2008 Renfrew South District Women's Institute 90th Anniversary Bus Tour
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Welcome aboard for our 90th Anniversary bus trip. We hope to make you more acquainted with our Renfrew South District in various ways. As we travel, we may tell you things historical, industrial, old days and present times, bits of culture of various sorts, conservation items, educational glimpses, something for every area of our institute programming.

The land for this Fair Grounds was bought by the South Renfrew Agricultural Society in 1873 for $700. It comprises 5½ acres. The first Agricultural Hall was built for $3,700. Admission to the Fair that year (114 years ago) was 25¢ per adult, 10¢ per child. Last year it was $3.00 per adult, $1.00 per child.

[The town of Renfrew had its beginnings in the early 1800's. Its first settler was Joseph Brunette 1820 - 1823. By the 1850's it was a village of about 400 people but had previously been called the 2nd Chute of the Bonnechere. Sir Francis Hincks who once was Prime Minister of Canada for 10 weeks was responsible for its industrial beginnings. It is built on both sides of the Bonnechere River and it is interesting to note that that river's name appears on a map made in 1774, so this country was known and mapped 240 years ago.]

The short stretch of highway on which we are riding, from Renfrew Junction to the Douglas turn off, is known as the stone road--well named. It was begun in 1919 and eventually was built to Douglas and then on to Pembroke. The old stone fences and stonepiles in fields were drawn with wagons, carts, sleighs, and stoneboats, at all seasons of the year to piles every 3 miles along the way, to be later crushed and spread to a depth of 18" (6"large, 6"medium, & 6"fine with tar). They built about 5 miles per year and paid the farmers about $6.00 per day for stone, 35¢ - 45¢ per hour for a 10 hour day for labourers! The road to your right goes to Balsam Hill W. I. Hall and on to Douglas. We are travelling Hwy. 132 from here to Dacre.

On your left watch for Ferguslea road sign. That is part of the old Opeongo road. We will tell you more about the Opeongo road shortly. but first about Ferguslea. It was a busy place in early days. It had a railway station on the K&P Line called Opeongo Station. Ferguslea was the site of the Reid woollen Mills begun in 1842 by Ephraim Reid and his family. Their original log house and the later large frame one are still standing, occupied by the McMahon family (Bill in clerk-treasurer of Renfrew). These Reid woollen mills provided blankets for the troops who went to the Riel Rebellion in 1886. Reids bought raw

grey wool from South Africa by the bale, carded, spun, dyed and wove it into blankets which were shipped by K & P to Renfrew and thence by C.P.R. to the west ($500 per carload) and supplied over 5000 men (soldiers and N.W.M. Police) with blankets and material for uniforms.

Ferguslea also had the Opeongo Hotel built of logs in 1860's by a Mr. Harty - 12 rooms (7 were bedrooms) and log stables. It was built in the form of a letter T.

From here to Dacre we follow closely the old Opeongo Road, though it was a winding trail.

It was the first colonization road in the Upper Ottawa. Commenced in 1854 it ran west from the mouth of the Bonnechere to Great Opeongo Lake in Algonquin Park, roughly along the watershed of the Bonnechere and Madawaska. Today we will follow the Madawaska valley to Combermere and the Bonnechere valley on the way home. It was to facilitate movement of supplies to the lumber camps but lots were later granted of 50 or 100 acres to settlers on condition that they would build a cabin and cultivate a certain acreage within 4 years. The Opeongo road was a slashed trail around boulders and over corduroy-laid swamps. After the timber was gone it fell to the settlers to maintain the road. I'm glad we are using Hwy 132 today!

Note on your left - Whelan Road leading to Calabogie Peaks - one of the finest ski slopes in Eastern Ontario. Today we will also pass Candiac and Mt. Madawaska ski areas.

We will be crossing at various points today the Madawaska river, which with the Bonnechere and the Opeongo Trail linked our Renfrew South District from Arnprior to Combermere. The Madawaska begins in Algonquin Park, runs through Combermere to Calabogie and thence to Arnprior where it runs into the Ottawa. On our road home this evening we will follow the Bonnechere.

Shamrock - old log home on left now at least 135 years old. This area settled by the Irish - names like O'Gorman. There once were a store, sawmill, and 4 hotels (or stopping places). Teams from Denbigh en route to Renfrew stopped here one night on way in and one on return trip. Today we figure 45 minutes for the trip.

Here's one for conservationists. We are approaching Dacre and 3 things you can watch for - (1) Candiac ski slopes on your left if you are watching at the right moment (2) Constant Creek which runs right to