



COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

COMMITTEE REPORT

To: Chair and Members of the Information, Heritage and Seniors Committee
From: Jana Burns, Wellington Place Administrator
Date: Wednesday, September 14, 2022
Subject: **WCMA Update**

Summer Comments

The WCMA has welcomed 4,325 visitors so far this summer, numbers which are similar to pre-pandemic. It was wonderful to expose the many weeks of camp children to the Museum, and to teach them of their obligation to caring for the site. We also hosted events, including the Historical Society AGM, where I had the opportunity to provide remarks and updates on our activities, and introduce guest speaker Senator Black.

Positioning the WCMA for Success

At a team building day August 3, staff acknowledged that it is important we be a place that stands out among tourism experiences in the region. With this objective, we had a kickoff meeting August 22 with BC Hughes Tourism Development, retained to undertake the coaching and recommendations involved in this project. Two workshops will take place in the fall, an Essence of Place workshop late September followed by a Visitor Experience workshop early November. Both workshops will involve staff and external tourism stakeholders, to help us develop our ideal positioning and our unique selling propositions. The timing of this project is opportune as it runs parallel to the County's first ever Tourism Strategy, led by Christina Mann in Economic Development.

145 Anniversary of the Poor House – September 24

On September 24, from 11am to 3pm, the WCMA will host our House of Industry and Refuge Anniversary Celebration for the public. The event begins with opening remarks followed by a skit presented by the IH&S Committee members. Costumes will be available for Committee members (overcoats, top hats, etc.). The skit will involve short, prepared statements in the form of an historic debate that occurred amongst council surrounding the opening of the House of Industry in 1877. Archives staff have researched and developed the skit and Councillors will be provided their notes in advance of the day.

Following the skit, at 11:45am attendees will be head to the Aboyne Hall for the performance of a special play based around the life of the House of Industry preformed by a local theatre company and created just for this event. At the conclusion of the performance, the Nicholas Keith Room will be transformed into the House of Industry dining room for a historical lunch featuring stew from Fraberts Fresh Food, warm bread, and beer - everything one would need for a days work on the Poor House Industrial Farm!

A second vignette will be available at 1:30pm, and tours of the Museum will be ongoing in the afternoon, including to some of the less familiar corners of the House of Industry.

Summer Camp

2022 represented the first year we held an entire summer full of camps for those aged 5 to 12 years. Aside from varied weekly themes, we had the opportunity to expose children to the museum world. Camps were sold out and the comments from both campers and parents were universally positive. Programme Manager Kyle Smith let me know that many campers even said it was their favourite camp ever.

One highlight of the camps was the creation of the Camp History Detectives Exhibit, where kids explored the Museum collection to curate their own exhibit using artifacts they themselves chose. The campers chose an artifact and were assisted to display their item in the Museum with professional labels describing why it spoke to them. The exhibit is quite cute and is still available for viewing. Much praise goes to summer students and camp leaders Ronan Crozier and Sarah O'Donnell, who planned and executed the programmes, and without whose leadership the camp would not have been as successful.

Family Drop in Activities

During the summer Programming staff organized a number of family drop-in activities. These consisted of special presentations such as visits from the OPP K9 unit, Firetrucks, Garbage Trucks, an astronomy show, and storytelling and other crafts and activities to supplement the afternoon. The events took place Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings, were well attended and met with enthusiastic support from the public.

Poor House Tours – Summer 2022

As a part of the 145 anniversary, and as a way to animate the Museum on weekends when we see our largest visitor traffic, Programming staff have been leading tours of the Historic Building each Saturday at 1pm. These drop-in tours are offered as a part of the regular Museum admission. Tours last an hour and involve the entire history of the building, including visits to the Cemetery. Tours have been successful with up to 24 attendees each week and groups are usually a wonderful mix of locals who want to know more about the building and visitors from outside the local area who saw our advertisements while they were in downtown Elora during their 'staycation'. Given the success of the Poor House tours, they will be extended into the fall.

Historic Drinking in Elora Tours in Association with the Elora Distillery

An WCMA 2021 Action Plan objective was to provide a downtown presence and partner with local businesses. This summer staff have piloted guided tours of the downtown Elora area on Saturday afternoons at 3pm. The tours are a partnership with the Elora Distillery, they advertise and sell the tickets and tours begin at the Distillery. The tours are a historic overview of how alcohol, alcohol sales and alcohol regulations have shaped the village, and also feature a number of colourful characters and stories from our past, using research from the Archives. The tours have not been as well attended, but have been wonderful to help a local business support local history and having the Museum staff very prominently (and loudly) talking local history downtown when Elora is at its busiest, excellent advertising for the Museum. People often tag along on tours eavesdropping and many other follow us home to the Museum afterwards or take a few of the cards that we handout along the way.

Sunset Concerts

Summer Concerts were back again after a shortened year last year due to Covid19 restrictions. This year we were able to have a full schedule of artists perform in the Historic Barn. Attendance was up and down, we do not have a Museum social media account, however a dedicated push was made at the end of the summer to increase awareness of the concerts and the Communications division was very helpful in helping to raise our numbers for the close of the year.

August 28 Car Show

The Car Show represents the final large event of the WCMA summer season. The Show is exceedingly weather dependent and this year the weather was perfect, the cars came in unprecedented numbers. Our previous record for cars registered was 250 and this year saw 350 cars, with over 100 not officially registering. The front lawn was filled with cars and they began to overflow onto any available grass space on the property.

The high number of cars translated into over 2,000 attendees and over 1,200 visitors to the Museum building itself. As a result, the 2022 Car Show has been the WCMA's single biggest public event ever. Notable is that well over 1,000 people attended The Car Show than in previous years. Despite the attendance, our event infrastructure was stressed but never broke, we had space for everyone, two food vendors making sure everyone was fed and hydrated, the Fergus Brass Band provided musical entertainment and our washrooms remained usable.

Staff will be meeting in the aftermath of such a significant event to plan for next year. The Car Show has grown beyond our expectations, and we will be planning to make next year even bigger and better. An excellent way to end the summer!

September 11 Wedding Festival

On Sunday, September 11, the WCMA will host a Wedding Festival from 11:00am – 3:00pm in a large tent on the WCMA grounds. This is a family-friendly event with great food, live music, beer and wine, games, crafts, a photobooth, and a Wedding Showcase presentation featuring stories and wedding traditions from Wellington County and around the world. Guests are encouraged to dress up in wedding attire, whether new, old, tacky or borrowed, and show them off in the showcase.

The Wedding Fest will complement the wedding dress exhibit currently in the Exhibit Hall. As this event takes place during Welcoming Week, we are encouraging residents of all backgrounds to participate. We have listed our event with the Guelph Wellington Local Immigration Partnership as part of Welcoming Week, and

Help us make Wedding Fest unforgettable by submitting your unique story to our Wedding Showcase! Did your wedding include a special cultural or family tradition? Did the Best Man lose the rings just before the wedding? Do you still have your outfit and want a chance to show it off? [Submit your stories and photos online for a chance to be part of our Wedding Showcase here!](#)

Come dressed in your best wedding attire, be it from your own wedding, your grandma's closet, or a second-hand store! Do you have a tacky bridesmaid dress, ruffled tuxedo, or adorable ring bearer outfit? This is your chance to wear it again! Let's face it, weddings have been on hold for the last two years and we want a reason to celebrate!

shared the information with our Economic Development and Tourism stakeholders in the municipalities. Please help us in spreading the word.

Living in Relation Exhibit

Living in Relation is a family-friendly exhibit with engaging opportunities that align with Anishinaabe teachings. Since June, the public has experienced teaching opportunities with Indigenous exhibit host Amber Holmes in the gallery space (every Friday). To date the exhibit has reached over 4,306 visitors. We are currently planning additional programming opportunities for our visitors this fall and winter. It is a “living exhibit,” meaning it will evolve over the duration of the show with the addition of Museum visitor contributions being displayed, and “play” items such as animal hand puppets and natural building blocks for young children to engage with. Other planned updates this fall include content changes such as highlights of the upcoming plan for the Indigenous Gathering Circle at Wellington Place, as well as the use of relationship pronouns (ki and kin) and the realignment of the direction of the colonial map to reflect Anishinaabe teachings.

The WCMA partnership bringing Amber Holmes’ Indigenous exhibit was recently invited to speak at the Ontario Museum Association Conference on November 7, 2022. This in-person presentation will provide opportunities for participants to actively engage in the different aspects of the Living in Relation exhibit. The outcomes of the presentation will be like the exhibit whereby participants are asked to reflect on their individual relationships with the environment and to reflect on call to actions by the TRC so that they can make positive changes in their professional and personal lives.

Artifact Storage Building Renovations

The expansion of the mezzanine level in the artifact storage building is proceeding on schedule. This additional storage space is crucial. The large wood (furniture) storage located in the attic of the Museum has been full for several years, and staff have been shifting overflow artifacts out to the storage building which is rapidly running out of space.

The artifact storage building holds the bulk of our large artifacts, such as:

- Agricultural implements (thresher, plows, cultivators, seeders, fanning mills, etc.)
- Vehicles (wagons, sleighs, hearse, street organ, etc.)
- Furniture (school desks, chairs, cabinets, etc.)
- Household items (sewing machines, Beatty appliances, stoves, windows, pumps, etc.)
- Large artifacts from local businesses (signs, dental and optometry tools, carts)
- Unique artifacts such as a jail cell, witness box, and items from the House of Industry and Refuge

In July, staff cleared the floor on the west side of the building, moving and tarping the large artifacts that could not be moved onto or under the existing mezzanine to protect them from the dust generated by the construction. The footings for the expanded mezzanine have been poured, and water lines have been extended to the building to provide humidification to the environmental controls. This is important as fluctuations in humidity are damaging to wood and metal artifacts (the most common materials present in the artifacts stored in this building), and the ability to control the humidity in the space as well as the

temperature will ensure we can meet our standard of care for the artifacts and ensure their preservation for future generations.



Cutting new footings (above) and newly poured footings (below) for mezzanine expansion.



Barn Restoration

The exposed stone foundation of our heritage barn has been in need of repointing for some time. The stone walls and concrete silo were previously painted white, which prevented water from passing through the mortar and exiting the walls safely. Over time, this has caused damage to the stones, and the paint on the silo has begun to flake off, creating an untidy appearance.



West wall of stable prior to removal of paint and old mortar (August 2022).



Silo prior to sandblasting to remove old paint (August 2022).

The structures have now been cleaned of all paint and repairs have been made to ensure the walls are stable. A historically accurate lime mortar will be used to ensure the continued preservation of these foundation walls, and drip edges will be added to the underside of the window ledges to prevent further damage by water running down the walls.

Time Capsule Discovery

When running the water line to the artifact storage building, crews unearthed the time capsule that was buried on June 16, 1996, as part of the “Brotherly Walk” event at the WCMA. This was a re-enactment of the original centennial “Bury the Hatchet” event that took place on June 18, 1967, when the townspeople of Fergus and Elora met at Aboyne to celebrate the centennial together and end the rivalry between the two communities. David Lowe of Fergus, and William Taylor and Walter Kreps of Elora organized the event, with Lowe donating a pipe, Taylor a hatchet, and Kreps a concrete vault in which to bury the two items on “neutral ground” at the Wellington County Home for the Aged in Aboyne. Residents of Elora and Fergus dressed in period costume and walked to Aboyne, escorted by the Fergus Pipe and Brass Bands, and gathered for a picnic and celebration.



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Art Hoffer, Reeve of Elora (with pipe and shovel), Mayor John Campbell of Fergus (centre, with hatchet), and Warden Cameron Lush (right). Warden Lush placed the concrete vault containing a “peace declaration” scroll into a garden at the front gate of Wellington Place, then Hoffer and Campbell placed the pipe and hatchet inside.



The burial was marked with a placard, but later dug up and the items were given to Wilf Roszell, Superintendant of the Wellington County Home for the Aged for safekeeping. When the Home closed in 1971 and moved to a new facility in Elora, the capsule and its contents were donated to the WCMA.



John Lowe (left) and Ken Taylor (right) re-enact the ceremony undertaken by their fathers nearly 30 years before.



John Lowe, Jim Kreps, and Ken Taylor with the new time capsule, June 16, 1996.

The Archives

From June to August, 190 members of the public visited the Archives to undertake research in person. Archives staff processed 59 photo reproduction orders, answered 67 phone calls, and responded to 145 emails. This summer we began to see a return to pre-pandemic in person visits from members of the public travelling from all parts of Ontario, western Canada as well as the United States. Overall, in person visits are still down compared to pre-pandemic numbers. Email requests continue to increase year over year. Photo reproduction orders have increased since the pandemic due to the public's ability to use our online portal for photo reproduction requests, available as soon as the public view the image online through our Collections Catalogue.

Inquiries from the public included: research to establish where and when ancestors lived in Nichol Township; to ask where United Church records should be deposited and if we accept church records into our collection; to establish if a cemetery existed on church grounds; request records to be viewed during an upcoming visit; to let staff know the researcher was having trouble accessing issues of the Wellington Advertiser while using our online database; procedure to donate records relating to a family in Elora; to ask if we are interested any Guelph directories for the collection; looking to use postcard from the collection depicting giant hogweed in an art exhibit; searching for background information on an individual for a eulogy; looking for historical information for a walking tour in Wellington North for Cultural Days and property history research.

Fifty-nine photograph reproduction orders were processed. Photographs were used in a number of ways including: a T.E. Bissell of Elora postcard article; to show family how the father's hometown has changed over the years; to frame and display historic photo of neighborhood as well as home a family lived in; background research for a book on Elora; Minto Township family history publication; to share image with elderly family member who is in the photo; historical research on downtown Guelph buildings; to use photo in a book on the militia of Waterloo County as well as in local newspaper articles.

Over the past several months Archives summer student Tim Liebrecht was the principal member of staff undertaking the background research into the House of Industry residents for the database to be launched on September 24th as part of our House of Industry 145th anniversary events. Tim was assisted by Archives Volunteer Susan Edwards and Archivist Assistants Kelsey Lindinger and Kyle Pugh. This was Tim's second year with the Archives, where he has provided invaluable historical research and data input for our upcoming House of Industry resident database. From Tim: "I really enjoyed working with the historic House of Industry records. The research made each resident feel like much more than just a number and showed many of their journeys from childhood to parenthood to their final years."

Recommendation:

That the WCMA Update be received for information and forwarded to County Council.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jana Burns', with a stylized, cursive script.

Jana Burns
Wellington Place Administrator