

Self-Guided Walking Tour of Billy Graham's Wheaton



**Westgate Alumni Building
326 N. Washington Street
(Purchased 1936)**

While Billy was a student at Florida Bible Institute (1937-1940), Alma Toff Edman heard him preach and told her son Elnor Edman and his friend Paul Fischer about him and urged that they hear him too, which they did. The two men took Graham with them as a caddy when they played a round of golf. They urged him to attend Wheaton College after graduating from the Institute, to add a liberal arts education to his Bible and homiletics training. Edman's brother was president of Wheaton and Fischer was chairman of the board of trustees. They even offered to help with his expenses. Graham did apply to Wheaton and was accepted, starting on September 19, 1940. He needed to work to pay for part of his expenses, so he had a job with the College's Buildings & Grounds department. One of his first duties was to trim the shrubbery at the College president's house, Westgate. While doing so, he met the acting president (he was officially elected president in January 1941), V. Raymond Edman. Edman had heard enthusiastic reports on Graham from his mother and brother and Fischer but had never met him. This began a friendship that continued to Edman's death in 1967. Edman recommended Graham as his successor at the United Gospel Tabernacle and was a mentor and advisor to him, eventually serving on the board of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.



**The Lane Home
512 Scott Street
(no longer standing)**

Mortimer Lane was a professor of Business & Economics at the college. He and his wife, who were financially well off, hosted the weekly, early-morning Plymouth Brethren worship service at their home and in the late afternoon would regularly have many students at a time over for dinner. Graham was a frequent guest from his earliest days at Wheaton. He and Ruth McCue Bell walked to the Lane home through the snow after their first date and later often ate Sunday dinner there as an engaged couple. Graham would often attend the early Plymouth Brethren service as well. Fellow student William Barnett often cut Graham's hair in the basement of the home, as well as the hair of other people from the College, including President Edman. Still standing today (and visible on the left in the photo) at the northeast corner of the property is a large copper beech tree that was part of the Lane property.



**United Gospel Tabernacle
120 W. Wesley Street
(Completed 1913
Rebuilt after fire, completed 1949)**

Graham already had felt called to preach and been ordained before he ever saw Wheaton. He had also had probably hundreds of hours of preaching experience around Florida and Georgia. Almost as soon as he had arrived at Wheaton, he was going to preach at nearby churches, including the United Gospel Tabernacle in Wheaton. The "Tab" had existed since the mid-1920s and by this time the congregation was made up mainly of students, faculty and staff from the College. The Tabernacle met on Sundays in the first floor auditorium leased from the local Masonic lodge. During the week, a Tab prayer meeting met on Wednesday at the home of a member of the congregation. Edman was pastor in 1940 and when his responsibilities as the newly-appointed College president took up all his time, he recommended Graham to replace him. The congregation approved and Graham was the pastor from September 1941 through June 1943. He preached two sermons on Sunday and was also involved in the young people's meeting that met Sunday afternoon. The congregation usually consisted of 100 to 200 people and he almost always gave an alter call. It was while leaving the Tab one December night in 1941 that he heard a paperboy yelling out the news about the attack on Pearl Harbor. Besides the Tab, Graham was preaching at other churches and holding evangelistic meetings around the Midwest and the South during his student days.



**Williston Hall
Built 1891
(Wheaton College Campus,
northeast of Blanchard Hall)**

Williston, besides being a woman's dormitory, also housed two of the College's three dining halls. Graham was assigned to eat in the upper hall, and like the other students, grew used to standing in the long lines caused by the inadequate facilities. He had also been hired by his friend and classmate John Streater to help in Streater's hauling business. For 50 cents an hour they moved just about everything, including the trunks and luggage of coeds to Williston at the start of a semester and to the train station at the end. And it was in front of Williston, getting ready to go to another hauling job in nearby Glen Ellyn, that Streater introduced Graham to a woman he had told him about earlier, Ruth McCue Bell. Graham would later say that his favorite spot on campus was under the tree in front of Williston where he first met his future wife and fell instantly in love.



Blanchard Hall
500 College Ave.
(Begun 1853, last addition finished 1927)

The main building on campus, Graham attended most of his classes here. It was in the east wing that he delivered his senior paper in his major (anthropology). And it was in the library, also located in the east wing, that he wrote a note to Ruth Bell, asking her out on their first date. At Graham's suggestion and with President Edman's approval, the bell in the central tower of the building, beginning in April 1942 and continuing until the end of World War II, was rung every day to remind people to pray for peace and for their loved ones in harm's way.



The Gymnasium
Built 1899
(now Adams Hall,
Wheaton College campus,
northwest of Blanchard Hall)

This was a multi-purpose building, serving as the women's gymnasium, the post office, the student lounge, a soda fountain (the Stupe), and offices for various College organizations. The Christian Council certainly had their office in this building in 1946 and possibly also in 1942-1943 when Graham served as the elected president (another possibility for the location of the office at that time is Williston Hall). During his presidency, Graham greatly increased the number of outreach efforts that the Council sent students on, to teach or witness at orphanages, schools, hospitals, rescue missions and other places throughout the greater-Chicago area. He vigorously encouraged every student to become active in some ministry in addition to their school work.

Shortly after Graham's graduation, the basement of the building served as a barracks for soldiers who were on campus to take classes as part of an Army training program during the war.

In 1959, the upper floor of the building served as the office of the staff planning Graham's 1959 evangelistic campaign, held on Wheaton's campus and in cooperation with 130 churches in Chicago and the surrounding towns (September 27-October 4).



Pierce Chapel
433 N. Washington Street
(Built 1925)

Pierce was the largest auditorium on campus and the site of the daily chapel meetings which the entire College community attended. Pierce is also the site of Billy and Ruth's first date, a late-1940 performance of Handel's *Messiah*. In February 1943, the campus experienced a spiritual awakening during a chapel service lead by visiting minister Harold Warren in Pierce Chapel, resulting in three days of spontaneous confession of sin and prayer and culminating in a College-wide worship service. When Graham preached in Warren's church in Flint, Michigan the following month, that church experienced a similar awakening. During World War II, a banner hung in the front of the chapel auditorium with the number of alumni on active service in the armed forces and gold stars for those killed in service. The basement of Pierce Chapel became a mess hall for the soldiers, sailors and army engineers studying on campus.



805 N. Washington
(Built 1938)

French Provincial style home in which Ruth Bell lived as a student during the 1942-43 school year, just before she and Graham wed after graduating in 1943.



The Gerstung Home
741 Irving
(No longer standing)

Graham stayed in the house of Fred and Lillian Gerstung his freshman/sophomore year. Fred was German professor at the College. The downstairs, where the family lived, had been wired for electricity, but the upstairs was still lit by gaslight. Graham had begun dating his future wife, Ruth McCue Bell. She was rooming just a block away. He would often discuss the ups and downs of his courtship with sympathetic members of the Gerstung family.



**The Attic
712 Howard
(Built 1931)**

This private home was owned by Gus and Anna Hansen. While their son Ken attended Wheaton College, they opened the second floor to four other student boarders who roomed there with Ken. Graham boarded at this location during his junior and senior years (September 1941 through June 1943). Mrs. Hansen and even people on the street often heard him practicing his Sunday sermons on Saturday nights. Graham was also one of a group of six students that held prayer meetings in each other's rooms through 1942 and into 1943, praying for a spiritual awakening on campus and their own future ministries.



**Graham Field
South of Harrison Avenue, north of the Sports and Recreation
Complex, between Centennial and Howard Streets**

This area on the east side of Centennial Street, was originally called Centennial Field in honor of the College's 100th birthday celebration in 1959-1960. The name was then changed by the trustees to Graham Field to commemorate the fact that it had been the site for most of the evening meetings of Graham's 1959 Wheaton Crusade. The meetings ran from September 27 until October 4 and were attended by 101,500 people, with 2,182 inquirers, more than half of whom were 18 or younger. The dedication of the College's brand new Centennial Gymnasium, just to the south of the field, took place on the first night of services. Centennial Gym is now part of the Sports and Recreation Complex.



**The Billy Graham Center
500 College Avenue
(Built 1977-1980)**

The Billy Graham Center was created in 1974, due to the joint efforts of Wheaton College and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

The Center housed evangelism resources, such as an archives, library, and museum, and was the site of the Wheaton Graduate School and media center. Created as a hub of evangelism institutes and initiatives, the Center's motto is "Accelerating Global Evangelism." Billy Graham dedicated the building on September 13, 1980 (just six days short of forty years from when he first started classes at Wheaton). The dedication speech concludes:

"Therefore, as Moses charged succeeding generations, so, today, I charge future generations of Wheaton College Trustees, faculty, staff and students: This Center has been dedicated, this day, to the glory of God and the advancement of the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. So be it."