

Over 2,000 visitors in one month

The McDougall Mill Museum

Certainly one of Renfrew's major attractions, the McDougall Mill Museum, in only its second year, has proved to be one of Renfrew's and the Valley's chief assets. 2005 visitors were recorded in the guest book in the month of July, 99 percent of them out-of-towners.

As is always the case anywhere you go, local people and those close to home fail to appreciate their own attractions. Most people who have lived in New York all their lives have never been up the Empire State building or in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Those in Vancouver take for granted the mountain chair lifts and the suspension bridges. So, too, in Renfrew few residents have glimpsed the fascinating exhibits of Renfrew and Valley history on display at the McDougall Mill museum.

Most of the items are turn of the century, but many date back to the 1850's and even the late 1700's. The exact number of pieces on display isn't known, however, 3000 would probably be a close estimate.

There have been 188 donors some whom have contributed as many as 30 articles. The old mill can certainly accommodate them and display them in the proper complementary settings of their era. Donated articles, it should be said, are gratefully accepted and the museum has space for many more.

The old mill itself has a colorful history. Built in 1855 by John Lorn McDougall, it was the first grist mill in the area and in an ideal site where the river dropped a total of 82 feet over a series of rock ledges.

The building of the mill could be considered the formal beginning of the town of Renfrew, which was incorporated as a village in 1858.

Built of fine stone the mill stands an Arthur Avenue in M.J. O'Brien park.

It had been used for a time, as one of the buildings of the M.J. O'Brien owned Renfrew Woolens. When the company closed the mill was to be torn down but Mike Murray, a grandson of M.J. O'Brien saved it by purchasing it from Ambrose O'Brien for one dollar. In the following years Mike Murray worked with others in the town to have it developed as an historical site. In 1967 when the town was looking for a centennial project, Mike Murray offered the old grist mill with its water wheel and M.J. O'Brien Ltd. donated the land around, as a place to be developed as a park.

In 1969 the town permitted the newly formed Renfrew Historical Society to develop the

mill as a museum. Now in its second year, it shows every sign of a success.

Some 20 Historical society volunteers have cleaned and swept it, but other than that it remains exactly as it was built, steeped in history. Great axe-hewn beams and thick floor planking attest to the sturdy hand-built construction.

Inside it is a treasure trove of Renfrew and Valley history. Credit for the accomplishment goes to the many members of the Historical Society who scoured the country-side for the articles now on display. Thanks for a job well done should go also to Les Anderson, President of the Renfrew Historical Society and to Manford Walker, now Curator of the Museum.

Some articles of the fascinating collection are easily identifiable as to the uses with which they were put. For others, however, one can only conjecture what they were good for or what they did.

Museum staffer, Miss Marion McQuade, said that she "often ponders what the people must have been like who used these appliances and implements, clothes and furniture." "I wonder how many times she rolled bread on that old cupboard, and what was she wearing, what was she like?"

Here you can see an old swivel chair used by W Smallfield, the founder of the Renfrew Mercury in 1871. Admire the craftsmanship of the Barnett Ice Box made right in Renfrew by the old Renfrew Refrigerator Co. and, too, the cute little miniature ice box that was used as a salesman's sample.

There are spinning wheels and knitting machines, an old Edison gramophone which still plays the cylinders, a beautiful old organ and a magnificent "Chickering" grand piano made in Boston in 1872.

There is a fascinating old dentists' chair and a beautifully carved Edwardian love seat.

There is an old tin bath tub used in the late 1800's, shanty pots and a spittoon, candle molds and scores of kitchen utensils. There are pieces of period clothing, hair nets and baby clothes.

There is also an egg collection, rivalling any, that was made in 1890. An Ostrich egg and an Emu egg, it is said, were obtained in a trade for a humming bird egg.

Down in the basement one can find the larger items. Principal of these is a mammoth tree stump puller donated by Wilson McIntyre of Renfrew. Circa 1850 it was used by both his grandfather and father who manufactured and sold them.

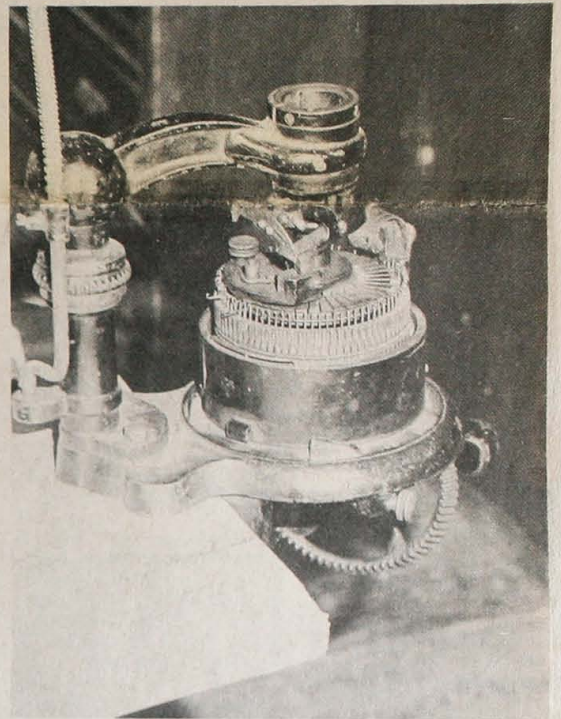
There are old wagons, blacksmiths, bellows, broad

axes manufactured in Renfrew, cream separators-also made here and hundreds of other smaller items too numerous to list.

One can't just breeze through in a half hour and expect to see everything. It's a thoroughly fascinating display and should be seen by everyone in Renfrew. But spend a little time here and history will be before you. Oh what stories this old building and its contents could tell you and will tell you - when you visit it.

The reputation of our museum is spreading far and wide. A Mr Joseph Wren of Whitehorse, Yukon, met a Daniel Scully of Detroit, Michigan up around Thunder Bay and Mr Scully said during their conversation, "if you're ever in Renfrew, be sure to visit their museum," to which Mr Wren replied "yes I've been there and its fantastic isn't it."

So come on people of Renfrew! For a treat and a peep into the past that will certainly delight you drive over to the McDougall Mill Museum. Hours are 1-5 and 7-9. You won't be sorry you've taken the time.



A knitting machine, turn of the century.



Barnett ice box made at the old Renfrew Refrigerator Company. The little white one at the left is a salesman's sample.