

Geneva Lake Guardian

GENEVA LAKE ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 412
Lake Geneva, WI 53147
Phone 262/275-9656

Fall 2006

The Association is dedicated to Conservation, Ecological Preservation and Education, and the General Welfare of the Geneva Lake Area.

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF GENEVA LAKE ASSOCIATION, INC. • PROTECTING GENEVA LAKE SINCE 1935

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Lake Geneva, WI 53147
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N2454 Forest Rest Lane
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(262) 275-8212
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118 YEARS YOUNG

BLACK POINT MANSION COMES TO LIFE AGAIN

To Refurbish – “To brighten or freshen up - to renovate”

To Renovate – “To restore to a former, better state (as by cleaning, repairing, or rebuilding)”

To Renew – “To make like new - to restore to freshness, vigor”

All the above definitions from the Webster Dictionary adequately describe what has been happening with and at the Black Point Mansion these past many months. Carpenters, roofers, painters, plumbers, electricians, heavy equipment operators have all been at the Black Point site applying their trades. Now, as this newsletter is being written, the Black Point Mansion has all but come to life as a result of their talents. It is exciting to watch, as construction activity always is, and this writer and his wife have visited the site several times a week since summer. The most dramatic change has come about these past weeks as a result of the painters doing their work. Not only have exterior wall surfaces been painted a dramatic color, but the extensive trim in railings, window casings, posts, etc., have been hand-painted white with distinctive accent colors. The color of the exterior walls is a color you will have to see for yourselves. It is most dramatic!

The entire project is under the supervision of **Dan Stephans**, an architect/engineer with the Wisconsin Department of Administration, Division of State Facilities, who has had vast experience in working on State buildings, including the Wisconsin State Capitol in Madison. He has taken a real interest in the project from the beginning, for which the Black Point Historic Preserve Board is most grateful.

The General Contractor, J.P. Cullen & Sons, of Janesville, Wisconsin, chosen by Dan Stephans and his associates, was an excellent choice. They

have enormous resources and have the ability to bring men and heavy equipment to the job when it is needed. Their Project Manager for Black Point and who has been on the project daily since April 1, 2006, is **Ben Doetch**, a manager of many talents, as displayed these past seven months.

The first subcontractor, a large roofing contractor from Milwaukee, was the first to arrive on the scene. His crew first removed all the old asphalt shingles, and the restoration began! Currently, there is major activity throughout the project. A new visitor restroom building is nearing completion, the stairs from the lake to the upper plateau are almost completed, electricians are installing all new wiring and electric boxes, plumbers are installing new plumbing fixtures, and an all-new septic system is being installed.

It is exciting to watch the transformation, and the Black Point Historic Preserve Board of Directors is looking forward to early summer 2007, when the Mansion will be open to the public for the first time. The Board anticipates that most visitors will arrive by a Gage Marine Cruise Line Boat.

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JOHN BRINK, AN OLD GOVERNMENT SURVEYOR

From the "Wisconsin Professional Surveyor Newsletter" of September, 2006

"Surveyor" Editor's Note: The following excerpts were taken, with permission, from an article printed in the January 29, 1899 issue of the "Milwaukee Sentinel". Surveyors in southeastern Wisconsin will recognize John Brink as the Surveyor whose name is on so many maps of the original government surveyors in their area. The article is made up from Mr. Brink's responses (in 1899) to a series of questions about his experiences as an early government surveyor.

"You want to know about some of my early experiences as a government surveyor in Wisconsin?" The speaker was **John Brink**, the old government surveyor, now 88 years old and a resident of Illinois.

"Well, I began surveying before **Abraham Lincoln** did, although Lincoln was two years older than I. He was born Feb. 12, 1809 and I was born Jan. 12, 1811.

"I began to make government surveys in 1831 under the surveyor general, and Lincoln began as a deputy county surveyor under **John Calhoun** of Sangamon county, Illinois, in 1833. It is the only instance in my life where I outranked Old Abe.

How Lake Geneva Got Its Name

"I first saw Lake Geneva in 1833. Our party had come down across from Fort Winnebago to the state line to establish the first correction line of our survey. We struck the head of the lake at what is now Fontana. Previous to this I had seen many of the lakes of Wisconsin, but nothing to compare with this one in beauty. **Chief Big Foot** and his Indians were still there, but camped further down the lake. We camped at the big spring which boils out of the bluffs about a half mile above the head of the lake which now feeds the Douglas millponds. Not many rods from the spring, suspended in a tall oak tree, was the body of Big Foot's son, a lad about 14 years old. They had taken a section of the tree and split it, and hollowed out each half, enclosed the body within, and bound the parts together with withes and sinew, then suspended it high up in the tree, safe from vultures and wolves—a romantic resting place in a lovely spot, overlooking one of the most beautiful lakes in the world.

"In 1835 I was running township lines in southern Wisconsin, and ran a line through the lake. Our instructions were to plat all lakes, rivers and streams, and preserve all Indian names to the same. The Indians call the lake 'Big Foot' and whether the name originated with the lake or with

the old Winnebago chief of that name, I do not know. I am inclined to think, however, the name originated from the shape of the lake. Before the lake was dammed at the outlet its surface was about six feet lower, and its general outline was the shape of a human leg and foot. The upper end of the lake, what is now Williams Bay, forming the knee cap, and Geneva village the toe. At that time very little water extended into Williams' bay, and it was only a strong curve to the shore of the lake.

"Juneau, the French trader who founded Milwaukee, and who, by the way, was a personal friend of mine, said we were the first white men to see the lake. Though Juneau had seen it, he said in a jocose way, he did not consider a Frenchman a white man.

"In due time I made my returns to the surveyor general's office at Cincinnati, and the chief clerk put them in his own private desk. When I made my appearance he called me into his private office, and, taking from his desk the plat I had made of Big Foot lake, and pointing to the name 'Geneva' asked:

"Is that what the Indians call that lake?"

"No."

"Well, what were your instructions with regard to preserving original names?"

"I was to carefully preserve them."

"What do the Indians call it?"

"Big Foot."

"What right had you to change the name?"

"None whatever."

"Then why did you do so?"

"Because it was too beautiful a sheet of water to be called by such an ugly name.' I then launched out in an enthusiastic description of its beauties and painted the finest word picture I was capable of.

"But why did you name it Geneva?"

"Because I was born eight miles north of Geneva, at the foot of Seneca lake, New York, and I thought it a beautiful and appropriate name for that lovely sheet of water in these Wisconsin woods."

"Well, Brink, I was raised near there, too, and we'll let it go on the records as Lake Geneva."

BLACK POINT . . . continued from page 1

Harold Friestad, Vice President and Manager of the Cruise Line, has been most cooperative and will be a key player in transporting the visitors to the site. It should be a fascinating trip leaving the Riviera Docks, and arriving at the foot of Historic Black Point!

The Black Point Mansion was built in 1888 by **Conrad Seipp**, a wealthy Chicago brewer. Four generations later,

in the fall of 2005, it was given by the then current owner and great grandson, **William O. Petersen**, to the citizens of the State of Wisconsin for use as an historic home site. The home will be managed by the Black Point Historic Preserve Board, a group of local citizens.

(This update was written by Russell J. Hovde, Director of Field Operations of the Geneva Lake Association, Inc., and as President of the Black Point Historic Preserve, Inc.)

111 YEARS YOUNG YERKES OBSERVATORY AND GROUNDS

How best can this Treasure be used over the next 100 years?

As most citizens and property owners in Williams Bay and the Geneva Lake community are aware, a New York State developer, the Mirbeau Company, has proposed buying the historic Yerkes Observatory and Grounds from its long-time owner, the University of Chicago. Upon purchase, Mirbeau would develop the property and grounds, including housing and a 100-room hotel and spa. When the news broke this past summer, the Village of Williams Bay conducted three public hearings where Mirbeau could explain its intentions, and the public could voice their concerns. The hearings on July 13, August 3 and August 24 were held at the Williams Bay High School. Over 500 citizens attended each of the three meetings. At the last meeting, the public was invited to verbally ask questions of the Mirbeau principals. It was pretty obvious that those presenting their questions were opposed to the Mirbeau project.

Since then, no further word has been heard from Mirbeau or the University of Chicago, but the "Beacon Newspaper" in a recently-published issue, said there was a rumor that Mirbeau is working on new plans to present to the UofC. As of this writing (10/25/06), the Village of Williams Bay has received no word from either party.

The Village of Williams Bay has received word that The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation of Chicago has offered to set up a competition with three architectural firms, in which they would each come up with a plan to best preserve the Observatory and Grounds. The prize would be \$50,000 each, with \$10,000 being paid to each of the three at the beginning of the competition, and \$40,000 upon completion of the plan. The plans are due on December 2, 2006, or slightly more than a month from the time of the announcement of the competition. As the process developed, the Driehaus Foundation chose the three architectural firms, and all three will apparently now receive a \$50,000 reward for their plan. What will happen to these plans and any action taken as a result of their submission is not known at this time.

The three architects and their firms are listed as follows,



YERKES OBSERVATORY RECEIVES \$800,000 GRANT FROM NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

On September 21, 2006, **Jim Gee**, General Manager of the Yerkes Observatory, and the First Vice President of the Geneva Lake Association, proudly notified all of us at the GLA that the Yerkes Grant Proposal to the National Science Foundation has been awarded to Yerkes and our partners, Aurora University and George Williams College, plus 20 local schools. The \$800,000 will be given over a period of three years and will be used for education and outreach activities.

each with a brief biographical sketch:

Johnson*Lasky, Architects, Walker C. Johnson, Principal

Walker Johnson is a nationally recognized, award-winning architect with more than 35 years of experience from the design of new structures to the restoration and rehabilitation of historic landmarks. He services clients on the federal, state and local levels with budgets ranging from several hundred thousand to eighty million dollars. Select projects include the reconstruction of Wacker Drive, Edgewater Beach Apartments and the Marquette Building, all in Chicago. As a well-known speaker, he lectures on topics such as ADA accessibility, lighting for historic buildings and terrazzo. His professional service includes three terms on the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council to the State Historic Preservation Office.

Moule & Polyzoides, Architects and Urbanists, Stefanos Polyzoides, Principal

Stefanos Polyzoides received his Bachelor of Arts, Magna Cum Laude, and Masters in Architecture from Princeton University. He is a registered architect in the States of California, Arizona and New Mexico. He was born in Athens, Greece, and has lived in Los Angeles since 1973. His distinguished career covers the areas of architectural and urban design education, design and execution, and theory. His professional experience spans institutional and civic buildings, historic rehabilitation, commercial projects, housing, campus planning and urban design.

Harley Ellis Deveraux, John H. Nelson, Principal

Prior to the Harley Ellis Deveraux merger in January, 2006, Mr. Nelson was a founding member of Environ, Inc., Architecture, Design & Planning in Chicago. During his tenure at Environ, his responsibilities included project design and coordination. Mr. Nelson obtained extensive experience as a designer and project director for several of Chicago's leading architectural design firms. His experience includes an expansive range of architectural and interior design planning services and a variety of corporate, governmental, institutional and residential projects.

MAPLE PARK HISTORIC DISTRICT IN THE CITY OF LAKE GENEVA

The Maple Park Historic District located in the near northwest corner of Lake Geneva has recently received attention by the sudden appearance of signage around the perimeter of this 12-block area and by the awareness of the public on the rehabilitation of the classic old homes in the neighborhood. In fact, the District became listed on the National Register of Historic Places, a year ago in June, 2005. The residents and property owners of Maple Park are to be complimented on the wonderful job they have done in restoring their individual homes.

Mary Tanner, local resident, historian, antique dealer, a good friend of the writer, and the owner of her own historic home on Main Street in Lake Geneva, has written a brief history of what is Maple Park. This writer is paraphrasing Mary's remarks here:

"The earliest houses in the Maple Park District date to the mid-1840s and 1850s. The bulk of the District was developed between 1870 and 1920. The last two decades of the 19th Century and the first decade of the 20th Century saw most development in the District.

"Maple Park and Pioneer Cemetery, located in the middle of Maple Park, were established in the original Plat of Lake Geneva (1837) that **Thomas McKay** drew for several early pioneers of the community and recorded with the County in 1840.

"A Town Square soon became a part of many town plats in Wisconsin in the Mid-Nineteenth Century. This was a tradition

in town planning started by William Penn in a 1683 plat for Philadelphia. The idea for a Town Square was also based on town planning for England.

"The Greek Revival Style came after the log house. This was followed by the Italianate Style, then next the Gothic Revival Style, the Queen Anne Style, the Empire Style, Stick Style, East Lake Style, Georgian Style, Tudor Style, Craftsman Style, the Bungalow Style, the Dutch Colonial, and in 1950, the Ranch Style.

"In October, 1835, a government surveyor, **John Brink**, made a claim at the Lake Geneva site, then left, planning to return the next Spring. In February, 1836 Christopher Payne, made his claim. Brink, along with several partners, claimed all of the Section which included water power on the White River. Because these claims overlapped, a dispute started on who owned the "Water Power". The Brink Party finally gave up and sold their claims, making Payne the winner. The great "Water Power" is what brought people from the East here.

"Geneva quickly grew along Main Street, with some small residences north and west of the commercial area. In 1837, the General Store and two mills were built in the Village.

"Geneva, later known as Lake Geneva, might have remained a small farming community, but for two events that occurred in 1871: the coming of a permanent rail link to Chicago, and the Chicago Fire. It was also during this time that the Maple Park Historic District began to take on the appearance of the town's most prominent residential neighborhood."

THE BOOK – "LAKE GENEVA—LIFE AT THE WATER'S EDGE"

Our Congratulations to Michael Keefe, Creator and Publisher

A wonderful new book has recently been published by **Mike Keefe**, of the famed Keefe Real Estate Company. He is to be commended on producing one of the best books now available on the Lake Geneva area. It has already become enormously popular. The writing was done by **Andria Hayday**, a free-lance writer and editor. Many of the photographs were taken by **Tom Keefe**, a full-time professional photographer and Mike Keefe's son. The photographs are superb. Interestingly, there is an excellent story with pictures on the Black Point Mansion

and its history. (See article on the Black Point Mansion elsewhere in this Fall Newsletter.)

The book sells for \$39.95 at local retail establishments. The overleaf states that "100% of the profits from this book will be donated to local charities".

We encourage you to add this book to your personal library. It will also make a wonderful Christmas gift for anyone with ties to the Geneva Lake Community.

Thank you again, Mike, for a wonderful piece of work.

YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE GENEVA LAKE ASSOCIATION, INC.

The Geneva Lake Association, Inc. a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, founded in 1935, has for years published a Directory listing the homeowners around Geneva Lake. In fact, the GLA initiated the pier-numbering system, and one of our efforts is to ensure the accuracy of the pier listings in the GLA Directory of Members.

The Directory is sent to the printer at the end of April and is mailed approximately two weeks later, in mid-May.

Your contribution level is based on contributions received from May 1, of the previous year, to April 30 of the new year. Since each of you make your contribution at different times in

the year (at year-end, early Spring, just after the Directory comes out, etc.), we enclose a Member Application Form with each of our Newsletters.

We ask, therefore that you are not offended by receiving an Application Form with a Newsletter when you have already sent in your contribution in a previous mailing.

We thank you for your membership contribution, whenever received.

Be assured that we do not ever give our mailing list with your name and address to anyone or any organization.

The Geneva Lake Guardian, *Russell Hovde, Editor*