

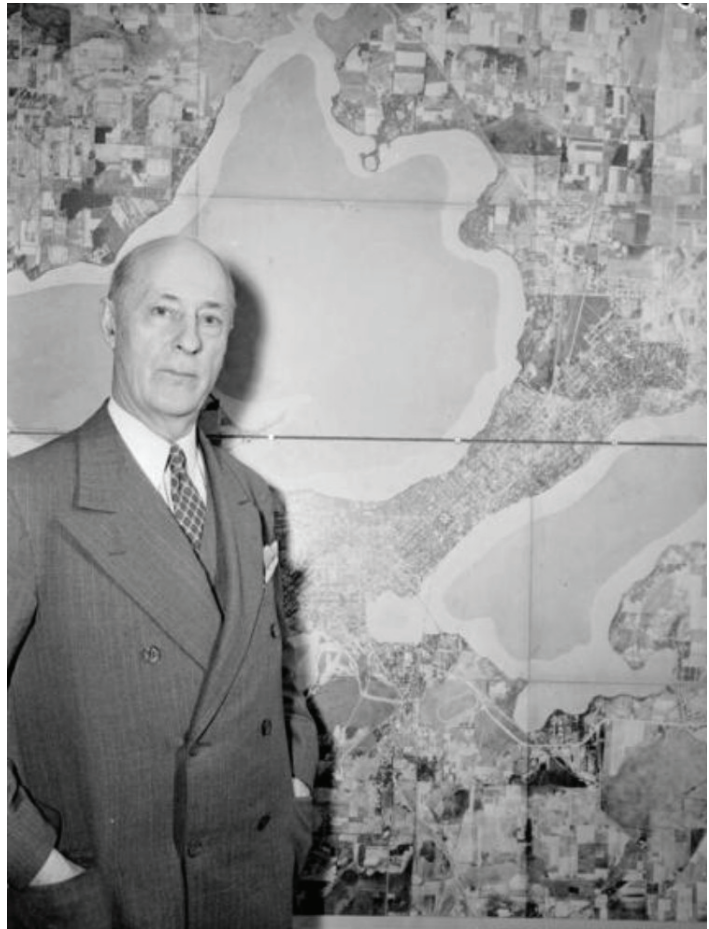
“When a man plants a tree he plants himself. Every root is an anchor...”

— John Muir, *Steep Trails*

What He Planted

BORN INTO A FAMILY OF DOCTORS, JOSEPH “COL. BUD” JACKSON RAN CATTLE IN THE DAKOTA BADLANDS, CONDITIONED THE ARMY’S HORSES FOR THE GREAT WAR, BEEFED WITH FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT, AND SPENT DECADES BUILDING A CITY — ITS ARBORETUM, ITS PARKS, ITS CIVIC LIFE — AND, ALMOST IN PASSING, A PROFESSION

1947: Joseph W. Jackson, executive director of the Madison and Wisconsin Foundation, standing next to a map of the isthmus where he helped direct Madison’s growth in the early 1900s. (Photo courtesy Wisconsin History)



By **Chris Harrop** *MGMA Senior Editor* and **David N. Gans** *MSHA, FACMPE*

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Joseph William “Bud” Jackson spent his young manhood on the open plains of western North Dakota, under a sky with nothing in it to break the horizon. When he finally came home to Wisconsin, he gave the rest of his life to planting things meant to outlast him — trees, parks, civic institutions and a profession that a century later spans the globe.¹ The man who called and chaired the first meeting of what became MGMA is barely remembered by some in his own city. His life — one of the more remarkable American stories sitting at the root of this association — deserves its own retelling beyond his role in practice management. ➤

➤ THE MAKING OF A COWBOY

Sometime around the turn of the last century, Jackson — a Madison boy who had starred on the city's 1896 championship high school baseball team² — went west, into the broken, butte-and-coulee country along the Little Missouri River north of Medora,³ the same badlands where Theodore Roosevelt had ranched in the 1880s. He hired on as a cowhand, and the frontier made him.

We have his own account of that life, because years later he set it down in a letter. The outfit he rode for, he wrote, ran 46,000 head of beef. Each fall a crew of 25 or 30 top hands would go down into the timber after cattle that had slipped the roundup and gone wild — some of them eight and nine years old, born and grown in the brush — and the men would spend days “*smoking them out*.” It was dangerous, filthy, exhausting work, and the yield was small: “the most we ever brought out at one time,” Jackson recalled, “was five or six.” He never forgot it. It was the hardest, proudest schooling of his life.

Back in Madison, a young woman named Julia Morris waited. The two had met when Jackson attended the University of Wisconsin, and through the ranching years they kept up a long-distance courtship by mail — his half in a handwriting so illegible that the archivists who later kept his papers warned researchers it would take patience to read. They married at the turn of the century and made their life in Williston, in the far northwest corner of the state, where Jackson prospered: he acquired land, went into business and was elected the town's mayor.¹ His Dakota years ran, all told, from around 1900 to the eve of the First World War. And the land he assembled out there had a long tail. Oil was struck beneath the Williston Basin in the late 1940s, the town boomed, and the

1918: Col. Joseph W. Jackson salutes a woman in civilian dress at Camp Lewis. Jackson was an officer in the U.S. Remount Service training at the camp.
(Photo courtesy Wisconsin History)

1896: The Madison High School championship baseball team, including second baseman J.W. “Bud” Jackson and his younger brother James A. “Jim” Jackson, Jr., as the team's “mascot.”



property the old cowboy still held a thousand miles away needed managing for the rest of his life, making him wealthy.³

THE HORSE SOLDIER

Then the country went to war, and the Army came looking for men exactly like him. The First World War still moved on hooves — the American Expeditionary Forces needed hundreds of thousands of horses and mules to haul guns, wagons and ambulances — and someone had to buy those animals, break them, condition them and ship them overseas. The outfit that did it was the Army Remount Service, one of the least-remembered corners of the war,





"Smokin' 'em Out," oil on canvas, painted in 1906 by Charles M. Russell (1864-1926).

➤ and it wanted cattlemen. Jackson was commissioned and given command of Auxiliary Remount Depot No. 331 at Camp Lewis, on American Lake in Washington state,³ and later served in France. He came home a man his city would call Colonel Jackson or "Col. Bud" for the rest of his life.¹

CHARLIE RUSSELL'S GIFT

It was at Camp Lewis that the West's most famous artist entered his story. Charles M. Russell — the cowboy painter of Great Falls, Montana, whose canvases of the open range were already collected across the country — was a devoted supporter of the war, and Russell's Montana world overlapped with the depot's: one of Jackson's foremen was a former Montana stock inspector out of Great Falls, Russell's own town. Russell sent the depot a painting for the men's club room, along with black-and-white sketches to hearten the horsemen and mule-skinners stationed there. In January 1918, Jackson wrote to Russell's wife, Nancy, to thank them and to report that the picture hung "over the great open fire place."

He asked, if it could be spared, for a sketch of Russell himself on his "favorite bald faced bay horse."³

In his thank-you note, Jackson could not help adding a postscript explaining why it had struck him so. The picture took him back, he wrote, to his own cow-puncher days in the brakes of the Little Missouri — to that same wild work of driving cattle out of the timber.³ While the two men's cowboy years did not overlap, they were men of the same vanishing world, and the canvas plainly meant a great deal to the former cowboy now commanding a depot of them.

It meant enough that he fought to keep it despite it belonging to the federal government. After the war Jackson set out to regain custody of it — a campaign of correspondence that ran for years and eventually succeeded. "Smokin' 'em Out" came home to Madison with him, where he prized it, fielded interest from prominent Russell collectors as the artist's fame soared, and at last, in 1955, sold it.¹ A piece of the frontier had followed him east and stayed for nearly 40 years. ➤

➤ THE BUSINESSMAN AND THE FOUNDER

He came home to Madison in 1920, to a family enterprise. His father and physician brothers had opened the Jackson Clinic — one of Madison's first multispecialty group practices⁴ — and Joe, the one son who had not gone to medical school, was brought in to run the business side of the practice.¹ He turned out to be exactly what a clinic full of doctors needed.

A family of doctors — Dr. James A. Jackson Sr. (center), with his sons (left to right) Reginald H. Jackson, Arnold Jackson, and James A. Jackson Jr. about the time the family established the Jackson Clinic in 1917 in Madison, Wisconsin. (Photo courtesy of Wisconsin History)



And in 1926, sensing that a scattering of people around the country were doing a job that had no name, he called them together in Madison, chaired their first meeting and delivered — off a deck of playing cards — what amounted to the profession's first body of knowledge.⁵ That story, and its long reach into the credential today's administrators earn, is told in a companion piece, "What a Practice Manager is Expected to Know." What may be more important than founding a profession was, for Jackson, almost a sideline. His attention belonged to his city.

MAKING MADISON

For 40 years, Joseph Jackson was one of the handful of people who decided what Madison would become. He ran its booster organization, the Madison and Wisconsin Foundation, as its first

director, and wrote and edited its bulletin himself. He served as an officer of the Madison Association of Commerce and led locally in Rotary International. He never stopped agitating on the university's behalf. And more than any of it, he poured his energy into the parks and green spaces that still shape the city.^{1,6}

The one he cared about most was the University of Wisconsin Arboretum. The idea had stalled after its earliest champion died; in 1931 Jackson revived it and gave himself to the slow, unglamorous business of acquiring the land, parcel by parcel, farm by farm — the same patient assembly he had practiced with cattle and clinics. The first tract came in 1932. The last came in 1963 — the very year the little club he had convened in Madison formally became the Medical Group Management Association.^{7,8} Two things he set in motion reached maturity in the same year. He worked, too, on the development of Hoyt Park on the city's west side,¹ and late in life he suggested to the Parks Commission the name for a lakeshore park he loved: James Madison Park, for the president he revered.⁶

The Arboretum honored him with a tree. Along the Curtis Prairie stood a great, spreading oak that had taken root around 1837, and the Arboretum named it the Jackson Oak. It was not chosen at random: University of Wisconsin President E. B. Fred wrote that the tree "resembles in character the man it is named after." While the oak died in the late 1990s,⁹ the 1,200-acre preserve it stood in is now a National Historic Landmark.¹⁰



This massive tree was dubbed the Jackson Oak in honor of the man who worked to establish the University of Wisconsin Arboretum. (Photo courtesy of B-Wolfgang Hoffman)





One civic cause consumed Jackson for decades: he wanted Madison to have a great auditorium and civic center. He researched the idea as far back as the 1930s, championed a lakeside war-memorial auditorium after the next war, and pushed for a site he favored on Lake Mendota.¹⁶ That crusade set him against Frank Lloyd Wright, who had proposed his own “dream civic center” for the opposite shore, on Lake Monona, in 1938 and spent the rest of his life trying to build it.¹¹ Jackson became one of its most determined opponents — backing his rival site, defending the state height limit that made Wright’s design impossible, even compiling a dossier that he claimed proved the architect was “a communist or communist fellow traveler.” When Wright died in 1959 and the city moved ahead anyway, Jackson, by then an old man, filed a taxpayer’s lawsuit that helped stall the project another 30 years.¹² Wright’s Monona Terrace was finally built in 1997, faithful to his design, and is today one of the most beloved buildings in the city.¹¹ The thing Jackson fought hardest to stop became a monument anyway — proof that even a formidable civic hand does not get the last word against time.

THE WOULD-BE AUTHOR

There was, finally, a literary Jackson. He was a tireless public speaker, and in retirement around 1950 he became a would-be author. He wrote a lengthy memoir. He labored for years over “Big Alec,” a book-length biography of Alexander McKenzie, the legendary North Dakota political boss whose machine had run the territory in Jackson’s frontier years. He wrote to old Dakota politicians and to McKenzie’s own relatives, hunting the story down; it was never published. Earlier he had gathered accounts of the African American soldiers of the First World War — another book that never found a publisher. The only book of his that ever reached a reader was the one he printed himself: a slim, cheerful volume on musky fishing, a lifelong passion.¹

Colonel Joseph “Bud” Jackson, was, in short, a man who could not stop trying to set things down. And it is only because his friend Clifford Lord, then director of the State Historical Society, quietly pulled them back from the discard



Joseph Jackson gathered several accounts of the African American soldiers of the First World War — a book that never found a publisher. (Photo courtesy U.S. Army)

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WHAT ENDURES

He was wrong about their value, as men often are about themselves. What Jackson planted has outlasted nearly everyone who knew him. The Arboretum he assembled is a national landmark. The parks he championed still ring the lakes. The Dakota range he rode as a cowboy made his fortune; the frontier painting he wrested back from the government has changed hands among collectors; and the profession he convened on a November morning in 1926 has grown into a global association of practice leaders who have never heard his name. He fought some things that endured in spite of him, and built others that endure because of him, and Madison, in the end, kept all of it.

“When a man plants a tree,” Muir wrote, “he plants himself. Every root is an anchor.” Joseph Jackson set down more roots than most — in two states, in a city’s parks, in a profession’s founding. A century on, they are still holding and still growing. ■



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NOTES

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2. Madison High School championship baseball team photograph.
3. J.W. Jackson to Mrs. C.M. Russell, January 14, 1918, Auxiliary Remount Depot No. 331, Camp Lewis, American Lake, Washington. Gilcrease Museum, Charles M. Russell Research Collection (Britzman), Tulsa, Oklahoma, TU2009.39.1379. <https://collections.gilcrease.org/object/tu2009391379>
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6. “James Madison,” Historic Madison, Inc. of Wisconsin. <https://www.historicmadison.org/jamesmadison>
7. “Back to nature at the UW Arboretum,” Isthmus (Madison), 2009, <https://isthmus.com/news/cover-story/back-to-nature-at-the-uw-arboretum/>; and “The Arb through the ages,” Isthmus (Madison).
8. Medical Group Management Association, association history; the National Association of Clinic Managers was renamed the Medical Group Management Association in 1963. <https://www.mgma.com>
9. R. Bruce Allison, *Every Root an Anchor: Wisconsin’s Famous and Historic Trees* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2005), University of Wisconsin Arboretum entry. https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/sites/default/files/topic/ForestManagement/everyRootAnAnchor_087-UWArboretum.pdf
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11. “Frank Lloyd Wright,” History of Monona Terrace, Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center. <https://www.mononaterrace.com/experience-monona-terrace/frank-lloyd-wright/>
12. Stu Levitan, “1959: Sabotaging Monona Terrace,” Isthmus (Madison), 2009, <https://isthmus.com/archive/scenes/1959-sabotaging-monona-terrace/>; drawn from Levitan, *Madison: The Illustrated Sesquicentennial History, Vol. 1* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).