



JANUARY – MARCH 2025 • VOLUME 49, EDITION 1

# SPARKS

NEWSLETTER OF THE WESTERN DEVELOPMENT MUSEUM



**Cut, Colour & Play**

WDM kids activity book

**Made in Saskatchewan**

Curling innovations

**My WDM Story**

A passion for steam

# Here is What is Happening at the WDM

## WDM Moose Jaw

January 2 – 31	75th Anniversary & Winter Vehicles Seek and Find
February 1 – 28	Accession Numbers & Porter Cap Seek and Find
February 22	Community Heritage Day
March 1 – 31	Women in History & Diamond Seek and Find
March 8	Smarter Science Better Buildings Public Open House

## WDM North Battleford

January 2 – 31	Snowflake Seek and Find
February 1 – 28	Vintage Logos Seek and Find
March 1 – 31	Prairie Life Seek and Find

## WDM Saskatoon

Through January 3	<i>Eaton's Once Upon a Christmas</i> exhibit
Through June 30	<i>Saskatchewan Sari-Sari: Filipino Roots, Prairie Growth</i> Filipino-Canadian Community History Exhibit
January 2 – 31	Telephones in Boomtown Seek and Find
January 17 – 19	36th Annual Saskatoon Farm Toy and Collectible Show*
January 21	Pop In and Play with the WDM
February 1 – 28	Vehicle Search Seek and Find
February 2	Heritage Festival of Saskatoon, 12:00 – 5:00 pm*
February 18	Smarter Science Better Buildings Public Day
March 1 – 31	Clocks in Boomtown Seek and Find
March 18	Pop In and Play with the WDM

## WDM Yorkton

January 2 – 31	Travel and Transportation Seek and Find
February 1 – 28	Made in Saskatchewan Seek and Find
February 16	Heritage Day, 1:00 – 4:00 pm
March 1 – 31	Warm and Cozy Seek and Find
March 8	The Art of Hygge, 1:00 – 4:00 pm

\* Not a WDM organized event

Events and dates listed here are subject to change. For details visit [wdm.ca](http://wdm.ca)



## More Stories, More Sharing

Happy New Year! I hope you and your family had a wonderful holiday season and are as excited as we are for the opportunities that 2025 brings.

2025 is another pivotal year for the WDM. As we move beyond our 75th anniversary, we find ourselves reflecting on the profound legacy we have built and the important work that lies ahead. Over the decades, the WDM has grown from two locations in North Battleford and Saskatoon, to five, with the WDM Yorkton opening in 1951, the WDM Moose Jaw in 1976 and the establishment of the Corporate Office in Saskatoon in 1984.

While we look back on 75 years of preserving and showcasing Saskatchewan's history, our mission remains unchanged. The WDM was founded to "stimulate interest

in the history of the economic and cultural development of western Canada" (WDM Act, 11c), and today, this directive is as vital as ever. As Saskatchewan's largest human history museum, we continue to honour this purpose while expanding our storytelling to be more inclusive and comprehensive.

From our origins focused on agricultural history - with one of North America's largest collections of steam traction engines - we have evolved to include exhibits that highlight the full breadth of Saskatchewan's economic and cultural heritage. Iconic displays like *Boomtown* and the *Heritage Farm and Village* are complemented by recent additions such as *Wapaha Sīka Oyate: Living Our Culture, Sharing Our Community at Pion-Era, 1955 - 69* in Saskatoon and the *J. Marjan Shoe Shop* in North Battleford.

We look forward to continuing to share Saskatchewan's rich cultural heritage. It is an honour to be part of this community, and I am eager to continue our journey together as we explore and share the stories that make Saskatchewan unique.

Sincerely,

Joan Kanigan, CEO

*Sparks* is published four times a year and delivered to WDM members. It's a great way to keep up to date on everything happening at all WDM locations.

Editor: Corinne Daelick

© 2025 Western Development Museum

**On the Cover:**

Photo time in Boomtown,  
WDM Saskatoon

## In This Edition . . .

### 8 My WDM Story

Steve Lipsit Shannon's passion for steam engines led him to the WDM Saskatoon over 50 years ago.

### 14 Saskatchewan People

Meet Tobias (Tom) Bjorndahl who was described by some as the "First Citizen of Watrous." Learn how he used his talents as an inventor to improve his favourite sport.

### 16 Safeguarding Artifacts

Not everything that happens at the WDM is visible to the public. Hear about a project to improve artifact storage thanks, in part, to funding from the Government of Canada.



## WDM Board of Directors

**Orlanda Drebit**  
Chair, Saskatoon

**Bernie Broughton**  
Secretary, Saskatoon

**Anita Fuller**  
Saskatoon

**Brian Martynook**  
Moose Jaw

## Hours of Operation

**WDM Moose Jaw**  
Tues – Sun 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

**WDM North Battleford**  
Tues – Sun 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

**WDM Yorkton**  
Tues – Fri 9:00 am – 5:00 pm  
Weekends 12:00 – 5:00 pm

**WDM Saskatoon**  
Tues – Wed 9:00 am – 5:00 pm  
Thurs 9:00 am – 8:00 pm  
Fri – Sun 9:00 am – 5:00 pm

**Boomtown Café (Saskatoon)**  
Tues – Sun 8:30 am – 3:30 pm

All WDM locations are closed on Mondays in January, February and March, and on statutory holidays.

# In A WDM Gift Shop Near You

## *My Saskatchewan Activity Book: From Lilies to Lacrosse*

As we continue to celebrate the WDM's 75th anniversary, we are excited to launch our Saskatchewan inspired activity book for children.

Did you know that curling is Saskatchewan's provincial sport or that burrowing owls build their nests underground? Children will learn about this and so much more about Saskatchewan in the WDM's *My Saskatchewan Activity Book: From Lilies to Lacrosse*. Filled with colouring pages and activity sheets, children can cut, colour and play while learning about Saskatchewan. The book features our province's official emblems, has information about plants and animals and explores things that Saskatchewanians like to do.

Available for purchase in all WDM gift shops, *My Saskatchewan Activity Book: From Lilies to Lacrosse* makes a great gift. Check it out for yourself.





# Volunteering at the WDM

## Three generations of sharing

When Erin Cooper, the WDM North Battleford's Visitor Services and Rentals Supervisor, began working at the WDM in 2019 she already had a relationship with the Museum. She had been volunteering for a number of years. Not only did Erin volunteer but so did her family. Over the past 40 years, 20 family members - who make up two families and three generations - have volunteered at the WDM North Battleford.

It all started with Erin's uncle, Ron Pilot. Ron took part in the WDM steam traction engine program including "steaming up" the WDM calliope for parades. From there Ron got involved with other Museum activities and invited his family to join him. That included Erin and her cousins who were part of the same 4-H club so they would come out to help with the summer show, *Those Were The Days*.

Today, there are eight family members who still volunteer on a regular basis. These include Erin, her parents Pat and Lorne Cooper, aunt Peggy Pilot, children Jess and Matt French, niece Maddi Herman and nephew Hudson Bullerwell. We asked Erin what keeps bringing her family out to volunteer at the WDM? Her response is similar to what we hear from other volunteers, "For the majority of the family, it is a way to keep traditions and knowledge alive for future generations. For the younger



Peggy (left) and Pat set up the rope making demonstration at Museum Days, June 8, 2023



Lorne explains grain cleaning to students at Museum Days, June 8, 2023



Erin (left) and Pat help in the canteen at the Great Pumpkin Masquerade, October 26, 2024

generation, they volunteered because their parents were there. From there, as they got older, they continued to come and volunteer.”

Members of the family have volunteered for a variety of WDM events ranging from school programs like Museum Days and Giddy Up and Whoa to public events like Light Up The Village, the Great Pumpkin Masquerade and History in Motion. If you’ve attended History in Motion or its predecessor, Those Were The Days, you’ve likely interacted with a member of the family. The Pilot and Cooper families can often be found teaching visitors how to make rope. Originally, it was Ron who was interested in learning to make rope and he instilled this interest in the rest of the family.

**Rope making is a great interactive activity that engages young and old. We now have three generations who are able to make rope and explain the significance and the impact of rope on rural families.**

Erin Cooper

As Erin explained, “It [rope making] is a great interactive activity that engages young and old. The young children are amazed how a single strand of sisal can be twisted and made into something useful. The older generation shares their stories of how they had to make rope as a young child. Rope making is a great activity for any age.” Erin went on to say that because the family could volunteer together, “We now have three generations who are able to make rope and explain the significance and the impact of rope on rural families.”

Thank you, Erin, Pat, Lorne, Peggy, Jess, Matt, Hudson and Maddi! We appreciate all you do! The WDM is grateful to these families, and others like them, who continue to support the WDM year after year by sharing their talents and time. We are honoured to be part of your family traditions and memories.



Matt volunteers at the Great Pumpkin Masquerade, October 26, 2024

## My WDM Story with Steve Lipsit Shannon, Saskatoon

"Passing on passion....it's a joy!"

We love sharing stories about the ways the WDM connects with Saskatchewan people and how your stories and messages continue to encourage us in what we do. In this issue, you'll meet long-time volunteer Steve Lipsit Shannon who began as a junior volunteer in 1971. Today, Steve is president of the Pioneer Threshermen's Club (PTC), he's a steam traction engine operator at the WDM Saskatoon and occasional steam locomotive engineer at the WDM Moose Jaw. Steve was born to run steam engines. Read on as Steve shares his passion for steam engines, the PTC and the WDM.

When I was three years old and living in Wynyard, my dad would take me to the railway station to see the steam locomotives that were still operating across the country. We then moved to Saskatoon and, at the age of 5, my aunt took me to Pion-Era at the WDM Saskatoon. All I wanted to do was hang out around the steam engines. For years I would go by myself and help the old engineers haul some wood and go for rides on the steamers.

Turn the page to when I was 12 years old, touring the annual hobby show at Prairieland Park. The PTC, a WDM volunteer group, had a display with the 18 hp Case portable engine. I went over and asked how to become a member. It was volunteer Allen Doherty who gave me a PTC membership form but stated they didn't have a junior membership. Not long after, I got an invitation to the spring general meeting as a new junior member. I sat beside volunteer Art Vessey who I had known for years through Scouts. I was impressed with the number of people that were around the room. Art said, "Wait until you see how many people are at the AGM in July!"

I bought the engineer's garb and on a regular weekend came out to help run an engine.



Steve prepares to "belt up" the steam engine to the threshing machine, 1979





Steve and Allen Doherty take the steam engine up the ramp, c. 1990

PHOTO CREDIT: STEVE LIPSIT SHANNON



George Dunlap, the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker and Steve, September 20, 1975

I met Charlie McCoy and at first thought he was an old grump until I found out he was partially deaf. We became friends instantly. 1971 was my first show at age 13.

That winter, I took the steam training course taught by my paper route customer, Brad Bradwell, and co-instructor Tom Brown. Even though I could not take the exam until I was 18, I was completely drawn to these engines and couldn't get enough. When I was 16, the hobby turned into a full-time summer job at the WDM and part-time on winter weekends...but that's another story.

I wrote the steam ticket exam when I turned 18. My mom said the steam exam results and my high school grades arrived the same day. Guess which one I opened first? I passed and was a fully licensed engineer and a high school graduate. Before getting my steam ticket, I would run and belt up an engine on my own for the World Threshing Competition

with a licensed operator sitting on the engine. (Editor's note: To belt up an engine means to use a large belt to connect the steam engine to a threshing machine. The steam engine would provide power for the threshing machine to thresh grain.)

The summer of 1975 kept me busy at the WDM working with George Dunlap on steam. Yes...I was getting paid to work with steam! I got to steam up and run out 22 engines for the show. I had worked with Allen Doherty on the ramp engine for about three years by then. I spent 25 years taking the engine up and down the ramp every year with Allen.

In August 1975, we were informed that the double-cylinder Rumley engine and a section of the 20-bottom plow would be transported to the future site of the John G. Diefenbaker Canada Centre at the University of



Steve (right) with former WDM chief engineer Tim Pomeroy at the Grade 4 Harvest program, September 2018

Saskatchewan. The former Prime Minister, one of my heroes, would turn the sod by pulling the throttle on his 80th birthday. Charlie McCoy was to be the fireman that day but called George to say he was ill. George called me to fill in because I had done the work getting the engine and plows ready. What followed was part of history, but again, that's another story.

I now serve as president of the PTC as did another man who I introduced to the club... my dad, Don Lipsit.

A huge thank you to Steve for sharing his story and his time, knowledge and passion for over 50 years.

Coming up in the July – September 2025 issue of *Sparks*, Steve tells us about spending time on a WDM steam engine with Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker.

What's your WDM story? Share your #WDM memories for a chance to win an exclusive branded WDM prize pack! Terms and conditions apply.





## Welcome!

The WDM welcomes our new Minister, the Honourable Alana Ross, who was appointed on November 7, 2024, by Premier Scott Moe.

The WDM is a legislated agency of the Province of Saskatchewan and operates within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport. Minister Ross is the new Minister of Parks, Culture and Sport and Minister Responsible for the Status

of Women, the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority and Tourism Saskatchewan.

Minister Ross, the MLA for Prince Albert Northcote, was first elected in the 2020 provincial election and re-elected in 2024. Prior to becoming an MLA, Alana Ross was employed in the province's health care sector as a front-line nurse, unit union rep, in the management team and as a post-secondary instructor. She has three grown children, one grandchild and resides in Prince Albert. The WDM looks forward to working with Minister Ross. Congratulations on your appointment.



## SaskTel Safe Kids Wristbands

Having a child lost in the Museum is scary for everyone. That's why the WDM has partnered with SaskTel for the SaskTel Safe Kids program. With this new program, the WDM is hoping to reduce the time it takes to reunite lost kids with their caregivers. The SaskTel Safe Kids program provides a wristband for kids under six years old. The wristband has a spot for the caregiver or parent to provide a cell phone number for WDM staff to quickly call in the event kids are separated from them during their time in the Museum. Thanks to our partnership with SaskTel, there is no charge for this program.

Thank you, SaskTel for supporting this worthwhile initiative!

**SaskTel** 

# BRAINBUSTERS

## Saskatchewan Places Word Scramble

How well do you know Saskatchewan towns, villages and waterways? Find out by unscrambling these names?

KELA RFIEKDEABNE	_____
NRYKOTO	_____
DBKAELJOR	_____
RDILYELNOSMT	_____
YASDN AYB	_____
CCNOOHRA	_____
TRCPSEE	_____
KERAD	_____
OMLHRCTA	_____
MUNRUAI TICY	_____

### Did you know...

The coldest temperature recorded in Saskatchewan was  $-56.7^{\circ}\text{C}$  recorded on February 1, 1893 in Prince Albert. This temperature broke previous records also set in Prince Albert in 1885 and 1886.

That's a **Sask Fact!**

### Search for the Saskatchewan Symbol

Hidden somewhere in this issue of *Sparks* is a Western Red Lily like this one. This lily is Saskatchewan's official flower. Can you find it?





# Spot the Difference

Cruise on into the WDM Moose Jaw to check out our groovy collection of cars like the 1962 Volkswagon Beetle. This popular German-made car was produced from 1938 – 2003. Who can remember playing “punch bug” every time you saw a Beetle drive by?

Look closely to spot **seven** differences between the exhibit scenes.



Answers on page 17.



# Tobias Nelson Bjorndahl

"We Make Everything for Curling Ice," proclaimed a promotional handbill for one of Tobias (Tom) Nelson Bjorndahl's curling inventions. The inventor and businessman from Watrous had a passion for curling so he used his creative skills to come up with ways to improve ice conditions for curlers.

Bjorndahl was born in Mandal, Norway on April 24, 1875, where he lived until his family moved to North Dakota, USA in 1882. In 1903, Bjorndahl and several other Norwegian immigrants travelled to Canada looking for new homesteads. Happy with what he found, the next year Bjorndahl moved with his wife and son to an area south of Little Manitou Lake. As the nearest town was Davidson, which was over 80 km away, area residents applied for a post office that would be on the Bjorndahl homestead called Mandal. Bjorndahl became the first postmaster and he also opened up a general store and blacksmith shop. In 1908, the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway was surveying for a new rail line in the area and chose a site one mile from Mandal. Needing a rail link, the entire village moved — buildings and all — to the new community called Watrous.

Bjorndahl sold his farm in 1910 and opened T.N.B Manufacturing (later renamed T.N.B. Machine Shop) where he could indulge his interest in machines and inventing. To help support the shop, he also became a dealer for farm implements, cars,



Tobias Bjorndahl in his IHC motor buggy in front of his Watrous home, 1908  
PHOTO CREDIT: WAYNE BJORNDahl/WATROUS MANITOU BEACH HERITAGE CENTRE

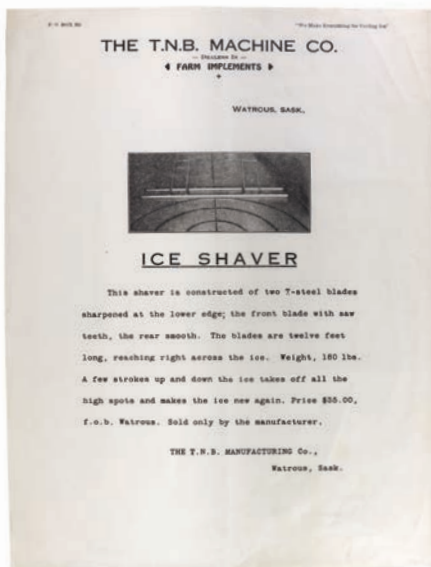


Bjorndahl's machine shop in Watrous, 1910  
PHOTO CREDIT: WAYNE BJORNDahl/WATROUS MANITOU BEACH HERITAGE CENTRE

cream separators and sewing machines. His first patented invention was a grain dump rack for threshing outfits, while his most successful was a grain saving sieve. Developed in the early 1940s, the grain saver was attached to the tailing chaffer to help prevent grain loss.

It was in his shop that Bjorndahl was able to use his love of inventing to support another passion — curling. He was an avid curler and passionate about the game. Starting in the 1920s, his curling inventions included a curling ice sprinkler, curling ice smoothing drag and an ice shaver. The ice sprinkler (WDM-1979-S-181) was a metal box with a sprinkler pipe attachment that was used for placing droplets of water on the ice surface or pebbling. As the water droplets freeze into ice pebbles, they create a surface that minimizes friction so that curling rocks slide further. Although the process looks different today, the T.N.B. ice sprinkler was an early prototype.

The smoothing drag (WDM-1979-S-180) was created to help clean the ice. Bjorndahl's version used a sheepskin hung over a wooden rod that was then dragged across the ice to clear away debris.



Promotional handbill for the T.N.B. ice shaver, WDM-1980-S-172



T.N.B. ice sprinkler for pebbling curling ice, WDM-1979-S-181

While the WDM does not have an ice shaver in our collection, we do have a handbill (WDM-1980-S-172) promoting the device. As its name implies, the ice shaver is a method of smoothing out the ice which improves the consistency of shot making. The handbill states, "A few strokes up and

down the ice takes off all the high spots and makes the ice new again." What curler wouldn't want to compete under these conditions?

Bjorndahl continued to curl and invent through the 1940s until a concussion forced him to stop. He died on December 26, 1955.

# Behind The Scenes

## Improving Artifact Storage

The WDM Corporate Office is embarking on a large-scale collections project to implement critical upgrades in artifact storage to meet fire code regulations. This work will ensure that artifacts in storage are cared for now and for future generations.

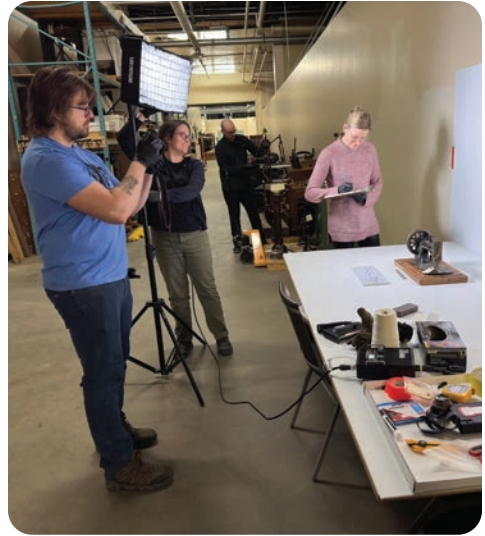
The responsibilities of this project include removing the old wooden shelving and installing new wire decking on artifact storage pallet racks. Volunteers have also helped by making new pallets for artifacts to rest on. Thousands of artifacts have been moved and their conditions/properties updated, and we've taken fresh photographs of each one. These updated locations and images will make it much easier for our staff to access and identify the artifacts in the future. Bringing these changes also provides additional safety measures for both staff and artifacts alike.

Thanks to the Government of Canada for partially funding this project.

Funded by the Government of Canada



Artifact storage before updates began



Staff update condition reports and photograph artifacts as they are moved during storage upgrades

L-R: Curatorial Assistant Intern Dall Perkins, Research Associate Heather Engelbert, Collections Coordinator Oliver Friesen and Registrar Melissa Stus



Artifacts reorganized and ready to be reshelved

## WDM 75th Anniversary Adventure Passport

Since April 2024, you've seen us promoting the WDM 75th Anniversary Adventure Passports. By visiting all four WDM locations and getting a stamp on your passport, you receive a special edition WDM t-shirt and are entered in a draw for a WDM prize package. Of the visitors who have redeemed their passports so far, almost one third are from outside Saskatchewan! We've had visitors from Victoria, BC to St. Raymond, PQ and every province in-between as well as folks from California and Arizona who visited each WDM! A little bit of Saskatchewan has travelled home with these visitors. We hope you'll take the opportunity to explore all four WDMs too!

For contest details and rules visit [wdm.ca/75years](http://wdm.ca/75years).

The contest ends April 2, 2025.




Nancy and Ron Ahsmuhs of LaQuinta, California, USA, completed their passports and show off their special edition WDM t-shirts, July 2024



Spot the Difference

### Saskatchewan Word Scramble

URANIUM CITY  
MORTLACH  
DRAKE  
SCEPTRE  
CORONACH  
SANDY BAY  
LLOYDMINSTER  
BJORKDALE  
YORKTON  
LAKE DUFFENBAKER

Search for the Saskatchewan Symbol  The Western Red Lily is on page 7.

### Brainbuster Answers



### WDM MOOSE JAW

#### Snowplow

WDM-1977-MJ-17

For airports in Saskatchewan, a very important piece of equipment is a snowplow to keep runways clear. This snowplow, a SnoGo Model SU 5 ton, cleared airport runways for 35 years, including several years at Canadian Forces Base - 15 Wing Moose Jaw. It was retired from service in April 1976.

The SnoGo snowplow was designed by Klauer Manufacturing Company of Dubuque, Iowa, USA. It was said that its rotary snow remover revolutionized snow removal. This design was made specifically for use on heavy road equipment that was used to clear roads and airport runways. This plow was manufactured in 1941 by FWD Corp (Canada) Ltd. of Kitchener, ON.



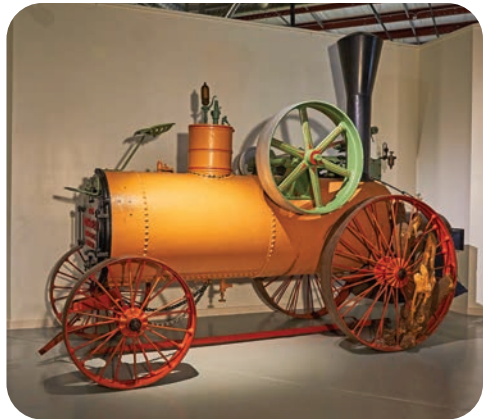
### WDM NORTH BATTLEFORD

#### Portable Steam Engine

WDM-1973-S-313

The WDM has an outstanding collection of 19th century Canadian-built, portable steam engines, including this extremely rare engine built in the 1880s by R. Whitelaw of Woodstock, ON. In 1903, it was purchased second-hand by Albert Dickie and John Allan who used it in the Creelman district. With larger machines becoming available, this small engine was retired in 1912.

If you look closely at the rear wheel, you'll notice a tree growing through it. The tree came with the engine at the time of donation. Like many old engines, it had been abandoned to nature. Fortunately, it found a home at the WDM in 1958.





## Golden Jubilee Sweater

1955 marked Saskatchewan's 50th anniversary. The Golden Jubilee was a year-long celebration with homecomings, parades and events. Regina hosted the Brier—the Canadian Men's Curling Championship—with a record breaking 51,725 fans attending. Avonlea's Garnet Campbell team won Saskatchewan's first ever Brier.

For the curling crazy province, craft company Mary Maxim created a Golden Jubilee curling sweater pattern. Knitters could order the pattern and make their own. This sweater is a replica, made in 2009 by WDM volunteer Bea Mennie with yarn donated by Mary Maxim. Pictured here is the back of the sweater which cannot be seen when it's on display.



## Wall-O-Matic

In a 1952 *Saskatoon Star Phoenix* article, the Wall-O-Matic was described as, "a little gadget about the size of a payphone mounted on the restaurant table or on the bar. For a nickel you get a choice of melodies, old and new.... you can have half an hour of melody, or at any rate, the assurance that, in your cubicle, you won't have to endure the musical taste of others."

The Wall-O-Matic was introduced in 1949 by the J.P. Seeburg Music Corporation of Chicago, Illinois, USA. This small jukebox became popular in the 1950s - 60s. This Wall-O-Matic features 1950s pop and country music hits and even includes a polka.



Western Development Museum – Corporate Office  
2935 Lorne Avenue  
Saskatoon, SK S7J 0S5



## WDM Corporate Office

For SPARKS and membership questions  
please contact us at:

Phone: 306-934-1400  
Toll Free: 1-800-363-6345  
Email: [info@wdm.ca](mailto:info@wdm.ca)

## WDM Corporate Office Business Hours

Monday – Friday 8:30 am – 4:30 pm  
Closed statutory holidays



[WDM.CA](http://wdm.ca)



#SaskInspired



Saskatchewan Senior Curling Champs banner, 1965  
WDM-1973-NB-13615