

× [NOTICE TO READERS:](#)

[Register now to support your local journalism!](#)

[\(/community-static/8891523-register/\)](/community-static/8891523-register/)

Thorold museum faces crossroads

News 05:00 AM by [Melinda Cheevers](/stcatharines-on-author/melinda-cheevers/8FBC7CCB-1E05-4134-8C19-A2DE98E41B5F/) 

<mailto:mcheevers@niagarathisweek.com> Niagara This Week - Thorold

Walking through the rooms of the Lock 7 Viewing Centre, Thorold's history is on full display.

It's hanging from the ceiling, affixed to the walls, and covering every inch of shelf space and a lot of the floor as well.

"It's a canal town," said Randy Barnes, president of the Thorold & Beaverdams Historical Society and de facto curator of the Thorold museum. "And that still very much influences the personality and character of the town."

Thorold's history, from when it incorporated as a village in 1850, then became a town 20 years later in 1870, and finally a city in 1975, is all on display. From its canal history, to the desk of the reeve, Thorold police uniforms, old telephone switchboards and phonograms are included in the display.

Story continues below▼

"We try to emphasize the human element. There's a lot to reflect the day-to-day life in Thorold," said Barnes.

The museum used to be housed in Chestnut Hall, however the city moved them into the Lock 7 Viewing Centre when it was determined renovations were needed at the historic site.

Barnes said the move has its benefits, and its drawbacks.

To start, there is a certain degree of foot traffic that comes along with being in the viewing centre. The centre, set up at Lock 7, also serves as a tourist information centre. Last year, more than 9,000 visitors made their way through the museum.

Story continues below▼

However, the tight quarters means only a fraction of their artifacts are on display and there's little to no room for behind-the-scenes museum work, which includes digitizing the collection and planning future exhibits.

"It's a tight squeeze here and there's no room to grow," said Steve Fulton, chair of the Niagara branch of the Ontario Genealogy Society, which shares space with the museum inside the viewing centre.

Story continues below▼

As Barnes says though, the museum is at a crossroads.

Currently, the collection is owned by the Thorold & Beaverdams Historical Society, which has been serving the town since 1894. The society has had stewardship of the collection for the last 125 years. With an aging membership that's beginning to dwindle, Barnes said the group that's dedicated to preserving the city's past has begun to look to the future.

"We need to form a new organization that will take over stewardship of the museum collection," he said, expressing gratitude to the historical society for taking such great care of the artifacts for so long. "There is a need for a new organization with a broader base that has long-term stability."

While the historical society board has agreed to the formation of a new group to handle the collection, it still needs to receive approval, set its constitution and create a board. Barnes said he'd like to see input from all of Thorold's different heritage groups, including the Thorold & Beaverdams Historical Society, the Ontario Genealogy Society, and Heritage Thorold Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committees, to name a few.

Once the new organization is in place, they'll start to consider other spaces in Thorold where the museum can thrive.

In the meantime, to help ensure as much as the collection is on display as possible, satellite exhibits are being constructed at Thorold City Hall and potentially other locations in town.

The museum opens for the season later this month.

 Show Fact Box

by [Melinda Cheevers](/stcatharines-on-author/Melinda-Cheevers/8fbc7ccb-1e05-4134-8c19-a2de98e41b5f/)

Melinda Cheevers is managing editor for Niagara this Week. She also edits Niagara Life magazine.

Email: mcheevers@niagarathisweek.com (<mailto:mcheevers@niagarathisweek.com>) Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/melinda.cheeversmedia/>)
Twitter (<https://twitter.com/NTWMelinda>)

Tags: [Local News](/search/allarticles/?q=&location=stcatharines-on&ttid=7) (</search/allarticles/?q=&location=stcatharines-on&ttid=7>), [News](/stcatharines-on-news/) (</stcatharines-on-news/>)