

MoD launches new exhibit comparing historical events to present day



Written By **Paula Brown**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

History can be repetitive, but how does it compare over time?

The Museum of Dufferin (MoD) has launched a new main exhibit called "Through the Looking Glass", which allows visitors to explore how events and everyday common occurrence from the past compare to those in the present.

The exhibit consists of 21 unique topics including weddings, farming, child care, film, and television with displays of historic artifacts from Dufferin County. A "look here" feature resembles a magnifying glass for visitors to see specific items up close.

"When people hear it's a now and then exhibit, they're going to look at artifacts and think about how things are different now, but the other part of this is that sometimes you realize how things have not changed so much," said Sarah Robinson, curator for the MoD.

The "Through the Looking Glass" exhibit has been in the works for the Museum of Dufferin since 2019, and was schedule to open in April 2020. While working on reconfiguring the interactive components of the exhibit, the museum added two new displays in lieu of the COVID-19 pandemic and historic Black Lives Matter marches.

"It amazing what can happen in two years and as things progress we decided we had to change a few thing with us as well," said Robinson.

In the midst of living through a world-wide pandemic, the MoD begins the exhibit with a display focused on the history of pandemics; specifically the 1918 Spanish Flu. The display notes the comparisons in restrictions with the closure of schools, churches, libraries and all public meetings in both 1918 and 2020. Medical artifacts reading "chloroform lozenges", "concentrated medicinal essence of cinnamon" showcase the growth in medicines.

Moving forward in the exhibit, a display on mental health shows how treatment has changed over decades. A look back at hundred year old jail records lists "insanity" as a cause for imprisonment.

‘We weren’t prepared as a County early on to look after mental health as we think of it now,’ said Laura Camilleri, the MoD’s archivist. ‘We had a jail, which unfortunately served more as our local social services.’

A display Robinson says she likes to give as an example for comparison of then and now, is the communication case. Displayed with an old rotary phone she says it gives visual understanding to technological advances that now allow us to have phones in our pockets.

While the ‘Through the Looking Glass’ exhibit explores a wide range of topics, each specific one was chosen based on curiosities from visitors in the past. Robinson said she’s been making note over the years as visitors come into the MoD of what they find interesting in history.

Based on these interests and the artifacts the local museum has in their collection, each display case was put together.

‘The majority of our collection is donated by community members and every year we get hundreds of donations of artifacts to our archival and artifact collection,’ said Robinson. ‘Our mandate is that the artifact has to relate to the history of Dufferin County. What makes the exhibit is the stories connected to the artifacts.’

The Museum of Dufferin recently reopened their doors to the public and are enjoying visits to learn about the community’s history.

The ‘Through the Looking Glass’ exhibit is scheduled to remain as the main exhibit at the MoD until the end of 2023.