

## Office History

In 1869 Congressman H. E. Paine of Wisconsin introduced a bill to establish a National Weather Service under the Secretary of War. It became effective February 9, 1870 and the U.S. Army Signal Corps (USASC) began collecting weather data on a national basis.

The first weather observation was taken in La Crosse, Wisconsin on October 15, 1872 by Sergeant Rick Williams of the USASC. Observations were taken three times daily and disseminated to the public by displaying weather and temperature flags. A year later a river gage was constructed on the La Crosse Wagon Bridge and a network of river stage observations were established. Soon after, weather forecasts (then called "probabilities"), were issued once daily and also shown by a display of flags. In the late 1870's the forecasts, river stages, and observations were not only shown by a display of flags but also posted in the post office, several other public places, and published in the local newspapers.

In the early 1880's warnings of frost, heavy snow, cold waves, and high water were being issued. The warnings were written on cards and mailed to nearby towns so that flags could be raised. In the 1890's, a weather chart and forecasts of river crests and stages were put on one sheet and distributed by mail, messenger, newspapers, flags, and posted in public places. This method was gradually changed and the mailing of forecasts was discontinued in the 1950's. Weather information is now distributed mainly by computer.

The first weather station in La Crosse was in the Anderson Building on 2nd and Main. In the 1880's the station was moved into the Opera Building on 4th and Main and later across the street into the McMillan Building. In 1890 it moved into the Post Office Building and in 1907 into the Weather Bureau Building on 5th and Cass. In 1952 the Weather Bureau Building was turned over to the La Crosse Board of Education. Forecasts and observations were then made at the Municipal Airport. Hourly observations were also taken at Brice Prairie from 1939 to 1950. The National Weather Service Office was moved from the Municipal Airport into the Post Office Building, 425 State Street, in February 1969.

During the summer of 1963 the government was threatening to close the Weather Office in La Crosse. A group of individuals, including the Airport Manager at the time, engaged in a petition drive to keep the facility open. Petitions were in every bar, store and gas station in La Crosse, and gathered thousands of signatures. As a result, the government relented and the Weather Service Station stayed. Without the efforts of these individuals, the Weather Service might not have a presence in La Crosse today.

As part of the modernization of the National Weather Service, the La Crosse office moved to a new location on County Road FA (just north of Grandad Bluff) in August 1995. The Doppler Radar (the first weather radar in La Crosse) was installed in early 1996 and today the office maintains forecast and warning responsibility for 28 counties across a three state area.

Over the years staff size has changed quite a bit. As late as the 1980s there were times when only 1 staff member ran a part-time office here in La Crosse. In the early 1990s the hours were increased to 6 am - 10 pm as the staff grew in size to 5. The office went to 24-hour operations on February 20, 1996 and now maintains a staff of 21 people.

**Thanks...to Kwik Trip for generously supplying the cookies for today's event...La Crosse Premium Water for the drinking water...the volunteer Amateur Radio Operators (HAMS) who aid our office in collecting severe weather reports...and to both the La Crosse and Olmsted County Emergency Operation Centers for displaying their Incident Command Vehicles.**

# Welcome to the National Weather Service La Crosse, WI



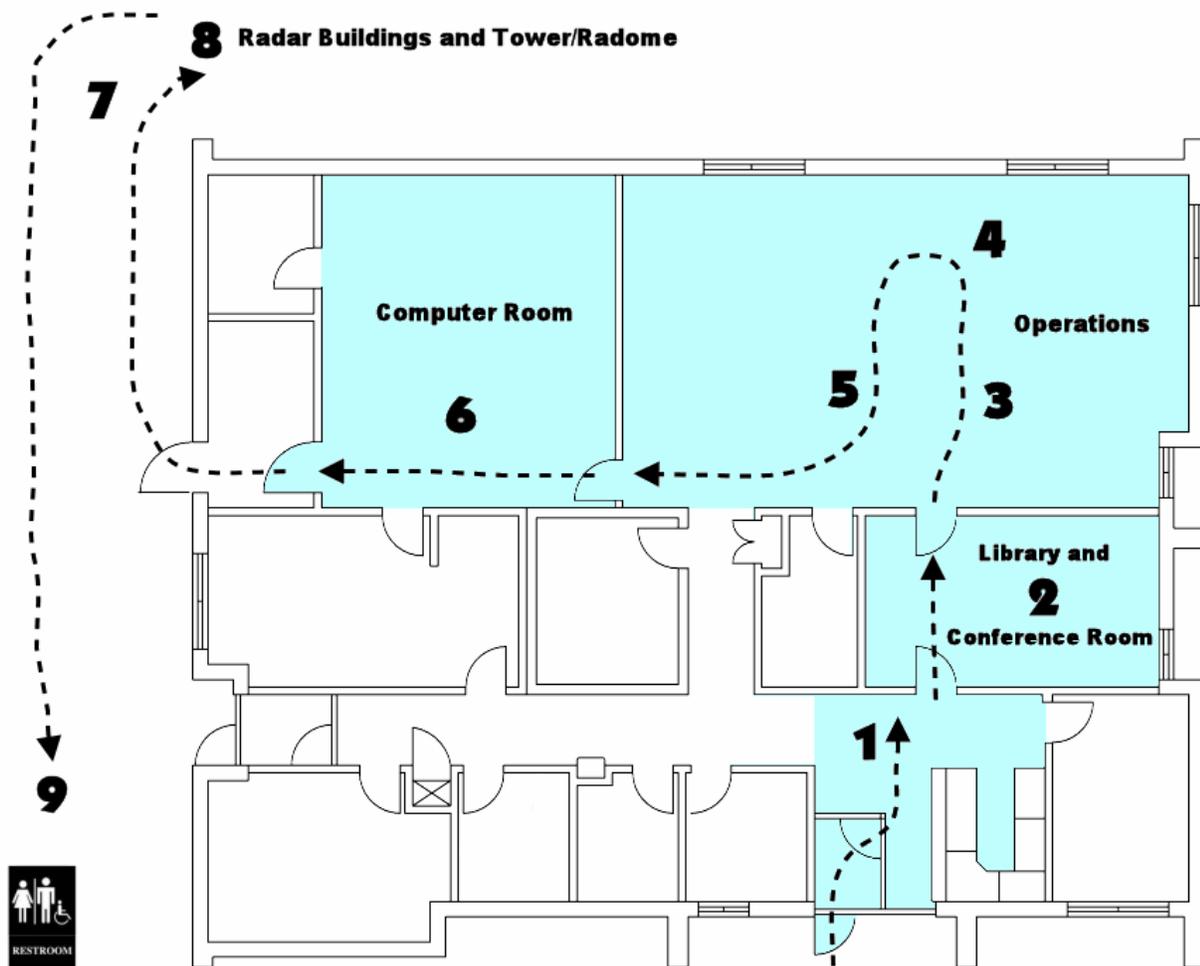
Thursday, September 14<sup>th</sup>  
2-7 pm

For further information:

National Weather Service  
N2788 County Rd. FA  
La Crosse, WI 54601

(608) 784-7294

<http://www.weather.gov/lacrosse>



**1: Administrative Area:** Welcome to the La Crosse National Weather Service (NWS). Your tour begins in our Reception Area where you can view various displays and pictures from weather events of the past.

**2: Library and Conference Room:** This is where we conduct meetings, seminars, training, and some outreach programs. Take a few minutes to learn about the NWS in this room and pick up any informational pamphlets and brochures that interest you. Our tornado chamber is also on display.

**3: AWIPS Demonstration:** Your first stop in our Operations Area will include a demonstration by our staff of our main forecasting and weather monitoring tool, the Advanced Weather Interactive Processing System (AWIPS). This nationally awarded system allows us to monitor the weather, display forecast models, and prepare our forecast information.

**4: Severe Weather Demonstration:** See how we interpret radar data, make warning decisions, and disseminate warnings in our severe weather area. Using an actual severe weather case from the past, we will demonstrate how a warning is issued and discuss some of the communication equipment used to talk with county officials and storm spotters.

**5: NOAA "All Hazards" Weather Radio:** Learn more about NOAA "All Hazards" Weather Radio programming and how it can be your most useful tool for alerting you to dangerous weather conditions. Also, get a demonstration of how text is converted to voice and even have our computer say your name for fun!

**6: Computer Room:** This room houses most of the mainframe computers that process, transmit, interpret, and receive data, including our own local Doppler Radar data.

**7: CO-OP Equipment:** The Cooperative Observer program (CO-OP) is a volunteer network of individuals who take daily temperature and precipitation measurements, using equipment supplied by the NWS. Take a look at some of the equipment on display used to take these measurements.

**8: Radar Buildings and Tower/Radome:** Our Doppler Radar can detect precipitation out to approximately 250 miles and is essential in our severe weather program. It sends our pulses of energy, then "listens" for any signal return, which might include rain, hail, birds and insects. Wind velocity information can often be determined from these signal returns. The tower stands just over 100 ft, while the white ball (called the radome) is 39 ft in diameter. The radome protects a 28 ft diameter radar dish inside it. The buildings below the tower house processing equipment. Small groups of people can climb the tower into the radome for our open house (age limit of 14 years or older).

**9: Amateur (HAMS) Radio and Incident Command Vehicle Displays:** Local Amateur Radio operators will be demonstrating long distance communication used to relay weather reports. These volunteers are essential in providing real-time weather reports to aid in warning decisions. As partners to us, Incident Command Vehicles from La Crosse County, WI and Olmsted County, MN are also on display and open for tours.



A restroom is located outside, by the side of the building (see map above for approximate location).