

Media Release

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HISTORIC SARANAC LAKE RECEIVES DONATION OF BÉLA BARTÓK'S PERSONAL EFFECTS

Saranac Lake, NY, March 15, 2022 — Historic Saranac Lake (HSL) announced that the Saranac Laboratory Museum has received an important donation — a collection of personal effects that once belonged to Béla Bartók.

Widely regarded as one of the greatest composers in human history, Bartók spent the last three summers of his life in Saranac Lake, in the Adirondack Mountains of Northern New York. HSL maintains the cabin where Bartók stayed the year of his death, in 1945, and shows it to the public by appointment.

The collection was a gift from the estate of Béla's second son, Peter Bartók, who died in December of 2020. Peter visited the cabin in Saranac Lake many years ago, when it had fallen to ruin and was slated for demolition. Thanks to his support, and the efforts of numerous volunteers, the cabin was restored.

Archivist/Curator, Chessie Monks-Kelly is working to rehouse and catalog the donation, which includes shoes, dress clothing, a snippet of music written in Bartók's hand, a pair of his spectacles, and more. Monks-Kelly said, "These items can help us make a very personal connection to Bartók."

Bartók was an avid collector of the melodies of ancient Europe and one of the founders of ethnomusicology. He traveled the countryside of rural Eastern Europe, recording songs in peasant villages. He notated Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Ukrainian, and Bulgarian folk music. He also collected melodies in Moldavia, Transylvania, Algeria, and Turkey.

During WWII, Hungary joined the Axis Powers. Béla's anti-fascist views were well known, and his wife Ditta was Jewish. They fled the Nazis to New York City. Bartók came to Saranac Lake hoping the change of climate would boost his health. Saranac Lake was well-known as a destination for victims of tuberculosis. Bartók died of leukemia in September of 1945, shortly after returning to New York City from Saranac Lake.

“We are certain that this donation will bring new attention to the important legacy of Bartók and his time here in Saranac Lake,” explained Executive Director, Amy Catania. “Bartók devoted his life to preserving diverse cultures of Eastern Europe. Now, the museum is honored to preserve his last few belongings. With this pair of shoes that fled the Holocaust, we remember Bartók, and we contemplate the incredible beauty and enormous tragedy of Ukraine and its neighbors.”

The gift coincides with a new initiative to expand the HSL’s Saranac Laboratory Museum. The organization recently purchased a neighboring historic building, the former home and medical office of Dr. E. L. Trudeau, for expansion of the museum to establish a two-building campus that tells the broader story of the Saranac Lake region. “We are absolutely thrilled to accept the donation, and we look forward to displaying the items in the new museum,” said Catania. A reception is planned later in the spring to celebrate the new acquisition.

HSL is conducting a capital campaign to support the museum expansion. Over \$3.8 million has been raised to-date toward the total project goal of \$5.2 million. A special naming opportunity has been announced to support the care and exhibition of the Bartók collection, public programs about Bartók, and the ongoing maintenance of the Bartók Cabin. Donations can be made at historicsaranaclake.org/the-bartok-fund.

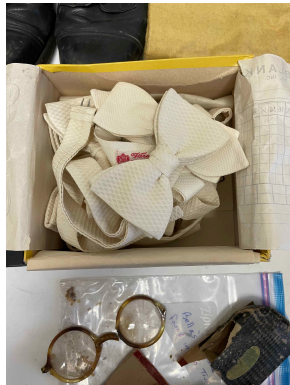
About Historic Saranac Lake and the Saranac Laboratory Museum

Historic Saranac Lake is a not-for-profit architectural preservation organization that works to preserve and present area history and architecture to build a stronger community from their center at the Saranac Laboratory Museum. The Saranac Laboratory Museum is open year-round, Tuesday - Saturday, from 10am to 5pm.

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The Saranac Laboratory Museum



Béla Bartók's Concert Shoes, bow ties, glasses, collars, medal, cufflinks. HSL Collection



Béla, Ditta, and Peter Bartók in Saranac Lake. From My Father by Peter Bartók