Salem Township
An area containing beautiful small lakes, dense hardwood stands, rolling hills, wildlife areas, the Fox River and numerous small ponds and streams, Salem Township has developed first as a recreational area.

Because it borders Illinois on the south and flows quiedy natural ly from the Chain 'o Lakes area in Illinois, much of the early housing was built as summer or retirement homes for Chicago area residents. Although some of these continue as summer homes (particularly the very large unheatable ones) most have been converted for occupancy year-round.

Concentrations of population exist around each lake, but these are loosely organized with zoning almost non-existent. The rest of the township maintains a fairly predictable low density. Homes with one to ten acres of empty land around them are numerous. There are a few real farms still extant, but proposed new sewer lines with the accompanying taxes may force these to subdivide as well. "Farmettes" are the most popular type of housing and are already plentiful.

New apartments in Salem and Silver Lake supplement large old houses divided into apartments for the rental market. In Paddock Lake and Silver Lake newer duplexes have also been built. Country houses for rent are at a premium. Some farms have absentee owners who rent the land to neighboring farmers and the houses to town escapees.

Real estate sales were very brisk until the current nationwide slowdown. Realtors claim that a large share of the buyers were Illinois residents who wished to move to Wisconsin for the beautiful scenery and planned to continue to commute to jobs in Illinois.

The recent rise in real estate taxes in Kenosha County in response to very quickly escalating real estate values was very hard on the many retirees in Salem township. Older people with a few acres which were valued at $500 per acre 10 years ago found themselves paying taxes on land currently valued at much inflated prices. Some were forced to sell.

SEWERS:

The most recent tax burden comes from a plan to extend sewers to a large part of the township. Most soil in Kenosha County will not pass the stricter state requirements for septic systems instituted 5-6 years ago. The fear of polluting the lakes is very real.

Sewers currently serve Paddock Lake, Silver Lake and the town of Salem. The plans to extend sewers to Center Lake, Camp Lake, Rock Lake, etc. mean that all residents must pay a fixed amount per acre owned, and those who actually get sewers will pay a per foot frontage cost plus a hookup fee.
Commercial Areas & Road Use
SHOPPING: Shopping areas tend to be strip-type developments of a very folksy type. Small foodstores to accommodate weekenders and the mid-week needs of residents, baitshops, bars and restaurants and gas stations predominate.

Many residents go to Kenosha or Burlington (about 15 miles each), Twin Lakes (4-8 miles) or Antioch, Ill. (1-5 miles) to do most shopping.

The most active shopping area in the township is the strip of Route 50 as it passes through Paddock Lake. This includes a drug store, laundry, hardware store, bank, beauty salon, larger grocery store, professional offices, and the ubiquitous gas stations, bars and restaurants. Ancillary areas are the "downtowns" of Silver Lake, Salem, Camp Lake, Wilmot and Trevor. Of these the most identifiable and seemingly the most used is Silver Lake.

ROADS:

The roads with heaviest use are Route 50 going east to Kenosha and west to Lake Geneva and Route 83 south to Antioch and north to Burlington. Other heavily used roads include County C going east to Kenosha and west to Twin Lakes, County K going east to Kenosha, and F between Silver Lake and Twin Lakes to the west. Because residents depend so heavily on cars the routes they usually travel take on daily significance.

RECREATION:

Outdoor recreation in all seasons is plentiful. The three most popular parks are Fox River County Park, Paddock Lake Park and Silver Lake County Park.

Fox River Park offers fishing, boating/canoeing, ice skating, snowmobiling, bird watching, etc. Silver Lake Park has these plus a sandy swimming beach, water-skiing, and hilly terrain for tobogganing and cross country skiing. Paddock Lake Park is smaller but seems to be the favorite summer picnic spot, especially for non-residents. This may be because of its location on Route 50. Many residents complain that these parks are too crowded by tourists for residents' use, but other residents make a living from tourists' dollars and are unlikely to want any change.

Bong recreation area, a seven square mile nature preserve is within 5 minutes of Salem Township. Golf courses are plentiful in the area, but only one is actually located in the township.

SALEM STRIP on Route 83

FISHING in the Fox River
A downhill ski run at Wilmot is usually full of tourists on winter weekends, but usable by residents on weekday evenings. The spring event in Wilmot is the carp run at Wilmot Dam.

A campground owned by the Salvation Army on Center Lake brings many urban people in year-round. Activities include swimming, boating, tennis, volleyball, baseball, hiking, etc. in summer and ice-skating, sledding, etc. in winter. Residents can get family passes to this campground for five dollars per year.

A private game preserve and hunt club has 40 acres of woods, hills and ponds across the road from Silver Lake Park. Many kinds of game animals including deer take advantage of this large area of wild land.

Residents in each cluster around a lake usually have a residents only park and beach. Houses in these areas are sold with "lake rights". There is a lot of fishing on all the lakes, including ice fishing all winter. Impromptu ice motor and motorcycle racing also occurs. All lakes are required to have public access but in many cases denial of any adjacent parking effectively prevents public use of these access points.

The largest number of recreational spots active year round are the many bars and bar/restaurants.
Topography
Surface Water
Glaciation which left behind distinct moraines traceable through miles of Southeastern Wisconsin also created numerous small kettle lakes. In Salem Township these lakes are spring fed for the most part although numerous small streams also exist.

The streams are mostly intermittent, only a few flowing all summer. The many marsh areas, being neither good for farming or home building have remained natural refuges for wildlife. A large number of waterfowl (including blue herons) find Salem Township either a good home or an excellent migratory stop over. Foxes, deer, pheasant, groundhogs, ground squirrels, rabbits and tree squirrels all find homes near streams and marshes.

Fish in the lakes have included walleyed pike, Northern, bass, lake trout (Rock Lake is stocked with trout by the state), catfish and others. A fish hatching area on Camp Lake helps keep up the population despite heavy fishing.

The Fox River measures the seasons, carrying each spring the snow melt from northern Wisconsin toward its eventual destination, the Mississippi River. In spring the valley floods isolating the houses on the lower banks in shallow pools. Most of these are built on pilings or open concrete block foundations to accommodate the water. The dam at Wilmot creates a torrent upon which large carp swim, jumping up water like salmon. Large numbers of fisherpersons hunt the dam area catching trunk loads of these 20 to 30" carp.

Since the drainage patterns in the county are primitive and lakes in a stage between maturity and the inevitable filling-in process, the lake ecology is very vulnerable to manipulation. Some lakes were altered during the early recreational boom with channels being dug to create more waterfront property for sale (see Camp Lake and Center Lake configurations.)

Currently excessive waterplant growth caused by farm fertilizers and septic flow washing into the lakes has caused concern. Several solutions including chemical killing of plants, putting black plastic over the lake bottom, etc. have been discussed and fortunately have been discarded because of the potential damage to fish and other wildlife.
Vegetation - Cover
The woodlands of Salem Township are composed primarily of Shagbark Hickory, Black Walnut, Pin Oak, White Oak, Black Oak, Aspen, Poplar, Birch and Wild Cherry. Upright Juniper, Bloody Sumac, wild Honeysuckle, wild raspberry and wild grape are prevalent in these woods.

Many types of wildflowers including alfalfa, spiderwort, bachelor's buttons, Queen Anne's lace, nightshade, yaro, daylilies, scotch thistle and musk thistle join wild grasses in wooded areas and along country roads. Spring flowering shrubs, summer wildflowers and fall leaf colors are all spectacular in Salem Township. Out-of-state cars are common weekend sights as they cruise the backroads absorbing the beauty.

Many fruit trees were planted by settlers here - apple, pear, and cherry being the most popular. Many farmers sell apples each fall. The many orchards and all the wildflowers also make this excellent bee country. Many farmers also make extra money selling honey.

The farmland which is planted in crops is almost all field corn and soybeans. Some small vegetable stands sell locally grown tomatoes, cucumbers, etc. In Kenosha County cabbage is big crop, but not in Salem Township. A large part of the farmland unsuitable for crops (billy, rocky, etc.) is used for grazing.

The most noticeable cover in marshy areas are the cattails which grow to 7-8' each summer. Enormous willows are also very common. Marshes also support pussywillows, wild water lilies and many other water weeds.
Town Centers
Because population concentrations were focused on natural recreational areas, the "downtowns" tend to be ancillary to and supportive of the functions of recreational activity. The downtowns are not the foci of the communities, the lakes, rivers and woods are.

Paddock Lake and Silver Lake are two of only three incorporated towns in western Kenosha County (Twin Lakes is the other.) Salem and Wilmot, though unincorporated, have historical interest and recognizable, albeit loose, town structures. Camp Lake and Trevor are not easily recognizable as towns and are more amorphous and spread out. Because of this difficulty they will not be discussed at such a detailed scale.
SALEM: With a major highway (Rte 83) running through the center of town, public facilities, gas stations, shops, etc., have developed in a strip along this route.

Hooker Lake reaches almost to the highway but views from highway to lake are blocked with houses and vegetation so that a passer-through would be unaware that a lake exists in Salem.

One of the older settlements, Salem contains some beautiful older homes away from the lake and some very marginal converted summer cottages near the lake, and everything inbetween.

The township fire station is located in Salem. A post office helps the fire station begin to define a town center which is currently an open grassy space. It is tempting to hope that this could develop into a town square, but the land is owned privately and the owners are unlikely to be sympathetic to such a proposal. Further, such "gentrification" of such a folksy town is very low on the list of residents' priorities. If it meant more tax money residents would be likely to be opposed.

Salem Consolidated Grade School is located just south of town on Route 83. There are no sidewalks so all children, no matter how close they may live to the school must be bussed for safety.
WILMOT: The most interesting of the small centers architecturally, Wilmot is an old settlement which developed at the junction of the Fox River and a stage route. Wilmot is now dominated by a downhill ski resort (at night in winter the lights of this resort are visible from any other high point in the township) and a summer fishing area around Wilmot dam. But the old town is still mainly intact. The only real intrusion is a gas station on the SW corner of the major intersection of town.

At times, Wilmot has had some antique shops in the older houses in an effort to take advantage of its quaintness to attract tourist dollars. But evidently skiers and fisherpersons are not connoisseurs of quaint, and these have mainly closed. There is still a nice restaurant in one of the houses which appears to be surviving well, and the old stage stop bar and restaurant still functions.

Wilmot is also the home of the Kenosha County Fairgrounds and contains one of two high schools in the township. A dragstrip contributes to nightlife — and noise — on summer evenings.
SILVER LAKE: A town developed between the largest and most beautiful lake in the township and the Fox River. Silver Lake has the potential to be a very pleasant cohesive town.

A well-defined downtown street which is not a highway exists. The surrounding neighborhoods are quiet, tree-lined and contain some very attractive older houses. Subdivisions around the perimeter have added architecturally undistinguished trilevels and ranches, but the central older area is nice. Unfortunately some of the stores downtown are currently empty.

Silver Lake has an elementary school, two trailer parks and several old boarding-house style resorts. On the southern edge of town is a boat dock/camper parking area which is generally crowded all summer. On the northern edge of town is a combination nightspot with live music and motorcycle racing track.

Silver Lake seems to attract a large percentage of the summer people who come to the township. During the summer the streets and beaches are active, boats proliferate and the single soft ice cream place is jammed.

The three major roads coming into town delight with heavily wooded slopes, and glimpses of water. The views on the major road within the town, while tacky, yet have the trees and water to soften the unplanned and unzoned built environment.

Silver Lake has been designated as the most appropriate place for a library serving all of western Kenosha County by SEVRPC. It is the most cohesive community geographically and architecturally. People in Silver Lake could actually walk to a public library located in the downtown area. But so far Silver Lake has shown no interest in supporting the library, and would be more difficult to reach for most township residents since it is not located on a major highway.
Currently the most active area in the township, Paddock Lake has grown so quickly that the sprawl has been unorganized and unplanned.

Strip development along Route 50 includes the stores mentioned above plus a church and manse and Salem Central High School.

The older housing is in a heavily wooded area around the lake. Winding streets and dense foliage give even the least expensive housing a definite charm. The best of these homes are rustic and pleasant with a Hansel and Gretel quality which is well suited to this site. In the newer subdivisions the ranches and tri-levels have lost this identifying charm.

The connection between the strip development and the housing is not well developed. Since Route 50 is the major route between the expressway and Lake Geneva it is almost impossible to cross it on foot on weekends. This means that most residents drive to stores on the south side of the highway even when they are within walking distance.

SEWRPC has recommended that the Route 50 designation be moved to County K on the north edge of Paddock Lake to bypass this strip. If this occurs, Paddock Lake would have the opportunity to develop a real downtown on old 50. Unfortunately, many merchants object to this plan, and new building on this strip is continuing the practice of putting huge parking areas between road and store, effectively isolating the shopping for anyone on foot.

Paddock Lake appears to be most active in terms of community groups, community support for social programs, etc. Paddock Lake Board is the only governing body which voted to support the library without having to call a referendum.
Character
Save the trees

Unlike many farm areas, southeastern Wisconsin farms usually contain untouched stands of trees. Frequently these are near the farmhouse, but they also occur often between fields or in mid-field. Since most of the farmhouses do not have fireplaces, the reason for leaving trees on valuable farmland appears to either be aesthetic or ecological.

In recreational areas the love of trees is fanatical. As one proud owner of an acre of forest said when questioned about his refusal to cut even dead trees out, "It took decades for them to grow so big, how can I presume to cut one?" (He was later persuaded the live trees would benefit if he took out the dead ones.) Love of trees has been translated into economics. Wooded land carries a much higher price tag than bare land.

Orchards in the front yard

In southeastern Wisconsin, many farms and farmettes have orchards in the front yard. This may be practical - to discourage pilfering - or it may be aesthetic - to act as a shield between house and road. The regular planting, however, does not seem to be done for effect.

Farmlands shielded (somewhat)

In common with farms in other cold climates, the farm buildings are built to make a sheltered environment - close together to form a rough courtyard. But no matter which way the farm is situated, the house is always facing the road, whether this provides it the best shelter or not.
Front porch - Back deck

Most older houses have a front porch screened or open. This is as true for country houses as it is for houses in towns and neighborhoods. Few newer homes have more than a concrete step in front, but often have a deck or patio in back.

Steep pitch or Shallow

Very few homes in this area have flat or almost flat roofs. Few newer homes have the steep pitch (45 degrees or more) found in almost all older homes.

Horizontal - Vertical divide

Very few houses in Salem Township have more than a "show strip" of masonry on the front. The choices are wood or aluminum/vinyl. Most are horizontal beveled siding. A few have brick or stone and vertical stained wood on the front and horizontal aluminum on the other three sides.

Major window faces the street

Almost invariably the living room window faces the street. This is true even for most lakefront homes with magnificent views to the rear. Most kitchen and family room windows face the rear.
Shop by car

Shown is a typical shopping situation. Stores are set back from the highway and isolated from each other by large parking areas. Most residents must drive to reach shopping and the result is this car convenience set-up. Even walking from store to store along the strip is uninviting and probably hazardous.

There are areas where more than two or three stores are grouped together with either sidewalks or quieter roads, e.g. Silver Lake. Salem and Wilmot have bars and antique shops grouped, but no foodstores, drugstores, etc. that attract most business. The strip of route 50 through Faddock Lake is definitely the busiest shopping area in the township and it is the example shown here.

There are no sidewalks and residents who walk or ride bikes must dodge traffic.