

## **ASYLUM POINT and LIGHTHOUSE**

Latitude: 44.06244

Longitude: -88.51467

### **Asylum Point Park**

On the central western shore of Lake Winnebago, just a few miles north of Oshkosh, a promontory extends into the water. On this point in 1871, construction began on the Northern Asylum for the Insane. The name of the institute was later changed to Winnebago Mental Health Institute, reflecting perhaps an increasingly sensitive public, but the hospital's original name has been forever connected with the surrounding geography. The promontory is still known as Asylum Point, and the surrounding water is called Asylum Bay.

The word Asylum means a place of refuge or sanctuary, and the institute "has throughout its history, provided many troubled individuals with a sanctuary, a refuge, and a safe place to prepare for re-entry into a turbulent world." The same statement of purpose might just as well be applied to the nearby Asylum Point Park, as many people come to the park to take refuge from a turbulent world and spend a carefree afternoon fishing in the tranquil waters or simply relaxing on the man-made island next to the Asylum Point Lighthouse.

### **Asylum Bay Lighthouse**

The lighthouse stands sentinel in a once busy area known as Asylum Point Park that separates North and South Asylum Bay. It was formerly known as Lighthouse Island and Picnic Point. WCC and WPS were involved with this area's development in the 1930's and 40's and reportedly constructed the lighthouse in 1937 on an artificial island (though it was rejected by the Department of Transportation as a navigational light for the lake and was thus never lit). The main tower is over 24 feet tall, 8 ft around at the base, and tapers to 6 ft around at the top. The copper topped 7 foot tall cupola was formerly topped by a flag pole to make the entire height 42 feet. In 2007, the lighthouse received a \$4,000 makeover with labor provided by inmates from the Winnebago Correctional Institute. Parts of the wooden lantern room were replaced, windows were refitted, and the metal roof was rebuilt. Reconstruction replaced the flag pole with a copper fish weather-vane.

Originally the island was made by filling in marsh to make an island of 600' x 75'. The island had open air fireplaces, trees, shrubs, flowers, and was popular with picnickers who gained access by a wooden bridge. Later a fishpond holding area was created by dredging of the channel for a rough fish removal program run by the WDNR. The WDNR still maintains a fish station at this location. It was also used as a beacon for those on the lake in bad weather. About 1 million pounds of Carp were caught by local fishermen and sold to markets in Chicago and NY annually through this fish processing operation. The lighthouse served as a beacon for those bringing in their catch to the operation's headquarters. Lit by kerosene lantern the light could be seen 12 miles out on a clear night. The area once boasted barges, boat building, and fish trapping equipment. During restoration an attempt was made to illuminate the lighthouse with solar or electrical fixtures but the plan was abandoned because of TSA concerns.

## **CCC in Wisconsin in the 1930's**

### **Civilian Conservation Corps**

*Excerpts from a message from the President of the United States to members of the CCC read over NBC network at 7:30 p. m., Friday, April 17, 1936:*

“To the million and a half young men and war veterans who have been, or are today, enrolled in the Civilian Conservation Corps Camps, I extend greeting on this third anniversary of the establishment of the first CCC Camp.

Idle through no fault of your own, you were enrolled from city and rural homes and offered an opportunity to engage in healthful, outdoor work on forest, park and soil conservation projects of definite practical value to all the people of the nation. The promptness with which you seized the opportunity to engage in honest work, the willingness with which you have performed your daily tasks and the fine spirit you have shown winning the respect of the communities in which your camps have been located, merits the admiration of the entire country. You, and the men who have guided and supervised your efforts, have cause to be proud of the record the CCC has made in the development of sturdy manhood and in the initiation and prosecution of a conservation program of unprecedented proportions.

Since the Corps began some 1,150,000 of you have been graduated, improved in health, self-disciplined, alert and eager for the opportunity to make good in any kind of honest employment. Our records show that the results achieved in the protection and improvement of our timbered domain, in the arrest of soil wastage, in the development of needed recreational areas, in wild life conservation and in flood control have been as impressive as the results achieved in the rehabilitation of youth. Through your spirit and industry it has been demonstrated that young men can be put to work in our forests, parks, and fields on projects which benefit both the nation's youth and conservation generally.”

### **WPA (in Wisconsin)**

#### **Works Progress Administration**

**Definition:** A federally funded program intended to put the unemployed back to work and stimulate the economy during the Great Depression.

#### **The Nation's Problem**

The stock market crash of 1929 caused widespread poverty and unemployment as banks folded, businesses went bankrupt, and factories shut down. By 1933 more than 12 million Americans were out of work (about 25% of the labor force). In Wisconsin, by 1933 the majority of the state's banks had closed, retail sales and tax collections plummeted, and nearly 400,000 residents were on welfare or some other kind of relief.

#### **The Government's Solution**

To address the crisis, in 1935 Congress authorized the Works Progress Administration to create jobs and stimulate the economy. They funded it with an appropriation of \$5 billion (\$82 billion in today's dollars). Wisconsin participated eagerly in the WPA, setting up a state administration as soon as funds became available. In 1939, the program's name was changed to Works Projects Administration but the abbreviation remained accurate.

WPA projects were required to have a local sponsor who paid a portion of the cost and to recruit their workers from the ranks of the unemployed and those on relief. In Wisconsin, about three-fourths of the funding went to construction and engineering projects, and a quarter to professional projects and community service work.

### **Results of the WPA in Wisconsin**

Between 1935 and 1943, WPA construction crews created 22,889 miles of roads, erected 1,456 new buildings, laid 1,588 miles of water pipes and sewers, constructed 504 dams, built 17 airports, and planted 63 million trees in Wisconsin.

Between 1935 and 1940, professional and community service programs taught 9,437 people how to read and write, served 3.1 million hot lunches to school children, gave citizenship classes to 3,611 immigrants, and manufactured or repaired 4.5 million articles of clothing or bedding. Other programs performed work or taught classes in the arts, music, and literature, including the Wisconsin Writers' Project and Arts Project, the Wisconsin Public Records Survey, and the Milwaukee Handicraft Project.

On average, the WPA employed 43,000 people per year in Wisconsin. Wages averaged about 60% of those paid to workers performing the same jobs in the private sector. About \$318 million was spent in Wisconsin during the life of the program, \$220 million of it going to wages.

### **The End of the WPA**

The WPA was not the only public works initiative undertaken during the Depression. Other federal programs separate from WPA included the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Rural Electrification Administration, and the Tennessee Valley Authority, and the state of Wisconsin operated its own relief and public works agencies.

In the early 1940s, as World War Two approached, the federal government helped American industry gear up for the war effort. The resulting economic growth and the war itself provided jobs for millions of workers, and the WPA was phased out. It formally ended in 1943 after giving work to more than 8 million Americans during the greatest economic collapse in the nation's history.

*[Source: Lackore, James The W.P.A. in Wisconsin (Masters Thesis, Univ. of Wisconsin, 1966); Wisconsin Dept. of Public Welfare, "The W.P.A. in Wisconsin: 1935-43" in Public Welfare Review (first quarter, 1943). ]*

