

Find family and Indigenous heritage at museum



Algonquin Negotiation Representative Stephen Hunter explains the heritage of the museum's birch bark basket, crafted in 1888. / SARAH SOBANSKI Staff

By Sarah Sobanski

Bancroft North Hastings Heritage Museum is helping area locals reconnect with their family trees.

The museum has installed a genealogy research centre after receiving a \$3,000 from the federal government in partnership with Community Futures Development Corporation of North and Central Hastings and South Algonquin which the museum will match. The genealogy centre that had been running in Bancroft with Nancy Baker as the curator, set up by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, moved out to her house in Cardiff, said museum board chair Councillor Mary Kavanagh, noting Baker consulted with the museum on the centre as a part of the museum board. We thought, well this is the perfect opportunity to step in and fill that void.

Hastings-Lennox and Addington MP Mike Bossio stopped by the museum Aug. 4 to help announce the Community Futures Program investment. According to a local CFDC release, the new centre is an important part of the museum's expanding programs and offerings. The centre will result in an increase in the number of visitors and one part-time job.

This is a real treat for me to come in, said Bossio. It was his first time in the museum. Genealogy is important. It is who we are, it is where we come from. You can't know where you're going if you don't know where you come from. With this window, that opportunity, to look into our past, to look into where we come from, I am so proud to be a part of it.

Two computers now sit at the back of the front room in the museum. There, with the assistance of museum staff and volunteers, patrons can search historical data about their families. The centre pools the museum's documents, photos and artifacts with online resources. With the addition of computer equipment, genealogy resources will be available to the public, including searches by surname, historical persons, obituaries and historical collections such as vital records, census and military records and family searches, according to the release.

Algonquin artifacts have also found a new home at the museum.

The museum's summer students Mary, Paige and Sierra have worked hard to prepare the room for Bancroft's Indigenous heritage.

We are on traditional Algonquin land and Bancroft is part of that region. We're sort of the western edge of traditional Algonquin lands, said Kavanagh. There is no home for the Algonquin artifacts in this area, so I thought it made sense, and so did the museum board.

Among the artifacts are pieces from the Baptiste family. Two birch bark canoes one built by Frank Lavalley, Mary Baptiste's husband, and the other by long time Algonquin Park guide Henry Taylor line a wall in the room. On the opposing wall is a 1967 Algonquin basket and a small birch bark basket gifted to the museum by the Irwin family who had a cottage beside the Lavalley's in 1922. Those who gifted the basket provided evidence it had been made by John Baptiste's wife Madeline in 1888. John Baptiste was the chief of the Kijicho Manito Madaouskarini Algonquin Nation.

Within that basket there were flint nap arrowheads and flint nap scraper. Flint napping technique is old. Much older than 1888,

said Kavanagh.

Community members have a chance to see what goes into making a birch bark canoe outside the museum through the beginning of August. Algonquin Negotiation Representative Stephen Hunter and his team have moved the build from Millennium Park this year to correspond with the opening of the Algonquin room.

‘We’re hoping that because there’s a safe, central spot where everyone in the Algonquin community can come and observe and look at the artifacts and appreciate them and also the general population can observe them,’ said Kavanagh. She’s looking to fill the room with area artifacts.

She welcomes history buffs who want to donate to the museum, ‘They don’t have to give them to the museum or they can loan them to us for a period of time.’