

# Forged in Fire

*19th-Century Firearms in Alberta*



The Provincial Museum of Alberta presents

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## *19th-Century Firearms in Alberta*

Edmonton - The Provincial Museum of Alberta is proud to present **Forged in Fire: 19th Century Firearms in Alberta**, the newest installment in the Spotlight Gallery series of exhibitions. Open from August 14 to January 11, 2004, **Forged in Fire** features two collections of 19th century firearms that have never before been on public display.

One of the collections featured is the extraordinary Halmrast collection of American Civil War carbines. The other featured collection showcases several Canadian muzzleloaders from the 19th century. Although these two collections are very different, the exhibition's display and interpretation of 96 individual pieces serves to tell the story of the firearms' history, evolution and role in our culture.

Visitors will also see a stunning collection of intricate one-third scale firearms produced by Montreal artist David Kucer. In addition, **Forged in Fire** features two beautiful illustrations of soldiers and their carbines during the American Civil War, created by talented local artist Ron Volstad.

The museum's curator of government history, Maurice Doll, has collected, documented and preserved firearms for over 20 years at the museum. The expertise of the staff and volunteers working with Doll in the Government History Program has created this exciting exhibition of firearms that represent a compelling part of our history in western Canada.

The *Spotlight Gallery* offers a series of exhibitions that interpret the story of Alberta through our curators and their collections, connecting visitors with important pieces of our rich history.

The **Forged in Fire: 19th Century Firearms in Alberta** exhibition opens with a special media event at 10:30 a.m. on August 14.

The Provincial Museum of Alberta is located at 12845-102 Avenue in Edmonton. For further information phone (780) 453-9100 or toll free 310-0000. Visit our Web site at [www.pma.edmonton.ab.ca](http://www.pma.edmonton.ab.ca).

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# The Provincial Museum of Alberta

## *Admission:*

Adult (18-64 years)	\$10	\$40
Senior (65 and over)	\$8	\$30
Student (with ID)	\$8	\$30
Youth (7-17)	\$5	\$30
Family (Two adults and children 7-17)	\$28	\$70
Grandparent (Two grandparents and children 7-17)	NA	\$60

## *Annual Mammoth Pass:*

(Unlimited Admission plus benefits)

## *Hours:*

Saturday to Thursday: 9 am to 5 pm

Friday: 9 am to 9 pm

*Admission is half-price on Saturdays and Sundays between 9 am & 11 am*

## *Special Children's Programs*

**A to Z ...at the Museum** *(included with admission – half price between 9 am & 11 am)*

Join us each Saturday morning between 9 am and 11 am for games, crafts and activities for the whole family!

**Treasured Time for Tots** *(included with regular admission)*

This literacy program for the wee ones and their parents or caregivers happens every Tuesday morning at 10:15 am. Visitors can hear stories, then see and touch objects relating to the story.

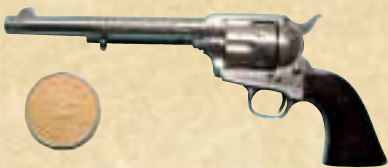
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## *19th-Century Firearms in Alberta*

### *Exhibition Overview*

**Forged in Fire** is a compelling look at 19th Century firearms and their role in Alberta's history. Many of the items that are showcased in this exhibition are donations from members of the Edmonton community, as the Museum is a wonderful repository for the preservation of artifacts representing the accomplishments of soldiers across Canada.

#### **Features of the gallery:**



- The collection of Canadian muzzleloaders presents firearms as unique and fascinating pieces of art; no piece is interchangeable with another firearm.
- The Halmrast collection of firearms illustrates three problem-solving principles incorporated in the work of inventors in the United States during the Industrial Revolution. The firearms displayed will illustrate the evolution from muzzleloaders to breachloaders, loose powder in ball to fixed ammunition, and single shot to multiple-shot firearms.
- In addition to these wonderful collections, there will be two firearms on display made by Peter Alexander, a 21st century Canadian craftsman.
- Miniature 1/3-scale firearms, hand crafted by artist David Kucer, will showcase the unique skills that he has been practicing for over 50 years. These intricate pieces of art, some small enough to fit in the palm of your hand, have been displayed at many major institutions around the world.
- Two illustrations will also be on display in the gallery. Ron Volstad, an internationally renowned Edmonton artist, provides a visual indication of how carbines were used and what they might look like on a soldier in uniform.

# Maurice Doll — Curator

## *Government History Program*

**M**aurice Francois Victor Doll was born in Saskatchewan on January 2, 1947 and lived on the Poor Man and Muscowekwan Reserves (about 100 miles NE of Regina) where his father served as an Indian Agent. He was raised in Battleford, Saskatchewan, and as a young boy he played in the reconstructed Ft. Battleford. In 1963, Maurice left Battleford and moved to Edmonton to complete his secondary education at the University of Alberta. Maurice is married to Catherine Whalley, Director of Historic Sites Service, Alberta Community Development.

Maurice began his tenure at the Museum with a summer job in 1969, working on the Ft. White/Edmonton House II 1810-1813 archaeological site. He returned to the Museum in 1970 on contract to do archaeological lab analysis.

On July 12, 1972, Maurice started full time as Archaeological Assistant to the Curator of Archaeology, Bob Kidd. During 1972- 1987, Maurice conducted archaeological research and managed the archaeology collections. The research projects included important work on the history of Metis peoples at important sites around Buffalo Lake and around central Alberta. Maurice was also responsible for archaeological surveying, which involved looking for sites and mapping their locations. During this time, Maurice acquired and documented private archaeological collections with a focus on paleo-Aboriginal sites.

In 1987, Maurice accepted the curatorship of a newly created program called Government Services that was charged with documenting all three levels of government in Alberta - municipal, provincial and federal. In 1990, the program's name was changed to Government History, incorporating a greater focus on military history. Over the years, Maurice has built an impressive collection of uniforms, insignia, memorabilia and firearms.

Responsibility for the curatorship of the Museum's multi-million dollar numismatic collections was also added to Maurice's duties. Maurice has reorganized this collection, attracted significant donations and given context to these holdings. In the early 1990s, Maurice was moved with the rest of the Museum's Human History curators to the Historic Sites Service for about 2.5 years where he has responsibility for HSS fur trade sites including Ft. George/Buckingham House.

One of Maurice's greatest achievements includes successfully building a curatorial program from scratch by collecting, documenting and preserving tens of thousands of heritage objects worth millions of dollars. He is dedicated to the preservation of our impressive provincial military heritage, including artifacts, photos, taped interviews and diaries.

Maurice is due to retire in early September 2003 after more than 31 years with the Alberta Government.

On May 6, 2003, Curator of Government History Maurice Doll, along with 28 other Albertans, was honoured at a special ceremony at Government House with the award of the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal. The medal is awarded to Canadians who have made a significant contribution to their fellow citizens, their community or to Canada. The medal and a special certificate from the Governor General was presented to Maurice for outstanding work in heritage preservation by the Honourable Lois E. Hole, C.M. AOE, Lieutenant Governor of Alberta.



# *Staff and Volunteers Involved in* **Forged in Fire**



*Jim Mann* joined the Provincial Museum as a volunteer 12 years ago to nurture his interest in history. He has tackled the huge job of researching, cataloguing and storing the Government History Program's historical ammunition collection. Jim's dedication and willingness to learn new technologies has made him an invaluable asset to the Museum.



*Jackie Van Fossen* has been working behind the scenes during the past eight years with the Government History Program in all technical capacities. She has been particularly creative and innovative with the Museum's massive, ongoing collections' organization and storage project. Jackie loves to work with textiles and is largely responsible for implementing the terrific hanging-storage system for the Museum's extensive collection of uniforms belonging originally to the military, police, firefighters and Lieutenant Governors. Jackie also works with our military and police insignia collection that consists of more than 3,000 badges.



*Tom Henderson* volunteers at the Provincial Museum where he has worked with the Vertebrate Paleontology, Archaeology and Government History Programs since 1999. Tom has been instrumental in researching, cataloguing and documenting thousands of newly acquired coins, medals and badges.



*David Glen Kessler* joined the Museum this year as a volunteer with the Government History Program. He has been assigned to work with our extensive firearms collection where his expertise in firearms identification is most appreciated. David is looking forward to documenting the firearms and working with our conservator on the preservation of the collection.

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## *Ron Volstad*

was born in Claresholm in 1949 and has lived his whole life in Alberta. Drawing has been his favourite pastime from a very young age. His interest in military subjects began before he entered first grade when an uncle showed him his wartime photos and souvenirs from his service in the Calgary Highlanders.

Although Ron was unable to take advantage of a scholarship to the Alberta College of Art, he continued to learn and developed an outstanding technique that was entirely self-taught. While working in pipeline construction for more than a dozen years, Ron continued to draw military subjects and illustrated a number of books. His illustrations were first published in 1973.

Artwork became a full-time profession for Ron with an offer of illustration commissions in 1984 from a British firm called Osprey Publishing. Soon after, Ron began to provide research and box illustrations for Dragon Models Limited, a plastic model manufacturer based in Hong Kong. Relying primarily on his own reference library, Ron has illustrated more than 60 books and more than 200 model kit box tops.

In this exhibition you will see examples of Ron's work from the American Civil War, but his personal interest is in 20th century military history, especially through the experiences of the individual combat soldier from whom he draws inspiration.



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## *David Kucer*

Kucer has been pursuing an art form that he has been developing for more than 50 years: making complex miniatures. Miniatures, according to David, are an expression of the soul. Model ships, lead soldiers and small cars stir the imagination of boys; small dolls affect girls; and dollhouses, complete in every detail, are fascinating to girls, boys and big people, too. Miniatures have provided pleasure for many millennia, and the history of miniature firearms can be traced back almost 500 years. In 1930, at the age of seven, David Kucer left his native town of Vilna, Poland and arrived with his parents in Montreal where he has made his home ever since. His father and grandfather had practiced the metal worker's art, so it was natural that he continue in the trade. He took his formal education at Montreal Technical School as an apprentice toolmaker and has never stopped learning. In 1935, he visited New York City where he saw an event called Dr. Sibbald's Smallest Show on Earth. That exhibition at the Radio City Music Hall, with everything in miniature, left a life-long impression on him.



At the outbreak of the Second World War, he took work in a Montreal armament plant, and he joined the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in 1942. As he tells it: "In a month I was wearing three stripes and a crown as an armaments officer." After the Armistice, he served as a military interpreter, specializing in the French and German languages. Upon his return from overseas, he joined Artnetwork Inc., a family firm that produced almost anything in metal. In 1969, a fire destroyed the building in which Artnetwork was housed and his company folded. Nevertheless, it was this tragedy that generated the opportunity for him to develop his artistic talents.

He opened a small shop on Mackay St. in Montreal, and began to produce signet rings carved and engraved with small coats of arms used to leave unique impressions in sealing wax. In his current shop, he still has the little steel punches and dies that he made for this job. The designs are too small to see with the naked eye, but they are engraved with heraldic symbols: shields, crowns, coronets, stars, helms and the like. All the while, he worked in his spare time on miniatures. This was a project that he had wanted to pursue since he saw his first miniatures exhibition in 1935.

In 1946, there were very few miniaturists in the world and each laboured in isolation. Now, the Miniature Arms Society has brought together a circle of craftsmen and collectors of miniatures, and the membership is worldwide.

David Kucer's techniques have evolved through time. His first miniature, a Colt Model 1911 semi-automatic pistol, was made in 1/3-scale but he found that the tools available for purchase at the time were too large and inadequate. So, for a while he worked in 2.5:1 scale. As he gained experience he realized that he had to manufacture a number of tools himself. Soon he returned to the 1/3-scale that he is still using.

Miniatures have been something of a crusade with him. He is always willing to share his knowledge and to help develop the interests of others. His miniature firearms have been displayed at many major institutions, including:

Place des Arts, Montreal (1974)  
The Visual Arts Centre, Montreal (1976)  
The Eli Whitney Museum, Connecticut (1981)

The David Stewart Museum, Montreal (1988)  
The Royal Armouries at the Tower of London, England (1989)  
The Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (1991)

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## *Lawrence D. Halmrast*

was born in Raymond, Alberta on May 20, 1925 and raised on a farm near Warner. In the spring of 1947, Lawrence left his job at a furniture factory and returned to Warner to farm with his dad. From then until his death in 1992, he spent a lifetime of passion and love that was embodied in the firearms, photographs, fossils, rocks and archaeological material he had collected.

By 1951, Lawrence's knowledge and interest in guns was becoming known by his neighbours, many of whom gave him old guns they had around their farms. Visitors often came to see his growing collection which, by 1964, had grown to 300 pieces. Lawrence developed his gun collection by spending many of his weekends attending gun shows and meeting other collectors. Early on he began developing displays of his Civil War carbines and taking them to various shows throughout Alberta, Saskatchewan and Montana.

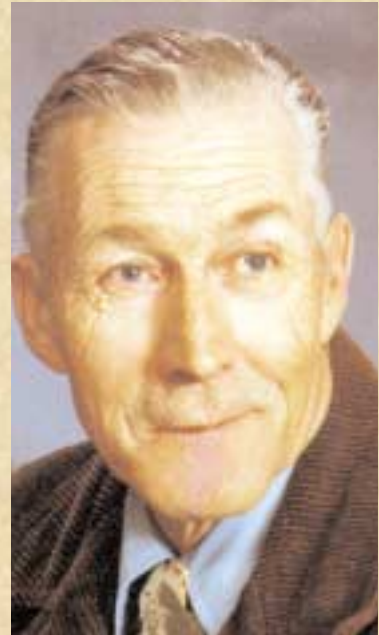
The strength of Lawrence's collection was its focus on firearms from the American Civil War and on the cultural and natural history of the Milk River region. Much of the collection was amassed before others became interested in the preservation of firearms. As with all pioneers, Lawrence recognized the importance of what was around him and he set out to do something about it.

At home, Lawrence covered every wall of his den with racks for his guns and showcases for his revolvers. Between the racks he placed his various big game trophies, artifacts, awards, photographs and other collectibles. The new den soon became a popular stopping place for friends bringing visitors from all over to see Lawrence's collections.

The unselfish sharing of his collection and the affect it had upon others during his life led Lawrence to the realization he was more of a keeper than an owner of the collection. In a way, it belonged to everyone. Lawrence realized it was time to pass the collection onto another keeper who would continue to nurture the collection's contribution to history and the enjoyment of history by anyone who was interested.

With his collection, Lawrence left us all a legacy, and it was a great honour for The Provincial Museum of Alberta to be chosen by Lawrence as the next keeper of the Halmrast collection.

Lawrence received many honours, but the most notable of all recognition came in 1991 when the University of Lethbridge bestowed upon him an Honourary Doctorate of Laws for his contributions to the preservation of the history of southern Alberta.



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### *Q & A with Maurice Doff*

#### 1. What will we see in the Forged in Fire exhibition?

**Forged in Fire** looks at two selected firearms collections from the holdings of The Provincial Museum of Alberta that have never been on exhibition at any museum.

These include the Halmrast collection of American Civil War carbines and the Canadian gunsmith's muzzleloader collection. Although these two collections are very different, the exhibition serves to tell the story of their history, acquisition and the remarkable relationship between them. In addition, **Forged in Fire** will show a most excellent collection of 1/3 scale miniature firearms hand made by David Kucer of Montreal. Kucer is a miniaturist whose work is collected and admired all over the world, and this is the first exhibition of his work in western Canada.

#### 2. Tell us about the collections in the *Forged in Fire* exhibition.

The Kucer collection is a variety of 1/3-scale miniature firearms.

The Halmrast collection focuses on American Civil War carbines that equipped the Union Cavalry between 1861 and 1865. The collection reflects the inventive minds at work during the early part of the Industrial Revolution in America.

In contrast, we are exhibiting the fruits of craftsmen, the product of independent Canadian gunsmiths who practiced their trade around the same period of time. Ironically, it was the introduction of surplus American arms to western Canada after the American Civil War that led to the demise of our Canadian gunsmiths.

However, to show that the craft of building muzzle loaders still survives more than two hundred years later, we are exhibiting two firearms made by one of Canada's leading 21st century craftsmen, Peter Alexander.

#### 3. What would you like all Albertans to know/learn about the *Forged in Fire* gallery?

Firearms are an interesting and compelling part of our history.

#### 4. Tell us about your family's long history in Canada.

We can trace family in Canada back to 1665 on my mother's side when our ancestor, Pierre Hudon arrived in Quebec from France as a member of the Carrignan-Saliers Regiment (The Good Regiment), sent by Louis XIV to protect the settlers of New France from the Iroquois. My father's family arrived more recently (1906) from Finnisterre, Brittany, France.

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### **5. How did your interest in military history develop?**

I lived across the street from and visited with Fred Light, one-time owner of the largest firearms collection in western Canada. Since age eight, I have had an interest in history and collected coins. At age 13, I took a personal interest in the NW Rebellion after witnessing the 75th anniversary commemoration of the Battle of Cutknife Hill between Poundmaker's Band and the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada. The regimental museum exhibited a piece of the actual rope that was used to hang Louis Riel. I personally was acquainted with several survivors of the battle and the campaign, Cree, Metis and Caucasian. This really "whetted my appetite for history." Later I discovered I had a relative who fought at the battle of Fish Creek and Batoche. Throughout my adult life I have retained an interest in firearms, coins and Canadian history – both by formal education and avocation. My interest in firearms and history has led me to participate in historical re-enactments focusing on the Fur Trade period.

### **6. What is your educational background?**

I pursued post-secondary education at U of A where I graduated Magna Cum Laude with First Class Honours in Anthropology, completed a degree in Education with a specialization in History and Native Studies and finally obtained a Masters degree in Anthropology with a specialization in Archaeology.

### **7. What is your vision for the future of the program?**

I see the Government History Program tripling the size of the collection to maybe 100,000 artifacts; currently, the collection has approximately 30,000 artifacts. I also see the Program being divided amongst two or more curators, and I think that there will be significant representation in the new history galleries.

### **8. What are some memorable projects you have worked on?**

All of the projects I have worked on have been important in their own way and have all involved some element of problem solving; I tend to not look at past accomplishments but at future projects.

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### *Did You Know?*

- Edmonton is the home of one of the world's most famous contemporary military artists, Ronald Volstad, and some of his work for the *Osprey Men At Arms* series of books is featured in **Forged In Fire**.
- In addition to firearms, Lawrence Halmrast donated to the province thousands of natural history specimens, archaeological artifacts and his photographs documenting Writing on Stone Provincial Park.
- Connoisseurs all over the world collect David Kucer's miniature firearms, yet this is the first time they are on display in western Canada.
- Although the trade of building muzzleloaders essentially ended in the 1870s, the work of Peter Alexander, one of Canada's best contemporary gunsmiths, is proof that the craft persists.
- The best revolver designed for use during the American Civil War was the Rogers and Spencer. Approximately 5,000 were ordered for the Union Army, but they were not delivered until after the surrender of the Confederate Forces at Appomattox.
- Many of the American Civil War firearms in this exhibition were fired in demonstrations to impress President Abraham Lincoln on the lawn of the White House in Washington – events that are highly unlikely today.
- A hundred years ago, firearms were present in almost every household in what is now Alberta.
- The Sharps Rifle, originally used as a military weapon, became the most widely used firearm for buffalo hunting. In what is now Alberta, even missionaries carried Sharps to help them live off the land.
- 19th century Canadian muzzleloaders were used for hunting in Alberta as late as 1945 because the Second World War caused a shortage of modern ammunition.
- Many 19th century Canadian gunsmiths turned to making and repairing bicycles for a living after 1870.

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### *Did You Know?*

- General Burnside, the inventor of the Burnside Carbine also gave the world a new term for facial hair – sideburns.
- David Kucer, at over 80 years of age, still works every day at his studio in Montreal. He says it keeps him young!
- Approximately 50,000 Canadian-born soldiers served on both sides during the American Civil War. Four attained the rank of Brigadier-General and 29 were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.
- Colt revolving rifles today are worth thousands of dollars as collector items yet the American Government sold them off as surplus after the Civil War at a mere 42 cents each!
- The Maynard breech-loading carbine was a favourite of the Confederate Cavalry.
- A Spencer Carbine fired the last shot of the American Civil War east of the Mississippi.
- Over 80,000 Sharps carbines were used in the American Civil War, yet the US Government only purchased 10,000. Most were privately purchased or purchased by individual states.
- Although the Colt Peacemaker and Winchester rifle won the American West, the double-barrel shotgun won the Canadian West.