

A way of life long gone

Steam-Era visitors take look back in time

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**

The Champion

Four-year-old Mitchell Keen didn't say much, but then he didn't really have to.

His happiness visiting Milton's Steam-Era last Friday afternoon for the first time was written all over his face, particularly as he held up one of the day's treasures: a red model tractor.

Mitchell's granny looked at him with pleasure, obviously pleased to be teaching the small boy about a way of life long gone. Audrey Newell has lived in Milton for 33 years, a period peppered with semi-regular visits to the Steam-Era at the Milton Fair Grounds with her children.

For one day, with her daughter, Liz Keen — who moved away from Milton more than 20 years ago — and two grandchildren, it seemed like the good old days.

The family is a three-generation snapshot that encapsulates what the Steam-Era, now in its 44th year, is all about — the old teaching the young and passing down their knowledge of a different way of life.

"The kids have never seen this before," Ms Keen said, adding, "I used to come here when I was a kid."

Ms Newell said the atmosphere is one to which she's accustomed.

"I like the farm atmosphere. I lived on a farm for a while when I was young. I think it's neat for the kids to have a chance to see these sorts of things," she said from the stands, watching a demonstration.

The three-day festival was hosted by the Ontario Steam and Antique Preservers Association and, according to organizers, likely drew record crowds, although numbers have yet to be tabulated.

Visitors were treated to demonstrations of saw mills, threshing, shingle mills and log splitting as well as displays of steam engines, antique tractors and cars, models and agricultural equipment. Participants of the show came from near and far, many camping for the weekend in RVs.

David Stirk, president of the Ontario Steam and Antique Preservers Association, said operating displays have become a mainstay of the show in the past few years.

"People have a chance to learn," he said, adding he's received positive feedback about the steam engine demonstrations for that reason.

He added it's not just kids who learn about a time gone by, but adults too.

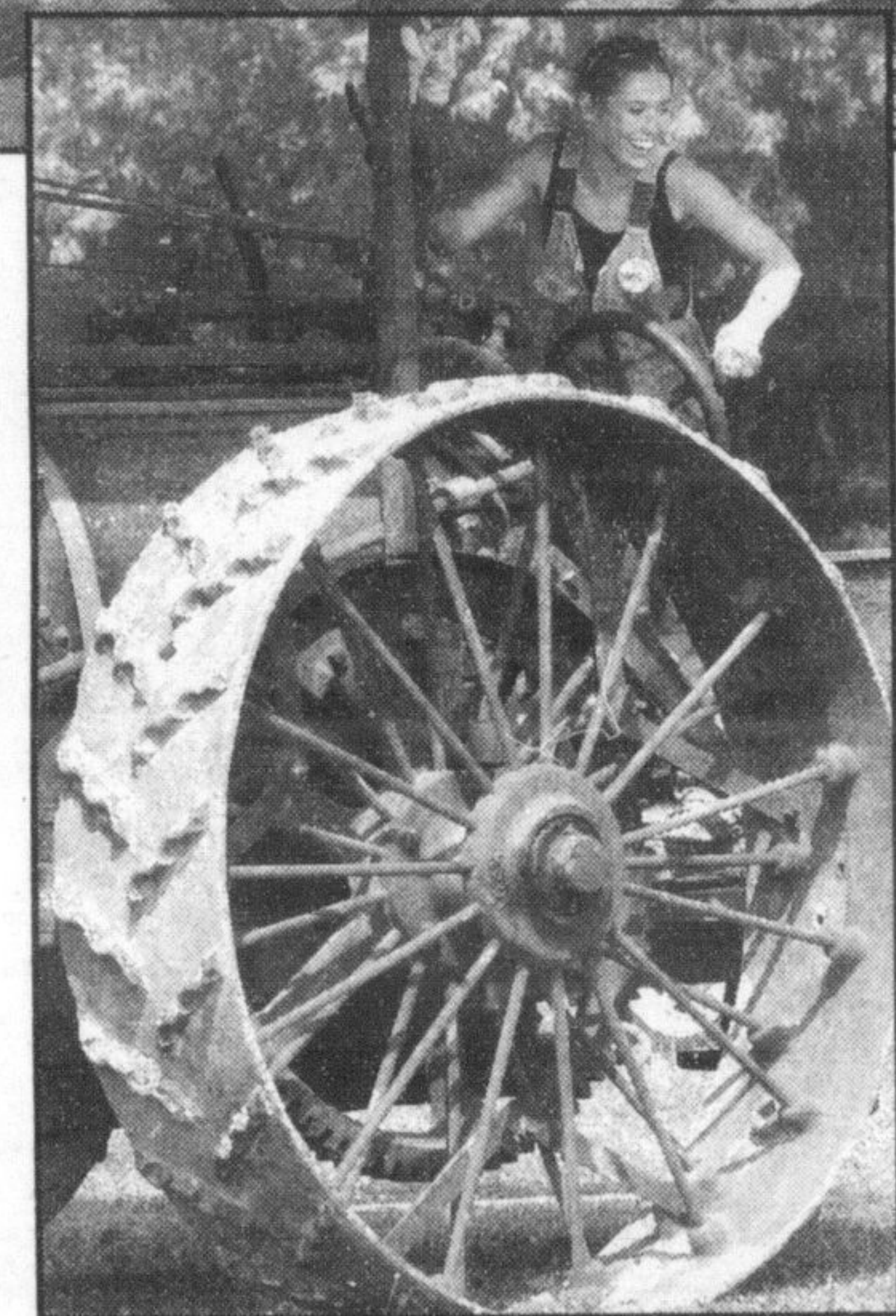
In coming years, the festival will focus even more on the educational component, next year featuring chronological displays showing the evolution of steam powered equipment.

Eddie Kunkel, a watch fob collector displaying his wares at the show, said it's the youngsters who want to learn that put a smile on his face. "I've always been intrigued by the younger people who have taken an interest," he said.

The 67-year-old has been attending the Steam-Era show in Milton since 1972 and said he's watched the town change over the years. "I've watched the drastic changes to Milton itself. It was first just a dot on the map," he said.

Caledon resident Shirley White was on hand last Friday at the raffle for a handmade quilt stitched by the women's group of a Cambridge church. With her was her 14-year-old granddaughter, Cindy Wilson, who spends a day at the Steam-Era each year. "When she was a baby she had naps in that office," Ms White said, pointing to a closed door.

Stephanie Thiessen can be reached at sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com.



Above, Kerri Coxon and Andrew Snell hold up dinner before putting it in the fire box of their friend's 1929 Waterloo steam engine tractor, while (inset left) Ms Coxon prepares to drive the tractor in last weekend's Milton Steam-Era parade. At right, a cyclist makes his way through the slow-moving procession of vintage cars and tractors — including a vintage Sawyer-Massey steam engine (below centre) — that were part of the parade. Bottom left, parade watchers of all ages line the street to take in the festivities, while five-year-old Cassandra Frampton (bottom right) shields her ears from the steam whistles while touring the fairgrounds.



Photos by GRAHAM PAINE

