

GREENE SMITH AND HIS MAGNIFICENT BIRD HOUSE

Abolitionist Gerrit Smith's son Greene was bird watching at age nine, collecting specimens of birds from around the world as a young adult, and died in his Bird House at age 38 trying to complete the annotated catalog of his mounted bird collection. Greene built the remarkable three story bird museum in 1863 on his father Gerrit's estate in Peterboro to house his large collection. The Bird House had central heating at a time when private homes did not. The building had marble plumbing fixtures, a mahogany staircase climbing the open two-story atrium, polished birch paneling, and stained glass windows. Behind its outer shell of rustic hemlock bark, the Bird House was a stunning private museum.

Greene, who lectured as a professor of ornithology at Cornell University and was widely recognized as an excellent taxidermist, donated scores of his rare specimens for scientific and academic study. Eventually, more than 2000 bird, nest, and egg specimens were donated to help establish the ornithological collections at Harvard, Cornell, and Colgate Universities. "I must state again how scientifically valuable these specimens are – they were collected near the very beginning of scientific ornithology – and represent some of the earliest collections known." (Douglas Causey, Senior Biologist, Museum of Comparative Zoology, the Agassiz Museum, Harvard University, March 2004)

Sunday, August 30 at 2 p.m. Kay Rorer, Chair of the Gerrit Smith Estate National Historic Landmark Stewards' Birdhouse Squad, will describe Greene, his museum, his collection, and the future plans for the Bird House site on the estate. The public is encouraged to come to learn of this unusual building and its future, and to share memories of the site.

The presentation is part of a summer series provided by the Stewards of the Gerrit Smith Estate National Historic Landmark. The Estate is on the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, and the Heritage NY Underground Railroad Trail as part of the New York State Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation. Programs and tours are \$2 per person, \$5 for a season pass, and free to children, stewards, and residents of Smithfield with season passes from The Lodge. For more information, a list of summer programs, and to become a volunteer contact mail@sca-peterboro.org or 315-684-3262.



Greene Smith's magnificent Bird House built in Peterboro in 1863.



Greene Smith (on the right) and his hunting companion Hiram Wilson.