

Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol

2025 Annual Report





Corporation of the County of Huron

2025 Annual Report:
Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol

Mission
Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol engages the community in preserving, sharing, and fostering culture in Huron County.

Vision
Imagine More: Exhibits, programs, and collections that reflect evolving community stories.

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.

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Museum Planning & Engagement

A new multi-year Strategic Plan began for 2025 to 2028. With community, staff and stakeholder input, the following goals were part of the strategic plan for the Museum and Gaol:

Welcoming & Inclusive: Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol strives to be equitable, diverse, inclusive, and accessible.

Storytelling: Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol creates and provides opportunities to share diverse cultural stories and histories.

Capacity: Huron County Museum and Historic Gaol explores opportunities to build capacity and strengthen core services.

With these priorities in mind, the 2025 action plan included the redevelopment of long-term exhibit galleries, continued multi-year exhibit planning, review and update of school programs, inclusion of IDEA programming in various events and programs, extended outreach presentations across the County, guided customer service training and onboarding, development of an oral history collection project to diversify stories, and ongoing work with collections review and storage. These and other items were part of the Museum and Gaol's work to ensure continued progress in the Strategic Plan.



Initiatives & Funding

The Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol successfully received the Community Museum Operating Grant in 2025 to assist with Museum & Gaol operations.

Grant funding was received from the Young Canada Works in Heritage program and Canada Summer Jobs for summer staffing opportunities. The summer staff grants focused student projects on events, collections work, and archival projects. Funding was also received from Young Canada Works Building Careers in Heritage for an Intern to work on a collections and oral history development project.

To advance youth programming, funding was received from Compass Minerals, Excalibur Insurance Group, and West Wawanosh Mutual Insurance to cover bussing and program fees for school groups that wish to visit in-person or virtually. Individual donors and a community organized event also supported this progam.

Sponsorship was received from Axiom Insurance to support a Museum & Gaol donation program and from the Maple Leaf Chapter IODE Goderich to support the development of sensory backpacks to be used by visitors at the Huron Historic Gaol.

Fundraising for refurbishment of the Museum Theatre, including new seating continued. A special fundraising event was held with Live History who presented “In Time”, an immersive historical experience that invited participants to complete escape room-style tasks, challenges and puzzles at the Historic Gaol. The theatre was completed in 2025 and the Museum is grateful to all donors for their support.

> “Such a fun museum for kids and adults alike! It really brought the past to life! Highly recommend this museum to anyone visiting the area.



Exhibits



The Huron County Museum continued the multi-year collections exhibit series, Stories from Storage, in 2025. Spinning Through Time was the third installment in the series, featuring spinning wheels, yarn winders, flax equipment, textiles, Benmiller blankets and more from the Museum's collection. The exhibit series continues to allow for review of the collection with further required research, determination of provenance, condition assessments, and collections documentation as we continue to investigate each piece to determine its place in our collection. This is part of a multi-year exhibit series.



The Huron County Art Show featured 44 artworks by local artists including painted artworks, sculpture and photography. First and second prizes are purchased to become part of the Huron County Art Bank. A new education program, Huron Landscapes, was also developed to coincide with the exhibit.

2025 Art Show Award winners:

- 1st prize – Huron Sky by Roman Turczyn
- 2nd prize – Sunshine on Snow in Maitland Woods by Anne Laviolette



The 2025 Community Curators display was developed in partnership with the Goderich Youth Collective, a group of high school students supported by the YMCA and Huron Perth United Way. The display focused on women who served during the World Wars, using artifacts from the Museum's collection.

Work continued in the permanent exhibit galleries with the addition of special topic interpretive panels; floor and lighting replacement in the government gallery; replacement of secondary components including sandbags in the military gallery; and artifact installations in the new Industry Gallery on the upper floor of the museum. A new long-term exhibit of CKNX radio and television equipment and memorabilia was also installed.

To make the artifacts stored in the main collections area more accessible to visitors, staff worked to move artifacts to shelving viewable from the second floor windows. The items are displayed based on museum nomenclature to not only show the artifacts but also educate the public about museum cataloging and classification.

Outreach Exhibits

2025 Outreach Exhibits included:

- Huron Historic National Historic Site 50th Anniversary – Community Exhibits Programme, Ontario Legislature, Toronto
- George Allen's Carved Birds – Seaforth Branch, Huron County Library
- Clinton 150th & Back to School artifacts – Clinton Branch, Huron County Library
- Winter Sports; Souvenir China; Military & Remembrance; and Toys & Games – Alice Munro Branch, Huron County Library
- Huronlea Homes for the Aged reminiscence case



> What an amazing little piece of history nestled into a beautiful little town. It was a great self guided tour, super interesting and lots to see! Highly recommend. They offer a deal with the Gaol tour and the museum. A definite must do for both.

Select Events & Activities

The Huron Historic Gaol celebrated 50 years as an historic site, marking the July 5, 1975 celebration when the Historic Jail Board unveiled the National Historic Site Plaque and officially celebrated the Gaol's second life as a museum open to the public. Speakers included Warden Heffer, MPP Lisa Thompson, and the Senior Curator. Activities throughout the day included touch-the-equipment with Public Works, touch-the-cruiser with the OPP, alpacas from DL farms of Lucknow, instant photo souvenir, cake & ice cream treats, and a performance from the Goderich Laketown Band, who played at the original open house 50 years before.

In Person presentations included:

- Sinead Cox, "British Home Children placed in Huron County in the 19th and early 20th centuries"
- Larry Wright, Prohibition, Pirates & Lighthouses
- Compass Minerals, Steve Windsor, Technical Services Supervisor, The Goderich Salt Mine
- Screenings & Q & A – We Lend a Hand, in partnership with the Huron County Historical Society
- Navigating Menopause, in partnership with the Stratford Perth Museum
- University of Guelph, Wild Ontario
- Annual Author Talk & Book Fair in partnership with the Huron County Library to spotlight local authors and stories.
- b. h. Yael, Filmmaker, Letter to My Tribe
- Western University professor Oleksa Drachewych and Registered Psychotherapist Dan Ward, Ukrainian Canadian Congress -- London Branch, the crisis of abducted children in occupied Ukraine.
- Activist, educator, storyteller and drag performer Rico Rodriguez, Documentary film Parade: Queer Acts of Love & Resistance, chronicling the history of queer activism in Canada. In partnership with No Hate in Huron.

Virtual presentation included:

- Lorna Poplak, The History of Capital Punishment in Canada





In-person and virtual education programs were provided for groups throughout the year including school visits, Dads & Kids Night at the Museum, Art Unplugged, senior's groups, and youth groups. Four weeks of summer STEAM Power day camps were facilitated and activities held on PA Days for camps and general visitors.

Staff would like to thank the following guests and organizations who presented on activity days: Ontario Provincial Police, Huron Area Search and Rescue, Kristyn Englert, Maitland Trails Association, Huron Stewardship Council, Maitland Vallery Conservation Authority, Betty Hendricks, Andrew Scott, Darlene Stashuk, Huron County Children's Services and Annie Scott.

In-person events included Make a Mess, Walking Scrabble, film screenings, Multilingual Movie Nights, Family Day programming, Archives Awareness Week, International Museum Day, Historic Places Days, Behind the Bars, Ghost Tours, Halloween Trick or Treating, Gaol Boo-tique, Artsy Afternoons, Death Café, and a Holiday Open House.

Outreach programs and presentations were provided for a number of groups including Library branches, Huron County Historical Society, Exeter Villa, OneCare, Huronview & Huronlea Home for the Aged, ETFO, Wingham & Area Historical Society, Goderich Adult Day Centre, Goderich Legion, Goderich Reads, and other County Departments.

The Museum & Gaol also attended community events providing outreach displays and activities at the GDCI Celebration of Cultures, Huron County Pride Festival, Goderich Children's Festival, Huron Multicultural Festival, Huron County Library Summer Reading Program, Seaforth 150th & Doors Open, Blyth Festival, Huron County Plowing Match, Clinton Spring Fair, Seaforth Fall Fair, Belgrave Elementary School Fair, and Goderich Salt Festival.

The Historic Gaol was used as a film location for three organizations:

- Dickson & Bruce: History Meets Mystery
- Ghost Hunters of the Grand River
- Ontario Paranormal Society



Collection Highlights

There were **85** new collection accessions in 2025, including:

- Signature quilt gifted to Verna and Kingsley Harris on their wedding day.
- Town of Goderich ceremonial top hat with signatures from the first captains to arrive in the Goderich harbour each year.
- Reports, letters of support, photographs, drawings, and memorabilia related to the saving of the Huron Historic Gaol.
- Knitted bedspread made by Alice Petty from Hensall.
- Coleman implement from the Coleman's Foundry & Machine Shop in Seaforth.
- Wooden milk crate from Exeter Creamery Co. Ltd., believed to be from the 1920s/30s.



Collections

Collections staff worked throughout 2025 with database reconciliation, file updates, artifact cataloging, digitization, and deaccessioning at the Huron County Museum. First steps towards a collection review to identify gaps in the collection (ex. Geography, time period, cultural diversity, etc.) began.

Work continued on the addition of artifacts to the PastPerfect online collection database finishing the year with 8,720 artifact and photograph records available online to researchers.

Assistance was provided to local municipalities regarding historic collections. Staff worked on the review and transfer of artifacts deaccessioned after the closure of the North Huron Museum. By the end of 2025, 8,865 artifacts and archival items were transferred to the Huron County Museum Collection from North Huron. Work will continue in 2026 to catalogue all items into the museum collection.

The 2025 Collections Committee met through the year to discuss Museum & Gaol collections issues regarding the collection, policy review, storage & space needs, deaccessioning, and site planning.

Members consisted of:
Louise Dockstader (Chair), Sally Leitch (Vice-Chair), Rhea Hamilton-Seeger (Past-Chair), Deb Sholdice, Deb McAuslan, Anne Tafeit, Patti Lamb, Shelley McPhee-Haist, and Bill Vanstone (Councillor).

Research

Research regarding the Historic Gaol and surrounding neighbourhood, British Home Children in Huron County, diaries and letters in the archives, "The Resurrectionist of Ainleyville", Grey Township Black pioneers, and programme related content was completed.

Collections research focused on incoming transfer collections and exhibit research focused on artifacts to be featured in the Stories from Storage series.

Blog posts written focused on the Lyceum Theatre in Wingham, Henderson Bicycle Company in Goderich, local artists featured in the giftshop, and the case of bodysnatching in Ainleyville.

Conservation

Collections staff from the Huron County Museum worked on rehousing and consolidation of a variety of collections in the Main Storage Area. A proposal for potential off-site expansion was presented to County Council. Conservation remediation was completed on train locomotive 6275.

A site review for operational and capital projects was conducted with Museum and Property Services staff. Completion of the accessible front walkway, log cabin use considerations, Gaol window repairs, and site building updates were discussed.



Professional Development

Staff attended workshops and webinars over the year, including those offered through Ontario Museum Association, Canadian Museum Association, Canadian Association for the Conservation of Cultural Property, Canadian Conservation Institute, Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion, National Trust, University of Lethbridge, Ontario Ancestors.

Staff took part in County of Huron leadership training, site visits to local partner museums, and team departmental training focused on Inclusive Visitor Services.

Museum staff attended conferences of the Archives Association of Ontario, Association of Canadian Archivists, Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property, Museum Next, Future of Museum summit, and Huron County Cultural Summit.

Staff

Beth Rumble, *Director of Cultural Services*
Elizabeth French-Gibson, *Senior Curator*
Sinead Cox, *Curator of Engagement & Dialogue*
Jeremy Allin, *Visitor Services Coordinator*
Michael Molnar, *Archivist*
Christi Hudson, *Registrar*
Michael Roy, *Education & Program Coordinator*
Amy Zoethout, *Marketing & Branding Coordinator*
Keith King, *Exhibits & Collections Assistant*
Lori vandenEnden, *Conservation Technician*
Jim Seale, *Fundraising*
Anneke Stryker, *Oral History Collections Intern*

Student Museum & Gaol Assistants

Alice Bosch
Ben Baker
Natalie Conrad
Claire Howard
Darian Mero
Kathryn Scott
Livia Picado-Swan

Volunteers

Thank you to our many volunteers who provided **2,011** hours of volunteer service during 2025.

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.

A popular feature in 2025 was the Frequently Asked Questions or "You Ask We Answer" short video series highlighting the answers to visitors' most common queries at the Huron Historic Gaol.



Social Media Followers (December 2025)		
Facebook	**Instagram**	**MailChimp - Subscribers**
4,652	**2,280**	**887**

Attendance

2025 Site Visits		Museum	Gaol
Individual Admissions		7,630	10,932
Individual Admissions – Huron County Library Card		2,042	733
Education & Youth Programs (in-person & virtual)		2,093	1,075
Special Events, Public Programs, Presentations		1,883	1,980
Outreach (in-person & virtual)		3,674	195
Groups		396	244
Object Depositors, OGS, Researchers, Volunteers, Others		1,424	1,340
Meetings, Rentals		1,798	132
Annual Total	**2025**	**21,181**	**16,659**
Comparative Years	2024	22,560	16,433
	2023	20,874	14,406

> "Great spot with loads of info if you take the audio guide. Staff are really friendly as well. Well worth the price (especially combined with the Huron Museum).