

Now & Then in Ripon ... Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society

Zobel Memorial Park once was farmland of Ripon family

People in the tri-county area may be found enjoying Zobel Memorial Park year round.

This park is located in Green Lake County, one mile north of Highway 23 at the corner of County Road J and Highway 49. The park features a sledding hill for winter fun and a well-rated disc golf course for enjoyment during other seasons.

Lillian Zobel (1892-1985) of Ripon donated the land for this 38-acre park in 1971 — in memory of her older brother, Edgar Zobel (1883-1969).

At that time, Lillian said it was Edgar’s dream that the land be made into a park and that she was only fulfilling his wish by giving the land to Green Lake County.

About the Zobel family

Otto Edward (O.E.) Herman Zobel (1847-1911) was born in Germany and immigrated to Ripon in 1860. He married Pauline Kahl Zobel (1852-1930) from Marquette, Wis. in 1872.

They lived at 603 Watson St. in Ripon and had five daughters and two sons. One daughter died very young. Herman was very active in the Ripon community, becoming a city alderman, school commissioner, a director of 1st National Bank of Ripon and trustee of Ripon College.

In 1873, Herman opened a grocery store on Ripon’s Watson Street with his brother. He retired from this business in 1900. He also ran several farms, which included dairy farms in Rosendale and North Dakota, a grain farm in South Dakota and a 257-acre farm in Green Lake County. When he died in 1911, his son, Edgar, assumed ownership and management of these properties. Each were operated by tenants, with Edgar as the overseer and superintendent.

In a letter dated 1940, Edgar described the Green Lake farm as being on “slightly rolling sandy-clay country.”

Approximately 177 acres of the Green Lake County Zobel farm was on the east side of Highway 49. On the south side of the farm were railroad tracks bordered by County Highway J on the north side. A one-room schoolhouse (currently The Old School Bar & Grill located at N6694 Highway 49) sat upon the northwest corner of this land. West of Highway 49, the farm extended another 80 acres. The northern half of that land would become the 38-acre Zobel Memorial Park.

Edgar Zobel achievements

In 1903, Edgar received a PhD from Milwaukee Medical College (now known as Marquette University.) He went on to study at Ripon College in 1907 and received a master’s degree from University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1908. He was a registered pharmacist and was employed by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture as an inspector in the field of dairies and food processing from 1946 until his retirement.



THIS IS AN undated photo of Edgar Zobel (1883-1969) with one of his Corriedale sheep, which he raised on his farm. The farm later became part of the Zobel Memorial Park. submitted photo

Edgar raised Corriedale sheep at his Green Lake farm. Corriedale sheep are a breed that originated in Australia and New Zealand. The U.S government imported them in 1914 to the F.S. King Brothers Ranch in Laramie, Wy. In 1936, Edgar traveled to Wyoming to purchase “12 aged ewes and a yearling ram.” In 1939, he purchased a second ram.

Edgar’s farm was the only one in Wisconsin with sheep being the direct descendants from the imported King Ranch Wyoming sheep.

Edgar’s sheep were repeat prize champions and his herd included lambs and mutton. The sheep excelled over other breeds’ quality and amount of wool produced.

A 1951 *Milwaukee Journal* article noted that “Wisconsin has been importing 6,000 to 8,000 western ewes a year.”

The article also said that “most Wisconsin farmers should keep a moderate-sized flock of sheep,” followed by they are “almost pure gold these days.” It also stated that year’s prize-winning fleeces were, in fact, from Corriedale sheep.

In 1950, Edgar noted, “Our flock is small at present — 25 head of choice animals.”

Edgar also was well known for his poultry production and participation in helping to establish a Ripon Poultry Association. He also enjoyed gardening and caring for his own herd of Holstein cattle.

Edgar’s family was musically inclined and educated. Each sibling — Edgar, Olga, Clara, Otto, Erna and Lillian — and their mother, Pauline, played different instruments.

Collectively, the Zobel family played orchestral music in their home in the living room every evening. Edgar became a music teacher, band and orchestra leader, plus composer.

In 1958, he wrote and recorded symphonies about Ripon’s South Woods. He helped start the Ripon Boy Scouts, served in the military and led the Ripon High School Orchestra. Edgar never married. He and two of his sisters lived together in the family’s home on Watson Street until their passing.

Edgar also composed “Forest Moods” and “Spanish Moss.” These two music pieces were

performed by Edgar and two of his sisters at the City Charter Centennial banquet in Ripon. The music was inspired by planting trees on his farm that are native to the area of Wisconsin.

A 1958 article in the *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern* talked about the Zobel’s coming together with the state forester for Green Lake and Marquette counties to plant approximately 5,000 evergreen trees at the farm site.

During 1972, hundreds of trees were planted in the newly dedicated Zobel Park by the Green Lake chapter of the Izaak Walton League, various 4-H groups and area Boy Scout troops.



THE 1901 PLAT Book of Green Lake County shows the Zobel Farm off Highway 23. A one-room schoolhouse, now known as “The Old School Bar & Grill,” is shown on the northwest corner of the land boarding County Road J. Half of the land to the west, just across Highway 49, became Zobel Memorial Park. submitted photo

Zobel Park today

In the summer of 1973, a large monument rock was added to Zobel Park and includes a plaque with the inscription: “Zobel Memorial Park donated to Green Lake County in 1971.”

In 1975, Green Lake County was awarded a federal grant for the development of the park. This money created the park Edgar dreamed of that has been

enjoyed by the public for more than 50 years.

The Ripon Historical Society is Wisconsin’s oldest continuously operating historical society.

It is located at 508 Watson St. and is open Fridays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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