

Fort la Reine Museum and Pioneer Village

Fort la Reine Museum is named for the first fort in this area. It was built by Pierre Gaultier de la Verendrye and his two sons in 1739 on the north side of the Assiniboine River along the Yellowquill Trail, just southwest of the City of Portage la Prairie.

It served as his headquarters for 13 years while he explored the territories to the south, west, and north. In 1852 a group of Cree Indians burned Fort la Reine to the ground. A cairn has been erected on the site of the original fort.

The official opening of the Museum took place on November 13 1967, as a Manitoba Centennial Project. The Museum at that time consisted of only the main building, which housed Mr. Fred Thomson's unique collection of regional Native and pioneer artifacts.

From that humble beginning, the Museum has blossomed into the "Fort la Reine Museum, Pioneer Village and Tourist Bureau" which is proud to offer not only many exciting pioneer buildings and displays, but also features many special weekend events throughout the season.

The Main Building

This building was constructed in 1967 in the style of buildings of the early settlers. The front portion of the building houses the Tourist Bureau. The display area contains many artifacts from the local districts, which were donated by Mr. Fred Thomson.

In the display cases to the right as you enter this room are a collection of Native Artifacts, and a selection of guns including one used in the Louis Riel Rebellion. The next display cases contain a variety of early pioneer artifacts. There are also many old pictures on the walls and an old Dictaphone along the wall.

On the north end of the building is a display case with a R.C.M.P. uniform that was donated by Mrs. Barbara Johnson. The uniform belonged to Major James Lyle Johnson (retired), Mrs. Johnson's late husband, who was one of the last members of the R.C.M.P. to achieve the rank of Staff Sergeant Major, a rank that has since been retired.

In the shelves opposite the north wall is a collection of Depression Glass, donated by the Manitoba Depression Glass Club, and a collection of Oil Lamps that have been donated from the Portage area.

At the north end of the west wall there is a collection of old toys including an old Mickey Mouse Radio. The remainders of the north and west wall displays are changed throughout the summer.

On the south wall, and immediately to your left when you enter, is a statue of la Verendrye's sons, who were the first European explorers to see the Rockies, accompanied by their native guide. Among the other artifacts are a Golden Eagle, a number of tools including an ash sifter, a 4000 year old Bison skull and a piece of petrified wood. There is also a handmade fiddle! Before you continue into the village you can see the old safe from the Rabkin's Department Store.



The Millstone

Just outside the west door of the Main Building you will find an old millstone. This millstone was found buried between two houses at 231 and 233 Queen Street in Portage la Prairie. It was one of two millstones from the Johnson Oat Mill built on that very spot by David R. Johnston who lived in Portage la Prairie from about 1882 to 1900. It was the first oatmeal mill west of the Great Lakes.

Querns

Against the west wall of the Main Building are several querns. These stones were used to grind cereals and pre-dated the invention of the watermill and windmill, but the principle operation was similar. The bottom stone is fixed, while the top stone turns to produce the grinding of the cereals.