



The Cannon Speaks

Newsletter of the Elgin Military Museum
Summer 2004

Still Awaiting Decision on Pioneer Museum Renovations

Despite numerous reports and recommendations, Elgin County Council still has not made a decision regarding the fate of the Elgin County Pioneer Museum. Most recently, articles in the press have reported that Council is considering moving the Museum to the 4th floor of the County Administration building on Sunset Drive.

Our Museum members and staff are becoming more and more concerned as the days and weeks of indecision have now become months and years (the Pioneer Museum closed and moved away on September 3, 2002).

If reports in the media are to be believed, the original \$400,000 + grant has diminished by close to 25% to just over \$300,000, eaten up by rental costs for the temporary facility on Talbot Street, moving costs, and the costs of plans and consultants, all of which seem to have been rejected by County Council. And the costs continue to grow, with rent alone reducing the original amount by over \$80 every single day, close to \$600 every week.

If the Museum does move out to the County Administration building, no one seems to know what will happen

to the 32 Talbot Street location, a matter of major concern to the Military Museum.

Public opinion seems to be that there is a genuine desire to see the Museum return to its historic site at 32 Talbot Street. Certainly our experience has been that this is an excellent location for a Museum, and the history of the Duncombe house certainly makes it worthy of preservation.

It seems that the Pioneer Museum has become the County's version of the City of St. Thomas Arena debate. It will be interesting to see which 'log jam' breaks first.

The Remembrance Lottery

To qualify for the Early Bird Draw,
tickets must be purchased by August
15.

Order yours today !

Attendance Continues to Grow

While many museums and galleries are reporting declines in attendance, visitors to the Elgin Military Museum continue to set new attendance records.

In 2003, attendance figures rose 14% over 2002 figures, and so far in 2004, our figures are up over 24% above 2003 figures.

While there is no single reason for the increase, Museum Manager Ian Raven said “the feedback we are receiving from visitors is consistently positive.”

“They like our site and find our exhibits informative and interesting. They enjoy their visit, and are apparently telling their friends and neighbours”.

If you haven't visited the Museum lately, perhaps you should. After all, with the consistent growth in visitors over the past two years, Raven noted “we must be doing something right”.

Memorial Service for Wing Commander J. Fred Green, DFC Exceeds Expectations

The Museum was filled to the bursting point (or so it seemed) on Sunday, May 16, 2004, as friends and relatives of the late Fred Green gathered to remember him at the Museum.

Fred, a colourful character by anyone's standards, passed away January 30, 2004, in his 97th year. During World War II, Fred earned the Distinguished Flying Cross while serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Following the war, Fred worked as an architect, designing many homes and businesses across the area. A founding member of the Museum, Fred oversaw the renovations to the

original Museum building, and designed the link that connects the Military and Pioneer museum buildings.

Many of the other ‘originals’ remember with great fondness the high spirited ‘debates’ that would occur between ‘J. Fred’ and his great friend and arch rival Harry Medcalf, as each argued the opposite side of some trivial point, usually as to which of the two ‘had the floor’.

Nonetheless, both Harry and Fred were great supporters of the Museum, and we were greatly honoured when Fred's family asked if the Museum would host the memorial service.

Plans were made for an attendance of somewhere between 75 and 125 people, who all seemed to arrive in the first 30 seconds, and all of whom brought friends. Museum staff lost count after about 250, as guests spilled out onto the Museum grounds, and the event moved outdoors into what was one of the first really beautiful spring days.

The family were very touched at the attendance, and the many tributes made in Fred's memory. For all who knew him, Fred will live forever in our hearts and memories, and we all know that somewhere the other ‘originals’ who have gone on before are listening to Fred and Harry debating yet another trivial point – and loving every word.

Finances – A Light At the End of the Tunnel?

Over the past two years, the Museum has been sailing in troubled waters – financially. A decline in income from our bingo operations suddenly turned to an abrupt halt when the hall closed without notice.

Time has also taken its toll of veterans and regular supporters of the Museum – a toll which is magnified by the fact that the Museum does not receive any funding from the City or the County.

However, the Museum has not been defeated. New initiatives, such as the Remembrance Lottery, are taking off and have the potential to produce significant revenue for the museum. Plans are also afoot to reopen the Bingo hall by the end of summer, and this too will help to stem the demand on our reserves.

The Museum still needs your support to survive and prosper while these new revenue streams come on line. The volunteers and staff are working hard to make each \$1.00 produce \$1.10 in value for the museum.

We know that we have a great museum – everyone who visits (and those numbers continue to set new records) – tell us so. But we still need your donations to help us to carry on, to replace the reserves that have carried across these rough waters, and build that reserve for the rough times yet to come.

Many people have taken advantage of our new Visa and Mastercard programs to increase their annual donation through a smaller monthly payment on their credit card. \$25.00 per month adds up to a big \$300.00 tax receipt at the end of the year, all set up in a few minutes as an automatic monthly withdrawal.

Any donation – from \$5.00 to \$5,000 helps us to keep the memories and accomplishments of the veterans from Elgin County alive for the future. Help us to achieve this goal ! Use the enclosed postage paid envelope to send your donation today !

Bingo Returning – Volunteers Needed !

With the reincarnation of the former Bingo Bingo operation as Dolphin Bingo, the Museum is setting about to again reap the benefit of this lucrative fundraising device.

Volunteers are again needed to help us staff the events, which the Museum will be running every Sunday evening. Unlike the previous operation where up to 15 volunteers were needed, the new bingo operation will employ paid runners, reducing our need for volunteers to only four per event. It is hoped that we will be able to set up a series of teams, so that the volunteers will only be required to work a maximum of one event per month.

If you would like to volunteer for our 'bingo team', please call the Museum at 633-7641.

**Your support is key to our
success !**

**The Museum receives NO funding
from either the City of St. Thomas
or the County of Elgin.**

60th Anniversary of the D – Day Landings Focus of Summer Exhibit

The story of the D – Day landings in Normandy form the focus of the Museum's main summer exhibit.

Filling the Thorman room, the exhibit takes the visitor through the build up in England to the landings in France, and finally across Europe to Germany and the end of the war in Europe.

Special maps, produced by Museum Exhibits Chairman Laurie Beavis, provide tremendous detail of the planning and execution of the largest amphibious attack in history, and the huge amount of planning and coordination that was required to make the attack a success.

The exhibit will run through August, and has received rave reviews from all who have seen it. Why not visit the Museum and see for yourself?