

Monthly Update

January/February 2023



Photography by Andrew Spearin

President's Message

Clayton Spears | Cottonwood Mansion Preservation Foundation

When Larry Hamilton established the Cottonwood Mansion Preservation Foundation in 1989, the following mission statement was included with the governance policy: *“To collect, preserve, interpret, maintain and promote the historical building known as Cottonwood Mansion as a living museum that encourages the public to experience the Victorian and Edwardian eras and the early settlement of the Lake Erie North Shore so that the visiting public can become lifetime learners and promoters of the local heritage and community supporters of it.”*

When the World Health Organization voiced its international concern relating to Covid, little did we realize such an all encompassing effect this pandemic would have throughout the world, but as I have mentioned previously, it afforded people an opportunity to explore new areas in which to devote their free time. One of these areas was learning about his or her lineage and also how their ancestors lived. As a result, Cottonwood quickly became a go-to site and the ambience created by restoring the mansion to its original historical grandeur became a highlight for those visiting.

This newsletter not only highlights the exceptional events that have already taken place, but Iona is giving us an in-depth taste of what the future holds for Cottonwood Mansion Museum. I look forward to the year ahead.

-Clayt Spears, *President*



Painting by Bill Stephens

Cottonwood Mansion Museum
watercolour painting by Artist Bill
Stephens, retired Police Officer and
Artist.

Bill decided to paint the mansion after
driving by this past summer. We are
excited to announce that this painting
will be available as an 11x14 print in our
Gift Shop for \$40 in late mid-to-late
March. Call or email us to reserve your
print today!

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Past Events & Updates

Volunteer Appreciation 2022

In January, Cottonwood celebrated it's awesome 2022 volunteers at it's Volunteer Appreciation Event. We had over 50 volunteers and contributors attend! New for this year, Cottonwood distributed Volunteer Awards. The Outstanding Volunteer Awards were given to all volunteers that attended and helped at a minimum of 4 events in 2022. 18 volunteers were awarded! The 2022 Significant Impact Award was awarded to Debbie Van Dalen, a particularly devoted board member who served an estimated 308+ hours at Cottonwood throughout 2022. Thank you to all volunteers for your wonderful devotion and continuous impact on Cottonwood Mansion! We couldn't do anything without you!

Valentine's Afternoon Tea

Back by popular demand was Cottonwood's Valentine's Afternoon Tea. Each guest received a Victorian Valentine at their seat, and everyone enjoyed the tours and time spent at the Gift Shop. Our Cottonwood Heritage Tea Blend continues to be a bestseller at these teas! Cottonwood hosted 36 guests, and made a record-breaking revenue through ticket and gift shop sales. Thank you to all who volunteered and attended this event!

Weddings Update

Cottonwood has now booked 10 weddings for the 2023 year, and is taking bookings for the 2024 and 2025 years. This has brought in over \$25k in revenue! For information on our wedding packages, please visit our website.



Vice President Debbie Van Dalen received an award at the Volunteer Appreciation Event for her continued hard work and dedication to Cottonwood.



Each guest received a Victorian Valentine

Updates Continued

Inventory Project

In January, Cottonwood underwent an inventory project which involved sorting and organizing of the collections onsite. This project was made possible by Karen Turk, who kindly volunteered a week of her time to assist the Museum Manager onsite. The collections were sorted, are now better stored and organized, and a new space in the Servant's Quarters is now open in the mansion thanks to this project.



A servant's quarters bedroom is now set up and open for guests to view

Victorian House Guest Experience Update

Cottonwood's new experience, the Victorian House Guest Experience, had it's filming day on February 6th. Marketing materials were captured and the experience will go to market in April 2023. This program, covered by the From Great to Grand: Growing Tourism Experiences in Haldimand County grant, is an exciting new step forward for Cottonwood. Stay tuned and keep your eyes on our social media!



Filming day for the Victorian House Guest Experience marketing materials

New Rezoning Project

Cottonwood is pleased to be working with Haldimand County as it undergoes a rezoning project. Currently the museum is zoned for agriculture, preventing the mansion from being able to run certain types of events and rentals. Once rezoned, Cottonwood will be better situated for the future, and will be able to see through it's revenue plans. The project comes with some necessary upgrades for the mansion, to ensure it is accessible and as barrier-free as possible. Some changes will include accessible and non-accessible washroom upgrades, parking upgrades, accessible path upgrades, and more. These upgrades will be covered in part by grants from the county.



Upcoming Events

Board & Volunteer Workday

Saturday, March 18th, 2023

9:00-5:00pm

We are getting a jump on spring cleaning at Cottonwood this March 18th! We are planning to clean out and organize the basement. If you are able to help in any way for any amount of time, please come out to this workday. We appreciate it!

Architecture Exhibit Reception

Friday, March 24th, 2023

7:00pm

Come out to see Cottonwood's latest exhibit and hear Researcher Andrew Spearin speak on his process of uncovering more information on Cottonwood's architecture. Hors D'oeuvres will be served, this event is free/by donation.

Wardian Case Workshop

Saturday, April 15th, 2023

\$100 per person

12:00pm

Longing for spring? Come out and create your very own Victorian Wardian Case led by Victorian Garden History specialist Iona. Learn about the Victorians and their obsession with tropical plants as you build your own Wardian Case. Ticket includes glass terrarium, plants, all equipment required.

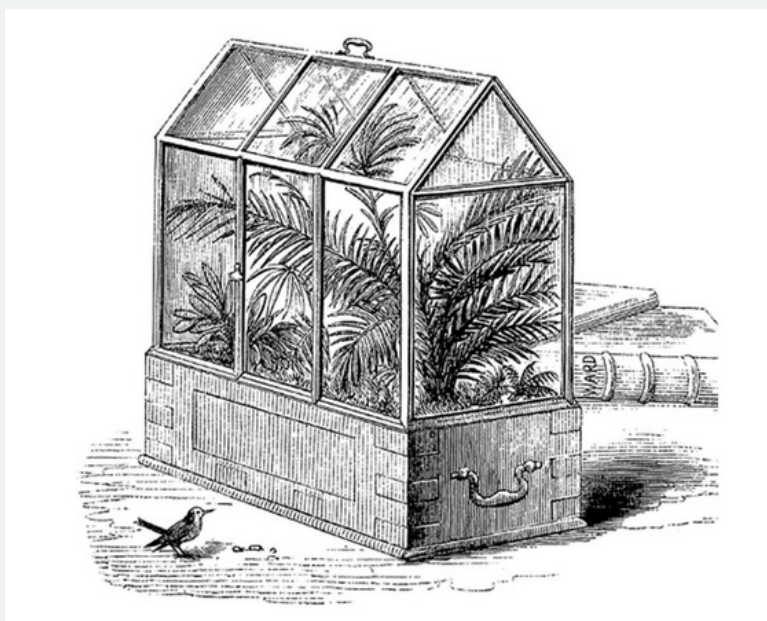
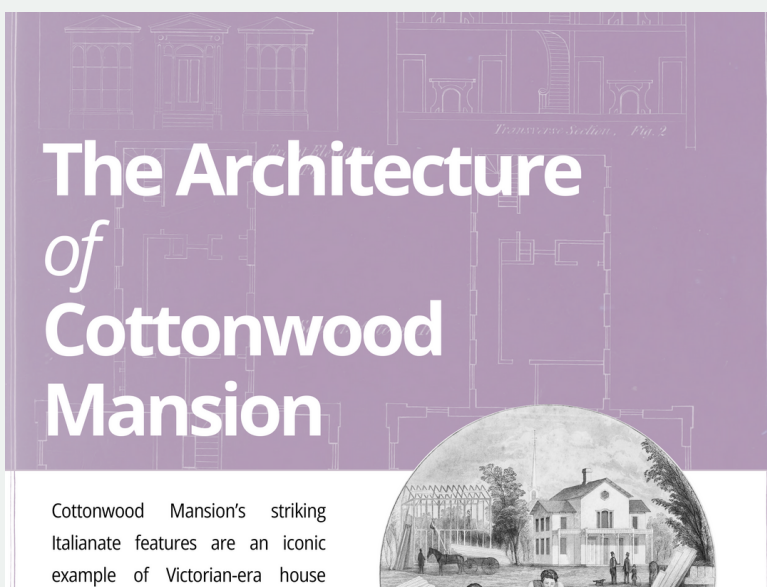
Public Paranormal Investigation

Saturday, April 15th, 2023

\$65 per person

6:00pm & 8:30pm

Run in partnership with Spirit Hunters Ontario, allow guests to explore additional spaces previously closed to the public, utilize more equipment, and opportunities for guided and independent EVP sessions. Tickets are limited, book your spot today!



From the desk of the Museum Manager



Accessioning some new Stereoscopes

It was exciting to dig into some curatorial work through our Inventory Project onsite this past January. There is something very special about the accessioning process, which requires detailing the object's provenance, age, and a description that includes every inch of the object. The final moment of installing the accession number on the object itself is thrilling, and signifies the reality that the object is now apart of the collections at Cottonwood. It will go on to be a teaching tool, and will amaze visitors for years to come.

My curatorial work continued in February as we wrapped up the content and plans for Cottonwood's latest exhibit: "The Architecture of Cottonwood Mansion". This exhibit, researched by Trustee and Researcher Andrew Spearin, explores the unique architecture of the mansion, how it was designed, and even sheds light on a new theorized architect. There will be an exhibit talk by Andrew Spearin on March

24th, and we'd love to see you at this free event. It was such a pleasure to curate the content of this exhibit, and I'm excited to engage visitors in discussions on research, the terminology of Victorian architecture, and the long-standing mystery of Cottonwood Mansion's architect.

Lastly, we are still waiting to hear back on the Canada Summer Jobs and the Ontario Trillium Fund Resilient Communities Fund grant applications. We will have some good news regarding the FedDev Tourism Relief Fund in the coming weeks! The next grants applications in the works will revolve around the rezoning project upgrades as well as the front veranda and pillars on the mansion. We will be applying to the Rural Business and Tourism Community Improvement Plan and the Ontario Trillium Fun Capital Fund grants for these projects.

Have a wonderful next couple of months, I hope to see you at our upcoming events!

-Iona Whatford, Museum Manager



From the Archives

by Andrew Spearin



Welcome to the inaugural “*From the Archive*” article. The archive of Cottonwood Crier newsletters has been a great research resource containing many story gems from Larry Hamilton and other Cottonwood volunteers over the years. This regular column will shine new light on stories that may have otherwise been forgotten to be told over time.

For the first article, we shine a literal light on cornerstone bricks at the front of the mansion to reveal inscribed names!

Three inscribed names offer hints to the Mansion’s provenance. In the very first *Cottonwood Crier* issue, Larry wrote about a volunteer discovering three distinctive signatures, however, the research into the persons was never published. We have done some digging to reveal who might have left their permanent mark on Cottonwood.

“William Nelson Dennis, Esq. Selkirk, Ont. 1865”

The 1861 Canada West census has a William Dennis listed in Walpole Township. He is 26 years old, works as a Labourer, is married to Esther, and they live in a frame house with 3 sons under the age of 6. If this is the same William Dennis as the inscription, he would likely have worked on building Cottonwood Mansion. Possibly related as William’s father is Josiah Dennis, who owns a farm a few plots west of Cottonwood. By 1879, this plot is owned by Nelson Dennis (likely William’s brother), who has a son named William.

“R.F. Daley, Rainham Center”

The only result from a census search was Russell Daley. The 1911 census lists the 14-year-old Russell living with his parents David and Ada, at Lot 11, Concession 2, near Rainham Centre. Perhaps as a young lad, Russell explored a then-abandoned Cottonwood Mansion and noticing the William Dennis inscription, decided to add his own mark.

“Jeanne Kramp”

The elegant cursive inscription is a late addition from a family member living in the back portion of the home while the front of the mansion was abandoned. According to Helen Spears, Jeanne was a schoolteacher in nearby Rainham.

Cottonwood Mansion is now all booked up for the 2023 wedding season, and is taking bookings for the 2024 and 2025 seasons!



For more details on Cottonwood's wedding packages, visit us at www.cottonwoodmansionmuseum.com or view us on WeddingWire!