

MERRITT PARK  
WELLAND CANAL MEMORIAL MONUMENT  
KING STREET  
WELLAND, ONTARIO

Prepared for City of Welland Heritage Advisory Committee  
(Heritage Welland)

Nora A. Reid, M.A. (History of Art)

Nov. 1, 2017

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ARCHITECTURE

Style

This monument consists of a fountain with a central motif of piled rocks, a rock surrounding wall and five life sized figural statues surrounding/interacting with the fountain and rocks (Figs. 1 & 10). It also has a bench where people can sit next to one of the sculptural figures.

The overall monument was conceived and designed by artist Bas Degroot (Fig. 12). Despite the fact that Mr. Degroot died before the monument could be finished and he was able to complete only one of the statues to casting (the standing figure), the completed project does reflect his original conception of the monument as seen in his concept drawing (Fig. 12) and maquette (Fig. 13) . All the sculpted figures of the monument adhere to the rough and energetic style seen in this drawing and in the maquette. The artists who completed the remaining figures (see Designer, Sculptors and Bronze Caster below) used Degroot's maquette as a model.<sup>1</sup>

Construction

The City of Welland donated the site in Merritt Park for the Monument and poured the concrete pad for the fountain.<sup>2</sup>

When Bas Degroot died, William Jurgenson of William Jurgenson Art Foundry, who also completed some of the sculptures and cast all the sculptures in bronze (see below) took over the management of the project. The original design by Degroot was simple and called for a rubber membrane on the ground with stones on top and a small pump. Mr. Jurgenson obtained granite stone for the fountain from a Niagara Falls supplier and worked with a Welland engineering firm,

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Joseph Ha Engineering, who upgraded the technical specifications for the fountain. This included designing the concrete slab, wall structure, base, footings for the centrepiece rock and an underground chamber to hold the electrical service and pump (located behind the fountain) and a method to get the water up through the piled granite stones. This is accomplished by a 2 inch schedule 40 standard pipe that brings the water up through a drilled hole in the granite stones.<sup>3</sup>

Robinson Landscaping (Scot Robinson) built the pool and the fountain and Charles Carrigan laid the bricks of the historical pathway.

Working from Degroot's small maquette, all the figures that form part of the monument were first completed as life sized clay models. They were cast in bronze using the "lost wax" process. A plaster mould of the sculpture is created and the interior of the mould is brushed with wax to a depth of 3/16 to 1/4 inch. Once cooled, the hollow wax copy of the mould is removed, marks left by the mould are rubbed off, and sprues or vents of wax are attached (these will later provide avenues for the wax to run out). Another mould is poured around the wax model, and it is placed in the kiln at 750 degrees Fahrenheit for 50 hours. A separate kiln is built around each sculpture using fire brick and a fibre blanket on top (Fig. 19) as they all vary in size. This cures the mould and melts the wax, leaving a gap to be filled with bronze.

Molten bronze at approximately 2100 degrees F is poured into the void left by the wax using a cup (Figs 17 & 18). Once the bronze has cooled, the mould is broken off and the vents removed. As the figures are done in pieces, they need to be welded together and chased. Fine details are cleaned using a grinder and sand blasting. When the surface is acceptable, the sculpture is heated for patination – giving it a black, brown or green finish (the copper in bronze is what gives it a greenish hue. Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin or other metals). The sculpture is finished with a coating of wax. Outdoor sculptures should be re-waxed regularly.

Once the fountain was completed, the area was landscaped and it was lit using a colour shifting LED design that makes the figures appear to move. <sup>4</sup>

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Age

At its meeting of March 7, 2000, Welland City Council passed the following resolution: "THAT Council endorse, in principle, the proposal of the Welland Heritage Council and Multicultural Centre to construct a monument in Merritt Park or at another site deemed suitable by City staff, to honour the immigrants, who built the Welland Canal; and That Council support the construction of the base of the monument and refer this matter to Community Services staff for study and review." <sup>5</sup> The monument was conceived as a Millenium (year 2000) project (see Context below). In March of 2001 the Heritage Council put out an appeal to raise the remainder of the funding needed to complete the monument that spring. It was unveiled on Sept. 27, 2001. The sculpture of the boy sitting on the back of the fountain was added one year later. <sup>6</sup>

Designer, Sculptors and Bronze Caster

*Bas Degroot*

Local artist Bas Degroot designed the fountain and made two of the statues.

Degroot was born into a family of Dutch craftsmen and artists in Gorinchem, the Netherlands, in 1948. He later studied at universities in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Canada. Bas and his family immigrated to Canada in 1988.

Major works by Degroot include works completed in terra cotta, bronze, brick, paint and stained glass in 25 cities in Canada and the United States. Many of his works can be found in the Niagara area, including Niagara Falls and Welland. He was also a translator, book illustrator and author of five books.

Important works in the Netherlands include a brick mosaic and square for theater "De Bussel" in Oosterhout, a brick mosaic for the Moonen building in Waalwijk, and a mosaic in granite for the arena "de beverbol" in the city of Ridderkerk. Locally he created twelve stained glass windows for the Crossroads Centre in Burlington, a large brick mosaic for the Maid of the Mist building in Niagara Falls, a sculpture of two beavers for the Welland bus terminal (Fig. 15), a brick mosaic mural "New World" constructed in 1990 on Holy Trinity Anglican Church hall at 77 Division Street (facing Market Square) containing almost 12,000 bricks of seven colours (Fig. 14), also a painted mural, "Canal Construction" at 140 King Street, the former Carnegie Library building, now the Welland Museum. Major works in

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the USA can be found in Florida, Kentucky and Louisiana.

Bas Degroot died in 2001 in Port Colborne, Ontario, Canada, while in the midst of finishing the Welland Canal Memorial Monument.

The Bas Degroot website describes him as a visual artist whose work

...ranged from meticulously detailed illustrations of nature's smallest creatures, to monumental mosaics of brick and mortar that stretched across more than 1,000 square feet. In much of his art, Degroot championed social justice, wrestled with the conflicting nature of modernity, and explored the enduring value of spirituality. Degroot pioneered innovative artistic techniques, including many-layered, brilliantly unpainted stained glass, and a new kind of monumental brick mosaic that could incorporate over 12,000 bricks.<sup>7</sup>

When Bas Degroot died he had completed the standing figure carrying a sack (working with bronze caster Bill Jurgenson - see below) in bronze (Figs. 7 & 8) and was almost finished with the clay model of the seated figure with its head resting on a shovel (Fig. 6). Bronze caster Bill Jurgenson completed the fine detail work on the seated figure and made the kneeling figure (Fig. 6). The seated woman (worker's wife) (Fig. 5) was created by Melynda Jurgenson, daughter of Bill and Lynda Jurgenson, and the boy seated on the rock at the back was done by artist Perry Wakulich.<sup>8</sup>

*William Jurgenson* (Fig. 16)

*William Jurgenson Art Foundry Ltd.* (Figs. 17-19)

As noted above, designer of the Monument Bas Degroot worked hand in hand with Bronze Caster William Jurgenson, owner of William Jurgenson Art Foundry in Vineland Ontario, as did the other artists who completed the sculptures for the monument after his death. Mr. Jurgenson completed the almost finished clay model of the seated figure and sculpted the kneeling figure (Figs. 6, 7 & 8). The Jurgenson Foundry cast all five of the statues for the Welland Canal Memorial Monument in bronze.

Mr. Jurgenson has a B.A. in Fine Art from McMaster University. He also has a Specialist Certificate for Teaching Art, Design and Technology and taught those

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subjects at South Lincoln High School in Smithville, Laura Secord Secondary in St. Catharines and at Brock University.

He and his wife established the Art Foundry in 1981 as a family business and over the years Mrs. Jurgenson and both the Jurgenson's children have worked as Foundry assistants. The William Jurgenson Art Foundry has cast sculptures for numerous artists over the years including Alice Crawley of St. Catharines, Perry Wakulich and Reinhard Reitzenstein whose work is in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada and the Art Gallery of Ontario. Among works cast at the Foundry are the statues of Alexander Galt and son Elliot Galt by Bob Dey in front of the Galt Museum in Lethbridge Alberta and the 18 foot tall statue "La Vivrière" (Fig. 20), part of a fountain in the Place de la FAO commemorating the founding of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Québec City in 1945.<sup>9</sup>

*Melynda Jurgenson* (Fig.16)

Melynda Jurgenson, daughter of William and Lynda Jurgenson, created the seated woman sculpture (Fig. 5) using Bas Degroot's maquette as a model. She was 21 years of age at the time. Working with her father, Ms. Jurgenson also put the finishing touches on several of the other statues.

Melynda Jurgenson is a graduate of Ryerson University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Technical Production and currently works as Assistant Technical Director for the Four Seasons Opera Company in Toronto, Ontario.<sup>10</sup>

*Perry Wakulich* (Fig. 21)

Perry Wakulich sculpted the figure of the boy sitting on the back of the fountain (Figs.11 & 12). He was a Visual Arts teacher at St Catharines Collegiate Institute and Vocational in St Catharines, Ontario. As well as being a painter and sculptor, he is also an athlete and a coach, coaching wrestling at St. Catharines Collegiate and for Brock's junior wrestling team.

Other works by Mr. Wakulich include the bronze rowing statue "Spirit of St. Catharines" in Port Dalhousie (Fig. 22) and more recently "Reconnecting With Nature" for the District School Board of Niagara Walker Living Campus (2015).<sup>11</sup>

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Contractors (see Construction above)

- City of Welland – concrete pad for monument
- Welland Hydro - colour shifting LED lighting design for the fountain. The lighting pulses with various colors onto each statue. If you sit on the street facing the monuments the lights will give the impression of the statues moving. Mr. Rimas Slavickas, then manager of Welland Hydro, was instrumental in obtaining the unique lighting, which enhances the artistic display. It was purchased from Disney World U.S.A. after he met a colleague at a hydro convention. Welland Hydro installed the lighting and a technician was trained to maintain the lights.
- Engineering Firm – Joseph Ha Engineering, St. Catharines ON – donated their time to work with Wm. Jurgenson on upgrading the technical specifications for the monument.
- Robinson Landscaping - construction of Pool and Fountain
- Charles Carrigan – laid bricks in historical pathway (Figs.2-4)
- Niagara Electric, Welland – did the underground electrical service for lighting and water pump

Volunteers

The Programme for the Monument unveiling on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2001 mentions the following City of Welland Workers who donated their time to help finish the work: Pierre Godbout, Anthony Gallacio, Ray Picard, Nick Guldice, Mike Robillard, Bill Currie, Fred McLaughlin, Benny Iannantonio, Tim Sumbler, Basil Falvo, Rick Tisi and Ray Goudreault. <sup>12</sup> Selling of the bricks was at one time all done by volunteers as well. <sup>13</sup>

Board of Directors, Welland Heritage Council and Multicultural Centre

The Board of Directors of the Welland Heritage Council and Multicultural Centre when the monument was completed were as follows: Steve Sveda, Past President; Ann Simunic, President; Mary Anderson, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President; Robert Henry McMaster, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President; Rudolf W. Masswohl, Secretary; Lorenzo Scolaro, Treasurer; Frank DeDonato, Rita Scolaro, Dan Fortier, Jean Misener, Frank DeChellis, Mark Dzugan, Vi Vrbanac and Tivador Torzsak, Directors; Claire (Gerenscer) Masswohl, Executive Director.

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Alterations

There have been no alterations to the fountain since the last seated boy statue was added one year after it was dedicated. The Welland Heritage and Multicultural Centre however, does continue to “sell” bricks in the pathway to pay for the ongoing upkeep of the Monument.<sup>13</sup>

Condition

It appears to be in good condition although some of the figures have been the target of vandalism with paint (Fig. 11).

HISTORY

Event

The Welland Canal Memorial Monument was unveiled on September 27, 2001 with Jeff Jackson as Master of Ceremonies. O Canada was played by The Grands, followed by a Parade of Flags to the music of “We are the World” played by The Grands. Speakers included Claire Gerenscer, Executive Director of the Welland Heritage Council and Multicultural Centre, Rudy Masswohl, Secretary of the Board of Directors and Ann Simunic, President of the Centre, Mayor Cindy Forster, Members of Provincial Parliament Peter Kormos and Anthony Tirabassi and the Honourable Gilbert Parent, Ambassador to the Environment and former Speaker of the House of Commons.

The Welland Tribune reported that hundreds of local residents came out for the dedication despite pouring rain. Mayor Forster expressed the hope that the monument would be a first step in the revitalization of Welland’s downtown and the redevelopment of the city’s recreational waterway lands.<sup>14</sup>

Persons

Ann Simunic current President of the Welland Heritage and Multicultural Centre explained the focus of the monument: “The Welland Canal Memorial Monument was built to commemorate the hardworking people of Canada and around the world who came to the Niagara Peninsula to build the Welland Canal.”<sup>15</sup>



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The Monument depicts three canal workers breaking for lunch and the wife of one who has brought her husband a meal. At the dedication ceremony, then Mayor Cindy Forster said “The majority of people who live in Welland are the children, the grandchildren or the great-grandchildren of the people who built this canal”. Gib Parent, former Niagara Centre Member of Parliament and Speaker of the House of Commons recollected his father’s work on the fourth Welland Canal.

Claire Gerenscer, Executive Director of the Welland Heritage Council and Multicultural Centre noted that while the businessmen who spearheaded the canal project are recognized, the workers who did the actual canal construction, ...”the people whose sweat and blood built the canal...” are not. Niagara Centre Member of Provincial Parliament Peter Kormos said that these people came mainly from Europe and settled here after the canal work was done. They “...not only built the canal, they built neighbourhoods one at a time. And they built churches and cultural halls.”<sup>16</sup>

Context

This was conceived by the Welland Heritage and Multicultural Centre as a project to help celebrate the millennial (the year 2000) and was funded by a grant of \$75,912.00 from the Millenium Bureau of Canada along with numerous donations from local people. It was one of 1700 projects across Canada that received Millenium Project funding from the federal government.<sup>17</sup> The total cost of the project was \$190,034.28. Community members “purchased” bricks in the pathway leading to the monument on which names of their families were etched. Bricks are still being sold by the Multicultural Centre to continue to fund the ongoing costs of the monument.<sup>18</sup>

The Multicultural Centre’s application to the Millenium Bureau of Canada submitted on Nov. 30, 1999 gave the following rationale for the construction of the monument:

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For the past 24 years, The Welland Heritage Council and Multicultural Centre has worked in the City of Welland promoting the understanding and mutual respect of all nations as well as assisting in the process of all newcomers that come from many lands. We are committed to meeting the needs of a diverse cultural population and to helping newcomers participate fully in community life.

Immigration is essential to the Canadian economy. Newcomers are consumers and employees, professionals and entrepreneurs. Our strength as a nation depends on our willingness to help newcomers gain the skills, confidence and opportunities they need to become active members of Canadian society. It is equally important that they be recognized for their achievements and contributions to our communities. Given our agency's beliefs, we feel it is our duty to recognize the many immigrants who actively contributed to the growth of the Welland community.

The city of Welland owes much of its history to the lives of immigrants who helped to build this town. One event in particular was the construction of the Welland Canal. Early in the nineteenth century, people from all over the world came to this region to find work. Many of them found employment as construction workers contracted to build the Welland Canal. This was an important mission; the canal was to be built between Lakes Ontario and Erie, opening navigation through all the Great Lakes making transportation for industry much more accessible. Considering the size of this task, it was an amazing feat considering the entire construction had to be completed manually or with steam-power. Subsequently, many lives were lost due to less than ideal working conditions.

The construction of this canal had provided the city of Welland with a great deal of wealth. Until the mid-seventies when the downtown canal locks was closed, the canal acted as an immense source of employment and income for

the city of Welland. Because of the success of the canal, our city prospered and was nicknamed the industrial hub of the region. Today, the canal attracts a great number of visitors from far and wide. In 1989 the Welland Canal was the site of the World Rowing Championships as well as the Championship of the Americas, and is recognized internationally as one of the best rowing sites. It is utilized by the Welland Water-ski Club, as well as by many others as a site for many leisure activities. It is to this that we owe thanks to the many immigrants who worked painstakingly to build this incredible structure.

The Heritage Council has become familiar with the history of the Welland Canal through the descendants of immigrants who worked on its construction. As mentioned earlier, we believe it is our responsibility as a Heritage Council, to recognize the efforts of immigrants who made a difference in our community. We believe that one way of accomplishing this, is to establish a monument in honour of the dedication, and contributions that immigrants have made to Welland, through the construction of the Welland Canal. We believe that honoring their contributions is a precedent for the newcomers of the future.

The website of the Multicultural Centre today describes it as "...a lasting legacy for the citizens of the community who supported the vision of the Director and Members of the Board of the Welland Heritage Council...[that]...will remind us of the importance of multiculturalism to development in Welland – past, present, and future."

The website goes on to note that industries, businesses, and citizens prospered in Welland and the Niagara Peninsula through the efforts of the people who built the canal. Some of these workers lost their lives digging with picks and shovels, many left their families and friends when they came to Canada in search of work.<sup>19</sup>

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Setting

The presence of the Welland Canal Memorial Monument in this location in downtown Welland adjacent to the original canal provides an appropriate setting in the context of the memorial and provides a water feature that enhances the downtown park in which it is set.

Landmark

The memorial monument is a fairly well known landmark in the context of the City.

INTEGRITY

Site

The memorial monument occupies its original site and has not been moved.

Ownership and Maintenance

The City of Welland donated the site in Merritt Park for the monument with the value of the land being assessed at approximately \$25,000.00. In addition, the City donated the work of constructing the base for the monument, valuing that cost at approximately \$30,000.00. The City also provides annual maintenance of the site, including landscaping, opening and closing the fountain, and operational costs, estimated in 2000 at approximately \$5000.00 per year.<sup>20</sup>

As noted above, the Monument itself, including the brick walkway, fountain and sculptures was entirely funded and built by the Welland Heritage and Multicultural Centre through a Millennium grant and private donations at a total cost of \$190,034.28 and they continue to fundraise through the sale of bricks for ongoing maintenance.

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Figures 1-11 Welland Canal Memorial Monument Photos N. Reid Oct. 8, 2016



Figures 1 & 2

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Figures 3 & 4  
 Brick walkway with pavers inscribed with donor's family names.

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Figures 5 & 6

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Figure 7

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Figure 8



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Figure 9

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Figures 10 & 11



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Figure 12

Source: City of Welland website, "Welland Canal Memorial Monument"



Figure 13

Concept sketch by artist Bas Degroot of the Welland  
Canal Memorial Monument (courtesy of Bill Jurgenson)

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Figure 13  
Artist Bas Degroot with maquette of Monument  
Welland Tribune, March 15, 2001,  
“Help needed for memorial fundraising”



Figure 14  
Bas Degroot brick mosaic on wall of Holy Trinity Church, Division Street, Welland

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Figure 15. Beavers sculpted by Bas Degroot at Welland Bus Terminal  
Source for Figs. 14 & 15: website, basdegroot.net



Figure 16  
Bill, Lynda and Melynda Jurgenson at Monument dedication Sept. 27, 2001  
Courtesy of Bill and Linda Jurgenson.

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Figure 17  
Melting pot for bronze at William Jurgenson Art Foundry  
Photo N. Reid, Sept. 21, 2017.

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Figure 18  
Equipment at William Jurgenson Art Foundry, Vineland  
Photo N. Reid

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Figure 19

Bricks to build kiln at William Jurgenson Art Foundry, Vineland ON  
Photo N. Reid



Figure 20

Monumental Figure in square at  
Quebec City cast by William  
Jurgenson Art Foundry.

“La Vivrière”

Artists: Carmelo Arnoldin,  
Richard Purdy and Francois  
Hébert.



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Figure 21

Artist Perry Wakulich, who did the sculpture of the boy on the rock

Source: Niagara This Week June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010 "Art Fuses with Sport for City Hall Exhibit"



Figure 22

"Spirit of St. Catharines" bronze rower by Perry Wakulich

Source: Rowperfect UK

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Figure 23  
 Donors' plaques, Welland Canal Memorial Monument  
 Photo N. Reid, Oct. 2016

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References

<sup>1</sup> Interview, September 21, 2017, William Jurgenson, Vineland ON, owner of William Jurgenson Art Foundry Ltd. and Lynda Jurgenson. Mr. Jurgenson cast all the sculptures of the monument and was involved in the project from start to finish. The maquette in clay is in the possession of the Welland Heritage and Multicultural Centre.

<sup>2</sup> Letter, April 10, 2000 from Ian Smith, City of Welland Community Services to Claire Gerenscer, Executive Director, Welland Heritage and Multicultural Centre.

<sup>3</sup> Interview, September 21, 2017, William Jurgenson

<sup>4</sup> Interview, September 21, 2017, William Jurgenson

Programme, "Unveiling of the Welland Canal Memorial Monument Thursday September 27, 2001, 5:00 p.m."

Interview, Claire (Gernsger) Masswohl, former Executive Director, Welland Heritage and Multicultural Centre, October 26, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Letter, March 9, 2000, from Craig Stirtzinger, City Clerk, City of Welland to Claire Gerenscer, Executive Director, Welland Heritage and Multicultural Centre.

<sup>6</sup> "Help needed for memorial fundraising", Welland Tribune, March 15, 2001

Programme, "Unveiling of the Welland Canal Memorial Monument Thursday September 27, 2001, 5:00 p.m."

"Hundreds attend monument unveiling despite rain", Welland Tribune Sept. 28, 2001

Interview, September 21, 2017, William Jurgenson

<sup>7</sup> Website, <http://www.basdegroot.net/> : "Bas Degroot", "Bio"; Bas Degroot, Visual Artist.

<sup>8</sup> Interview, September 21, 2017 with William and Lynda Jurgenson at Jurgenson Art Foundry

<sup>9</sup> Interview, William and Lynda Jurgenson

Lethbridge News, August 14, 2017, "Statue of Alexander Galt and Son, Elliot Galt, Installed at Galt Museum"

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Website, "Ville de Québec" [ville.quebec.qc.ca](http://ville.quebec.qc.ca)

<sup>10</sup> Interview, William and Lynda Jurgenson

Programme, "Unveiling of the Welland Canal Memorial Monument Thursday September 27, 2001

<sup>11</sup> Interview, William and Lynda Jurgenson

Niagara This Week June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010 "Art Fuses with Sport for City Hall Exhibit"

Website, DSBN Walker Living Campus [www.dsbn.org/walkerlivingcampus/](http://www.dsbn.org/walkerlivingcampus/)

<sup>12</sup> Interview, William and Lynda Jurgenson

Info on contractors, City of Welland volunteers and Board of Directors of the Welland Heritage Council and Multicultural Centre from programme, "Unveiling of the Welland Canal Memorial Monument Thursday September 27, 2001, 5:00 p.m."

Invoice, 9/20/01 from Niagara Electric to Welland Heritage Council for material and labour to commence underground electrical servicing for lighting and water pump, \$9800.00.

Email, Nov. 1, 2017, Claire Masswohl to Nora Reid. Mrs. Masswohl provided the name of the Engineering firm and the information on the Welland Hydro lighting design.

<sup>13</sup> Email, Claire Masswohl to Nora Reid, August 21, 2017

<sup>14</sup> "Hundreds attend monument unveiling despite rain", Welland Tribune Sept. 28, 2001

<sup>15</sup> Letter, 10 August 2017 from Anne Simunic, President, Welland Heritage Council and Multicultural Centre to Nora Reid, Secretary/Researcher, City of Welland Heritage Advisory Committee.

<sup>16</sup> "Hundreds attend monument unveiling despite rain" Welland Tribune Sept. 28, 2001

<sup>17</sup> Letter, February 16, 2001 from Millenium Bureau of Canada to Claire Gerenscer, Executive Director, Welland Heritage Council and Multicultural Centre

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“Hundreds attend monument unveiling despite rain”,

<sup>18</sup> Letter, 10 August 2017 from Anne Simunic to Nora Reid

Email, Claire Masswohl, August 21, 2017

<sup>19</sup> Website, Welland Heritage and Multicultural Centre, 2017,  
[wellandheritagecouncil.com](http://wellandheritagecouncil.com)

<sup>20</sup> Letter, April 10, 2000 from Ian Smith, City of Welland Community Services to  
Claire Gerenscer, Executive Director, Welland Heritage and Multicultural Centre.