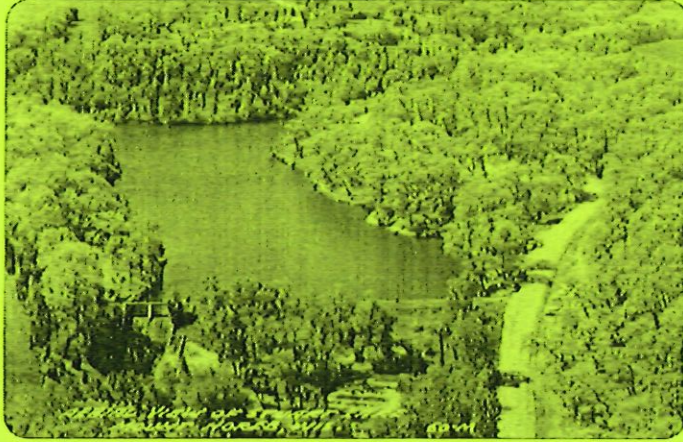


## What's in a Name? : "Stewart Park" By Jackie Sale



**T**he Dane County park on the north side of Mount Horeb with its picturesque lake was not always called Stewart Park. That name came much later in the lake's history as a recreational area.

Initially, and very informally, the blockage of Moen Creek formed a small swimming hole. Then in 1912, Mount Horeb residents formed the Lake Park Association with the goal of creating a community park. Within five days, the Association raised \$10,000 from 54 individuals: enough money to purchase 50 acres, build an access road, and construct a concrete dam to create a six-acre lake. Huge 4th of July celebrations were held at the park with baseball, water carnivals, boat races, swimming contests and log rolling competitions. In winter, there was ice skating and the Lake Association had an ice harvesting business. In 1913, a ski jump measuring 60 feet high and 160 feet long was built; the newly formed ski club planned to host ski jumping competitions that "would put Mount Horeb on the map" and enable competitors to set world records. The following year, the first professional ski jump competition at Lake Park hosted 23 competitors with 1,500 spectators, many of whom came by a special-service train from Madison. These tournaments were held at Lake Park for three consecutive years. But there were troubles, presumably some of them financial. The biggest downfall of the park came when the dam was washed away during a 14-hour rainstorm in September 1915. Finally, in 1918 Lake Park was sold at auction to Dr. J. E. Brager, a local physician, for \$5,500.

There was not much reported public use of the property for 16 years. In 1934, as part of the New Deal economic recovery program, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) set up a temporary camp on park land that provided housing, work assignments and pay to 200 WWI veterans. With the arrival of

the CCC in town, there was renewed interest in rebuilding the park's dam. The following summer, a more permanent CCC camp was set up on the south side of Mount Horeb. J. B. Johnson of Hoff's Store wrote an article in the newspaper to say that, with the government's help, it would make sense to reestablish the lake: "An attractive recreation park is a decided advantage to any town."

Frank Stewart entered the scene in 1935 and eventually, in 1941, the park was renamed in his honor. Stewart was, at that time, the Dane County Board Chairman. He lived in the Verona area and was a persistent supporter of western Dane County and public parks and noted that Madison had many public parks but rural areas had none. After a County Parks Commission report identified desirable sites for a park, Lake Park was purchased by the county for \$2,800 in 1935 making it the first Dane County park. The Village of Mount Horeb donated \$1,000 to the county to help defray costs, and the American Legion, which had an option on the property, agreed to the sale.

The National Park Service agreed that the CCC could be involved in the work at the park with a correspondence describing the park as "one of the most beautiful spots they have seen in the state." But work on the project was delayed and many had given up hope before September 1939 when 21 men were assigned to the park project. In 1942, as work on Stewart Park was near completion, the Capital Times reported that the park "may become famed as the Sun Valley of Dane County."

The County Board had seen fit to honor Frank Stewart by naming the park after him, but not without him first questioning whether the parks commission had asked the people of Mount Horeb for their choice of a name. Supervisors agreed that all the people of the county had paid for the park and declared that Stewart, as board chairman for 13 years, had guided the affairs of the county in its most trying times during the Great Depression and WWII.

Frank Stewart, born in 1882, was principal of a Verona grade school and a railroad mail clerk. In 1911, Stewart and his father-in-law, Adrian Richardson, bought the general store of J.B. Donkle in Verona, and so began another of Stewart's connections to Mount Horeb's history. William Miller purchased an interest in the business in 1916 and the store became known as Stewart and Miller.

Stewart sold his share of the business to Keith Miller in 1950; the name became Miller and Sons in 1958, a branch of which opened in Mount Horeb in 2009. Frank Stewart, champion of parks and longtime County Board chair, died in 1956 at age 74 and is buried in Verona Cemetery.

Special thanks to Larry Kruckman and Friends of Stewart Park!



Above: Aerial view of Stewart Park  
Below: Frank Stewart with his wife in an automobile.