

# Bridgewater Museum Commission

## Annual Report

2009

## BRIDGEWATER MUSEUM COMMISSION

Brian Tennyson, Chair

Susan Beazley, Vice Chair

Joan Fillmore

Jean Fraser McHarg

James Reid

Mr Greg Ritcey, Council Representative

Mr Ken Smith, ex officio

Carol Pickings-Anthony, ex officio

## DESBRISAY MUSEUM STAFF

Barbara Thompson, Director

Linda Bedford, Curator

Kendra Power, Program Officer

Doug George, Maintenance Technician

Carolyn Colbourne, Relief Receptionist

Marlee Powers, Relief Receptionist

Kaitlin Adlam, Summer Student, Interpreter

Michel Breau, Summer Student, Built Heritage Researcher

Kareen Wong, Stephanie Caron and Nicole MacIlwain, Katimavik

## WILE CARDING MILL

Heather O'Dell, Chief Interpreter (seasonal)

Florence Selig, Interpreter (casual)

Melissa Fisher, Interpreter (casual)

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Bridgewater Museum Commission was incorporated by an Act of the General Assembly of Nova Scotia (38 Elizabeth II, 1989, c59) 'to take charge of, equip, manage and operate one or more museums within the Town, including the museum now known as the DesBrisay Museum.'

Its mission is to enrich our community by providing meaningful experiences that build understanding, knowledge and pride in our past and present way of life to help us meet future challenges.

## MANDATE

To bring before the County's people examples of the accomplishments and discoveries of the outside cultures and communities, and to manifest the County's natural and cultural heritage to those outside the County.

To preserve and interpret the natural and cultural heritage of Bridgewater and Lunenburg County as a unified and coordinated experience, including the County's industrial heritage not only within the Museum but also on such sites outside the Museum for which the Commission has accepted responsibility.

To work in cooperation with other heritage and cultural institutions.

## INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to present the 2010 annual report of the Bridgewater Museum Commission, reporting on our activities during 2009.

This year we have adopted a new format in presenting this report. For the first time it combines the Commission's report with the annual report of the Director of the DesBrisay Museum. This has been done in the hope that it will provide a more coordinated overall report on governance, exhibits, programs and activities.

The Commission is carrying out its mandate on behalf of the citizens of Bridgewater effectively and efficiently, providing community representation, advice and guidance that are critical to the progress that has been achieved by the Museum during the past year. At the same time, the Commission's working relationship with Town and Museum staff is all that could be wished for.

We are pleased to acknowledge the extraordinary amount of work carried out, despite financial constraints, by our very able and dedicated staff. The Commission wishes particularly to recognize the effective leadership being provided by the Museum Director, Barbara Thompson. The Commission wishes also to express its appreciation to the Mayor and Town Council, as well as the Town's chief administrative officer, Ken Smith, and Carol Pickings-Anthony, Director of Parks, Recreation and Culture, for their support.

We conclude again, as we did last year, by urging the people of Bridgewater to take pride in the fact that this town is unique in Nova Scotia in owning and operating a community museum. This recognition of the importance of history and heritage to the cultural and community life of the town should be a cause for much pride.

*Brian Tennyson*

Chair

12 January 2010

## OFFICERS AND MEMBERSHIP

Brian Tennyson, who was elected chair of the Commission at the 2008 annual general meeting, was re-elected at the 2009 annual general meeting. Susan Beazley, who joined the Commission in March 2008, was elected vice chair, replacing Greg Ritcey, who had been elected to Town Council in October 2008. Greg continues to serve on the Commission, however, as Council's representative, replacing Kevin Marlin, who was not successful in the municipal elections.

Two new members joined the Commission in 2009. Joan Fillmore is well known to the citizens of Bridgewater through her work in the news department of CKBW radio station. She is also an active volunteer at the Museum. Jean Fraser McHarg is also well known in the community through her volunteer work at the Museum, in the South Shore Hospital Auxiliary, and in the Girl Guides of Canada. I am delighted to be able to report that both have been making a strong contribution to the Commission's work. There remains one vacancy which we expect to be filled before the end of January.

## RESTRUCTURING OF COMMISSION

In June 2008 the Commission was notified by the town's chief administrative officer that the town had initiated a review of all committees and commissions. Following extensive consideration of the working document prepared by town staff, the Commission presented a formal response in November 2008 pointing out a number of factual errors and expressing the view that the document's analysis was seriously deficient. The chair met with the Mayor and the chief administrative officer, who gave assurances that there was no predetermined plan to make any major changes and promised that the Commission would be included in any future discussions. The Commission continues to believe this proposal is highly problematic.

## FINANCES

After a very difficult year in 2007-8, because of the extraordinary expenses incurred in replacing the Museum's roof, Town Council in 2008-9 showed its appreciation of the very considerable progress being made in revitalizing the Museum by increasing our budget from \$115, 452 to \$148,193. Unfortunately, 2009-10 was an entirely different story, when Council reduced the budget to \$131,900.

While the Commission fully appreciates that Town Council must make tough decisions in a time of financial stress, it fears that a reduction of more than 15% in the budget of the smallest department – which amounts to only approximately 1% of Bridge-water's total budget – may reflect a failure to fully appreciate the value of the DesBrisay Museum's service to the community.

It is important to remember also that the Museum receives matching funds from the Nova Scotia Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage. Any lessening of municipal support for the Museum may well affect the amount of the provincial grant, which presently constitutes approximately 40% of annual operating revenues.

On a more positive note, however, Council did set aside \$6,000 in its reserve fund in recognition of the fact that there was a high risk that our humidifier might die within this fiscal year. It also included funding in its capital budget to replace the museum's tile floor, which is more than forty years old.

It remains to be seen what the 2010-11 budget will be like. We are encouraged, however, by the declaration in the Town's proposed strategic plan that 'recreation' includes heritage and culture, to both of which the DesBrisay Museum contributes in a significant way.

Meanwhile, as noted elsewhere in this report, we have made changes to the gift shop operations in an effort to increase sales and our very dynamic schedule of programs and

activities is bringing in more people, which is generating higher sales. At the same time, we are actively reviewing the Museum's endowment fund to determine how to encourage donations that will over time build up an investment portfolio to help support our work.

## WILE CARDING MILL

The Town, through the Commission, manages the Wile Carding Mill on behalf of the Nova Scotia Museum. There has, however, not been a management agreement in place for some years, a situation which applies to the other regional museums operated on behalf of the Nova Scotia Museum as well. Last year's annual report referred to the negotiations which had been on-going with the Nova Scotia Museum since February 2008 to conclude a management agreement regarding the Wile Carding Mill. Unfortunately, little progress has been made on this matter, which is part of the larger issue of the Nova Scotia Museum's contractual relationship with the organizations that manage its various regional sites throughout the province.

In our case, the situation is complicated by the fact that Bridgewater is the only municipal government that manages a regional site. It is impossible to anticipate when an agreement will be reached but the Commission and the Town are committed to continue operating the Wile Carding Mill as long as this can reasonably be done at little or no cost to the citizens of Bridgewater.

The decision of the Nova Scotia Museum in the autumn of 2008 to raise the salaries of provincial seasonal and casual staff at regional sites including the Wile Carding Mill continues to be a problem for the Commission for two reasons: the financial uncertainties which it has caused in terms of managing the operation, and the dissatisfaction it has created among the site's staff. While the Commission agreed that higher wages were desirable, the failure to increase the already inadequate funding being provided to manage

the site has seriously aggravated existing difficulties. The Commission, the Town and the Museum Director continue to hope that a more satisfactory arrangement will be agreed in the not too distant future.

## MUSEUM DIRECTOR'S REPORT

### STRATEGIC PLAN

One of the recommendations of the Museum's strategic plan, completed in late 2007, was that assisting the citizens of Bridgewater to carry out research on local history, genealogy and built heritage should be given greater priority. Accordingly, the research space has been enlarged and made more user friendly. As well, policies have been updated and finding aids and procedures have been developed.

Programs were reviewed and new ones developed, surveys were taken of visitors for exhibit improvements, and a new marketing plan was implemented. The result has been an increase in usage of the research centre. This year staff responded to 106 research inquiries in 2009, consisting of 49 visits, 22 e-mails, and 35 telephone requests.

The ad hoc committee that worked hard in 2008 to design the new research space also recommended that the Museum acquire the back issues of the *Bridgewater Bulletin* on microfilm. This is not available anywhere in Bridgewater, requiring researchers to go to Lunenburg or Halifax, so having it available at the Museum will provide an extremely valuable service to the citizens of the town. Thanks to a generous gift from a member of the Friends of the DesBrisay Museum, we have made a good start on this. As well, a campaign to encourage people to donate microfilm reels for particular years of interest has resulted

in some additional donations. We have also acquired a microfilm reader, donated by the Ross Farm Museum in New Ross. This is an old machine whose usefulness is limited, but it is a beginning in our attempt to become a more important research centre for the citizens of Bridgewater and hopefully will do until we are able to acquire a new machine.

## EVALUATION

The DesBrisay Museum receives approximately 40% of its annual operating revenue from the Province through the Nova Scotia Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage. All community museums which receive this funding are subject to a rigorous external peer evaluation every three years. This year it was the DesBrisay Museum's turn and the evaluation took place in July 2009.

We are very pleased to be able to report that the Museum obtained a score of 89.7%, the highest it has ever received. In our last evaluation, in 2005, our score was 82.0%, which was actually down from the previous score of 85.4% in 2002. Our highest results were in governance, collection and access, marketing and management. There has been some criticism of the fact that in the governance category, which is a self-evaluation component, the Commission gave itself a score of 100.0%. Anyone familiar with the criteria and the governance structure and policies of Bridgewater's Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture, the Commission and the Museum will know, however, that this was indeed a legitimate score. The Town should take great pride in this fact.

Of the twenty-three community museums throughout Nova Scotia that were evaluated this year, the DesBrisay received the highest score. Town Council and the citizens of Bridgewater should take great pride in this achievement, which is a reflection of their support and involvement as well as the dedication of the Museum's staff and volunteers.

This provincial recognition of the quality of our work and the Museum's

improvement over the past three years appears to be reflected in public attendance. Visitors in 2007 numbered 3,656, which rose 4,191 this year. We fully anticipate – and intend – that this trend will continue.

## COLLECTION

Managing the Museum's collection is an on-going and critical part of our work. This year we accepted 170 new artifacts from twenty-six individual collections as well as ten new books for the library. Volunteers were trained by the Curator to assist with rolling maps, creating finding aids, and adding to the reference library. Ten finding aids created for the research room this year included Bridgewater Directories, Business inventories, *Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly* indexes, Mi'kmaq resources, Acadia Gas Engines resources, and Bridgewater census data.

Annual collection work included environmental monitoring, preservation storage of textiles, inventories, data entry, answering inquiries, and research for various projects such as exhibits, interpretive panels, etc. Improvements included installation of UV filters on fluorescent lighting.

We were pleased to be able to make possible the reproduction of an image of the Museum's priceless porcupine quill cradle in a new book by Theodore Brassler, entitled *Native American Clothing: An Illustrated History* (Firefly Books, 2009, 368 p). We are pleased to have a copy of this book in our library.

## EXHIBITS

The Bridgewater Gallery is, of course, the main exhibit space in the Museum. We had hoped to make some significant improvements in it this year but were unable to do so because of financial constraints, although we did create the natural history component. Even

so, we are proud of this relatively new gallery, which provides a fascinating overview of the history of Bridgewater and its involvement with the socio-economic development of the LaHave river valley.

In addition to the Bridgewater Gallery, the Museum's Exhibit Centre is used for short-term topical exhibits. Temporary exhibits this year included

- Things People Collect, January 18 to April 11
- Lunenburg County High School Art Fair, April to May
- Extra! Extra! Newspapers of Lunenburg County, May to September
- Wooden Ships and Iron Men by Felicia Knock, May to September
- The Way We Used To Be, Martine Vermeulen, October to November
- "Celebrate" Christmas Around the World, November to January

Temporary exhibits created by staff and volunteers included "Bridgewater Then and Now," a Red Cross anniversary exhibit and local school heritage fair projects. As part of our community outreach program, our off-site showcases at the Bridgewater Mall featured unusual artifacts, fences and military history.

Individual exhibit guides were produced for each Heritage Gallery exhibit.

We are also participating in an exciting new initiative, the virtual exhibit partnership program, which will create a video scan of current exhibits which can be accessed via the Internet. This will provide a brief introduction to our exhibits and holdings to people not only in and around Bridgewater but also throughout Nova Scotia and indeed around the world.

## PROGRAMS

We now place a strong emphasis on program development, recognizing that the public attitude towards museums has changed in recent years. Many people are no longer

attracted to a building that houses and displays artifacts from the past. Instead, they want to see those artifacts organized and displayed in thematic presentations and they want to participate in activities associated with the history and heritage which they represent.

The DesBrisay Museum has responded enthusiastically to this challenge and we are proud of what we have accomplished so far. Because we believe that our mandate calls upon us to serve as Bridgewater's cultural centre as well as its museum and archive, we try to offer a wide range of programs, bearing in mind always that they should be related to our history, heritage and cultural identity.

Programs offered this year included

- organizing several adult 'Coffee and Conversation' sessions on topics such as how to make silhouette art, vintage jewellery, sharing one's collections, folk art, the life of a Mi'kmaq woman, and rug hooking.
- sponsoring a number of guest speakers this year, including David Rollinson on rum, Chris Wiseman on astronomy, Dean Jobb on the history of newspapers in Nova Scotia, Peter Duffy on his career as a reporter, Vernon Oickle on the future of newspapers, Dr Alan Marble on the great flu pandemic of 1918, and Bruce Nunn on historical mysteries of Nova Scotia.
- A talk by artist Martine Vermeulen at the Museum to residents of the Mahone Bay Nursing Home, the New Germany Nursing Home, the Red Hatters group and the Tea and Company Club.
- sponsoring a workshop on writing memoirs in April.
- a March Break program for children that included projects such as creating a journal, braiding rugs, making a sampler, making a checkerboard and making felt dolls.
- programs offered by Museum Volunteers in stamp collecting for kids, and recycling for kids.
- themed birthday parties in January and June.

- Saturday afternoon craft programs for children that included Samplers on paper, making picture and twig frames, farm animal mobiles, old fashioned pinwheels, and punched tin pictures.
- a Pirate Day in August organized by summer students.
- continuing to administer the Nova Scotia Museum School Kits Program.
- organizing program visits for the Bridgewater Parks Day Camp (2), the YMCA Day Camp and the Small World Daycare.
- providing a program for Sparks and Brownies (2), as well as a special and highly successful “Bridging the Generations” program involving Scouts and war veterans as part of Remembrance Day commemoration.
- sponsoring several walking tours of historic homes, led by a summer student.
- holding a very successful Christmas Open House in December.

## GIFT SHOP

We believe that the role of the gift shop is not only to generate revenue but to complement the Museum’s historical and cultural awareness mandate. Accordingly, the Gift Shop was redesigned this year to make it more attractive. We have also begun producing postcards, reproductions of historic photographs of Bridgewater buildings and scenes, and a 2010 calendar featuring historic photographs.

At the same time, with financial assistance from the Nova Scotia Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage the Museum produced a number of new products based on artifacts in the our collection. This project not also enabled us to build partnerships with local artisans. We are pleased to be able to report that the public response has been encouraging, as monthly sales figures are showing growth. Gift shop sales have risen from \$3,054 in 2007 to \$4,518 in 2009.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Both the Commission and the Museum are committed to being actively involved in the community, to better promote historical and heritage awareness, and to raise the profile of the Museum in the public consciousness. This year

- we continued our program of school visits. This year there were two visits to the Bridgewater Elementary Grade 4, as well as visits to Pentz Elementary Grade 4, Hebbville Elementary Grade 2, the Waldorf School Grade 2 and 3, West Northfield Grade primary and 1 and two visits to Parkview Grade 11.
- the Director chaired a committee and will manage the implementation of fourteen interpretive panels for Riverfront Renaissance.
- the Director attended several Friends of the DesBrisay Museum Society Board of Directors meetings.
- the Program Officer assisted Friends of the DesBrisay Museum with the organization and implementation of a very successful fund-raiser.
- we sponsored a Multicultural Celebration in June, to welcome new immigrants to our community and to celebrate our various cultures with food, entertainment and games. This was done in partnership with the Immigration Navigation Officer of the Lunenburg-Queens Regional Development Association.
- the Museum is represented on the Bridgewater Heritage Advisory Committee and arranged the completion of three statements of significance of historic properties for the Province of Nova Scotia on Bridgewater's municipally registered properties.
- the Museum supervised a summer student, several walking tours, provided information on heritage properties, prepared a new built heritage web presence
- the Director attended the Provincial Built Heritage Conference in Lunenburg.
- the Museum participated in the Katimavik program again this year, accepting two

participants to volunteer at the Museum from January to March and one participant from October to December.

- the Director attended a meeting of the South West Curators Group in Mahone Bay and the Association of Nova Scotia Museums conference in Dartmouth in April.
- the Commission chair and vice chair both attended the South West Curators Group meeting in Annapolis Royal in November, as well as the Association of Nova Scotia Museums conference in Dartmouth in April.
- members of the the Bridgewater Chamber of Commerce were invited to visit the Museum, tour the facilities and exhibits, and meet the staff.
- we took the initiative, following up on one of the recommendations in the Museum's strategic plan, to advance the idea of encouraging cooperation among the community museums of Lunenburg County. How much can be achieved along this line remains to be seen but as a first step the Commission chair, vice chair and Museum Director visited three local museums in August. This gave us the opportunity not only to see their facilities and exhibits but also to chat with their directors and staff. We followed this up by organizing a county-wide information-sharing session, which took place at the Museum in October. It was a valuable experience and we hope that it will lead to further meetings.
- The Commission chair and the director served as judges at heritage fairs in local schools

## STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Staff attended training in First Aid, firearms handling, supervisory training, food handling and copyright legislation.

## BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

Maintenance is an on-going and critical responsibility of both the Town and the Commission. This year, two thermostats were replaced for the washrooms and humidifier in the Heritage Gallery collection storage space both had to be repaired.

A safety audit was completed on the building, a meeting took place with the Fire Chief, and a major collections evacuation plan has been completed. In-house signage was replaced to match the Museum's new logo. Tenders for replacement of the tile flooring were awarded and the work will be completed in January.

## MUSEUM VOLUNTEERS

Put frankly, the Museum could not function at the level which it does without the very significant contributions of its Volunteers. They do everything from staffing the front desk to assisting with research and participating in a variety of programs. Needless to say, we work closely with the Friends of the DesBrisay Museum, a vibrant community-based organization which supports the Museum in many ways, from volunteers to financial contributions to organizing events and generating publicity. Saying "thank you" hardly seems adequate to express our appreciation.

This year, volunteer job descriptions and application forms have been created, volunteers are now assisting with research, volunteer orientation and training sessions have been held, volunteer identification tags have been provided and a policy for volunteer administration has been developed.

More than 1,667 hours were donated by volunteers to DesBrisay Museum for assistance with front desk reception, programs, collection management, special events and moving support. Special thanks to our volunteers for this yeoman's work. Special thanks

are owed to Norma Wentzell for her very significant contribution over the years as volunteer coordinator. Norma retired from the position this year.

A Volunteer Appreciation Night took place in April to express our appreciation of their contributions. As well, we were pleased to be able to collaborate with the Bridgewater Heritage and Historical Society and the Friends of the DesBrisay Museum in May to celebrate deceased volunteers, with the dedication of two memorial trees in the Woodland Gardens. Those honoured at this ceremony were Agnes Stokes, Barbara E. Wentzell, Helmut Wolter, Florrie Little and Elfreda Mossman.

## PUBLICITY

The success of our exhibits and programs relies on a very active publicity program. Regular press releases, photo opportunities, radio and newspaper ads, tourism ads, e-mail notices and flyers were distributed and website updates were created for all exhibits and programs. Our new logo and image were integrated into our promotional items, including new interior signage. Six bi-monthly newsletters, *The Judge's Journal*, were produced.

An information panel promoting the Museum was created for installation in the downtown kiosk on King Street. A new exterior sign was placed on the Museum showing hours of operation and a new provincial museum key sign was installed at Exit 12 on Highway 103.

## GRANTS

It may not always be recognized that approximately 40% of the annual operating revenue of the DesBrisay Museum is provided by the Nova Scotia Department of Tourism,

Culture and Heritage. This funding has proven to be stable in recent years, although it has not grown to reflect unavoidably rising costs.

As usual, we applied for grants to assist with the cost of hiring summer students. Unfortunately, funding was received for only one student interpreter position this year. This represented a failed opportunity to provide educational employment for a student but it also meant that a critical component of the Museum's summer workforce was reduced, with the result that the Museum had to close on Mondays throughout the summer months.

We also received a Heritage Properties Initiative grant for statements of significance of Bridgewater heritage properties.

Corporate sponsors – local businesses – fund free days at the Museum, thereby contributing to our revenues but also making the Museum more accessible to those in our community living on low incomes. This year we generated \$1,200 in this way, compared to \$800 last year.

Another fund-raising activity which was initiated last year and has proven to be popular was Ada's Dessert Party, which was also a success this year.

## WILE CARDING MILL

The DesBrisay Museum managed the Wile Carding Mill historic site on behalf of the Nova Scotia Museum. This year marked its 35th anniversary and a ceremony marking the occasion was attended by Gerald Keddy, MP, Gary Ramey, MLA, David Walker, Deputy Mayor of Bridgewater, Don Downe, Mayor of the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg, as well as Bill Greenlaw, Executive Director of the Heritage Division of the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage, and Rhonda Fleming, Director of Site Operations for the Nova Scotia Museum. Music was provided by Eldon Cooper and Brenda Fitzgerald in period costume and colleagues.

We received grants from the provincial government to enable us to hire three seasonal employees.

Ongoing programs included a needle felting workshop, a teddy bear picnic, a breakfast with the birds walk, and junkyard boat-building. A tour of the Wile Carding Mill was provided to students in the NSCC heritage carpentry program.

Required maintenance that was undertaken this year included replacing a washroom sink, installing a security system, and completion of an engineer's assessment of the dam.

## CONCLUSIONS

I believe that 2009 was a good year for the Museum. Much was accomplished and staff worked diligently and cooperatively throughout the year. I want to thank Ken Smith, Carol Pickings-Anthony and members of the Museum Commission for their support. I look forward to 2010 with optimism.

*Barbara Thompson*

Museum Director

10 January 2010