

Halton's County Museum at Kelso

July official opening for history showcase

The rustic, winding road leads through the Kelso Conservation Area into the vivid past of Halton County and even our 100-year-old nation.

Halton County's museum, while still in an adolescent stage, is reaching towards maturity as it enters its fifth year of operation, located on the Duff Alexander farm in the heart of the conservation area. It tells an intriguing story of the lives of early settlers — in an unique way.

"We're trying to make it homey — the way it used to be — rather than like a laboratory with 'don't touch' signs all over," curator Major Harold J. Newman explains.

Those who have visited other larger and smaller museums and found them to be stark, unattractive, but interesting storehouses for the relics of the past, will appreciate the difference when they step through Halton Museum's French doors into the "living past".

When completed, the museum will show the progression of 100 years of rural living. It will not be a "Pioneer Village" or anything like it. "There are too many of them now," the curator explains. "Whenever possible, a complete development of one phase of life will be shown. Even now, there is a complete picture of the development of light and an almost complete collection of early types of stoves is on hand — but yet to be restored."

Only two galleries, containing approximately 1,800 pieces, are ready to be visited, but several more will likely be completed by the time the museum is "officially" opened this summer. Tentative date for the official opening is the fourth Wednesday of July.

Even now, one can catch an accurate glimpse into our colorful history. Nearly 7,000 items are currently in the possession of the Halton County Museum Board and each is neatly catalogued according to the international cataloguing system. The complete story of a gift, loan or purchase is recorded in the files and can be traced quickly on request.

Approximately 60 per cent of the articles are gifts to the Museum Board, while another 20 per cent are on loan. The remainder have been purchased by the Board at an approximate cost of \$1,200. A huge stump-pulling rig costing \$320 was one of the major purchases.

The second floor of the main museum building — a 97-year-old barn — contains hundreds of valuable items yet to be restored and about only one-third of the currently restored items are on display. "A good

museum never displays more than a third of its articles at any time. That way, it can be kept activated, encouraging visitors to return," the curator noted.

Major Newman supervises all the restoration work and on many articles which are donated, it is considerable. "Some of the stuff you just wouldn't recognize, but in the end, if we have an article that is interesting and tells a story, we think it's worth all the work involved," Major Newman said.

Gifts are the life blood of the museum and since this is Centennial Year, they'll be encouraged more than ever. People will be asked to make a "Centennial Year Gift" of a cherished hand-me-down and in return, they will receive a special certificate. Of course, the complete record of the gift will be kept on file in the museum's records.

Since its inception in June of 1962, the museum has been on a "five-year plan leading to Centennial year." The museum's nearly 7,000 articles are evidence of the success. "We started with almost nothing and now we have the beginnings of an excellent museum," Major Newman suggested.

Already there are over 20 heavy equipment items — many yet to be restored — including sleighs, democrats and large farm equipment. This will all be displayed in the Centennial Project building, which recently received government approval. The \$31,857 enterprise will be shared equally by the municipal, provincial and federal governments and it is hoped construction will begin as soon as the frost is out of the ground.

The building, to consist of a main building and two wings to start with, will be constructed to the south of the current museum building and together will form an L. It is expected antique stage coaches, buggies and sleighs, in fact most means of early transportation, along with horse-drawn agricultural implements, will be housed in the addition.

Like most worthwhile projects, the end will not be achieved quickly. The majority of the Museum Board's budget has been spent on buildings and this will be continued until all the necessary buildings have been constructed or renovated. Then more money will be concentrated on

the purchase of new articles. Despite the evident interest of residents in the county's past, many of the valuable should-be museum pieces have left the county. "Halton has been pretty well milked by auctioneers and American purchases," the Major says, "but still quite a few things have been willed to the museum and this is a great help."

Visitors to the museum will be fascinated by the fine display of firearms. "We have quite a good arsenal of guns and bayonets — about 22 varieties of guns which range as far back as a British Army gun of 1797," the curator pointed out.

A copper plate which could date back to the late 1600s or early 1700s is probably the oldest item on display. Major Newman found it in the Humber River and suggests "It is the type used by early French Voyageurs."

By the time of the official opening, it is hoped a replica of the Judge's Chambers — complete with a judge's chair and balls and chains — will be completed.

Museum work is "old hat" to Major Newman. A writer, artist, British army officer and former professor, "The Major" as he's often called, has worked at such distant places as the British Museum in London and the Wood Museum in Copenhagen, Denmark. He also did a lot of the research work on Fort York in Toronto and worked on the restoration of Fort Niagara.

If Keats was right — "a thing of beauty is a joy forever" — then Major Newman could be described as the keeper of Halton's past, for the enjoyment of the present and future generations.

Museum stays at Kelso committee recommends

Halton County's Museum will stay where it is — in the centre of the Kelso Conservation area west of Milton — according to recommendations of a special committee to Halton County council.

The committee unanimously rejected a suggestion by the Halton Region Conservation Authority to move from the current site. In addition, the committee confirmed the plan of the Museum Board to construct an addition to the current museum.

Members of the special committee were Halton County Warden William Coulter, Reeve George Leslie of Essex and Reeve Gordon Callaghan of Burlington and Museum Board members Herbert Merry, Reeve of Oakville and chair-

man of the board, Deputy Reeve William Hoey of Niagara and Jack Penberton.

The meeting of the special committee immediately followed a meeting of the committee with representatives of the Halton Region Conservation Authority.



CURATOR MAJOR HAROLD NEWMAN has taken great pains to make the Halton museum a living one. The Major is shown seated among some of the vehicles of a bygone era which will proudly be displayed in the museum's Centennial Project — a \$31,857 addition to the current building. Antique stage coaches, buggies and sleighs — in fact, most means of early transportation — along with horse-drawn agricultural implements will be housed in the new building.

Give second reading

A bill providing for the establishment of a provincial agricultural museum on the Archie Service farm at Milton Heights was given a second reading and approval in principle in the legislature on Friday.

Agriculture and Food Minister William Stewart said the museum will qualify for federal grants of up to \$12,000 a year toward operating costs. It will display artifacts from pioneer farming, equipment from the steam locomotive era and some examples of early tractors and trucks.



A CONVERTED BARN currently serves as the main museum building. The 97-year-old barn houses most of the treasures currently in the possession of the museum. Attractive French doors lead into the main body of the building.



AN OLD FASHIONED FIREPLACE surrounded by relics of the past is a poignant reminder of our heritage in this Centennial Year. More than 7,000 articles are now in the possession of Halton County Museum, although less than a third are on display at any one time. The official opening of the museum will be held late in July. The museum is located in the centre of the Kelso Conservation Area, just west of Milton Heights.

Free Press Feature Page



THE FAMOUS PAINTING of the Fathers of Confederation occupies a prominent spot in the County Museum. Curator Major Harold J. Newman, shown here inspecting the painting, estimates that 60 per cent of the museum's 7,000 items were received through donations. In the foreground are some of the dolls from the Museum's extensive collection.

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