



HURON COUNTY MUSEUM AND HISTORIC GAOL

2021 ANNUAL REPORT





Corporation of the County of Huron

2021 ANNUAL REPORT: **HURON COUNTY MUSEUM & HISTORIC GAOL**

MISSION

The Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol engage our community in preserving, sharing, and fostering Huron County culture.

VISION

The vision of the Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol is to nurture and inspire heritage and culture.

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

The Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol designs its exhibits, programs, events, and services through a lens that includes a wide range of ideas, voices and viewpoints that reflect and engage Huron County's diverse community.

HURON COUNTY MUSEUM

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MUSEUM PLANNING AND ENGAGEMENT

The five-year Strategic Plan was developed and introduced in 2019. During the period this strategic plan covers, the Museum aims to engage with more people to increase a shared understanding of our culture, leading to greater social cohesion and stronger Huron County roots. It will also be important to put strategies and practices in place to ensure the long-term sustainability of the organization. We understand that preserving the past means we will ensure future generations will have access to artifacts, places and stories.

With community, staff and stakeholder input, the following goals are part of the strategic plan for the Museum and Gaol:

Engage with more people:

1. Engage and inspire the next generation of Huron County by sparking an interest in their heritage and culture.
2. Connect with audiences beyond physical sites.
3. Create dynamic exhibits that generate interest and attention.
4. Maximize existing footprint to support enhanced participation.
5. Increase the strength of the Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol brand.

Long-term sustainability:

1. Seek out partnerships to share skills, resources and ideas.
2. Implement environmentally sustainable practices and celebrate natural heritage.
3. Build support with funders and advocates to ensure long term financial support.
4. Ensure sufficient staffing levels to maintain energy and support for new strategic directions.

Throughout 2021, the Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol worked to engage with people throughout Huron County and beyond both in person and virtually. Using virtual outreach and programming opportunities to connect with patrons; continuing collections projects that make artifacts more discoverable online; updating permanent exhibits, including virtual components to re-engage visitors; and production of a new temporary exhibit for our visitors to visit in-person, were all part of the Museum and Gaol's work to ensure continued progress on the Strategic Plan even during the COVID-19 closures and restrictions.

“Very impressed given the size of this community and one they must be so proud of.”





COVID-19

The start of 2021 found the Huron County Museum closed to the public as part of the province-wide shut down and stay at home order. While the Museum was closed to in-person visits and services, staff remained available to answer research inquiries via email and phone, and offered virtual programs and activities online.

By mid-February, the Museum was able to re-open to the public, but was closed again by April 3 under the province-wide, 'emergency brake,' which was later extended to a stay-at-home order commencing April 8. The reading room and galleries were again closed to visitors and artifact donations were not accepted. Virtual and phone research services continued, as well as online programs.

When the Province of Ontario entered Step 3 of its Roadmap to Recovery plan in mid-July, the Museum first re-opened with special hours for a 'last look' of the Reflections exhibit July 16-17, and the Museum and Gaol fully opened with summer hours beginning July 19. The Museum's capacity was limited based on provincial regulations, but all permanent gallery exhibit spaces were open with some interactive components remaining unavailable. At the Historic Gaol, guided tours were offered by appointment only due to the Gaol's limited capacity. Small community use rentals of spaces of the Museum began in August for individuals and groups in need of private meeting spaces. In-person programs were made available beginning in October. All rentals and programs required proof of vaccination for participants/

attendees. Volunteers returned to visitor services and limited collections projects in November. While the Gaol closed for its regular season at the end of October, the Museum remained open until the end of December.

DAYS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

In a typical year, the Huron County Museum is open to the public year-round with reduced seasonal winter hours. Although closed to the public through Provincial restrictions in 2020 and 2021, staff continued to work onsite on the collection, and preparing and presenting virtual programs and exhibits. The chart below reflects only days when the public was able to enter the building.

In a typical year, the Huron Historic Gaol is open from May through August with additional programming offered in March and November/December.

Days open to the public		
Year	Museum	Gaol
2021	184 days	103 days
2020	148 days	0 days
2019	311 days	182 days



INITIATIVES & FUNDING

The Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol successfully received the Community Museum Operating Grant, Community Museum Digital Capacity Top-Up Grant, and MAP Reopening Fund for Heritage Organizations in 2021 to assist with Museum & Gaol operations, programs, exhibition, collections and digitization.

Grant funding was received from Young Canada Works in Heritage and the Canada Summer Jobs program for summer staffing opportunities for the Museum & Gaol. The summer staff grants focused student projects on an Archives virtual exhibit, on-site exhibition development, and Gaol outreach & programming. The 2020 funding from Young Canada Works at Building Careers in Heritage Internship provided funding for a continued Collections staff intern for the first quarter of the year.

In March, the Museum welcomed a Marketing Intern completing his education in Public Relations at Cambrian College. A partnership with the Centre for Employment

and Learning, brought two Reach for Success staff placements to the Museum and Archives in the fall to assist with collections projects.

Compass Minerals continued their education program support with funding provided to cover virtual program fees for schools and/or bussing fees for school groups that wish to visit in person.

The Cultural Services department received a Reconnect Ontario Funding grant to be used towards Illuminate Huron. The lighting project was to see lighting installations in place in Exeter, Clinton and Goderich, including at the Huron County Museum. Unfortunately, the installations were installed but not lit due to County direction and the Provincewide shutdown initiated in March and were removed shortly after.



SPECIAL EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

The Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol facilitated a variety of special events and activities over the course of 2021 both in-person and virtually.

Virtual programming included Huron Hygge virtual social series and trivia night, family paint-alongs, knitting workshop, seed tape and gardening workshops, Behind the Bars, and Historic Places Day activities.

Virtual presentations included:

- Jack McLaren: A Soldier of Song with Jason Wilson;
- Ripple Effect: Get to Know you H2O with Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority;
- The launch of the book *Prisoner Profiles: Unlocking Secret Stories from the Huron Historic Gaol*;
- Ripple Effect: Exploring Wetlands with Maitland Valley Conservation Authority;
- Ripple Effect: Huron County's Beaches and Dunes with Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation;
- What Does it Mean to be Treaty People? with Randall Kahgee; and
- Canada's D-Day Story with Juno Beach Centre Association.

Virtual education programs and outreach programs were provided for groups throughout the year including school and classroom visits, Kids 'n Dads evening program, senior's groups, and youth groups. Compass Minerals sponsorship funding allowed for education program to be offered for free beginning in May for Museum Week.

In-person events were limited but included the sold-out October Ghost Tours series at the Historic Gaol and a popular Holiday Movie afternoon at the Museum.

In celebration of the IODE's 120th anniversary, the Museum partnered with the IODE Maple Leaf Chapter in Goderich to drape the Sherman Tank on the Museum lawn with over 3,000 crocheted and knit poppies submitted by the public to the IODE. The installation coincided with the Royal Canadian Legion's commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the poppy being recognized as Canada's remembrance symbol.

Programming & Development staff coordinated social media activities throughout the year as at home activities.

RESEARCH & PUBLICATION

Research, writing and printing was completed for a new Gaol themed book "*Prisoner Profiles: Unlocking Secret Stories*" from the Huron Historic Gaol written by the Curator of Engagement & Dialogue. The book was printed and ready for sale in June, and required two reprints through the year.



Top photo: Jack McLaren as "The General"
Source: PPCLI Archives, Calgary, P30 (217.1-217.3)-1



EXHIBITS

The Huron County Museum facilitated three temporary exhibits on site throughout 2021.

- The “Ripple Effect” exhibit was developed as an interactive exhibit to explore Huron County’s waterways. The exhibit opened for only a few days in March 2020 and then remained closed for the year. The exhibit was held over to 2021 and reopened in March with modifications to the interactive components.
- The “Reflections: The Life and Works of J. W. McLaren” exhibit continued in 2021. When the site re-opened in July the exhibit was available for a last look and then dismantled in order to return all loaned items to their owners. The exhibit was presented in partnership with the Huron County Historical Society.
- A new exhibit “Forgotten: People and Portraits of the County” was opened in September in the Museum’s Feature Gallery. The exhibit focus is the many photographs and portraits in the Museum collection that are unfortunately unidentified but were taken by Huron County photographers. The exhibit also includes a social media Facebook group to further prompt identifications.

As the Museum continued to provide virtual access to the collections during COVID-19, three online exhibits were developed. The Reflections J.W. McLaren exhibit was converted to a virtual exhibit to provide an alternative for those who could not visit the physical exhibit. The Henderson digital collection of military photography from WWII was transferred to a new Museum platform, information updated and new photographs added. The Forgotten exhibit includes a virtual exhibit with portraits from the Museum’s Archival collection added, digitized, and ultimately organized by Huron County communities.

Work continued in the permanent exhibits to revitalize galleries. Additional interpretive panels were developed and installed including a Huron County Land Acknowledgement in the Lattimer Gallery, and Black settlement in Huron County in the Settlement exhibit. Consultants worked with the Museum staff to design and develop plans for an updated Industry Gallery on the upper floor of the Museum with work to continue through 2022.

The Outreach exhibit program was continued at Huronlea Homes for the Aged with an exhibit of a wood carvings made by Michael Meidinger, Zurich.





COLLECTIONS HIGHLIGHTS

There were 57 new accessions in 2021. The following items are a representative sample of items donated to the collection:

- Earthenware jar made at Zurich
- Sheaffer Pen Co, Goderich artifacts
- Cast iron plaque from the Western Foundry Company Limited, Wingham
- Three-piece baptism ensemble made in 1900, Howick Township
- Gun Son-Ola Concert Grand phonograph manufactured in Wingham
- Archival items including business journals, photographs, diaries, property documents, deeds, ration books, maps, etc.

“ A BIG thank you to all the Collections staff. I’ve been able to find some interesting tidbits of family history. COVID may have kept us home, but all your hard work is keeping the stay a bit more tolerable.

COLLECTIONS

Collections staff worked throughout 2021 with artifact cataloging, digitization, and organization work at the Huron County Museum. Work continued on the addition of artifacts to the PastPerfect online collection database finishing the year with 6,382 artifact and photograph records available on-line to researchers.

The 2021 Collections Committee met virtually through the year to discuss Museum & Gaol collections issues including policy review, storage & space needs, deaccessioning, and site planning.

Members consisted of:

Louise Dockstader (Chair), Rhea Hamilton-Seeger (Past-Chair), Al Sanders, Deb Sholdice, Ted Turner, Thomas Lang, Elisabeth Sykes, Sally Leitch, and Glen McNeil (Warden)

CONSERVATION

Collections staff from the Huron County Museum completed a project to inventory, condition report, rehouse and photograph artifacts in the flat storage drawers of the Main Storage Area.

At the Historic Gaol, work was completed during the site closure to repair and repaint plaster work in the building and install a new roof on the main Gaol areas.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Staff participated in a variety of online workshops and webinars over the course of the year including those offered through Ontario Museum Association, Canadian Museum Association, Canadian Conservation Institute, Western Museum Association, and Capital Heritage Professional Network. The majority of presentations were in regards to museum responses, programming, funding, and future planning through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staff also completed the Four Seasons of Reconciliation Training from First Nations University of Canada.

Museum staff attended the annual conferences of the Ontario Museum Association, Canadian Association for Conservation for Cultural Property, and Canadian Museum Association.

The Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol are active members of the Huron Perth Middlesex Museum Network and the PastPerfect Users group.

MARKETING & PROMOTIONS

During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media was an important part of Museum work with a variety of team members contributing. Throughout the year, marketing efforts were focused on ways people could still enjoy the Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol from home, including highlights of artifacts and archival materials. Once able to reopen, marketing pivoted to focus on inviting visitors safely back to the space.





“ The museum is self-guided but well laid out with directional arrows and an accompanying map. Some exhibits are very creative being (bicycles) hung from the ceiling, for example. Some of the larger steam and farm equipment are displayed so that you can walk among the pieces and get a real sense of their size, weight and robustness.

ATTENDANCE

2021 Site Visits		Museum	Gaol
Individual Admissions		3,166	3,496
Individual Admissions – Huron County Library Card		633	155
Groups, Programs, Special Events (in-person)		98	221
Outreach & Virtual Presentations		1,407	1,234
Virtual Public Programs		481	272
Object Depositors, OGS, Researchers, Volunteers, Others		492	82
Meetings, Rentals		159	33
Annual Total	2021	6,436	5,493
Comparative Years		2020	119
		2019	14,385