



Walter J. Kohler

“This building is not a temporary structure, to be razed within a generation, but its construction is such that it will last many years . . .”

“If this Club, besides providing suitable living conditions, be also an influence in the Americanization of the foreign born, and serve as stimulus for a greater love of country and a desire for a higher citizenship, then its purpose will have been achieved.”

Remarks of Walter J. Kohler upon the dedication of The American Club, June 23, 1918.



Herbert V. Kohler

“This ‘sea-change’ has not been undertaken lightly. Rather, it has been conceived and carried out with a deep regard for the traditions and heritage of all which has gone before. It is my hope that this facility shall continue to represent the best of those traditions and the best of that heritage.”

Remarks of Herbert V. Kohler, Jr., upon the grand reopening of The American Club, December 5, 1981.

**Highland Drive, Kohler, Wisconsin 53044
920-457-8000, DestinationKohler.com**

The American club®



A Heritage of Patriotism

The American Club, is more than a hotel. It is a spirit.
A spirit that celebrates America and Americans.



The Dining Room, 1918

A NEW LIFE IN AMERICA

Once settled in their new home, the men worked hard, formed friendships and ate well. A reporter of the day marveled: "The tables fairly groan under the loads of wholesome food, and the men can eat as much as they wish. There is only one rule in the dining room; that is to clean the plate. The manager wants nothing wasted. A Victrola renders patriotic numbers and stirring marches during mealtime."

After work there was time for study and learning English so the men could obtain their important "first papers." In addition to studying in the relaxing Lincoln Room across from the main desk, in the quiet Washington Room or in their own bedrooms, the immigrants could walk a block and a half to the new Kohler Public School. There, by arrangement with Kohler Co., they attended "Evening School" two nights a week.

What was once The American Club, laundry room, where the men's "plain washing" was done, is now The Immigrant Restaurant & Winery Bar. A series of six authentically decorated dining rooms represents the energetic ethnic groups who settled and prospered here. The cozy Dutch Room displays delft tiles and terra cotta as used in 18th century Holland, while the French Room exhibits the warmth of antique walnut.

At the opposite end of the building in what was once the bowling alley, the informal atmosphere of The Horse & Plow now welcomes guests with innovative pub fare. The walls display antique farm tools used by the area's early settlers and hundreds of old photographs.

The past is always present and provides security, warmth and interest much like that given to the immigrants who first enjoyed The American Club.

To view the exterior of The American Club is to realize the building remains unchanged. The 100-foot flagpole and American flag are just where they were in 1918. The gabled blue slate roof has the rich patina of graceful aging.

The immigrants are gone now. What endure are reminders of the American dream — that an immigrant could better himself by becoming an American citizen.



"Our Snow Plow"



The American Club Dedication, June 1918

THE PRIDE AND SPIRIT OF THE AMERICAN CLUB. LIVE ON

In the decades that followed, the spirit of The American Club prevailed even as subtle changes occurred. Immigrants, now citizens, married and bought homes in the surrounding communities. One floor on the east wing of The Club was set aside as a “teacherage” for single female teachers at the Kohler School.

In the early 1940s, the dining room was redecorated and renamed The Wisconsin Room in honor of the 30th state. Décor included 24 drawings of distinguished Wisconsinites, and two unique tapestries were commissioned and hung on either side of the entry stairs. One depicts a map of Wisconsin with tiny costumed figures representing the various ethnic groups and the areas of the state in which they settled. In a touch of whimsy, the artist also included Wisconsin’s mythical Paul Bunyan and Babe, his Blue Ox. The symbolic American eagle is shown at the top of each tapestry.

Designers also placed a handsome carved statue of Old Abe on the east end of The Wisconsin Room. Known to most school children in the state, Old Abe was the Wisconsin war eagle and mascot of Eagle Regiment - 8th Wisconsin Infantry. He perched proudly on the mast of the regimental flag carried into 39 battles and skirmishes in the Civil War.

On the west end of the large room, the center leaded glass window features a reproduction of the Kohler Co. medallion. The adjacent window has Walter Kohler’s favorite quotation from John Ruskin: “Life without labor is guilt; labor without art is brutality.”

In 1978, 60 years after it was dedicated, The American Club was placed on The National Register of Historic Places. It was at this point that Herbert V. Kohler, Jr., Chairman of the Board and President of Kohler Co., chose to continue the Kohler tradition of commitment to the historical past.

He closed The American Club for three years, and between 1978 and 1981 the interiors of the building were carefully and lovingly restored and renovated. The renovation sought to retain the historic American spirit of the original structure and preserve its ethnic links to the immigrants who lived here, while at the same time provide the finest modern accommodations.



The Campaign for Governor



THE AMERICAN CLUB, REDEDICATED

In 1981 The American Club opened as an elegant hotel of uncommon luxury. But the link to the past remained. A stroll through the hotel gives guests an intimate glimpse and flavor of the storied past of this historic structure.

Oak-paneled hallways display charming pictures of simpler bygone days. In one, men in high-starched collars and women in long, white dresses pose stiffly at a July picnic in nearby Ravine Park. In another, three winsome ladies recline in a hammock on the edge of a local lake. An engaging enlargement of "Our Snow Plow" shows a 12-horse hitch pulling a massive blade fabricated in the Kohler factory, an example of typical American resourcefulness.

A walk down the Library hall reveals portraits of distinguished Wisconsinites, from John Muir to Billy Mitchell. Each guest room in the hotel honors a famous American with a portrait and various papers of memorabilia framed on the wall. Those Americans honored run the historical gamut from Mary Pickford to Ernest Hemingway and John James Audubon to Lou Gehrig. George Washington and Abraham Lincoln are still honored in the rooms named for them.

Each spring on the annual "Americanization Day," men with first names like Fritz, Otto, Ferdinand and Gottlieb were taken to the county court house on company time to become American citizens. The men posed proudly in front of the Lincoln Room balcony and later attended special banquets. In 1930 the Company newspaper reported that since 1919, 678 immigrants had taken out the important "first papers."

The spirit of American patriotism was a constant at The American Club. In addition to the celebrations for new citizens, there were other occasional joyful outbursts. Walter Kohler brought John Phillip Sousa to the Village of Kohler for rousing performances in 1919 and 1925. Sousa's special train pulled up at Kohler Co.'s freight siding, while streetcars hurried back and forth from Sheboygan bringing people from all over the area. Ultimately, 10,000 people came to the 1919 concert. But the concert that never made the headlines was held on The American Club lawn at noon. John Phillip Sousa, in a magnificent gesture, came over to lead the Kohler band during one of its noontime concerts for employees.

In 1928, Walter J. Kohler showed his patriotism once again when he ran successfully for Governor of Wisconsin, giving several campaign speeches on the balcony of the Lincoln Room. It was probably fitting that this son of an immigrant, whose formal education ended at eighth grade, spoke from a building he dedicated to America and American ideals.

