

THE MILLER'S



HOUSE



The Miller's House was the home of the Morningstar family. **Wilson Morningstar**, a descendant of Loyalists who had emigrated from Pennsylvania at the outbreak of the American Revolution, built the house in the early 1890s for his second wife, **Emma Sutton**. He and Emma had married shortly before he bought the Mill property from the City of St. Catharines in 1883. They had two daughters, **Nora and Jessie**, pictured here with their parents. Upon her marriage, Jessie moved to Georgia, but Nora married David Robson and stayed in the area. After Wilson died in 1933, the Robsons and their two children moved into the house. They continued to live there even after the property was acquired by Ontario Hydro and subsequently by the City of St. Catharines. In 1961 Nora's children **Lorna and Don** took over the house, acting as caretakers for the property. In 1991, Don died from a fall into the gorge. Lorna lived here

until her death in 1993.

The property on which the new house stood was comprised of more than three and one half acres of land. There were also a number of outbuildings on the site. There was a chicken coop behind the garage where the large millstones are now. The original barn, which stabled a team of horses, a buggy, a hay wagon and mow, was situated where the willow trees are now. At one end of the barn, there was a pig pen. The Morningstars always kept two pigs which they butchered in the fall for meat. They made liverwurst, sausage, bacon, *saus* (jellied pigs' knuckles) and *Schwanz* (pigs' tails) and smoked some of the meat as well. They also churned their own butter and traded any extra butter and eggs for groceries at Sherwood's Grocery Store on James Street in St. Catharines. At one point there was a **cider mill** and a **shoddy mill** located on the grounds. The shoddy mill produced stuffing for furniture from old clothing and scrap material. Before the fabric was put through the shoddy machine all buttons had to be removed. One of Lorna Robson's childhood memories are of boxes of buttons throughout the house. The **icehouse** was probably built at the same time as the house. Before the Friends of Morningstar Mill rebuilt it all that remained of the icehouse was its original foundation, from which they discovered that it had had two levels. Access to the ground level, where food was kept frozen in ice, was by a door and to the lower level, where food was only kept cold, was by the exterior hatch and steps.

The house itself appears to have been constructed in stages, the centre section first, followed by the north and south wings, respectively. Its style is that of simple carpenter gothic revival, in the Andrew Jackson Downing, Country Cottage tradition. The boards for the construction of its walls (known as "balloon framing"), as well as the finishing clapboard were prepared at Morningstar's sawmill, but planed elsewhere. The house was built by a master carpenter and his helper who drove each day from Thorold. The carpenter was paid \$1.50 a day and his helper \$1.00 a day and they ate all of their meals at the house. In 1905, Wilson Morningstar purchased a generator which provided electricity to the house and to the mill. By 1919, a pump was providing the house with running water. Restoration of the house was begun several years ago with the help of the John Howard Society of Niagara. Since then, the Friends of Morningstar Mill have continued the work under the guidance of the City of St. Catharines.

The interior of the house and its furnishings have been restored to reflect the lifestyle of an upper middle class family during the 1920's and '30s, a period during which the Morningstars were at their most prosperous. The **kitchen**, with its large wood-fired **cook stove**, is the first room that you see as you enter the west door. To your left is the **laundry room** which boasts an agitating **washing machine** along with the regular laundering equipment from earlier times. The square hole in the floor covers a cistern that was used to capture rain water from the eavestroughs. A water ram, a type of pump powered by water, was also used to fill this cistern from the creek. Cistern water was used for laundry and other cleaning. Drinking water was provided by a well and there was also a spring located not far from the house which provided "special" drinking water. It was not until 1927 that drinking water was supplied to the house from the St Catharines Water Works Commission Water Treatment plant located next door. Note also the large foot-operated **butter churn** and a **fruit press** and **separator** that were very modern for their day. In the

far-right corner of the kitchen is the **pantry**. Its **dumb waiter** was constructed with a rope, pulley and iron counterweight. Made of black walnut and built by Wilson Morningstar, it was used to lower food to the cellar to keep it cool during the summer months, as well as to bring preserves and such up to the pantry as they were needed.

In the **dining room** you will notice an extra hole in the ceiling above the stove. This was used to capture excess heat and send it to the upper floor. The **family tree** has always hung beside the stove. Note that the legs of the small, white, slat-back **nursing rocker** with the rush seat, circa 1840, are fitted over the rockers. At the south end of the house is the **parlour**. Its large pocket door was used to close off this room during the winter in order to save heat. Of particular interest is the **empire side chair** with its blue needlepoint seat. This chair has been dated to 1840 and so was likely brought with the family when they moved into the house. The oak dining chairs in this room are relatively modern. The **sewing room** is to the left of the parlour.



The dining table dates to 1890, but the chairs and desk-bookcase are of a later period, likely the 1920s.

As you go up **the stairs** you may notice the central vacuum plugs. The central vacuum was not, of course, a convenience of the early twentieth century but it does enable us to more effectively protect the furniture and a variety of fragile fabrics from damage by dust and other environmental dangers. The two rooms at the top of the stairs have changed in use over the years. The **yellow bedroom** was originally a **morning room** where the family would have had their tea and toast. It was converted into a bedroom and used as such from the 1920s on. The painted white bed in this room, with its knob and spool-turned decoration on the headboard and footboard, dates to approximately 1880. The **quilting frame** that you see there holds a quilt in progress that is appropriate to the period. While the Morningstar family was relatively affluent during the 1920s and `30s, they were still of a generation that believed in self-sufficiency and abhorred waste. They therefore continued to make their own quilts from scratch. The sheep raised on the property provided the wool for the batting and pieces cut from worn or outgrown clothing and linens were fashioned into popular patterns of the time such as Nine Patch, Dresden Plate and Shirt Tail. The quilting Bee was most often held in winter when outdoor chores were less onerous. It not only provided a time to entertain neighbours and friends, catch up on news, develop sewing skills and express a woman's creativity, it also produced a source of warmth and comfort for the family. During the Mill's Open Houses, visitors may find one of the Friends of Morningstar Mill working on a quilt; other times one of these quilts-in-progress is usually on the frame. The original **bathroom** was in the south-east corner of the yellow bedroom. The room where the bathroom fixtures are displayed now was originally **Wilson Morningstar's workroom** where he designed and worked on his various inventions. The back stairs allowed him access to this room without his having to enter the main house. (A sample of the house's original knob and tube wiring is on the wall of this room.) The middle bedroom was likely the original **master bedroom**. It houses a walnut bed of late Eastlake style with a high headboard that was made in the 1890s. Two of a set of six walnut **dining chairs** with caned seats of late Eastlake style which date to around 1890 are also in this room. The other four are in the room at the south end of the hallway.

Towards the south end of the house you will notice the stove pipes and the extra vent hole that brought heat from the dining room stove to the upper floor. In the room at the far end of the **hallway** you will find a small **drop-leaf table**, circa 1865. Its drawer is constructed with hand-made dovetail joints. The **box**, with its sloped hinged lid for writing, is said to have been made by Wilson Morningstar and used for keeping accounts. By the 1920s, this room had been converted from a bedroom to a **sitting room** for a boarder. The Morningstar family took in boarders, such as the local school teacher who taught at the school up the road. (Its foundation is still visible.) The boarder would have slept in what was originally the **small bedroom**, now the Mill's office. When the teacher was not there, travelling artists would sometimes rent this room, along with the small bedroom, on a temporary basis. Many paid, at least partially, with their paintings, some of which may be seen at the St. Catharines Lock 3 museum in St Catharines.

THE GARDENS

Carol Martin, in her book *A History of Canadian Gardening*, tells us that during the nineteenth century government publications were encouraging Ontarians to plant gardens: "Landscaping and kitchen gardening, we fear, do not secure the attention to which their importance entitles them. A well laid out and carefully cultivated garden ranks among the highest efforts of artistic skill." By the time Wilson Morningstar built his house, the people of the province appear to have taken the government's words to heart and were seeking information on how to cultivate new varieties of flowers in their home gardens.

In 1919, Isabella Preston played a vital role in supplying these demands when she introduced her first hybrid lily to the public. Preston's first hybridized lily, *Lilium x princeps*, which she developed while working at the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa, caught on quickly and in the following decades she developed new cultivars of roses, lilacs, Siberian irises and columbine, all of which could conceivably have found their way into the Morningstar's gardens.

The present-day gardens are meant to reflect the 1920s and 1930s, the years in which many of these plants were developed and the period during which the Morningstar family would have enjoyed the luxury of time spent cultivating flower beds. However, while specimens of those early cultivars may still be



present in special collections, most of the plants available to us today are hybridized versions of the originals. Therefore, some of the plants in our gardens, like the columbine, are actually descendants of those varieties that would have been here during the 1920s and '30s. Of course, many are just as they would have been then. For instance, Russian sage harks back to the 19th century and is indigenous to North America and the Joe Pye weed is native to the surrounding countryside. Only one or two, like the Bonica rose in the south garden, would not have been here during the period in question. They were selected because they bear a close resemblance to the flowers that would have been planted, but are far more suited to the conditions in which they must survive today.

Although we have tried to remain faithful to the period in terms of the plants that would have been available to the family, we have not attempted to duplicate the gardens that were here during these two decades. Growing conditions on any property change considerably over a span of 80 years, a fact that is especially true of this property where mature trees now shade many of the areas that would have supported sun-loving plants then. As well, our criteria for plant selection needed to include an ability to thrive without the daily attention enjoyed by the garden of an inhabited residence, as well as a tolerance for the challenging conditions of a tourist site.

As you will note, the gardens are very much in transition. Their restoration, begun in 2006, is a five-year project. During 2006 we designed and planted the cottage garden at the south and south-east of the house. We also planted several clusters of spring bulbs in what will be the shady garden on the north side. We hope to plant this garden, as well as a rock garden on the east side of the house by the end of the 2007 season. Before the project is complete we plan to add an herb garden, as well as amenities such as a seating area in a walled garden at the back porch, a walking path, and trellises, arbours and urns appropriate to the period. Of course, gardens are never really finished and these are no exception. Even after five years, we are certain that there will still be a space for just one more plant.

The information which you will find below offers a brief history or some interesting facts about some of the perennials that we have planted or plan to plant. We hope that you enjoy your time in the gardens and that you'll visit us sometime to see how they are progressing.

The house is open to the public during the spring and fall Open House weekends, as well as most Tuesdays and Thursdays throughout the nice weather. We hope you'll visit us. This information was produced by the Friends of Morningstar Mill with the support of the City of St. Catharines.

THE MORNINGSTARS' GARDENS

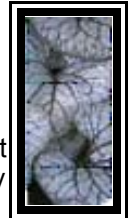


The **wrought iron urns** that frame the front entrance to the Morningstar home reflect a time in which gardeners were experimenting with new cultivars that had become available since World War I. At the same time they were also still using the flowers and ornamental grasses favoured by the Victorians. Thus our urns combine typical Victorian grasses (such as striped Japanese maize or dracena) and trailers (such as ivy or vinca) with newer varieties of annuals that had become popular by the 1930s, like coleus, geraniums, pansies and begonias. **The gardens on either side of the front steps** are also planted with a mixture of Victorian favourites and their more modern cultivars. These include annuals and perennials which thrive in the partial shade provided by the open canopy of trees along the western portion of the property. Among the perennials are ferns, various lilies, ornamental grasses, Solomon's seal, yucca, garden astilbe (false spirea), lungwort pulmonaria) and hydrangeas. Even the **pot on the side porch**, which spends the winter in the house, contains house plants commonly grown during that time; these include schefflera (umbrella plant), spider plant and philodendron.



The shady garden is centred on the north end of the house. It also extends toward the east and the west where sun in the morning and afternoon allow us to grow plants that do well in partial shade. Early in the spring, if the deer, squirrels and other local wildlife have not gotten there first, visitors should see spring bulbs blooming in this garden. There are plantings of four large circles made up of pink and white **tulips**, "Dutch Master" **daffodils** (an old fashioned yellow single flower), blue **muscari** and **allium** "Bulgaricum." There are also two smaller plantings of **scilla** "Siberica" in the garden.

In May and June pink and white **bleeding hearts**, **coral bells**, **columbine** and **brunnera** (Siberian bugloss), with its delicate blue flowers, come into bloom. **Brunnera macrophylla**, also known as false forget-me-not, is a member of the borage family. Plants belonging to this family can be found everywhere in the world except extreme climates such as the Arctic and the Sahara Desert. As we might expect, this particular species is native to Siberia. Brunnera likes a moist, shady location and is valued, not only for the brilliance of its flowers, but for the fine ground cover provided by its attractive foliage.



By late summer and early autumn visitors will enjoy the large white bell-shaped flowers of **Hosta plantaginea** (August lily) and the purple blooms of **Hosta lancifolia**. Although hostas have only recently become popular in home gardens, they appeared as early as 1712 in a catalogue of exotic plants published by a German botanist named Kaempfer. Hosta plantaginea is the oldest known hosta in Europe and Hosta lancifolia is reputed to be the first hosta to be grown in North America. The **toad lily**, with its orchid-like flowers in various shades of red and purple, should also be in bloom during this time.



The foliage of **brunnera**, **goutweed** and **ferns** will provide interest throughout the growing season. The oldest known fern, native to Ontario, is the **Interrupted Fern** (*Osmunda interrupta*) which has the distinction of having the oldest fossil record in the world; it is, 200 million years old. It gets its name from the fact that its larger leaflets are interrupted by smaller, darker, fertile ones partway up the frond. **The cinnamon fern** (*Osmunda cinnamomea*), so-called because of the colour and shape of its central fronds, should not be confused with the **Ostrich fern** whose upright fertile fronds turn black late in the season. Other common ferns native to this province are **wood ferns**, also known as shield ferns.

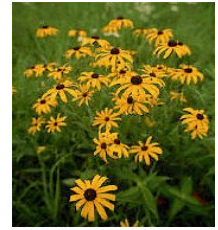


Cinnamon Fern

THE COTTAGE GARDEN

The garden which faces south and south-east is home to the sun-loving plants frequently found in the cottage garden of the 1920s and '30s. They tend to be bold bloomers which tolerate the dry, hot conditions of a sunny garden. Some interesting facts about the flowers in this garden, most of which are old favourites, are provided below.

Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) is a member of the sunflower family and is commonly found in fields and on roadsides all over North America. Originally a wildflower native to the eastern United States, it was first described in 1753 by Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus. He gave it its botanical name "Rudbeckia" after Olav Rudbeck and his son, professors at the University of Uppsala, and "hirta" from the Latin rough or hairy, referring to its leaves.



Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*): Also a member of the sunflower family, this plant attracts bees, birds and butterflies, especially Monarchs. An old-fashioned prairie flower that grows wild on roadsides and in fields, it blooms from July to September and is found exclusively in North America. *Echinacea* comes from the Greek *echinos* meaning hedgehog or sea urchin, referring to the prickly scales of the dried seed head. Herbalists also use parts of the plant to prepare a medicinal preparation.

Lavender (*Lavender augustifolia*) has been used since ancient times. The Egyptians utilized it for mummification and the Romans brought it to England as early as 77 A.D. In the United States and Canada it was the Shakers who first grew lavender. They established herb farms upon their arrival from England and sold their herbal and medicinal products to the those outside their community. Lavender is drought tolerant and its scent makes it a welcome addition to a cottage garden.



Shasta Daisy (*chrysanthemum superbum*)

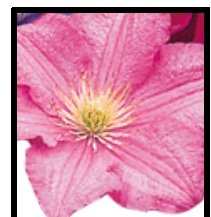
Although it originated in Europe, Luther Burbank, a well-known plant hybridizer from San Francisco, is credited with developing the shasta daisy as we know it today. Named after the snow capped Mount Shasta in Northern California, this hardy perennial has since naturalized throughout North America. Shasta daisies are drought-tolerant and unattractive to deer, which makes them ideal for this garden.

Bee Balm (*Monarda didyma*), also known as Oswego Tea, Bergamot and Horsemint, is native to eastern North America. Its genus was named for Nicolas Monardes, a 16th century Spanish botanist, while the name Oswego Tea came from an early explorer named John Bartram who found settlers near Oswego, N.Y. using its leaves for a tea. The name Bergamot comes from the Italian "Citrus bergamia," a tree the scent of which is used in aromatherapy. Its common name refers to its attractiveness to bees. It attracts butterflies and hummingbirds as well.

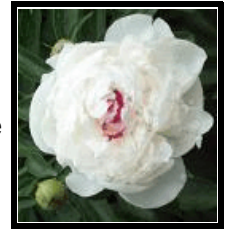


Silver Mound Artemisia (*A. schmidtiana*) is one of many aromatic plants in a family which has grayish foliage and includes mugwort, sagebrush, tarragon, and wormweed. Used mainly to provide contrast to the brightly coloured flowers of a cottage garden, it is thought to have been named either for Artemis, goddess of the moon or Artemesia, a botanist and medical researcher of the fourth century B.C. and sister of the Greek king Mausolus.

Clematis (*C. virginiana*) The varieties in our garden were chosen for their hardiness as well as their availability during the first part of the 20th century. Developed in England in 1858, *Jackmanii*, with its dark purple flowers and green stamens, is the oldest large-flowered cultivar. It is combined here with two pink clematis: *Ernest Markham*, named after its English developer in the 1930s, and *Comtesse de Bourchaud*, introduced in France in 1900.



Peony (*Paeonia lactiflora*) was among the first flowers that colonists brought to North America. Its name is derived from the Latin *paean*, a hymn of praise to a helping god, and it is associated with healing in the legends and folklore of many cultures. Peonies have been cultivated for more than 2000 years as medicinal and ornamental plants. They are long-lived (often for more than 50 years), hardy, drought-tolerant and deer-resistant. The variety in this garden is called "Ice Cream" for its creamy white flowers.



Obedient Plant (*Physostegia virginiana*) is so named because its snapdragon-like flowers will stay where you put them when twisted around the stem. Also known as false dragonhead, this herbaceous perennial is native to eastern North America, grows two to four feet tall, depending upon the variety, and blooms all summer. Although it spreads through an underground root system, it is less invasive than some other plants such as veronica.

Sedum, also known as stonecrop, is a succulent that grows throughout the Northern Hemisphere. Its name derives from the Latin *sedeo* meaning "I sit" which refers to its habit of covering the rocks among which it grows. *Stonecrop* describes the greyish cast of its foliage which appears to be growing out of the stones themselves. Sedum is also referred to in old herbals as English mouse tail, wall pepper and old man's pepper. We have planted "Autumn Joy" for its late-season display of blooms.



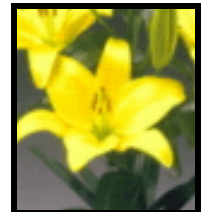
Yarrow (*Achillea millifolium*) is associated with Achilles, hero of Homer's *Iliad*, whose men purportedly used yarrow plants to staunch the flow of blood from their wounds. According to Greek mythology yarrow plants were supposed to have sprung from some metal scrapings off Achilles's spear. Millifolium means thousand-leafed and refers to the plant's fern-like foliage. Yarrow can grow as high as three feet and blooms throughout the summer. Flowers can be white, red, pink or yellow.

Floribunda Rose "Bonica" was developed in 1958 and it is the only flower that is not appropriate to the time period of this garden. An exception was made in this instance because "Bonica" resembles the type of rose that might have been grown during the 1920s and '30s, but it is far more hardy and disease resistant, and therefore better suited to survive given the conditions in which it must grow here. It should not be confused with the more recent cultivar "Bonica 82."



Russian Sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) grows four to five feet tall and blooms in late summer and fall, creating a backdrop of silvery-green and lavender-blue haze in the garden. It is hardy, cold and drought-tolerant and thrives in almost any soil. Reports of the origin of its name and region are conflicting: some horticulturists claim it is native to Pakistan, others say it came from Afghanistan. And it is said to be named for either B.A. Perovski, who was governor of Orenburg, a Russian city or V. A. Perovskia, a 19th Century Russian general.

Asiatic Lily (*Lilium lancifolium*) Although lilies have been cultivated since at least 2800 B.C., the Asiatic species did not reach North America until the 1800s. Hybridized versions of these, such as the one developed by Isabella Preston, were not available until the 1920s. One of the Asiatics that you will see in our gardens is a hybridized short variety suitable for pots and borders. The pink is called "Mr. Duckling" and the yellow ones are "Butter Pixie."



Tickseed (*Coreopsis lanceolata*) The common name of this perennial comes from its small, dark seeds, which have a tiny hook suggestive of an insect called the tick. Coreopsis flowers all summer and cutting it back in late August will cause it to bloom well into the fall. Native to Eastern North America, coreopsis does well in dry conditions; in fact natural stands of the plant may be found on roadsides in some areas.



The back of the house before the addition of the rock and kitchen gardens

THE KITCHEN GARDENS

The kitchen gardens are located around the back porch of the house and are planted in containers. Container gardens were common during Victorian times. They were used to grow flowers, condiments for the kitchen and herbs that were used for medicinal purposes. Our containers are made of pine and painted green on the outside, just as they would have been during the period in which the Morningstar family lived in this house.

A few of the plants in these gardens are tender perennials, but the majority are annuals that the Morningstars would have started from seed. This would have given them (and gives us) the option of growing different herbs and condiments each year. For instance, if the crop of dill yielded enough seeds for two years use, another herb would be planted in its place the next spring.

Here are some of the herbs which might have been grown in these containers, depending upon the year:

Basil: An annual, it was used centuries ago as protection against witchcraft and purported to repel flies; it was also exchanged by couples in Italy as a symbol of love and fidelity. It was brought from Europe to Newfoundland around the 1600s. In these gardens, basil might have been grown for use in butters and vinegars, soups, stews and salads.

Chives: A perennial, native to China, chives were used very early on in Europe before they found their way to North America. A member of the onion family they would have been used as seasoning in a variety of dishes.

Dill: An annual, and like basil, used as a charm against witchcraft during the Middle Ages, dills' seeds were known as "Meeting House Seeds" by early American settlers, who apparently munched on them during long Sunday sermons. However, the Morningstars were more likely to have used dill for pickling or to flavour fish.

Rosemary: A tender perennial of Mediterranean origin, rosemary has been used as an aromatic as well as a culinary herb. It was also a symbol for remembrance and as such has often been included in wedding bouquets, carried at funerals and used in church decorations for festivals.

Sage: A perennial, native to the eastern Mediterranean region, sage has always been an important culinary herb. Before the use of hops, it was a staple in brewing. It was also a medicinal herb used for fevers and colds. Its use, by the twentieth century, was predominantly as a condiment in the flavouring of foods such as sausages and poultry stuffings.

THE ROCK GARDEN

The rock garden is an extension of the kitchen gardens and is used to grow plants that require very well-drained soil and thrive in dry conditions. Many of these plants were also used for household purposes at one time, and, like those in the kitchen garden, they may vary from year to year.

Some of the herbs that do well in a rock garden are **ajuga** or bugleweed, used to produce a black dye for wool as far back as colonial times; **feverfew**, purported to be an insect repellent and, if that didn't work, to relieve insect bites; perennial **thyme**, at one time considered an important medicinal herb; and **sedum**, once thought to ward off lightning strikes if planted near the house.

