



RIVERSONG

NEWSLETTER OF THE LOWER GRAND RIVER LAND TRUST INC.

Volume 21 Number 1

Spring 2015

Cold Temperatures and Snow can be a Good Thing

By Marilyn Havelka, CAO

The month of February was an opportune time to focus on the basement of the interior of the mansion. The Conservation Plan for the Historic Wood Floors was prepared by ERA Architects and Engineer, Mark Shoalts in 2013 with funding provided through the Cost Share Program of Parks Canada. The need for the plan was to find solutions to repair the wooden floor boards in the kitchen, billiards room (formerly a servant's hall) and the estate office.

Floors were the most abused element in any home due to heavy traffic and their function to support shifting loads of furnishings. In Ruthven's early years the basement was a hub of activity with servants using the area to provide services to the Thompson family upstairs. The floors, due to food preparation, would have been maintained by mixing water with lye which would have been a harsh treatment for floors. Other causes of decay to Ruthven's floors is due to exposure to moisture, significant changes in moisture levels and in the case of the billiard room failure of the floor structure. This was the result of a heavy slate billiard tabletop added when Andrew Thompson, we believe, retrofitted the room for his sons Andrew and Walter in the early part of the twentieth century. ERA and Shoalts carried out a site inspection and the architects returned for a site assessment which included documenting the floor construction, its geometry and dimensions; recording of current conditions; measuring relative humidity of the rooms and temperatures of the soil. They re-



To our surprise the billiard room tongue and groove floor was installed over a pine floor which was laid diagonally.

corded their findings through photo documentation and proposed interventions necessary to conserve the floors with associated cost estimates. The resulting conservation work was to be phased in over two years.

We were fortunate to receive additional funding from the (Haldimand) Mayor's Gala Fund and donations in order to facilitate the project and enable a February start date.

Contractor Art Dean started to remove the floor joists which rested directly on the ground on soil with substantial amounts of Haldimand clay.



Archaeologist sifting through the soil looking for small artifacts excavated from the floor.



Artifacts excavated from the floor: a glass bottle, a clay pipe and an unknown metal item (for vision or scissors?)

The contractor was careful not to walk on the exposed soil below the floor as archaeologists from Fisher Archaeological Consulting were to record "as found" conditions before surveying and sampling the soil under the floor joists.

Removal of the floor boards revealed the decayed conditions of the floor joists in the billiard room as well those in the estate office which were rotting from below due to moisture. The intent was to save as much of the original building material as possible but in the case of the floor joists replacement with new wood was the only option.

The frozen ground (another advantage of the extreme cold) enabled a heavy concrete truck to park on the north side of the mansion.

The new floors joists were laid followed by one and one-half inch base strips to support the floor. Enough of the maple floor boards in the billiard room were salvaged to cover three quarters of the billiard room. The rest of the floor boards are currently being milled using matching materials and will soon be installed. The



In the Estate Office floor joists were rotting from the bottom due to moisture.



Removal of floor boards revealed decayed conditions of the floor joists in the billiard room.



After the dirt was levelled a four inch concrete base slab was poured.



After curing a two inch layer of spray foam was applied over the concrete.

original pine boards in the estate office were relaid. Pine was one of the dominant woods used in flooring in the 1800's.

The kitchen floor is to be repaired where floor boards have broken. In 1999, some floor joists were replaced and a partial polyethylene had been installed.

The basement rooms will now be structurally sound and possibly used in the future for something yet to be determined. As Edith Wharton wrote in her book *The Decoration of Houses* (1902) ..."a floor should not only be, but appear to be, perfectly level surface, without simulated losses of concavities."



The remains of a metal grill which was part of a drainage system was discovered during archaeological investigation. The drain feature has been left exposed for interpretation purposes.

Another project which requires cold weather and snow is banding of Snow Buntings. These birds come "south" to over winter and will start returning to the Arctic in March. They behave like shorebirds as they travel in one unit or large flocks and "drop out of the sky like snowflakes."



The Dutch call Snow Buntings 'Sneeuwvlok' which means snowflake.



Snow Buntings like to feed on open fallow fields or cornfields. The open space provides visibility to keep a look out for lurking predators.

Ruthven's bander, Nancy Furber and other volunteers have been working with the Canadian Snow Bunting Network, since February 2003.



Nancy Furber, checking on Snow Buntings caught in the field.

Over the years, the team has banded over 2,274 Snow Buntings (and as a bonus 88 Horned Lark's and 15 Lapland Longspur's). Snow Owls have all also been watching the banders while sitting on hydro wires looking for rodents. Nancy says that many of the Snow Buntings are retraps but others have been banded by other sites in New Liskeard, King City and Long Point.

The banding has taken place on private property where local farmers have generously made their fields available to the banders.



Tools used to band Snow Buntings. Banding takes place out of a vehicle, usually Nancy's van.

Mark These Events on Your Calendars

Join us for Family Fun this March Break

This March Break join us for family tours of the mansion Mon, Wed, Thurs and Fri from 12 – 4 pm on the hour, regular tour rates apply.

On Tuesday afternoon take part in Mad Science! The beach themed, interactive science presentation (which is fun for the whole family) starts at 2pm in the Coach House. Admission by Donation.

Tia McGraff CD Release Party

April 4 ~ 7:30pm

Come celebrate with Tia on her 7th CD release, Crazy Beautiful! The CD was inspired by the heroic story of Canadian freestyle skier, Sarah Burke.

Enjoy wine and cheese (or beer) before and after Tia's performance.

Tickets \$22.60 (includes tax). Pre-registration required. Wine and beer is an additional cost.

A Grand Bridal Show

April 25 ~ 10am - 2pm

This intimate bridal show is a great opportunity to meet with a variety of wedding professionals and services in the surrounding area and to view the Coach House.

The show will feature exciting door prizes, special displays and gift bags for the first 80 brides.

Admission is \$5 at the door.

Pan Am Bird Festival

May 8 & 9

This year the Bird Festival will celebrate the 2015 Pan/Parapan America Games. Our event will focus on neotropical migratory birds which breed in Canada and the United States during spring and summer months and then return to Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean Islands over the winter. Admission by donation (suggested \$15).

Mansion opens for tours on May 16. Tours Wed-Sun, and holiday Monday's 10am-4pm, tours on the hour.

Book tea & scones with your mansion tour. Reserve in advance.

LOWER GRAND RIVER LAND TRUST INC.

Board of Directors

2014 - 2015

Executive Committee

Betsy Smith, President

Walter Peace, Vice President

Philip Kuckyt, Secretary

Michelle Amaral, Treasurer

Rob Gerrie, Executive Director

Directors

Janet de Vos

Nancy Furber

James Potter

Paul Famula

Richard Pardoe

EugeneTjepkema

Jim Walton

LOWER GRAND RIVER LAND TRUST STAFF

Marilynn Havelka, CAO, Ruthven Park

Natalie Campbell, Education Coordinator

Caitlin Cannon, Operations Coordinator

AND

Sandra Turner, Stewardship Coordinator

Bob Donald, Maintenance

The Lower Grand River Land Trust Inc.
c/o Ruthven Park National Historic Site
243 Haldimand Hwy #54, Box 610, Cayuga,
Ontario N0A 1E0 • 905.772.0560

email: info@ruthvenpark.ca

website: www.ruthvenpark.ca

Volunteer?

We have several projects on hand!
If you are interested, please give us a call at
the Gate House.

905 - 772- 0560