

Middleton History Center

A Proposal

Like the City Library, the Middleton Area Historical Society (MAHS) is also in need of greater space ... additional room for historic photographs, documents and artifacts that are currently housed primarily at the Rowley House Museum (across Hubbard Ave. from the library). Therefore, the Middleton Area Historical Society proposes that when designs for the Middleton City Library expansion are developed, that a part of the library be dedicated to the creation of a Middleton History Center consisting of a Display-Reference Room and a MAHS Office-Research Room. The Center would then house MAHS's historic documents and photographs along with other Middleton historical documents and reference materials.

The Middleton History Center's Display-Reference Room, open to the public during normal library hours, would serve a twofold purpose: (1) to house changeable displays showcasing various materials that would help promote an interest in Middleton's history; (2) to contain all Middleton historic materials currently in the City Library including newspaper microfilms. Other Wisconsin historic reference material in the Library could also be relocated to the History Center, as well as Historic documents currently stored at Middleton High School. The Display-Reference Room would help concentrate all of Middleton's historic materials, yet still maintain public access to the Library's collections.

The MAHS Office-Research Room, containing documents and photographic collections relocated from Rowley House, would be open to the public only when staffed by MAHS volunteers. Although access would be regulated, the Office-Research Room would be staffed for several hours on one or more specified days of the week throughout the year, or by special appointment. This arrangement would provide much greater year-round access to the Middleton Area Historical Society information than is currently available at the Rowley House Museum. Furthermore, the Office-Research Room could be open during evening hours if an appointment is made and volunteers are available.

Office space at Rowley House is limited to two rooms containing 92 and 94 square feet respectively. These small rooms contain the complete collection of MAHS's historic Middleton documents and photographs along with computer work stations, office supplies and one small table for use by history researchers. The situation is far from ideal, especially when more than one person is trying to find materials that are on file, or a quiet corner for studying documents. Not only is space an issue, but research is limited to the hours when Rowley House is open ... 1:00 to 4:00 pm on Tuesdays and Saturdays (6 hours per week) between mid-April and mid-October. Additionally, Rowley House, built in 1868 does not provide the best environmental

conditions for safe storage of the valuable historic materials, most of which were donated to MAHS with the understanding that they would be safeguarded forever.

A Middleton History Center within the City Library would provide those who wish to conduct historical and genealogical research with a greater window of opportunity for reviewing the materials. This would double the roughly 6-month timeframe that now exists at Rowley House.

When conducting historical research, people need to be able to spread out the materials for detailed study. With the History Center as part of the Middleton City Library there would be ample room for perusing documents. Research could be conducted entirely within the Office-Research Room or materials could be properly signed out and taken to spacious library tables or to a Library Study Room. In either case, research would be conducted in comfortable and quiet surroundings ... conditions that are usually lacking at Rowley House.

Valuable historic Middleton documents and photographs would have a secure home in the History Center. The storage conditions in Middleton's City Library are ideally suited for preservation of historic papers and photographs. Donors should feel confident that their valuable materials will be stored under the safest conditions.

To ensure that all parties have a complete understanding of how such a combined venture would work and who would be responsible for each aspect and detail of the arrangement, a Memorandum of Understanding should be formulated. This MOU would describe the responsibilities of Middleton Public Library, the City of Middleton and the Middleton Area Historical Society.

Materials maintained by MAHS are a valuable community resource and should be readily accessible to those who wish to conduct history research, family genealogy and similar work. A Middleton History Center housed in our City Library would increase public access and generate greater awareness of Middleton's past and the City's development over time. Having Middleton's history on display in a prominent place gives Library visitors, including our many school children, a great opportunity for continually comparing the old with the new.