

Wilcox Park Cottage



Have you ever wondered who lives in the little cottage in Wilcox Park? Perched sweetly at the edge of the pond, the cottage sits as a little vignette, inviting the imagination to lend it a story. Originally built around 1850 and moved to its present location in the early 1900s, it has served over the years as a home for the caretakers of Wilcox Park.

After lying fallow since the mid-2000s, the cottage interior was damaged in 2019 due to a burst pipe, rendering it as unlivable space. But with the help of two very generous local donors, a refurbishment of the cottage began in 2023 to bring the house into the 21st century.

With guidance from a local architect, the Westerly Library & Wilcox Park Memorial Association worked with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission to ensure the historical integrity of the exterior structure was preserved. The Preservation Commission did, however, allow key updates to be made to the structure. For example, new energy efficient windows were installed and rotted wood clapboard was replaced, all kept within the existing style and color scheme. The main pipe for the cottage and barn septic system was connected to the town sewer, which was a tremendous environmental improvement.

In the interior, plumbing and electrical work was brought up to code. New batt and spray foam insulation insured efficient heating and cooling -- a welcome advancement. New sheetrock walls were installed but the original wood plank flooring was kept and repaired as needed. The kitchen was modernized with a farmhouse style feel. A full, first floor, ADA compliant bathroom was also added, along with a stand-up shower in the bathroom on the second floor -- no longer just a tub for the occupant!

And who might this occupant be? The cottage's new lease on life is to serve as an abode for an artist in residence. The AIR program provides artists an opportunity to work on and share their art during a 2-8 week stay at the cottage. Artists of all mediums are welcome to apply, including but not limited to: musicians, visual artists, writers, and performance artists. Each artist in residence is encouraged to use Wilcox Park and the surrounding area as inspiration for their project. Inspiration that abounds throughout the park, library, local art scene, and the shores of Westerly.

In addition to the AIR program, this quaint cottage is available as a rental space for small events so you, too, can experience the charm and history of this little gem.

For almost 175 years, the cottage in Wilcox Park has been a steadfast sign of domestic warmth and welcoming. The rehabilitation and updating of the cottage shows the commitment of the library and park to maintaining this piece of historical prominence in Westerly.

By Mary Jo Girard, Westerly Library & Wilcox Park Board of Trustees Secretary and Park Committee member

