



# The Cannon Speaks

Newsletter of the Elgin Military Museum  
Fall 2007

## Here We Grow Again

The long awaited day has finally arrived. As of November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007 we have acquired the 32 Talbot Street building. The location, formerly known as the Elgin County Pioneer Museum was vacated by the County of Elgin many months past. The County moved their operation to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the County Administration building, and with the new location came a new name, the Elgin County Museum.

Our planning committee has met several times in the past year and is looking forward to the challenges of putting the new acquired property to good use. Plans for the permanent use of the building have not been defined yet, but will come about through more work on the committee's part and staff input.

The first plans are to have a series of public meetings to find interested parties to help identify uses and funding for the structure. Already several ideas have been floating around amongst our members including several ideas that may have us enhancing our mandate.

Our working title for the building is "The Duncombe House Heritage Centre." What will be inside the



"Centre" is sure to be a hot topic of discussion at upcoming meetings.

Some of the initial ideas include; expanding the military exhibits, a larger Hall of Honour, enhanced reference and research facilities, improved artifact storage, a Jumbo Exhibit or even a Sports Hall of Fame.

Needless to say funding is of prime concern. No clear plan for use can commence until a stable funding plan for the property is in place. As for now most of the building will be 'mothballed' and will remain so as our funding plans develop.

This does not mean the new space won't be used as needs demand. The 2007 Rotary Club Tour of Homes, recently used the newer part of the structure on November 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> as an the site for hot cider

and cookies (and a tour of the museum). Over 850 attended the event, giving an endless stream of people both days.



**The former “Agriculture Building” alone will provide close to 1,800 square feet of additional space .**

Plans also exist to utilize some areas for storage, so we can work on planned improvements to storage areas in our original location.

Reference books and files may also soon be moved to larger work areas upstairs, a long overdue item and another part of the ‘storage shuffle’.

Now is the time for you to have your say in planning the future of both our museum and the “Duncombe House Heritage Centre”. We need your input on what we should do, how we can do it, and, equally importantly, how we can generate the funding to continue for the next twenty five years.

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## **New School Research Project a Big Success**

Again at the end of this month a flurry of high school kinds will invade the museum. No, we are not being occupied, but the students will be participating in our new “Veteran Research Project.”

The project, developed by museum staff, involves students in the researching of World War II veterans, using the museum’s comprehensive files. Each student is assigned a name and sent to the records room of the museum. After locating the veteran in our binders, the student is given a prepared copy of the veteran’s file. The file contains copies of documents relating to the individual veteran. The student then works through a

standardized sheet of questions. Some questions are clear, some can be deduced and some cannot be answered from the information in the file, hopefully leaving the student with an interest to do more research on their own later. The students then take away the work sheet as a basis for a later class discussion.

The teacher is provided with a copy of completed work sheets by the museum so they can see how well the students did in their information gathering.

There are over 60 files currently available to be chosen by the students so every class experience will be a bit different. More veterans will be added to the project as time permits. Initial use and feedback on the World War II Veteran Research Project has been very positive.

## Mark Your Calendar

In April, 2008, the Museum will host a special three month traveling exhibit from Museums Guelph relating to John McCrae, author of *In Flander's Fields*.

Plan now to see this very special exhibit – it's sure to be a busy time !

### *Lest We Forget . . .*

Once again the week of Remembrance Day has come and gone. This week is traditionally the busiest time of the museum's operational calendar. Both staff and volunteers have had their dancing (running?) shoes on as the list of events the museum participates in took them around the County. Some of these events included:

- the 2007 Rotary Tour of Homes;
- Remembrance Services in St. Thomas, Port Stanley, West Lorne and Shedden;

- Tours for Scout troops, Girl Guides, and Cub packs at the museum;

- Regular meetings of the Antiques Club and Elgin Historical Society at the museum;

- A talk for Elgin Manor residents by staff; and

- A special meeting of the Elgin Genealogical Society at the museum.

All these events were being attended to on top of opening the museum for regular visitors, requests for research (which also increase at this time of year), and all the details

and work relating to taking over the former Pioneer Museum.

A very special thanks to everyone who pitched in !

## Museum Filled to Overflowing to View Elgin's Only VC

The Museum was filled to capacity on Monday April 9, as people came from far and wide to a viewing of the only Victoria Cross awarded to a citizen of our County.

Thanks to the generous cooperation of the Elgin County Museum, the Victoria Cross awarded to Ellis Wellwood Sifton was taken from its normal resting place in a vault for exhibition at the Elgin Military Museum on the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event for which it was awarded – the battle of Vimy Ridge.

Flanked by an honour guard from No. 2884 Cadet Corps (West Elgin), and carefully watched over by members of both the St. Thomas Police Service and the Ontario Provincial Police, Sifton's medals were displayed to the public for the first time in three years, resting amidst an exhibit of his letters home to his two sisters.

The occasion was also the launch of the Museum's latest publication, "*All is Well with Ellis Tonight*", a compilation of 68 letters home from Sifton, from the time of his first enlisting to just days before his death



on Vimy Ridge. Researched and edited by noted local historian Jeffrey Booth, the letters allow the reader to accompany Sifton on his emotional and spiritual journey that formed an integral part of his physical journey from the peace and tranquility of the family farm in Wallacetown to the battlefields of France.

The 100 copies of the book available for sale were quickly snapped up by the crowd, and the book continues to sell well in the museum gift shop (only \$10 – a great Christmas idea).

In addition to the public viewing, a special private viewing was held in the morning for the Sifton family. Over 70 relatives of Sifton attended this special viewing, many seeing his

actual medals for the first time. It was also the first time in 8 years that his medals had been exhibited with the few personal effects that were returned to his family, which the family generously donated to our Museum many years ago.

The event was front page news for the St. Thomas Times Journal, and was also well covered by the A Channel and other local media. By the time the medals left the Museum to return to the safety of their vault, over 500 people had viewed the small bronze cross that is our highest award for gallantry.

## **Christmas Hours**

As in previous years, the Museum will close at 5:00 pm Saturday, December 22, and will reopen at 1:00 pm on Wednesday, 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.

## **Local Jeep Troop Visit with Dignitary in Tow**



**The Elgin Veteran's Association "Jeep Troop" recently visited the museum with Tom Bruce, guest of honour for the Regimental Remembrance Dinner.**

## New Museum Hours

Following an extensive review, the Museum Executive has amended our hours of operation for the fall and winter months, suspending our Sunday openings until the return of warm weather in the Spring. A review has shown that on many Sundays in the winter, no visitors have come to our door. Rather than tie up the valuable hours of our volunteers waiting for people who never arrive, the Museum will save ourselves for the busier months of Spring and Summer. The Museum will continue our other hours through the week, namely Tuesday to Friday, 1pm to 5pm, and Saturday 9am to Noon and 1pm to 5pm.



**Our new room in the former Pioneer Museum was beautifully decorated for the 2007 Rotary Tour of Homes by The Olde Gardens Flower Shop.**

## Grants, Attendance Increase in 2007

Attendance at the Elgin Military Museum will reach new heights in 2007. Thanks to a number of successful events, and increases in school visits and summer tourists, the Museum has already exceeded

our previous record of 4,098 in 2006, with almost two months still to go. Bright news also came our way financially in 2007. Our traditional funding grant from the Province of Ontario (the Community Museum Operating Grant) increased by almost \$1,000 (from \$7,422 to \$8,411), and, in the first of what we hope to become annual grants, the Museum received grants from the City of St. Thomas and the Municipality of West Elgin.

The City matched our Provincial Operating Grant, as did West Elgin (on a proportionate, per capita basis). While grants were requested from all the Municipalities of Elgin, only St. Thomas and West Elgin provided their support. Hopefully, more will support our efforts in 2008.

If you live in St. Thomas or West Elgin, please make an effort to thank your Mayor and Council for their support of the Museum. If you live in another Municipality, we hope you will help lobby your Councilors to support our 2008 request for funding.



**A large wreath decorated with poppies formed a fitting focal point at the 2007 Rotary Tour of Homes.**

## Support of Donors Crucial for Success of Museum in 2008

With the acquisition of the former Elgin County Pioneer Museum, the future of our Museum has never looked brighter. Over 6,000 square feet of storage and exhibit space, gardens and grounds, more parking – the positives leap out.

However, there are also many negatives – three furnaces to service, more hydro costs, insurance, maintenance and upkeep.

While we explore the potential of this acquisition to generate new interest and income for the Museum, we are already picking up the increases in costs.

Until new revenue sources are found, and funds begin to flow, the Museum will need the support of all of our donors more than ever before.

Everyone who has viewed the new facilities has been impressed, and agrees that the potential is incredible. But without the support of our loyal donor base, the potential also exists to cause serious, possibly irreparable financial harm to the Museum.

For the past twenty-five years, the Museum has demonstrated excellent operational management and financial responsibility. A few years ago, the Museum volunteered to have our operations reviewed by an independent Chartered Accountant

as part of a study being done by the Ontario Museum Association.

The result – of all the Museum's studied, the report described the Elgin Military Museum as "by far" the most efficient, best managed in the province.

There is an old military adage that smart commanders will only reinforce success, not failure. The Elgin Military Museum has twenty-five years of success. In 1998, the Museum effectively doubled in size with the addition of the Thorman Room, and with the acquisition of the former Pioneer Museum site, we effectively double in size again.

Our attendance has never been higher, our school programs never busier. It is clear that the community appreciates our efforts.

As you review your requests and plan your donations for the year, please stop and consider the Museum. Our need has never been greater, as we absorb the costs of the new buildings. But our success has never been greater, and our potential seems almost unlimited.

This Museum, your Museum, needs your support for 2008. Please be generous – our future depends on it.

*Best Wishes  
For a Happy  
and Safe  
Holiday*

## **Museum takes Some Casualties in Battle with Father Time**

After a long and valiant struggle with the elements, the roof of the Museum finally succumbed to the gremlins of time earlier this year.

An intermittent leak (oddly enough on the first floor) had staff searching high and low for a possible source, which, through a process of elimination, finally led to the roof.

While it appeared fine from the ground, detailed examination on the roof itself clearly showed the need for replacement.

Fortunately, a relatively dry spring helped to minimize any damage to the museum from the leak, and we were blessed with several sunny, warm days as the work was completed.

A little over \$4,000 later, we have a protective coat of new shingles over the house, and a virtually indestructible steel roof installed over the flat roof of the library.

With the onset of the heating season, Father Time again dispatched his gremlins to the Museum. This time, the blower motor on the furnace was the focus of their attention, and their onslaught was repelled only after we received a bill for just under \$1,000 from the service company.

Unfortunately, a group to whom the Museum applied for a grant to cover

these unbudgeted expenses declined our request, putting an unwelcome strain on our meager financial reserves. Donations to help cover the costs would be most welcome.

## **Last Chance to Order Special 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Pin**

This is your last chance to order one of the few remaining special commemorative pins celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Priced at only \$25, the solid pewter pin features the museum crest with the dates 1982 – 2007, and is already being sought by a number of local pin collectors.

Along with the handsome pin, you also receive a charitable donation receipt for \$20.00, the maximum allowable.

Call or visit the Museum soon, and get your 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Pin before they are sold out.



**Workers install the new steel roof over the Museum library – this should keep the roof gremlins at bay for a while !**