



COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

COMMITTEE REPORT

To: Chair and Members of the Information, Heritage and Seniors Committee
From: Jana Burns, Wellington Place Administrator
Date: Wednesday, February 14, 2024
Subject: WCMA Update

Black History Month

2024 represents the third year of partnering with the school boards in Wellington County to present the history of Black settlement within the Queen's Bush as a celebration of Black History Month. The first year featured a virtual presentation, whereby the County was able to reach students and test the programme in the classroom. In 2023 staff began in-person presentations to grade 10 students. On February 20 for example, over 150 grade 10 students from the Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic High School will receive an in-person presentation. The class has chosen *Freedom Fighters*, which explores the many men and women that experienced slavery in North America and their struggles to gain freedom. Individuals such as John Little and Richard Pierpoint will be discussed, as their stories touch on the importance of family, community and identity.

First ever sleepover at Museum

On Friday February 2 the WCMA hosted its first sleepover. A total of 21 Beaver Scouts aged 5 to 7 had the Museum exhibits all to themselves, including the dinosaur exhibit on the Friday evening, followed by the sleepover in Aboyne Hall. After breakfast in the Hall the children spent the morning outside on the grounds. Below is the email with photos which staff received on Sunday morning:

"Hello Jana, thank you for your warm welcome! We are having a fabulous time, and appreciate the hospitality. Julia, Kim, Aaron and the other staff have been so helpful. We had a great time visiting the exhibits last night. This morning we are getting some outdoor play time on that superb playground, and checking out the trail, before we return to Aboyne Hall to do the crafts supplied by the programming team.

What a lovely venue!

Best regards,
Jared Martin"





Dinosaurs!

The Dinosaurs exhibit from Canada's Dinosaur Park has received great reviews and several thousand happy visitors so far. The first 28 days 7,210 visitors, including several school and homeschool groups, and 600 visitors alone on January 26, a PD Day for the Upper Grand District School Board.

Dinosaurs has transformed the Exhibit Hall and Nicholas Keith room into a Jurassic wonderland complete with life-sized dinosaurs, including some that move and roar, nestled amongst rocks, trees, replica fossils, and immersive sounds and lighting that provide a memorable experience for visitors of all ages. The image below right shows the grandchildren of former County Director of Planning Gary Cousins enjoying the exhibit.

The decision to offer quiet visiting hours from 9:30am to 11:00am on Wednesday mornings has been well received. Many parents have opted to bring their toddlers in during this time for a less overwhelming visit, when the sounds and movements are turned off. Offering quiet visiting hours is increasing the accessibility of the museum to visitors with special sensory needs. A reminder that the Museum will be open Family Day!



DINOSAURS LIVE

January 9 – March 31, 2024

Experience a world of feathered dinosaurs!

See life size, animatronic dinosaurs and fossils up close. This exhibit will challenge everything you thought you knew about dinosaurs!



Programming Outreach

Staff have provided a full month of presentations to various seniors' groups in January, including Mapleton, Caressant Care, Older Adults and for the very first time, providing a session at the Victoria Park Seniors' Centre.

Education

The Museum has had the highest number of school group bookings this February. Surprisingly, the introduction of dinosaurs has not been the catalyst for the interest. Another surprise is that the classes are older than previously seen, notably students in grades three to five. With the many Guide and school group bookings in February, staff will be relying on the Museum new Programming Volunteers for assistance.

Looking Ahead

Mark your calendars and help us spread the word on the following list of events scheduled for 2024:

- March Break Dino drop-in activities
- Space Week in partnership with Royal City Science April 8 to 11
- Strawberry Social - June 22
- Summer Concert Series – July and August
- Pour House Tours – July and August
- Multicultural Festival – July 13
- Car Show – August 25
- Cemetery Tours – October 18, 19, 25, 26
- Murder Mystery – October 24, 25
- Hollow'Tots Party – October 31
- Pumpkin Walk – November 1
- Remembrance Ceremony – November 5
- Remembrance Candle Vigil – November 10
- Christmas Market – November 29 and 30

Smaller events in planning but not currently scheduled include exhibit programming, toddler events, Trivia Nights, and evening workshops.

Summary of 2023 Museum Donations

The WCMA received 43 donations in 2023, consisting of 175 artifacts. The donations included:

- 20 donations by first time donors
- 19 donations by repeat donors
- 2 artifact purchases made by the WCMA
- 2 transfers from other County departments

“Today’s program was so informative and interesting! Katie is one enthusiastic Robbie Burns fan! I always enjoy Wayne’s input to the program as well. I had a map of Scotland open in front of me during the presentation, and so learned where the places mentioned by Katie were situated. My father’s ancestors came from a little place in Scotland called Hawick (pronounced Hoyle) near Jedburgh, south of Edinburgh, so tied this into the history lesson of today, too. Thanks for hosting interesting and educational programs!” Glynis Belec, Mapleton Seniors’ Centre for Excellence.

Notable donations include:

- Buckskin jacket worn by Canadian artist Ken Danby (1940-2007). Danby bought and restored the historic Armstrong Mill property in Guelph/Eramosa, where he painted many of his best-known works. Several of his neighbours served as models for him in the creation of these works, who hold cherish memories of Danby and his role in the community to this day. In 2001, Danby was inducted into both the Order of Ontario and the Order of Canada.
- Sewing machine that was used by Marjorie Stewart (1904-1992) of Harriston, who used it to sew casket linings for the Harriston Casket Company Limited.
- Gym bag, gym uniform, school spirit ribbon, class ring, and cap from Norwell District High School in Palmerston. These items belonged to Joanne Walter (née Mallett), who attended NDHS from 1965-1970. She grew up on a farm just outside Palmerston with her parents, Harold and Marie Mallett, who operated Mallett's Poultry Farm and Hatchery.
- "Daisy" butter churn, made by Beatty Bros. Ltd circa 1912
- Eight correspondence sewing examination made by Frances Jacobsen (1910-2001) and mailed to the Woman's Institute of Domestic Arts and Sciences in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The exams were marked and mailed back to her between 1925 and 1931, and consisted of learning how to sew clothing, including pockets, plain seam plackets, fabric roses, essential stitches and seams, hems, buttonholes, piping, and collars. Frances married William Miles (1900-1986) on 14 June 1934 in West Garafraxa Township. They farmed the west half of Lot 4, Concession 3, West Garafraxa Twp. from 1935-1964 before granting the property to their son.
- Armoire made by the Weir Wardrobe Company of Mount Forest, circa 1903-1923. It was purchased by newlyweds John and Ethel McGibbon in 1923 in Alberta or Saskatchewan. John worked for the Bank of Commerce, and when he was transferred to the Toronto branch in 1928 the armoire was shipped to Toronto by train.
- Items from Wellington County schools, including a blazer and lapel pin from St. Joseph's Separate School (Fergus), sweater and lapel pin from Elora Junior Public School, and badges, ribbons, and choir album from James McQueen Public School (Fergus).
- Sheng (Chinese reed instrument) that belonged to Janet Lillian Brydon (1886-1982) of Eramosa Township. Brydon was a registered nurse who left home in 1917 to do medical missionary work in Honan Province, China, with Dr. James R. Menzies. Brydon nursed in China until the outbreak of the Second World War. She worked at the mission hospital at Huaiqing and assisted with plans to open a new hospital and nursing school at nearby Weihui. She brought this instrument home with her and later passed it down to her nephew, who in turn gave it to his son.

- Items from Wellington County churches, including a banner, Sunday school pins, bookmark, and communion tray from Goldstone United Church, and a communion set from Alma United Church.
- Artifacts from Wellington Terrace that date to the COVID-19 pandemic, including two scrub caps, two vaccine vials, and a rock painted with the inspirational message “Adversity gives valuable opportunities to temper oneself. Only people who can stand the test of the environment can be strong” (paraphrased from Konosuke Matshushita).
- Muskrat trap and pelt stretcher used by John H. "Jack" Spies and his family, who trapped muskrat seasonally to supplement their farm income. The family lived on Lot 2 and 3, Concession 4 in Pilkington Township. Jack learned to trap as a teenager, getting his first license in 1929 and trapping primarily muskrat and mink in March and April. Trapping became a family affair after he was married to Florence "Bessie" Kirby of Fergus in 1938. Together with their four daughters and son, Jack and Bessie worked hard each season to process the animals and prepare the furs for the annual visit of the fur buyer. They continued to trap until Jack's death in 1988.

2023 Collections Activities

In addition to processing incoming artifact donations throughout the year, curatorial staff ensure the artifact collection is safe, organized, and accessible to the public. Examples of this work include:

Large Artifact Storage Building Renovation: Following an expansion of the mezzanine level in the large artifact storage building, curatorial staff spent 12 weeks installing new artifact shelving and reorganizing artifacts into this newly expanded storage space. This was the first phase in a complete reorganization and inventory of this space, which houses the largest artifacts such as agricultural equipment, vehicles, building fixtures, furniture, appliances, tools, and machinery.

The 2023 reorganization included:

- 170ft of new shelving added, consisting of 85 individual shelves
- Approximately 577 artifacts were moved and cleaned, including:
 - 49 windows from the House of Industry and other historic buildings
 - 39 chairs and benches
 - 29 trunks and chests
 - 22 signs
 - 16 models
 - 20 washing machines and dryers
 - 11 sewing machines
 - 20 boxes containing archaeological material (with space left for this collection to double as it is anticipated to do within the year with additional transfers)
- Our 1905 “New Favorite” threshing machine, made by Ernst Bros. of Mount Forest has been moved to a new central spot on the main floor of the artifact storage building

Outreach Programmes: 103 artifacts from the collection were used in outreach programmes delivered to residents at Wellington Terrace, on the following themes:

- Life at the Poor House
- Weddings
- First Responders
- All Things Scottish
- The Titanic Disaster
- Remembrance
- Quilts
- Christmas
- Spring

2023 Exhibitions Summary

Temporary Exhibitions at WCMA

In 2023, the WCMA mounted eleven temporary exhibitions in the main exhibit hall, smaller galleries, and archives reading room.

- Quiet Moments – Exploring the Elora Gorge with Barry McCarthy and John Connon
- Insights 42nd Juried Exhibition of Fine Art
- Sonic Sensation (travelling exhibition about the science of sound)
- A Century Later: The Octarine Artists inspired by A.J. Casson
- Queen Elizabeth II: In Memoriam
- Guelph Black Heritage Society – Our Stories. Our History. Our Heritage.
- Cola Goes Better with Elvis: The Rick Clark Collection
- Wild Child (fashions and fads of the 1960s and 70s)
- My Story, My Tattoo
- Elora Community Theatre – Celebrating 50 Years
- Our Small Town PRIDE (Minto Pride Committee)

Temporary Exhibitions at Off-site Locations

In addition to mounting exhibitions at the museum and archives, curatorial staff create temporary exhibitions in display cases at the Drayton, Fergus, Hillsburgh, Palmerston, and Rockwood library branches. In December 2023, a display case was added at Wellington Terrace, and staff continue to rotate displays through a case outside Council Chambers at the County Administration Centre as well. This past year, 180 artifacts went out on display in off-site exhibitions on the following themes:

- Once Upon a Time in Palmerston
- All Dolled Up
- Things That Go
- It's All About Time
- Once Upon a Time in Fergus
- Small But Mighty

- Writing Accessories
- Shoes
- Gone But Not Forgotten

The Archives

In January, 39 members of the public visited the Archives to undertake research in person. Archives staff processed 4 photo reproduction orders, answered 16 phone calls and responded to 29 emails. Over the course of the month requests for information included: property history research in Elora, Fergus, Arthur and Eramosa Township; copies of archival records relating to the Webster, Falconer, Hall and Day families; information relating to a Beatty Bros. deep well pump; research into the Knowles family; a copy of a Fergus tourism pamphlet from ca. 1970 that documented a family business; seeking the population of Fergus in 1984; looking to research lacrosse in Fergus; someone wanting information on a farmerette badge from 1943 and a request to inter-loan microfilm from the United Church Archives. In addition, members of the public were looking for a 1926 West Luther telephone directory to determine if an ancestor had a telephone at that time, seeking school attendance records for a Catholic school and a request for a selection of historic photographs of downtown Elora buildings to be framed and displayed.

Four photograph reproduction orders were processed. Photographs were used in a presentation promoting the publication of a new book, to frame for personal display, to supplement research on a channel of the Speed River and photos were used in a social media post.

Archives staff attended the Arthur, Palmerston, Mount Forest and Harriston Library branches this month to engage local residents with the “Ask the Archivist” programme. During these one-on-one sessions topics discussed included local and Newfoundland genealogy, property history research, the donation process relating to archival records as well as a grade seven student who had questions about getting into the archival profession.

Archives Photo Highlight

What do these three photographs have in common?



The above photos depict three of the hundreds of items Beatty Bros. Limited of Fergus manufactured during the course of their business which existed predominantly between 1874 and 1965. In January feedback was provided by someone who still uses a ladder like the one in the first photo (ph 5881); another member of the public who has this sump pump in the second photo (ph 44165) asked if parts were still being produced and the final photo is going to be used in an Instagram post by a vintage dealer in England who has a Beatty Electric Washer Model SB. They want to add some original historical photos to a video reel on this “most unusual and fascinating thing”.

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 'J Burns', written in a cursive style.

Jana Burns
Wellington Place Administrator