

WHERE SCIENCE HISTORY AND ART CONNECT

To: Raven Hill friends

From: Cheri

Date: June 21, 2025

Re: *From artifacts to experiences*

The transition from individual objects to interactive experiences is what sets Raven Hill apart as a place of discovery. Rooted in the mission of connecting science, history and the arts, Raven Hill invites visitors to engage, not just with artifacts, but also with the stories, questions, and connections they inspire. Over the past 33 years, what began as traditional collections of buttons, rocks, skulls, and more, has grown into a series of immersive experiences. Visitors are encouraged to look closely, touch thoughtfully, ask questions, and make meaningful connections. At Raven Hill, objects are more than artifacts on display. Those objects are starting points for exploration and discovery with each one opening a door to understanding.

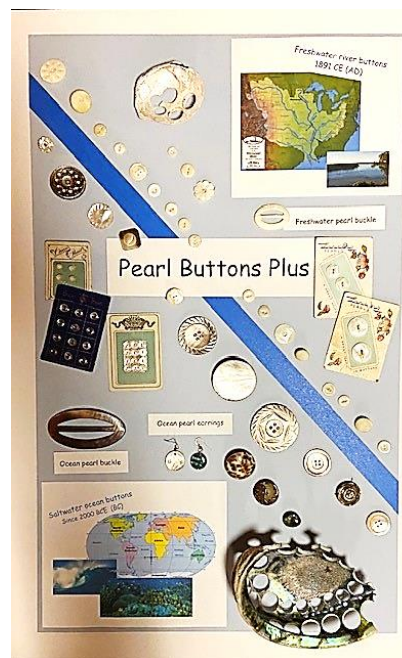
Bonnie's Button House



Made with Bonnie's buttons, this Button House is a small tribute to a big-hearted volunteer, donor & friend of Raven Hill.



Pearl Buttons Plus



Fashioned from button blanks punched out of freshwater and marine shells, buttons can be miniature works of art. Visitors are invited to look closely and identify likenesses and differences between buttons.

For example, **Bonnie's Button House** transformed boxes and jars of buttons into a miniature work of art that fills families with wonder. Visitors are drawn to peek through its tiny windows and marvel at the variety of buttons used in the house's creation. From that spark of curiosity, guests are invited to explore further—learning about buttons as

fasteners and works of art. Through hands-on activities, they can investigate the materials used to make buttons and use their senses to distinguish between plastic reproductions and authentic buttons made of pearl, bone, glass, or wood. Visitors discover how buttons are made. They come to understand how a button's design, materials, and purpose have evolved over time, as technology and fashion has changed. Workshops extend the experience, offering participants the chance to craft their own buttons from Sculpy clay, Egyptian paste, antler, or wood—and to use those buttons on handmade leather pouches they can make and take home.

Lithophone



Strike a chord! Try Raven Hill's indoor and outdoor lithophones as they allow visitors to create "rock" music with stone keys and discover the music hidden in rocks!

Fossil ammonites & nautiloids



Visitors are invited to feel the texture of this incredible ammonite fossil specimen generously donated by Paul Barden and family.

Likewise, boxes and piles of rocks at Raven Hill morph into a fascinating geological experience that deepens visitor understanding of Earth's resources. The current exhibition, **Under Michigan & Beyond**, helps guests visualize the natural resources that come from Michigan and other parts of the world, how those resources are extracted from the ground, and how they're used in everyday life. Guests can match fossils to their geologic time periods, observe a wide array of petrified wood, and examine fossilized ammonites—on display and available to touch. A highlight of the experience is **Sound from Stone**, where visitors can play musical notes on a lithophone that was fashioned from granite floor tiles. For those eager to dig deeper, classes are available where participants can learn how to hand-polish local fossils or get started on building their own rock or fossil collection.

George and friend



Where else can visitors learn and laugh while exploring the human skeleton? At Raven Hill, learning is hands-on, minds-on and fun!

Bear skulls



The extinct cave bear replica skull on the left dwarfs both the modern grizzly bear skull in the middle and the modern black bear skull on the right. It shows just how massive this prehistoric creature was.

In addition, Raven Hill's extensive collection of skulls and skeletons never fails to fascinate visitors of all ages. Children and adults are encouraged to compare both modern and prehistoric skulls. Visitors can observe how bear skulls have decreased in size while horse skulls have grown larger during Earth's recent geologic history. In the Animal Room, visitors can also meet "George," Raven Hill's replica human skeleton. They are invited to find and feel corresponding bones in their own bodies, like the sternum, as a way of bridging curiosity and encouraging self-awareness. For aspiring doctors, nurses, or veterinarians, hands-on dissection classes are available, offering early and inspiring insight into potential careers in medicine or science.

At Raven Hill, a button isn't just a button. A rock isn't just a rock. And skulls aren't just skulls. Every object has a story and every visitor can become a part of that narrative. As guests move from artifacts to collections to hands-on experiences, they are invited to explore, observe, compare, create, and connect. What begins as a single artifact often unfolds into an immersive event. It is an encounter that sparks curiosity and deepens understanding, as it brings science, history, and art together. Visit Raven Hill soon and take a class or workshop. See where the adventure leads you.

Cheri