

Over 100 years of gracious living

Sweet sounds of the old fashioned waltz, whirling skirts of gentle ladies, and an aura of sophistication all amid an old fashioned background, enter one's mind the moment one steps into the old Carswell homestead on Opeongo Road.

The long hallways with its beautiful high ceilings and plaster walls that look as if they were marble adds to the atmosphere. Partitions throughout the house are made of brick and are approximately three feet in width. The walls and ceilings of the home were hand decorated by Mr Reynolds and his two sons who were English painters.

The beautiful old home was built in 1872 by James Carswell after his home in town was destroyed by a disastrous fire. He bought one of the Robert McIntyre farms and built on this ideal spot which was named The Hill, as the house stood atop of Carswells Hill surrounded by a few oak trees.

The roof of Cornish tin has lasted these many years.

James Carswell and his wife the former Jane Whyte raised six children and the beautiful home on the hill was the centre of social life in Renfrew for many years.

The 14 room home has approximately 50 windows, seven bedrooms, two bathrooms, drawing room, sitting room, office-kitchen, summer kitchen and a dormitory over the garage which was used to house the help.

The drawing room which is situated to the left as one enters the home has a beautiful hand made white marble fireplace. Every evening during the winter the Carswell family would gather round this fireplace for a family get together and sing song. One could almost imagine the fire glowing, and some one sitting at the beautiful old square Dunham and Son piano. Over top of the piano is a beautiful

old picture of the drawing room at St James Place. The gold frame is four inches in width and surrounds a wide velvet border. A beautiful hand carved Chinese chair is situated beside the piano and

features intricately carved arms and back. A genuine black horsehair sofa is in front of the fireplace and is in excellent condition.

The highlight of this room is a beautiful 8' high genuine pine highboy with hand-carved corners and side pieces. On top of this are placed some priceless antiques including some original figurines and beautiful pieces of silver.

The sitting room as in the drawing room features cornice work which is deep grooves carved in the wall as it meets the ceilings. The curtains on the windows are hung on the original brass rods which are about six inches in diameter.

At the end of the long hallway is a beautiful hand carved desk, and halfway down the hall is an old fashioned hall tree which contains an umbrella stand.

The office-kitchen houses a small table with a beautiful marble top, that has carved legs and sides. The high shelves now used as cupboards are quite narrow as they were once used for office supplies. A small walnut cupboard is 150 years old.

The front of the house on the flat of the lawn once saw beautiful tennis courts, which were greatly used by the Carswell family. A beautifully furnished play house also once stood among the trees to the left of the tennis courts.

Mrs Carswell also had beautiful gardens of currants, black, white and red grapes.

At the back of this house is an extremely long two storey shed. It has ten partition posts. These partitions were used to store the long cuts of wood for the furnace, to rest and feed horses. Two units were used as a bath room and adjoining these a small room housed a stove and a supply of wood. Just off this was a metal lined bathtub.

Also situated at the back of the house is an ash house built of brick. This was built as Mr Carswell was afraid of fire. The ashes were all brought from the house and cooled off to prevent fire, then later used to make soap.

Some of the original white picket fence

which at one time surrounded the home can still be seen, at the back of the home.

The storehouse and carriage house were constructed of batten board. The store house was used by John Carswell and his family while the family house was being built. It has two rooms upstairs and two down. Behind this is a stable for the driving and riding horses and a stable for heavy horses which were used in lumbering. Each member of the Carswell family had a horse for riding and there were also buckboards, and a phaeton for Mrs Carswell. This was easier for Mrs Carswell to get in and out of and was also upholstered to a greater degree. There were also at least three other carriages of some sort in the stable.

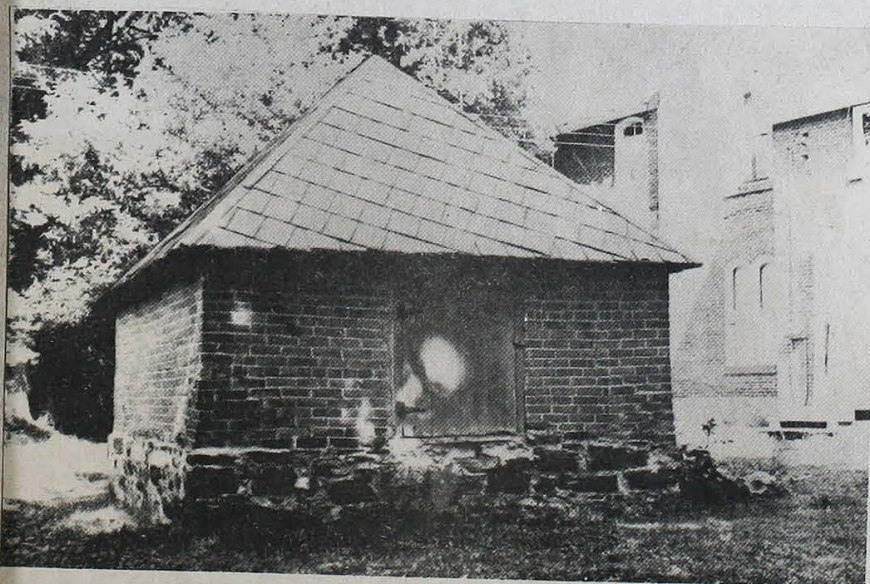
The house is presently occupied by Miss Joan MacKay who was a most gracious hostess. She and her sister Katharine occupied the home of their grandfather some four years ago following the death of their aunts, the Misses Carswells.

The homestead was unoccupied for some time and a great deal of damage was done. All the lights were broken and a great deal of smaller damage such as chairs and windows broken and walls shot up. All the bed and table linen with the exception of two table napkins had disappeared and a beautiful silver tea service has never been located.

When Joan and Katherine first moved into the homestead, they were very much surprised to find that people were enquiring to buy furniture that they never knew existed.

The Carswell home is still in excellent condition, and houses a great many beautiful antiques. Although it has been a lot of work and is extremely costly, Miss Joan MacKay is working steadily bit by bit to restore to some degree the beautiful old home.

The Carswell home on the hill will always be remembered for its gracious hospitality and with Joan MacKay at the helm there is no doubt this hospitality will continue for some time.



This odd-looking, quaint little brick building with the copper roof is what was known in days gone by as an "ash house". It stands out back of the old, baronial 'Carswell House' and is about one-third full of coal and wood ashes. The ashes from the furnaces and fireplaces of the house were given this luxurious sheltering to prevent them from getting wet and losing the minerals they contained so essential in the making of soap. Soap making must be a lost art because this ash house is one of the very few left standing in the country.



Elaine Dick imagines herself back about 100 years as she admires the drawing room of the Carswell home.