

# ~~ The Aviaries of Sonnenberg ~~

After Frederick's death in 1899, his wife Mary travelled for about two years. Perhaps during this period away from Sonnenberg, she gave thought about the plans the two of them had for expansion as well as visions of her own.

In 1902, she initiated a plan to have an aviary built. It was to be erected on the land running parallel to Fort Hill Ave. near the Old-Fashioned Garden. The dimensions of the inner space were 50'x27'. Attached to this was a circular flying cage measuring 30'x50'. The aviary was constructed of wood and cement and the side toward the flying cage made of glass with numerous ventilators in the roof. The flying cage was dome shaped with the lower portion covered with bar mesh and the upper portion covered with diamond mesh.



**Historic Photo of Aviary in late 1800's**



**Side of Aviary  
(2019)**

**Current Aviary  
(2023)**





**1902 Workers Constructing the Flying Cage**

The inside was supplied with water from a pool 12'x5' with a gradual depth of 16". Millet, hemp, and canary plants were grown which formed a dense mass. These plants were pruned before seeds could mature as they could prove potentially harmful if eaten by some of the species of birds. Plumed Bobwhite quail liked to nest in these plants. The structure housed approximately 600 birds, many of whom were bred in captivity. Some species were extremely rare especially the "Indian Spur-Winged Plover".



**Bobwhite Quail**



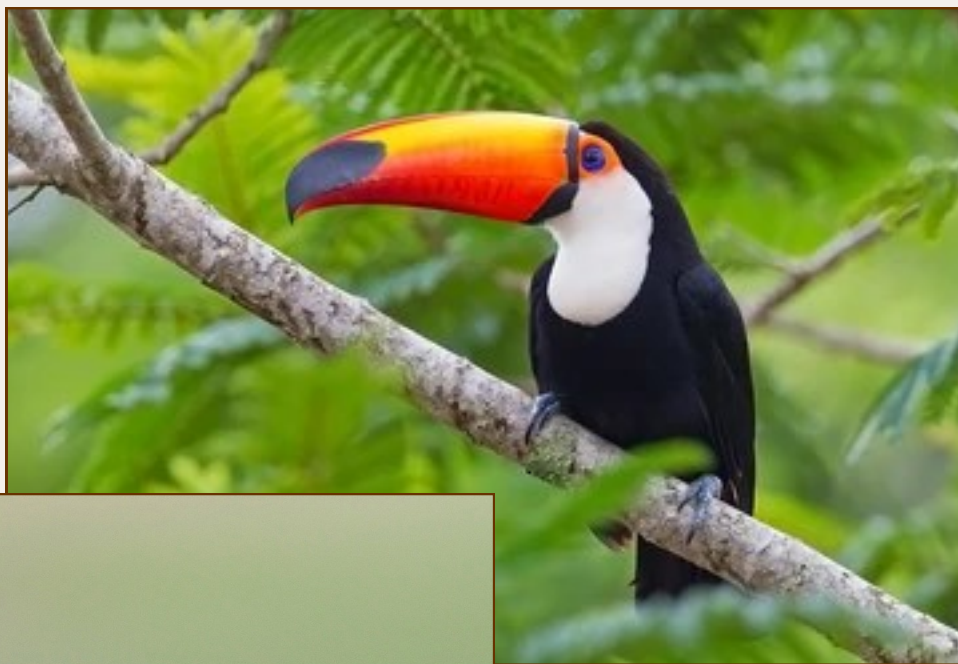
**Indian Spur-Winged Plover**

During the winter months, hot water pipes which encircled the aviary provided warmth. The pipes were approximately 6 feet from the floor and protected by 18-inch shelves covered with sand for extra warmth. These shelves provided “resting” places and there were also nesting boxes attached to the walls as well. The floor was also covered with sand.

### **The Jay House**

The next building erected was the Jay House. This also ran parallel to Fort Hill Avenue. It measured 35'x10' with a height of 8 feet at the front and sloping to 6 feet in the rear. Constructed entirely of wood, it consisted of 4 compartments. The fronts of these compartments were covered with wire mesh in the summer and glass panes in the winter. This building was unheated, so the less hardy birds were caged elsewhere during the cold weather. Toucans, Mynahs, Jays, and Magpies could be observed here.

**Toucan**



**Magpie**

## **The Parrot House**

This was an L-shaped building with the longer section running parallel to Fort Hill Avenue and the shorter section on East Street. It was constructed of wood and concrete in the same style as the other bird houses. It housed 40 to 50 species of Parrots, Cockatoos, Macaws, Finches, and other perching birds. There were approximately 30 different species of parakeets, and they were considered “The Pride of Sonnenberg”.

The collection included a “Black-Headed” parakeet which was common in Europe but rarely seen in the United States. Located in the parrot house was the bird hospital. This room was separated from the main part by a solid partition and had a concrete floor. It was well equipped and easy to keep clean/disinfect thoroughly so as not to spread disease to healthy birds, injuries would have been treated here as well. On the walls, small cages were placed and light shone in from the front windows.



**Black-Headed Parakeet**

## **The Pheasant House**

The pheasant house was built in 1909. It ran parallel to East Ave and was located between the Jay House and the service block. It was constructed of wood and concrete with dimensions of 100'x16'. It was divided into 8 cages which opened into caged areas 40' long. This collection consisted mostly of the more commonly known species of pheasants. Most of these species would have been seen locally.



**Ring Necked Pheasant**

## **The Peacock House**

This was the last house to be completed in the aviary complex. It is the only building that stills exists to this day. Constructed from hewn stone with a semicircular cage, beautiful white peacocks resided here. In the building's battlements, were living quarters for a flock of Tumbler Pigeons. With the freedom of the air to their advantage, they would show off their amazing ariel feats to anyone interested!



**White Peacocks**



**Turkish Tumbler Pigeons**

The Aviaries of Sonnenberg were under the supervision of groundskeeper Addison P. Wilbur. The birds were under the direct care of Ernest A. Watts, who was an aviary and bird specialist along with his four assistants. Mrs. Thompson afforded the public the opportunity to observe the birds every Saturday afternoon from 2:00 to 5:00 PM. Without her graciousness, many people would never have had the chance to observe so many exotic species of birds in their lifetime.