



## **Elgin County Museum Advisory Committee Meeting**

October 25, 2023

Elgin Heritage Centre

**Present: Joan Mansell (Secretary), Jennifer Beauchamp, Donna Lord**

**Council Representatives: Mayor Dominique Giguère and Mayor Mike Hentz**

**Regrets: Chair- Amanda VandenWyngaert, Vice Chair- Kim Teuscher, Charlie Jenkins**

**Staff in Attendance: Brian Masschaele, Mike Baker, Ally Shelly (recording secretary), Nicole Reid**

**Guest: Don Shropshire, CAO**

Before the meeting was called to order Mike Baker asked Jennifer Beauchamp to act as Chair in place of Amanda VandenWyngaert.

### **1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 11:02 a.m. by Jennifer Beauchamp, acting chair.

### **2. Additions to the Agenda**

*Moved by Donna Lord to approve the agenda as presented,  
seconded by Dominique Giguère. Carried.*

### **3. Approval Minutes from June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023.**

*Moved by Dominique Giguère and seconded by Mike Hentz that the minutes from the June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023 meeting be approved as presented. Carried.*

#### **4. Introduction of Don Shropshire, CAO / Clerk**

Don Shropshire introduced himself to committee members. He had been appointed Interim Chief Administrative Officer/Clerk (CAO) for the County of Elgin, earlier this year. Don had served as the CAO for the Municipality of Chatham-Kent for ten years. He is assisting with the recruitment of a new permanent CAO, which should be confirmed in the coming weeks.

Don lived in Elgin County in the 1950's, his mother's family immigrated from Scotland and settled in Elgin County. His career led him to Toronto and Ottawa before moving back to southwestern Ontario.

Committee members introduced themselves to Mr. Shropshire. Including the museum's new collections review assistant Nicole Reid. Nicole is a graduate of Western University, receiving a Master of Library and Information Science.

#### **5. Business Arising from the Minutes**

##### **a) Crane Plaque**

Brain Masschaele circulated an image of the replacement Crane plaque now on the cairn located at the former Crane Conservation Area on Iona Road in the Township of Southwold.

Brian confirmed that the plaque located on the cairn is a replica and that the cairn is not located on municipal property, and is not included in the road allowance.

To date, there has been no formal response from the property owner or their legal representative expressing a willingness to donate the plaque to the County.

Mike Hentz has offered to reach out the property owner, as he knows the owner personally,

contact the Lower Thames Conservation Area to better understand their position on the matter and contact Crane family's advocate, Jim Crane.

#### **6. Correspondence**

**None**

#### **7. Curator's Report**

Mike Baker presented a draft of the museums Annual Report.

The museum had two exhibits this year with good attendance of approximately 1000 walk-in visitors. This was largely the result of great media exposure from the CBC and Globe and Mail for Cycling: An Unspoken History. A large portion of visitors mentioned these sources when asked where they heard about the cycling exhibit.

There was a lot of social media support from Rick Wolfe who has a wide network of bike folks – many of whom came to see it.

There was a record number of booked tours, seven if we include the visit from Rogers, but only 119 visitors. Booked few outside our traditional audience of heritage organizations.

This type of exhibit is something to consider with future shows, something with wide appeal that will generate bookings.

Museum will look for a partner or several partners and build a recurring visit into their schedules. One potential target is the Golden Kiwanis Club. Mike has spoken to them several times at their meeting space at Knox Church and they came here for a tour of Cycling: An Unspoken History. We will see if they would like to make an annual visit.

The Ride the Whistle Stop event, a trial event held in May went fairly well. We relied on a partner – The Railway City Cycling Club, really one person in the club to do most of the planning, both in terms of organizing the event and in getting numbers out. About 30 of the 127 visitors were from the club.

A guide was created for it. Content for these things takes a lot of time, as there are few resources available. For example, Elgin County's Trail Guide is still relying on Paul Baldwin's book, which is not a site by site guide it's a narrative. This booklet is now scanned and it was suggested that a link be included in the new Elgin County Hiking and Trail Guide. Mike circulated the Ride the Whistle Stop Guide, Elgin County's Trail Guide and Paul Baldwin's booklet.

The Ride the Whistlestop Guide is online, but only on the Railway City Tourism website. There is a link from Elgin County's website. There are plans for a new website on the way.

Establishing this connection with tourism is a great opportunity for us to keep contributing to improved cycling guides for other parts of the County, it's an opportunity to get our message out and share our resources – especially the archives.

We are participating in a bike event next year, but it is moving back to St. Thomas, seems fair to alternate locations.

The Elgin County Library and Tourism will remain involved. The museum's role will be some content depending on what the program is, last year we did a tour of Talbot Street.

The current exhibit is on Port Stanley on one wall and we are still working on the permanent show on the other wall. This will be displayed at least to Family Day in February 2024, so we have something to plan the activities around.

Will be making a number of changes to the space, reworking some of the displays that are now 5 years old. Such as the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan display.

Offsite there have been several exhibits at a number of the libraries. This is a way to provide programming outside of the immediate St. Thomas area to our municipalities.

Our programming at the Heritage Centre has room for improvement. There were very few held this year. The museum had one good program with the Elgin Historical Society, Gramma's Wartime Kitchen. There was a press release, CBC London picked it up from MyFM St. Thomas, which got the presenters an interview.

Paul Allen's talk on Baseball had a small turn out, but a lot of new people attended the talk, some from London. His presentation at the Heritage Centre was more successful than his appearance at the London Library the same day.

Without programming we don't exist. Visitors are more responsive to community interests, and people doing family research at the archives often come here first.

Anything we install has to be moveable to some extent in May and June for school visits.

School visits have returned to their pre-pandemic levels which is great. Two new volunteers joined us, one used to volunteer at the Pioneer Museum and the other was recruited through another longtime volunteer.

We have discussed contacting the Retired Women's Teachers group as a possible a source for new volunteers, which we will need. The museum has relied a lot on a core group of volunteers.

## **8. Bushell Projects**

### **a) Oneida Project**

Mike Baker provided an update regarding the mural depicting the settlement story of Oneida Nation of the Thames on the exterior of the Elgin County Heritage Centre. The work is progressing quickly, they have sent us two updates. It may be finished by next month. The location of the mural will be on the south end of the back of the Heritage Centre, further interpretation and landscaping is being planned around it.

## **9. Collection Review**

Nicole Reid started last week to continue the Collection Review.

Almost all of the unprocessed material on the 4th floor has been reviewed and there are a number of additional items to find homes for. About 150 items were transferred to the archives, with more to come.

Another shipment of fine art is ready to be sent to the St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre, some smaller works and one very large work by Gary Radford that is located at Elgin Manor.

Next project will be the textile collection. New textile racks are in place and are ready to be filled. Unprocessed textiles are next to be reviewed.

New shelving is going up at the Manor on Friday, this will allow us to move what's outside of the cages inside and also relieve some of the congestion on the 4th floor. We will move floor mounted material out there.

There are a few things to relocate from The Manor as well. The Port Burwell Marine Museum and the Sparta Museums are taking some unused display cases.

The suggestions will be fleshed out in a draft of the strategic plan which will be the focus of the February 2023 meeting.

Mike concluded his report with announcing that he will be retiring at the end of March next year and thanked the committee for the support provided to him over the years.

## **10. Museum Partner Reports**

Jennifer Beauchamp provided an Elgin County Museums Update, including events for the Port Burwell Marine Museum and Backus Page House Museum.

### Port Burwell Marine Museum and Historic Lighthouse

The museum started the season with a visit from the entire student body of the Port Burwell Public School. This year we had the classes scheduled for all on one day, as we had a guest presenter, a ropemaker. Educational programming continues to be developed, as the museum hopes again to host the Port Burwell Public School next spring.

Our summer children's program consisted of 6 one-hour activities and was successful - for us. We offered a different theme each week, with endangered species three times, a submarine, marble runs, and Lego Demolition Derby.

The museum closed Sept. 4<sup>th</sup> for the season. Our 2 students worked right to the end and were great additions. We accomplished many small projects during the summer.

Despite the Lighthouse being closed due to structural instability, our numbers were over 1400.

The museum will be undergoing a significant makeover during this off season. The lifeboat from the Laker Henry Steinbrenner, currently on display outside, will be brought into the museum to become a new focal point for the collection. Planning has begun to shift a number of exhibits to make room for the 23-foot boat.

### Backus-Page House Museum

Here are some statistics for your report from June through to Labour Day. Our visitors' numbers are lower than usual.

Hours of Operation were Tuesdays to Sundays 10am – 4pm

#### June

40 visitors

Life in the Talbot Settlement 193 visitors

This will be the last edition of this re-enactment (1812 or multiple time periods) as the numbers since 2008 just aren't enough to put in the human and financial resources. The reenactors are disappointed, but we have a fun new idea for replacing this event in 2024. More details to come.

2 afternoons of crokinole

2 field trips

Various facility rentals

Participated in the Dutton Night Market by taking the gift shop

Angela Bobier was on the panel for the OMA session on podcasts.

#### July

64 visitors

Various Facility rentals

#### August

65 visitors

Victorian Painting Workshop

Paranormal Investigation

September 2 & 3: The 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Heritage Farm Show had 541 visitors. We moved our paid advertising exclusively to Pure Country FM93 and Facebook. Free calendars in newspapers and free online listings were used as well. No print advertising (other than Daytripping) was used.

Hours of Operation are now Thursdays – Sundays noon – 4pm until we have funding for more staff.

Angela Bobier

Executive Director

## **11. Committee Member Reports**

Joan Mansell expressed her appreciation at receiving an award for her 25 years of volunteer service with the Elgin County Museum at 2023 Ontario Volunteer Service Awards. She has always been passionate about history and has volunteered for a number of groups. She has been with the Women's institute of 50 years. Joan shared a photo of the Westlake/Evans sisters at the Patterson Cabin. This was when she was involved with the North Yarmouth Historical Society. She still is involved with the Patterson Cabin through the Kettle Valley Pioneers, of which she is the secretary.

Donna Lord shared the Women's Institute Report

The Women's Institute Southern Area Convention is Saturday, October 28<sup>th</sup> in Lawrence Station. The theme is Go County. There will be a silent auction to raise money for charitable donations.

The WI's have continued to meet regularly at members houses, the Fingal Presbyterian Church and the Shedden Library.

## **12. Next Meeting Date**

The next meeting will be held February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024 at 11:00 a.m. at the Heritage Centre.

## **14. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:09 p.m.

*Moved by Donna Lord.*

*All in Favour.*