

HERITAGE CORNER

1950 railroad crash rocks Corunna: crews escape harm

On the evening of Saturday, November 11, 1950, the peaceful community of Corunna was rocked by the sounds of two trains colliding. While searching for more information on this story at the Sarnia Library, Heritage St. Clair member Dave Taylor came across a Sarnia Observer account of it, along with the photo **shown right**. This is the condensed version of what happened.

According to the story, Chesapeake and Ohio (C & O) Engine No. 750, pulling about 50 cars and Sarnia-bound, was pulling off on a siding at the Corunna junction to allow C & O Engine No. 751, pulling 14 cars and southbound to Chatham, to pass.

Unfortunately, No. 750 had not cleared the main track when No. 751 reached the junction and the trains collided. Three cars were derailed and Engine No. 751 left the track, burrowing several feet into the dirt. The front of the engine was left with a massive gash. (*The site of the crash is now the railway crossing on Hill Street at St. George's Square parkette in Corunna*). Although damage to the trains was substantial, there was no loss of life. Aside from a sprained ankle and a few burnt hands, both train crews survived the crash. A Steward's ambulance was ordered but it was not necessary.

The task of clearing the tracks became the first order of business once the crew was secured. Two cranes were summoned to the crash site to clear the rubble, and 30 railwaymen were brought in to help untangle and clear the rails to speed the resumption of rail service. One of the factors that had to be considered for the safety of the work crew was the presence of high



Above: In this photo from the Sarnia Observer, a front view of north-bound Engine No. 751 shows the massive breach that was created during its collision with the tank cars of the second train. Workmen are seen beginning the task of untangling the wrecks so rail service can resume.

octane gasoline in several of the rail cars.

The work proceeded quickly and by Sunday night, the rails were cleared. Regular service resumed shortly after.

The estimated cost of the damage done to the railway equipment was not mentioned in the story, but a railway official said two of the damaged cars could be repaired for \$300.

Precious windows from Christ Church being preserved by museum

The little white church on the corner of Hill and Lyndoch Streets is now a cherished memory, but the public hasn't seen the last of its beautiful stained glass windows. Moore Museum volunteers have rescued them. The men have rescued a total of 16 stained glass windows in the past two years; 12 from Christ Church and four from St. Stephens Anglican Church in Courtright in 2023.

Dave Pattenden, Vice-chair of the Moore Museum Advisory Committee, says the glass may be used to create bi-fold doors that could be used as room dividers or items to adorn special events; there are several projects that might be considered. In the meantime, there are other projects that need to be done. "The options are limitless," he said. "They'll be one of our winter projects."

During the window rescue, a train bell bearing the date 1871 was discovered in the church attic. It has also found a home at the museum. Based on the date and structure of the bell, the museum historians believe it could possibly be a bell that once sounded aboard a British war ship during the Lord Nelson era.

Museum volunteer Tony Doyle carefully wields a pry bar to free a triangular pane from the window



Museum volunteer Tom Walter admires two of the rescued church windows.

Long-time Moore Museum staffer retires

Please join us in congratulating Linda Woods on her retirement after over 34 years at Moore Museum. Linda has been a dedicated and passionate employee, and she will be missed. The museum staff and volunteers wish her the best of luck in this new chapter.

~From all of Linda's friends at Moore Museum and St. Clair Township



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Abraham Cabin protective pavilion underway

A humble little cabin at the Sombra Museum has been the recipient of its own protective roof. The 195 year-old Abraham Smith log cabin is the oldest building in Sombra. It resides on the Sombra Museum site where visitors can usually get a close look at it.

But over the years, time and the weather has taken its toll on the structure to the point where action had to be taken to prevent irreparable damage.

A pavilion over the cabin presented the most practical solution to the problem.

The pavilion project began on December 11, 2023 and was completed in mid-March. It was generously funded through grants from the Judith and Norman Alix Foundation and the Moore Community and Recreation Foundation.

Kailyn Shepley, Curator of the Sombra Museum, said, "Finishing details, preservation work on the cabin, and the installation of accompanying outdoor displays will progress over the spring and summer."

FUN FACT: This original "tiny house", built in 1829 as a temporary home and later used as a milk house, leaves the visitor marveling at how a family could possibly have survived in such close quarters. Check it out this summer.



Above: The new pavilion under construction.

Inset right: The huge auger that sank the foundation support posts.

Sombra museum photos

Sombra Museum plans exhibition to honour Lambton County's 175th anniversary

To celebrate the 175th anniversary of the County of Lambton, Sombra Museum is planning an exhibition of paintings, drawings, and photographs by local artists of locations, homes, and events from around St. Clair Township. The museum would like to borrow these items until approximately Nov. 30, 2024 for display in the exhibit. Examples of items sought include, but are not limited to, paintings by folk artist Stan Norris, photographs or paintings of landmarks or villages, or fond childhood memories. If you would like to have your items featured, please contact Sombra Museum by Saturday, June 1.

Contact Sombra Museum: Call 519-892-3982, email: www.sombramuseum.ca,

VOLUNTEERS SOUGHT for the Advisory Committee and the Tuesday Group

The Moore Museum is looking for anyone who would be interested in joining the **Advisory Committee**. We meet at the museum once a month (with a few exceptions), at 7 p.m. on the first Wednesday. We discuss all matters concerning the museum, including upcoming events, maintenance needs, the accepting of large donations/artifacts, etc.. Anyone with an interest in the Museum or local history would be welcome to join!

The Moore Museum is also looking for volunteers who may enjoy being part of the **Tuesday Group** on Tuesday mornings. The group comes to do general maintenance around the grounds, such as painting or building shelving or display mounts, etc. and they enjoy the camaraderie of working together. They usually stay until early afternoon.

Beacon Bits

"Volunteerism is the voice of the people put into action. These actions shape and mold the present into a future of which we can all be proud."

-Helen Dyer, biochemist and cancer researcher