



Spring Newsletter 2017

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May

From the President's Desk

When I first joined the board of the Brant Historical Society, I thought it would be good to help tell the stories of Brantford, Brant County, and the Indigenous peoples who lived in our area. I have been a volunteer for many years in our community and I viewed this opportunity as another chance to make my community a better place. I had no idea what was ahead for me and for the museum!

Let me tell you a little bit about myself.

I have been involved in the Brantford community since 1963 and have a background in Electronics Engineering including designing computer controls for material handling equipment and railway locomotives. I also worked designing electronic warfare equipment for the Canadian Navy. I was a Host of the television program Politically Speaking for many years on Rogers Television. There have been many other non-profit organizations in which I have served as director or officer, including: Vice-chairman and finance chair of the Brantford Public Library, The Boys and Girls Club, The Southern Ontario Library Service, Vice-chairman of the Ontario Library Trustees Association, Director of Sport Safety for the Ontario Underwater Council, Chairman of Theatre Brantford, Chair of Rosewood House, Chair of the Brant Community Social Planning Council, Director, Brant United Way, Director

of the Your Homes board, and President and founder of the Brant FreeNet.

I am currently a member of the City's Heritage Committee and chair the Prospect Point subcommittee. I have been a columnist and feature writer for The Expositor and currently write a weekly science column called Thought Experiments.

I am employed as Executive Director of Rosewood House, a group home for people with mental health and addictions issues.

It is a challenging time for the Brant Museum and Archives and there are some tough decisions to be made over the next few months to ensure a future for the museum and I view myself as an 'agent of change' to help bring the museum into the 21st century. I have a great board behind me and I am confident that we are up to the challenges that we face. I look forward to meeting as many of you as I can and I am always available to discuss the Brant Historical Society with you.

Please see my report in this newsletter about exciting changes at the Museum over the summer!

Tim Philp
President

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Special Report

As everyone is aware, we are drowning in 'stuff' at the museum. We are stuffed to the gills with artifacts that may or may not be reflective of our history and our ability to preserve, display and interpret our history has been severely hampered by the clutter. We live in an old building that has structural, mechanical, and electrical issues that need attention, but money was never abundant. This has resulted in maintenance being delayed, and there has been a reluctance to tackle these big issues because the future of this facility was uncertain.

We have been stalled for so long because a 'New Museum' has always been just around the corner and it seemed a shame to put money into our current operation if we were just going to move. I believe that, while there are still various schemes extant for our getting new space, we must act as if we are staying right where we are. Any other course leads to more paralysis and a worsening problem.

We have artifacts that are being stored under conditions that are less than optimal and there has been deterioration of the collection. As well, we have collected stuff that is not related in any way to the mission of telling and preserving local stories about people who lived here. Much of this material has little or no provenance and does not fit with our primary collection.

This has resulted in items clogging valuable exhibit space and forced items to be stored which should be on display. Further, textiles are stored in spaces that lack proper environmental controls and our paper records are not as accessible as they should be to allow for research and cataloging of the archives. Frankly, there are places in the museum that typify what it means to be a 'dusty old museum' and other areas that more closely resemble a hoarder's apartment than a heritage institution!

I have had a preliminary look at the material, both in the museum and at the mall location and something drastic must be done. We have heavy material stored in an upstairs room which may be causing structural damage, or at the very least, severe stress to an aging building.

The upshot of this is that we are not doing our job as caretakers of our cultural heritage and this cannot continue. If we are to be worthy of support, we need to stop waiting for some nebulous future where we will have proper space and facilities and look after what we have now.

As a result, the board has decided on an action plan that will address the worst of the issues facing the museum and bring us up to proper standards so we can tell the stories from our past. **This plan will start by closing the museum building to visitors starting Monday May 29th and it will not reopen for several months while we review, sort, and purge the collection.**

Re-Configuring the Existing Space

Each room will be completely emptied and cleaned. Artifacts will be assessed for value to the collection. Items which are to be kept will be cleaned, restored as required, and stored for display when the museum reopens. Items which are deemed surplus to the collection will be assessed and offered to other cultural and heritage institutions, sold, or otherwise disposed of after proper evaluation and deaccessioning.

I want to make clear, we are not doing this like thieves in the night. We are doing this following proper deaccessioning practices for heritage institutions. Nothing will be disposed of that does not meet strict criteria and measured against the mission of our museum to tell and preserve the stories of our past. This does not mean that everything that is old must be kept. If it has no provenance, no relationship to local history, or has no historical value, it will be disposed of using the proper procedures for doing so.

Now, the reason we are doing all of this is it will give us the space we need to properly display the artifacts we have and we will have increased display space to tell the stories of our past. Staff have been working on a plan to reconfigure the museum space to dedicate rooms to various aspects of our past. Brantford and Brant County have a rich history of scientific innovation, industrial might, cultural heritage, and indi-

Special Report (con't)

vidual social histories that we will now have the space to exhibit and explore.

Offices will be removed to the back of the building and more display space opened. Our large exhibit room will be available for special exhibitions and it will also give us the ability to host larger events that we hope will bring some revenue to the museum.

Looking to the Future

Technology will be a feature of the future where we use computer screens to interpret displays. This is a longer-term goal and will depend on special funding if we can get it. Such displays will allow us to change displays without incurring expense for printing and will allow for display of printed material and photographs to tell our stories.

Part of our plan is to replace the aging computer network in the museum. We spent in the neighbourhood of \$100,000 a few years ago to do an inventory of the collection and it is currently stored on a computer system that is long past it's "best before date". We do have backups, but we are only a stray cosmic ray from disaster. A new server with error detection and correction drives and cloud backup will keep this information safe.

Part of this plan is to upgrade the kitchen and bathroom facilities to freshen them up. As well, the kitchen is currently used mainly for storage of chairs and equipment. This must be removed and places found for everything. We need to ensure a neat and healthy workplace for our staff.

Lend a Helping Hand

I would like to put out a call for the membership to pitch in and help. We will need people for cleaning, painting, repairs, and general grunt labour to move things around. While there is a lot of work in this, I cannot think of a better way to get a good look at the complete collection and to assist the museum in getting ready for the next 100 years!

Anyone who is interested in volunteering should contact myself or museum staff and we will find a way for you to help.

Business as Usual (Almost)

I want to point out that the museum's programs will continue throughout the time the building is shutdown. Our Museum Walks, Members Picnic, and Speaker's Series will still go on as planned. As well, all programs at Myrtleville House will go on without interruption. Details will be supplied via e-mail and media announcements.

I know that the scale of this project will be daunting to some members. Heck, it is daunting to all the board members and to the staff, however, the option of doing nothing is just not available to us any more. If we are to remain worthy of community support, we must take charge of the collection and the infrastructure of the museum to preserve what we have and to give us the ability to preserve and tell the stories of our fabulous past.

I know the result will be worth it!

Tim Philp,
President,
Brant Historical Society

Operational Report

It is hard to believe that it is already time for another newsletter and operations report. People often think the winter is slow at museums, but it is when we tend to do preparatory work for the spring. We tend to run on fumes of energy and excitement at this time of year, being able to see the fruits of our labour. From mid-February to mid-May we had 8 events in 2015, 10 events in 2016, and we are on track 12 events by mid-May in 2017!

After our Heritage week traveling exhibit, staff worked with the special events committee to host a talk by Zig Misiak and Walter Gretzky in late February. Unfortunately, we had a power outage and rescheduled the evening for early April. The second try in April was much more successful where Zig shared stories of the Gretzky family's involvement during the first World War.

In March, we rushed to refresh the displays in the lower gallery for families who would visit during March Break. We added new materials into five displays to tell smaller bits and pieces of Brantford's History. The first is a smoking display that showcases pioneer smoking industries in Brantford, while another shows artifacts from the Waterous Factory. Two other displays focus more on the social life of Brantford, with part of the dining set that was made for a banquet when Brantford became a city and trophies that are part of the collection. Finally, we have a display of "What is it?"; Equipment that children probably have never seen, but their grandparents used. I am hopeful that we can refresh these displays twice a year.

Also in March we were busy preparing for the Annual General Meeting and coordinating the Endowment Fund By-Law vote with members. At the end of March, we had a co-op student transition to the museum in the morning. She was given the task of developing the interpretation material for the lower gallery displays mentioned above. March was also the time when the bulk of the exhibit research and writing of the text panels would happen. Because of these responsibilities,



Waterous Plaque

our timeline for the exhibit was compressed.

This meant that it was all hands on deck for research during the first week while leading up to Easter was the writing of content and layout of the text panels leading up to Easter, with the week after Easter being taken up by a Museum Certificate Course on Museums in Historic Building. This course taught me a lot more about understanding the museum facility and how to better care for and improve the efficiency of our existing building. The final week of April was all that was left for Exhibit installation. The opening of the exhibit for the Heritage Excursion Tour and the Gala already has seen 63 Visitors. I must encourage you all to visit the museum to see the first 2-museum exhibit in Brant County and one of the first in Ontario.

I make it sound as if April was only the exhibit, but we had four other events in April. Two were speaker events, the Walter Gretzky event and a talk by Dr. Peter Farrugia about WWI battlefields and the munitions that are discovered. Jason also lead our contributions to the Veteran of Vimy play collaboration hosted at the Armouries with a display and created a slideshow presentation of the soldiers who served at Vimy from Brantford.

Finally April also kicked off our busiest Walking Tour season with 13 scheduled walks. The first was on architecture of the downtown core that was educational and informative of different periods and styles of construction that can be seen in downtown Brantford. The second walk I lead on a rainy Saturday morning with a loyal group of 6 walkers who knew little of Paris. We walked around and pointed out various bits and pieces of history and participants shared additional information they knew. More walking tours will be occurring including another in Paris in the fall.

We have no time to rest though as we will be preparing for the arrival of summer students over through June and our contributions to Canada Day's 2-day long celebration at Lions Park. Then it will be time to plan programming for the Fall. We are excited to see all the energy coming into the organization and remain committed to showcasing the values of history and heritage for our future generations.

Nathan Etherington
Program Coordinator

Myrtleville House News

The Myrtleville House welcomed visitors to the Museum over the winter for several special annual events. On Monday February 20th, the Myrtleville House Museum hosted its Family Day open house. The day was a success with over 50 visitors coming to enjoy the free activities provided. Volunteers gave tours of the House, a traditional oatmeal cookie recipe was baked in the historic kitchen and a watercolour station was available for children and adults alike. Visitors enjoyed painting images that they identified as representing “My Canada”, a theme borrowed from the National Trust for 2017.

Every Easter the Myrtleville House Museum Hosts an Egg Hunt on our gorgeous grounds. Despite the rain this year, the public came out in full force. Over 250 people attended. Local children waited at the ribbon



Egg Hunters

anxiously for the bell to ring to go fill their baskets. After the hunt, families were welcome to visit our craft station and get their faces painted. Tours of the house

Heritage Excursion

Excitement was in the air on May 2nd as 28 people arrived at the Brant Museum for Brant Historical Society's 2nd Heritage Excursion. The day began with coffee and muffins and a brief overview of the day before departing for Sanderson Centre.

Scott Broham offered an excellent behind the scenes tour of the Sanderson Centre. Some brave souls climbed the final stairs to walk the catwalk above the domed ceiling. I will never again sit during a performance without thinking about that ceiling. I also wonder how they ever managed to get all that dark paint off

were also available. We would like to say thank you to our dedicated volunteers who made this event possible. Your generosity is greatly appreciated.

Our Crafty Kids March Break camp from March 13 – 17 was very well attended. Over 40 children registered. We kept busy by making crafts galore! Marble race-tracks, cheerio bird feeders and wooden airplanes were some of the favorite creations of the week.

Each April, representatives from the Myrtleville House attend Bite of Brant. This two day educational program welcomes grade five students to learn about how the food they eat is grown in their community. Myrtleville's station demonstrates how wheat was grown and harvested historically. Students enjoy grinding a handful of wheat with our antique coffee grinder.

When the weather starts to warm up outside we start to think about our summer plans. Myrtleville House is no exception. We opened our registration for Summer Camps just after March break and we are almost fully booked! This summer we will need more Jr. volunteers than ever to help out with camp. If you know of any teens who are looking to gain their 40 community service hours for graduation, they can join us on Saturday June 24th 10 am – 12 pm for our camp orientation day.

Sarah Thomas
Education Officer

the walls from the days when it was a movie theatre. Knowing how the building was designed has forever changed the way I look at the Sanderson Centre.

Up next was a tour of the Brantford Parks and Recreation five greenhouses. Our guide, Mark Meloun, has great enthusiasm for horticulture and his knowledge of the work being done to keep our city beautiful made this tour one of our favourites.

Back on the bus, we found our way to MMMC Architects, where we were met by Craig Newsome. They

Heritage Excursion... con't

are located in two historical homes on Brant Avenue. MMMC Architects have been part of the Brantford community for over 50 years. Craig started by showing us the historical house next door to his office which MMMC has restored. Inside their boardroom, he took us through the steps taken to restore the house. MMMC has some of the original drawings by F.C. Bodley (1880-1968), a Brantford architect. He designed more than a dozen Brantford schools from 1920-1960; the last was North Park Collegiate in 1960.

Myrtleville House offered a welcome, where we enjoyed a delicious lunch catered by The Kitchen, a new restaurant in Brantford. Education Officer, Sarah Thomas-D'Amato, gave us an interesting talk about Anne Good and the part she played in saving the farm for the Good family. She showed us Anne's writing chest, complete with quill and seal.

Lastly, we toured the Brant County Branch of The Ontario Genealogical Society. Jean Farquharson told us about the society and how we can use their resources to help in researching our family ancestry.

We ended the excursion back at the Brant Museum, where we had the opportunity to take a sneak preview of "Preserving Our HERitage: HERtory from the Womyn's Perspective". This exhibit opened on May 8th and will run through to June 30th, and also as part of The Brant Museum Crawl. Overall, we had an interesting and enjoyable day. As a testament, most people would have stayed longer at each stop on the excursion if the schedule had allowed!

Jean Kendall

Canada 150 Celebrations: Fathers of Confederation Picnic



Sir Oliver Mowat

If you are looking for something to do on Father's Day weekend, look no further than Myrtleville House park where the Brant Historical Society will be offering its free community celebration for Canada 150.

It's a "Fathers of Confederation Picnic" on Saturday, June 17th beginning at 11 AM and running through the afternoon to 5 PM.

The event is geared to the whole family with historical demonstrators and interpreters offered by the likes of the Muzzleloaders, returning after a 22-year absence; the Brantford Cricket Club demonstration the most popular game of 1867; and a clairvoyant to foretell your future, just as it was in those olden times.

For the children, there will be heritage lawn picnic games.

For people of all ages there will be musical performances through the day from the Grand River Chorus, the Brantford Pipes and Drums, the folk group Hunter's

Corners, and more.

Feel free to bring your own picnic, or you can take advantage of our heritage Tea Room and food vendors who will be available.

There will be costumed volunteers wandering the property, and you may wish to join them by wearing a costume of your own.

There will also be specially scheduled museum tours offered at a modest price.

There will be displays by some of our community supporters and especially our sponsors, with special thanks to Annette Minutello of Century 21, who is covering the expense for our entertainers and presenters.

So plan to join us for a special Saturday of fun on June 17th. If you are interested in volunteering contact Myrtleville House museum for further details.

Looking forward to seeing you there. Happy Canada 150!

Brian Moore

Special Contributor

Editor's Note:

Sarah Casler is a high-school coop student who is spending her spring working at the Brant Museum and Archives. She was asked to contribute her thoughts about her time working at the museum.

When choosing my courses for my Grade 13 year, I decided on taking a co-op as I thought it would help me learn and decide if my placement was something I would want to go to school for in the future.

Originally, at the beginning of the semester, I started my co-op placement in the pharmacy at Shoppers Drug Mart in the mall. Helping in the field of Pharmacy Technician work I got to learn their daily tasks that included filling prescriptions, organizing the medications, taking calls and cashing people out. However, I quickly learned this was not the right placement for me! Going into it, I already knew some of the jobs I would be doing but after experiencing what it was really like, I realized that it was a very boring and repetitive job and I thought overall there would be a lot more to it! Back at square one, I talked to my teacher and explained to her that I was not enjoying nor benefiting from the pharmacy so, we decided to try another co-op here at the museum. As I like and enjoy learning about history, I thought this would be a much better option for a co-op placement. Plus where I was at, anything was better than counting pills all day!

Since arriving at the museum, I have enjoyed my time here as I have been able to help out with many different tasks, had the opportunity to learn a lot about some of the artifacts and gain information about some of Brantford's history. Some of my first jobs included putting artifact information into the Past Perfect database program and doing a research project. In one of many rooms here at the museum, there are many artifacts

that are presented in some of the display cabinets and my job was to research and present the information about the artifacts and their connection to Brantford in a mini story/summary. As the pages are now hung up in the display cases I am proud of how they turned out and to see all of it come together! Another job I enjoyed helping out with was setting up the exhibit and seeing all the work that goes into preparing an exhibit! Throughout the days leading up to the opening of the exhibit I helped to hang curtains up around the room, prepare the text panels in order for them to be hung up, helped to carry and set up some of the bigger artifacts, assisted in finding some of the quilts that were located in the attic (that has stairs that scare me - just saying) and typed up instructions for euchre and even learned how to play it...somewhat! As part of the exhibit is a euchre table, I learned how to play in order for me to type out the instructions, as it was quite difficult to try and tell others how to play when I had no clue what I was doing. It was entertaining to say the least!

Most recently, I have been working on putting information into the computer from pages that date back to 1913 containing numerous information about many of the artifacts stating what the accession number is, the donor, date and description that needs to be documented in order for everything to be organized and easy to find. As there are so many pages to do I haven't even put a dent in it so, it's going to take me awhile to complete!

Overall, I have enjoyed doing my co-op here at the museum as I have had the opportunity to help with many different jobs and being able to learn more about the museum world!

Sarah Casler



Special Thanks

The Brant Historical Society would like to thank volunteers Lynn Elsie and Kay Boyd for making the lawn and gardens around the museum look so wonderful. They spent many hours out in the hot sun turning the soil, replanting flowers and trimming the lawn.



From the Collection

If you were to ask 100 people who the most influential person in history was, you would probably get 100 different answers. If you were to ask 100 people who the most influential person to come from Brant was, the majority of people would narrow it to some of the bigger names like Alexander Graham Bell, Pauline Johnson, or the ever popular Wayne Gretzky.

For myself, I have developed a growing passion, burgeoning on obsession with one individual – Reverend William Cochrane. I find the interesting part of history is seeing the places that people lived, work, and socialized in to contextualize the story. Sometimes I try to envision what would be around at their time and put myself in their shoes.



William Cochrane

This is the case for my connection with William Cochrane. He lived in the original building of the museum, which looked significantly different back then with porches, balustrades, and a slate shingle roof. We was the preacher at Zion Presbyterian Church, now St. Andrews United Church. I see these places in my daily life and spend a fair number of hours at either location. At the museum, we have 3 document boxes full of his personal papers

including diaries, sermons, and other correspondence.

We have so much information on this guy, that it has inspired me to try and see if I have enough to do an exhibit on him in the future. I want to plan my research for this ahead of time so that I can go through everything that we have. The museum now has two volunteers working on transcribing his diaries. When I recently had to go to Brockville for a museum course, I took a third along with me and started typing.

His journals contain everything from snippets of local history and politics in the City to stories of regional,

national, and international importance. My journal goes from 1884 to 1894 in the middle of his career in Brantford, although he is 52 at the start of this journal. He often makes references to having “fits of blindness” some evenings. At first I thought perhaps he liked to drink his alcohol, until he makes reference to poorly attended temperance meetings and suggests that the men of Brantford claim to support temperance, but when “time comes for action, they are found wanting”! It is so far unknown which medical condition could have caused these.



One day as I was typing along in 1886 getting ready for him to mention the scripture readings for this week’s sermons or whose funeral he had presided over that week, Cochrane mentions attending a meeting for the Brant Monument. I quickly recalled that it was unveiled in October of that year. I madly, but carefully, turn the pages to find that he does mention attending the Unveiling of Brant’s Monument.

I knew we had a couple images of the Unveiling day. Could I spot him in it? I dashed away to the computer

BRANT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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We're on the Web!
Brantmuseums.ca

Donations

We are always accepting donations for the museum. Not every donation needs to be financial. We also accept office and museum supplies. If you have something you would like to donate, please contact us to make arrangements for your donation.

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From the Collection (con't)

and I had three pictures to choose from. I knew what he looked like roughly, could I pick him out. Some of the details of the faces in the pictures are hard to see, but since he was involved with the unveiling, he should be placed in a prominent position. I believe I have located him in two of the three photos.

I continue to build to my memory with the work of Reverend Cochrane. I want to look at the type of correspondence he has written, but his sermons will be fairly dull to read. I have also heard that he was a fire and brimstone style of preacher. Regardless of his strengths and weaknesses, I look forward to learning more about this individual that had an impact on Brantford before the 20 century.

Nathan Etherington
Program Coordinator

Upcoming Events

May—June 2017

Museum Crawl—May 18th to the 28th — various locations (visit: brantmuseumcrawl.ca)

Walking Tour—Saturday, June 10th—Original Village of Brantford Walk [New]

Fathers of Confederation Picnic—June 17th @ Myrtleville House Museum—11 am to 5 pm

Walking Tour—Saturday, July 1st (Canada Day) - Local Authors Walk

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