

## EXPLORE ONTARIO

## War and pieces: New museums, enticing exhibits

Outstanding architecture and new exhibits engage visitors at three new or newly renovated museums



## Waterloo Region Museum

When you first approach the new Waterloo Region Museum your eye sees a patchwork quilt rendered in pieces of multi-coloured glass—a folksy tribute to the neighbouring farm country. But in a nod to the region's tech-savvy entrepreneurs and educators, the 16 colours of glass are more than just a pretty arrangement; they contain a message in hexadecimal computer code, an excerpt from a stirring 1905 speech by Prime Minister Sir Wilfred Laurier:

*"We do not want, that any individuals should forget the land of their origin or their ancestors. Let them look to the past, but let them also look to the future; let them look to the land of their ancestors, but let them look also to the land of their children."*

From the bamboo splint rice basket that Tom Lee used to pack his belongings in the late 1800s to the plastic milk crates used by recent university students, artifacts weave together to tell a fascinating story of settlement and enterprise in a sleek new building designed by architects Moriyama & Teshima, in association with the Walter Fedy Partnership of Kitchener. Among the highlights: Beck's circus, a promotional truck that travelled the region's backroads and ploughing matches in the early 1900s, introducing farmers to the marvels of electric lights, milking machines, butter churns and water pumps. It worked. The farmers were convinced of electricity's benefits and Berlin (now Kitchener) was the first municipality in Ontario with electric streetlights powered by Niagara Falls.

The new museum is a perfect complement to its neighbour, Doon Heritage Village, a living history museum on a lush 24-hectare site. Both are included in a single admission price.

[waterlooregionmuseum.com](http://waterlooregionmuseum.com)

## Ship shape and shore ready at Bruce County Museum

From the blue waters of great Lake Huron, it's but a short stroll up High Street to the Bruce County Museum & Cultural Centre in Southampton. So it makes sense that the renovated museum focuses this summer on a marine theme. But what a marine theme it is!

Their prime exhibit, Titanic: Unsinkable Passion, opened on the 200th anniversary of the tragedy, recalls the fate of the "unsinkable" vessel with artifacts from a local collector. In fact, on opening night in April, some invited special guests wore period costume and replica life jackets made of cork and canvas in honor of the lost passengers. Until September 13, rare items on display include a pocket watch recovered from the ship, a piece of stair carving, a replica Titanic deck chair and a real chair from the rescue ship, Carpathia.

"This exhibit tugs on the emotions of people," says Marketing and Special Events Coordinator Shannon Paiva. "It really has an impact when you can show people these two chairs and say, 'On April 14, 1912, a person was perhaps sitting in this chair on the Titanic, but a few days later, a widow or survivor may have been sitting in this chair from the Carpathia.' It's more than just artifacts."

Another triumphal exhibit focuses on an actual War of 1812 warship, the HMS General Hunter. It had been shipwrecked during a fierce gale, only to be found almost two hundred years later buried in the sand on the Southampton beach. The local Marine Heritage Society did the research and a dig, but what's left of the very fragile British warship remains in the sand

alongside explanatory plaques and photos.

From June 19, visit the HMS General Hunter/War of 1812 exhibit. Kids can dress in costume to raise the flag from a replicated deck, learn about knots, steer the ship or take part in simulated cannon-firing exercises. Real cannon balls from the period lie alongside. "It's our little piece of history," says Paiva. "And we are so pleased to be taking hold of what we own

and putting it into a permanent exhibit."

And if you're strictly a landlubber? That's OK. There are a lot of other exhibits to admire. Bring a picnic, have lunch on the grounds, visit the reconstructed pioneer log buildings, or the new First Nations gallery with native artifacts on show, found recently at the mouth of the local river.

[www.bruce-museum.ca](http://www.bruce-museum.ca)



The HMS General Hunter, as she would have appeared under full sail on Lake Huron

## A landmark museum for Niagara Falls

Confronted with the neon spectacle of wax museums on Clifton Hill, it's easy to forget Niagara Falls has a serious history museum. But when the \$12-million expansion and renovation to the former township hall is completed in July, it will carry the city's hopes for revitalizing the Lundy's Lane neighbourhood with a striking landmark attraction. Some 500 metres from the famous 1812 battle site of Lundy's Lane, the Niagara Falls History Museum will be expanded from 8,000 to 18,000 square feet, with a glass exterior by architects

Moriyama & Teshima.

An entire gallery dedicated to the War of 1812 will hold period uniforms and more. Kids can try on replica costumes and heft a canon ball. An upper gallery covers Niagara Falls' broader history, "from the geological transformation of the gorge to the daredevils. Tactile, interactive displays include magnetic building blocks to create your own bridge over a model Niagara gorge," said Niagara Falls museums manager, Clark Bernat. The museum opens on July 21.

[niagarafallsmuseums.ca](http://niagarafallsmuseums.ca)





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