

# **Green Lake Conference Center**

## **Historical Sites of Interest**

Green Lake Conference Center has a rich and interesting history dating back to the early 1800s. Explore our historical sites, outlined in this guide. Grab a grounds map at Kraft Centre to follow along and enjoy our unique property!



### **HISTORY OF GREEN LAKE CONFERENCE CENTER**

#### **WINNEBAGO INDIANS**

In the early 1800s this land was Winnebago Indian territory, believed to be sacred and worthy of pilgrimage at least once in a lifetime. They believed the Great Water Spirit lived in the lake.

#### **PIONEER SETTLERS**

Chris Briswold and his family constructed a Log Cabin in the mid 1840s and an 80 parcel of land. Their log cabin still stands on the property.

#### **VICTOR AND JESSIE LAWSON**

In the late 1800s Victor and Jessie Lawson of Chicago developed the elaborate Lone Tree Farm. Victor helped found the Associated Press and became Publisher of the Chicago Daily News newspaper at age 25; at age 38 he became the owner. He married Jessie Strong Bradley in 1880. He met her in the church choir and they honeymooned at Green Lake. They loved to escape the city life of Chicago in Green Lake.

They purchased the first parcel of land in 1888 after Jessie and her friends took shelter from a storm in the area now called Lone Tree Point. It was the start of Jessie's project that in time grew to an 1,100 acre farm. She coordinated the design and development of roads, stone walls, bridges and buildings, and oversaw the farm operation. She traveled extensively in Europe and much of what she did here was influenced by what she saw during her travels. All this for a woman who could not vote!

#### **H.O. STONE DEVELOPMENT COMPANY**

Jessie died in 1914, and Victor died in 1925 at age 75. They did not have children and the farm was sold to the H.O. Stone Development Co. of Chicago and renamed Lawsonia Country Club. A 71 room hotel was built (Roger Williams Inn) with an outdoor swimming pool behind it. A casino was added and an 18 hole golf course was developed after the Scottish golf course tradition. The plan was to develop lots and sell homes.

The Inn was under construction when the stock market crashed in 1929, and Lawsonia Country Club went into receivership in 1932. A bank in Chicago ran it for 10 more years before closing the gates in 1942.

## **AMERICAN BAPTIST ASSEMBLY**



In 1943 Luther Wesley Smith, a visionary of the American Baptist denomination, became aware of the property. He had a dream of what a national training center could mean to the denomination. He shared his dream with J.L. Kraft, president of Kraft Foods and an active American Baptist in Chicago. With Kraft's help and perseverance, Smith raised and got approval to offer \$300,000 to the bank for the property. It went to the board and was surprisingly accepted! We celebrated our 75th Anniversary in 2019!

## **TEMPORARY WWII GERMAN POW CAMP**

June-October 1944, the U.S. Government rented William Carey Barn by the front gates and some cottages as a temporary camp for about 400 German prisoners of war. They worked at nearby canning factories.

## **GREEN LAKE CONFERENCE CENTER**

The first conference season was the summer of 1944. Today Green Lake Conference Center is a beautiful destination conference center. Over 400 groups with attendees from all 50 states and more than 50 countries gather here year-round for meetings, retreats, workshops and conferences. Our guests include associations, nonprofits, churches, schools, government groups, universities, hobbyists and families. Our hospitality and our unique facility provides the place and space of ReCreation for people to discover a better version of themselves and their world.

1. Lone Tree Point - It all started here, where Jessie Lawson took shelter from a storm on the lake with her friends. She and her husband Victor returned to buy 10 acres of farmland that included this point.
2. Roger Williams Inn—completed in 1930 by the Stone Development Co. It includes 71 guest rooms, six meeting rooms, and crystal chandeliers on the first floor imported from Europe. The penthouse on the 5th floor offers a terrific view of the lake.
3. Memory Lane is a quiet walking area filled with patios and bronze plaques in honor or memory of people whose lives were impacted by the grounds. Memory Lane leads to the Vesper Circle, an amphitheater for worship services, concerts and the local high school graduation ceremony. It seats 400.
4. Hopevale Cathedral in the Glen, tucked in the woods, is a replica of a chapel built in the Philippines by 11 missionaries who were martyred in World War II on the island of Panay. Poems written by a fugitive of the Japanese troops in 1942-43 line the path to the chapel.
5. Stone Walls and Bridges - Victor Lawson was a particular man. He walked along the stone walls being built and measured their height with his cane. If it wasn't exactly even he'd have it torn down and rebuilt. The stones are boulders created by glaciers in this area. The Lawsons paid 50¢ a load to area farmers for their stones. Watch for more stone walls and bridges throughout the grounds.

- 6. (Teen) Water Tower—one of seven on grounds, each was filled with water from its own well. Folklore says that Jessie had them built where her donkey balked in the road...they were used for watering dust on roads, plants and gardens. About the donkey -- Jessie purchased him from a circus in (former) Czechoslovakia and used him to pull her cart around the grounds on her inspection tours. The donkey would eat the worker's lunches, so Jessie would give those workers a home cooked supper. Cadichon (pronounced CAD E SHON) probably had a little encouragement at times to eat the lunches! The other water towers are the Tea House, Judson Tower and four more small towers: Builders, Heifer, Guild, and Prospect.**
- 7. Tea House used to be the Tee House for Lawson's 9-hole golf course, now used for meetings, picnics, etc. This is the western most edge of our property; we have over two miles of shoreline.**
- 8. Log House is the only structure on the grounds that pre-dates the Lawsons. It was built in the 1840s by Chris Briswold for his family. It is now a "working museum" staffed by summer volunteers who coordinate campfires, quilting, and candle-making. Private tours can be arranged.**
- 9. Dawson Prairie was developed for the preservation and exploration of the natural setting of the grounds. Each spring the prairie is burned off. The flowers change regularly through the summer and can be enjoyed by taking several of the mowed walking trails. The prairie is frequently used by area schools as a nature study site for field trips and by artists as the subject of their paintings.**
- 10. Judson Tower is our most famous landmark. It was built in 1908 and has a 121 step spiral staircase to an observation deck. Standing 200 ft. above the lake level, it was built for use as a 75,000 gallon water tank by the Lawsons. Obtain key at Guest Services to visit. It offers a beautiful view of the lake.**
- 11. Golf Courses of Lawsonia - The Links course (18 holes) was built in 1930 and is a championship-quality course reputed as one of the most celebrated and challenging courses in the Midwest. Since most holes on the Links were built as replicas of Scottish & English golf course holes, its layout strongly resembles courses played in the British Open. Wind comes into play due to green elevation and wide openness. Legend has it that a boxcar was buried under the seventh green to form its huge green elevation.**  
  
**The 18-hole Woodlands Course is a stunning contrast to the Links. It is carved out of long-standing forests of oak, maple, pine, elm and walnut trees. The first 9 was built in 1983 and the second nine in 1991.**
- 12. William Carey Barn was built in 1916 as a Guernsey barn. Over the years it has been used for guest housing, meeting space, winter sports center and currently as volunteer housing.**
- 13. Green Lake is 7 miles long, 2.5 miles wide, and 237 feet deep, the deepest lake in WI.**
- 14. Pump House was used in the Lawson era to pump water to Judson Tower.**
- 15. Boat House was built in 1910, large enough to recharge the boat. Jessie sent an architect to Switzerland to look for designs for boat houses. The green tiles were imported from Italy.**

16. Lakefront and Sea Wall was built in 1904. Cost of the wall was \$35,000. They deepened the bay to allow boats to enter at a cost of \$50,000. At a total of \$85,000, this was Jesse's most ambitious project!
17. No Hurry Boat was Lawson's boat, built in 1905. It was battery powered and there were only two others like it. One was built for Thomas Edison and one was built for the Czar of Russia.
18. Chapel Car Grace is one of seven cars used in chapel car ministry 1891-1948 to take church services to remote areas. The chapel in the front of the car seats 50-75, has stained glass windows, oak woodwork and an organ for church services. Living quarters for the missionary and family are in the back of the car. Obtain a key at Guest Services to visit.
19. Spurgeon Chapel is a former root cellar from the Lawson era that is now a quiet place to reflect and pray.
20. Greenhouse was built in 1916 and is used to grow the annuals on grounds. There is a Rose Garden next to the greenhouse.
21. Avenue of Flags is home to international flags that represent the scope of countries where American Baptist missionaries serve and the many countries Green Lake serves.
22. Aaron's Breastplate is a unique replica of the breastplate worn by Aaron, the first high priest and brother of Moses. It was presented to Green Lake in 1960 through the combined efforts of Orron D. Evans who purchased and donated the precious stones; A. Paul Davis who designed the jewel, cut and engraved the stones, and fabricated the gold; Lillian Wessel who wove the cloth and ribbons; and Roy Whisler who furnished the gold.
23. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke at Green Lake in 1956 and 1957. He spoke about new ways to resist racial injustice in the midst of the Montgomery bus boycott. His 1956 speech is on our Web site, [glcc.org](http://glcc.org). View a display about him and his Green Lake visits on the wall in Bauer Lodge lobby, the site of his speeches (formerly Morehouse Hall building).

