

The Many Faces of Cadiz Township

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Cadiz Township is nestled deep within the rolling hills of Green County. Corn sways in the gentle breezes and cows roam on the green pastures. Little seems to have changed over the years. Farms still dot the countryside, cheese making and the dairy industry are still extremely important to the local economy, and everyone in the community knows just about everyone. Well, at least this is the case in Cadiz Township. With careful observation, however, one can notice the massive environmental changes that have occurred since 1834. The 1785 Land Ordinance and the 1833 land survey also fundamentally altered the organization of the region. The vegetation of Cadiz Township also changed as agricultural production increased. In addition, farming techniques in general have changed significantly in the last fifty years, reducing the negative consequences of intensive agriculture on the environment. Finally, changing definitions of nature and conservation in Green County as well as the desire for public hunting and fishing grounds led to the creation of a man-made lake and the establishment of a state park. Each of these changes, while easy to overlook, are imperative to understanding Cadiz Township as it stands today.

The organization of Cadiz Township today is the direct result of a law passed over two hundred and twenty years ago. While Green County was not officially formed until the tenth of January 1849, in 1833 the area currently called Green County was surveyed in accordance with the 1785 Land Ordinance (Harrison, 1833). The 1785 ordinance dictated that territories should be divided into rectangular plots, each equaling thirty-six square miles. Each of these plots, later called townships, were further divided into thirty-six one square mile plots, containing 640 acres, to facilitate settlement and the sale of the land (Pintar, 1990). The 1785 Land Ordinance and the survey of Green County fundamentally changed the way we viewed the landscape. Boundaries were set by invisible lines, and location was determined not in relation to landmarks but by

townships and quadrants. The first settlers arrived in Cadiz in 1834, six years before the survey was certified by the national government. Once certified, the survey gave existing settlers a new way to identify their location and the division of the township dictated the sale of land to new settlers. Roads and property lines established after the original survey followed the new imaginary lines created by the 1833 survey. While each of the original thirty-six plots were further subdivided into smaller pieces, land ownership in 1850 closely followed the grid established by the land survey (Cadiz Township, 1850). As can be seen in a portion of the 1850 land survey, (see appendix, map one) even the smaller plots maintained the rectangular shape characterizing the 1785 ordinance.

Evidence of the original survey in Cadiz is still vivid today, both in the landscape and in maps and photographs. For instance, Franklin Road, an extremely hilly road connecting Monroe with Cadiz Township, follows the boundary between sections one and twelve and two and eleven instead of circumventing the hills (Pintar, 1990). The same is true for several other major roads including Ullom road, which runs the entire length of Cadiz Township and County B, which runs the width of the township. One can also see the influence of the 1785 Ordinance in the pattern of farms and roads from aerial photographs of the region (DNR, 2004). Major roads, with the exception of Highway 11, which are clearly visible in aerial photos, follow the original land survey grid lines (see appendix, map two). The photograph also demonstrates how the “shape” of current rural property, despite well over a hundred and fifty years of sales and purchases, still maintains the rectangular pattern established by the original land survey.

The vegetation of Cadiz Township has also changed fundamentally since the first settlers arrived in 1834. Cornfields and green pastures have blanketed the land for well over a century. However, this beautiful landscape, which attracts many city dwellers each summer, is

anthropogenic. The first settlers arrived in the area as the first survey of the region was being conducted; therefore, the original vegetation of the region can be inferred from the first land survey. The land survey indicated four main ecological regions in Cadiz Township. These main regions were mapped and color coded for convenience (DNR, 2004). The largest region, designated by the color purple on map number two, consisted of maple, basswood, ash, and oak forests. Some of the trees measured almost 30 inches in diameter. These areas were seen as important commodities and labeled as prime “lumber” in the original survey notes (Harrison, 1833). The off Gray/off white coloring designates the region dominated by white, black, and bur oaks. Light pink is used to mark the areas covered by marsh and sedge meadows. These areas surrounded the many spring fed streams that wander through the valleys, including the area now called Cadiz Springs State Park.

The color yellow designates prairies. While minimal in Cadiz Township, the “rolling prairies” spread extensively into neighboring townships and counties. There are several different reasons accounting for the expanse of prairies in Southern Wisconsin. Native Americans located in the northern portion of Cadiz Township and in Northern Illinois used fire as a means to create more forest edges, which improved game hunting, and to promote the growth of edible plants. Low population densities, and reliance on hunting and gathering in addition to agriculture, also mitigated the threat of fire (Curtis, 1959). Therefore, while prairies are considered to be one part of the natural vegetation of the region, they are in many respects man-made as well. In addition, small hardwood stands with relatively young trees, noted in the original survey notes, were most likely prairies during the height of Native American populations in the region (Curtis, 1959). Therefore, it is important to remember that the “original vegetation” of Cadiz Township in 1833 was subject to Native American influence in the previous centuries.

While change in vegetation patterns is inevitable with settlement, it is amazing how quickly the changes occurred. The Land Inventory and Economic Survey was completed for Green County in 1939. The survey concluded that by 1939, most of the township had been converted to pastures and farmland (Wisconsin, 1933/1945). Therefore, a conservative estimate would say that the landscape changed completely in approximately one hundred years. When other evidence is taken into account, however, one can conclude that the transformation of the landscape occurred by the turn of the century. The first settlers arrived in Cadiz Township in 1834. The 1850 plat map shows that most of Cadiz Township had been sold and partitioned by 1850 (Cadiz Township, 1850). By 1891, any remaining parcels of land had been sold (Foote, 1891). In addition, Green County was named the “Swiss Cheese Capital of the USA” in the 1870’s and in 1914, Green County celebrated its first Cheese Days. Both events, in addition to the rapid speculation of land, suggest that the transformation of the township to an agrarian society occurred by the turn of the century.

As noted above, farming was and still is extremely important to the local economy. Many early settlers in Cadiz Township came from mining communities located to the West of Green County. However, farming quickly became the dominant livelihood in the region. The area attracted both Swiss and German immigrants who brought with them their expertise in the dairy and cheese industries (Pintar, 1990). By 1939, the majority of Cadiz Township had been converted to pastures or cropland to support the dairy industry (Wisconsin, 1933/1945). However, the intensive agriculture and grazing associated with the dairy industry is extremely detrimental to the land. Cadiz Township is located in a portion of the state called the driftless area. Rolling hills, fragile soils, and diverse ecosystems are common characteristics of this unique geological region. While extremely beautiful, rolling hills pose a problem for agriculture;

farming on hillsides substantially increases soil erosion and decreases soil fertility. Indeed, soil erosion and loss of soil fertility are two main problems encountered by dairy farmers in Cadiz Township. The widespread use of contour and strip farming in the region suggest the desire to curb soil erosion and fertility loss through new scientific agricultural practices.

Contour farming is a method of plowing furrows that follow the curves of the land rather than straight up and down slopes. Topsoil and seed are easily washed away in fields with traditional furrows that run up and down the slopes. Contour farming, on the other hand, forms ridges around the hills, which slows water flow down hill and prevents topsoil erosion. Strip cropping aims to both prevent soil erosion and maintain soil fertility. Root crops, such as alfalfa or legumes can be planted in strips in between rows of corn. The dense root structure of these plants helps to prevent erosion. In addition, nitrogen and other minerals are often depleted through over intensive farming or erosion. Alfalfa and legumes, which are nitrogen fixing plants, help return nitrogen to the soil (Helms et al. 1992).

The presence of contour and strip farming in Cadiz Township can be seen by either taking a leisurely drive through the countryside or by looking at aerial photographs. Unfortunately, it is difficult to establish the exact time period when these new farming practices were adopted in the township. However, we do know that farm management practices flourished nationwide in the 1930's during the depression and FDR's New Deal. Both contour farming and strip cropping were two main programs promoted by the New Deal and the Soil Conservation Service. The Soil Conservation Service and the Civil Conservation Corps sponsored many demonstrations across the nation to promote new farming practices. One of the experimental demonstrations was conducted in the Coon Creek Water Shed in Southwestern Wisconsin in 1933. Hugh Bennet, the head of the Soil Erosion Service in 1933, anticipated that success in

Coon Creek would lead to widespread implementation of new farming practices in the unglaciated regions of the Midwest. The project was widely successful, and surrounding regions gradually adopted similar practices in the years following the war (Helms, 1992). Without aerial photographs or written data, it is difficult to pinpoint when the practices reached Cadiz Township. However, from the given evidence, it can be logically inferred that these practices were probably adopted in the mid 1940's.

While conservation was the prevailing ideology in the mid 1900's in Cadiz Township, conservation in conjunction with recreation dominated in the latter half of the century. Cadiz Springs State Recreation Area, is a prime example. Today, the park has 966 acres and two main hiking trails, which circle the two lakes, Zander's Lake and Beckman Lake. Families from surrounding towns come regularly in the summer and fall months to picnic, swim, fish, and collect wild berries. Both Beckman and Zander's Lakes are man-made lakes, fed by Cadiz Springs, a natural spring located just north of the park. Zander's Lake was created in 1955 and Beckman Lake was created in 1965. Yet, as you walk around the lakes today, there is one conspicuous piece missing, Beckman Lake! Last spring, Beckman Lake was drained in order to replace the "tin whistle," a device which controls the water level of the lake. Beckman Lake has been transformed into a large marshy field, covered with young grasses and plants. Tree stumps left from the original flooding of the lake have been uncovered after forty years of entombment. With the lake drained, it is possible to imagine what the area looked like in the 1950's. With a little imagination, it is also possible to remove Zander's Lake from the picture, recreating the "original landscape." From the original land survey and personal accounts of early residents, we know that this area was originally wetlands. The natural springs and Zander Creek kept the immediate area saturated with water, especially after heavy rainstorms. Early accounts of the

region also indicate that flooding was a regular occurrence. A farm located near or on the area designated today as Cadiz Springs State Recreation Area was called the “Frog Farm.” The farm earned this title not because it raised frogs, but because the area was often completely flooded. Pictures of the area taken at the turn of the century also provide evidence of substantial flooding. One picture shows water reaching the edge of the Devil’s Tea Table, a massive rock formation approximately twenty feet high. Tree tops struggled to remain above water and water stretched as far as the eye could see (Pintar, 1990). Yet one main question remains. Why did the residents of Cadiz Township replace the native wetlands, by damming the natural springs and Zander’s Creek, with two man-made lakes?

Little evidence is available regarding the creation of Zander’s Lake. However, based on given information, we can make an educated guess as to why the lake was created. Many old residents of the area returned to Cadiz Springs over the summer to see the progress of Beckman Lake. Several recounted the community effort involved in creating the dam for Zander’s Lake. Everyone in the community hauled rock to create Zander’s dike. In addition, as was previously discussed, the area was prone to considerable flooding. Recurrent floods compromised farming near the springs and the creek. Therefore, we can conclude that Zander’s lake might have been a community effort to reduce the magnitude of the floods and damage to crops and valuable farm land. However, other evidence suggests that it might have been created solely for recreational purposes. “Our Part of America: Browntown” says that in the early years Zander Lake was “a lovely, tranquil place to spend the day, a place for local children to go swimming” (Pintar, 1990). Without further evidence, it is difficult to determine the actual reason for creating the lake.

More evidence can be found regarding the creation of Beckman Lake and the Browntown/Cadiz State Recreation Area. Both were primarily created to satisfy the increased



demand for outdoor recreation. Beckman Lake was built in 1965 by the Green County Conservation League (Pintar, 1990). Recreational demand for the lakes increased rapidly, resulting in the establishment of Cadiz Springs State Park in 1970. The park attracted a wide range of visitors. Avid anglers came to the lakes to fish. Both lakes were stocked with large and small mouth bass as well as a variety of pan fish. In addition, Zander Lake was stocked with brown and rainbow trout while northern pike, catfish and bullheads could be found in Beckman Lake. Locals also enjoyed walking around the lakes, having picnics in the grassy fields, and simply enjoying the outdoors (DNR, 2003). Attendance in the 1970's hit record highs and the park was often filled to capacity. Cars lined up at the front entrance waiting to be admitted to the park. Hunters during this era also demanded public hunting and trapping grounds. In 1980, the Browntown Recreational Area and Cadiz Springs merged to create the Browntown/Cadiz State Recreational area (DNR, 2003). While use of the public hunting ground has remained steady, demand for the park in recent years, however, has dramatically declined. Other forms of recreation, such as snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles (ATV's) and "dirt bikes," have proliferated in the last twenty years. To meet this demand, the county transformed the old Milwaukee/St. Paul railroad, which had long since been abandoned, into an all purpose recreational trail. Unlike attendance of the park, use of the trail, which runs from Mineral Point to Monroe, has increased steadily over the years. The "Cheese Country Trail" marks a change in outdoor recreation preferences in Green County and the surrounding area.

Before 1832, European influence in the Northwest Territory, which encompassed the states now called Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin, was relatively minimal. The European population was restricted to fur traders and lead miners (Pintar, 1990). Beginning in 1832, however, European settlers rapidly began to settle the region. The Europeans saw the land

strictly as a commodity, and treated it as such. In Cadiz Township, dairy farming quickly became an intricate part of the local economy. Every spare piece of land was cultivated or cleared for pasture. As time passed, however, perceptions of the land shifted. Cadiz Township realized that current farming practices were detrimental to the land. Thus, in the late 1940's farm conservation practices were widely accepted and implemented. Today, farmers still practice the conservation methods introduced in the 1940's. In addition, they have also ceased farming unstable and fragile lands, such as the wetlands located to the west of Cadiz Springs. In the 1970's, community demand for outdoor recreation and public hunting grounds increased rapidly. Browntown/Cadiz State Recreational Area fulfilled both demands. Cadiz Township today reflects the changing ideals and perceptions of nature of the residents of Green County. The current generation of residents will leave its mark on the land as well. Change in the landscape is inevitable. However, we can dictate what the change will be.

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