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## *Community-Based Education Program*



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### Promotional Copy

## #4131 History of Peterborough Area Militia and Fenian Raids

### Organization Information

The host organization was established by the County of Peterborough in 1967 to celebrate and preserve the rural history of the area. During the last 43 years, it has become one of the major cultural heritage attractions in central Ontario hosting an average of 20,000 visitors per season. In addition to its tourist season, which runs from mid June to mid September, they host spring and fall education programs, adult workshops, weddings and several special events throughout the year. Its operations have an annual economic impact on the greater Peterborough area of \$3.5 million. The organization's vision is "to provide each and every visitor with a living history experience of exceptional quality." Its mission is "to preserve, promote and authentically recreate the rural history of Peterborough County." Finally, the host's mandate is "to be a vibrant living history museum that engages our community and actively preserves our cultural heritage in order to provide an interactive and educational visitor experience."

### Project Information

The host organization has been developing its annual July 1<sup>st</sup> Historic Dominion Day event over the past four years in an effort to draw more visitors. In 2007, it was decided to place an emphasis on the political history of Canada to differentiate its festivities from the parades, festivals and fireworks displays that generally take place on Canada Day. The host has a unique opportunity to provide a living-history interpretation of life at the time of Confederation in 1867. This process started with the reading of the BNA Act Proclamation by an interpreter playing the part of our first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. In 2009, this was enhanced with the reading of some of Sir John A.'s speeches and by having and interpretive exhibit on the Fenian raids (a major factor in the move towards Confederation by the British North American colonies) along with three re-enactors dressed as Fenians present in the Village and re-enactors representing Canadian Militia. The ceremonies ended with a brief skirmish in which the three Fenians were driven off by members of the Canadian Militia. In 2010 the re-enactment increased in scope and authenticity. In addition to the three Fenian uniforms the Village created in 2009, three 1870's vintage Canadian Militia uniforms were acquired. There were twenty to twenty-five re-enactors who took part in skirmishes throughout the day culminating in a 10 to 15 minute recreation of the 1870 Battle of Eccles Hill. Sir John's interpretation was stretched to a 30 minute presentation chronicling the series of events leading up to Confederation and the program included musical groups playing and singing the patriotic songs of the era. A rare portrait of the Fathers of Confederation was restored and placed on display for the event as well. Attendance at this event has increased steadily over the past 4 years from around 100 in 2007 to close to 300 in 2010. They would like to see this trend continue.

In keeping with the host's mission statement of: preserving, promoting and authentically recreating the rural history of Peterborough County, they would like to find out more about the participation of the Peterborough Region's militia companies in the Fenian Raids of 1866 through 1870. This would add to the quality of the interpretation of the event as those interpreters representing the militia troops on the day would be able to provide visitors with a greater understanding of how the Fenian Raids affected the local population.

The purpose of the student project is to document the historical connection of the Peterborough area militia units to the Fenian Raids of 1866 to 1870. They would like to include this story as part of our annual Historic Dominion Day special event interpretation and other education programming.

The host will provide the student with background information as to the context of the Fenian Raids. The student will be conducting research that will expand on this base of knowledge and, using primary sources (local newspapers, firsthand accounts, contemporary documents, military records), highlight the involvement of local units and individuals who participated in the defense of Canada during the Fenian raids. They have set up an exhibit profiling John Beatty who was a member of the Millbrook Militia Company and who was awarded a medal for his participation in the 1866 raids. Further research of that nature is required.

**We would like the research to include:**

- A historical timeline of the raids
- A list of the local militia companies which existed in Peterborough County in the 1860's & 70's
- A summary of the deployment of local militia groups during 1866 and 1870
- Identification of individual participation in the raids by local citizens and people of note, if possible
- Response of Peterborough Irish community to the Fenian invaders
- Identification of specific drill instructions for 1860's to 1870's Canadian Militia

**Benefit to the Host Organization and the Community**

- The benefit will be that organization's staff will have a greater knowledge of the local involvement in the Fenian Raids and the reaction of the citizen of Irish decent to this perceived "terrorist" threat to Canada. It will enhance the quality of our interpretation for the Historic Dominion Day event. It will also help us to educate and entertain a growing audience in future years adding the Museum's annual visitor volumes and revenues. Knowledge of this aspect of our local history offers us the opportunity to stage other related events and educational programs in the future.
- The community will gain an understanding of a little known but important aspect of Canadian political history through the process of participating in the Historic Dominion Day event. School programs focusing on this element of Canadian history could be developed providing a broader base of students with a deeper understanding of their country's origins.

**What Students Might Learn**

- A heightened awareness of the political, military and social history of 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Canada
- A greater awareness of the history of Peterborough County
- Research skills and a better understanding of primary source documentation
- Exposure to working with one of the region's largest living history museums

**Screening or Training Requirements**

- Police records check may be required if the student is based at the Museum
- Confidentiality agreement

**Skills or Experience Needed**

- Familiarity with the importance of local history education
- Working independently
- Working consultatively
- Conversation skills
- Writing skills
- Spreadsheet and mapping skills would be assets

**Resources Required for Project that will be Provided by Host**

- Photocopying, office supplies, long distance telephone charges, audio/video tapes, some transportation costs (up to \$500 value in cash & in kind)