



Ravensworth

A first glance at Ravensworth's pillared front portico with the fluted columns and ornamented pediment, brings to mind a plantation of the old south. The house has a magnificent setting, overlooking the lake and surrounded by five acres of landscaped lawns and mature trees.

Visions of sashaying ladies in long swaying hoop skirts and of mint juleps served from silver trays carried by white-gloved servants, instantly spring to mind. And indeed, Ravensworth was originally built for entertaining, garden parties, and the wonderful, carefree summer life carried on by its wealthy American owners.

In 1897 General Charles Lane Fitzhugh selected a Cincinnati Ohio firm of architects to draw up plans for his summer residence in Cobourg Canada.

Ravensthorpe

OPENING PHOTO: The sweeping staircase ascends to a large landing beautifully lit by an arched window. The harbour scene wallpaper is an original decoration.

RIGHT: A pure delight for any young lady. The columned Corinthian-style white tiled fireplace and mantel is an attractive example of an original feature found in most rooms of the house.

BELOW TOP: The beautifully decorated living room is the most welcoming of all the rooms in the house. The crystal chandelier is original to the house, as is the medallion and the ornate decorative cornice which encircles the ceiling.

BELOW BOTTOM: The perfect selection for a sun-room—cool, cheerful, comfortable wicker.



General Fitzhugh had been a U.S. Civil War general and was a steel company owner and magnate. He and his family visited in Cobourg on business trips to the Marmora iron mines. In early days the town had a thriving American colony and an active social life. The hotel accommodation was described as the best between Toronto and Montreal. Cobourg was said to dispense the "world's second highest ozone content in its air"! Great for the health.

Forty-eight pages of specifications, detailing fifteen categories of material and labour, produced a beautiful, spacious, perfectly proportioned Neo Classical Revival style "summer cottage" constructed of rows of solid brick with a stucco covering.

Named after a Fitzhugh family castle in England, Ravensworth had a twin house in a neighbouring easterly family home called simply, East House. Stories abound of the former lifestyles in the homes.

At the time General Fitzhugh was drawing up plans for Ravensworth, he was also convincing his newly-married youngest son to live in Canada. Agreeing, the son and his bride left their house plans with the General to be executed during Ravensworth's construction.

Being a practical businessman, General Fitzhugh simply ordered up two of everything and when the son and wife later arrived in Canada, they were astounded to discover their newly-built house was identical to their father's home. In later years the son admitted to liking the house plan better than his original one. The East House remained a Fitzhugh summer home until it tragically burnt to the ground Christmas Day 1976.

Ravensthorpe was sold to a friend of the family in 1923. It became a full-time family home when it sold again in 1948. It changed hands once more before the current owners purchased the house in 1973. Since that time, Ravensworth has been well cared for with total upgrading of all systems. Major drainage and tiling around the exterior of the house cured basement water level problems which had persisted. Sympathetic restoration and complete maintenance carried on by dedicated, knowledgeable owners continues to secure the survival of this beautiful home.

The modern era has done away with the dozen or so domestics who earlier accompanied their family to the north in the summers and ran the household. The separate coach house for the servants, the gardener's home, and the horse stables, all still standing, have long ago been put to more practical use as attractive private homes. The large vault in the basement, said to have been storage for expensive whiskey during prohibition, and the wine cellar with a capacity of 700 bottles, see more limited use in today's world.

The interior of this large imposing house is equally as impressive as the exterior. With impeccable taste the current owners managed to retain the gracious grandeur of Ravensworth, while at the same time creating a liveable, comfortable, active home for themselves, and their growing family of four young adults.

The house obviously is a place that loves parties and good times—it's in the atmosphere. And the family of six doesn't let Ravensworth down. From the heated swimming pool overlooking the lake to the billiard table in the basement 'wreck room' to the 'junk room' on the third floor, the house rings with life.

Surely a tribute to the ozone in the air! □



ABOVE: In 1920 a richly paneled pine library was carved by two craftsmen over a one-year period. The library is said to be a replica of a 1600's English drawing room. The work is marvellously ornate particularly the fireplace breast. The owners are avid collectors of a variety of items for example the miniature brass candlesticks on the mantel.

LEFT: The spacious dining room ensures elegant entertaining. Sumptuous draperies complement baronial furnishings. The imported French tapestry wallcovering is an original decoration. At one end is a bay window intimate eating area and at the other (not shown) is a columned white tiled fireplace with a mantel collection of china figurines. Wall sconces softly light the room.



