

DISCOVER SPARTA HISTORIC SPARTA

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Welcome to one of the most genuinely historic towns you'll discover in Southwestern Ontario! Sparta has been a favourite for many years among daytrippers who visit the many shops, galleries, wineries and artisans studios that dot the landscape in this area. Sparta is 'en route' to many other destinations, but also 'off the beaten path' enough that it has remained truly authentic. On your visit to Sparta, pick up a walking tour guide and set off to view some outstanding examples of early Ontario architecture. Founded in 1818 by Quakers from Philadelphia, Sparta features many buildings from the early 1800's, including the two-storey Sparta House and the General Store. Just north of the village is the Quaker meeting house built in 1865.

Many buildings have information on their history posted outside and form part of the walking tour. Be sure not to miss the Forge and Anvil built in 1827 - it is one of the few remaining mud houses in Ontario, now a museum operated by the Sparta and District Historical Society. For more information on the history of Sparta and walking tours for groups of 10 or more, contact Mrs. Sally Martyn at 519-775-2292.

SPARTA EVENTS 2009

September 5: Scarecrow Trail
October 3: Doors Open
November 28 & 29: Country Christmas



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Winter Wheat

Article & Photos by Anne Theresa Halsall, Williams Lake, BC

how wonderful it is to be in the hush of the woods again.

Chainsaw carvings, uniquely decorated with recycled scraps of wood, metal and tin, are tucked among trees and bushes. There are angels with halos of rusty nails. A gigantic black crow wearing red glasses plays a piano, on top of which is a tiny wooden Bette Midler, complete with curly wire hair. She serenades us with 'The Wind Beneath My Wings.' I am snapping photos constantly. Surprises abound, like the tiny, moss-covered cement squirrel peeking up at me from inside a clump of ferns. We choose a fork in the trail, which leads to a tiny cabin in a clearing of sunshine. A place to rest, have a cup of coffee and a cookie. And it is here where I really begin to notice the energy of Winter Wheat. Visitors speak quietly, smile at strangers and... take their time. I notice the look in their eyes, the softness of their faces; some sit almost trancelike. I believe these people are hungry. Hungry for peace and quiet... something pleasing to look at... time to listen and just "be." I enjoy studying others' response to this refuge in the woods. I sense their gratitude, and a need for soul connection, or... nostalgia is the word that comes to mind. Nostalgia... not based on memory, but based on an idealized version of life.

There is no programmed entertainment, no fancy restaurant, and no expensive or exotic art, only simplicity. The cabin has twig sofas and coffee tables. Artwork graces the walls; flute music filters gently into the room. Coffee and cookies are free... donations appreciated. In the corner, a woodstove crackles. A small

table holding a multi-coloured pile of journals and pens provides a healing exercise for visitors to express their appreciation and suggestions... or simply tell how they feel today. Curling up on the soft, flowered cushions of the couch, I browse through the pages, reading proof of a need to feed the soul. The books are bursting with heart-felt sentiments and I feel as though I am intruding on personal journals. Nothing is held back. Words tell of the desire for a quiet place within; of the absolute delight and joy this place brings. I wonder if people notice a difference in themselves after spending time here, and how long that change lasts.

Outside we discover more unique carvings of angels. Saw blade halos peek out from behind trees or are tucked in amongst lush green hostas. Others peer curiously at us from behind old stumps. What magic! I wouldn't be surprised to catch sight of a fairy. I am happy to be here. Next, we discover a large signboard holding newspaper articles about the beginnings of this forest... a tribute to Mr. Fred Shepherd.

During the 1950's, Fred Shepherd, reportedly of German-Irish ancestry, moved from St. Thomas to the idyllic village of Sparta. Here, choosing to live without plumbing or hydro, he created a forest haven by planting hundreds of trees and flowers. For more than thirty-five years, he shared his sanctuary with visitors, even placing benches along the winding trails. He donated Christmas

trees to needy families. In Fred's day, two signs hung at the gateway of his home. They read, "Hermit's Abode" and "Vorsicht Unter Den Verboten Wald", which, according to Mr. Shepherd means, "Take Care Under the Forbidden Forest".

In 1997, the property sold to folk artists Lucy Ogletree and Mike Roberts, who continue Fred's welcoming attitude - sharing their time, space, and incredible artistic gifts with travelers.

Following the gentle sound of harp music, we arrive at another shelter, a small hut constructed mostly of glass. Colourful Tibetan prayer flags hang on a tree by 'The Glass House', spreading blessings and wishes for luck and happiness on the breeze. Inside a harpist mesmerizes the wanderers with music that flows through the house and out into the woods. We



listen for a while and then, reluctantly pile into the car and head down the shady lane for home. I look back for a last farewell, just in time to see two tall, husky guys in motorcycle leathers going into a tiny resting cabin, coffee cups in hand. They stand looking down at an angel peeking at them from a cedar bush outside the door. I smile... satisfied. I think that probably Mr. Shepherd and his angels are satisfied too.

The angel points the way down a narrow dirt road leading into the heart of a stand of pines and spruce. It's a typical October day in Southern Ontario... sun, then cloud... a few drops of rain... more sun. Today, my sisters, nieces and I are exploring small towns and craft shops around Sparta. The angel sign guides us to their favourite refuge - a folk art park called "Winter Wheat."

I love visiting my family here, but find myself longing for the vast forests and sense of isolation of my home in the interior of British Columbia. So the woods ahead pique my curiosity. But first, we must pass by a giant wooden rabbit with a stopwatch dangling from his waist. Beside him, a sign reads "This is the place where time stands still."

The woods are abundant with red and gold deciduous trees. This is what I miss living in Interior British Columbia...the shades of red. We are mostly golden. There is something magical about these autumn woods. It is cool inside. Glorious aspen tower to the sky, brilliant against the darkness of the pines and spruce. I am glad of my jacket. Breathing in the gentle fragrance of the land and feeling the soft bed of needles beneath my feet, I think