



HURON COUNTY MUSEUM AND HISTORIC GAOL

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT







Corporation of the County of Huron

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# 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

110 North St., Goderich ON, N7A 2T8

p. 519-524-2686

e. [museum@huroncounty.ca](mailto:museum@huroncounty.ca)

w. [www.HuronCountyMuseum.ca](http://www.HuronCountyMuseum.ca)

### HURON HISTORIC GAOL

181 Victoria St. North, Goderich ON

p. 519-524-6971

### FOLLOW US:

  @HuronCountyMuseum



# MUSEUM PLANNING & ENGAGEMENT

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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 Museum and 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 2023, the Museum and Gaol worked to engage with people throughout Huron County and beyond both in-person and virtually. An increase of in-person programming and youth engagement, outreach and events to connect with patrons; continuing collections projects focused on nomenclature and collections review; work towards the redevelopment of a permanent exhibit gallery to re-engage visitors; and production of new temporary exhibits for our visitors to visit in-person, were all part of the Museum and Gaol's work to ensure continued progress in the Strategic Plan. A new strategic plan will be developed with community and staff input in 2024.





# INITIATIVES & FUNDING

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The Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol successfully received the Community Museum Operating Grant in 2023 to assist with Museum & Gaol operations. Funding from the Digital Access grant through the Museum Assistance Program supported further digitization of the archival collection.

Grant funding was received from Young Canada Works in Heritage program for summer staffing opportunities for the Museum & Gaol. The summer staff grants focused student projects on Museum & Gaol events, exhibit preparations and archival cataloging. Funding for two Young Canada Works Interns through the Building Careers in Heritage programme was also received for staff to work with newly transferred collections.

To advance youth programming, funding was received from Compass Minerals to cover virtual programme fees for schools and bussing fees for school groups that wish to visit in person.

Sponsorship was received from the Rotary Club of Goderich, Compass Minerals, MicroAge Basics, Huron County Historical Society and the Museum Friends to support the redevelopment of the Northwest Gallery Industry exhibit gallery at the Huron County Museum. Individual sponsorships were also received in December.

A "Late Night at the Gaol" fundraiser for Museum's Industry Gallery development took place in August. An outdoor evening market featured a variety of retail vendors and a silent auction of donated items. Within the large Gaol courtyard there were live performances by Graham Bedard and Jelly Bean Blue for the ticketed concert portion of the festivities.

“Totally blown away by this museum! The quantity AND quality of the exhibits: 5-star. Wonderfully diverse collection, rich in detail, and interactive exhibits. This museum is a 'must-see'. Very well done!!!



# EXHIBITS

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The Huron County Museum facilitated two temporary exhibits on site in 2023 which are the first part of a multi-year exhibit series.



## Stories from Storage: Have a Seat

**Stories from Storage: Have a Seat** was an exploration of the chairs from the Huron County Museum's collection. Over 125 chairs can be found in the Museum's main storage, current permanent exhibitions, and Historic Gaol collections. Within the collection, several were handmade or locally produced, some were used in local institutions, many passed through family and friends, and others have little to no local provenance. We continue to investigate each piece to determine its place in our collection.



## Stories from Storage: Sleep In

**Stories from Storage: Sleep In** was the second installment in the exhibit series with the beds, dressers and bedroom furnishing from Main storage. The exhibit series continues to allow for review of the collection for further required research, determination of provenance, condition assessment, and potential deaccessioning of items determined to have low relevance to the Museum collection.





# PARTNERSHIP EXHIBITS

Two partnership exhibits were also installed in temporary exhibit spaces. These partnerships were important to allow for expanded stories to be presented in the Museum.

The 2023 Community Curators display, **Mental Health is a Journey**, was installed by partners from the Tanner Steffler Foundation. The exhibit features objects loaned by members of the foundation's Youth Council that symbolize their mental health struggles, coping mechanisms, and hope. The exhibit also featured an iPad where visitors could view videos from the foundation's docu-series, and a supplementary display of artifacts from the museum collection that provide insight into how people in the past coped with mental illness.

A temporary exhibit of 10 quilts on loan from the Wolfe family, **In Honour of Residential School Survivors**, was on display for the summer months in one of the Museum's large exhibit galleries. Each quilt featured the same Journey Home fabric panel with different motifs and fabrics sewn by the Kincardine Sunset Quilters Guild on behalf of Miss Kettle & Stony Point Jr. These quilts were gifted to the Residential School Survivors of Kettle & Stony Point First Nation at the close of the exhibit.

## **The Outreach exhibit programme was continued:**

- Summer Reading Program Connections – Goderich Branch, Huron County Library

- Co-op student artifact selections – Seaforth Branch, Clinton Branch & Goderich Branch, Huron County Library
- Exeter 150th Anniversary – South Huron Town Hall
- Alice Munro artifacts – Alice Munro Branch, Huron County Library
- Huronlea Homes for the Aged reminiscence case – Brussels related artifacts

Work proceeded in the permanent exhibit galleries with construction projects in the new Industry gallery to be installed on the upper floor of the museum. Work included drywall, electrical, paint, and flooring. Installation of the full exhibit will take place through 2024.

Five redeveloped interpretive panels were installed at the Tiger Dunlop Tomb with updated graphics and text in a more accessible format.

At the Historic Gaol, a new exhibit was developed and installed in the front entrance exhibit room that examines the development of the county gaol and prisoner demographics based on the Gaol prisoner registry (1841-1922).

The 2023 Huron County Agricultural Hall of Fame inductee, Robert James Scott, was added to the agriculture gallery with a presentation by his family and members of the Huron County Federation of Agriculture. Scott was recognized as one of the most dynamic and influential men in Canadian agriculture through the Depression and World War 2.



# SELECT EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

The Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol facilitated a variety of special events & activities over the course of 2023 both in-person and virtually.

## In-person presentations included:

- Kathryn Adams spoke about her mother's experience as one of Canada's last British Home Children or Migrant children.
- A film screening of 1998's *Soop on Wheels*, a documentary about the life and contributions of disabled Blackfoot political cartoonist and residential school survivor Everett Soop. Filmmaker Sandy Greer was in attendance for a Q & A.
- Cree activist, artist and writer Crystal Semaganis. She spoke about the Semaganis' family and their experience of the Sixties Scoop.
- Author Talk & Book Fair in partnership with the Huron County Library to spotlight local authors and stories.

## Virtual presentations included:

- Lucie Heins of the Royal Alberta Museum, regarding the return of World War II Red Cross comfort quilts from the UK to communities across Canada

In-person and virtual education programs were provided for local students, as well as Kids & Dads program, summer day camps, and PA Day camps.

In-person events included Multilingual Movie nights, Family Day programming, Historic Places Days, Behind the Bars, Ghost Tours, Halloween Trick of Treating, and a Holiday Open House. The annual Textile Show and Sale was also facilitated by the Huron County Spinners, Weavers & Quilters guilds at the Museum. Partnerships with other departments included Maple Mania events.

Outreach programs and presentations were provided for a number of groups including OneCare, Huronview Home for the Aged, Ontario Ancestors Huron Branch, the Ontario Museum Association and the Sustainable Huron and Water Protection Steering Committee. Staff also attended local community events at The Launch, Huron County Pride Festival, Goderich Children's Festival, Huron Multicultural Festival, Exeter 150th Anniversary, Huron County Library Summer Reading Program, Bayfield Fair, Huron County Plowing Match, Seaforth Fair, Belgrave Elementary School Fair, and the Goderich Salt Festival.

The Museum also participated in filming for *Secrets des profondeurs – Secrets of the Depth*. The crew exploring the wreck of the *Wexford* visited the Museum to record interviews with the Senior Curator during their time in Huron County.





# Collection Highlights

There were 80 new accessions in 2023. The following items are a representative sample of items donated to the collection:

- Mural - The Homeseekers: Fording the Credit painted by George Agnew Reid in 1935 based on his earlier work, The Homeseekers, which represents the Maitland River.
- Oil painting of "Big Bill Forrest and his business partner, Bill Birmingham as they survey the progress on the construction of the breakwalls in Goderich in 1908".
- A comfort quilt that was one of over 400,000 quilts sent by the Canadian Red Cross to England during WWII that was made in Exeter.
- A collection of items used, owned and awarded to Alice Munro including a desk, chair, trunk, typewriter, clothing, awards, including the Nobel Prize for Literature.
- Huron County Holstein Club - Letter of Patent, anniversary certificates and booklets, membership lists and minute books 1939 to 2022.
- Huron-Bruce Swingers Square Dance Club banner, skirt, magnetic banner, and button/pin.



## COLLECTIONS

Collections staff worked throughout 2023 with database review and file updates, artifact cataloging, digitization, deaccessioning, and storage consolidation work at the Huron County Museum. A new collections plan was completed to guide future collecting for the Museum & Gaol.

Work continued on the addition of artifacts to the PastPerfect online collection database finishing the year with 7,196 artifact and photograph records available online to researchers. Assistance was provided to local municipalities in regard to historic collections. In particular, staff worked on the review and transfer of artifacts deaccessioned after the closure of the North Huron Museum.

The 2023 Collections Committee met through the year to discuss Museum & Gaol collections issues including the collection, policy review, storage and space needs, deaccessioning, and site planning.

## CONSERVATION

Collections staff from the Huron County Museum worked on rehousing and consolidation of a variety of collections in the Main Storage Area.

At the Historic Gaol the preliminary assessment of the windows in the gaol building was completed with recommendations of preservation and replacement. The interior Gaol courtyards were also landscaped to prevent damage to the stone walls and foundation from overgrowth.

## RESEARCH

The Curator of Engagement & Dialogue researched and completed a new outreach presentation to introduce Huron County residents to the treaty territories that cover what is now Huron County (Treaty #29 and Treaty #45 ½).

Collections research focused on incoming transfer collections and intensive exhibit research focused on the Industrial Diversity section of the Industry Gallery redevelopment project.







# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Staff participated in a variety of workshops and webinars over the course of the year including those offered through Ontario Museum Association, Canadian Museum Association, National Trust, Ontario Ancestors, and various local organizations.

Some staff took part in a variety of County of Huron leadership training. Additional staff were recertified in First Aid training, fork lift training and certification, and fire extinguisher training.

Museum staff attended the conferences of the Canadian Museum Association, Archives Association of Ontario, American Alliance of Museums, and Huron County Tourism Summit.

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

## Staff

Beth Rumble, *Director of Cultural Services*  
Elizabeth French-Gibson, *Senior Curator*  
Sinead Cox, *Curator of Engagement & Dialogue*  
Patti Lamb, *Registrar (retired 2023)*  
Jeremy Allin, *Visitor Services Coordinator*  
Michael Molnar, *Archivist*  
Amy Zoethout, *Marketing & Branding Coordinator*  
Heid Zoethout, *Museum Technician*  
Keith King, *Exhibits & Collections Assistant*  
Michael Roy, *Education & Program Coordinator*  
Christi Hudson, *Registrar*  
Jacob Smith, *Special Projects Coordinator, Digitization*  
Noah Chapman, *Collections Intern*  
Evelyn Riddell, *Collections Intern*

## Student Museum & Gaol Assistants

Adam Britton  
Darian Mero  
Emma Cook (co-op)  
Jacob Watson  
Julia Jim  
Kevin denDunnen  
Kyra Lewis  
Mary Murdoch  
Roham Ghiasi  
Ruby Taylor  
Talia Collins

## Volunteers

Thank you to our many volunteers who provided 1,744 hours of volunteer service during 2023.



# MARKETING & PROMOTIONS

Social media posts, newly researched blog posts, press releases, interviews with local media, and participation in a variety of video series all added to the regular marketing and advertising to promote the site, collections and resources of the Museum & Gaol.

Social Media Followers (December 2023)		
Facebook	Instagram	MailChimp - Subscribers
3,956	1,836	804



# ATTENDANCE

2023 Site Visits		Museum	Gaol
Individual Admissions		8,038	9,554
Individual Admissions – Huron County Library Card		2,267	838
Education & Youth Programs (in-person & virtual)		1,746	811
Special Events		1,473	1,903
Outreach (in-person & virtual)		3,652	24
Groups		169	219
Object Depositors, OGS, Researchers, Volunteers, Others		1,269	1,027
Meetings, Rentals		2,260	30
<b>Annual Total</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>20,874</b>	<b>14,406</b>
Comparative Years		2022	14,320
		2021	5,493
		2020	119
		2019	14,385



Thanks so much for accommodating our group! They thought it was a fantastic stop and our guide was so knowledgeable and enjoyable. I will recommend this stop."