

At the dedication of the historical plaque at the Mill of Kintail, Major J. F. Leys, present owner of the mill, addresses the gathering.

The Mill of Kintail

By Dorothy Brown



ON THE 10TH of September, 1958, the Ramsay Women's Institute, under the presidency of Mrs. Gordon Duncan, were co-sponsors and tea hostesses at a colourful ceremony at the Mill of Kintail, near Almonte.

The occasion was the unveiling of a plaque erected by the Ontario Government to commemorate both the Mill of Kintail, as a fine example of pioneer stone architecture, and Robert Tait McKenzie, the famous Canadian surgeon-sculptor who was born in Ramsay Township in 1867. McKenzie, who had played in the ruins of the old grist mill as a boy, restored it as his summer home and studio in 1930, when it was already one hundred years old. Keenly aware of the need to honour our pioneer ancestors, he gathered to the Mill, in addition to many originals of his own inspiring works of sculpture, a collection of pioneer effects from the local countryside of Lanark County. Dr. McKenzie died in 1938.

In 1952 the Mill of Kintail was bought by Major James Farquharson Leys, of the Canadian Army, from the widow, Mrs. Tait McKenzie, who has since died. It was the intention of Major and Mrs. Leys, while safeguarding the precious relics and maintaining the historic and artistic associations of the old Mill, gradually to develop the property and exhibits in the public interest. In this successful development the Ramsay Women's Institute have played many useful parts, indirectly by awakening the minds of the people to the recreative and educational value of such a shrine, and directly by providing teas for visitors on many occasions, and by helping in the continuing process of adding appropriate pioneer effects and local handicrafts to the collections.

In 1957 the present owners formally created the "Mill of Kintail Canadian Arts and Pioneer Museum" (The Tait McKenzie Memorial) under the laws of Ontario, in order to give permanence to their original objectives. The subsequent official provincial recognition is a matter of great satisfaction to all who know the Mill of Kintail. Many have expressed their gratitude to the members of

the Ontario Historic Sites Board for this particular action, as well as for their good selective taste shown in the present campaign to highlight Ontario's past achievements as a guide to our future betterment. Recognition, however, does not carry with it any financial or other support, and continuing development at the Mill of Kintail still depends on private enterprise.

Each year on the last Saturday of May, "Tait McKenzie Day" is celebrated at the Mill of Kintail, and also for a number of years the Ramsay Women's Institute has held its annual historical meetings there, having had as its guests members of other Women's Institutes, notably of Lanark County.

Each year, furthermore, the Mill is visited by organized groups including international clubs and societies, as well as many from the Greater Ottawa area, and on several of these occasions the Ramsay Women's Institute provided teas. During the summer of 1958, for the first time, the Mill was open to the public at regular hours on Saturdays and first Sundays, the Ramsay Women's Institute again serving the teas at a nominal cost, yet sufficient to bring some profit to the Institute.

With attendance to date having reached over 7,000, and with the fame of the Mill of Kintail spreading in widening national and international circles, it seems likely that the ideals of Dr. Tait McKenzie, regarding health and beauty strength and sportsmanship, will be appreciably furthered. He was in the world's front ranks as a surgeon, as a sculptor and as a physical educator. He was also a soldier, an athlete, a teacher, and a writer. In his many works of art and written lectures and books he has shown a way to help solve what is probably the most vexing problem of our century, namely, how to maintain mental and physical balance in an expanding industrial age.

It is a source of considerable local pride that a site that is now attracting interest throughout the world lies in Ramsay Township and that it has had the active support of the Ramsay Women's Institute.