

# Herald Times Reporter

---

## LIFE

# Jens Jensen, internationally renowned landscape architect, designed the original landscape plan for Manitowoc Lincoln High School

**Bob Fay** For USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin

Published 6:01 a.m. CT Jan. 27, 2022

Jens Jensen was one of America's most distinguished landscape architects. He was born in 1860 in Slesvig (now Schleswig, Germany) when it was a part of Denmark. He received his education at the agricultural college in Jutland and studied horticulture in Copenhagen and Hanover before coming to the United States in 1884 with his wife Anne-Marie.

Jensen began working for the Chicago parks system in 1890, and was a driving force in establishing the Illinois state parks system and the Cook County forest preserves.

Jensen pioneered the use of native plants and wildflowers in his landscape designs and founded the Friends of Our Native Landscape to raise awareness about land conservation. He advocated to preserve the Indiana sand dunes and other natural areas in the Midwest. He also designed private gardens and estate plantings for clients that included Henry Ford of Dearborn, Michigan.

In 1935, Jensen established The Clearing Folk School at his summer home on Ellison Bay in Door County to immerse people in nature for "spiritual renewal." Today, The Clearing offers classes in natural sciences, fine arts, skilled crafts and humanities.

Manitowoc has an important association with Jensen as he designed the original landscape plan for Lincoln High School. In 1923, when construction of the Collegiate Gothic high school on Roeff's Hill was underway, Jensen came to Manitowoc with Chicago architect Dwight Perkins to meet with school board members and survey the building site.

Jensen's blueprint drawing for beautifying the 19 acres on Lake Michigan, completed in

February 1924, included 6,964 individual trees, shrubs and flowers. Planting materials included ash, oak, ironwood, sugar maple, elm, hemlock, birch, beech, white pine, crabapple, junberry, plum, hawthorn, staghorn sumac, trillium and phlox. The lakeside bluff was to be planted in witch hazel, gray dogwood and ninebark. Areas adjacent to buildings were to be lawn or turf.

In July 1924, the Board of Education appropriated \$16,500 to pay the cost of improving the site of Lincoln High School, according to plans and specifications prepared by Jensen, who was from Highland Park, Illinois.

As part of the plan, two circular stone council rings were built on high knolls — one in the northeast corner of the property and another near the natatorium. These structures were a common Jensen landscape feature and they symbolized fellowship, unity, democracy and equality. Photos of the council rings appear in 1926, 1928, 1937 and 1939 Flambeau yearbooks. After falling into disrepair, the council rings were removed. During the summer of 2021, a new brick council ring, funded by the Class of 1972, was constructed near the natatorium.

As a result of budgetary constraints, many features Jensen envisioned were not built. They include flower lanes, play rings (one for girls), a sunset pole and a court of debates with a rock of wisdom.

One important feature of Jensen's original landscape plan remains — a large, open and scenic "Play Meadow" in front of the high school along Ninth Street — the site of today's graduation exercises.

On May 15, 1925, Jensen returned to Lincoln High School and spoke about the value of planting trees. During his 30-minute talk in the auditorium, he told students that love of nature should be a part of every American.

Jensen, at age 91, died in 1951. He was posthumously inducted into the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame in 2020.

*Bob Fay is a historian and former executive director of the Manitowoc County Historical Society.*