



THE UPDATE

York Pioneer and Historical Society

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July 2020 Special Edition of The Update!

On May 12, 2020, the Canadian National Exhibition Association with the full support of the City of Toronto and the Province of Ontario, voted to cancel the CNE this summer. This marks the first time since the Second World War that the Scadding Cabin will remain closed to the public.

The York Pioneers invite all members to cast their minds back to recent happier times by journeying with us through this special July 2020 edition of The Update where board member-at-large Sarah Gossip presents the first of two parts of her hand spinning adventures at the Scadding Cabin!

Notice of Mailing Address Change

Members are advised that our mailing address has changed. Going forward and effective immediately, our new mailing address is:

P.O. Box 186

260 Adelaide Street East

Toronto, ON

M5N 1N1



Above: Scadding Cabin, September 2019.

Photo: Brent Cunningham

2020 SCADDING CABIN VOLUNTEERS - PAST & PRESENT

As the State of Emergency measures remain in effect across the Province of Ontario, we invite all volunteers to share their stories. See page 4.

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My Hand Spinning Adventures at Scadding Cabin – Part 1

By Sarah Gossip

My name is Sarah Gossip. I have been learning the craft of hand spinning for approximately 10 years, and have been involved in spinning demonstrations, on both wheels at Scadding Cabin, since 2014.

Hand spinning for me has been a uniquely personal pursuit. I have no family background related to hand spinning, and grew up with no hand spinning influences around me. I discovered hand spinning while following a creative breadcrumb trail which started for me with crochet, in approximately 2006.

I came to Scadding originally in response to a call out from David Raymont, requesting assistance from the Toronto Guild of Spinners and Weavers of which I was a member, for a planned King George birthday celebration in 2014.

I didn't know what to expect on that first visit. I had never been to Scadding before; quite frankly, I didn't even know it existed. How many times have those words been heard said by visitors to the Cabin during the Ex, those of us who volunteer there can attest. I found the exterior of the building, the gardens and the interior totally charming. But my eyes just about popped out of my head when I glimpsed for the first time the glorious great wheel which is resident there! It has truly been a privilege for me to work with that wheel. At the time I was introduced to it, I did not yet own one myself, so David was actually giving me two opportunities in one, to learn exactly what spinning on a great wheel is all about, and as my skill increased to demo its use.

With no great wheel spinner mentor available, I augmented my learning with YouTube videos. Interesting how elements of such an old and venerable skill can be taught on social media, such a contrast. It took me quite some time, more than a couple of years, to learn how best to position my left arm and hand to draft the fibre, and how much tension to keep the fibre under for product quality continuity without having to stop and restart after winding on each time with my right. I observed in those videos that there was a "great wheel walk" that I should eventually acquire if I was to learn how to spin on it properly. I am delighted to say that the great wheel walk is something I can manage more and more often, for a couple of glorious moments, each time I visit the Cabin. I once heard a story about a great wheel owner actually having worn a groove in the floor from all that walking activity, which I think speaks to a passion for and commitment to the craft. All moments of delight aside, the great wheel experience of spinning can be a meditative experience, a very "present moment".

The invention of the great wheel is alleged to date back to medieval times. I think about this lineage between myself and the spinners of yore when I spin, and I am keenly aware that our shared experience of the activity is based on very different needs. Their experience, of course, arose out of necessity, mine out of curiosity.

Spinning wheels were one of the first craft tools to be replaced by modern machinery in the mid-eighteenth century. As machine-spun yarn became increasingly available, the use of spinning wheels steadily declined. At the end of the 19th century there were estimated to be around three million Great Wheels in the US. 120 years later, hand-spinning of any kind was an oddity.

I remember as a child being taken to visit friends of my parents, homes in which the décor favoured “Canadiana”, which was a style of the time. As home décor style becomes more and more minimalist/modern, there is no longer a place or need for a spinning wheel, particularly not a 45 inch great wheel, in the home. Consequently, there are lots of orphaned wheels, great or otherwise, needing homes. My spinning wheel repair technician had 125 wheels housed in a converted garage/workshop; I have 13 myself, in my very tiny home. I heard a horror story, from the owner of a great wheel I purchased, about he himself having chopped up a treadle-driven wheel because he was unable to sell it. Tragically, it ended up in his fireplace.

In terms of technique, spinning off the spindle of a great wheel is a little different than spinning on a flyer wheel. There is no bobbin; just a shaft, or spindle, that turns. You spin by holding the yarn at about a 45-degree angle to the tip and while turning the spindle let the yarn spiral out and fall off the tip. Each time the yarn falls off the tip (once per turn of the spindle), one twist is added to the yarn.



Sarah takes questions at the Scadding Cabin during the CNE. Photo: Brent Cunningham

In approximately the 16th century the flyer wheel, a smaller wheel the spinner could sit down in front of, was developed. On a treadle-driven wheel, the feet control the speed at which the wheel turns, which in turn spins the flyer that turns the bobbin. This wheel, because of the treadle, frees both hands for the spinner to draft the fiber, with the flyer automatically winding the spun fiber onto the bobbin.

I am always delighted to discover how well made “antique” wheels are. Assuming all parts are present and in relatively good repair, with a bit of small machine oil and gentle coaxing these wheels kick back to life very quickly and work as intended. Considering that the great wheel at Scadding dates back to 1860, and the treadle wheel is even older, they are in amazing shape. I seriously doubt any of my modern wheels will weather as well with time, being made of MDF and plastic/rubber parts.



I've read that there are some spinners who think the great wheel is only the worthwhile wheel to spin wool on, but you can spin just about anything you want on it. You can also ply on the great wheel. I have spun on the both wheels at Scadding with plant and animal fibres, such as flax, hemp, ramie, Merino, buffalo, llama, Coopworth, etc, and I've always got an eye out for something new to try. I've had the greatest success on the great wheel to date spinning with Icelandic fleece fibre. Icelandic sheep have a double coat, and nearly always both types of hair are carded together. This means that the fibre slips nicely during the drafting stage and produces a fine and consistent yarn. Icelandic is best suited for outerwear and non-garment items, being coarse on the skin.

Next month in Part 2, I will address common questions that I have received over the years during demonstrations at the Scadding Cabin.

To be continued...

SCADDING CABIN VOLUNTEERS - PAST & PRESENT

Everyone looks forward to our summers working at the Cabin. Health measures this year will keep the doors and windows closed. However, Kayoko has maintained the garden as colourful and butterfly friendly as usual. Fred has seen to several necessary repairs.

Can the rest of us, like Sarah use this unexpected free time to do some reminiscing, with a pen? Can you share a short story of the interesting memories you have enjoyed at the Cabin? Perhaps recalling who or what inspired your participation?

Our visitors always have the most surprising information to enrich our experience. So often visitors compare Cabin life with their own, when growing up in various locations around the world!

Please everyone, tell about the fun of your summers at Scadding Cabin. These stories will be another treat waiting for us when we reopen in 2021.

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The York Pioneer and Historical Society
PO Box 186
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Welcome New Members!

Mitch Goldsmith Jennifer Gray Robert Packham James Rideout
Amanda Smiles

New Life Members!

Madeline McDowell

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