



A History of Madison Meadow

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Long before the arrival of the first explorers in the Willamette Valley, native Kalapuyans inhabited this oak savannah grassland, hunting, gathering and trading with other tribes in the Northwest. The Meadow may have provided the acorns, filberts, berries, camas and deer, which were staples in their diet. By the early nineteenth century, fur trappers and traders had moved through the valley, opening the way for the influx of more immigrants overland through California, or the Oregon Trail beginning in 1842. Eugene Skinner arrived in 1846, starting a trading post and settlement near the Willamette River. The 1855 Dayton treaty with the Confederated Kalapuya Tribes ended their practice of burning grasslands to enhance camas root gathering.

The origins of the Meadow in this era can be traced to the Donation Land Claim Act of 1850, which allowed pioneer settlers to acquire free acreage in the West. In 1851 William and Eliza Masterson left Missouri by wagon train for the Dalles, traveled down the Columbia by boat to Portland and continued south by oxen team into the Upper Willamette Valley and settled on what is now the Dorris Ranch near Springfield, site of their replicated homestead cabin where they raised 5 children and founded a historic filbert farm.

William Masterson was a millwright and also made brick for the early buildings. In 1856 he purchased 166 acres across the river, from another settler, Pardon Dodge, for the sum of \$2000. The Masterson House (at 2050 Madison St.) was built in 1857 and is the second oldest remaining house of the settlement era (1846- 1870). It was built in the Classic Revival style of Masterson's native Kentucky, with 8 rooms and "box construction" with walls of 2" planks. It is also known as a "double house", with each side of the house having an entrance, parlor and fireplace. Located at the crest of a hill between pasture and fields, 1.5 miles southwest of Skinner's Butte, it was also a stopover for travelers passing through this growing community. The Masterson family built up a farm to include fields of wheat, oats, flax, apple orchards, walnuts, filberts and vegetable gardens in addition to raising horses and dairy cows.

The Mastersons helped found the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in 1853, Columbia College (for which College Hill was named) in 1856, and other civic enterprises. The State of Oregon was established in 1859 and by 1860, "Eugene City" had a population of 200, reaching 861 by 1879, as the town became the county seat for Lane County. In 1861 a one-year mortgage of \$500 was conveyed on the farm, with an interest rate of 25%. In 1871 the railroad arrived, marking the second period of the city's growth. The Mastersons sold their farm (then 171 acres) for \$5152 in 1884 and moved to Union County in Eastern Oregon.

Over the subsequent decades the original property was divided and sold off to establish some of the residential subdivisions that exist in the Friendly Neighborhood today. In 1891, the blocks of "Hendricks Addition to College Hill Park", were surveyed and platted, with lots being 60' X 150', streets 60' wide and 12' alleys.

The entrance to the Masterson farm was originally further east, on Old County Road (city limits in 1924) where a line of original fir trees remains today (now Jefferson Alley). This lane continued south to the eastern edge of Madison Meadow. The southern boundary of the farm was beyond 23rd Avenue (Pleasant St.). Madison Street was originally named Grundy Avenue and became the frontage to the Masterson House in later years. 22nd Avenue was then Tremont Street. A City ordinance in 1913 changed these names along with 30 other streets.

In 1936, the farm's original filbert orchard stood on the north side of 22nd Avenue, and even today some of the old fruit trees remain in the northwest corner of the Meadow. The large open hillside at 23rd and Monroe also contained fruit and nut trees until the 1990's. In 1945, 22nd and Madison was the end of the paved streets in this area, and once past 22nd and Friendly St., one was really outside of the developed city. The Meadow then consisted of two narrow lots, each stretching the length of the property, east to west. Only

two frame houses were built on the Meadow, both located along Jefferson Alley, where the drainage was better. One was removed about 1980 and the other, in the northeast corner of the Meadow, was finally removed in June 2011 after long being vacant.

Many trees in the area were lost in the Columbus Day Storm of 1962, including the fine locust trees marking the front yard of the Masterson House. Stuart and Joan Rich bought the residence in 1963 and lived there until 2012. In October of 2006 the Eugene Historic Review Board granted their application for Historic Landmark Designation. It was significant that the Masterson House had never been moved, and the 1953 landscape design was done by renowned architect Lloyd Bond. In 2013 the new owners began some remodeling, after a review process compatible with the home's historic status.

In 1977, the newly created Friendly Area Neighbors had some federal HCC funds available for park acquisition. There were only 3 large open sites available in this area: 27th & Tyler, 23rd & Monroe (both are now developed), and 22nd & Madison. At just over 2 acres, the Meadow was the largest, and was selected as the neighborhood's choice of a natural area which would be largely undeveloped and offer a different setting than the heavily used sports fields of nearby Washington Park. With the help of a design by Bill Campbell, a university student in Jerry Diethelm's Landscape Architecture class, a presentation was made to the City Council to secure this site for our neighborhood. However, the \$100,000 in funds administered by the city HCDC, was re-allocated to the restoration of the downtown Palace Hotel, and this opportunity to save the Meadow was lost.

In July of 1981, developer John Mattot proposed a "Madison Square" Planned Unit Development at the Meadow, with 22 building sites (allowing 1000 sq. ft. houses with zero lot lines) arranged around a U-shaped entrance drive from 22nd Avenue. There was no area of undeveloped "commons", a usual provision of such a project. At a FAN meeting held in the Washington Park center, many residents showed up to voice their opposition to this high-density proposal, which was subsequently turned down by the City Planning Dept. The Meadow has remained largely unchanged since then, until the final effort to save this remnant of our community's historic past.

In the summer of 2003, a For Sale sign appeared in the Meadow. Alarmed at the prospect of having this open space replaced by developed housing, several dozen neighbors met in October 2003 and formed a committee to create the non-profit organization known as Madison Meadow. With the help of many fundraising events, door-to-door collections, and an anonymous \$100,000 donation, the group was able to make a down payment of \$240,000 by December of 2004 and receive title to the property thereafter. The group had until the end of 2007 to raise the remaining \$200,000. Regular meetings, events, and donations from concerned residents continued to support the cause. The final funds were

secured with the help of a matching grant and a few private loans, ensuring the preservation of the Meadow. On Oct. 30, 2008, after five years of hard work, the Madison Meadow nonprofit group raised the final dollars towards this purchase.

The Meadow Today:

Madison Meadow in Eugene, Oregon, is an undeveloped haven in the heart of our urban neighborhood, located on 2 acres bordered by 22nd Avenue at Madison Street, with alleys on the east and west and residential properties along the southern edge. This open natural area is predominately orchard grass and forbs, with native and orchard trees scattered throughout, providing a nurturing habitat for wildlife, from bees and butterflies to birds, bats and deer.

The Meadow welcomes visitors young and old to experience a closer connection to nature. Generations of neighborhood children have played among the grasses and wildflowers, madrone, filbert, apple, pear and cherry trees. It is a place for exploration and discovery, for learning and teaching, and for strengthening a sense of environmental stewardship.

The Board of Madison Meadow plans to continue projects which enhance biodiversity and native plants, and preserve the Meadow's rural feeling without creating an off-limits reserve. Recent additions include some heritage trees: several white oaks, a Willamette Valley pine, big leaf maples, additional madrone, and a giant sequoia. The group has worked with schools to plant native prairie grasses, a wildflower garden with milkweed to attract more monarch butterflies, and a native island with pollinating shrubs and vine maple. Ongoing efforts have reintroduced the camas plants which were once so abundant in the valley.

In future generations, the Board will keep and maintain Madison Meadow as a natural open space for the benefit of plants, wildlife and people.

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References: Historic Review Board / Staff Report For Historic Landmark Designation (10-26-06), original Abstract of Title, interviews with longtime residents, personal recollections, and numerous online sources.