

# 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION ISSUE

## THE COTTAGE'S EARLY DAYS

*Inspiration, Organization, Hope, and Hard Work*

By Jerry Minnich

This year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the rehabilitation and opening of the Seth Peterson Cottage. It was the first Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home to be opened to the public for rental and has, since 1992, achieved widespread notoriety and success.

Four years earlier, the future of the Cottage was severely in doubt, swallowed up by a state park expansion in 1966, boarded up, fenced off, and left to decay in the elements, it had been unoccupied for more than 25 years. Wright's final Wisconsin commission seemed destined for destruction.



But in the late 1980s, a group of lakeside residents, spearheaded by Audrey Laatsch, coalesced to save the Cottage from destruction, to turn this diamond in the rough to a "jewel in the woods." Their story has been told in the book, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Seth Peterson Cottage: Rescuing a Lost Masterwork*, by John Eifler, AIA, and Kristin Visser.

Recently, we interviewed several people who worked on the project since its early beginnings and have served continuously through the years. They were instrumental in those early days of inspiration, organization, hope, and hard work.

*(Continued on Page 2, Column 2: INTERVIEWS)*

Frank Lloyd Wright  
Cottage Architect



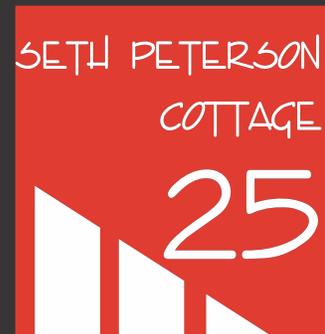
Seth Peterson  
Cottage Owner

2017



"THE LONGER I LIVE THE MORE BEAUTIFUL LIFE BECOMES. IF YOU FOOLISHLY IGNORE BEAUTY, YOU WILL SOON FIND YOURSELF WITHOUT IT. YOUR LIFE WILL BE IMPOVERISHED. BUT IF YOU INVEST IN BEAUTY, IT WILL REMAIN WITH YOU ALL THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE."

*Frank Lloyd Wright*



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Kermit Traska

This June we will be celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the opening to the public of the Seth Peterson Cottage and the 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of Frank Lloyd Wright. Both are the main topics of this issue of *Writings*. We will look back over the past 25 years, but we must also look forward to make sure the Seth Peterson Cottage is cared for into the future.

The success of the first Frank Lloyd Wright home to be rented by the public started slowly but has grown to nearly 100% occupancy in recent years. In addition, the concept of renting Wright-designed homes has spread to include almost 20 other unique homes. This seems to have generated more interest for people to now be able to stay in Wright-designed homes and more interest in the Seth Peterson Cottage.

The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy is a unique private/public partnership in which I have had the honor of serving on both sides. In the late 1980's, as the District State Park Supervisor, I worked as the Department of Natural Resources representative to ensure that the state's interests were considered as the project advanced. After my retirement from the DNR in 2001, I was asked to be on the SPCC Board of Directors, first as a board member, then as secretary and in recent years as president. It has been a long, enduring relationship from both sides of the organization.

The real impact of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy has come from the many volunteers who have served over the years. The volunteers serve in several capacities. Some serve on the Board of Directors providing vision and guidance to the Conservancy, others serve as Open House tour guides, and still others help with the annual spring clean-up chores. Some volunteers have served for many years, as you'll read in this newsletter, and others have served in other important roles for the organization. Certainly, we must remember Audrey Laatsch as the original mover and shaker for the SPCC. It was her inspiration and vision that helped shape the path the Conservancy would follow.

The future use and care of the Seth Peterson Cottage appears to be on stable ground. The revenue generated from renting the Cottage provides the continuing support for its upkeep. Also important is the dedication of the many volunteers who keep the organization running smoothly. Please join us at the Open House on Sunday, June 4, 2017 as we celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of Frank Lloyd Wright and first 25 years of the Seth Peterson Cottage being open to the public. We look forward to many more years of successful continuation of this private/public partnership making the Seth Peterson Cottage available to even more people. 

(Continued from Page 1—The Cottage's Early Days)

## THE INTERVIEWS

**Kermit Traska**, currently President of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy Board, was District State Park Supervisor in the '80s and first saw the Cottage in 1982. "It was surrounded by a six-foot chain-link fence with a locked gate. We didn't have a key. All we could do was stare at the boarded-up edifice."

That did not stop **Bill Martinelli**, whose early interest in architecture led him to learn of the Cottage in William Storrer's Book, *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright: A Complete Catalog*. "In August 1986, I drove up to Mirror Lake State Park and stopped at the headquarters building and asked about the Cottage. The park ranger told me I should not try to find it because I could get in trouble if I trespassed on the property. I proceeded to drive down Fern Dell Road and checked every abandoned drive and finally found the drive to the Cottage. I climbed over the chain-link fence and took some slides. That was in August 1986."

Bill was recruited by Audrey and has been a board member since the beginning, currently serving as First Vice President. He is also one of the hardest-working board members. He supervises maintenance and repairs of the Cottage—no simple task, since a year's worth of constantly changing guests is very hard on a house.

**Alice Seeliger**, who designs and produces the SPCC newsletter, *Writings*, came on board from a different direction. She lived next to Kermit Traska, where she operated her own writing, marketing, and graphic design business. Kermit talked her into taking over *Writings* on a volunteer basis. Now, 24 years later, she is still turning out issue after issue.

"Sadly," said Alice, "I never met Audrey Laatsch, though we talked on the phone a number of times. I also did not see the Cottage until several years later. My main contact was Kristin Visser. We would meet in Madison so she could hand me the articles, graphics, and photos for each issue, or Kermit would be the courier."

**Claire Barnett**, who also learned of the Cottage through William Storrer's book, caught her first glimpse of the decaying structure in 1988. An avid Wright fan, she attended the opening of a major Wright exhibition at the Elvehjem Museum, in Madison, whose curator, Mary Jane Hamilton, was a friend. There, she met and spoke with Gov. Tommy Thompson, who was very interested to learn that the state owned a Wright building. Claire later became a member of the steering committee of the Frank Lloyd Wright Dells Cottage group, which later became the SPCC, and has been serving on the board ever since, including a stint as President.

Claire has been a long-time advocate for, and contributor to, the success of the Cottage. She lobbied Rep. Dale Schultz and Gov. Thompson, and soon after, the State Legislature passed a budget amendment to provide matching funds for restoration planning. Claire's tireless efforts included presenting slide shows to various civic and social groups to raise awareness of the Cottage, and planning and working at numerous events and fundraisers to benefit the Cottage.

The force of **Audrey Laatsch** cannot be overemphasized in chronicling the early days of the Cottage rescue. "I learned early on that Audrey was persistent and would not take 'no' for an answer," said Kermit Traska. "She had organized several other Mirror Lake residents. The interest in the Cottage grew in the area, but then took off statewide after an article appeared in the *Sunday Milwaukee Journal Magazine*. Next came a public meeting with a panel of representatives from the park, the DNR district office, and the State Historical Society. We thought that only the local residents would attend. There was a snowstorm, but over two hundred people showed up, some from as far away as Chicago. There was no stopping the saving of the Cottage from that point on!" Sadly, Audrey Laatsch passed away in August 2002, but the work she started continues.

After that, things moved quickly. Bill Martinelli enlisted the support of the Southwest Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. State Rep. Dale Schultz championed the cause in the State Legislature. The early founders realized that the Cottage could not be self-sustaining unless it could earn income as a rental property. Before long, a law forbidding lodging in state parks was amended specifically identifying the Seth Peterson Cottage in Mirror Lake State Park as an exception to the law.

John Eifler, noted Chicago architect with a special interest in Wright, offered his services in planning. Major fundraising began, again spearheaded by Audrey Laatsch, who, as always, would not take "no" for an answer. Dozens of local builders and contractors volunteered their services, helping to create a model public/private partnership that has been studied and imitated by historic building groups everywhere. The Cottage was the first Wright-designed home to be offered for rent to the public. Today there are nearly twenty.

The success of the Seth Peterson Cottage today is testament to the power of an idea, when it is conceptualized by a small group of inspired people who are committed to advance that idea and bring it to fruition through inspiration, organization, hope, and hard work.

It also helps to have a leader like Audrey Laatsch, who simply would not take "no" for an answer. ☐

## THE MAKING OF A MUG

**E**ach year a new design is developed for the Seth Peterson Cottage commemorative mug.

Some years prove to be more difficult than others in coming up with a design. 2017 was pretty straightforward as we (and Wright followers throughout the world) commemorate Frank Lloyd Wright's birth 150 years ago, and the Seth Peterson Cottage is recognized for reaching the 25 year mark since completion of its rehabilitation, dedication, and opening for tours and rental to the public.

The FLW 150 logo had already been created so we just needed permission to use it. The background graphic used for "The Seth Peterson Cottage 25" is recognizable as the one used in our newsletter, "Writings," SPCC stationary, and various marketing pieces.

Usually an SPCC board member suggests quotations. This year, we opened it up to our Facebook Friends (*Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy, Inc.*). David Staskowski of Berwyn, IL (pictured right) had the winning submittal. We expanded it to include the full quotation as shown in the graphic on page one of this newsletter. David is a long-time Wright fan and volunteer at FLW's Home & Studio and Unity Temple where he leads tours. He said, "I like to visit great architecture and find more on Facebook, so naturally I discovered the Seth Peterson page. I can keep informed about the site and connect with like-minded people."



Bill Martinelli created a preliminary design which Alice Seeliger finalized for printing. Mug (black) and printing colors (Cottage red, and white) were chosen and the design turned over to Top Promotions in Middleton. Five weeks later 500 mugs arrived at Sand County Services to be given to Cottage guests throughout 2017.

Renting the Cottage is usually the only way to acquire a mug (or at an Open House the following year). As an exception, this year the 2017 mug will also be available at the 25 Year Anniversary celebration on June 4<sup>th</sup>. (An invitation was included in your May Membership Renewal letter and some details are included here on page 8.)

Now on to the 2018 mug! Any suggestions? ☐

### Milestones in 2017—only two made it on to the mug.

**150 Years – Floyd Lloyd Wright's birth**

81 Years – Seth Peterson's birth

59 Years – Wright's Design of the Seth Peterson Cottage

58 Years – The Seth Peterson Cottage was built

57 Years – Seth Peterson's tragic death at 24

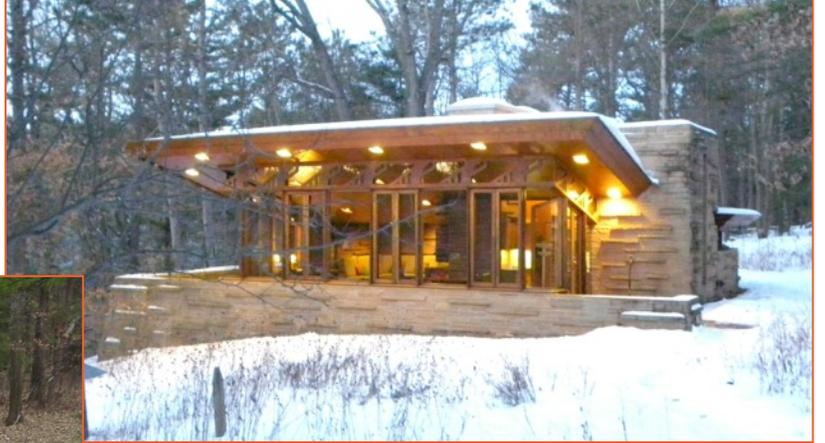
28 Years – The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy (SPCC) began

27 Years – Deconstruction and Reconstruction of the Cottage began

**25 Years – The Seth Peterson Cottage rehabilitation was completed and the Cottage was opened to the public for rental and tours.**

## THE COTTAGE FROM 1992 TO 2017

The Seth Peterson Cottage has now been a cozy and relaxing destination for 25 years. Despite its initial rehabilitation being completed in 1992, maintenance, repairs, and improvements will go on indefinitely. Pictured here is some of the work performed during its first twenty-five years of operation, to insure that its condition will match the expectations of guests and visitors.



Air Conditioning 2005

*Air conditioning 2005*



*Ongoing staining, shown here in 2006*



*New roof shingles 2008*



*Reinstalling flagstone flooring after heating tube replacement 2006*

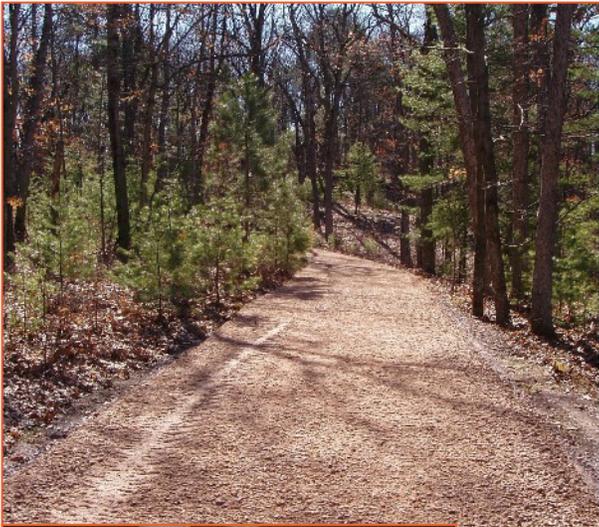
MAINTENANCE, REPAIRS, AND IMPROVEMENTS



*Replacing the firebrick 2008*



*Resetting the terrace flagstones 2010*



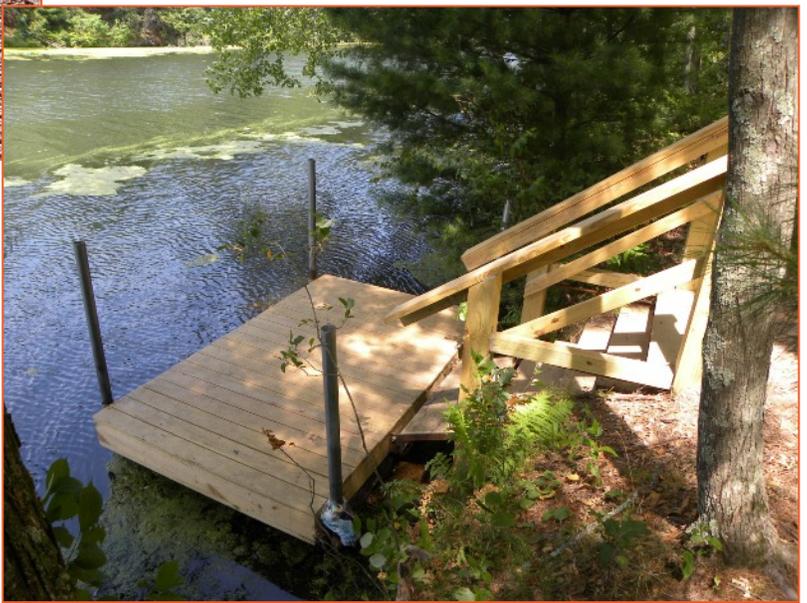
*The second gravel resurfacing of the drive*



*New shingles for the storage shed 2011*



*The third boiler and hot water system 2009*



*New pier and stairs 2012*

## MIRROR LAKE STATE PARK REPORT

*Ryder Will, Park Supervisor*

**M**irror Lake was once again busy in 2016, and we are looking forward to a successful year in 2017 as well. Over the course of the year the park saw over 335,000 visitors who spent time enjoying the park and the lake. The campgrounds were certainly busy as well with just over 65,600 total camper nights stayed at our 147 campsites.

The State Park System did see an increase of fees for the 2016 season, and that is reflected in a near-record year for revenue at Mirror Lake State Park—a total of \$445,000.00 in entrance and camping fees. That does not include the amount paid by campers who used the reservation system to book their stay ahead of time. While these numbers seem like a lot, it is important to remember the Wisconsin State Parks are now fully self-funded. That means the State Parks no longer use any state tax dollars and must pay for all the ongoing operations of the system from revenue generated at the parks and other properties.

All that revenue and visitor service requires a lot of work from the park staff. We had a great group of LTE (limited-term employees) last summer and are glad to have several of them returning for the 2017 season. We will be hiring a few new people though as a few of our long-time returning staff have moved on. Some of our staff are students, and a few have graduated while others are going into internships or jobs more closely aligned with their studies. Special thanks are due to Larry Ironmonger, our long-time LTE Facility Repair Worker. The 2016 season was Larry's last at the park. He worked here for over 20 years and will be greatly missed. His will be some big shoes to fill, but we look forward to a good group of new recruits with a great full-time staff ready to help new employees get up to speed.

We also extend a thank you to the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy Board as well as the Friends of Mirror Lake State Park for their continued support of our summer naturalist program. Funds from the two groups go toward the wages of our summer naturalist as well as the fees for some of the outside groups and presenters who provide programming for park visitors throughout the summer. This is a terrific, value-added amenity for park visitors which could not be provided without this generous support. Examples of programs include presentations from the International Crane Foundation, International Wolf Center, and Bat Conservation Wisconsin. A wide variety of other programs are presented most Saturdays through the summer. Monthly calendars of events and programs are posted at the park office.

This winter did not provide the best conditions for cross-country skiing, but we provided the best experi-

ence we could for those who came to ski. Staff spent time each week working on trail maintenance and grooming. When we did get snow, we were able to keep about 19 miles of trail open for skiers. Mirror Lake State Park over the last few decades has come to be known as a destination for cross-country skiing and we hope to continue that tradition.

As the spring thaw spread across the state we looked forward to another summer season and the activity that it brings. Mirror Lake and all the other properties in the State Park System continue to be great places for visitors to enjoy nature, reconnect with friends and family, make memories, and build an appreciation for the natural world. Much like Seth Peterson was drawn to this area so many decades ago, Mirror Lake continues to draw people closer to nature and this beautiful area.

As always, thank you for your support of, and interest in, the Seth Peterson Cottage. It is a wonderful asset for the people of the State of Wisconsin. The Cottage is here after 25 years of heavy use and remains in great condition through the dedication and continued support of the Conservancy and its many volunteers. □

## MIRROR LAKE ASSOCIATION UPDATE

*Mark Blakeslee, President*

**O**n behalf of all the members of the Mirror Lake Association, I want to congratulate the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy for 25 years of maintaining a terrific asset to Mirror Lake!

In 1988, a number of Lake Association members and lake residents were taking a boat ride. As they passed the ruins of the Seth Peterson Cottage, they decided that it was a shame to leave such a treasure in shambles. At that time, the idea of forming a conservancy and restoring the cottage was born.

Since that time, there have been many dedicated volunteers who have worked many hours to make the Seth Peterson Cottage a great destination and a lasting tribute to Seth Peterson and Frank Lloyd Wright. Their work and dedication is an inspiration to the entire Mirror Lake community.

At the Mirror Lake Association, we are gearing up for another season of activities. We continue to do our lake and roadway clean-up in the spring. We also begin testing water, harvesting of aquatic vegetation and control of invasive species.

Of course, throughout the year we educate people on the best land-management practices to protect the lake and the surrounding land.

We hope that all of you will come visit the Cottage and take in the scenic beauty of Mirror Lake.

As always, I'd love to hear your feedback. If you have any thoughts, comments or concerns, please give me a call or send an e-mail.

My cell phone number is 608-575-4652 and my e-mail is markblakeslee57@gmail.com. ☐

## FROM THE GUEST BOOK

“The best anniversary getaway in all our 12 years. Fire – Wine – Colors – Sunset. Perfect. Inspiring space where plans come to full color. Enchanting.”

– *Michael & Kathy*

“Thank you uncle Seth, for acting upon your dream of a life here.”

– *Will*

“Thanks to everyone for allowing us to visit and for all the people who have made this possible.”

“Everything passes, Art alone endures”

– *Alan & Denise*

“We loved it here! We arrived on a fall afternoon and awoke the next morning to a white winter wonderland! 2 seasons in one visit! . . . Everything exceeded our expectations. We will be back. Grateful to all who made this possible!”

– *Tom & Teri*

“A breathtaking sight upon arrival. By the next morning it became evident the cottage is simple in concept, artistic in design and meek in its ability to showcase the beautiful woods outside its soaring windows. Will probably cry upon departure.”

– *Tregg & Julia*

“It was unseasonably warm the day we arrived. Spent the afternoon on the patio watching the bald eagles fly over the lake. This was our 5<sup>th</sup> time here and we will be back again next year. This place is truly amazing.”

– *Todd & Lindsey, Oconomowoc, WI*

“What a wonderful house, so warm & cozy. Just the right size for two. Thank you for restoring this cottage!”

– *Ralph & Karen, Columbia Falls, MT*

## FALL COLOR BOAT TOUR AND RECEPTION

It is not too early to start thinking about the 2017 Fall Color Boat Tour and Reception which will be on October 8<sup>th</sup> starting at 4:00 pm, following the Sunday Cottage open house tours. A \$30 per person fare will include a pontoon boat tour of Mirror Lake as well as hors d'oeuvres around the Cottage fireplace.

Application for reservations may be placed beginning July 1<sup>st</sup>. To request a reservation, call the Cottage toll-free voice mailbox at 877-466-2358 and leave your name and phone number along with a request for a reservation for the Fall Boat Tour. Your call will be returned in the order in which it was received. Reservations are limited to a maximum of four per person; total attendance is limited to the first 24 paid reservations.

The boat tour and festivities in the Cottage will take place rain or shine. Adverse weather conditions on the lake may preclude the boat tour. The path down to the lake and boat dock is steep and is not handicapped accessible. ☐

## WRITINGS

is a publication of The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy, Inc. for the Cottage by Frank Lloyd Wright in Mirror Lake State Park.

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Facebook: www.facebook.com/pages/Seth-Peterson-Cottage-Conservancy-Inc.

Cottage Voice Mail: 877 466-2358

### The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy, Inc. Board of Directors

#### Executive Committee

President: Kermit Traska

First Vice President: Bill Martinelli

Second Vice President: James Booth

Treasurer: Paul Wagner

Secretary: Peter Rott

#### Members

Claire Barnett, Jim Draeger, Bill Dupuy, Tim Heggland,

Dr. Steven Kincaid, Carolyne Kotchi, Raymond Matlosz,

Jerry Minnich, Heather Sabin

#### Ex-officio members

Mark Blakeslee, President, Mirror Lake Association

Ryder Will, Superintendent, Mirror Lake State Park

#### Conservancy Staff

Office Manager: Ron Dakter

Marketing Coordinator: Gail Kohl

**For Cottage reservations call the Sand County Service Company, Lake Delton, Wisconsin: 608 254-6551.**

# WRITINGS

THE SETH PETERSON COTTAGE CONSERVANCY, INC.  
400 VIKING DRIVE  
REEDSBURG, WI 53959

## Address Service Requested



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, **May 14**, 1-3:30 pm, Open House, Guided Tours, \$4

### Sunday, June 4

#### Statewide State Park Open House

Includes Free Admission to the Seth Peterson Cottage  
and All State Parks, Forests and Trails

#### COTTAGE CELEBRATION

25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

150<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Frank Lloyd Wright

1-4 pm with **SPECIAL PROGRAM** at 2:30 pm

Sunday, **June 11**, 1-3:30 pm, Open House, Guided Tours, \$4

Sunday, **July 9**, 1-3:30 pm, Open House, Guided Tours, \$4

Sunday, **August 13**, 1-3:30 pm, Open House, Guided Tours, \$4

Sunday, **Sept. 10**, 1-3:30 pm, Open House, Guided Tours, \$4

Sunday, **October 8**, 1-3:30 pm, Open House, Guided Tours, \$4

**SPCC Members receive free admission and  
10% off Cottage merchandise.**



The Seth Peterson Cottage  
is located at  
E9982 Fern Dell Road  
Lake Delton, Wisconsin

Visitors find touring the Cottage  
to be a great way to spend a  
Sunday afternoon. Take a scenic  
drive and experience first hand  
this restored Frank Lloyd Wright-  
designed Cottage during the  
Cottage Open House tours.

Mirror Lake State Park  
Headquarters  
Latitude/Longitude:  
43.5613° N 89.8170° W



[www.sethpeterson.org](http://www.sethpeterson.org)