

Museum of Dufferin launches exhibit on meteorite that hit Shelburne 120 years ago

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With the vastness of outer space, it's hard to imagine the small community of Shelburne being at the centre of a historical event from space.

On a cloudy summer evening nearly 120 years ago, a loud rumbling noise was heard across Shelburne, but it wasn't immediately clear what caused it. The next day the mystery was solved with the discovery of a meteorite fragment, Shelburne's very own visitor from outer space.

The Museum of Dufferin (MoD) has launched a new online exhibit called 'Fallen Star,' which explores the arrival, discovery, and study of what is known as the 1904 Shelburne Meteorite.

'We knew that the meteorite had a really cool story, and was probably something that many people would find interesting,' said Sarah Robinson, curator for the MoD, about the exhibit's development.

A digital exhibition for the Museum of Dufferin, 'Fallen Star,' was created as a way to allow the community to have a closer look at the piece of history from outer space.

'The fragment that we have in our collection is quite small - about the size of your pinky finger - and having an online exhibit meant that we would be able to include close up photos of it and let people see it in a way that they wouldn't necessarily be able to if we had it in a display case,' said Robinson.

One of the areas of focus for the 'Fallen Star' exhibit is the stories of the two local farmers, John Shields and George Johnston, who discovered fragments of the meteorite on their properties.

The first fragment of the meteorite was discovered beside John Shields' home on Aug. 14, 1904, weighing 12.5 pounds and embedded 18 inches into the ground. The second fragment was discovered two weeks later on Aug. 30, on George Johnston's farm. The second fragment of the meteorite was much bigger than the first, weighing almost 28 pounds and buried nearly 24 inches into the ground.

'Based on our research, we know that the meteorite falling on their properties was a significant point of pride for both farmers,' said Robinson. 'Their fragments were displayed in the window of the local hardware store; newspaper articles were written about them and even today, we know that their descendants know and love the story.'

Landing in a rural village with a population of less than 1,500 in 1904, the fragments of the Shelburne Meteorite have been used to study and further research.

'In a way, the meteorite is a 'local celebrity',' said Robinson. 'Pieces of it have made their way around the world into some of the most famous museum collection in the world, from the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C to the Museum of Natural History in Paris, France - even the Vatican Observatory in Italy has a fragment.'

Those interested in finding out more about the 'fallen star' can explore the MoD's online exhibit by visiting www.dufferinmuseum.com.

?The online exhibition is a fun, engaging read. It brings science and social history together, and puts our small community on the map in terms of historic discoveries,? said Robinson.