



Wisconsin Historic Aerial Imagery Finder

Researching Wisconsin's historic landscapes has never been easier. Digital aerial photography from the 1930's and 1940's is now at your fingertips! The WHAIFinder (pronounced "WAY-finder") digital archive of historic aerial imagery provides quick and easy access to over 38,000 digital aerial photographs covering the entire state of Wisconsin.

The History of Wisconsin's Oldest Aerial Photographs: 1937-1941

One of the first legislative proposals by President Franklin D. Roosevelt under what he dubbed the "New Deal", the Agricultural Adjustment Act (enacted May 12, 1933) restricted agricultural production by paying farmers subsidies to reduce crop area. The money for these subsidies was generated through an exclusive tax on companies which processed farm products. The purpose of the Act was to reduce crop surpluses to effectively raise the value of crops. The Act created a new agency, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (USDA-AAA)¹, to oversee the distribution of the subsidies.

In an effort to assess crop acreage, in the mid-1930's the USDA-AAA began collecting periodic aerial surveys in counties across the country. Using these aerial photographs, agricultural land was assessed and reductions in crop production were proposed and carried out.

In Wisconsin, the earliest USDA-AAA aerial surveys began in 1936, with a small number of photographs around the state dating to that year. The majority of the earliest comprehensive county photograph collections date from 1937-1941. In addition to providing valuable visual evidence for assessing crops, these photographs became the basis for the nation's first soil surveys. They also establish a baseline for understanding changes in Wisconsin's landscapes over the past 80 years.



maps.sco.wisc.edu/WHAIFinder/

The Digital Photograph Archive

The State Cartographer's Office, the Robinson Map Library², and the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections Center³ has digitally scanned the entire 1937-1941 collection of print aerial photographs. This project was funded by a grant from the Ira and Ineva Reilly Baldwin Wisconsin Idea Endowment⁴ at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Thanks to a nearly complete set of photograph prints donated to the project from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation⁵, the resulting digital archive is 99% complete across the state. The majority of the photographs in the original print collection were originally flown by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), while a few Wisconsin counties were flown by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

The original images are archived at the UW Digital Collections Center, and serve as the official copies for long-term preservation.

WHAIFinder

WHAIFinder (Wisconsin Historic Aerial Imagery Finder) is an online Web application designed to facilitate broad access to the digital photographs.

The WHAIFinder interface is designed to mimic the flight-line index paper maps that accompany the print aerial photograph collections. Aerial photo center point locations were digitized from scanned versions of the paper index maps. The center points are superimposed over a present-day image basemap, and are accompanied by reference layers that include Public Land Survey System (PLSS) townships and sections, county boundaries, and associated text labels.

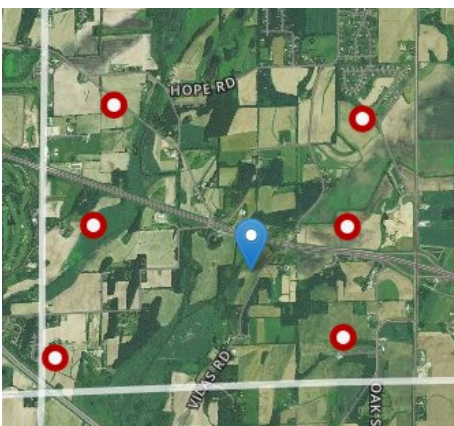
Selecting historic photographs

Users can navigate to an area of interest using an address search, county search, Public Land Survey System Township/Range search, or interactive zoom and pan tools.

Available photographs are shown with white dots indicating approximate photo center points. When the user clicks on an area of interest on the map, the system highlights all photographs in the archive that cover the desired location.

Previewing photographs

Hover your mouse over a white dot (photo center point) to view a semi-transparent preview of the photo available at that location. Due to the distortions present in these unprocessed photos, they will not line up perfectly with the modern-day color photographs shown in the background.

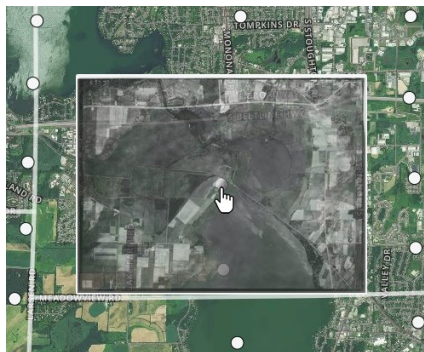


Click anywhere on the map to highlight aerial photographs that are likely to contain that point.

Download photographs in JPEG or TIFF format

Click on a white dot to view more information about the photograph available at that location, and to see several download options. Users can download selected photos using the quick download links: small (150 dpi JPEG image), medium (300 dpi JPEG image), and large (600 dpi TIFF image). For the best possible quality, we recommend using the 600 dpi TIFF images whenever possible.

In addition, you may click the “preview” link to view the photograph in a very simple online viewer that allows you to zoom and pan around in the image.

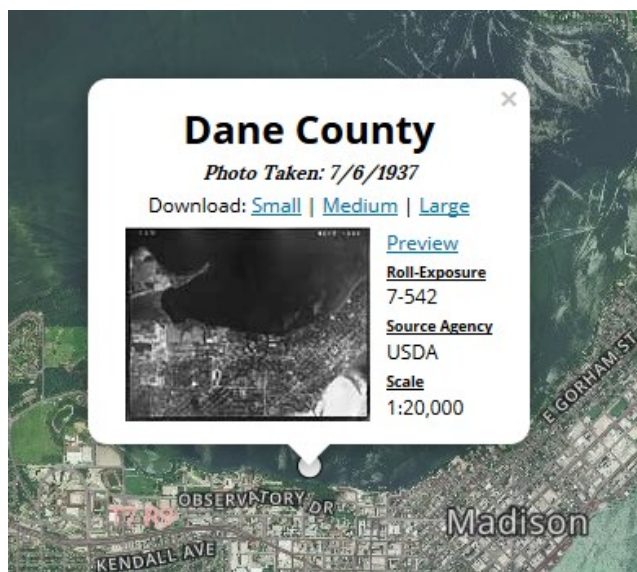


Mouse over a white dot to preview the aerial photo. Note that photos will not line up perfectly with the underlying base map... this is normal.

A resource for Wisconsin

The WHAIFinder application is intended to serve the needs of Wisconsin’s professional geospatial community as well as the general public.

Photographs are available online for free, and are in the public domain for use without restrictions.



Click a white dot to view more information about that photo, including several download options.

Web References

1. Agricultural Adjustment Act
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agricultural_adjustment_administration
2. Arthur H. Robinson Map Library
www.geography.wisc.edu/maplibrary/
3. UW Digital Collections Center
uwdcc.library.wisc.edu/
4. Baldwin Wisconsin Idea Endowment
provost.wisc.edu/baldwin-wisconsin-idea-endowment/
5. Wisconsin Department of Transportation
wisconsindot.gov