

Fox Point



by Douglas H. Frazer



THE JEWISH FEDERATION'S KARL CAMPUS And The Country Day And University Schools Before It

“Don't wait to become a great man, be a great boy.”

These were the bywords of the Country Day School's philosophy and success. The school opened at 6401 N. Richards Street (now Santa Monica Blvd.) in 1917 under the headmastership of A. Gledden Santer. Although the school building has been expanded, the original facade facing School Road has largely stayed the same. The school, and what became the 27 acre campus, straddled the boundary of Whitefish Bay and the Town of Milwaukee. When Fox Point incorporated in 1926, it annexed the Town of Milwaukee portion (about 7 acres).

Country Day, with its Church of England prayers, body sports, and Latin studies, was part of the general de-Germanization of Milwaukee culture that was occurring at the time. The original enrollment was 55 students. And it was truly in the country. Almost to the person, the faculty and student body lived in or just north of downtown Milwaukee, 7.5 miles away. William Stark, in his book *Be a Great Boy*, reports that the 1919 school bulletin actually included a section entitled, How to Reach the School:

The school is reached by taking the Fox Point car to North Limits Station (to the end of the tracks) and walking one block west. [This was at Lake Drive and School Road – the latter then called High Street.] The outgoing car, marked “Private,” leaves Broadway and Mason at 8:04 a.m., arriving at Brady Street 8:15 a.m., North Avenue 8:18 a.m. and Folsom Place 8:25 a.m. The return car leaves the school at 5:00 p.m. and reaches Wisconsin Street a little after 5:30 p.m. The fare is the regular city fare plus four zone fares one way.

Country Day soon developed a boarding school option in 1926 by renting a large house owned by Ms. Sophie Draves just to the north. The building known as the “Dorm” accommodated a maximum of 10 students. In 1934, the school bought the property from Ms. Draves and operated it until 1941.

Over time, the Country Day School campus included a hockey rink located on what is now the lower northwest part of the Milwaukee Jewish Day School parking lot, and a lower campus set of buildings that are now the Jewish Community Center's (JCC) main buildings just north of Devon Street, extending up the hill.

In 1963, the Country Day School merged with the Milwaukee University School (originally the German-English

Academy) and the Milwaukee Downer Seminary. The combined schools began operating as the University School of Milwaukee (USM) for the 1964-1965 school year. The new school was housed on two campuses; the north campus (Fairy Chasm Road, River Hills) and the south campus (Santa Monica Blvd., Whitefish Bay and Fox Point). Students in nursery school, kindergarten, boys and girls in grades 7 and 8, and boys in grades 9 through 12, were taught on the south campus, the balance of the student body on the north campus. In 1970, the high school girls moved to the south campus in a coeducational setting.

By 1983, the University School had decided to move its entire operation to the Fairy Chasm campus. It needed a buyer for its 27 acre southern campus and finding one was not so easy. Whitefish Bay officials made it clear that gaining zoning approval for commercial or residential development was unlikely.

By happy coincidence, the Milwaukee Jewish Federation was seeking a new home for a new and expanded Jewish Community Center, then located at 1360 North Prospect Avenue, and for other constituent agencies. In mid-1983, USM accepted an offer to purchase the campus from the Jewish Federation in the amount of \$2.7 million dollars. The offer had a number of contingencies, including rezoning by the Fox Point and Whitefish Bay Village boards, which was a condition precedent for the planned development.

On May 25, 1984, the Fox Point Village Board approved the rezoning. The approval process was much more contentious in Whitefish Bay. Finally on July 25, 1984, Whitefish Bay voted for the zoning change.

Then commenced a whole new round of applications for the approval of the project plan – which would involve a considerable amount of new construction—and facility use. Fox Point's approval came quickly. Whitefish Bay's process involved many months of meetings and negotiations. Eventually Whitefish Bay gave the go-ahead. The new Karl Campus was dedicated on September 30, 1987.

The anchor of the campus is the JCC, a non-profit social services agency, founded on Jewish values and ethics, committed to meeting the needs of the Jewish community, strengthening Jewish identity, and enriching Jewish life. It is a diverse and inclusive community that welcomes members and guests of all faiths. In addition to classes in Jewish education and enrichment, program offerings include fitness and exercise at the Habush Family Fitness Center, swimming lessons and open swim at the Peck Aquatics Center, open and organized recreation in the Marcus Gymnasium, and specialized services at the Teva spa, plus yoga and Pilates studios. The JCC is also home to the Gan Ami – Whitefish Bay early education program, the CAFA B DATA cafe, Tot Spot, Kids Center (before and after school supervision), and a resource center and library.

The original Country Day School facility (mostly in Fox Point) is now home to the Milwaukee Jewish Day School (K3-grade 8), the (Hillel) Academy (K5-grade 8), and the Jewish Beginnings Lubavitch Preschool (infant-K4).

Much has changed on this hill in the last hundred years, but much has stayed the same. Each school on the site has dedicated itself to turning out great kids. Each, in turn, has succeeded.

Douglas H. Frazer is a trustee on the Fox Point Village Board. The views expressed are his own and not necessarily those of the Village, the Village Board, other Village Board members, or Best Version Media, LLC.

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