

The Cannon Speaks

Newsletter of The Elgin Military Museum 30 Talbot Street, St. Thomas, Ontario N5P 1A3

November, 2003

Book Launch Astounds Author

On September 20, the Museum hosted a book launch for Wayne Neal's latest work, "5 Boys from Myrtle Street". Close to 200 people attended the event, packing the Museum to capacity.

Wayne's latest work chronicles the stories of 5 lads who all lived on the same street, attended the same school, and served in the Air Force during the Second World War. Out of the group of five, two were killed in action while three returned home, two wearing the Distinguished Flying Cross on their uniform.

The book also has a personal connection for the author. His uncle, Jack Murray, is one of the five boys, and another, Neil Campbell, was the subject of an earlier Neal book.

Reviews of the book have been very positive, as have sales. By the end of the book launch ceremony, Wayne had writer's cramp from signing copy after copy, and the Museum had less than ten books left – and those ten were quickly snapped up the next day. By the time the next case of thirty books arrived, over half were already sold, and the printer was rushing another run through the presses. That, too,

is now almost sold out, and more are on the way from the printer.

The Museum commemorated the launch with a special exhibit relating to the five boys of the book. Family and friends have graciously loaned treasures to the Museum for this exhibit, including a letter from Douglas 'Tin Legs' Bader, written to Neil Campbell's family, Cameron Rowe's log book and a very touching letter to his family from the family in

France who found his body after his Spitfire was shot down.

The exhibit will continue until the end of the year. Copies of the book may be obtained by contacting the Museum, or using the order form in this newsletter.

Remembrance Play Huge Hit

The Letter in the Wall, a new play written by Linda Maskell, was performed to rave reviews by the students at Central Elgin Collegiate Institute on November 11.

The play came about as a direct result of letter found by Maskell in the wall of her home on Metcalfe Street in St. Thomas. Written in 1916 by Kenneth Marshal Grant, who served with the 29th Howitzer Battery, to a woman only identified as "Mame", the letter formed the basis of the play, which speculates on the relationship between Mame and Grant, and illustrates the pain and loss of war.

Only four months after writing the letter, Grant was killed in action on the Somme. The play presents a touching scene depicting the arrival of the dreaded telegram notifying the family of Grant's death.

Research on the letter was done by Maskell, with the assistance of the Museum, and her Grade 12 class. Assisted by the CECI Wind Ensemble and Choir, the play was presented to the school in two performances on November 11, and

to the public in an evening performance.

All those in attendance were unanimous in their praise for the production, and many felt the play should be offered to all the schools in the area, and entered into local drama festivals.

Proceeds from a collection taken at the door were donated to the Museum.

Museum Bucking Trends in Attendance

While many museums, both locally and nationally, are reporting declines in attendance in 2003, the same cannot be said here at the Military Museum. In fact, on November 8, the Museum matched its year to date attendance figures for all of 2002.

Mary Olde, Assistant Manager at the Museum, also noted that the month of November would be very busy. "Visits by schools and other youth groups, such as cubs and girl guides, are way up. We have never had so many groups booking tours in November".

"This is certainly a very positive year for our Museum", said James Ziegler, Museum president, "the efforts of all of our members and staff are to be commended."

TIME FOR A NEW FLAG ?
BUY A NEW ONE FROM THE MUSEUM
TODAY !

Museum Launches New Fund Raising Program

In November, the Museum launched a new fund raising initiative – the Remembrance Lottery. With \$49,000 in prizes, including a Mary Rose Sanderson print, digital cameras, and a home theatre system, the lottery has the potential to generate almost \$50,000 for the Museum operation.

“The Museum has never received any regular funding from local municipalities” said Ian Raven, Museum Manager, “and the members do not wish the Museum to become a burden on the public purse. Every year, we need to raise almost 90% of our operating costs, and the proceeds from this new lottery has the potential to generate the income we need to operate the Museum. In addition, it will also help to inject over \$50,000 into the local economy.”

**HELP PRESERVE THE MEMORY
SUPPORT THE
REMEMBRANCE LOTTERY**

“The support from local businesses has been fantastic”, said Tom Beechey, who is heading up the lottery campaign for the Museum, “from providing prizes to advertising and promotional support, there has been great interest and enthusiasm for this project right from the beginning.”

Tickets cost \$50.00 each, and there are only 2,500 tickets available. “People should order their tickets right away, as there is only one ticket

available for every 30 people in Elgin County. With our great prizes, and the limited number of tickets available, they’ll be going fast” said Beechey.

Help show your support for the Museum by buying your ticket today – call the Museum at (519) 633-7641 or use the enclosed order form. Remember, all the proceeds help preserve the Museum for future generations, and Remembrance Lottery tickets make a great Christmas gift idea !

“Will that be cash, debit or charge?”

The Museum has entered the 21st century in more ways than one. Earlier this year, the Museum began to accept Visa, Mastercard and debit transactions, in addition to the traditional cash and cheques.

Use of the new methods are rapidly growing. In the month of September, almost 50% of the museum’s sales were from debit or credit card transactions.

In addition to purchasing gift items, flags or books from the Museum, many visitors and members are also using their ‘plastic’ to make donations to the Museum.

“Its easy and convenient”, said one donor, “I make a \$25.00 donation every month on my credit card. I hardly notice the amount on my statement, but at the end of the year I’ll get a \$300.00 tax receipt – more than I would usually donate in one lump sum”.

Many businesses also find it easier now that the Museum accepts credit cards. Rather than running a petty cash system, many companies now issue employees a credit card to pay for small purchases. It provides them with a clear accounting trail, with no cash to go astray. For many firms who purchase their flags from the Museum, the ability to pay by credit card is greatly valued, and saves time and money compared to the traditional method of purchase orders, invoices and cheques.

FROM THE MANAGER'S DESK . . .

Can I borrow a red pen?

While attendance is setting new records this year, the same cannot be said about our finances. The closing of the bingo operation, a matter that came as a complete surprise to the Museum, knocked a significant hole in the income side of our budget.

While new ventures have been initiated, such as our very successful Knife Show in August, they will take several years before they can develop sufficiently to generate income similar to that of the former bingo program. Our new lottery, which appears to be a winner, judging from initial responses, will generate significant income, but again, time is needed to sell all the tickets.

Since the opening of the Museum, when money was even tighter than today, the Executive and staff have

been very careful to watch expenditures. The care and planning of previous years is now bearing fruit, as we weather this financial lean time by drawing on the reserves we have accumulated in previous years.

However, this cannot continue. We need the help of every museum supporter, the friends of the Museum, and the brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, and grandchildren of all the veterans we work to commemorate, to ensure that the Museum has the resources we need to continue.

The Museum currently has individual records on over 8,000 veterans from Elgin County. If only one of each of their descendants made a \$10.00 donation to the Museum, our entire annual budget would be exceeded – if only half of those chose to donate, our current deficit would merely be a dim memory, and we would be adding to our investment account for the next 'lean' time.

Our needs are not great, but they are real, and need to be addressed. With your support, this shortfall will soon be a distant memory, and our future secure. On behalf of the Museum, I urge you to show your support today – make a donation or buy a lottery ticket, or better yet, do both. We need your help to keep the Museum an active, vibrant part of our local community.

***THE ELGIN MILITARY MUSEUM
RECEIVES NO FUNDING FROM THE
CITY OF ST. THOMAS OR THE COUNTY
OF ELGIN***

1st Annual Knife Show and Sale a Resounding Success

On Sunday, August 3, the Elgin Military Museum hosted its 1st Annual Knife Show and Sale at the Port Stanley Arena.

21 exhibitors from across Ontario attended the show, including some of the leading knife makers in Canada, including world renowned knifemaker Wolfgang Loerchner, whose knives can sell for several thousand dollars apiece.

"I tell people I'm a sculptor, I work with metals. This is really an art industry" said George Tichbourne, whose knives ranged from around \$100 to over \$2,000.

Over 150 people attended the one day show and sale, and the exhibitors were all pleased with the turnout. "A recent Canadian Knifemakers Guild show in Toronto only attracted 350 people over 2 days, so our turnout is great" said Jim Ziegler, show organizer and himself an amateur knifemaker.

Thanks to very positive comments from the exhibitors and those in attendance, the Museum has already booked the hall for the 2004 show on Sunday, August 1. Plan now to attend and learn more about this fascinating craft.

**AT THE MUSEUM,
EVERY DAY IS
REMEMBRANCE DAY.**

*These local Businesses are
Helping to Support the Museum
Through the Remembrance Lottery.*

*Please give them your thanks
and business, and help keep
our Museum and Community strong !*

Museum Active in Local Remembrance Services

The Elgin Military Museum continues to play an active part in local Remembrance services across the County.

This year, Museum President Jim Ziegler, assisted by his daughter Alexandra, placed a wreath on behalf of the Museum at the Remembrance Service in Port Stanley.

At the service in St. Thomas, the wreath was laid by Museum Director Lt. Col. Bruce Doan, CD. Museum Assistant Manager Mary Olde was

also present to place a wreath on behalf of the IODE.

Museum Manager Ian Raven provided the keynote address at the Southwold Keystone Complex Remembrance Service, which this year honoured the 19 people who died in flying and ground accidents at No. 4 Bombing and Gunnery School in Fingal.

Amongst those attending the service were several family members of the 19 men being especially honoured at the service. They were all deeply moved by the efforts of the community to honour and remember the loss of their loved ones so far from the front lines, but equally as tragic.

A new publication, *Southwold Remembers . . . No. 4 Bombing and Gunnery School*, was launched at the service, and every available copy was quickly snapped up by the large crowd attending the service. More copies are now available through the Southwold Municipal office in Fingal.

Christmas Hours

As in previous years, the Museum will close at 5:00 pm Tuesday, December 23, and will reopen at 1:00 pm on Friday, January 2, 2004.

The Executive, Members and Staff extend their best wishes for a happy and safe Holiday Season to all of our readers and supporters.

**Christmas Open House
Sunday, December 14
2pm – 4 pm**

Show your Support Make a Donation, or Order a Flag, Book or Lottery Ticket today!

Name: _____

Address: _____

City / Town: _____

Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____

Donation: Here is my donation to help keep the Museum strong and active.

A one time donation of \$ _____

A pledge of \$ _____ every

Month 3 Months 6 Months

for a total donation of \$ _____.

(A Tax receipt will be issued in December for the total of donations received during the year.)

I would like to order:

Item	No.	Cost
<input type="checkbox"/> 5 Boys from Myrtle Street	___	\$22.00 ea.
<input type="checkbox"/> Remembrance Lottery Ticket(s)	___	\$50.00 ea
<input type="checkbox"/> Flag(s) Please indicate type and size from price list.		

Payment Information

Cheque _____ _____

Card Number: _____

Expiry Date: _____

Signature: _____

Mail to: The Elgin Military Museum, 30 Talbot St.,
St. Thomas, Ontario N5P 1A3 or fax to
(519) 637-0580.

Museum Reviewed by Magazine

Militaria International, a semi monthly magazine published in the United States, is featuring an article on the Elgin Military Museum in its December 2003 edition.

Written by Chris Arnold, the two page article and accompanying photographs paint a very positive image of the Museum. Reproduced with the permission of the author, we are pleased to reprint his review here.

The Elgin Military Museum, St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada by Chris Arnold

On a recent trip to Canada for the Toronto Military Collector's Show I noticed a sign for a local military museum outside of London, Ontario, and made a mental note to visit it the next time I was in the area. In July I was back in Canada and decided to drop in on the Elgin Military Museum. I have to admit I have a passion for small, local museums, I've visited a lot of them. While each have their own appeal it's a rarity when one visits a local museum that has a clear focus on its content, great displays and a stellar staff. I'm pleased to report that the Elgin Military Museum is one of those jewels.

The museum is in a smallish-looking white building just off Talbot Street and shares a parking lot with a local Pioneer Museum. Looks can be deceiving and while pleasant looking, the exterior of the building

didn't provide a hint of what treasures I was about to see inside

When I walked in the door I was met by Ian Raven, the museum manager and James Ziegler, the president of the Elgin Military Museum. They had not a clue I was visiting so I introduced myself. They were very pleased that one of their 'cousins' from the south stopped in to poke around. Not being Canadian and having a limited exposure to its history I asked them about the museum and its contents.

The purpose of the Elgin Military Museum is to collect, preserve, identify and exhibit mementoes of Canadian military history, with an emphasis on Elgin County and its residents. The vast majority of the museum's collections are gifts from private individuals.

The museum displays are very professional and have been set up to allow visitors to take self-guided tours. The collection is well lit and protected by glass display cases. There are several very nice diorama-type displays showing what life was like on the front lines in the First World War. The museum also doesn't sugar coat the fact that armed forces means armed. There are some excellent firearms displays including a Bren gun, PIAT, and standard Canadian rifles to foreign weapons such as the U.S. Thompson SMG and the German MG-42 machinegun.

One of the highlights of the collection is a wonderful display based around Militaria and personal items

belonging to Lance Sergeant E. W. Sifton. Sifton was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for gallantly attacking a German machinegun post. He was subsequently killed during that attack at Vimy Ridge, April 9, 1917. Lance Sergeant Sifton was the county's only recipient of the VC, which is the British Empire's highest award for valor.

While the Elgin Military Museum focuses on the Elgin Regiment and its participation in Canada's self defense over the years, the museum is not simply a regimental museum. The museum seeks to honor all Elgin County residents who served their country in any branch of service or in civilian roles during periods of conflict. Consequently, there are displays related to the Navy, Air Force and role of women in the military and the home front.

As an American I quickly discovered how much I didn't know about Canada and its military history. From British allies in the American revolution to over 50,000 Canadians serving in both the Union and Confederate armies in the U.S. Civil War, Canada's military history is storied and interesting. I found it fascinating and it's motivated me to learn more about Canada, its people and its military.

The bottom line is that this museum does a great job showcasing its region's history. Also the people I met there were enthusiastic and grateful for the people who were visiting. It's absolutely worth a visit! The museum is located on the west

end of the town of St. Thomas at 30 Talbot St. The phone number is (519) 633-7641. It's about two hours from Windsor off the 401 outside of London, Ontario. Their website is <http://www.execulink.com/~emm>.

Museum Providing Material for 2004 D - Day Program

Recently, Donna Dudinsky of YAP Productions visited the Museum. She is working on a series of programs for CBC Television as part of their commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of the D – Day landings.

"Thanks to the Elgin Military Museum, we have lots of great information to help us with this project", Ms. Dudinsky said, "the cooperation has been magnificent".

The programs will include film footage from World War II, but is unique in that all the film they are seeking is in colour. Our Museum was contacted after she spoke with the Museum of the Regiments in Calgary, who told her of the colour film in our collection relating to the Calgary Tank Regiment.

In addition to the film, the production company also expressed interest in a number of other items in the Museum collection, including letters and recordings.

If anyone has, or knows of colour film from World War II, or letters and recordings that may be of interest, please contact the Museum and we will pass the information on to YAP Productions.