

Reviving the past

New Hamburg's historic Puddicombe House receives renovations as it takes on a new life

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Photos by Tim Murphy



ABOVE After removing the drop ceilings, the Cressmans discovered painted ceilings throughout the home.

BELOW Lyle and Karen Cressman are renovating the historic Puddicombe House, located in New Hamburg's downtown.

RIGHT A contractor plasters over cracked ceilings on the lower level of the home.

FAR TOP RIGHT Brass relief ceiling fixtures were also uncovered during the renovations.

FAR RIGHT MIDDLE A variety of carved wood banisters are found throughout the home.



ABOVE RIGHT The attic of the Puddicombe House required several support upgrades to meet building code requirements. An attic window allows a bit of natural light into the small space.

BELOW LEFT Large bay windows on the upper level offer a view of New Hamburg's downtown. The view would have changed considerably since the time of Samuel Merner.

BELOW Karen Cressman traces stencils of the original artwork which will be repainted onto the replastered ceilings.



Puddicombe House under repair

Historic site to be part of this fall's Doors Open tour

TIM MURPHY
Independent staff

An historic New Hamburg home is receiving a long overdue face lift.

The Puddicombe House, located at 145 Peel Street, is being restored inside and out to host a restaurant, spa, hair salon and bed and breakfast.

And it's all happening while restoring and retaining the home's original Victorian designs.

Lyle and Karen Cressman, who purchased the home just shy of two years ago, are currently directing a busy renovations crew to get the property ready for the Doors Open tour in September.

"There's lots of goodies you find," said Karen during a recent tour of the home.

So far during the last few months of tearing out walls, ceilings and the backyard, a few interesting aspects to the Puddicombe House, believed lost to history, have turned up.

One of the most interesting finds, discovered during the removal of the home's lowered ceilings, are ornate paintings and brass light fixtures found in each room on the lower levels.

Although not as immaculate as the paintings on the ceilings of Baden's Castle Kilbride, the designs are from the same era and general concept. The designs form a border around the edges of the ceilings, rather than covering the entire space such as at Kilbride.

During renovations, a long abandoned septic tank was found in the back yard, which needed to be drained and filled in.

A tin ceiling was also in the kitchen, which was removed and may be later reinstalled by a local tinsmith.

The Peel Street property first came into existence in 1866, when Don Wagner sold the property for \$800 to Samuel Merner. This was the first land registry to exist, or at least still exist.

Designed by architect William Hamilton, and built in 1868, the first occupant of the home was Samuel Merner. A businessman, MP and Senator, Merner was an active member of the New

Hamburg community.

Immigrating to Canada from Switzerland in 1837, he settled with his parents two miles west of New Hamburg on a farm. The elder Merners lived on the farm until their deaths in the mid 1870s.

At age 15, Merner studied the blacksmith trade, and managed various blacksmith and wagon shops in New Hamburg. He then sold the business to his younger brother Frederick and started a foundry. He ran that until 1873 and gave it to his eldest son Simpson.

In 1874, Merner bought a flouring mill in New Hamburg, and during the same time period was a member of county council, a reeve and a warden, as well as a member of the school board. Merner was also a founder of the New Hamburg Independent, which is described to have been a "campaign rag" at the time. He used the paper as a platform for his political rhetoric.

In 1879, he became an independent candidate for the south riding of Waterloo, and was elected to Parliament. The renovated Puddicombe House restaurant will feature three dining rooms on the main floor, which will seat over 60 people. A wrap-around deck, built to look like the original deck, will seat over 20 people.

"They'll (customers) be able to have a beer on the deck," she said.

The upstairs portion of the home will feature six bed and breakfast suites, and the basement will have a full service spa.

Pedicures, manicures, body wraps and other pampering services will be offered under the management of Amber Cressman, the daughter of Karen and Lyle.

Lou Cull, president of Heritage Wilmot, said during a recent tour of the

home she was impressed with the renovation plans.

"It makes its own statement," she said of the buildings style. "There can't be a better way of restoration than to go back to the original plans."

Cull said the home owned by the Puddicombes, after the Merners left, was one of several properties they owned in the area. The Puddicombe family owned the home until 1969 before selling.

The building became an apartment complex, during which time most of its architecture and paintings were covered, removed or sat in disrepair.