



Fairfield Notes

A Closer Look at the Past Issue 2, August 1, 2020

The Fairfield Homestead Heritage Association welcomes you to our new digital newsletter! It will be a way to look more closely at the collections of artifacts and archival material that once were part of the lives of the Fairfield family. This material has been researched and edited by Emma Wyse and Barb Snyder. We hope you enjoy! We'll welcome your suggestions and questions.

Do you know any fellow history enthusiasts who might be interested in *Fairfield Notes*? Please forward them a copy and suggest they send an email to fairfield1793@gmail.com to be added to our mailing list.

Collections associated with Fairfield House: When the Fairfields made the donation of their homestead and some acres of land to the Province of Ontario, the house contained heritage material that became two distinct collections.

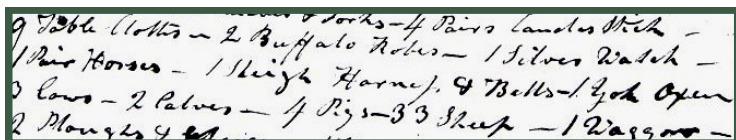
There were **archival materials**, which were moved to Queen's University Archives for appropriate care.

The **artifact collection** associated with Fairfield House is tightly defined as the furniture and small artifacts found within it in 1973 or known to have belonged in it during its first 100 years.

Artifact Spotlight: *The Bird Cage*

On the Fairfield farm, livestock was essential. The earliest documented clues about the Fairfields' farm are found in the Richard Cartwright ledger of accounts for 1791 to 1798 at the Queen's Archives. In May 1791, William Fairfield brought 14 lbs of butter and 52 lbs of ham to exchange for credit. Later transactions record farm products that were excess to the family's home needs: Pork, mutton, and cheese—clues to livestock.

In Stephen Fairfield's 1820 estate inventory (below), there is a listing of the type, number, and value of his livestock. At the time of his death Stephen owned 1 pair of horses, 1 yoke of oxen, 3 cows, 2 calves, 4 pigs, and 33 sheep! Certainly there was poultry, but its value was too insignificant to be recorded.



Domestic pets were part of the Fairfield household. The collection includes two bird cages and some later cage accessories. The larger of the two cages, measuring 19.5" tall and 13.4" wide, appears to be handmade using wire and wood for its simple construction. This type of bird cage was wall mounted and would have been placed in areas where the bird could be kept away from cold drafts and where it could entertain the family with its song. The second cage also appears handmade of wire with wooden base, and measures 16.5" tall and 11" wide. At the top it has a wire handle for hanging. It survives in frail condition.



Above: 020.001.001
Right: 005.001.059

By 1901, a brass wire bird cage could be bought from an Eaton catalogue for anywhere between 55¢ and \$2.75.



Notice the mounted bird cage on the top left portion of Woodville's painting "Waiting for the Stage" (1851). Smithsonian, National Gallery of Art.

Pet Birds in Upper Canada



The Sargent Family, 1800. NGA. Gift of Edgar William & Bernice Chrysler Garbisch.

Domestic birds were the favorite house pet in Upper Canada during the 19th century. As Jeanne Minhinnick characterizes pets in Upper Canada, “Cats and dogs worked for their living but birds were pure entertainers” (*At Home in Upper Canada*, 1970, p. 175). Their great appeal was their song. In a time before radio, cd’s, and iTunes, songbirds could add welcome melodies to the quiet times in family life.

Some of the most popular captive North American birds in the 19th century were goldfinches, mockingbirds, catbirds, blue birds, and cardinals. None of these could match the imported canary for song. Some more exotic birds like parrots were also popular. What species lived in the Fairfield cages?

Future research may find Kingston newspaper ads inviting customers to buy decorative, imported birds. Otherwise, native birds were captured, often by children. Children had the tasks of looking after the birds, training them to sing beautiful melodies, and cleaning the enclosures. Another reason songbirds were so popular as pets was because they were “exemplary examples of monogamy and devoted parenting” (Christal Pollock, *Companion Birds in Early America*, 2013).

A look at Charels Reiche's *The Bird Fancier's Companion*, first published in 1853, does provide a look into the mid-19th century bird business of New York City. From the 1840s, Reiche was a dealer, importer-exporter of birds between Germany and the USA. By 1853, he had imported more than 20,000 cultivated canaries from his native Germany. His book included descriptions of 13 popular North American caged birds, as well as European and exotic species. He included advice about cage sizes, diet, and care.

Reiche begins *The Bird Fancier's Companion* with a very serious reminder of the responsibility of pet owners in the opening lines of his “Introduction”:



We all love birds—song birds especially. How can we help it? Are they not the most lovely and joyous of all God's creatures; and such fitting companions for our parlors, delighting us, as they do, with their charming and sweet harmony?... True as this is, we should at the same time not forget that, to enjoy this pleasure, these little warblers have to become our prisoners, and can only look to us for their necessities.”

Charles Reiche, The Bird Fanciers Companion, 1853

Government Intervention in Canada West

Keeping songbirds in captivity became so popular a pastime that the Legislative Assembly of Canada West moved to give some protection to small native birds in 1864 in "An Act for the protection of insectivorous and other birds beneficial to Agriculture" (1864, Cap. 52) Its preamble gives two reasons for the act: to benefit agriculture AND because "the killing and capturing of singing birds and other small birds is a useless and cruel practice".

According to the new law it was unlawful “to take, capture, buy, sell, expose for sale, or have in possession any bird whatsoever” except crows, ravens, wild pigeons, and a few other species. The act made it unlawful "to set... any net, trap, spring, snare, cage, or other machine or engine" to capture birds. Bird protection laws continued into the 20th century, eventually expanding to species excluded in 1864.

What about household pests?



Deadfall mouse trap (F139)

While birds were welcome in the Fairfield house, there were also unwanted critters, such as mice, that plagued the family. They had an early wooden deadfall mouse trap, designed to deal with 6 mice at a time.

The trap is 27.5” long, 12” tall, and is carefully made. Each of the six heavy wooden blocks has rebated sides for vertical guide posts that keep them on target. When blocks were lifted up, they would be supported by the baited dead-fall mechanism. The slots were for part of the missing mechanism. When a mouse climbed into a baited compartment, the wooden block would be loosened and flatten it!

This style of mouse trap dates back to the Middle Ages.

A Puzzle for You!

“The Bewildered Hunter”, but WHY?

Take a closer look at what’s around the hunter in this 1872 Currier & Ives lithograph.



Find out the answers in our next edition of Fairfield Notes!

News and Events

Canada Historic Places Day in August!



Fairfield House is one of the 550 sites participating in this online adventure that started July 4. The theme is “Every Place, A Story”. The August focus is “Events”. The first event we are happy to offer you is a tour of the historical furniture of Fairfield House that you can experience right from the comfort of your own home! We will email a link to the slideshow for you to enjoy in mid August.

Learn more about sites and events at www.historicplacesday.ca.

Fairfield House Pewter Ornament

In December 2019 the Downtown Kingston included Fairfield House among its five holiday ornaments. The Fairfield House ornament is finely detailed, 2 inches wide, and 1 1/4 inches tall. Fairfield staff has learned from Downtown Kingston that there are unsold Fairfield House ornaments that the FHHA will purchase to use as its own fundraiser. Are you interested in purchasing an ornament or two?

What do you think? Please contact us at fairfield1793@gmail.com.

New: FHHA coming on Facebook

You’ll soon can find us by searching for **Fairfield Homestead Heritage Association** in the Facebook search bar. Follow this page for news, updates, photographs, and much more!



We are looking to expand our readership and engagement with social media, but first we want hear from YOU!

What is your most used type of social media? Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook?

Let us know which type of media you'd like to see us expand into.

We'll welcome any ideas or questions you might have. We will do our best to answer questions in a future issue of *Fairfield Notes* or with an email.

Send us an email at fairfield1793@gmail.com.

You can also phone us at 613-384-2813 during July and August.



Become a Friend of Fairfield House.

Our Association aims are:

* To promote the preservation of the Fairfield Homestead, including the House, the associated collections, and landscape for the study, education, and enjoyment of present and future generations.

* To provide programs for the discovery and appreciation of the heritage of the Fairfield Homestead and its neighbouring region.

We carry out these aims both by volunteer work and by fund-raising.

As a **Friend of Fairfield House**, you have the opportunity to join a group that supports these objectives and be involved in the future directions of development and programs.

If you can volunteer, please let us know of your interest.

Call Fairfield House at (613)384-2813 during the season. At other times, call (613)389-1907.

Membership fees and donations are eligible for charitable tax receipts.



I wish to be one of the Friends of Fairfield House.



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Please make cheque payable to **Fairfield Homestead Heritage Association, or simply FHHA.**

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