MUSEUMS Make A Historic Journey

You don't need to be a astronaut to travel in time; and you don't need to be a tourist to visit local museums. Many of the villages in Inverness County have a museum that is a kind of time capsule that brings you in contact, not with alien creatures, but with your own past, your own ancestors. These museums are a great place to bring the whole family, to chat with staff, to explore the treasures of another era, and to gain a greater understanding of your community and your neighbours. We are inviting tourists to step into Nova Scotia, to be a part of the picture. Why not step into a greater apppreciation of your own culture and heritage?

Put yourself in the picture, too.

COUNTY of INVERNESS

Partici~Paper

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Iona Connection

to adopt a formal structure

At a June 18th meeting at St. Ann's Gaelic College, The Iona Connection acted upon a realization that its informal structure and ad hoc style were no longer viable if the group wished to further its objectives. The need for a paid coordinator to carry the load of administrative work was also recognized, as well as a need to investigate incorporation under the formal Societies' Act.

The Iona Connection, an informal coalition of heritage societies in Cape Breton, was initially formed in 1984 to foster Cape Breton, Culture, heritage and history. This was accomplished by sharing information, sponsoring activities, lobbying government and encouraging research. The Federation of Nova Scotia Heritage welcomed this networking as an invaluable access to the "grass roots" heritage community of Cape Breton. Rural areas are considered the backbone of the Island. The Iona Connection, in turn, is grateful for the many ways in which the Federation can be of assistance in connecting with other Nova Scotia heritage societies-- among its many other services.

In view of the need for formal structure, several organizational styles were investigated, among them the formation of a HERITAGE CO-OPERATIVE. As explained by Scott MacAulay, field worker for the St. F.X. Extension Department, the co-operative choice would have the advantage of being already a familiar part of the life of Cape Breton, now in place in retail stores, among farmers and fishermen, in

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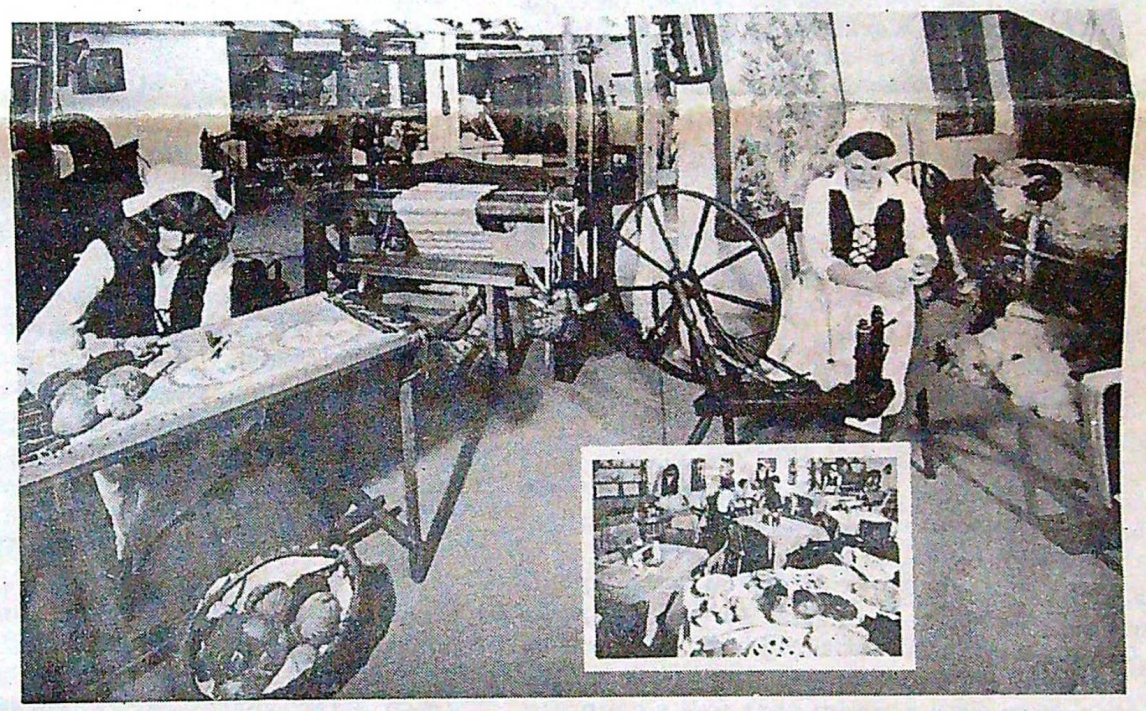

Musee Acadian:

Tapis en laine crocheter à la main

by Kevin MacDonell

CHETICAMP - "You would never realize how much patience it took until you tried it yourself," explained museum employee Gisele Chiasson, bent over her run-hooking frame. She say that the craft of hooking mats and rugs used to be known as "the work of patience."

Working her second summer at the museum, the university student says that she finds her work educational, having learned all the skills of spinning, weaving and hooking on the job. The Musee Acadien (Acadian Museum) is located in the basement, under the main attraction of the site, a handcrafts shop that features locally made hooked rugs. The shop, run by Co-operative Artisanale de Cheticamp Ltee., is operated in conjunction with the Restaurant Acadien.

Throughout the summer, the site is constantly bustling with tourists, who are often members of large bus tours. Downstairs, however, the pace is mercifully slower, almost a retreat back to the time when Gisele's craft demonstrations were a part of daily life in every Acadian household.

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Musee Acadian: Continued

For all the striking beauty of the finished product, hooking is tedious work. The equipment is simple, consisting of a specially made wooden frame in which a section of burlap is held taut. Yarn of the required color and shade is fed to this working surface from underneath with one hand, while the other hand lifts a tiny loop of the yarn through one of the square holes in the burlap with a special hook. Following a drawn design, thousands of these loops will form the desired pattern. Gisele says that it takes much practice to attain a smooth, even texture in the finished mat because each loop must be lifted to the same height. When a mistake is made, the yarn is yanked out from below, and dozens of loops disappear in seconds.

In the days before supplies of yarn could be bought, the trip from the sheep's back to the crafter's frame was a long and labour-intensive one. Sitting next to a stuffed sheep, Gisele demonstrated the various steps and processes of spinning wool to produce yarn.

The sheep were sheared in the spring and the wool washed in hot water. It was then "teased" - slowly pulled apart by hand to lenthen and strengthen the fibres and clean it. Hand cards, two surfaces of metal bristles, were then used to comb the wool, making the fibres parallel. That small amount of wool was then ready for spinning. As one can see, it took a very long time to make ready any appreciable amount.

The wool was then formed into a cylindrical mass called a "rollag." At this point, the wool was as clean as the spinner could make it. Purity was essential because dirt would cause breaks in the finished yarn.

As the spinner fed the wheel, the wool had to be held back at a constant tension to produce even-sized yarn. The wheel works by twisting the fibres together as it spins in a clockwise direction. This yarn is only one-ply; yarn that is more durable and suitable for working with is made by twisting two or more single-ply yarns together with a wheel that has a counter-clockwise spin.

Gisele also gives demonstrations of weaving on a giant, hand-hewn loom. She says the loom is quite old but very easy to operate. It consists of a framework of heavy beams, two pedals, a "beater-frame" and two levels of closely-spaced strings that form the weft and warp. A "shuttle" carrying a piéce of material is passed between these levels. Gisele believes that the art of weaving is becoming popular again, as people realize that they can create products that are both warm and durable. She says that many household disposed of their looms after they had become obsolete. "There are many people who now wish they hadn't done that," she says.

The museum is filled with the utensils and implements of daily Adacian life that survived the changing technology. There are many household articles that date back to the 1700's and 1800's, including a wood stove with irons being heated on it, books, Bibles, a baby carriage, a phonograph, a 120 year old spool bed, covered with handwoven material, old washing implements, and a rough-hewn cradle that according to its identification tag,"rocked three generations." All of the artifacts were donated by local residents.

At the rear of the museum is the Chapel Scene, featuring a bishop sitting on a throne and dressed in full raiment, including mitre and sceptre. His priest stands by his side and an altar is spread before the pair. Chalises, a large Bible, an organ and other artifacts surround the altar. All of these are from Cheticamp's first church, Ste. Appollinaire, built in Belle Marche around 1800. The bishop and priest figures are the work of M.A.J. Saulnier, a retired Cheticamp schoolteacher.

There is also some antique spinning equipment, including a small wheel from about 1800 operated by hand-crank, and a huge one that required two people to operate.

As well as being a repository for Acadian artifacts, the museum conducts geneological work and historical and cultural research.

Spokesperson for the Co-operative Artisanale, Mrs. Luce Marie Boudreau says that the museum's central purpose is to depict the history of the community by show how its people lived and worked in the days when they made a living on farms and by fishing.

She says that the rugs were first made not with wool yarn, but with strips of old material. Although rag rugs are still made today, the early craftsepeople made them of necessity. "They had to make do," says Mrs. Boudreau, "Someone who had a large farm and a suppy of wool was considered wealthy."

Eventually, wool did supplant rags as hooking material, but the rugs produced were still only for domestic use until about fifty years ago, when the people began to trade them with visitors. By a sort of barter system, rugs were exchanged for flannel blankets, floor coverings, and towels.

However, Mrs. Boudreau says that the real beginning of the industry occurred with the visit of New York artist Lillian Burke, who came to Cape Breton Island to find the makers of rugs that she had heard about. She eventually found them in Cheticamp, and went on to help the local craftspeople by introducing them to new patterning and "shading" techniques. With numerous shades of each color, people were able to produce the 'muted' shades in subjects like leaves and flowers. Mrs. Boudreau says that since no more than four shades per color of yarn are available commercially, the museum does most of its own dyeing.

Iona Connection to adopt a formal structure

Continued

credit unions and other worker groups. A co-operative is traditionally an economic union, he added,, in which the focus is need and not just profit. It is a very flexible system, which could be geared to purposes other than commerical businesses. This style of organization is democratic with one vote per member, regardless of the financial input of the individual. However, profit sharing is arranged in a ratio according to financial investment. This structure would also have great value in approaching government agencies in applications for grants and other financial assistance. A steering committee could be formed to articulate objectives and to see what the relationships would be among the members, the executive, and a board of directors.

While many members of the Iona Connection expressed a great interest in this particular style of organization, it was agreed that further research into other alternatives would yet be conducted, as well as investigation into how the co-operative style could be adapted for the uses of heritage. Continued Page 3

Correction:

Les Amis Sales

In last month's article about Les Amis du Plein Air bookshop, gross sales were incorrectly equated with net profit. In fact, more than 90% of gross sales revenue goes to pay for stock purchased, salaries, and other bookshop operating expenses. In the past three years, much of the remaining net profit was used to subsidize the community activity program: i.e. to hire summer activity and winter cross-country ski directors.

The $32,000 contributed by Les Amis towards the construction of the new bookstore represents a bank loan in addition to profit saved from several previous years. The figure of $65,000 which was reported as the amount turned over to the Park was entirely in error since this money does not exist as net profit.

Partici-Paper

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