

A Visit To Western Wisconsin

By Monroe S. Miller

It was a long anticipated day — our September meeting at Cedar Creek near Onalaska on the 10th.

September signals an end to summer and the first days of autumn. This month's meeting is usually well attended and is an opportunity to visit with friends and see how all went over the summer golfing months.

I was anxious to see my former assistant's new golf course; it was rural field and pasture and woodland when Pat Norton first went to the La Crosse area. That ground was transformed into a golf course under Pat's supervision.

Pat (Zurawski) and I left Madison at 6:30 a.m. to give us time to do a couple of other things before his 12:30 tee time at Cedar Creek.

We pulled into Tomah for a quick look at the Toro factory. Most of the Toro commercial equipment used on golf courses all over the world is manufactured in Tomah, Wisconsin.

A Writer From The Middle Border

Our next stop was Hamlin Garland's hometown — West Salem. His childhood home is on a main east/west street and we found it quickly. That excitement turned to disappointment when we discovered it was closed for the year.

We sought out the headquarters of the West Salem Historical Society, found it, and I was able to purchase three of Garland's books for my library there — *Son Of The Middle Border*, *Daughter Of The Middle Border* (which won him a Pulitzer Prize) and *More Main Travelled Roads*.

Finding A Rarity

For years I've been interested in the American Chestnut; a healthy pair of them is growing between the 13th fairway and Lake Mendota Drive on my golf course. Several years ago I read about an isolated grove of these trees in Hoyer Coulee, north of West Salem.

We found Hoyer Coulee Road in my *Wisconsin Atlas and Gazetteer*, and headed up that route. Pat drove slowly and we both scouted left and right for some sign or clue of an American Chestnut woods.

I was nearly ready to give up the hunt when Pat noticed a homemade sign on the east side of the road near a mailbox: *Am. chestnuts 4 sale*.

Bingo! The clue we needed turned out to be my dream come true. Pat pulled into the farmyard driveway and swung around in front of the house. We piled out, but before we made it to the doorbell, Ron Bockenbauer came from the backyard to greet us.

Ron was obviously used to having strangers stop in with questions about American Chestnuts. I told him of my interests and wondered where the chestnut grove was located.

He pointed southeast. "Over there," Ron said, "are the trees you've read about."

He has scores of younger trees planted around his homestead. The grove was growing on the farm settled by his great grandparents and now farmed by his brother-in-law.

On his invitation we jumped into Ron's 4X4 pickup and headed south on Hoyer Coulee Road and turned into the farmyard. The road took us through the barnyard and wound past corn and alfalfa fields and uphill toward the woods edge.

After he parked, we started walking. "Do you see them?" Ron asked.

Sure enough. Everywhere we looked were the familiar leaves of the American Chestnuts, growing on hundreds and hundreds of chestnut trees.

Some were saplings; others were so big that the three of us together couldn't have gotten our arms around one.

Ron told us of how his grandmother came to Hoyer Coulee from the East with chestnuts to plant. The results are obvious.

Interest in the Hoyer Coulee chestnuts is widespread. I couldn't help notice, while signing Ron's guest book, that he'd been visited the previous day by the president of the American Chestnut Society. That gentleman travelled to Wisconsin from Bennington, Vermont.

Our visit was made complete with the purchase of two small chestnut trees. They are now growing near the other two we have on the golf course.



Ron Bockenbauer and one of his American Chestnut trees.



A coulee golf hole — one of several at Cedar Creek.