

Capturing the History

Historic Saranac Lake has worked since 1995 to preserve the cabin and the Bartók story.

The small, shingled building where the composer spent the summer of 1945, his last, had been cited for demolition by the building inspector in late 1995. That summer, Romanian pianist Cristina Stanescu visited the cottage and found its historical significance fascinating. She insisted that it be spared, even in its dire condition at that time.

Funds for reconstruction was raised by summer benefit concerts donated by supportive musicians, at the rate of about \$2,000 per year. This paid for a new roof, structural members, flooring and a new set of stairs. In 2001 HSL received a major donation from Peter Bartók, son of the late Hungarian composer. The money was used to finish restoration of the cabin.

In March, 2022, Historic Saranac Lake was honored to receive a donation from the estate of Peter Bartók of an extensive collection of personal items that belonged to Béla Bartók. We are planning to exhibit the Bartók Collection at the Trudeau Building, in the future expanded museum.

Visiting the Bartók Cabin

Located in the village of Saranac Lake, the Bartók Cabin is privately owned.

Historic Saranac Lake oversees the building and shows it to visitors by appointment.

As of the Sumer of 2023, the cabin is temporarily closed for maintenance.

Please stay tuned to our website for updates:
www.historicsaranaclake.org

OUR MISSION

*Historic Saranac Lake
is a not-for-profit
architectural preservation
organization that captures and
presents local history
from our center at the
Saranac Laboratory Museum.*

BÉLA BARTÓK

AND THE BARTÓK CABIN IN SARANAC LAKE



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Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

was one of the greatest composers of the twentieth century. One of the first ethnomusicologists, Bartók studied the folk music of his native Hungary and the surrounding region. He incorporated elements of Eastern European folk music into his modern compositions.

In 1945 the great composer spent the last summer of his life in Saranac Lake, writing two pieces, his Third Piano Concerto and Viola Concerto. Sixty years later, Bartók's reputation has soared, and the cabin on Riverside Drive where he stayed has been saved from near collapse.

Bartók was sent by his doctors to Saranac Lake for the summer of 1943, ill with polycythemia, a form of leukemia.

That summer Bartók stayed with Mrs. Margaret Sageman, who owned a large cure cottage at 32 Park Avenue (now 63 Park Ave.) and lived in a smaller bungalow behind it. In less than two months there, Bartók composed his Concerto for Orchestra. He returned to the Sageman Cottage in 1944.

In the summer of 1945, the Bartóks moved into a four-room cabin on Riverside Drive, renting it for \$15 a month from Maks and Ida Haar. They inscribed in the guest book: "We are happy indeed to stay in this wonderful quiet place."

It is not known when the rustic cabin was built, though it seems likely to have been a summer curing facility for tuberculosis



patients when the house was a cure cottage called Balsam Manor. No historic photos of the house show the cabin, though it may have been present when they were taken.

Bartók described the cabin as "a small makeshift place" and "a hovel or hut." It was very simply furnished "with two cots, a small table, chairs that are gone long ago," and no piano, according to their son, Peter. The composer brought with him "a minimum of necessities, two kinds of manuscript paper (one for pencil, one for India ink) and writing instruments."

In these plain rooms, Bartók wrote his last two works. His wife, Ditta used the Rudolph Wurlitzer studio upright piano next door at the Levy's house at 93 Riverside Drive (now 68). The piano is now in possession of Historic Saranac Lake.

Bartók wrote about the cabin in a letter to Peter on July 7, calling it "very quiet, but very simple. ... the bath water must be heated in a stove. ... The ice-box must be fed real, natural ice." These comments were high praise from Bartók, who greatly valued quiet, simplicity and closeness to nature.

His son Peter observed, "my father was obviously contented; his surroundings were as spartan as the interior of a Hungarian peasant cottage -- a reminder of a world with such fond associations for him." Here, wrote Peter, "he found the peace and tranquility suitable for composing."



A page from the manuscript of Béla Bartók's Viola Concerto, composed in Saranac Lake. Reprint of music and photo of Béla Bartók courtesy of Peter Bartók, Bartók Records.