



Waukegan Historical Society Haines House

1917 N. Sheridan Rd.
Bicentennial Landmark

When Jane Addams, founder of Hull House, and Louise DeKoven Bowen, president and benefactor of the association, were driven in a sleigh over the crest of the hill at Sheridan Road and Greenwood Avenue on a snowy November day in 1910, they took one look at the glistening panorama and knew they had found their campsite. For months the women had been searching for the perfect spot for summer outings for underprivileged Chicago children. The 72-acre site with its gentle slopes, ravine and woods, owned by Waukegan Mayor Fred Buck, proved the answer to their dream.

Earlier, Buck had tried to sell the property to the city for a park. His idea was rejected as foolish. "Too far out of town," opponents claimed.

The only house on the property in 1910 was the Haines "farmhouse" — a once elegant country home used as a retreat by John Charles Haines, mayor of Chicago in 1858. Marble fireplaces, an etched glass door and carved stairways represented rural living at its best in the 19th century. Haines died in residence in 1896.

The story goes that by the time Miss Addams and Mrs. Bowen arrived on the scene the dining room of the house was being used as a coal bin. Miss Addams is reported to have said, "Well, this will be torn down anyway." But Mrs. Bowen decreed that it be saved and cleaned up.

For all the years the camp — known as Bowen Country Club — operated, the house was used by Miss Addams and Mrs. Bowen when they came out from the city, by caretakers and by winter campers, one of the more famous of whom was Benny Goodman.

In 1963 Hull House Association sold the property to the Waukegan Park District, thus realizing Buck's old dream. In 1973 the farmhouse was leased to the Waukegan Historical Society for their permanent headquarters.

With the help of the Park District there has been an on-going restoration of the Victorian beauty ever since. Old records document the original house circa 1855. Rooms were added on to the south in the 1870s with Charles Dickinson as architect. In one of those little turns of fate, documentation was gleaned from the diaries of David Simpson, a carpenter who worked on the addition. Simpson was the great grandfather of Chandra Simpson Sefton, past president of the society, who thought of the idea for this project.