



## BROOKFIELD KINDERGARTEN

### ILLINOIS HOME WINS '21 KRISTEN VISSER HISTORICAL PRESERVATION AWARD

**T**he William Drummond-designed Brookfield Kindergarten (1911) in Brookfield, Illinois, is the winner of the 2021 Kristen Visser Historical Preservation Award. The biannual award has been presented since 2007 by the board of directors of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy.

The Brookfield Kindergarten is owned by Nick and Lauren Witkowski. Drummond designed the private-school building for Avery and Queene (Ferry) Coonley, of Riverside, Illinois. The couple were early advocates of early childhood education.

Nick bought the house in December 2017, while it was in foreclosure proceedings, as a wedding gift for his wife-to-be, Lauren Waninski. The couple lives there with their daughter.

The T-shaped Brookfield Kindergarten consists of a single

story and a loft, with overall dimensions of 50-by-61 feet. The exterior is white stucco with brown trim.

The building was converted to residential use in the 1940s, when a two-car garage also was added. Since purchasing the home, the Witkowskis have completed a thorough restoration.

According to their award submission: “The Brookfield Kindergarten is important to us and our families. By preserving its history, we hope to contribute to the preservation of American architecture and bring further awareness to the Prairie Style found throughout Chicagoland and the Midwest.”

“The restoration, adaptive reuse and historical preservation

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# WRITINGS

WRITINGS is a semi-annual publication of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy Inc.

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More than 100 tons of limestone were used in the mirror-image version of the Seth Peterson Cottage that Joe O'Donnell and his wife, Kelly, built.

## CLOSER TO HOME: IOWA COUPLE BUILDS OWN PETERSON COTTAGE

By Brian R. Hannan

**B**y a show of hands: Who's had the same idea? Given enough land and budget, would you continue to book time at the Seth Peterson Cottage — or would you build your own?

For Iowa couple Joe and Kelly O'Donnell, the answer was clear. Following an April 2016 stay, they knew just what to do with a 60-acre plot they owned near their St. Donatus home.

"We always wanted to do the Peterson cottage," Joe said. "Right from the get-go."

Work on what they've since dubbed the O'Donnell Stone Cottage began in late 2018, with the installation of an access road. Construction began in early 2019 and wrapped up nearly two years later.

At approximately 1,100 square feet, the cottage is bigger than the 880-square-foot Peterson cottage — notably with a larger bedroom,



kitchen and bathroom with a laundry area. Furnishings have been kept to a minimum, Joe said, to avoid a feeling of clutter.

"We want to make sure that we keep it very open — and fluid."

**Editor's Note:** See more photos of the O'Donnell Stone Cottage on pages 6-7. It is available for overnight stays at: [odonnellscottage.com](http://odonnellscottage.com).

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Kermit Traska

**U**rrah! The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has issued new guidelines for state properties, allowing us to begin limited indoor tours of the Seth Peterson Cottage.

Tours were canceled last April. In October, we were able to partially reopen tours with exterior-only viewings.

A few people walked up each month to view the cottage, with lots of people peering through windows to check out the interior details.

Join us for a guided tour of the cottage on the second Sunday of each month, from 1 to 4:00 p.m.

Overnight reservations have remained strong throughout the year after a few cancellations early in the pandemic. Our rental agency has done a superb job providing the extra cleaning necessary to meet the sanitation guidelines for rental facilities. Throughout the pandemic, many people have been able to experience living in a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home for themselves, albeit through a short stay.

Two changes have been made to the board of directors.

At our annual meeting in December, Rachel Lohman was elected. She is the owner of a coffee shop in Door County and brings business acumen to the board.

The other change was to add Marcus Jaeger, the Mirror Lake Association president, as an ex-officio member. The Mirror Lake Association is charged with promoting and improving the physical appearance and well-being of Mirror Lake and protecting its future. He replaces Mark Blakeslee, the outgoing president who served in that position for many years.

Thank you, Mark. Welcome, Rachel and Marcus.

The 2021 Kristin Visser Historical Preservation Award winner is described in this issue of our newsletter. The award is given in recognition of past work in historical preservation of a Wright or Prairie School building in Wisconsin or a contiguous state. There were two worthy applications for the award, making it a difficult decision to choose just one.

A note of thank you goes out to the volunteers who helped during our annual spring cleanup following our April open house.

Tasks included splitting and piling firewood, raking leaves, placing wood chips around the cottage, deep-cleaning inside and updating interior features.

We look forward to another year of making the Seth Peterson Cottage available for overnight stays and monthly open houses. Stop by and say hello. We'd like to show you around as we talk about the cottage, Seth Peterson and Wright.

## MIRROR LAKE STATE PARK REPORT

By Ryder Will, Park Supervisor

**S**pring has arrived in full force at Mirror Lake State Park. We are working to get all the staff on for the summer

and be ready for the influx of visitors. As travel and other restrictions are lifting, more people will be hitting the road for Wisconsin state parks.

Last year was very unusual in a lot of respects, and we saw record numbers of visitors to our parks. Every indication is that 2021 will as busy or even busier than 2020.

All the parks across the state are seeing significant increases in camping reservations, and Mirror Lake is no exception. Camping has been fully booked every weekend since our reservation season began and looks almost completely booked on weekends for the rest of the summer. Weekday camping is seeing a notable increase as well.

We are not yet at the occupancy level of the cottage, but we are staying very busy.

We have a lot of new members on our team operating the park. With the assistance of the returning staff, we will be ready to help our visitors make new memories.

More visitors means more work. Through the hard work of our staff and volunteers, we strive to provide visitors with a safe and enjoyable experience.

We saw a lot of change to our operations in 2020, but our staff was incredibly adaptable and made the best of it. Unfortunately during 2020, we were limited in the amount of work we could do with volunteers.

Mirror Lake has an outstanding group of volunteers, and we missed the chance to work with them. The park certainly is a better place when we can have volunteers with us working to their fullest. We are very excited as we've had more opportunities to work with them in 2021.

As operations guidance continues to change, I will not be able to provide a lot of detail on how we will operate this season.

That being said, I can share a few things.

We are currently open for window service at the visitor center to get visitors their park passes and answer questions.

We also are available by phone at the park office, (608) 254-2333, to answer questions or provide assistance.

Our staff has worked hard this spring to get our facilities up and running. All the campgrounds, shelters, playgrounds and other facilities, including the amphitheater, are open for the season.

Even in the best of times, people find solace and a chance to recharge in nature. Over the last year, we have seen a tremendous number of visitors enjoying the park.

We hope that a visit to Mirror Lake has been a bright spot for people. I encourage you to take time to get out in nature (at Mirror Lake or anywhere else that works for you) and just be in the moment.

I think the design and feel of the Seth Peterson Cottage has always encouraged that connection to nature. I am sure more than a few visitors really needed that connection in the last year.

Thanks to all of you for your support of the cottage. Be safe. We look forward to seeing you in the park.

# 2021 COTTAGE WORK WEEK

ANNUAL PROJECTS REFRESH AND RESTORE COTTAGE FOR ANOTHER SEASONS

By Bill Martinelli

**T**he Seth Peterson Cottage annual work week was held this year from April 11 through April 16. The cool spring weather did not stop our always hardworking group of volunteers from completing the never-ending list of maintenance projects that happen every year.

Our one major project this year was replacing the cedar fascia around the bedroom roof. The corners had become rotten from water penetrating the mitered corners.

Once the old cedar was removed, some rotten sub-fascia was found and replaced with treated lumber to prevent that damage from occurring again.

New cedar trim was installed to make the cottage look new again.

Firewood that was cut, split and stacked outside last fall was moved in to the woodshed. The last of the wood that was cut last spring was split and stacked.

The fireplace stonework was cleaned to remove the past years' soot and smoke.

The stone floor was cleaned, and all the upholstery was shampooed.

A new mattress and box spring were delivered. New brass wall plates were installed on all electrical switches and outlets, and new shades were installed on the table and floor lamps.

These and many more maintenance projects were accomplished to complete another successful work week. 



**Far left:** The woodshed is fully stocked with wood that was cut and split last fall.

**Above and left:** Cedar fascia around the bedroom roof was replaced.

**Middle left:** The cottage floor was cleaned, and the banquette seating upholstery was shampooed. Soot was removed from the fireplace hearth.



## FROM THE GUESTBOOK

Like many before us this season, we booked long ago and had no idea how much we would need an escape. In this beautiful sanctuary, we were able to physically distance from the world yet be completely present with one another, the Wisconsin woods and the timeless Frank Lloyd Wright architectural gifts around us.

Returning home today with our cups full and spirits bright.

**Eric & Meredith**, Edina, Minnesota

When we made this reservation two years ago, little did we know it would be a great off-the-grid break from a pandemic and nonstop election bickering. Hiking in Mirror Lake State Park, canoeing and enjoying the fireplace was awesome! We will be back.

**L & M**, Madison

We booked the cottage three years ago, not knowing what a welcome respite this place would provide from the pandemic and all the other disruptions of 2020. We came to celebrate our seventh wedding anniversary. Immersing ourselves in the great stillness of Mirror Lake via canoe was the perfect healing balm for our weary souls. We spent so much time enjoying the fireplace at the cottage. Such relaxation and a time to reset. So happy that the cottage was preserved. A true retreat.

## Unsigned

Our second stay. A welcome retreat from the pandemic. No TV, no radio. Quiet walks in the woods. Watched the moon rise in the trees. The fires were wonderful. First ice on the lake. The canoe did not seem to be built as an icebreaker, so we stayed on shore. Hate to go home, but our Akita-husky mix awaits at the kennel. Peace!

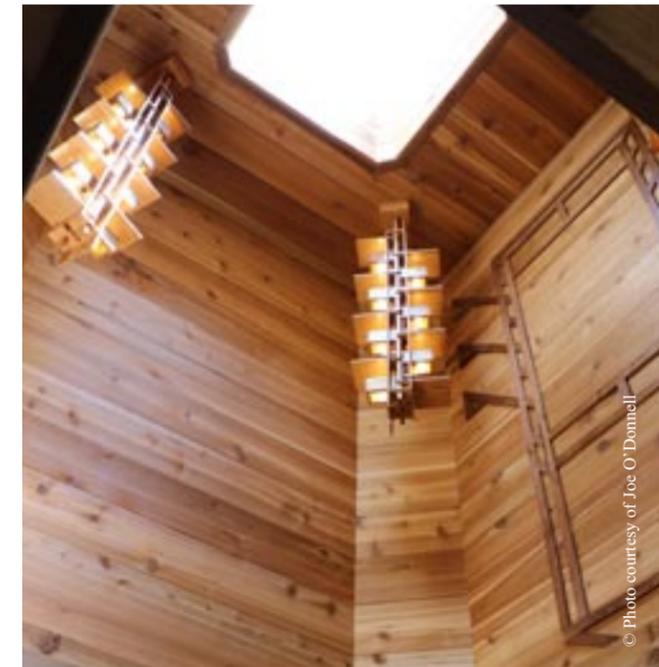
**Norm & Carol**, Orfordville

What a beautiful conclusion to a turbulent year. The evolution of this cottage is an inspiring lesson of family, community and compromise. Sitting at the dining table sipping coffee, I am grateful for the added insulation, in-floor heating and selective double-pane glass that make Seth Peterson Cottage a more efficient and cozier place to stay.

The lake is blanketed in snow; the birds are quiet and the fire crackles. It is magic.

**Jess & Will** 

## MORE PHOTOS: O'DONNELL STONE COTTAGE



**Far left:** The O'Donnell Stone Cottage near Bellevue, Iowa, was inspired by the Seth Peterson Cottage. The 1-bedroom home is situated on a ridge overlooking a scenic valley and is available for overnight stays. See 'Closer to Home' on page 2.

**Left:** The kitchen sky-light



## BROOKFIELD KINDERGARTEN

*continued from page 1*

of the Brookfield Kindergarten will extend into the future. We realize our work will never truly end in our historical preservation of the Brookfield Kindergarten. We are honored to serve as stewards of this great architectural building, which is known as one of Drummond's finest designs."

## About the Witkowskis

Nick is a mechanical engineer who designs heavy truck engines. Lauren is an attorney who volunteers for the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust, giving tours of the Frederick C. and Laura Robie House in Hyde Park, Illinois, and serving as co-captain for the annual Wright Plus Housewalk. 

## MIRROR LAKE ASSOCIATION REPORT

*By Marcus Jaeger, President*

**A**s the newly elected president of the Mirror Lake Association, I am pleased to join the dedicated group of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy.

I follow in the footsteps of the three previous presidents — Jerry Majerus, Waldo Peterson and Mark Blakeslee, as well as many others whose love of Mirror Lake and its rich history has led them to roles in the association.

My wife, Leeandra, and I purchased our Mirror Lake home in 1998 from Jerry and Lois Majerus. They had a close friend who visited several times each year and who also fell in love with the lake and its unique beauty.

Several years later, the home next to Jerry and Lois became available. Their friend joyously purchased it.

The three of them loved to spend time on the water, always picking up any trash along their route. One notable story tells of the ladies canoeing one day and spotting some garbage on the shoreline area near the interstate bridge.

Paddling closer to gather up the "trash," they discovered a sack containing money. Quite a bit of money, as it turned out! They turned all the money over to the authorities and, after a period of time, were called and told that no one had come forth to claim the money. The two women claimed their find. Perhaps I was told the actual amount at one time, but that is lost to me now. I do know that they spent time in Mexico that winter!

That friend of the Majeruses became a trusted friend of our family. My first meeting with her — Audrey Laatsch — occurred as she spread kitty litter under my car's tires after I'd driven it somewhere I shouldn't have. She always kept a bag



**Left:** Audrey Laatsch helped lead the effort to restore and preserve the Seth Peterson Cottage.

of kitty litter for such emergencies, as we do to this day.

Most of you know of Audrey's steadfast, determined drive to save and resurrect the cottage you all so unselfishly care for. As I have become more reflective as I grow older (but not old), by way of introduction, I want to convey to you my connection to the Seth Peterson Cottage.

Like all of us in the Mirror Lake Association, I take pride in knowing about the jewel that sits atop the west-end narrows of the lake. For my family and myself, though, it is more than that. There is a responsibility to my late friend, who influenced me in so many ways.

Audrey died almost 20 years ago, just before my wife gave birth to our now strong-willed, determined daughter. Her name is Quinn Audrey Jaeger.

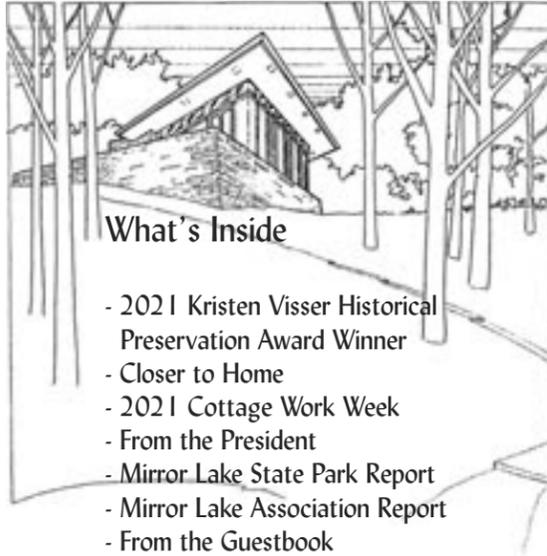
Thank you for allowing me to be a contributor to this group. I pledge the cooperation of the entire Mirror Lake Association as we work toward making this corner of the world as good a place as we can.

I should mention that my grandparents, Otto and Jeanette Jaeger, purchased a modest lake cabin on their honeymoon in 1924, less than one-quarter mile from the Seth Peterson Cottage. That story, as they say, is one for another time. 

# WRITINGS

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## Address Service Requested



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Want to learn more about Frank Lloyd Wright's work in Wisconsin? Visit [WrightInWisconsin.org](http://WrightInWisconsin.org).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Seth Peterson Cottage Open House and Guided Tour

- June 13 1 to 4 p.m. \$5
- July 11 1 to 4 p.m. \$5
- Aug. 8 1 to 4 p.m. \$5
- Sept. 12 1 to 4 p.m. \$5
- Oct. 10 1 to 4 p.m. \$5
- Nov. 14 1 to 4 p.m. \$5
- Dec. 12 1 to 4 p.m. \$5

Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy members receive free admission and a discount of 10 percent off cottage merchandise.

### Annual Meeting & Volunteer Recognition

- 4 p.m. Dec. 12. RSVP by sending an e-mail to [sethpetersoncottage@gmail.com](mailto:sethpetersoncottage@gmail.com). The meeting lasts approximately one hour. After, we'll have social time and dinner.

✓ Visitors find touring the cottage a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon. Take a scenic drive and experience firsthand this restored Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home

during the open house tours held each month.

For more information about the cottage, visit us online at [SethPeterson.org](http://SethPeterson.org).

### Seth Peterson Cottage

E9982 Fern Dell Road  
Lake Delton, Wisconsin

