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# Museum holds a town's worth of treasure

## Occoquan's past safe in Mill House

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for the Potomac News

OCCOQUAN — The quaint Occoquan Mill House Museum is no bigger than most people's living room, but it holds much of the history of an entire town.

### Places

It is located at 413 Mill St., "at the end of the street on the right," said Marcia Pendleton, who wants to make sure no one gets lost. Although it is quite small, approximately 10,000 to 12,000 people visit it each year, Pendleton said.

"If you're going to have history, you're going to need a place to collect it," Mayor Laverne Carson said. "You need a repository to share [history] with everyone else."

Visitors can not only learn about the rich history of the town of Occoquan, but they can see it as well. Visitors can see what life was like for residents in the 18th century and learn that "Occoquan" comes from the Dogue Indian language and means "at the end of the water."

The museum opened in 1969 and houses artifacts such as Indian pieces, medicine bottles, antique dolls, a doctor's bag and instruments, a child's holster and locks of hair from former town residents. Each artifact has a story behind it, but only a visitor's imagination can bring the stories to life.

Those working in the museum can answer just about any question. "The docs are very knowledgeable about the town, which adds to the interest of the town," Carson said.

The building was once a miller's office and is the only remaining part of an 18th century grist



The Occoquan Mill House Museum, part of what was an 18th-century mill, sits at the end of Mill Street.

or grain mill. It is believed to be the site of the beginning of the automation of transferring grain from the holds of the ships, through the mill, and to the storage bins. It is one of the only buildings to survive the 1924 fire that destroyed much of the town.

The museum reflects the quiet serenity of Occoquan. The town and museum combine the some of the attributes of modern life with the area's rich heritage.

The historical artifacts housed in the museum are considered priceless memorabilia and needed to be preserved," said Pendleton, a member of Historical Occoquan Inc.

All of the priceless artifacts are donated or loaned to the museum by interested people, Pendleton said.

One of the prized artifacts on display is a bicentennial quilt of landmarks and buildings. It was completed by 29 "lovely ladies of the town," Pendleton said. The quilt won the Woodlawn Plantation Blue Ribbon.

Another item of special interest is a photo album the destruction of the 94-year-old Pratt Truss iron bridge by Hurricane Agnes in 1972. Each picture shows the

slow destruction as a flood waters crashed through the town. The bridge used to be the main thoroughfare for traffic between Washington, D.C., and Richmond. There are also pictures of the town submerged in water.

Admission to the museum is free. Hours are from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day. The museum sells postcards and books.