

The Harris WOOLEN MILL

Ruins

John Harris arrived from Ireland in 1820 and became the first settler of the Rockwood area. He married Jane Wetherald in 1836 and a year later, the couple had a son who they named John Richard Harris. Probably due to the Wetherald's connections with the weaving trade in England, John Richard became the driving force and founder of the Rockwood Woolen Mills in 1867.

The original wooden version of the mill burned and was replaced by the present stone structure in 1884. The business was passed on within the family after the death of John Richard in April, 1899, and operated successfully through the first World War, employing approximately 80 hands. Competition with the larger Toronto and Hespeler mills began to pinch, however, and operations ceased by 1925.

The lands and buildings continued in the hands of the Harris family until 1958, when the Grand River Conservation Authority purchased them from Edgar Harris, grandson of the founder. The mill had been idle and the machinery removed for many years when it was accidentally burned in 1967. A stone shell is all that remains of a once prosperous business, the mainstay of the town of Rockwood, and originators of the famous Harris Homespun Wools.



The Harris Woolen Mill in the 1890s, shortly after it was rebuilt of stone.



The Harris Woolen Mill, circa 1900.



The Harris Woolen Mill in the 1960s, looking from the present day Gilbert MacIntyre & Son Funeral Home Family Memorial Area.

Today, the Harris Mill ruins remain a major feature of Rockwood Conservation Area, and are a popular backdrop for weddings, movies and photo shoots. Maintenance of the old stone walls is an annual expense. Tax deductible donations to help preserve the historic mill ruins are accepted by the Grand River Conservation Foundation.

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