

New Brunswick Free Public Library director Robert Belvin with the 1902-era dollhouse, which will be open to the public beginning today. Below: One of the rooms in the newly renovated dollhouse.

STAFF PHOTOS: JASON TOWLEN

Dollhouse reopens today

BY TOM BALDWIN

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NEW BRUNSWICK — The cakes and pies are half the size of a penny but look hot, filling and delicious. Pets lounge or frolic in every room. The toilet has a pull-chain flusher with an overhead reservoir.

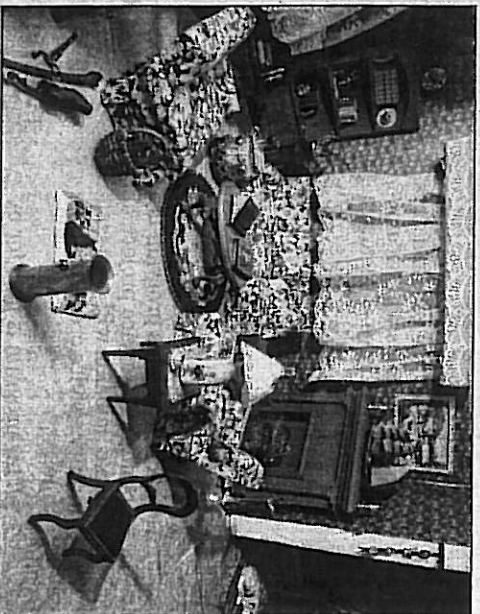
This, in the basement of the New Brunswick Free Public Library, is the library's 109-year-old dollhouse, a busy world in miniature, upon which one can gaze for hours at the intricate furnishings reduced to "mouse scale" but still clinging to the appearance of being real.

All it takes is a little imagination to bond with the latest renovation at the library: the 1902-era dollhouse. The Victorian-era gem was gifted in 1923 to the institution by the library's onetime children's librarian, M. Dorothy Long, who received the dollhouse for her 10th birthday.

Of late, the dollhouse has been in storage or under renovation.

It is to be officially reopened and refurbished at a 3 p.m. dedication today at the library, 60 Livingston Ave. ✓

"It needed work," librar-



ian Robert Belvin said. "We looked all over. We could not find a dollhouse society."

It came down to the library reaching out to the Jersey Shore Miniature Society of Neptune, which specializes in a variety of miniatures, such as collectibles, from art and statuary to dollhouses and decorative scenes that club members call "vignettes."

"It was in a state of disrepair, so we painted and wall-papered it, and we furnished it," said the society president Linda Carroll, a Neptune resident.

The club's biggest challenge on the job?

"It wasn't square," Carroll laughed.

"Over the years," Belvin

said, "there was wear and tear, just like in a real house. It took an amount of skill to do it right. We are happy to have it back in the children's room."

The two-story house looks as though it was plucked from the farmlands somewhere.

Fireplaces warm the rooms. The kitchen has an ice box — not a refrigerator. There is a living room down and two bedrooms upstairs.

The garage is — you guessed it — is overcrowded with yard gear and things the owner apparently cannot part with.

Measuring 3 feet by 4 feet, one can gaze into the house through a clear, plastic panel that defines the house's front wall.

Gone are the days when library staffers used to redecorate the interior to fit the seasons or the holidays. It would be just too costly, Belvin said.

Children's room dollhouse-sized lamps cost \$30 today, even with a discount over the Internet. Fancy light fixtures are in the \$300s. A tea set for two costs nearly \$50. A picnic table cost \$20, a grill about \$15.

"Oh it has become terribly expensive," Carroll said of dollhouse decor.

"We used some furnishings from the library. The rest was donated," she said.

Belvin pointed to a personal touch on the living-room wall. It is a photo of some ladies.

"They are members of the Jersey Shore Miniature Club," the librarian said.

He said visitors to the library took the dollhouse for granted, until it went off for its remake.

"People would ask, 'Where did the dollhouse go? I always enjoyed pausing to look at it,'" Belvin recalled.

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