

Lake Historian

Don Sanford, born and raised just outside of Syracuse, New York, made his move to Madison in 1976 for a position at Wisconsin Public Television and never left. Don grew up on a lake and fell in love with how water provides organic adventure. Upon his arrival in Madison so many years ago, Don quickly grew to love the lakes that define Madison. Don has been involved in many projects over the years, most notably the grand opening of the Monona Terrace in 1997. Don acted as production manager for the various opening events.

How do you think the lakes in Madison play a role in the desire to live here?

It's hard to ignore our lakes. I don't think it's possible to travel from one side of Madison to the other without seeing one of them. So visually, they offer an incredible treat for the eyes. There's a recreation opportunity in every season, whether it's sailing, paddling, fishing, iceboating, skating, skiing or swimming. You can have all kinds of fun afloat here in all kinds of conditions.

Do you have a favorite lake or lake destination?

I like to visit the "Mendota Triangle" late at night. It's a solitary place between Picnic Point and Maple Bluff. In one direction you can take in the view of the Capitol and the lights of Madison. In the other, looking towards Waunakee, it's almost pitch black. If you're lucky, you'll be there just as the moon rises over the Isthmus.

**MERRIL
SPRINGS
HISTORICAL
LOCATION**

UW Madison
summer session
students
gather at Merrill
Springs on Lake
Mendota, 1910.

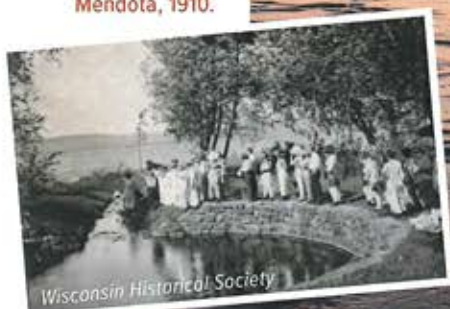


Photo of Lake Mendota By Jake Rostermundt

How do you see the lakes developing in the future as the Madison population continues to grow?

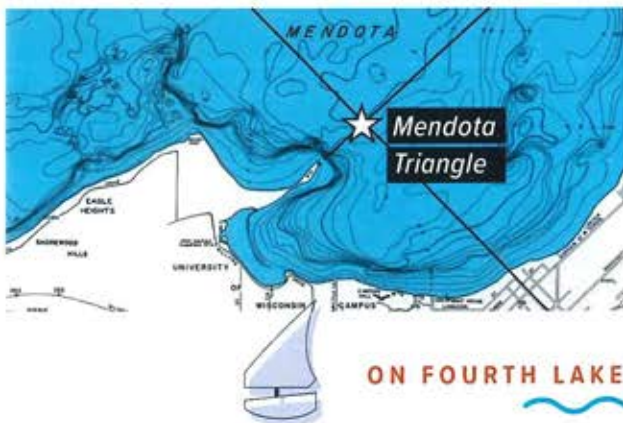
Fortunately, our forefathers had the wisdom to create public lands on large sections of lake-shore on each of our four lakes. This set the stage for those who came later like, James Marshall, George Burrows, F. J. Sensenbrenner, Michael Olbrich, Fred Risser, Jerry Frautschi and Hank Lufler. They knew we'd need some "breathing room" and took steps to create it. I think that we're quite unique in that respect, that these bodies of water so close to a large metropolitan area, have so much public land. It gives us all some space.

What was your best discovery when writing your book?

I learned that anyone who has grown up on a lake has been imprinted by it and it only takes the slightest nudge to send us time traveling back to the day when we won a sailboat race, caught a big fish, survived a storm, swam from one side to the other or just watched an amazing sunset. A lake is a magical place that teaches us something every day.



Photo of Don Sanford by Martin Menocal



Don's 2003 book *On Fourth Lake: A Social History of Lake Mendota* takes its readers on a journey around Lake Mendota and dives into the rich history and culture that it has provided the Madison community for centuries.



Buy the book at LakeMendotaHistory.com