

What Volunteers Can Do:

In 1995 The Tollkeeper's Cottage was learned about by the Community History Project and research began. Much was learned from previous owners. But the building, hidden behind later layers and additions, was on a redevelopment site. In 1996, it was purchased for \$1 from Victory Estates on condition that it be moved off the site and the site left ready for redevelopment. There was only a month's time allocated for the salvage operation. With assistance from then-Councillor Howard Joy's office and from Angie Antoniou of the City's Permits Office the work began. One volunteer, Bertram Sturup, then in his eighties, came daily from Etobicoke with his toolbox to work from dawn until dusk. Bertram later became a donor. CHP volunteers and others from the local community, with direction from the two architects, got the job done in 2626 hours. A professional house mover was hired and the Cottage was pulled off its site and slowly taken up to the TTC's Wychwood Yards with a police escort.

The TTC never charged rent for the three years that the Cottage stayed in that yard, and the TTC's security patrol kept an eye on it. The Community History Project was continually fundraising, but fundraising work was never included in the volunteers' hours - only the hours in which actual work was being done on the building. More of this work was done on the Victoria Day weekend in 2001, when volunteers signed up for dirty, heavy work over the three days. Pipes, drywall, and seven layers of asphalt shingles on the roof were removed in order to lighten the building's weight and keep it from collapsing before restoration work could begin. The work was finished in 92.1 hours over two days, and the volunteers who signed up for the third day had nothing to do. The entire roof was covered with a huge tarp which was ripped apart much later by storms and caused another day's effort by four volunteers to capture, put back in place, and repair the damage.

Volunteers worked alongside paid professionals once the building had been moved to its home in the park - some 800 feet from its original site now under the pavement of the street. The bulk of the volunteers' hours were spent on this site in all kinds of weather. They painted and nailed up clapboard in subzero temperatures, stripped away old drywall and beaverboard in hot humid temperatures. They dug holes and trenches, stacked and restacked lumber, carried and washed rocks, painted whenever anything was ready and whenever the Electricians' Union loaned scaffolding. They learned to use a froe and drawknife in making shakes for the roof. They learned about nineteenth century nails and salvaged all the ones they found to raise funds. They salvaged offcuts from construction of the modern addition and made benches for the yard. They salvaged clapboard and plan to conduct birdhouse workshops with it. They ran a thousand errands about needed pans, keys, and tools. They kept the site clean and safe, and coped with garbage on the site and in the park. They tackled major cleanups in the park, removing old mattresses, refrigerators, car batteries, construction debris, certain weeds and dog-strangling vine. They planted wild herbs and wildflowers. Over the years, a few volunteers died, some moved to other cities and a couple to nursing homes. The dedication of the team is remarkable. When you meet one of these volunteers, be sure to ask about their work and hours.