

Area man popular school visitor

# History of Welland canals brought to life by models

By JOAN WILEY  
Standard Reporter

**WELLAND** — When Lemuel (Lem) Hogue reminisces about the history of the old Welland Canals, he knows of what he speaks. He is of the fourth generation of his family to work on the waterways.

Lem's great-grandfather, William Casey, helped dig the first canal.

One grandfather, a barn framer, was enlisted to build trestles over the canal and Welland river. His other grandfather worked on the slow-moving

scows which transported goods up the canal.

His father operated a blacksmith's shop and, from time to time, was asked to do repair work on the ships.

Lem fondly remembers his own days on the Charles Dick, a scow which carried gravel to build the flight locks at Thorold.

Lem, born on March 25 or 26 ("My mom says one thing, my Dad says another"), 1904, does more than simply recall his canal-faring days.

To bridge the gap between older and younger generations, Lem has hand-built several

small working models of the canal bridges.

When invited, Lem takes these models to area schools and demonstrates them to the children. And he's not above telling them "a few yarns", he said with a twinkle in his eye.

Like feathers in a cap, Lem records the schools he's been to. He has made a trip to Ottawa ("the students didn't know what clay was"), Toronto, St. Catharines, the Niagara Centre for Youth Care for emotionally-handicapped children in Lincoln (formerly the Bethel School), and, of course, Welland.

"I run overtime in almost

every session," Lem told The Standard. "Even the caretakers mention the kids have to be chased away because they enjoy themselves so much."

Before the children operate the working bridge models, Lem tells them a few details of the operations.

He got his gift of the gab as a child from a public speaking course offered by his church minister.

"My minister taught me how to stand up, speak up and shut up. He also told me that if I felt myself freezing, to tell a joke. So I do," he said.

The tales he tells usually

result in questions from his young audience.

Lem recalls the animosity towards him when he was made a deckhand right away instead of the lowlier cabin-boy position. Despite the shenanigans of the salt-water second mate to get Lem into trouble because of his fresh-water status, Lem always managed to escape the wrath of his superiors through the help of his big sailor friend, Johnny.

Johnny became Lem's friend after the pair of them were painting the side of a ship in Port Maitland. Lem, who weighed 126 pounds at the time, and Johnny, whose hands were twice the size of Lem's, were filling their brushes in the wind.

Lem, upwind from Johnny, lifted the paintbrush very carefully so as not to splatter the toughened sailor beside him.

"Are you scared?" asked Johnny.

"No," replied Lem.

"Then what the hell are you shaking for?" laughed Johnny.

**Special protector**

From that day, according to Lem, Johnny was a special protector.

"He was my fairy godmother," Lem recalled fondly.

Lem reminisces about the types of floating craft that made their way down the canal. He remembers the scows, flat-bedded boats, that were pulled by oxen and carried about 20 tons of cargo. He said Welland clay was lugged to St. Catharines to build the canal banks.

Lem also remembers the first East Main Street bridge in Welland. The bridge would be moved by hand to allow passing scows through by means of a hand-operated swinging device.

Although there was one man on duty to move the bridge, school boys would often hang around and help. In appreciation, the scow's cook would toss them apples and oranges.

Lem's interest does not lie only with the canals. Between his school visits, he teaches painting at Sunset Haven in Welland on Wednesdays and at Extindicare Thursdays. There are also plans in the works to begin art classes for the handicapped at Niagara College.

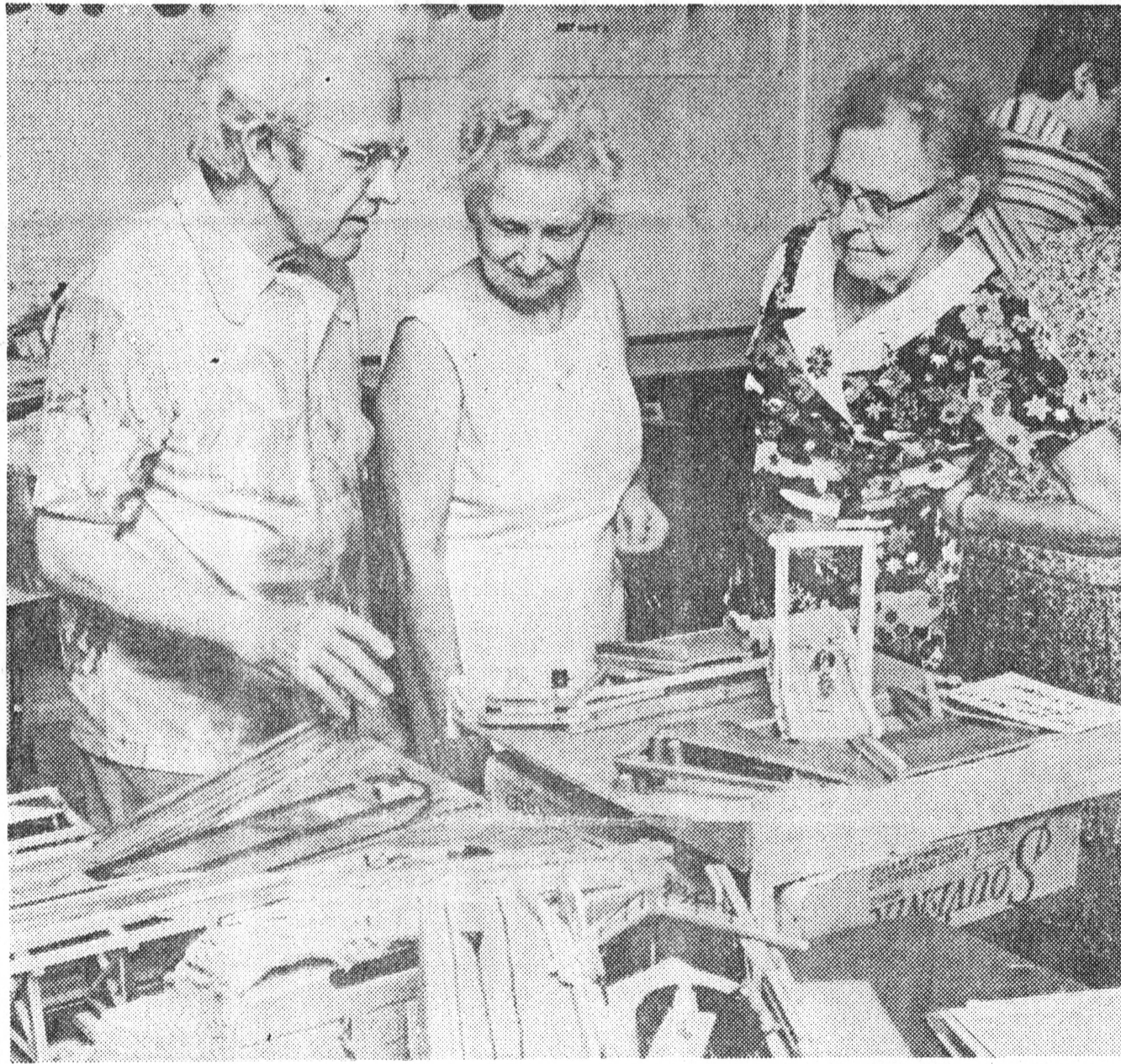
"I painted before I went to kindergarten," said Lem. He used as his canvas the cardboard pieces separating Shredded Wheat biscuits. His paint was mustard.

Through correspondence, he completed a magazine and book illustration course. Now he works in oils.

His wife of 50 years, Elizabeth, is one of his greatest fans. She patiently waited while Lem was being interviewed by The Standard at the Welland Historical Museum where his canal models have been displayed.

Accolades also come from Mary Sullivan, the museum's curator.

"Lem is just wonderful. He knows so much about the canals," she said.



Lem Hogue explains some of the finer details of his working models of Welland Canal structures to visitors to Welland Historical Museum. Lem built the models from his recollections as a deckhand

on the Charles Dick, a ship which carried gravel to build the flight locks at Thorold. Looking on with interest are Sophie Godak and Elsie Hewitt of Northland Manor, Port Colborne.

— Staff photo by Mike Conley