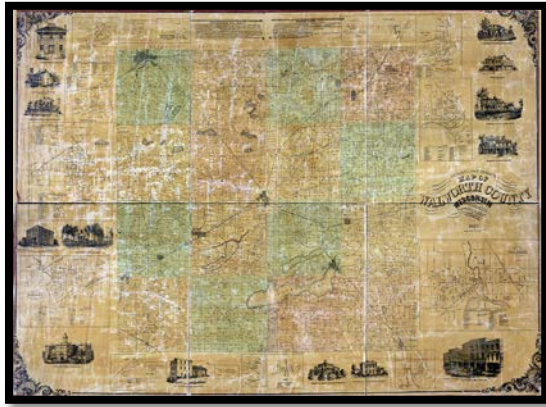


History of Williams Bay

Part 3 of 3

"History isn't about dates and places and wars. It's about the people who fill the spaces between them." ~ Jodi Picoult



1857 map of Walworth County

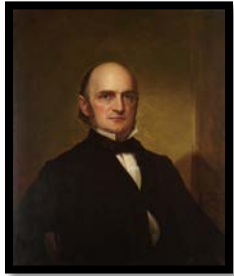
Walworth County grew rapidly in the years 1842-1846, early arrivals in the county included Levi Carey, Stephen, Brown, and Fred Brownell. D.P. Handy opened the first blacksmith shop at Delap's corner (corner of highway 67 and 50) in 1844. The blacksmith shop was later sold to Anthony Delap. Jarvis Vincent built a home east of Delap's Corner. Vincent School was located at the Vincent property. Other early arrivals were Mr. Bromaghim, Noah Joh, and Moses P. Hadley who bought the land on which Yerkes Observatory would later be built.

During the early years early settlers suffered a great deal of illnesses. At the time it was thought that vegetation mold being exposed to the air when the ground was turned over caused malarial and typhoid fevers. Moses and Austin Williams, sons of Captain Israel Williams, became ill with typhoid fever and died within three days of each other in 1845. Captain Williams would succumb to the same disease the following year.

Royal J. Williams had returned to Massachusetts in 1844 and Israel Williams Jr. had moved to Broom Prairie sometime prior to 1846. After the death of Captain Williams, Mrs. Williams and son Festus would also move to Broom Prairie. The Williams' daughter Lavina married John Fowle of Oak Creek (now South Milwaukee). In 1848 Mrs. Williams and Festus returned to the family homestead in Williams Bay. After Mrs. Williams' death in 1852, Royal was appointed administrator of the estate, he returned in 1855 and lived in the homestead until his death in 1886.

The twenty years following 1850 were uneventful in Williams Bay and the surrounding area. Old settlers died and new ones came to take their places. Boys grew into men and tilled the fields their fathers had cultivated from the wilderness. At the foot of the lake a beautiful and thriving village developed from the log cabins on 1837. At the head of the lake a cluster of houses surrounded Douglass' Mills which supplied flour and feed grain to farmers for miles around. At Williams Bay the old homestead still stood alone and no indication of a village were seen.

It was twenty years after the call to arms mentioned in Part 2 of the history, before any call was made for military service. A few small groups met as a militia during that time but most men were too busy building their homes and the county to think much about war.



Gov. Randall

On Monday, April 15, 1861 the Governor of Wisconsin, Alexander W. Randall received the following dispatch from the Secretary of War:

To His Excellency A.W. Randall, Governor of Wisconsin: Call made on you by tonight's mail, for one (1) regiment of militia for immediate service, Simon Cameron, Secretary of War.

On the following day Governor Randall issued the proclamation calling for volunteers which read:

To the loyal citizens of Wisconsin:—

For the first time in the history of the Federal government organized treason has manifested itself within several States of this Union, and armed rebels are making war against it. The proclamation of the President of the United States tell[s] of unlawful combinations too powerful to be suppressed, and calls for military forces to suppress such combinations, and to sustain him in executing the laws. The treasury must no longer be plundered; the public property must be protected from aggressive violence; that already seized must be retaken, and the laws must be executed.

A demand made upon Wisconsin by the President of the United States for aid to sustain the Federal arm must meet with a prompt response. One regiment of the militia of this State will be required for immediate service, and further service [sic], will be required as the exigencies of the government may demand. It is a time when against the civil and religious liberties of the people, and against the Government of the United States, parties and politicians, and platforms must be as dust in the balance. All citizens everywhere must join in making common cause against the enemy. Opportunities will be immediately offered to existing military companies under the direction of the proper authorities of the State for enlistment to fill the military demand of the Federal Government, and I hereby invite the patriotic citizens of this State to enrol [sic] themselves into companies of 78 men each and to advise the Executive of their readiness to be mustered into service immediately. Detailed instructions will be furnished on the acceptance of companies and commissioned officers of each regiment will nominate their own field officers. In times of public danger bad men grow bold and reckless[,] the property of the citizen becomes unsafe, and both the public and private rights are liable to be jeopardized. I enjoin on all administrative and peace officers within the State renewed vigilance in the maintainance and execution of the laws, and in guarding against exigencies leading to disorder among the people.

ALEX. W. RANDALL
Governor.

Within seven days thirty-six companies has tendered their services and among the first was one from Geneva, Captain Daniel Roundy enrolled as Company F 4th Wisconsin Infantry but afterward was known as Co. F 4th Wisconsin Cavalry. The companies were ordered to Madison and upon arrival found that their enlistment was for three years instead of three months. Those who wished could back down and only one man took advantage of it.

The War of the Rebellion (Civil War) would require many more men in the following four years. As nearly as possible the following is a list of the men who served in the war who lived before or afterward in the area surrounding Williams Bay.

The following are Civil War veterans buried in East Delavan Union Cemetery with notations that connect them to family members who lived in the area in the 1930s.

- Francis W. Russell, 32nd IOWA infantry Co. D and I, 9th IOWA cavalry Co. D, son of Robert and Hannah Williams Russell and grandson of Capt. Israel Williams, lived in a house which was located on Vision Hill above George Williams College,
- Robert Russell, 22nd WIS Infantry Co. D, son of Robert and Hannah Williams Russell and grandson of Capt. Israel Williams, lived in a house which was located on Vision Hill above George Williams College, Paroled from Andersonville Confederate Prison. Died April 20, 1863 buried in [Annapolis National Cemetery](#), Annapolis, Maryland, USA Plot: Section I Site 1707
- John Charles Kishner, 40th WIS Infantry Co. F - father of Everet Kishner, Elkhorn Road
- George Kishner, 49th WIS Infantry Co. K, brother of John Charles Kishner
- John D.C. Gaylord, 28th WIS Infantry Co. K, lived at southwest corner of Delap's corners.
- J.H. Merwin, 49th Infantry Co. F, Uncle of Dr. B.A. Merwin Walworth
- Norville Williams, 65th ILL infantry Co. F, deserted Oct 15, 1862, uncle of Elmer Williams and Mrs. Joshua Hackett,
- Hugh A. Rector, 10th WIS Infantry Co. A, died in service 1862
- Truman Johns, 10th WIS Infantry Co. A, died in service 1862
- Oscar F. Vincent, 40th WIS Infantry Co. F, lived where Geneva National is now located
- Henry Southwick, 49th Infantry Co. K, brother of William Southwick
- James Southwick, 49th Infantry Co. K, brother of William Southwick
- Lyman D. Smith, 28th WIS Infantry Co. E, lived near Delavan Lake, died in service 1863
- Russell S. Trumball, 40th WIS Infantry Co. F, lived near North Walworth School
- John Spencer, 13th WIS infantry Co. A lived on Como Road
- George Farrar, 28th WIS Infantry Co. I, father of Austin E. Farrar
- Clinton Q. Fisk, 9th. WIS Light Artillery, a neighbor and relative of Albert Hollister

- James Williams, 22nd WIS infantry Co. D, lived just south of East Delavan Union Cemetery, father of Will and Lou Williams
- Robert McChesney, 8th IOWA cavalry Co. K , lived on Geneva Street
- George W. Coburn, Jr. 22nd WIS Infantry Co. D, died in service 1864
- Hilas Dalrymple, 49th WI Infantry Co. K
- Hamilton S. Dalrymple, 42nd WIS Infantry Co. F, relative of Will Davis
- William Henry Virgil, 15th IOWA infantry Co. D, father of Mrs. Will Lackey and Mrs. Leland Williams
- William L. Bradt, 10th WIS Infantry Co. A, father of H.A. Bradt and grandfather if Mrs. Harold Williams
- Henry Dalton, 1st ORE. Cavalry Co. A, father of Ernest Dalton, East Delavan
- James Snell, 10th WIS. Infantry Co. A, lived just north of East Delavan corners, died in service 1862
- Charles Snell, 10th WIS. Infantry Co. A, lived just north of East Delavan corners, died in service 1862
- Daniel E. Vrooman 49th WIS Infantry Co, K, father of Ed Vrooman, Delavan Prairie
- George Wilday, 19th WIS Infantry Co. D, Delavan resident
- Charles Scoffin, Ensign US Navy, Delavan
- Otis Dodge, 49th WIS Infantry Co. K, lived in part of what is now Cedar Point Park

The following served in the Civil War but are not buried in East Delavan Union Cemetery.

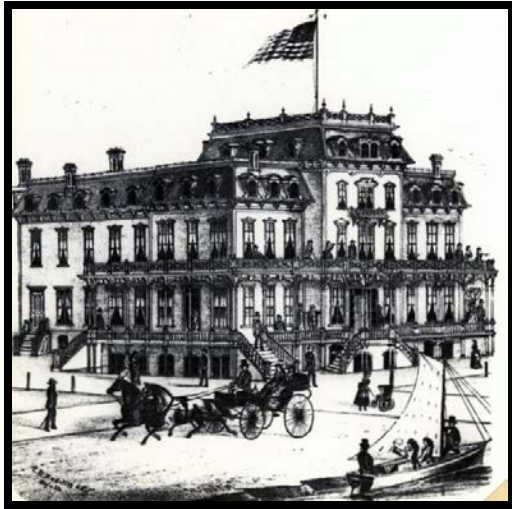
- Sidney Dodge, 4th WIS Cavalry Co. F, son of Otis Dodge
- Henry Delap, 49th WIS Infantry Co. K, son of Anthony Delap, Delap's Corner
- John Hall, 2nd WIS Cavalry Co. G, original owner of Hall's Park and father of Mrs. Bert Welsher
- Charles Rimmel, 42nd WIS Infantry Co. F, who lived where Aron Redin lived on highway 36 (now highway 67) west of Williams Bay



1873 map of Walworth County

Walworth County and the Geneva Lake area continued to grow in the years following the Civil War. Geneva Lake, nestled in among the hills of Walworth County gradually became known as the most brilliant jewel of all the lakes in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. Comparing the village maps from 1873 and 1882, it is clear the influx of summer residents was already well under way.

It is not possible to give the history of Geneva Lake without mentioning the Whiting House which was



Whiting House Hotel circa 1873

built in 1873 and by 1882 its capacity of 200 guests was taxed. At Pishcotaqua Park, where Cisco Beach Camp and Camp Augustana would later be located, stood a four story hotel with verandas on all four floors. Built in 1881, it was at the time the largest hotel of its kind in the northwest.

The village of Geneva had a railroad as early as 1856 but by 1860 the track was in such bad condition that the service was abandoned, not to resume for thirteen years. However, the daily trains from 1873 on raised Geneva from a country town to a summer colony.

Prosperous and wealthy industrialist from Chicago soon began to make their summer homes on the shore of the beautiful lake. Private steam yachts began to appear and the Lady of the Lake, Commodore, and Lucius Newberry carried visitors to locations around the lake.

By 1882 Camp Collie, now Conference Point Camp, was widely known for its assemblies. In 1868 a group of members of the Congregational Church in Delavan met on the shore of the lake together with their pastor, Reverend Joseph Collie. In 1874 the group would moved to facilities at the point. The mission of Camp Collie was declared as follows:



Camp Collie

"That vital Christianity sweetens and adorns all right relations among men, and is everywhere the crowning joy and glory of life, of recreation as well as work and worship. That the simplest pleasures are the best, and that neither pleasure seeking nor dissipation are recreation. That there are places of recreation needed not only to serve as a retreat from business, but also from the formalities of society."

Reverend Collie advertised that he had "Cottages, furnished rooms, board by the day or week, single meals, milk furnished, ice, and excellent water, a laundry department with reasonable charges, stabling for horses, cook stoves and wood fitted to them for those who do their own cooking and fishing tackle and boats to rent."

The Congress Club a pleasure club of young married people mostly living on Congress Street in Chicago purchased a ten acre plot of land in 1881. By July 1, 1882 the members had a clubhouse and several cottages ready for use.

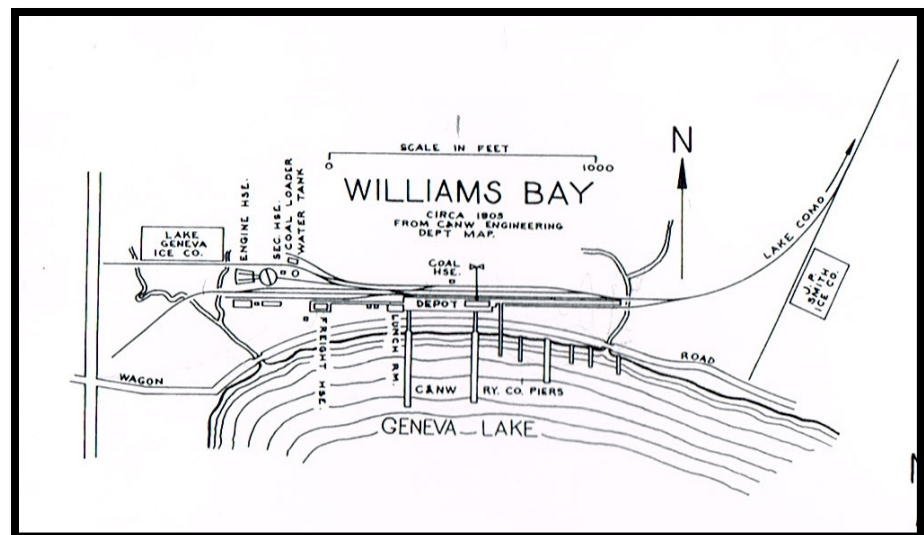


Prior to June 1, 1888, Williams Bay was considered a rural area but the arrival of the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad brought considerable growth to the village. Steam yachts would line up at the piers across from the depot waiting to take passengers to their lakefront homes, camps, and resorts around the lake.

In 1889 a subdivision was laid out by surveyor Tubbs of Elkhorn.

W.G. DeGroff was the first purchaser. The next purchasers were A.H. Arneson, and Peter Stenstrom who bought and built on the hill above the old Williams homestead. In the spring of 1889, John Hansen bought five acres from the south side of the homestead and built a house which he later sold to M. Johnson. During the next two years development was slow. The town line road (Elkhorn Road/highway 67) was laid out from Jonas Southwick's place south to the bay and other minor improvements were made. In 1892 A.H. Arneson, Eric Anderson, and G.L. Jensen incorporated the Scandinavian Free Lutheran Church, bought a lot and erected a church building. The Scandinavian Free Church was located on the corner of Williams and Geneva Streets.

The following winter Henry McBride and Frank Harville of Chicago purchased a piece of land from Harley Williams on the east side of the town line road for an ice house. They organized the Lake Geneva Ice Company and built one of the biggest ice houses in Wisconsin. It had a capacity of



Map showing location of the Lake Geneva Ice Company

40,000 tons of ice, employed 125 men for about six weeks in the winter to fill cut the ice and fill the house, and from five to fifteen men during the shipping season.

In February 1892, Marie Williams, wife of Edward F. Williams (second son of Royal and Lucretia Williams), secured appointment as postmistress and the post office of Williams Bay was established. For the first two years mail was brought from Lake Geneva, bi-weekly at first and in 1893 it was delivered daily. In the fall of 1894, the mail came by train from Lake Geneva and in 1895 a through mail to and from Chicago was established providing two mail deliveries per day.

In 1895 additional lots were laid out on the hill above the original subdivision, several houses were built, all of them a credit to the growing village. Among the most important are those built by Eric Anderson, A. Blix, Harley Williams, Henry Francis, Ulysses Lockwood, W.G. DeGroff, and C. Slocomb. The village had some thirty residences, one hotel, two stores, a post office, blacksmith shop, and a barber shop in 1895.

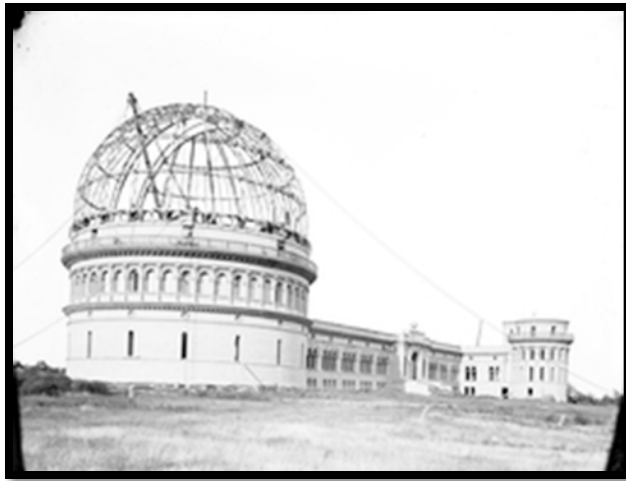
In 1890 George W. Hale learned that the University of Southern California planned to build the world's largest telescope, using glass disks cast by Mantois of Paris and polished into 40-inch lenses by Alvan Clark and Sons⁽¹⁾ in Cambridgeport, Massachusetts. When the University of Southern California abandoned the project for lack of funding, Hale urged the University of Chicago to acquire the lenses and construct the telescope and an observatory to house it. The work of grinding the 40-inch objective is given to Carl A. R. Lundin of Clark and Sons, who begins the actual work on January 14. It will take 2 years, 10 months to complete.

Hale and William Rainey Harper, president of the University, approached transit tycoon Charles Tyson Yerkes, who agreed to fund the facility. On December 5, 1892 Charles Yerkes hires Henry Ives Cobb, the architect who designed the buildings on the campus of the University of Chicago, to design his observatory. It was built in the shape of a cross, with two smaller domes for additional telescopes at the end of each arm. The building and its contents are a fascinating example of the architecture and technological accomplishments of the late 19th century.

Prior to being moved to Yerkes observatory, the 40 inch telescope was exhibited at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago before being installed in the observatory.

Hale sought a location close to the University but beyond the smoke, haze and city lights of Chicago. In addition to studying traditional night-time objects, Hale and his colleagues wished to do solar research. John Johnston, a retired Chicago lawyer and real estate speculator, extends an invitation to the site committee to visit his "Gardeners" house in Lake Geneva. He has a team of horses and will drive them wherever they need to go. He looks forward to showing them the "ideal site" for the new telescope. December 9th, 1893 Burnham writes to Hale, informing him that the Williams Bay site has finally been chosen and a railroad line already ran from Chicago

to Williams Bay, offering easy access to the University of Chicago. The 53-acre tract of land, about half a mile north of Geneva Lake was given to the university by Johnson.



Construction began in 1895, with the building of Yerkes Observatory there came many artisans who boarded in Williams Bay while here at work. Some brought their families and stayed. Warner and Swasey of Cleveland, Ohio built the mounting for the telescope and a 90-foot diameter dome to house it. They also constructed a 75-foot diameter movable floor that raises astronomers to the telescope eyepiece. The approximate latitude of Yerkes Observatory is +42 degrees 34 minutes 15 seconds;

longitude is -88 degrees 33 minutes 22 seconds. Science (1897) reports, "The center of motion of the great refractor is about 80 meters above the level of Lake Geneva.

The first astronomical observations with the completed telescope were made by Hale and his associates in the summer of 1897. The excellent optical qualities of the new telescope were immediately proven when astronomer Edward Emerson Barnard soon discovered a faint third companion to the star Vega, which had gone undetected even by the skilled astronomer Sherburne W. Burnham using the 36 inch Lick telescope.

Attention turned to Williams Bay on October 21, 1897 when a crowd gathered for the ceremony that would dedicate the University of Chicago's great Yerkes Observatory, featuring the largest refracting telescope that would ever exist. It was a day of speeches, glorifying both the telescope in its Beaux Arts observatory and the man who made the whole thing possible, Charles Tyson Yerkes.

For 180 years generations of men and women have shaped Walworth County and the Village of Williams Bay. In order to understand where we are going we must first understand the history of where we have come from.



Yerkes Observatory Dedication

⁽¹⁾ It is interesting to note that Alvan Clark and Sons had a personal connection to Ashfield, Massachusetts, the hometown of the Israel Williams family.