



Report to County Council

From: Brian Masschaele, Director of Community and Cultural Services

Date: July 8, 2025

Subject: Museum and Archives 2025 Activity Report

Recommendation(s):

THAT the report titled “Museum and Archives 2025 Activity Report” from the Director of Community and Cultural Services dated July 8, 2025, be received and filed.

Introduction:

This report provides County Council and the public with an update on 2025 projects and activities for Elgin County Museum and Elgin County Archives

Background and Discussion:

Elgin County Museum

Staffing

The museum employed Emilie Fagan as a summer student funded in part by the Government of Canada’s Young Canada Works Program. She is a returning summer student. Much of her work consists of on-going cataloguing and preparing museum artifacts for deaccession. In the winter, a museum collections assistant, Brianna McArdle, was employed on a year-long temporary contract to continue conducting the collections review and identify artifacts for deaccession.

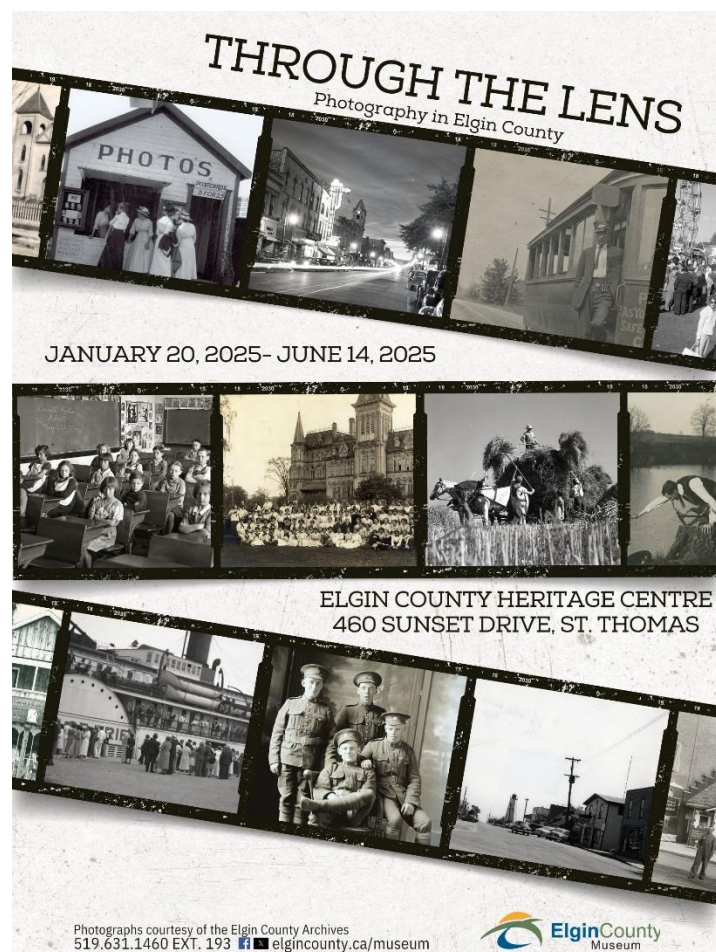
Colin Craig, a grade 12 student, has also been working at the museum as a part of his co-op program. Work includes assisting with moving artifacts, building storage units, and processing artifacts.

2025 Exhibitions

Through the Lens: Photography in Elgin County

January 20, 2025 – June 14, 2025

This exhibition is based on the history of photography in Elgin County and is illustrated through original artifacts in the museum collection. It also showcases photographs and photographers within the collections of the Elgin County Archives. It includes historic cameras, including the Brownie Camera, developed by Vienna-born Frank Brownell, and the camera used by T.H. Scott to take the famous photo of Jumbo after he was killed in St. Thomas, 1885. *Through the Lens* features photographs from studios, including the Scott Studio and the Stollery Studio, private collectors, newspaper articles, and family photo albums.



Through the Lens poster



Entry to Through the Lens exhibit



Photo wall for Through the Lens

Jumbomania

July 2, 2025 – March 20, 2026

This exhibit is to commemorate the 140th anniversary of the death of Jumbo, the Great African Elephant, who was killed in St. Thomas, September 15, 1885. With guest curator, Dariusz Korbiel, the exhibit will explore the craze that swept London during the Victorian era, and look at what made Jumbo such an enduring legacy. *Jumbomania* will feature original artifacts, photographs, illustrations, and newspapers to showcase the legacy of the first animal superstar.

The exhibition poster below is original artwork for the exhibit, created by Scott McKowen.



Programmes

Family Day- February 17 (27 attended)

Elgin Historical Society, *Alma College*- February 26 (53 attended)

Steve Peters, tour of *Through the Lens*- March 19 (17 attended)

March Break, green screen and crafts- March 8 to March 15

Women's Institute Executive- March 24 (8 attended)

Elgin Historical Society, meet and greet- March 26 (19 attended)

Pete Sheridan, *13th Annual Vimy Lecture*- April 9 (22 attended)

Extendicare, tour of *Through the Lens*- April 25 (14 attended)

Mess Dedication to Ellis Sifton, in Windsor- May 3 (81 attended)

Mark Richardson, *Colonel Richard Airey, Thomas Talbot and the Charge of the Light Brigade*- May 10 (22 attended)

School Group, *Pierre E. Trudeau French Immersion*- May 20 (37 students, 12 teachers/chaperones)

The Russian Golden Age Club, seniors tour- May 20 (30 attended)

Events

Family Day- February 17

The Elgin County Museum opened to the public for Family Day. Visitors participated in various crafts, including designing their own picture frames, and participated in a museum wide scavenger hunt related to *Through the Lens*. The highlight was the green screen program. Visitors chose from historic photographs in the archives collection, and were able to take home a physical copy of their time-travelling adventures.

Steve Peters, tour of *Through the Lens*- March 19

Steve Peters gave a tour of *Through the Lens*. He discussed the history of photography, St. Thomas and Elgin County photograph studios, and provided additional information on a variety of images and artifacts on display.

Pete Sheridan, *13th Annual Vimy Lecture*- April 9

Elgin Historical Society President, Pete Sheridan, was the lecturer for the 13th annual Vimy Lecture. He spoke largely about the war and its impact on the homefront in Elgin County and also discussed the actions of Victoria Cross recipient Ellis Sifton. Sifton's Victoria Cross was on display for the lecture.

Mark Richardson, *Colonel Richard Airey, Thomas Talbot, and the Charge of the Light Brigade*- May 10

Mark Richardson presented on the life of Colonel Richard Airey, and his relationship with his uncle, Thomas Talbot. On display for the lecture was an original Airey painting of Thomas Talbot in "The Den", as well as a baby cradle used by the Airey family during their time in Elgin County.

Outreach

Business After 5- April 16

The Elgin County Museum was invited to host the green screen activity at RIVA in Port Stanley for Business After 5. Visitors were able to choose from historic photos of Port Stanley into which they could be inserted digitally, and were able to take a physical copy of the photograph.

Dedication of the Mess to Lance Sergeant Ellis Wellwood Sifton, Windsor - May 3

The Essex and Kent Scottish in Windsor hosted an event dedicating their mess to Lance Sergeant Ellis Wellwood Sifton. The Elgin County Museum participated and displayed Ellis Sifton's Victoria Cross in Windsor for the event, along with Brent and Georgia Sifton, on behalf of the Sifton family.



Curator Madeleine Howard, Georgia and Brent Sifton with Ellis Sifton's Victoria Cross, on display in Windsor



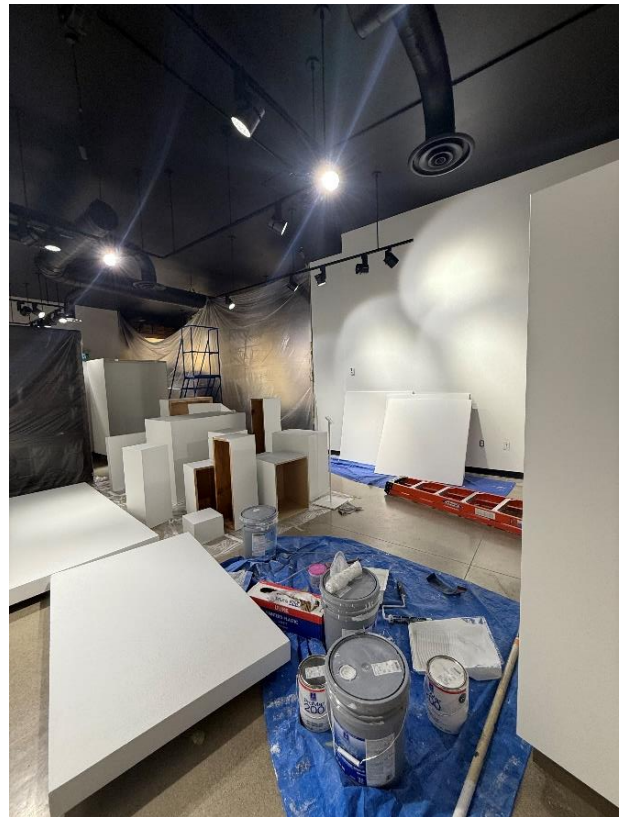
Dedication plaque at The Essex and Kent Scottish mess hall, Windsor.

Library Displays

The Elgin County Museum put on two **displays at the Shedden Library**. One display was in connection with *Through the Lens* and highlighted cameras and photography, while *Hats and Handbags* showcased fun and unique outerwear. The Elgin County Museum also put on a **display at the Dutton Library**, also in connection with *Through the Lens*, and showed unique cameras and photography tools.

Museum Updates

In December 2024, the exhibition space at the Elgin County Heritage Centre was repainted. In May 2025 renovations began on the fourth floor of the Elgin County Administration building. A new wall has been added at the front reception, and windows have been removed from one wall of the curator's office. A wall was removed in the meeting room.



Heritage Centre exhibit area before and during painting.

Collections review and storage consolidation continues on the fourth floor. Several artifacts have been identified for deaccession through a set of strict criteria. 10 items are in the process of being transferred to Sparta.

The transfer of archival material to the Elgin County Archives is ongoing.

Elgin County Archives

Projects

Newspaper Digitization Project

Approximately 99,000 newspaper pages were scanned in 2024 and so far, approximately 26,000 pages have been scanned in 2025. St. Thomas Times-Journal newspapers covering the Second World War have been digitized and made available to the public. Since the project began in 2019, more than 600 years of newspaper have been digitized, comprising 42 newspaper titles.

Digitization of Municipal Records

Work is on-going to digitize and make available records from the County's local municipal partners. Once that is complete, the Council minutes and by-laws of all 16 former municipalities in Elgin County from pre-amalgamation (pre-1998) will be available for viewing on our online database.

Digitization of Audio-Visual Collection

A large portion of the audio-visual collection has been digitized and made available on our online database. These include all of the audiocassettes of Elgin Historical Society meetings and events, and the conversion to mp4 files of Elgin County-related VHS cassettes. Here is a link to a 1996 "People & Places in Elgin County" episode on the Bobier Home: <https://bit.ly/3FAbN5S>.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION
SCOPE AND CONTENT

1 videocassette (ca. 00:23); col.

With host Carolyn Cameron, this installment of the "People and Places" series is a panel discussion on the situation of the Bobier Convalescent Home in Dutton, Ontario, including panelists Pat Vandevonne (Director of Nursing, Elgin County Homes); Leta West (Chairperson, "Caring for Seniors"); and Nancy Hunter (Activity Director, **Bobier Home**). The focus of the discussion is on the need for and fundraising efforts to support the construction of a new long-term care facility for senior citizens to replace the Bobier Convalescent Home in Dutton, Ontario.


NAME ACCESS

Bobier Villa
Bobier Convalescent Home
Dutton (Ont.)

SUBJECT ACCESS

Homes for the Aged

Video



0:17 / 30:11

● LESS DETAIL

Select + Share Feedback More like this Permalink

*Database
record for the
video "Bobier
Home". From
the Elgin
County
Archives
Audio-Visual
Collection*

Research for the 175th Anniversary of the Township of Southwold

Staff assisted the Southwold History Committee by conducting research to create a history timeline, and identify suitable images from our collection, for use in the celebrations of the 175th Anniversary of the Township of Southwold.

Accessions

* Photographic negatives from 1979 to 1987 from the newspaper “Voice of the Elgin Farmer”. These are especially valuable since Elgin County has such a strong agricultural heritage.

* The original paper copies of the newspapers the St. Thomas Super Shopper and the St. Thomas/Elgin Weekly News. As part of our newspaper digitization project, we will be digitizing these great sources of community news and events, and making them available on our newspaper finding aid online.

Social Media

Our social media accounts continue to grow and achieve high engagement. In 2024, content was created for 989 posts on three platforms, including Facebook, Instagram and X, achieving an overall reach of approximately 5.7 million and over 95,000 profile visits. Compared to the previous year, engagement increased by 18% with over 477,000 interactions with our posts. Facebook remains our most engaged platform, and in March 2025, we reached our goal of acquiring 10,000 followers. The most popular photograph on Facebook in the past year showed the departure of the 91st Battalion (formed in Elgin county) which departed from the Michigan Central Railroad Station, St. Thomas, in June 1916. This post achieved approximately 100,000 views, 42 comments, and was shared over 120 times. You can view this post [here](https://bit.ly/4jsuBlz). (<https://bit.ly/4jsuBlz>).



Soldiers of the 91st Battalion departing from the Michigan Central Railroad Station, St. Thomas, in June 1916.

Outreach

Exhibit at the Port Stanley Library for Archives Awareness Week

To mark Archives Awareness Week, we installed an exhibit at the Port Stanley Library called “Past and Present: Showcasing Port Stanley Landmarks of the Past with Photo Selections from the Archives”. With this pictorial exhibit, we highlighted historical photographs that showcase Port Stanley landmarks along with an image of what that site looks like today.



Maddy Howard, Elgin County Museum Curator (who assisted with installing the panels), and Elgin County Archivist Gina Elias are pictured standing in front of the title panel of the exhibit “Past and Present: Showcasing Port Stanley Landmarks of the Past with Photo Selections from the Archives” at the Port Stanley Library, April 2025.

Hosting Archives Association of Ontario events

We hosted two events for two groups of archivists from the Archives Association of Ontario. The events included tours, an update on our facility planning, and a demonstration of our newspaper digitization project.

Green Screen Program

We ran our Green Screen program at the Wartime Homefront event at the Backus-Page House Museum on Saturday May 31st.

Financial Implications:

Not applicable.

Advancement of the Strategic Plan:

Strategy #1 – Collaborative Engagement and Communication

Goal 1: Digitization and access to records of current and former municipalities strengthens the relationship with local municipal partners. Research projects and exhibits also highlight the history of communities across the County.

Strategy #3 – Service Excellence and Efficiency

Goal 1: Museum and Archives projects are leveraging technology such as digitization tools and on-line search features to enhance access to collections.

Local Municipal Partner Impact:

Not applicable.

Communication Requirements:

Many of the projects outlined in this report have received extensive media coverage and have been profiled on the County's various social media channels.

Conclusion:

Staff wish to acknowledge the generous financial support of the following donors in support of the projects outlined in this report, in addition to the operating support provided by Elgin County Council:

- The Blidner Family Foundation (\$20,000 annually to fund Archives' digitization projects).
- Government of Canada through the Young Canada Works in Heritage Organizations employment program for students through (approximately \$12,000 annually to support summer student wages in museum and archives).

All of which is Respectfully Submitted

Brian Masschaele
Director of Community and
Cultural Services

Approved for Submission

Blaine Parkin
Chief Administrative Officer/Clerk