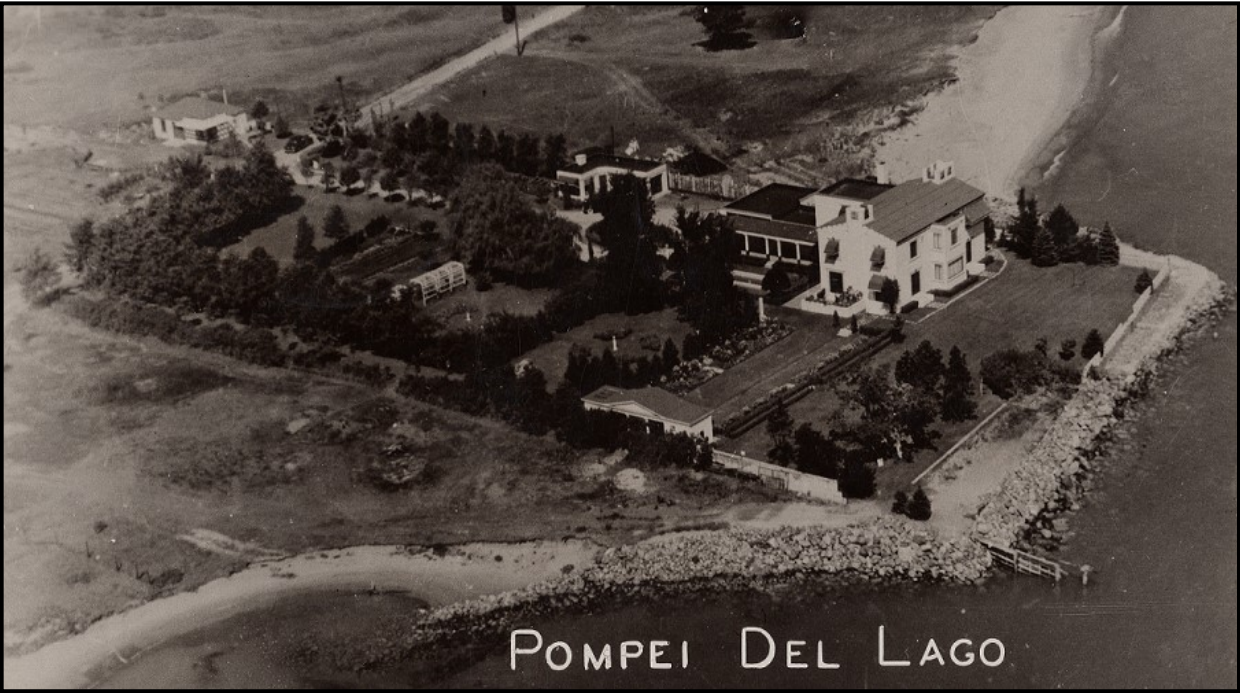
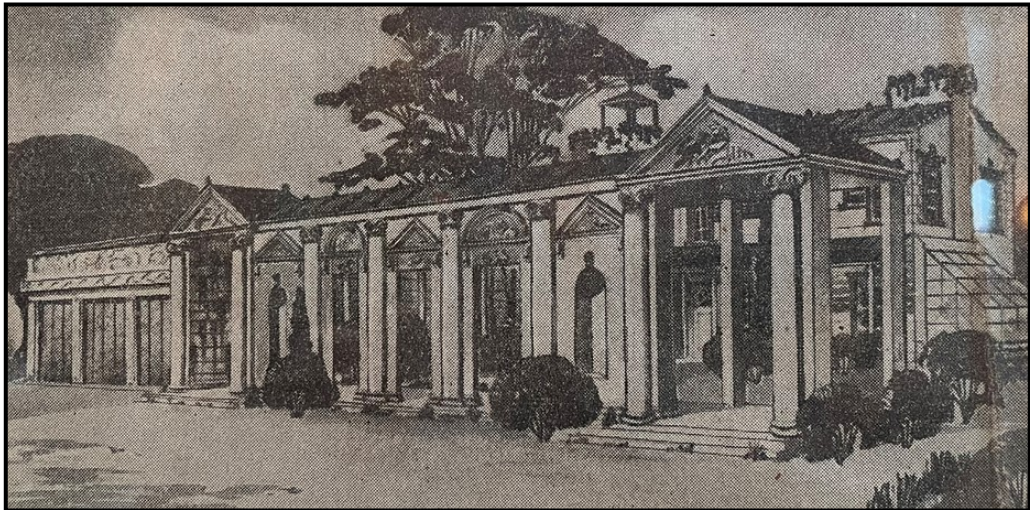
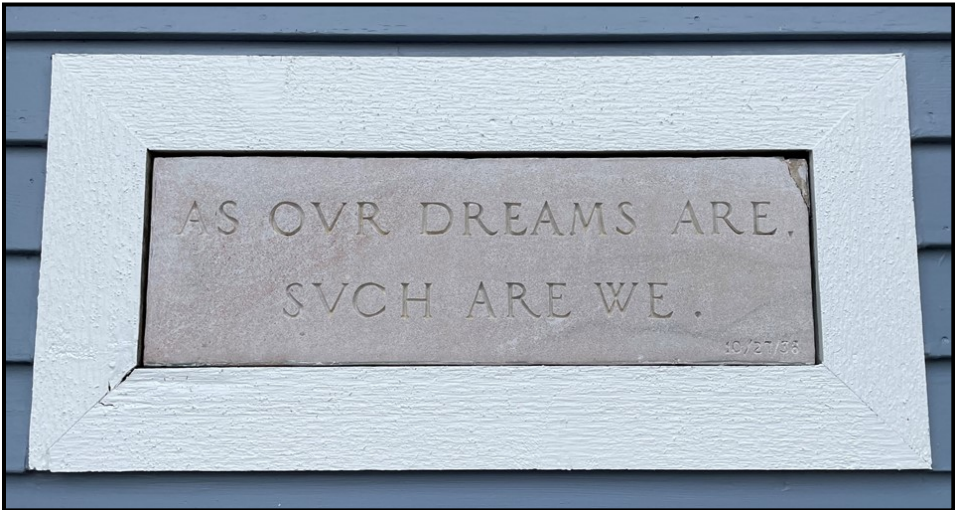


# THE PRAIRIE’S MARINA THROUGH THE YEARS

Nestled into the most southeastern corner of Wisconsin is Prairie Harbor Yacht Club—a “dockominium” style marina with a history dating back to 1938. That was the year Walter H. Mayer, Sr., founder of a Chicago linen supply company, began construction of “Pompeii Del Lago” (Pompeii on the Lake)—a Roman-style villa inspired by the ruins of Pompeii (a Roman city destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D.).



The complex (pictured above) included a marble bathhouse, gazebo, and formal gardens. The cornerstone of the garage was inscribed “**AS OUR DREAMS ARE, SUCH ARE WE**” and dated “10/27/38.” The quote is from *Liber Amoris: Being the Book of Love of Brother Aurelius* by Henry Bernard Carpenter and was a favorite of Mayer’s. The date was also his and his wife Harriet’s 20<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. That cornerstone now resides in the front of the present-day Prairie Harbor Yacht Club (pictured below on the left).



Artist's rendering of Pompeii Del Lago, 1938.



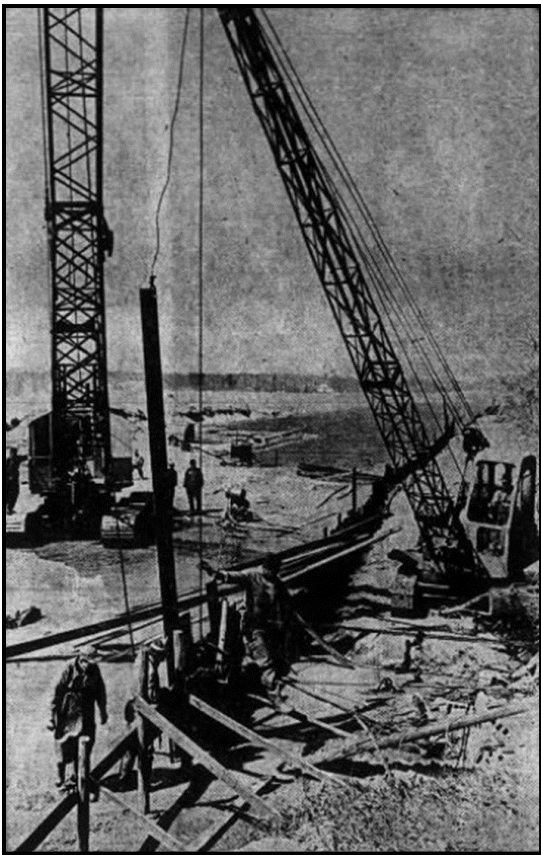
Walter H. Mayer, Sr. and Harriet Mayer, 1934.  
Courtesy of Prairie Harbor Yacht Club.

Walter H. Mayer died of a heart attack while on the train to Chicago to work in 1954. Harriet then sold Pompeii Del Lago for “nickels and dimes” at \$60,000.

In 1965, Kenosha County approved controversial plans for a large marina development at the location, called “Pompeii on the Lake.” The proposed plans included a 1,000-boat capacity marina which would use the existing villa as a clubhouse. After the county’s approval, Pompeii on the Lake moved forward with their plans, and began dredging the marina and installing steel sheeting along the north bank of the channel.

But the grand plans for the marina were not as speedy as anticipated. In 1967, Pompeii on the Lake had only 40 boat slips—a far cry from the 1,000 planned. The slowed progress of the marina was due to several lawsuits resulting in financial distress for the corporation, along with the efforts of a concerned local conservationist group wanting to protect the adjacent natural prairie environment. This group would later become the Chiwaukee Prairie Preservation Fund, Inc., which continues work today to acquire, restore, preserve, and manage prairie lands in the Chiwaukee Prairie – Carol Beach area.

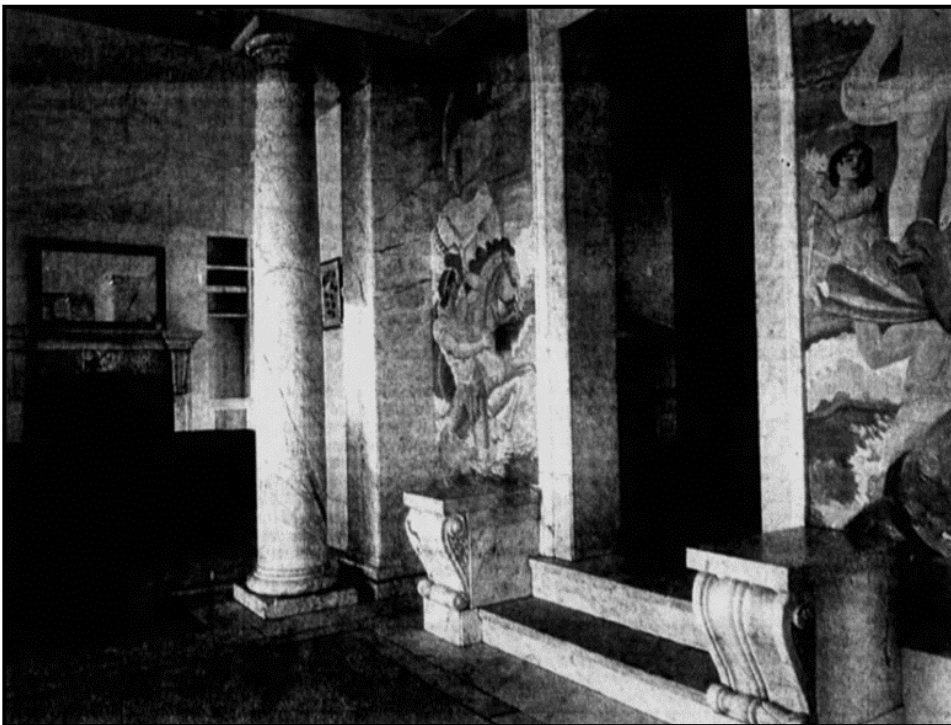




In the mid-1980s, Pompeii on the Lake was sold and became “Trident Marina.” The new owners had similar grand plans, but with similar luck. After a harsh storm in March of 1987, the owners were left with an estimated \$200,000 worth of damages and the marina filed for bankruptcy. The following year the marina was sold to investors who opened Prairie Harbor Yacht Club in 1991. The Yacht Club featured a new clubhouse (Pompeii Del Lago had been severely damaged by Lake Michigan by this point and was removed as a result) and 159 “dockominiums,” which are privately owned parking spaces that represent individual boat slips. It is one of the few marinas on Lake Michigan set up this way.

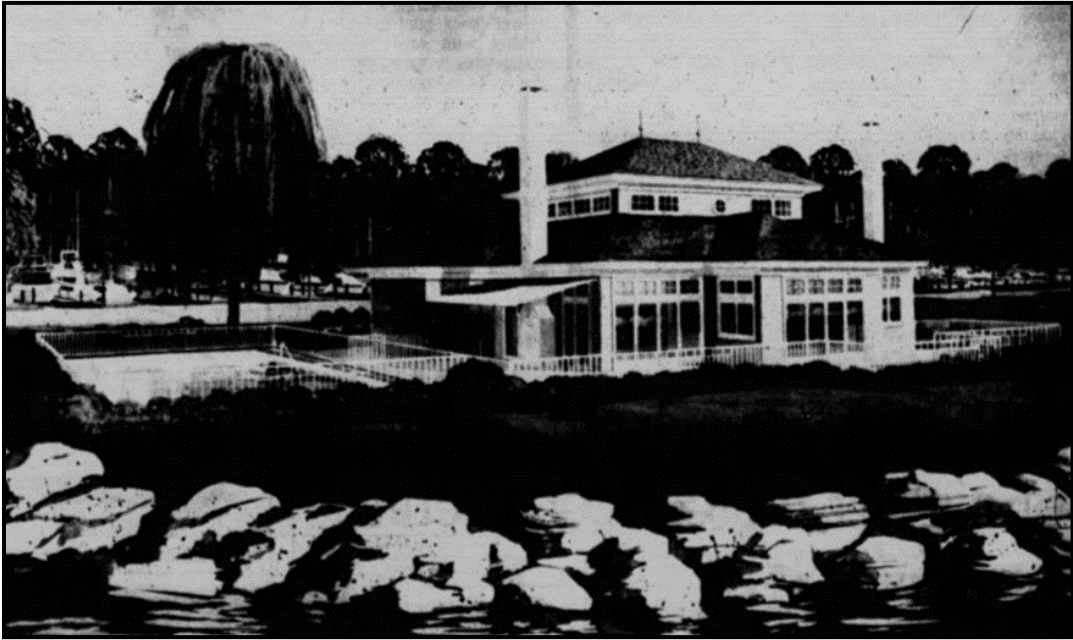
*(Left) Workers putting in steel-sheeting around a large water-filled basin that had been scooped out for the marina, May 1966.*

*Courtesy of the Kenosha News.*



*(Right) Trident Marina used the Pompeii villa as their clubhouse. This photo taken in 1985 shows the design of the interior. By this point, the marble bathhouse, gazebo, and some of the exterior marble pillars had been destroyed by the pounding waves of Lake Michigan. The 1987 storm would completely wash away the villa’s porch.*

*Courtesy of the Kenosha News.*



*Artist’s rendering of the Prairie Harbor Yacht Club, 1990.*

*Courtesy of the Kenosha News.*

Prairie Harbor Yacht Club celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and will begin a project to replace their docks this fall. They will be the first marina on this side of Lake Michigan to replace docks at this scale.

Though the Yacht Club is only three decades old, the site’s long history is evident as soon as you enter the clubhouse. Old newspapers and handwritten letters regarding Pompeii Del Lago and the Mayer family line the walls, and artifacts from the original villa can be seen throughout, including the base of one of the original marble pillars. To learn more about the Yacht Club, you can visit [prairieharboryachtclub.com](http://prairieharboryachtclub.com).



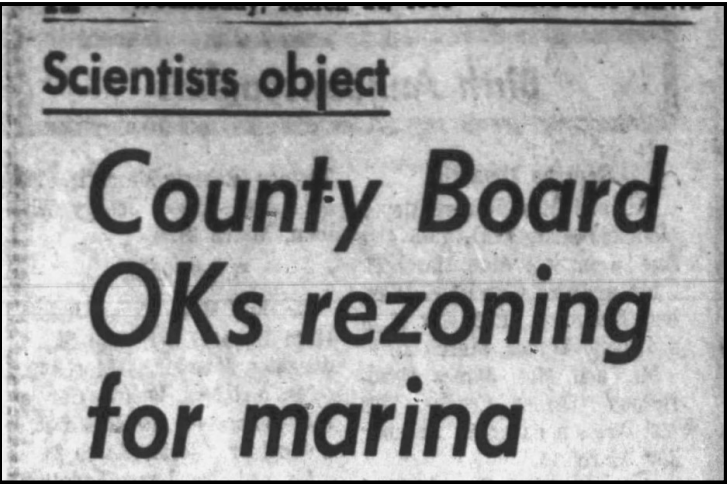
*Prairie Harbor Yacht Club in the 1990s.*

*Courtesy of Prairie Harbor Yacht Club.*



# PRESERVATION ON THE PRAIRIE

On a winter evening in 1965, conservationists from across the State drove through a snowstorm to attend a Kenosha County board meeting. The County was voting on plans for a huge marina in Pleasant Prairie that could very well have damaged the Chiwaukee. The Chiwaukee Prairie is located in the southeastern corner of the Village. Dr. Hugh Iltis, a UW-Madison plant geographer, educator, conservationist and one of the founders of the Wisconsin branch of The Nature Conservancy, drove from Madison to voice his opposition, saying, “Your children will ask, what is a pleasant prairie? and you will have no answer—for you will have destroyed it.”



Even though the private marina plans were approved, a passion was stirred by a concerned group of local citizens to join together and find a way to minimize the disturbance of this important prairie lowland and upland conservation area. The Chiwaukee Prairie is part of the last unbroken stretch of prairie of its kind in Wisconsin. Its diverse area provides wetlands, dunes, savannas and prairie habitat areas for hundreds of native plants and animals, many of which are listed as threatened or endangered. With the help of The Nature Conservancy of Wisconsin, this citizen’s group was able to buy a small strip of land which made it impossible to build a road leading east to the marina from Sheridan Road. The bulk of the prairie land was temporarily preserved, and the private interests of the marina proceeded. This citizens’ group plus a number of private and public entities continued land acquisition to protect the prairie.

### Local Preservation Fund is Formed

In 1985, Donna Peterson and Joan Rohan founded the Chiwaukee Prairie Preservation Fund, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. This local citizen group has been raising money and slowly purchasing more property in the Prairie. Today the Preservation Fund continues its mission to acquire, restore, preserve and manage prairie lands in the Chiwaukee Prairie and Carol Beach area. Visit [chiwaukee.org](http://chiwaukee.org) for contact and volunteer opportunities.



*Photos of Chiwaukee Prairie.  
Courtesy of Phil Sander.*

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**Photos:** Kate Bennett, Greg Czarny, Joyce Hill Westerman, Kenosha News, Prairie Harbor Yacht Club, Phil Sander, Negro Leagues Baseball Museum



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