

Boathouse

It all began with two souls and a captain being tossed to-and-fro by wind-fueled chop on the troubled waters of Big Green Lake. Helpless against a power greater than themselves, passengers sought relief from the turbulence and chaos that was threatening to do them in. As luck would have it, they found a safe harbour in Pigeon Cove. In the calm of the waters therein, they found a place that provided safe haven, protection and refuge from the storm.

Such was the introduction to Big Green Lake for Jessie and Victor Lawson and friends in the summer of 1888. And such has been the empirical experience, one of being safe and protected, of countless others ever since thanks to Jessie's dream of creating a safe harbor for all. So enamored and so grateful was the pair, that in that very year, they began to establish their estate, constructing the property, harbour and boathouse in response to their experience.

Beginning around 1900, Jessie developed the island off of Lone Tree Point, ensconcing the harbour further as a protective cove for mariners. Additionally, consciously or subconsciously, this work established new habitat and structure for bird, waterfowl and fish species, bolstering their populations. At the same time Jessie set about shaping and installing the greensward along the cove's riparian zone, forever establishing a user-friendly interface between the land and water. As an added human benefit, the secure calm water cove functioned as an ideal location from which to harvest ice for storage in the "Ice House," contributing to the year-round viability of the estate.

With these improvements in place, the Lawsons first launched their 140 battery- powered craft, the "No Hurry" in 1905. For five years the couple rode a dingy from the greensward out and back to the moored yacht for each and every excursion. In order to maintain its seaworthiness, its Captain regularly had to travel to an undisclosed location in order to maintain charge in its batteries. No doubt, weary of this routine and motivated by the need for facilities for all boaters, Jessie Lawson set about the planning and construction of the boathouse that we know and love today.

The Boat House, built in (1910), was inspired by one Jessie saw in Switzerland. She was specifically drawn to the romantic late 18th century/early 19th century lines of the Swiss chalet architectural style with its wide projecting roofs, gabled and with wide eaves, and richly decorated facades. Desiring a practical and functional facility, Jessie commissioned a building on the cutting fashionable architectural edge of her time. Today it is particularly noticeable that while the walls are comprised of durable cast stone, the green tile on its roof is more ornate and came from Italy. In summary, the boathouse was built by Mrs. Lawson, to not only accommodate their large boat and re-charge its batteries, but also to enhance the safe harbour of Pigeon Cove for all who would seek refuge and docking there.

From this inspiration has come over a century of safe harbour and use as Mrs. Lawson had first dreamed. Beginning in the late 1920s, when the Stone Development Company built what is now Roger Williams Inn, visitors flocked to the waterfront and boathouse as if magnetically drawn by its call and promise. Spilling out of the grand hotel, debutantes, esteemed gentlemen and staff alike sought the serenity and peace of a sauntering stroll along the shores of Big Green Lake. As lovers of the time would, rowboats were procured from the boathouse traversing the cove and circling the island, as sweet nothings were offered in attempts to woo.

In the summer of 1944 when the American Baptist Assembly (GLCC) was born, the boathouse continued to be an iconic structure on Big Green Lake. Its lighthouse beacon standing behind it (Judson Tower) became the primary way-finding marker for those navigating the waters of Big Green Lake and her shores. A union began to arise that brought together in symbolic relationship, the people of the village, town and county of Green Lake with the American Baptist Assembly (GLCC) grounds. Within this union, the boathouse became transformed. What at first had been a representation of the Lawson and ABA brand grew in its symbolism and meaning to represent the larger geographic area along with its people. One longtime resident says:

"I have been boating on Green Lake since I was a small child, and seeing the boathouse from the water is one of my first memories. I believe everyone who has spent any amount of time boating on Green Lake has a soft spot for the building. I don't want to use any scare tactics, but I think a lot of people would be very disappointed if the building was torn down. It is hands-down the most historically significant building on Green Lake."

By the 1950s waterfront staff aided visitors in docking their craft so that they might stroll along the waterfront, stopping to sip on a malted milkshake in the "snackery." By the 1960s, boathouse volunteers sold fishing bait, taught sailing and captained sightseeing tours on the Captain Bickel introducing all who held an interest to the wonders of Green Lake. In the 70s, oil, gasoline and limited mechanical services were added to what the boathouse offered and bicycles became available allowing for lazy rides along the carriage roads of the assembly grounds. In the 80s water skiing, fast boats and jet skis added to the mix of user types frequenting the cove. Boaters gathered in the clusters to socialize, bond and form community through relationships that would last a lifetime.

Boat owners and operators who both live on the grounds and in the surrounding community continue to be a major force of activity in Pigeon Cove. The boathouse leases and maintains 25 dock slips and 12 moorings for seasonal rental and use. In addition, through its rental services, kayaks, canoes, paddleboards, paddleboats and the like are available; fishing boats, recreational sports powerboats, and leisure cruising powerboats are available; and projected for 2017, guided pontoon boat excursions will also be made available. Building on its legacy of being a safe harbour for all, the swimming beach, bicycle rentals and interactive displays continue to serve a public eager to explore, needing to relax and wanting to connect with natural beauty, like-hearted people and a space and place that feels sacred.

The boathouse, under her watchful eye, for over a century now, has borne witness to the manifestations of life for those on the waters and along the shores of Big Green Lake. Appearing in her gaze has been the joy of couples tying the knot on Lone Tree Point; children learning to swim, overcoming their fears of the depths that lie beneath; the ecstasy of those who for the first time have felt the power of the wind luffing a sail, and then by courage and instruction, have begun to understand that in harnessing its force, a cooperative mobility is made possible. Beyond the practical services of a marina, Pigeon Cove and the boathouse remain true to its original purpose and design. For even today, when the storm winds blow, it stands ready and with open arms to welcome all in need of its protection and comfort.

Recognizing the unique role that the boathouse, the waterfront/greensward, the Judson Tower Lighthouse and the Rodger Williams Inn have played over the years for the residents and visitors on Green Lake, the GLCC Board of Directors has begun a campaign aimed at its

renewal and refurbishment. Given the history and legacy of the cove and its structures, it is only logical and natural to deduce that from the very beginning it has served as the seat of our collective community's soul. Today, we open this invitation to participate to you. Please consider giving, as you are able, to this critical venture in saving our common piece of history and what will continue to serve as our common piece of future collective meaning. Open your ears and open your heart...the Lawson boathouse is calling to you.

We Need Your Help

So that more than a century of history, active use and memories of Pigeon Cove, Lawson's Swiss chalet-style boathouse, might live on for future generations. We need your help, to reinvigorate a safe place and harbour where so many have found refuge. We need your help to refurbish and sustain the physical assets that provide resources to boaters, bathers, visitors and neighbors alike. We need your help to restoring a place of beauty, whose siren call beckons all to whom would have their gaze fall upon her, a place and structure whose presence defines for us what it means to be at or on Green Lake, as the primary marker of our visual memory. If the boathouse holds meaning for you...we are asking for your help today. Your gift of any size is greatly appreciated, and is fully tax deductible. With it, our architect, contractors and volunteers will be going to work, restoring and renewing this jewel. [Click here to give.](#)