

# Visited by history

## A moment in time in the civil-rights era

By Scott Williams

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**WILLIAMS BAY** — By the summer of 1965, Martin Luther King Jr. had delivered his "I Have A Dream" speech, had won the Nobel Peace Prize, and had persuaded Congress to act against race discrimination.

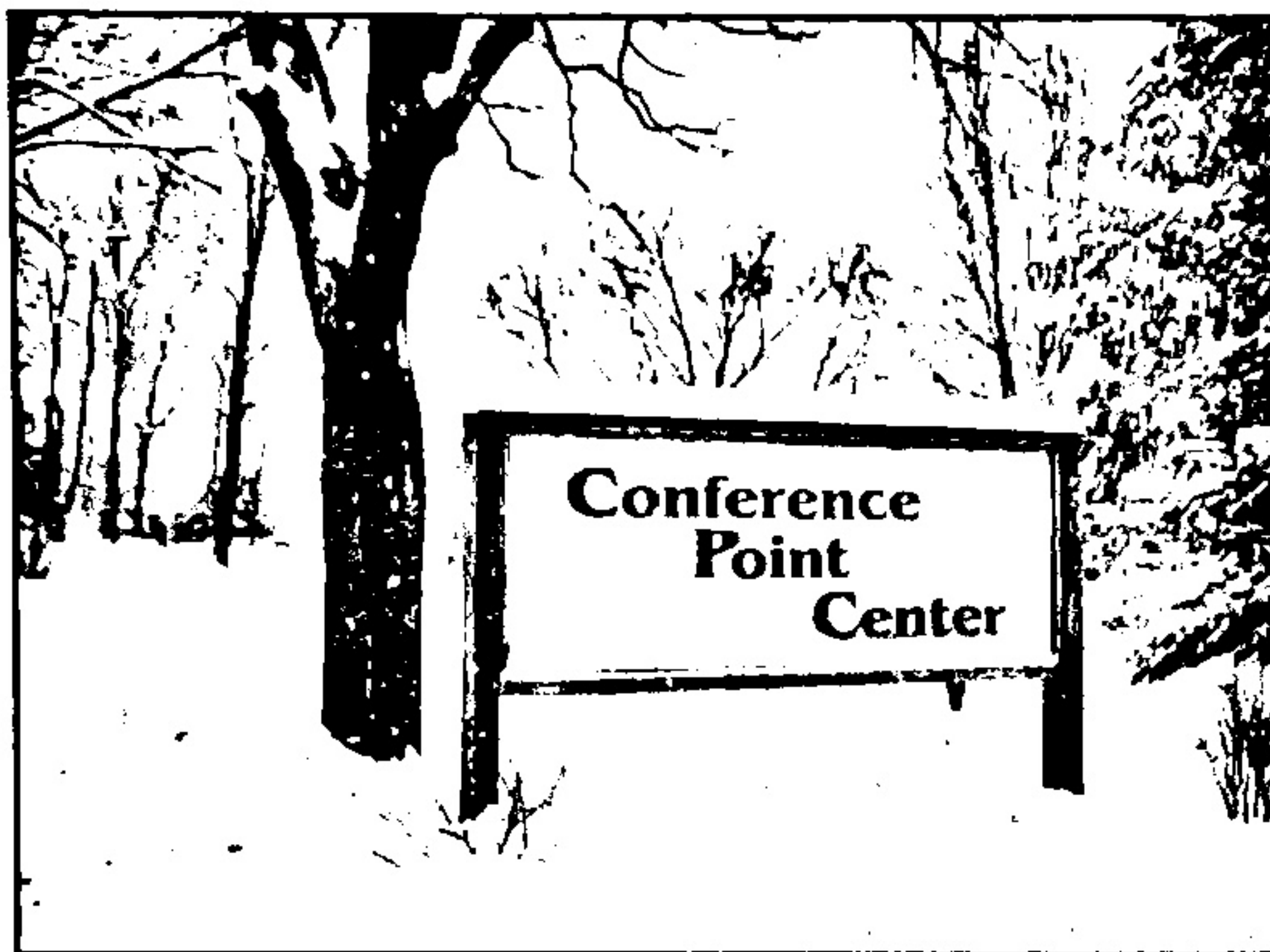
Then the civil rights leader from Atlanta turned his attention to a troubled city up north: Chicago.

But before taking on the broad-shouldered Chicago machine run by Mayor Richard J. Daley, King and his supporters needed to find a place where they could gather privately and work out a strategy.

So they headed for Lake Geneva.

For three days, King huddled with associates and supporters inside the comfortable surroundings of Conference Point Center, a religious retreat in Williams Bay, perched on a hill overlooking the lakefront.

The gathering in October 1965 took place in Wisconsin because organizers wanted to get away from the distractions of Chicago, and



Established in the 1870s, Conference Point Center is a 25-acre religious retreat in Williams Bay, and it is where Martin Luther King Jr. visited in October 1965 to plan a civil rights movement in Chicago. (Photo by Scott Williams/Regional News)

because they needed isolation to tend to the delicate business of plotting an insurgence in what was then the nation's second-largest city.

The Rev. Al Sampson, from the west side of Chicago, remembers riding a bus up to Lake Geneva and singing songs along the way with a large group, until the bus unloaded everyone in the peaceful and scenic Conference Point compound.

"We were, like, on an island," Sampson said.

Established in the 1870s, Conference Point still exists today as a 25-acre wooded enclave that includes a large chapel surrounded by dormitories and cabins for overnight guests. In the 1960s, the property was owned by a national church group whose leadership had ties to Martin Luther King Jr.

The chapel still standing

near the center of the property — the largest building on site in the mid-'60s — is quite likely where King delivered a rousing speech to the crowd, estimated at 200 people.

King was accompanied to Williams Bay by members of his inner circle who had stood with him during historic protests down south. They came to forge a coalition with Chicago civil rights activists who had sought King's help in confronting the Windy City's history of race discrimination in housing, education and employment.

What emerged from the three-day gathering was a blueprint for what became known as the Chicago Freedom Movement.

King moved into a Chicago apartment and spent months fighting for fair treatment of blacks. He endured angry white mobs in the streets. He led 30,000 demonstrators in a march on City Hall. He stared down Mayor Daley and won an agreement with the city that became a precursor to the federal Fair Housing Act

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