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BLOG: CASTLE IN THE CLOUDS & THE LOON CENTER TOUR

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Castle in the Clouds and The Loon Center Tour

by *Tim Adams, GSA Southern NH University Class of 2014*

The weather wasn't looking good when I started out on my trip North to join in on the Castle in the Clouds tour. While it wasn't raining real hard, it was raining enough, and the roads were wet enough, that I had to keep the wipers on for the majority of the drive. A few times I did turn them to intermittent mode but those times didn't seem to last very long.

When I arrived at the designated parking lot, at least I hoped I was at the correct one, I sat in the car for a few minutes debating if I should start the day carrying an umbrella or just wearing my GSA ball cap. I finally opted for the ball cap and, as I was exiting my car several other GSA members drove in, helping me confirm I was in the right place, or that we were all lost! The sky also started clearing which was nice to see.

We walked over to the Carriage house, passing a gift shop on the way and joined several other GSA members that had arrived earlier.

In short order, we were greeted by Brenda and then she introduced us to Chuck who gave us a bit of history of the Castle in the Clouds.

Now, having grown up in New Hampshire, I've heard people talk of this 'Castle in the Clouds' off and on for years but the closest I had ever come to seeing it was while passing through some of the surrounding grounds on a snowmobile in the dead of winter! Not the time I want to take a look around at the scenery since I was doing the driving and I was riding with several other people on their own sleds.

I did not know the Castle was built between 1912 and 1914 for an estimated cost of one million dollars. While that amount might not sound like much today, back in the early 1900's it was quite a tidy sum. Even more impressive was the fact that it was a retirement home for the owner, Tom G. Plant and, at one time this 'estate' (for the lack of a better term) owned all the land from the Castle to the lake and 2 1/2 miles of lake front property! This little piece of property was over 6,000 acres!

The actual building took, as I mentioned, around 2 years to complete and around 1,000 workers to build! While this might sound strange to you, you must remember most of the transportation for building supplies was still being done with the horse and wagon! Carting the material up the mountain wasn't an easy task, especially when you consider what we have for tools and equipment to use today.

After the talk, we adjourned to a shuttle and a ride up to the Castle itself.

We were greeted with construction vehicles along the way as there is some very serious roof repairs underway. Over the years, several repair projects have been undertaken. The entire goal of this work is to maintain the building as close to the original as possible. This is done by using pictures that exist from shortly after it was built.

The building wasn't quite what I expected but still a huge place for a couple to reside in. The main sitting room had a fantastic view of the lake.

From the old wood burning stove in the kitchen at one end of the building to the, now impossible to get, circular shower, the first floor of the building was very impressive. Most impressive I think was the small hidden room!

Now, when I was much younger I had always wanted to live in a house with a secret room or something similar but I would have wanted something just a bit bigger than this room. Built into the back corner of the main parlor, the room had a chair, a small book shelf and a window. It is believed the former owner would use this room to 'escape' from (annoying?) guests from time to time so he could relax and read a book in quiet. My thought was that it also made a great 'punishment' room for an unruly child. Put them in, close the door and I expect they would quiet down quickly.



The Hidden Room door is clearly visible in the picture.

The second floor had several bathrooms, 2 or 3 more circular showers, several tubs and the master suite. A sitting room, changing room, bed room

and bath room took up much of the western side of the building. With the lake to the west, I can just imagine the fantastic sunsets anybody that lived there must have seen.

There was also a maid's room on this floor while male servants had rooms in the basement.

Two other interesting items we saw was the intercom that had been installed when the building was built and the fire suppression system that was also built into the mansion.



Much of the interior Castle walls were covered in wallpaper. Several, while not original, were of the same color and pattern of the original. It seems that when a wall has needed to be recovered, extreme care is taken while removing the old paper to try and find out what the original paper underneath might have looked like so that they can digitally recreate it and re-paper in the original color and design. Quite a nice way to use modern technology to help keep history alive.

After the tour, several of us walked back down the hill to our starting place while the rest of the group jumped onto the trolley for a ride back. Lunch was then served and we were again given a short talk about the mansion and the property.

We then returned to our cars for a short drive down to the Loon Center, also located in Moultonborough. The Loon Center, while only 20 years old, has a history that goes back 40+ years in helping restore and preserve the natural habitat for the Common Loon here in New Hampshire.

At the Loon Center, we heard a talk on the Common Loon, found on many of the lakes and ponds here in New Hampshire. Forty years ago, there were less than 100 breeding pairs of Loons in New Hampshire. They survey 350 lakes in New Hampshire and all of them have at least one nesting pair on it. Quite an improvement even if it is slow. Work like this doesn't happen overnight.

If you kayak, you might have seen some of the nesting platforms that this organization places in many of the lakes and ponds of New Hampshire. The primary reason for this is if a nesting couple builds a nest on shore, predatory animals may find it and make it unsafe to raise the young. By adding the nesting platform, even if it's in the same area as the original nest, it's out on the water and a bit off shore and covered so eagles would have a harder time seeing the young.

The young don't spend much time on the nest after they hatch, opting instead for the water where the adults will pass them fish for their meals. At the beginning, the young need to learn how to turn the fish 90 degrees so it can swallow it. Not an easy task and the video we saw showed a young loon dropping its meal several times before getting it right.

As they grow they learn how to catch their own meal and so become less dependent on their parents.

Loons are a very solitude nesting bird, keeping other nesting pairs at quite a distance but, as their young reach that point where they are able to feed themselves, the adults seek out others and so you're apt to see more than just a pair at a time.

They migrate, as do many other birds, but their journey is a lot shorter than some as they merely head for the coast and the ocean where they will spend the winter. Some Loons even go north rather than south for the winter. They just need the opened water for a supply of food to survive.

Behind the Loon Center there are several hiking trails and so after the talk and movie, as well as a visit to the gift shop, I took a walk out around their Loon Nesting trail. The trails, as was to be expected after all the rain, were extremely wet and I had to wander off the trail in several places to avoid the puddles. While I was told by a couple of people I met along the way that there were a pair of Loons around the nesting box, I didn't see them. It was a good way to end the day however.

For more pictures, [CLICK HERE](#)



A view of the lake out the main floor window.

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