

## Fort St-Jean Museum 24-Pdr restoration project

By CWO (ret'd) Normand Roberge

We met at OMMC's annual meeting in 2014, the Curator of the Fort St-Jean Museum, Éric Ruel and our small group of volunteers from the Bytown Gunner Fire Power Museum, 30 RCA, Max Toms, LCol Terry Honour (retired), and I, sharing common interests in artillery. Eric mentioned that he had a bronze piece in a storeroom at RMC St-Jean and would like to showcase it. During the year he sent us photos of his 24-pound bronze howitzer.



In early 2015, we stopped on a trip for a short visit to the museum and Eric brought us to see the gun. We then discussed with our friend; blacksmith/gunsmith Tony Walsh from Artillery Ironwork Eric's project to reproduce a field gun carriage in order to put the canon in evidence in front of the Forges building at the museum for the opening scheduled in spring 2016.

During September 2015 Tony Walsh and our group were fetching the cannon in St-Jean.

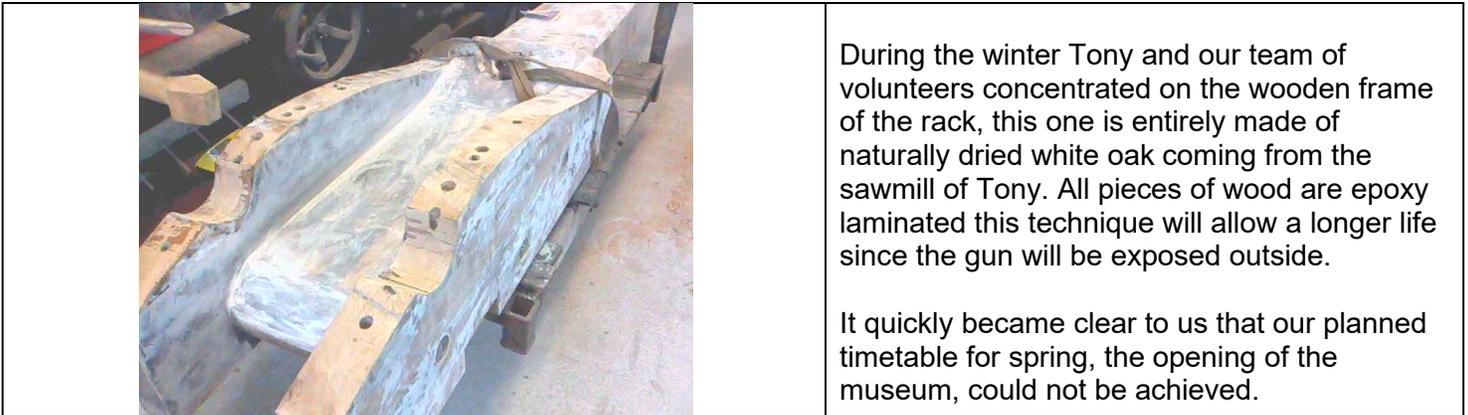
The Fort St-Jean Museum already had a description of the canon in the Report of identification of the old canons of Fort Saint-Jean, written by Michel Brassard of Parks Canada:



This piece is an excellent example of 19th century howitzer models. The first howitzers of this type entered service in 1820 in the British Army, and their caliber rose from 5.66 inches to 5.7 inches in 1830, like the copy of Fort Saint-Jean. We can be sure that this piece dates from after 1837, bearing the monogram of Queen Victoria, reigning from 1837. In addition, another monogram is visible on the fly: it is a G And a stylized M, surrounded by the motto of the order of Bath, TRIA JUNCTA IN UNO. A Maltese cross is suspended from the lower part of the banner. It is probably the monogram of Sir George Murray, Master of the Ordnance (MGO). Sir George Murray occupied the post of Grandmaster twice: from December 1834 to May 1835, and from September 1841 to July 1846. The presence of his "signature" on this howitzer, in conjunction with the monogram of Queen Victoria, Indicates that it was cast during its second period. (Google translation)

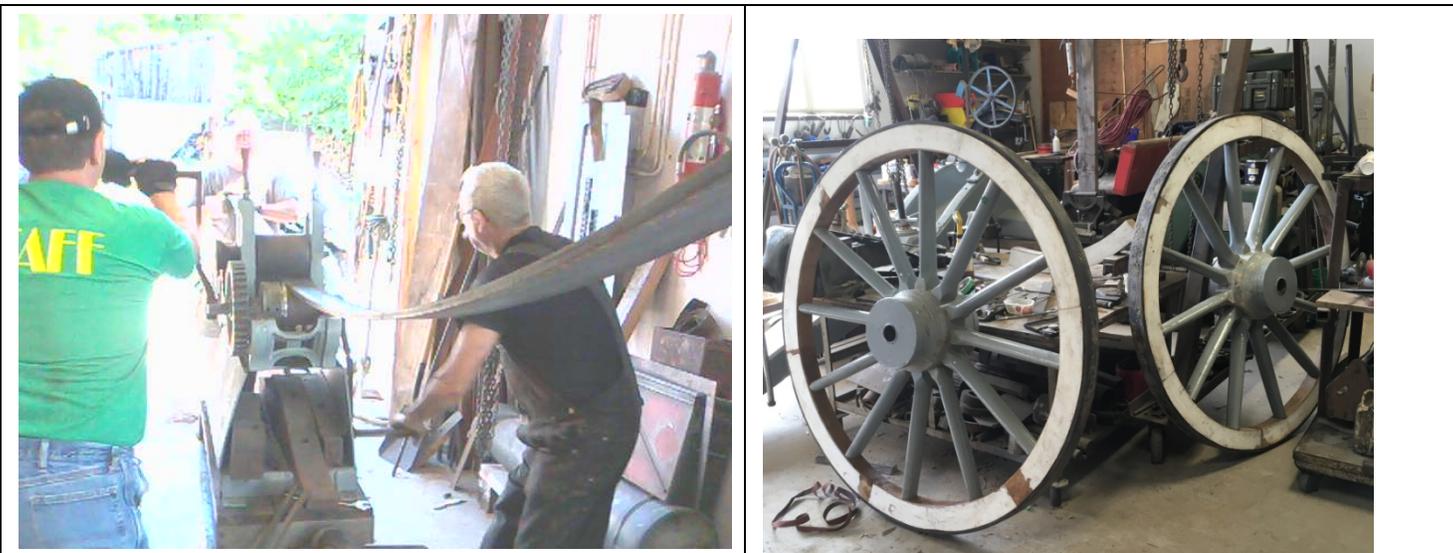
From then on, it was under the guidance of the prime contractor Tony Walsh to define the model of carriage and with the support of the curator and Max Toms to reproduce the plans from the original sketches and drawings of time.

In the fall Tony Walsh realized that we had to rehabilitate and create certain tools needed to make metal and wood pieces. A mechanical hammer was thus rehabilitated to forge the metal and create a woodcutter for the elliptical construction of the wheel spokes.



During the winter Tony and our team of volunteers concentrated on the wooden frame of the rack, this one is entirely made of naturally dried white oak coming from the sawmill of Tony. All pieces of wood are epoxy laminated this technique will allow a longer life since the gun will be exposed outside.

It quickly became clear to us that our planned timetable for spring, the opening of the museum, could not be achieved.



A tedious but most interesting stage; The manufacture of metal tires for wooden wheels. The metal strip must be manually cold-rolled to the diameter of the wheel less  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch. The metal will be heated on a wood fire to take the necessary expansion in order to slip it on the wheel. At this stage it is important to thoroughly water the assembly so as not to burn the wheel and allow its retraction.

Another very important lesson was learned; the more the project progressed and the more imposing the piece was, the more impossible to handle alone or without mechanical aid. So we did not reach the goal for the spring of 2016. It was over six months late that the piece was delivered to the Fort St-Jean Museum.



Tony Walsh, the project's prime contractor, estimates over 600 hours of work for the piece to which one can easily add 270 hours of volunteers from Pembroke, Gatineau, Belleville and Carleton Place. The carriage and wheels required more than 1,000 feet of white oak for their making. And finally Tony proof test it. (photo MJ Toms)



On October 19, Éric Ruel, curator of Fort St-Jean Museum came to Tony's forge in Lanark County and accepts the gun and a week later it was delivered at the museum. From left to right: Éric, Daniel, Chest, Terry, Max, Paul, "Grandma" & Tony and Darrel, all neighbours and volunteer on this mission.