goes over so big. I know several people from the area go up there, like the cheesemaker where our grandson works, he goes every week and he takes cheese. . . . one week he took 400 pounds of cheese curds alone, you know, and other kinds of cheese he makes. And then in Hollandale, [a] guy . . . he sells poultry, fresh dressed chickens, and he sells eggs, yeah, and maybe frozen meat too, . . . he’s a farmer. . . . he had a greenhouse and he grows lettuce. That tall lean stuff. They’re just crazy for it. (TH)

(JCG)

DAIRY & COLLECTIVE FARMING TRADITIONS

“Everything is Related in Ag”

Dairying and cheesemaking are still central to Wiota’s continuing viability as a place to live and work, in a county where these enterprises have dominated the economy for over a century. In Wiota, the two largest employers are “The dairy, that’s kind of the bigger thing and, the cheese plant here. Kinda makes the town,” says Ralph Johnson. (KR) As Ralph and Dorothy Johnson have also explained of their fathers’ and grandfathers’ blacksmithing and mechanics trade, many of the other lines of local work are dependent on these two chief enterprises. Wiota dairy farmer Randy Larson confirms that “Farming’s the main part. I mean, that’s where it all starts. But then they might sell feed, fertilizer, farm equipment. But everything is related in ag, it is today. Agriculture suffers in this area, everybody suffers.” (SR)



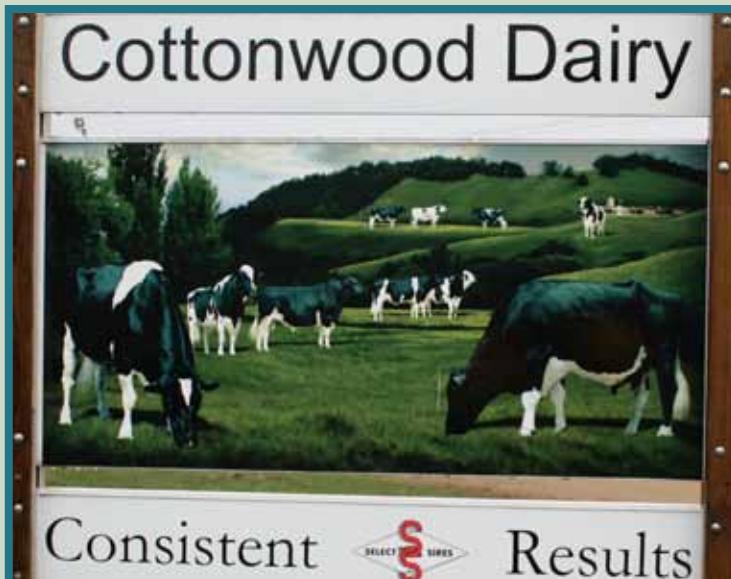
Wiota's Zimmerman cheese factory stretches over land dedicated to a creamery cooperative since the 1890s
PHOTO: April Braden

COTTONWOOD DAIRY & COLLECTIVE FARMING TRADITIONS

Interviews

On June 23 and 24, 2009, Cottonwood Dairy's three partners, Jim Winn, Brian Larson, and Randy Larson generously agreed to let us practice interviewing them and one of their Latino workers, Hector Mendez, who spoke some English. Tom Hopfensperger, April Braden, and Janet Gilmore interviewed Winn

and Randy Larson on June 23 using a digital sound recorder, while Dee Finnegan, Hopfensperger, and Gilmore recorded Winn and Brian Larson on June 24, using a mini DV video camera besides the digital sound recorder. Gilmore took notes for the short interview she conducted with Mendez on June 24. All interviews took place on the premises of the dairy's main milking parlor, at the intersection of Highway 78 and County Road D, which Winn and the Larsons referred to as "Cottonwood Corners" because of the cottonwood grove that once grew there. We were interested not only in how this modern dairy operates but in how it continues, yet departs from, the kinds of farming that pre-date it in the Wiota area.



The Big Dairy at "Cottonwood Corners"

Cottonwood Dairy, in June 2009, employed roughly 1,400 Holstein and "a few (b)red" cows, and 21 people—"its greatest asset," according to Jim Winn—besides the three owner-partners Winn, cousins Brian and Randy Larson, and the Larsons' fathers. Lifelong Wiota residents born in the 1950s and '60s, the three owners are "all neighborhood guys that dairy farmed our whole lives," says Winn. "We all live within two and a half miles of the dairy," he adds, and "our grandfathers and great-grandfathers all farmed in this area too." (VR)



Cottonwood's three owner-partners in the dairy's office, L to R, Randy Larson, Jim Winn, and Brian Larson
PHOTO: Arnold R. Alanen, 2011

COTTONWOOD DAIRY & COLLECTIVE FARMING TRADITIONS

Each with his own farm of 160+ to 270+ acres and 80 to 100 cows by the late 1990s, the three incorporated in 1997 and joined their herds in 1998, adding more cows to make 600. By 2004, their herd numbered 900, and in 2006, it expanded again to the size we witnessed in 2009.

Winn explains the evolution of their partnership as “we were getting in the ages of 35, 40 years old and we decided that if we’re gonna stick in with this business, we better either evaluate what we’re doing on our home farms or maybe join forces and make one larger dynamic dairy, and that’s what we ended up doing.” (VR) Randy Larson put it that “a lot of our equipment was starting to get tired, where we’re going to have to spend a lot of money to get it going. Just to upgrade, make things better” Each farmer was considering expanding his herd, when a consultant advised, “You got a guy up here that wants to build a 200-cow set up and you guys are talking about four. What do you say we try to put this together?” Hadn’t thought of that. So this is what we ended up with. It was really that simple.” (SR)

Each farmer’s own farm and “ground” remain active in the enterprise, making almost 700 acres combined. The partners rent almost 1,300 more acres of local farmland, where chiefly Brian and Randy grow alfalfa and corn to feed the herd. They also distribute dry cows and heifers around to different “satellite farms,” including Brian’s farm where some like to hang out near the Fort Hamilton site, a timbered area where Randy remembers combating mosquitos and flies in the summer, while searching for calves in his youth. Thus the new cultural landscape for this type of farming includes dispersed owned and rented properties scattered across the immediate area, altogether roughly 2,000 acres, with farm buildings utilized for heifers on more than the three individual farms and the central milking complex.

The main dairy complex at Cottonwood Corners includes several key functional areas. A main pole barn houses 560 cows, while a special needs pole barn can accommodate “close to 250 cows back there” that may need a little special attention or are ready to give birth. A metal-sided milk house contains a holding pen, parlor area, offices, and a break room where all employees can sit down and relax for a few minutes when they take breaks. On the site there also are at least one more pole barn structure for cows, a “money pit” manure lagoon at the back (east) of the lot, and “bunkers” for storage of crops for feed.

Key community objections to the facility when it was first proposed and then instituted included worries that 600 cows would be crammed into a 10-acre compound, like in a stockyard, and that the smell of manure would permeate the greater area. Winn claims locals have been pleased that their practice of pumping manure to fields and knifing it in reduces the aroma, and “every one of our neighbors that had questions about, maybe some concerns I should say, all came up and apologized to us and had no idea the operation was going to look like it does today.” (Winn VR)



Main pole barn with cows in their stalls.
PHOTO: Arnold R. Alanen, 2009

COTTONWOOD DAIRY & COLLECTIVE FARMING TRADITIONS

Specialization: While the three partners can help each other with the full range of the farm's activities, they have tended to specialize. Brian says he is "in charge of the cropping operation. So I enjoy the crops":

... along with my crop consultant, we spend a lot of time planning [planting?] the crops, you know, getting them harvested at a timely fashion, 'cause good feed is important to good milk production. So I enjoy the crops—and the cattle. (VR)

He says that Randy, "my partner's in charge of all the manure applications," but Randy also is the key person who manages the books, having learned the skill at his dad's insistence when Randy started farming officially with him:

When he set the business up, when we first started, he brought the books out to me and dropped them in front of me, and said "learn 'em." He said, "it's your job now." He said, "If you can't run the books," he said, "you can't run this place. It won't work." And to this day I'm uncomfortable if I don't know where everything's at. That's why they let me do this. That's my job. (RL SR)

Randy says that "Jim is a cow person," from the cow's beginning to its end, "and that's what makes him so good at it. He's excellent." Jim handles the medication, as well as the artificial insemination, but he also says that "we pooled our resources, hired some people so our niche was management, and we're better managing—we used to be better managing the cows, now I manage people, and I thoroughly enjoy it, I love it, I've got a lot of Hispanic labor here, a lot of local labor." (JW SR)

The dairy workers "all got their specialized jobs" too, says Randy. "We're round the clock here, but we have three eight hour shifts. . . . I hate this term, but it's almost like a factory type thing where you got your shift. And, that's what they do . . ." (RL SR) The labor does the actual milking, cycling the large number of cows in their

own shifts through the parlor process. Latino workers who can speak English provide informal leadership among fellow Spanish speakers. Some workers come from small rural farming towns like Wiota where they grew up in large families that tend cattle



Dairy worker tends cows hitched to milking machines in milking parlor
PHOTO: Arnold R. Alanen, 2009

and participate in coffee growing; yet these communities are sometimes isolated in mountainous valleys, unlike Wiota, and job opportunities are tougher than they are in America's dairyland. Often connected through family and home community relationships, Cottonwood's Latino/a workers are known for making sure that all shifts are filled.

The more complex enterprise and specialization make keeping up with technology and research an on-going challenge that requires reliance on numbers of specialists, including business and crop consultants, lawyers, and bankers, besides "custom harvesters." But the operation's scale of efficiencies also frees up more time for each person to share concerns with local farmer peer groups, extension agents, and UW-Madison researchers. Says Winn:

Before when we were smaller dairy farms, we always kind of kept to ourselves, but we never had a chance to comingle with our other peers other than at a farm sale or something. Now, with the larger dairies, we have peer groups, we get together and have speakers from the University of Wisconsin come out and talk to us on new technology. University of Wisconsin has helped us immensely on

COTTONWOOD DAIRY & COLLECTIVE FARMING TRADITIONS

new free stall dimensions, sand, sand reclaiming . . . A lot of resources, there's a lot of smart people in the State of Wisconsin, a lot of smart farmers that work on things, they're entrepreneurial I guess is what you want to call them maybe, and take something and go with it, and keep digging and digging and digging 'til we get it right—and it's turned out to be a good thing for us. (JW VR)

A Day in the Life of the Cottonwood Dairy Cow

On a typical day for one of the Cottonwood cows, Jim Winn explains that:

. . . we milk at 5 in the morning, 1 in the afternoon, and 9 at night. So we milk the same pens in the same order every day. . . . in the hot summer months like we are right now, they're getting cooled in the holding area, nice sprinkling water on them, and fans . . . they're in seventh heaven. They go in there and get milked, roughly they're in there for 12 to 15 minutes, come back out, they come to the barns, they usually go to the head lots to eat, they can eat as much as they want, they can go drink water, they can go back and drink some more, and then they go to our free stalls which is bedded with sand. So I always feel our cows are laying on the beach all the time. They're nice sand beds and they're soaking up the sun. You know, in the summer months the sun gets in the barns, but they got it pretty nice, they lay on the beach, and get up and eat whenever they want, and walk around whenever they want, and drink whenever they want, so they're free on their own to do whatever they want until they got to get milked again at one o'clock. (JW VR)

Randy Larson adds that "We're getting more out of the animals too, but a lot of it's from just good care. . . . They're clean, they're not unhappy. . . . The thing is trying to keep them comfortable, comfortable animals will work for you." (RL SR) When the cows "get dried off," Winn continues:

. . . they go up to my farm which is on the other side of Wiota, and basically, they got the same thing there, they can sit, lay on the beach, stay in free stalls, eat whatever they want, drink whenever they want, then they go out on dry lot, like the pasture, and get off the cement for a while to help 'em out a little bit there, if they got a little lameness to them or anything. (JW VR)

Winn and the Larsons are pleased that they still can do most of the work themselves, however. An important contributor to the success of this partnership has to be the prior informal collective farming tradition from which the Larsons emerged. Randy's and Brian's fathers were two of four brothers, brought up in a farming family. The two cousins' dads and their sons:

. . . farmed together. We didn't do the business part together, but we did all our crop acres, together all the years. So that's how Brian and I kinda got to this point. . . . We didn't share, we were separate, but . . . we owned most the equipment, so they hired us to fill their silos, do a lot of that kind of stuff. But we did share some of the equipment, but not the majority, it was ours. Dad was the kind of guy, if he wanted something he was going to go get it. If we needed it, let's not waste any time to go to get it. Now Bob, my uncle Bob was a little more careful, he was going to think things through pretty good. (RL SR)

But besides the prior traditional farming family support system that can be found among other Wisconsin Norwegian-American farmers, Randy Larson attributes their success in part to Brian and Jim's one-room school experience with teacher Jesse Holmen:

. . . that's one thing about that teacher they had down here, Jesse Holmen . . . see all those kids were sharp, you know, just for the first few grades. Every one of 'em that I've ever known to come out of that school. Great minds, good thinkers. . . . I think he must have taught 'em how to think, as much as anything. Not just teaching reading, writing, and 'rithmetic. Teaching people how to think. (RL SR)

INTERVIEWS

COTTONWOOD DAIRY & COLLECTIVE FARMING TRADITIONS

Brian's testimony gives a sense of what this school experience was like:

... there was probably 32, 33 in the school, Jim and I went through 1st through 3rd grade, we were the only two in our class. . . . back when we were in 2nd grade, I don't know if Jim mentioned it, he had some surgery . . . and he was out of school for, I'm gonna say a month. And when he come back to school . . . my job was to, him and I sat down side by side, we got caught up, . . . but that was just part of the camaraderie of having everybody in the same room. (BL VR)

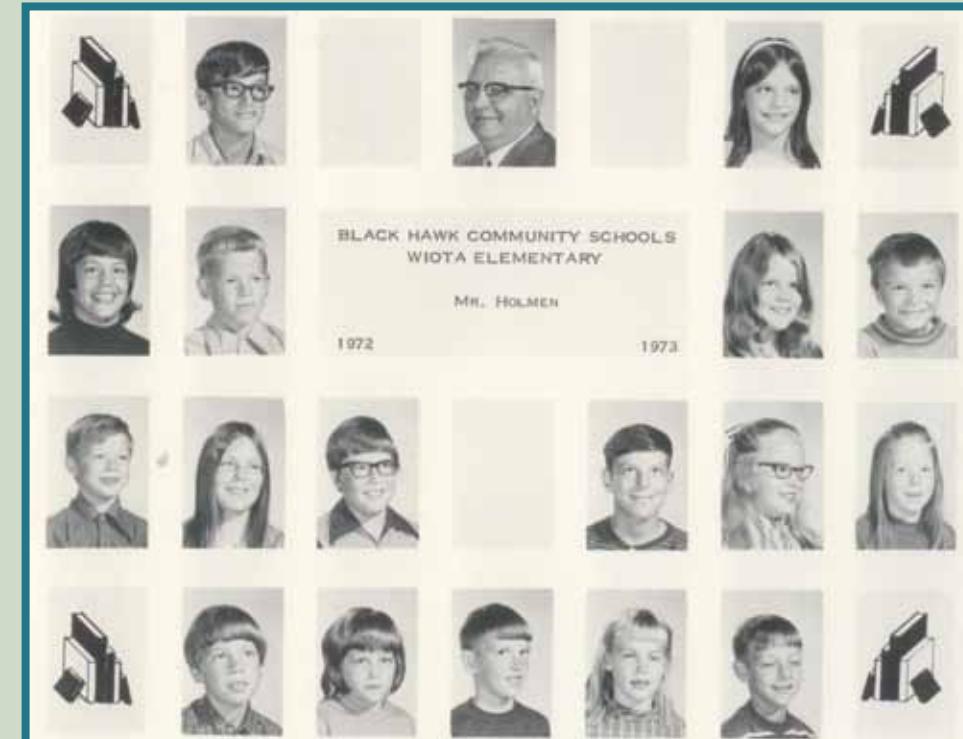
Beyond old-time farm and school partnerships, all three were also intimately familiar with farming by being brought up in multi-generational farming traditions where, as Randy Larson explains:

...it was expected of you, when we grew up, as you got older. I was driving tractors when I was 8, 9 years old. Jim and Brian could tell you the same stories.

You know we started young, they needed help, they couldn't afford hired men . . . It started there, then eventually as we got big enough, then we start milking cows. Then you know, as you started thinking that you could do certain activities, you know you just tried it, they didn't generally tell you, you just, "well I seen how he did that" so you go up and you do it. And



Wiota School 1983
PHOTO: Courtesy of James Ronnerud



Mr. Holmen and his 1972-1973 Wiota School students
PHOTO: Courtesy of James Ronnerud

then they'll tell you what you did wrong afterwards. I know one time when I was about 5 or 6, he caught me half way up a 70-foot silo. But he just looked up, he said, "I think you're far enough up, why don't you come on down now." And that was all that was ever said about it. (RL SR)

Or, as Jim explains:

... my grandfather farmed, and my great-grandfather farmed, my dad farmed. I guess it was just in your blood. I knew growing up I was going to be a farmer, it's not something I thought of you know when I was a freshman in high school, boom I want to be a farmer. I wanted to be a farmer ever since I could remember, just being a little kid. (JW VR)

COTTONWOOD DAIRY & COLLECTIVE FARMING TRADITIONS

Much as these farmers were conditioned to farming and partnerships, however, all doubt they would still be farming now if they had to do it the way they were before they joined forces. Jim says, "If I had to go back to doing it the way I used to do it, I might find a different career." Brian says:

I wouldn't be in the dairy business. Probably would have kept our farms, maybe done a little crop farming, maybe raised a little beef cattle, got a job in town, looked for something else, you know, secondary source of income. My wife is a elementary school teacher . . . I don't think I'd have been dairying, I know I wouldn't, I shouldn't say I don't think I wouldn't have been, I know I wouldn't have been dairying. (BL VR)

Randy, especially in his high school years, would consider quitting:

. . .when you're milking cows all the time, and you get some of your friends who aren't, and we gotta get up at 4 o'clock in the morning and we got to be home at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. It's 24/7, I mean it's every day of the week . . . you know, see your friends they don't have to go home or do anything, that gets a little hard. It makes you think a little bit. (RL SR)

But he says, "it's a good living, it's good living, and it's all I've ever known, to be honest." With the new farming enterprise, he adds:

Well for one thing, we can get away. It's a lot easier. This week I'm going . . . camping, and they were supposed to have been done making hay, but they weren't done, so, so what? They said, "We'll do it." We can do things like that. (RL SR)

(JCG)

Cottonwood's Annual Cropping Round

Brian explains the operation's cropping cycle, beginning in the fall:

. . .when the crop is out in the fall, we seed down rye, 'cause . . . we're on rolling hills as you see here, and we have erosion problems so we gotta seed down rye, 'cause we're not leaving any stock cover, put the rye down for some cover crop growth. Get the manure out, get it on fields as what our nutrimanagement plan says.

. . .wintertime is kind of a lull time . . . we plan on what crops are going to be planted in which areas—we're all alfalfa and corn, so there's no soybeans—getting them placed, making sure there's enough nutrients in the ground to take care of that crop. And then coming into the spring, start prepping the fields for, try to get our alfalfa seeded, and then we also have a guy, the same fellow that does our custom harvesting does our planting, so he comes in with his planters and gets it planted.

Then the busy time starts for me 'cause I've got to start spraying. And then by the 17th of May, we're ready to start making hay. So we get the first crop made, and still spraying, and then . . . at the time we are now [late June], usually we like to go in 28 day cycle, we're cutting our second cut, the hay, get that harvested, and it just keeps going through that cycle until usually the 1st of September, we're starting to think about harvesting our corn silage. So then we harvest about 900 acres of corn for silage here and fill our bunkers, and then when that silage is off, we're back to the cycle I started at before. And fighting with pests, you know we got, usually, I know after second crop now we'll have to spray all the hay fields for potato leaf hoppers, they were starting to come in, I can start to see some signs of 'em chewing on the plants now . . .

Dad helps in the field, and then my son Derek, who's mowing hay behind us here, he's going to be a junior in high school, so I guess I got three guys, plus the crew that comes in does our custom harvesting and our planting, so, there's usually two or three of them here at a time, from Fayette, they're just 10 miles north of here.

We started out on our operation harvesting our own crops, but it just got to be too much. We didn't have the equipment to do it, we couldn't get done in a timely fashion. . . Well if they have good going, they can put up 300 acres a day, where it would have taken me 6 days to do that with our equipment. . . . it just took too long. So if we can get the hay off within a 5, 6 day period and get it growing back to the next crop, that's money in our pocket. And the custom harvester got a circle they go on, . . . so it keeps everybody, everybody's on a time schedule. So, it works quite well for us. (BL VR)

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PHOTO: Adam Mandelman

INTERVIEWS RECORDED

Abbreviations in bold, such as WLC, indicate which interview quoted in passage.

Cooper, Bob. Interview notes by Jaclyn Binder, rural Wiota, July 7, 2009.

Duppler, Dana. Interview by Katie Ryan, Tom Hopfensperger, and Dee Finnegan, July 1, 2009; mini-DV video recording.

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Larson, Randy. Interview at Cottonwood Dairy by Janet Gilmore, Tom Hopfensperger, and April Braden, Wiota, June 23, 2009; digital sound recordings (**RL SR**), sound recording log and transcriptions.

Mendez, Hector. Interview at Cottonwood Dairy by Janet Gilmore, Wiota, June 24, 2009; interview notes.

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ARCHIVAL & MAP SOURCES

Several students, particularly Torkelson House team member Sigrid Peterson, Engebretson team members April Braden, Travis Olson, and Katie Ryan, and Cooper House specialist Jaclyn Binder, searched for relevant archival records for Wiota sites, the county, and the southwestern Wisconsin region, in Darlington at the Lafayette County Historical Society and the county courthouse, besides the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives in Madison. They reviewed such resources as U.S. Census Bureau Dicennial Population Census records from 1850 through 1930; Lafayette County deeds, directories of officials, business and telephone directories; Wisconsin railroad maps (1865, 1873, and 1936); and a variety of Wiota Township and Wiota residential plat maps (1858, 1874, 1895, 1916, 1949, and 1979). Adam Mandelman and Nate Millington also identified and reviewed historic lead mining region maps, U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps (1937 and 1962), and aerial photos (1937, 1955, 1962, and 1976). For class purposes and on-going research, they placed copies of many of these documents in our class repositories. During the last weeks of the class in Madison, April Braden created a detailed digital inventory of these records and the field documentation that the class had created and amassed, which is still taking shape. She also prepared interpretative guidelines for understanding the character, scope, and reliability of many of the recorded documents we encountered during fieldwork in Wiota. Formal permissions for public use of these records need to be pursued on a case by case basis.

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Back Undercover Design: Dee Finnegan

Back Cover Photos: Construction details help interpret buildings and place them in specific historical and cultural contexts

Left: Decorative iron fitting for brickwork stay, Cooper House, photo by Janet C. Gilmore

Right: (Upper) Circular saw cut marks in first floor joist, Wahler House, photo by Gabe Crilley

(Center) Rock mortarless retaining wall, Cooper House, photo by Janet C. Gilmore

(Lower) Split log first floor joist with bark intact, Johnson House, photo by Dee Finnegan

