

The Ruthmere Record

THE RUTHMERE FOUNDATION, INC. • 302 E. BEARDSLEY AVENUE • ELKHART, INDIANA 46514

SPRING/SUMMER 2021

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BEYOND WEDGWOOD BLUE

BY WILLIAM A. FIRSTENBERGER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The past year has tested our patience, our will, our compassion, our intelligence, and ultimately, our ability to survive. Ruthmere has used this time for the benefit of our community in preparing something truly new and special for 2021. From July 6-September 30, 2021, the Havilah Beardsley House will host the original exhibition *Beyond Wedgwood Blue*, the first in a series of national level exhibitions we expect to bring to Elkhart in coming years.

Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795) built a pottery empire in Staffordshire, England that, to this day, remains at the forefront of the global ceramics industry. When we hear the name “Wedgwood” we tend to think of that innovative pale blue Jasperware that has defined the company for over 250 years. But Wedgwood is so much more!



In this original special exhibition by Ruthmere Museum, we have assembled a stunning collection of Wedgwood ceramics from around the world representing a wide variety of styles, shapes, and uses. Of course, visitors will still see many fine examples of Jasperware that made the Wedgwood famous, but one will also encounter rare pieces of black basalt statuary, drab gray stoneware, multi-color majolica, Queen-approved creamware, unglazed buff caneware, and iridescent lustreware from the famous designer Daisy Makeig-Jones. Some pieces are strictly ornamental such as vases, plaques, busts, and tablets made to sit on mantels and impress guests. Others, like teapots, plates, clocks, candlesticks, and jewelry, had a specific function, enhanced and embellished by Wedgwood artisans.

American history and Wedgwood history are finely interwoven, as evidenced by Josiah Wedgwood's interests in the American Revolution and the Western anti-slavery movement. From the beginning, Wedgwood has incorporated American-specific commemorative wares into its marketing plan. *Beyond Wedgwood Blue* explores how American themes and national heroes made their way into Wedgwood's range of products, and in turn how American tastes influenced Wedgwood designs.

The time has come to step out of our collective caves and begin to enjoy life again. We can think of no better way than to celebrate the artistry of a world famous decorative arts company, and to bring this beauty to the doorstep of the Elkhart Community.

Ruthmere Record Editor
Carolyn Bonanno

COMING FULL CIRCLE

By WILLIAM A. FIRSTENBERGER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Sometimes things just fall into place. When it happens, it's profound. It makes us believers in fate and destiny, even when we live in a world that more often feels as though it's falling apart and lacks any real meaning. These are moments where we marvel in astonishment, and yes, write down and record history for posterity.

The last moment I experienced like this relates to the recent acquisition of the Beardsley Carriage House located just to the north of the Havilah Beardsley House. The previous owner, Bill Walter, has always been an exceptionally good neighbor to our operation there. While not everyone would want to live next to a tourist attraction, Bill was always friendly and kind when we filled the parking lot for Free Family Sundays, EOQs or other special events. Bill knew that his house was special too--a converted agricultural structure that originally was part of the Havilah Beardsley farmstead, and being "part of the Beardsley story" was an honor and a responsibility that he took seriously.

Tragically, on July 9, 2020, a substantial fire struck the Walter residence and made it unlivable. Over the remainder of the summer, the Walter family worked with Indiana Landmarks through the help of an Efroymsen Family Grant to obtain a feasibility report prepared by Kil Architecture & Planning. The report determined that the building was indeed salvageable, but it would require significant work.

Ruthmere stepped into this void and opened a discussion with Bill Walter regarding Ruthmere's longstanding interest in putting the Beardsley Carriage House and the Havilah Beardsley House "back together." A friendly negotiation ensued, producing a private sale transfer of ownership with a bonus!

Bill Walter had in his possession at the time of the fire a rare 19th century primitive oil painting of a "rope ferry" that had come with the house when he acquired it. Miraculously, this painting had survived the fire, and while it suffered heavy smoke damage, it was quickly deemed "restorable" by professional conservator Monica Radecki. Learn more on the details of what we've discovered about this gem since it has been at the conservation lab, and the summer 2021 release we have planned to the public on page 10 of this issue.

Was this painting an actual depiction of the famous Havilah Beardsley rope ferry operation of the 1830s - the very start of Elkhart entrepreneurship? No one knew the full story at the time of the fire, but the rarity of the subject matter alone was of enough interest for it to be a deal-closing bargaining chip in the property sale. So, on November 4, 2020, in one swoop, Ruthmere acquired an historic building and a rare painting, and we expressed our deepest thanks to the Walter family, who had been such good stewards of both for so many important years.

Unknown to anyone at the closing table was that, on the very same day of November 4th, a former resident of both the Beardsley Carriage House and the Havilah Beardsley House passed peacefully from this world, John D. Kistner. John and his lovely wife Judy, had become reconnected with the Havilah Beardsley House in 2012 when they learned of Ruthmere's efforts to restore the old home and turn it into a house museum. They traveled to Elkhart from their home near Seattle to explore the project and provide new information. The Ruthmere website features a 2012 interview with John Kistner on our YouTube channel for those who would like to know more. That week, the Kistners joined the Firstenbergers to underwrite the outdoor Plaza Garden, bearing their names as part of the capital campaign drive. We are cousins, you know, but that's another story you can read about in a past issue of The Ruthmere Record.



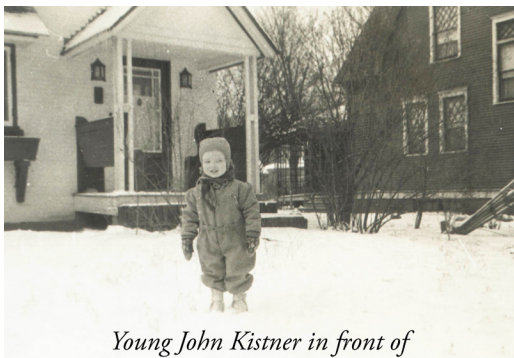
Bill Walter



John Kistner

COMING FULL CIRCLE (CONT'D)

By WILLIAM A. FIRSTENBERGER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



*Young John Kistner in front of
Beardsley Carriage House circa 1942*

John was the son of Arthur Kistner, owner of the Havilah Beardsley House from 1941 to 1952, and it was Art Kistner who made a series of significant updates to the Havilah Beardsley House his first year of ownership. In fact, so many renovations were made during 1941-42 that John recalled the family rented the Beardsley Carriage House (having been converted from a carriage house to a domicile in the 1920s) as their principal residence while the renovations were being executed.

When news came of John's death from his widow, Judy Kistner, there was one final surprise that felt as though fate may have played a role in the course of these events. John Kistner left a legacy gift in his will to Ruthmere for the express purpose of preserving and supporting the Havilah Beardsley House site. Through wise investment during his life this gift had grown in generosity, and in February of 2021, we received a check for \$50,000 to be used for the preservation and betterment of the Havilah Beardsley House site, which now includes the Beardsley Carriage House.

Before the Kistner check arrived in February, the Ruthmere Board of Directors had unanimously voted to preserve the Beardsley Carriage House and reconnect this long separated property back to the Havilah Beardsley House. The circle is now closed at the northwest corner of Beardsley Avenue and Main Street, Elkhart. Havilah and Rachel Beardsley, Bill Walter, and John Kistner (and every past owner of this landmark property) are all smiling. Their legacy begins anew.

INTEGRITY OF A CHAMPION

By WILLIAM A. FIRSTENBERGER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

There's not much that I can say about the late Arthur J. Decio that others who knew him much better than I have not already said, but I can share a few of my experiences and the impact of his influence upon me and Ruthmere.

One of my first encounters with Art was in his office at Skyline. Shortly into the conversation, he looked me straight in the eyes and asked, "Bill, what is the single most important characteristic of a leader?" Talk about being put on the spot! Here was the legend of Elkhart asking me for my opinion on leadership--really? I went with my gut, "Trust," I guessed. Art replied, "Close! And I like that, but no. It's Integrity. If you live your life with integrity, trust will come naturally, and you will be a great leader." I've never forgotten.

Art served on the Ruthmere Board of Directors as one of our very first non-Beardsley-family community leaders. He cited his connection to Walter Beardsley, who offered Art his first board seat position at First National Bank of Elkhart, as his inspiration for wanting to serve Ruthmere--Art never forgot a favor. Over the years, his support was pivotal and at its greatest impact during times of transformational change. His contributions toward the Havilah Beardsley House ensured that this piece of Elkhart's roots would not only be saved, but remain accessible for generations. Without knowing it, he also created the support model for what we now call "Ruthmere Champions," a legacy of inspiring generosity in others that is self-sustaining.

My last meeting with Art was in August of 2020 with Bob Deputy. The three of us sat for lunch at one of the many establishments in town that had an "Art's table," and we discussed his transition from the Ruthmere working Board to become the first ever "Board Member Emeritus" at Ruthmere. Art was eager to blaze this new trail for us, a way to keep long-standing Board members engaged with Ruthmere while gracefully accepting a lessened workload. The Ruthmere Board officially voted Art Decio to this new position the morning of November 6, 2020. We learned that afternoon that he passed just a couple hours after the vote was recorded. Upon reflection it seems fitting, as Art was never one to accept "less work."

Thank you, Art, for being Ruthmere's and my personal Champion of Integrity.



Photo by Elkhart Truth

WHAT IS A JEWEL?

By Joy Olsen, Collections Manager/Wedding Coordinator

What is a "Jewel?" It is a precious stone, a gem distinguished for its beauty and rarity. We call it Ruthmere, "The Jewel of Indiana." These three beautiful and rare jewels represent what we have to offer in our Ruthmere Wedding Venues.



The Diamond...Ruthmere Mansion!

The most precious jewel of all. In this grand celebration, in a vintage setting you are surrounded by history, art and elegance at this beautiful 1910 home. The ceremonies are held in a traditional French, "blue and white" formal garden. The original marble fountain, newly restored greenhouse and a covered piazza add to the ambiance. The expansive lawns can be set up for outdoor receptions.

Book your Diamond Wedding Today!!



The Ruby...Micro-Wedding!

You might have heard of the term, Micro-Wedding floating around recently. This type of wedding has become hugely popular during the pandemic. You might think of a Micro-Wedding as a miniature version of any sized wedding. Choose the beautifully landscaped grounds of Ruthmere or the stunning interior of Havilah Beardsley House. If you want an intimate and personal wedding celebration, our Ruby Micro-Wedding is the answer!



The Emerald... Havilah Beardsley House!

Opting for a historic venue? We have the perfect place for you, the Emerald of Ruthmere Campus, the Havilah Beardsley House! This historic home was built in 1848 for Elkhart's founding family, Dr. Havilah and Rachel Beardsley. From the grand staircase to the Italian fireplace, your day will become an unforgettable event!

For more information please contact Joy Olsen-Wedding Coordinator for the Ruthmere Campus, at (574) 264-0330 ext.103. or jolsen@ruthmere.org. We would love to add your names to the list of happy couples who have chosen Ruthmere, the beautiful and historic "Jewel of Indiana."

START YOUR SATURDAYS WITH FREE COFFEE AND MUSIC

By MARK DODDINGTON, MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR

After a shortened season last year, Ruthmere is looking forward to presenting a full round of coffee, donuts and quality entertainment this summer. That's right. Coffee on the Piazza is coming back with a roar!

Last year, COVID-19 forced us to cancel the first two Coffee dates, as well as reschedule a number of performers unable to appear. Rest assured, we gave those artists first crack at playing this summer.

We are pleased to report that the response to our inquiry this year was overwhelming and swift. After all the isolation and quiet of last year, many musicians are just anxious to get out and play for a live audience again. We managed to fill all thirteen dates in less than a month, an unprecedented feat. And I'm happy to say we found some wonderful new talent to grace our piazza this year. We've even filled one date for 2022 already!



Leading off the season is rock singer and guitarist Chris Burch. Chris was scheduled to open last year, but his was one of the dates cancelled. So it seems only fitting that he be given the opportunity to get the ball rolling in '21.

Many other first-time artists will be playing Ruthmere this summer. Blues/rock/country vocalist Natalie Gaza, pop singer Brynn Allison, and blues-rocker Rachel Eichhorn bring the female touch to a very diverse season. Balancing things out, pop/country vocalist Jeff Colin and rocker Mike Nyhuis (who was supposed to play last year) will be here in August, along with country singer Kyle Byler, who will close out the season on August 28.

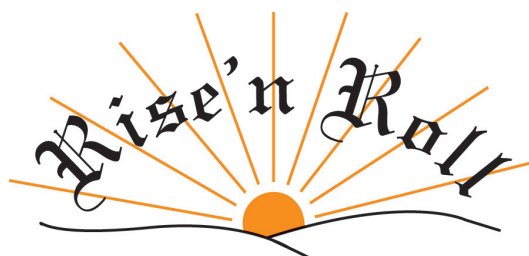
Long-time favorites John Kennedy and Chris O'Brien (of Irish pub band Kennedy's Kitchen) and Doug Harsch will be returning this summer. Blues/rock/country guitarist Paul Erdman will also be making an appearance this year, his first Ruthmere performance in several years. Pop/rock vocalist Mykayla Cynthia, who made a bold splash last summer, is also making a return visit.

Filling out the schedule are rock/country singer Marty Miles, and pop-rock duo 30 Year Wait, both appearing in July. For the complete lineup, including dates and video clips of all our featured artists, please visit Ruthmere.org.

Our thanks go to our season sponsor, The Phyllis Myers Family (Tom & Karen), for once again making it all possible. As has become tradition, we will be serving Rise N' Roll donuts for a \$2.00 donation. We'd like to also thank Regina Troyer at The Refinery for her generous donation of coffee for the entire 2021 season.

Our first Coffee on the Piazza date is Saturday, June 5, from 10:00 a.m. until noon. Musical artists this year will be playing 90-minute shows beginning at 10:30. Tours of Ruthmere and Havilah Beardsley House will be going on as well. Normal admission rates apply to see the houses, but the coffee and music are on us.

Coffee on the Piazza is open to the public and free to attend. Bring some money, though, as many of the artists sell souvenir merchandise you don't want to miss, from CDs to t-shirts to who knows what? And, of course, let us not forget about those delicious donuts!



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\$10,000

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Doug & Sharon Beardsley

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Kem Krest

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Rufus & Marilyn Beardsley
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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR
CONTINUED SUPPORT OF THE
RUTHMERE MUSEUM CAMPUS!**

**IF AN UPDATE IS
REQUIRED, PLEASE CALL
574-264-0330 EXT. 107**



2020 RUTHMERE FOREVER - WHAT A RESPONSE!

By WILLIAM A. FIRSTENBERGER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As you are well aware, last year was both challenging and transformational. Skipping the Spring drive, we held only our year-end Ruthmere Forever gift drive in 2020 in order to give our constituents extra time to evaluate their priorities in light of the pandemic. Your collective generosity was astounding and humbling. A total of 93 donors together gave \$127,430.85 Ruthmere Forever gifts in 2020, exceeding our budget goal by 27%!

Thank you for making Ruthmere's preservation and programs a priority in your life and our community.

Joan Beardsley Norris
Corson Family Foundation
Jack & Karen Cittadine
Bill Deputy Foundation
George & Kathy Freese
Connie Fulmer
Doug & Karen Grant
Dan & Jan Morrison
Raymond & Teri Stout
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Nancy Pletcher
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Jan & Nick Pellus
Nancy Denlinger
Jep & Joyce Hostetler
Thomas & Debra McArthur
Shana Dines
Anne Eisele & Nicholas Gonzales
Don & Dianne Frandsen

ONE CLASSY LADY!

By JOY OLSEN, COLLECTIONS MANAGER/WEDDING COORDINATOR



A very dear friend to Ruthmere and myself passed out of this world on May 14, 2020. I was saddened to hear the news and was able to pay my respects. I kidded with her sister Catherine, that she is now singing in the chorus in heaven.

For many years, early in my career at Ruthmere, Mary Ellen and I hosted "Coffee on the Piazza" giving us a chance to talk and share about our personal lives. I was blown away by the journey her life took. She lived in Chicago as a young girl and performed in many shows in the Windy City. Her talent was top notch.

Mary Ellen was a giving person, volunteering whenever we needed her. She will be remembered for her delicious homemade biscotti, the best I have ever tasted. I am not the only one at Ruthmere who will miss those treats. She spoiled us all!

We are all better people for having known Mary Ellen Shamory. I am sure in heaven they are saying, now that is one classy lady!

IS THAT MUSIC I HEAR?

By MARK DODDINGTON, MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR



Even though it's only March, preparations for this year's Fall Concert Series are nearly complete. Once again, Ruthmere is opening its doors for four spectacular concerts in October and November.

As has become tradition over the last couple of years, the winner of this year's Robert B. Beardsley Piano Prize will open the season on October 14 at 7:00 pm. If the past three years have taught us anything, it's that there is no shortage of extraordinary young talent in this country, so whoever wins, we can be sure of a marvelous opening salvo.

Former Beardsley Prize champion Nick Susi will be coming back on October 28. As he proved in his winning (2018) competition performance and concert, Nick brings an electrifying sense of youth and vigor to the stage. His performance of William Bolcom's "The Serpent's Kiss" was a highlight of the 2018 season, bringing a new dimension to piano music.

November 11 brings Steinway Artist Frank Huang presenting his "Odyssey of Dissent," a very timely theme given recent happenings in America. Chronicling the effects of music on political and social change, "Odyssey of Dissent" is an exciting blend of classical pieces spanning three centuries.

Nicholas Roth returns to close the season with his traditional Black Friday concert on November 26. Having cancelled his performance last year due to COVID-19 restrictions, Nicholas is eager to continue a long-standing engagement at Ruthmere, and we look forward to welcoming him back.

Details on the musical selections by the artists will be decided in the coming months, and will be announced on our website as they become available. All concerts are on Thursday evenings except Nicholas Roth, and all begin at 7:00 pm, followed by a meet-and-greet afterwards. Concert sponsors are invited to a pre-concert reception with the evening's performer, beginning at 6:00 pm. To become a Fall Concert Sponsor, contact Executive Director Bill Firstenberger.

It's still too early to tell what COVID-19 precautions may be in place at the time, so for now, please plan to wear a mask and do your best to social distance while still enjoying the company of fellow music lovers. Doors open at 6:00 pm. Tickets for the Fall Concert Series are \$25.00 per show for Ruthmere members, \$40.00 for non-members. Season passes are available to members for \$100.00 per person. For further details, please contact Ruthmere at (574) 264-0330 or visit www.Ruthmere.org.



Frank Huang

Nick Susi



Nicholas Roth

THE ROPE FERRY IS SAVED!

By JENNIFER JOHNS, CURATOR

Ruthmere recently acquired a landscape painting of a rope ferry from Bill Walter, former resident of the house that was originally the carriage house to the Havilah Beardsley property. Mr. Walter obtained the home from its previous resident, Frances Meiser, Walter R. Beardsley's secretary at Miles Laboratory. The painting has sustained extensive fire and smoke damage. Currently, the painting is being conserved by Monica Radecki, of Radecki Fine Art Conservation, in South Bend.

A previously hidden label discovered at the lab indicates it is "From Professor Harry J. Kellogg Art School, Elkhart, Indiana, Established February 11, 1882." This painting will make a great addition to the collection to show representation of an early form of transportation to cross the river in the early years of Elkhart. Havilah Beardsley owned two rope ferries that were located on the St. Joseph River, one being at the Main Street crossing, near the current bridge. The conservation of the painting is to be completed by August, and the painting will be revealed as part of the 2021 celebration of the St. Joseph River (see below).



*Rope Ferry from Professor Harry J. Kellogg
Art School Elkhart, Indiana*

FITNESS HIKE THROUGH HISTORY

By LOIS TOMASZEWSKI, PROGRAM COORDINATOR



The Fitness Hike Through History represents a new collaborative outreach program that embraces technology, history, health and wellness. The project, a smartphone-led, self-guided tour is funded by the Community Foundation of Elkhart County with a \$5,000 grant and matching donations from a variety of Ruthmere donors. The Fitness Hike Through History is the result of a partnership forged with the Elkhart Health and Aquatics Center - Beacon Health Systems and the City of Elkhart Parks Department.

Utilizing the existing city-managed Riverwalk and Island Park, the Fitness Hike traverses 1.6 miles, beginning and ending at the Health and Aquatics Center. The route takes participants down the Riverwalk, along Main Street to Beardsley Avenue, east on Beardsley to the bridge to Island Park, through Island Park and finally back to the Fitness Center. Along the way, participants will learn

information on the historic sites they pass as well as fitness tips and activities to make the most of their workout. As a part of the City of Elkhart, the Riverwalk is accessible to people of all abilities. The walk features changes in elevation – a bonus for an efficient work-out. The designated trail loop is exceptionally safe, as it does not cross any streets.

Using PocketSights technology, participants can access the hike from any smartphone. This technology interacts with users as they hike the path, with opportunities to share stories and pictures on social media. Users can also leave comments or ask questions to enhance their experience.

The Fitness Hike Through History is expected to be operational by June 1. In late summer, public television station WNIT will launch a documentary series on the history of the St. Joseph River. The Fitness Hike Through History is a complementary program that celebrates the river's role in the founding of Elkhart, as many of the historical facts revolve around the river.

RUTHMERE'S NEW BLOG: HOUSE OF HISTORY

By ANDREA BARBOUR, OUTREACH CURATOR

We are happy to announce the debut of Ruthmere's new blog - *House of History*! Check out our first few posts at www.houseofhistory.squarespace.com and keep an eye out for e-blasts about new and exciting articles from Ruthmere's team.

Whether we like it or not, COVID-19 has permanently changed the way that museums serve the public. When the world was forced into quarantine, we had to find new and creative ways to remain relevant and keep our community invested in what we have to offer. The effects - increased use of social media platforms and virtual museum experiences - are lingering; more and more people are looking for ways to interact with museum content online.

However, *House of History* wasn't just made to keep up with cultural online trends - we also have many untapped resources and potential on our hands to enhance our mission. Between the Arts Reference Library teeming with underappreciated texts, archives interwoven with the fascinating story of the Beardsleys and early Elkhart, and a world-class collection of historic objects and fine art, we have an incredible wealth of content to share with the community. This blog will be about that and everything else Ruthmere - behind-the-scenes insights, events, people, and news.

While I am the editor of *House of History*, and you will also see me write an occasional blog post, I would love to extend an invitation to others to get involved. Volunteers (including past volunteers), board members, and any other Ruthmere-affiliated performers, speakers, or partners are welcome to submit an article for *House of History*. We have a list of potential prompts below; you may pick from these or come up with your own! (Think of it as an opportunity to give a gallery talk and share what you love about Ruthmere without standing up in a room full of people.)

We recommend at least 300 and no more than 1,000 words per post. Potential Prompts:

- What is your favorite collection piece? Tell us what you know/like about it.
- Spotlight anything at all in our collection or in Ruthmere/HBH history. What makes it interesting to you? What is important to know about it? Why do we have that object/how did it come to us? What sources do we have that tell us about it?
- Tell an interesting story from Ruthmere, HBH, or local history.
- What's happening in the community right now? How is it affecting us? (Non-political)
- What is your opinion on [art piece, artist, art style, museum practice, etc.]?
- Tell the story about a local historical figure or artist.
- What makes your job/role at Ruthmere interesting? What is your favorite part of your job?
- What is the most interesting thing that has happened to you while working in a museum?
- Spotlight a topic and/or book from Ruthmere's arts reference library.
- What is something interesting you like to share when giving tours?
- Spotlight another local historical place (a house, building, cemetery, park, etc.).
- Talk about a Ruthmere event, either past or future. If in the past, recount your experience. If it's in the future, talk about what's in store or the process of planning.
- What is it like to perform for a Ruthmere audience?

If you are interested in writing a post, or if you have any questions or comments, please contact me via email (abarbour@ruthmere.org) or by phone (574-264-0330 ext. 102).



Inside This Issue

1. Beyond Wedgwood Blue
2. Coming Full Circle
3. Coming Full Circle (cont'd)/Integrity of a Champion
4. What is a Jewel?
5. Start Your Saturdays with Free Coffee and Music
6. Louis Comfort Tiffany Members/Business Members/Champions
7. Ruthmere Patron Membership
8. 2020 Ruthmere Forever/One Classy Lady
9. Is That Music I Hear?
10. The Rope Ferry is Saved/Fitness Hike Through History
11. Ruthmere's New Blog: House of History
12. Inside This Issue/Construction Zone Ahead

Ruthmere

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CONSTRUCTION ZONE AHEAD

By WILLIAM A. FIRSTENBERGER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Watch where you step! There are going to be MANY projects underway in 2021 at Ruthmere Campus. Having “historic preservation” in Ruthmere’s mission statement is something that we take seriously. For several years we deferred proactive maintenance needs, not because we were unaware of the risks associated with neglect, but instead because we intentionally prioritized public programs over preservation in the short term. We needed our community to experience and appreciate Ruthmere Campus first. After all, what is the value in a treasure that lies hidden and unknown?

So, we diverted resources to telling our stories, developing engaging programs and building our audience, knowing that at some day in the future, the preservation chickens would come home to roost, and we would have some significant catch up work to do. 2021 is finally THAT YEAR, and now our attentive and supportive constituents will watch with approval as we execute a series of major preservation projects.

The masonry bricks and limestone at Ruthmere (from the tops of the chimneys to the base of the perimeter wall) are being repaired, tuck-pointed, cleaned and weather-treated. Ruthmere will receive a new roof, and while we are at it, a new third floor HVAC system. Over the next two years we will invest approximately \$500,000 across all Ruthmere Campus sites to keep our buildings gleaming and well maintained. Albert and Elizabeth Beardsley would approve, and we hope you will too!