The City of Eagan

Highlights of our History and Heritage Map

Eagan's heritage dates back to the earliest United States land acquisition in Minnesota. In 1805 Lt. Zebulon Pike acquired nine square miles from the Dakota Indians for Fort Snelling. The military reservation included a portion of Eagan.

For 50 years Eagan's history was tied to activities related to Fort Snelling, Mendota's fur trade, and Black Dog's Village. All were within the military reservation where whites could live at the government's discretion. An 1833 map by Lt. Thompson shows three roads (trails) crossing Eagan to Mendota and Fort Snelling: the St. Croix, the Traders, and Black Dog's.

In 1837 the government hired Louis Martin to teach farming at Chief Wamditonka's Black Dog village. Martin's cabin was near today's Highway 13. Hazen Mooers succeeded Martin in 1849.

Opening a new territory

When the Minnesota Territory formed in 1849 Dakota County was one of the first nine counties. However, Dakota remained Indian territory until the Treaty of Mendota opened it to settlement in 1854. Virtually all Eagan land was claimed by 1853, a year before filings were legal. Whites connected with Mendota knew the land and made the early claims. An example is the two LeMays. Telesphore set his stake in Eagan and Constant in Mendota Twp. The result is the two LeMay lakes in different cities but only two miles apart.

John W. Brown, son-in-law of Hazen Mooers, is considered Eagan's first white settler.

In April 1858 the Dakota County commissioners formed the county's first townships including Mendota which included today's Eagan. An attempt was made to form Montgomery Township using the bottom two-thirds of today's Eagan. The state legislature rejected the attempt and proceeded to create Eagan Township on March 6, 1860. At the time Eagan's population of 565 was the fourth largest in Dakota County.

Organizing a new township, Eagan

Eagan citizens organized the township on April 3, 1860, at the home of Michael Comer. The first town board chairman was Patrick Eagan. During the next 100 years Eagan developed as a farming community with wheat, corn and onions as major crops. Early farmers delivered their produce to Mendota and St. Paul. The "Lone Oak" tree at Dodd Road and Highway 55 became a meeting place and bulletin board. The Dodd Road and the Sibley Highway were the north-south travel routes. The Wescott Inn on Dodd Road became a favorite stop, later known as Wescott Station.

In 1865 the first two railroads in Dakota County crossed Eagan, the Minnesota Central on the east and the Minnesota Valley along the Minnesota River. A small business community called Nicols Station grew up on the valley route in the heart of the onion fields.

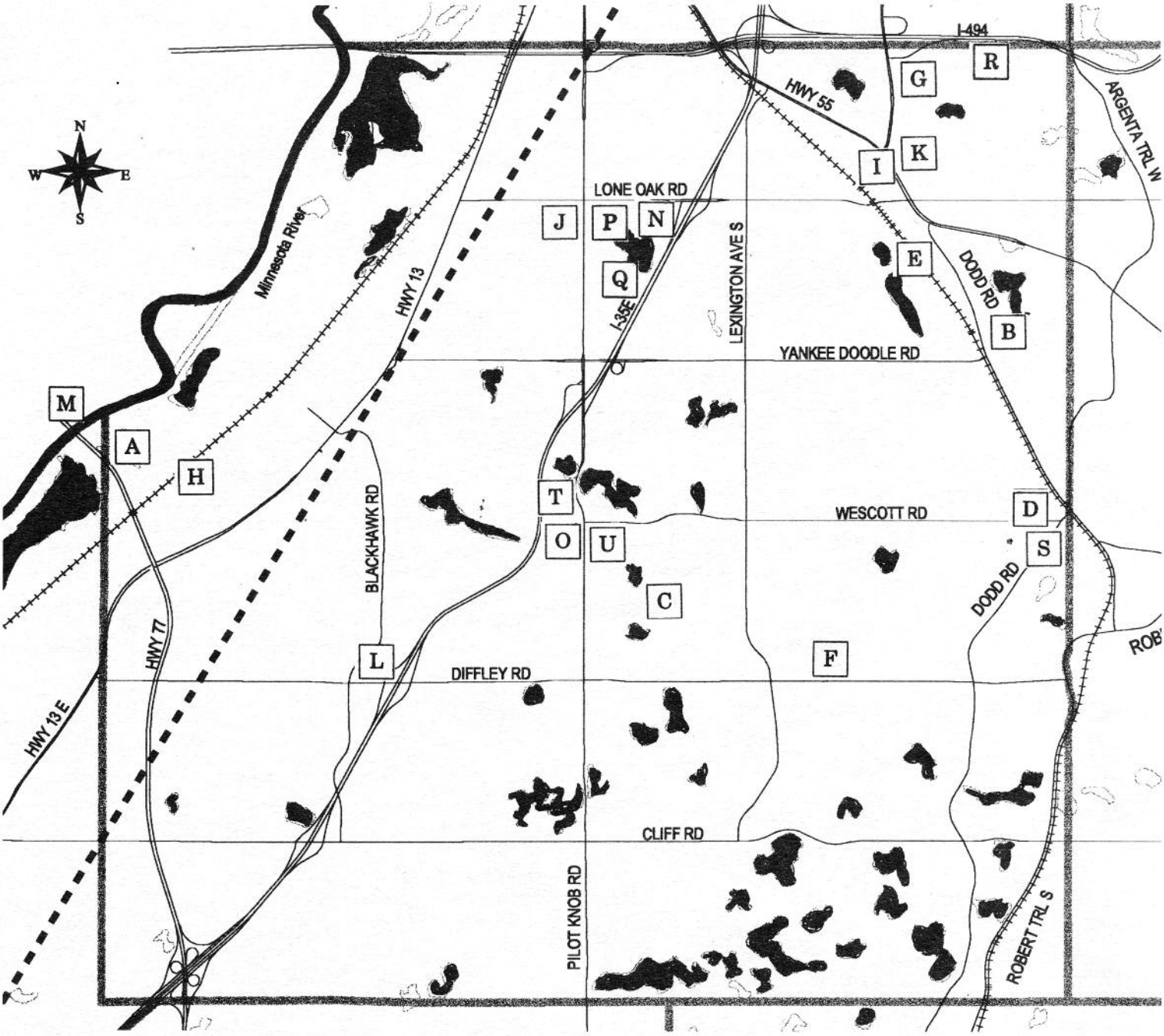
In 1890 the Cedar Avenue Swing Bridge provided access to Bloomington and in 1926 the Mendota Bridge to Minneapolis.

One hundred years, then suburbia

Eagan remained a farming community through World War II. Its population of only 1,185 in 1950 was about to change. Returning GI's and family formations resulted in a home building boom. Eagan's population tripled to 3,382 by 1960 and tripled again in 1970 to 10,398. Growth required services beyond the capability of a township, but a vote to incorporate was defeated in 1970.

After hearings in May 1972 the Metropolitan Council ordered Eagan's incorporation as a village. The first village election was held October 19, 1972. Herbert Polzin was elected mayor and council members were Arthur Rahn, James Smith, Theodore Wachter, and William Rydrych.

In 1974 Eagan became a City when the Minnesota legislature designated all incorporated municipalities as cities.



Basic map by Dakota County Survey and Land Information Office

Eagan History Map

A Use the letter to match historic places and sites with location on today's map. The word "site" identifies locations of historic subjects that no longer exist.

– – – Military reservation line. The portion of Eagan to the left of the line was part of Lt. Zebulon Pike's 1805 purchase from the Dakota Indians.

++++++++ Railroad routes. On the east the Minnesota Central. On the west the Minnesota Valley. They were the two earliest railroads in Dakota County.

Bill Wolston, 1998

A **Black Dog's Village site**

A Dakota village located near Highway 13 and Blackhawk Road. It consisted of several lodges and at times a population of 200. Louis Martin served as the first government farmer in 1837.

B **Dodd Road**

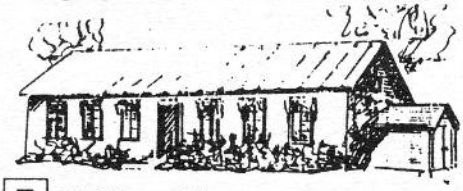
A road project promoted by Captain William Dodd to connect St. Peter with St. Paul. After not receiving government aid he went ahead on his own in 1853. The 65 mile road, a hewn path, was completed in 109 days. Dodd eventually received a government grant. The road became a major north-south artery. The portion between Eagan and St. Paul was the first state road to be paved.

C **Patrick Eagan farm site**

Eagan arrived in 1853 and in 1860 was elected as the town's first chairman. His name was chosen for the township name.

D **Wescott Station**

James Wescott opened an inn here in the 1850s. It became a favorite wagon and stage coach stop. In 1866 it became a flag stop of the C.M. & S.P. railroad (Minnesota Central). Later a depot was built followed by general store, grist mill, school, telegraph office and other buildings.



E **Halfway House**

Originally opened in 1865 as a dry goods store and saloon and the first stagecoach stop south of St. Paul. Continues today as restaurant and saloon. Name means halfway point from Hastings to St. Paul.

F **District 14 School (Town Hall)**

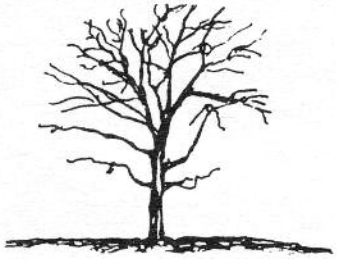
Location was at intersection of Diffley and Lexington. The original 1860 log house was replaced by a frame building in 1875 and a brick structure in 1898. The school was the site of Annual Town Meetings from 1860 to 1892.

G **Robert O'Neill farm site**

In 1857 O'Neill was elected to the territorial legislature, and later to the Minnesota statehood convention.

H **Nicols Station site**

Located at Nicols Road and Union Pacific tracks. A flag station in 1867 that grew into a little community in the 1870s with a depot, stores, and houses surrounded onion fields on a large peat bog. When trains passed through the buildings shook. Hence the name "Rubber Town."



I **Site of the Lone Oak Tree**

For 115 years the oak tree on the Trinity Lutheran Church property on Dodd Road was the meeting and message place for farmers in Eagan Township. They met at the Lone Oak on the way to market and the way home. If they had equipment to sell they nailed a notice to the tree. Notes were posted by four generations. The oak died and was cut down in 1984.

J **Site of original town hall**

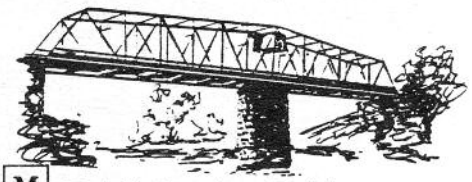
Built at southwest intersection of Lone Oak and Pilot Knob roads in 1892, destroyed by fire in 1914.

K **Trinity Lutheran Church**

The first services were held in a log cabin in today's cemetery. Trinity Lutheran became a frame structure in 1882. When the church was destroyed by fire in 1901 the present impressive brick structure was completed.

L **St. John's Lutheran Cemetery**

The 1888 site of St. John's Lutheran Church. After moving seven times Rosemount became its home. The cemetery is at the original site.

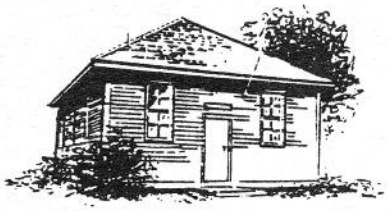


M **Old Cedar Ave. Bridge**

Completed in 1890 it was the last hand opened, swing bridge in the state. It took six men and a car at one end, for weight, to open it. Designed for horses and cattle, the bridge's limitations resulted in automobile bottlenecks especially when it had to be opened. It was replaced in 1980.

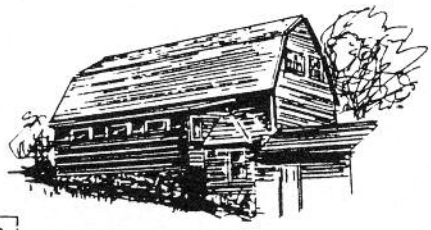
N **Site of Shields sorghum mill**

The mill operated by Michael Shields from 1899 to 1911 produced syrup from amber sugar cane in two 200 gallon boilers. The boilers were fired night and day during September and October with 11 men working 12 hour shifts.



O **Old Town Hall**

The Town Hall is located at the southwest corner of Pilot Knob and Wescott. It served from 1914 to 1965. It has been restored and is opened on special occasions. The hall has wooden benches, wall of voting booths, and pot bellied stove.



P **Shields-by-the-Lake**

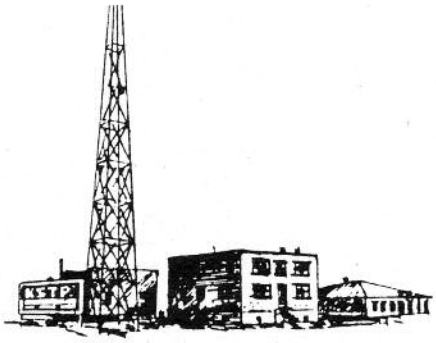
Shields was a very popular dance hall from the 1920s to 1940s. The dance hall was a converted barn and the building still exists.

Q **Moonshine Park**

On the south shore of LeMay Lake. "Moonshine" does not refer to the moon. It refers to the production of liquor at the site during prohibition days of the 1920s. Undoubtedly Eagan was a major supplier to the Mendota marketplace. Some building remains can still be found.

R **Ames estate and library**

In 1926 Charles Lesley Ames started collecting books on Southeast Asia at his estate on Blue Gentian Road (now O'Neill). After the collection outgrew his office and gatehouse he built a library. In 1961 he gave the 25,000 volume collection to the University of Minnesota. The library building is on O'Neill Road.



S **Radio Center site, 1928-30**

The National Battery Company selected the high and dry site at Wescott on the recommendation of a university professor in 1928. It turned out to be the opposite of a desirable site. In 1930 it was moved. The KSTP call letters were first used at the Eagan location and later became the company name.

T **1965 Munipical Center site**

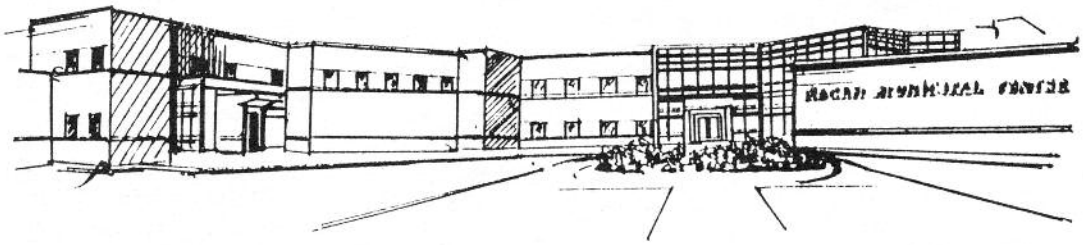
Eagan was a township with over 5,000 citizens when it decided the town hall with the pot bellied stove needed a replacement. A new municipal building was built on the northwest corner of Wescott and Pilot Knob. It closed out the township years and oversaw the first ten years of city government. It was razed in 1998.

From Suburbia to City

From truck farms to national corporations

The transition from township to city was rapid as the population multiplied. Here are some of the bench marks of the change and growth through the years.

- Opening of the Cedarvale shopping center; the first in Eagan.
- Completion of the new Cedar Bridge in 1980.
- Sperry Corp. building its Pilot Knob plant in 1967. Now Lockheed-Martin, the company employees now number over 5,000.
- Blue Cross-Blue Shield of Minnesota constructing its home office on Sibley Highway.
- West Publishing, the world's leading law book publisher, headquartering on Dodd Road in 1983. Now known as the West Group.
- The Interstate 494 freeway and Minnesota River Crossing.
- Interstate 35E. The freeway has become the commercial and transportation spine of the city.
- The construction of Northwest Airlines corporate headquarters off Dodd Road in northern Eagan in 1985.



U **The Eagan Municipal Center**

Eagan's Municipal Center retains its place at the city's center at the southeast corner of Pilot Knob and Wescott. The modern center grew as the city grew.

In 1978 a police station was built on the current site. In 1983 a second floor was added to the police building for the city offices. By 1995 city growth required an additional expansion. A new police structure was added and the city took over the entire former building.

The main entrance to the Eagan Municipal Center is now on the south side of the building.

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