

## Remarks to Malahide Council on Behalf of the Aylmer-Malahide Museum and Archives – Thursday, February 16, 2023

Mayor Giguere, Deputy Mayor Widner, honourable members of council.

Thanks for this opportunity to speak to the grant application for funding by the Aylmer-Malahide Museum and Archives. I am the museum board's volunteer chair of finance.

With your permission, I'd like to begin by sharing with you how important both Malahide and the museum are to me personally. My grandfather James Reid left the family farm near Reaboro as a youth, in order to come to Lyons to apprentice with his Uncle Wilson McCredie, a brick and tile maker. McCredie famously built a round barn in the late 1800s which served as a local landmark until being demolished in 1980. Granddad eventually took over the tile yard, until finally handing it off to his cousin and moving into Aylmer with his young family in 1925. Here he established a number of businesses from a rail shed at Little Aylmer and from their home on Myrtle Street. The fourth generation still lives on that block and at the 95 acre family woodlot at John Wise Line and Sawmill Road. The museum has painstakingly collected, documented and preserved numerous historical bits from photographs to artifacts that have helped me to construct a better picture of that personal history. I share that, simply to highlight how having such a resource for our citizens is unbelievably valuable. It is a repository for our collective past, which gives us context for everything we do now and helps us in planning for our future.

First, I need to express the sense of gratitude that we have to council and the township of Malahide for its past support. I am here to encourage you that every dollar spent over the years has been well and

efficiently used to serve the responsibility which every community has - to faithfully guard its heritage, literally from rust, moth and mold.

Let me provide you with a quick overview of this last year in the hopes of assuring you of wise stewardship. Our total expenses for 2022 came in at \$180,374.95. The township of Malahide provided \$6,500 of that or just about 3.5% of what we needed in order to operate. Compare that with our other partner, the town of Aylmer, who have provided \$20,000 per year in recent years. Even then, the vast majority of our operating funds come from grants from other levels of government, personal and corporate donations, and tireless fundraising – mainly on the backs of our faithful volunteers. Of the total expenses, only a little over \$88,000 was spent on contract wages – the museum operates with only two full-time and one part-time staff members. I will be coming back to that budget line.

We do more than most of you could imagine with that shoestring budget. I will highlight just a few of the achievements of the past year. The museum and archives mounted a new, major exhibition on the history of medicine in Aylmer-Malahide and a stunning 210 page publication to go with it; also two substantial “popup” exhibits, one on the Aylmer Fair and another on our communities’ Christmas through the ages. We carried out the entire process of acquiring a new building, then initiated a major fund-raising campaign, and held open houses to raise awareness. We sponsored a classic car show, held in conjunction with the Saxonia Club’s Oktoberfest. Thousands of donated items were received and processed for the archives and collection. This included a truly massive donation of wonderful artifacts by the Springfield Odd Fellows, and another made up of slides, negatives and photographs by Dick Brown of Imperial Tobacco. Additionally, substantial work was done to create a set of Edu-kits to be used for outreach programs to schools and home-school groups. The Mennonite History Project was

begun. New websites and multi-media presentations were created. Documents were transcribed, photographs, negatives and slides scanned. This is only a partial list. At present, we are busy mounting two exhibitions and preparing for a major photography and art show. I personally have been digitally archiving thousands of photographs, slides and negatives on loan by Ron Bradt from the collection of his Uncle Thomas who was both an amateur and professional photographer in Malahide. His pictures document literally every facet of rural life in this area one hundred years ago. It is a painstaking and time consuming process to preserve these, but it is incredibly exciting to know that this rich heritage will now be available to future generations.

How is it possible that all of this was accomplished with only two and a half paid staff? As with any organization of this type, no dollar value could ever be attached to the vast number of hours put in by our volunteers. These are women and men, most of whom are long-time Aylmer and Malahide residents, some at least third generation, who have not only paid taxes for all those years but who contribute in countless other ways... to the Legion, Horticultural Society, Community Theatre, service clubs, Township of Malahide council... the list goes on and on. They have backed up their service to Malahide out of their own wallets and personal resources. By the way, I need to give special recognition to the Whites and Steelway for their enormous generosity in giving us space in which to store our large item collection.

So what is it that we are asking Malahide to approve? It is our hope that council members will see the value of the work which is being done and support increasing our annual funding to \$20,000 to match the town of Aylmer. To use the classic Tim Hortons metric, this amounts to just a little more than the cost of a single large coffee from each of our citizens. Although it looks like a drastic jump from previous years, let

me remind you that Malahide for years has been allowing Aylmer to carry the lion's share, while benefitting equally from the work the museum does. We desperately need this level of funding.

Let me explain. Through 2022, our staff had received zero wage increase for the previous five years. Finally at the end of last year, the board approved a wage bump which amounts to less than half of what was lost to inflation during those years and which does nothing to make up for anticipated cost of living increase in the coming year. All three of these amazing women, Kathi Vandermeer, Amanda VandenWyngaert and Sarah Bentley are vastly qualified in their fields and are literally Jills-of-all trades. I can't even begin to list all of the jobs each tackled last year. Although they don't track these numbers I can attest that each of them puts in countless unpaid hours (in fact, often roping in their partners to do the same). They almost never claim mileage for all the running around that is required. Indeed they rarely take lunch breaks, instead grabbing a quick bite at their desks.

It would take much longer than I have to spell out for you how valuable the work of this non-profit is. The museum is an active booster of this community and of tourism here. It has provided hundreds of young people with summer jobs over the decades. It is a living classroom open to local school and home-school groups. It provides liaison with other significant cultural groups in Ontario and across Canada. It constantly answers media requests and requests for help by educators and researchers. Without our own museum and archives, so much of our shared heritage as a township would have likely already been consigned to the dust-bin. At present, we estimate that 70% of our archives and collection is related directly or tangentially to Malahide's history. We expect the need for what we do to only accelerate as a large portion of our population ages and looks for a place that will safely preserve their stories, pictures and priceless artifacts to be

handed down to future generations. We are already seeing that, as 100 year old churches and service clubs which relied on the blood, sweat and tears of volunteers are folding because of waning support. The loss to the community is impossible to calculate. Our community's museum and archives is here to ensure that, at the very least, their stories will not be lost. It's important to remind you of something that Kathi reinforced for me recently. The museum does not own these thousands of priceless artifacts. They belong to Aylmer and Malahide. We are looking after them for you, protecting and caring for them, making them available for everyone to enjoy and benefit from. That is a heavy stewardship and it has a cost to it.

I know or know of each one of you and am very aware of how each of you has contributed to the history of this region. Your hard work deserves to be honoured by those who will follow in your footsteps. All we are asking is for our fellow citizens to contribute in this small way to a cultural gem almost 50 years in the making. Our children and grandchildren will be paid dividends from this legacy.

We'd like to leave you with a quick glimpse into one of the main things we will be working towards in 2023 and the reason we have asked the Township of Malahide to approve budgeting \$150,000 towards the estimated \$2.3 million we will need to renovate and prepare our new building to serve Malahide and Aylmer in the decades to come. This amounts to 5.5% of the total we expect to spend on this project.