

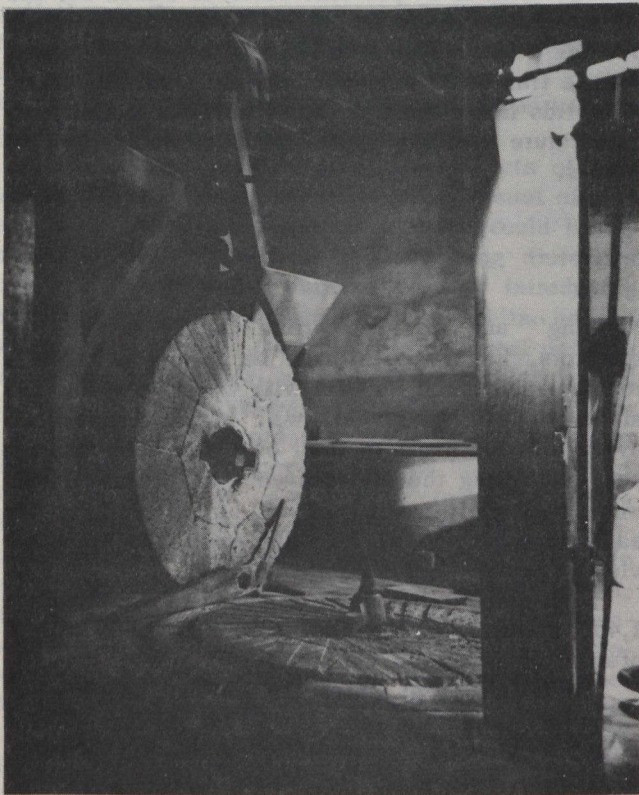
THE STUFF OF HISTORY

"Little bottles filled with mercury are carried by old-timers in the Yukon. These are handy substitutes for thermometers, for when the mercury is solid, the wise traveller in that country seeks shelter."

This is the sort of information which was taken from a contemporary account of the Yukon Gold Rush that the newly-established "material history" research section of the National Historic Sites Service is attempting to compile. The researchers approach history through the everyday stuff of Canada's past — goods illustrated in old newspaper advertisements and retail catalogues, observations from centuries-old travellers' journals, and objects found in museum collections.

Elizabeth Wylie, supervisor of the project, explains: "We're interested in Canada's social history during the European period, and the everyday things historians considered too ordinary to be worth recording."

When curators restore and furnish an interior, creation of the appropriate atmosphere depends on precise and accurate historical detail. "There is a basic peril in simply attempting to restore a house in 'period' furnishing. The furnishings often varied according to the individual's social standing and did not necessarily depend on whether his background



The millstones of Cope's grist mill in Ancaster, Ontario, which dates from 1863, were imported from a quarry near Paris, as were all high-quality millstones in North America in the nineteenth century.

was French or English, or whether his home was urban or rural. For example, as the French Canadian gained social status, he abandoned the carved pine *armoires* and other goods from the French settlers' rural 'peasant' past, and adopted current British, French, or American styles....," says Miss Wylie.

In recreating the home surroundings of a nineteenth century Quebecker, curators might refer to sources ranging from Cornelius Kreighoff's paintings to contemporary newspaper advertisements. Eaton's catalogue is a virtual encyclopedia of information, but it did not exist before 1884. The late 1880s brought mass production and a standardization of Canadian goods. Up to that time, the reflection of regional differences was more pronounced but systematically unrecorded.

One area of interest to the research section is how the use of some rooms and other interior features of Canadian homes have changed with changing social customs and economic circumstances.

EARLY DOMESTIC HEATING

Domestic researcher Marcel Moussette is now conducting a historical study of domestic heating in Canada. One of the most important features of the stove was its adaptability to the Canadian climate, Mr. Moussette points out; otherwise, there would have been no reason for the stove to replace the fireplace. The stove was mobile and radiated heat from its metal plates rather than simply providing a limited amount of direct heat as a fireplace would. (Most of the heat in early fireplaces went up the chimney.)

It is likely that the stove also had some effect on certain features of Quebec architecture. In the 1600s the first French settlers came to Canada from western France, where fireplaces were used for indoor heating, though stoves were already being used in other parts of Europe. The early settlers lived in two-room dwellings consisting of kitchen and sleeping-quarters with a chimney located at either end or in the centre of the house. When stoves came into popular use, however, people could live in several rooms, with pipes carrying heat throughout the house. And since they were obliged to heat their houses for a large part of the year, roofs were constructed of tin or slate-tile to avoid fire. Until 1760, historical accounts make no mention of cooking stoves; apparently, cooking was still done at the hearth.

Another area of research, traditional trades and crafts, will include information on early Canadian flour mills, lime kilns, weaving techniques, and the crafts of the blacksmith and cooper. Last summer, Miss Wylie and staff photographer Georges Lupien filmed an old stone flour-mill still in operation at Ancaster, Ontario. The film record, she explained, could serve as a valuable guide for restoring a similar structure in the historic sites system.