

3# Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association

Even though Madison was still a relatively small city in the later part of the 1800s, the noise and smells of urban life could sometimes be overwhelming. The combination of plentiful horse manure and raw sewage flowing into the lakes made for quite a stink.

For those city dwellers with access to a horse and carriage, a ride out to the fresh air in the “country” was a real treat. As early as the 1860s, the university was allowing the public to access their farm roads at the base of Observatory Hill for the purpose of so-called “pleasure driving.”

In 1892 a new civic organization was formed to increase the number of roads available to the public. Building a bridge to get across this creek, where you stand now, was the first big project of the new Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association.

This bridge was the start of the “Bay Road” later renamed Willow Drive because of all the willow trees that the association planted. Just a few of the original willows, planted well over 100 years ago, are still alive. Perhaps as you walk along the path towards Picnic Point you’ll be able to spot some of these old-timers.

The Pleasure Drive Association went on to build roads and acquire land all over Madison, and to develop some of our most popular Madison parks. Vilas, Hoyt, Tenney and Brittingham parks are but a few places that are part of the Pleasure Drive Association’s great legacy. What kind of open spaces do you think we should set aside for the next generation?

Today we call this stretch of the old pleasure drive the Lakeshore Path. The path follows four miles of shoreline from the Memorial Union, around Picnic Point and out to Eagle Heights Woods.

You can learn more about the cultural and natural history of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve at other stops on this audio tour. Visit our website or check the signs near major trailheads for maps and more information.