



*Preserving, promoting, and developing Wellington North's unique cultural resources to build a vibrant community and a prosperous economy.*

### CULTURAL MOMENT FOR FEBRUARY 22<sup>ND</sup> CELEBRATES SPINNING WHEELS IN THE PAST AND NOW

In the past, spinning fibres was a necessity to provide warm clothing, or household items. If a flax or cotton fibre was spun fine enough, it could be knitted or crocheted into cloths, tablemats, curtains, or lace. Spinning with wool, llama, alpaca, goat, or dog fibre could produce warm coats, sweaters, hats, mitts and even underwear.

Before spinning wheels were invented, fibre was spun on drop spindles over 10,000 years ago. A spindle provides a twist that turns fibre into yarn in a process known as drafting. Like spinning wheels, they come in a variety of designs; unlike spinning wheels they are more time consuming to produce yarns. Many men in third-world countries still use this method.



We may associate spinning wheels with our pioneers, but they were actually invented in China about 1000 AD. The idea later spread to Iran, then to India and finally to Europe. Mahatma Gandhi used a spinning wheel, called a Charkha, during his struggle for India's independence and economic self-sufficiency from British colonial rule. In a pioneer home, a great or walking wheel was common. It was invented in the 14<sup>th</sup> century to spin wool into yarn and was approximately 5 feet high. Known as the walking wheel because a person walked back and forth beside the wheel and could walk up to 20 miles a day, albeit inside their cabin, while feeding the unspun yarn into the orifice of the wheel. The right hand spun the wheel, and the left hand manipulated the fibre so that it twisted evenly.



Today, spinning wheels, are used as a popular handicraft. They are obsolete in commercial manufacturing as they now use industrial spinners however there are



farms who have home-businesses specializing in either the raw fibre or finished products. There are also groups whose sole purpose is to socialize while spinning and sharing information. One group is called the Queen's Bush Guild of Fibre Artisans. This group has 20+ members from Mount Forest, Conn, Williamsford, Hanover, and Mildmay and pre-Covid, met once a month in a member's home. The spinning wheels

that these ladies use are as various as the many makes & models of automobiles and are modifications of those used through the centuries.