

Artifacts provide exciting glimpse

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SIMCOE — Even after 15 years in the museum business, a new surprise waits around every corner.

Last week, the surprise lay in the thrill of holding a 12,000-year-old stone dart point while listening to the contagious enthusiasm of a pair of native artifacts buffs.

Ninety-one-year-old Bill Marshall, from Cainsville, and his young friend Don Wills were figuratively jumping up and down with excitement, despite being down on their hands and knees looking over a basket of early Indian relics spread out on our museum floor.

Bill and Don can still get excited about anything and everything they see in the native artifacts field. Bill has decades of scholarly recording the all-important field notes of exact lo-

Bill Yeager



cation and other historical information for a lucky discovery of a few arrowheads along a stream bed or on top of a newly plowed field. Both emphasized the historical importance of calling in a professional archaeologist if you stumble upon a site that calls for a legal archaeological dig.

Travelling exhibit

They had stopped by to see the new loan exhibit from the Royal Ontario Museum at our

Eva Brook Donly Museum until March 18. "The Ontario Iroquois — History through Archaeology" tells the 1,000-year history of the Iroquois through the artifacts they left behind under Ontario's soil.

The travelling exhibit uses artifacts, maps, painted scenes and photographs to show how the artifacts tell us about the Iroquois' tools, homes, utensils and foods.

Some of the highlights in the ROM display include a reconstructed pottery bowl, early stone scrapers and spearpoints, a figural pipe bowl and a 300-year-old French trade axe.

We weren't sure Bill and Don would find time to make it up to the second floor ROM exhibit, however, after we spread out a few dozen artifacts from our own museum's 60 years of accumulations.

into our past

Surprisingly, almost the first few items we pulled out turned out to be some of the most interesting and most varied of the whole collection.

An unusual pipe stem of banded slate is a seldom found stone relic about 1,500 to 2,500 years old. Such an item is far rarer than the large numbers of clay pipes found so often in most collections.

Crash course

Their visit proved to be a wonderful crash course introduction to Indian artifacts for me, as this has been an area I've had almost no experience in. I learned that most of the larger stone weapons most of us have always called arrowheads are actually dart points for the medium sized ones and spear points for the larger. Several long "arrowheads" with a slight

curve to one side turned out to be knives. Stone tools we have catalogued as axes or tomahawk heads for decades are usually scrapers, with a smooth, sharp edge, and the correct term is "celt." Flint is a British stone, and our North American variety is properly called "chert."

The great surprise for our visitors themselves turned out to be one nondescript dart point hidden among a heap of others. Tucked away with dozens of lesser items was the distinctive profile and the special identifying fluted groove on each side of the base. A very rarely found Clovis era point lay before us, made some 12,000 years ago by the first native inhabitants in Ontario after the last ice age.

Bill Yeager is curator of the Eva Brook Donly Museum in Simcoe.



Expositor Photo

Native lore: Catharine Shaw looks at a collection of native artifacts found on a Townsend farm and now on display at the Eva Brook Donly Museum in Simcoe. The col-

lection, along with a travelling Royal Ontario Museum exhibit called The Ontario Iroquois: History Through Archeology, will be showing at the museum until March 18.