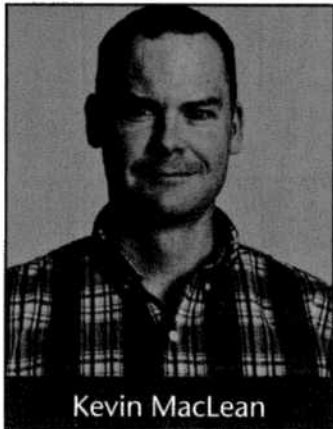


# Firearms legislation

The Galt Museum and Archives is a regional, human history institution located in Lethbridge, Alberta. Last year, its Museum Collections Technician, Kevin MacLean, “hit a wall” when he attempted to register two handguns with the RCMP’s Canada Firearms Centre. The handguns were service weapons formerly owned and used by the Lethbridge Regional Police Service (LRPS).



The Galt Museum & Archives stewards hundreds of artifacts related to the history of the LRPS. The foundation of the LRPS collection, including material dating back to the 1920s, was developed over decades by the Service and was donated to the Galt in 1997. Since then, the museum is a regular recipient of LRPS materials/tools as they are abandoned and replaced by the police.

On October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008 I noted with interest an article in the city’s *Lethbridge Herald* newspaper, reporting the police service’s intent to replace its thirteen-year-old Smith & Wesson (S&W) semi-automatic handgun(s). I immediately contacted the service, expressing the museum’s interest in acquiring an example, and learned that they were already committed to donating a handgun to the Galt. The museum was in possession of the service’s preceding sidearm — a revolver — and we thought it made great sense for the Galt to solicit and preserve the next evolutionary “step” in the LRPS’s firearms for posterity. Also, if the museum did not seize the opportunity to collect a handgun directly/immediately from the service, it would decrease the likelihood that the museum would possess one in the future.

And so, all proceeded well when the police service delivered two examples of their obsolete S&W handguns — one detective issue and one patrol officer issue — to us on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Both handguns were recommended for acceptance by the Galt’s acquisitions’ committee and approved for accession by the board of directors. I advanced the appropriate gift paperwork which came back signed by the LRPS Chief Tom McKenzie on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009. And that’s when all the “fun” began.

Current practice at the Galt Museum and Archives considers the registration/processing of firearm donations as complete when the Galt’s ownership is made known to, and is recognized by, the Canadian Firearms Centre. This final, external “registration” is undertaken only after the donor signs and returns the Gift Agreement. In contrast to past firearms’ registrations, however, officials with the Canadian Firearms Centre stipulated that the registration of the police donation could not occur due to the handgun’s assigned “Public Service Agency” status. In other words, the museum could not legally register or own the donated weapons.

“How can this be?” I wondered. Firearms donated by the service had been registered for the museum before, not to mention that the police service is even known to sell its handguns to its members as keepsakes. Provincial and local firearms officials all responded with the same message, “The museum cannot register the weapons and it is not legally entitled to collect them.” The reason, they say, was the passage of the *Public Agents Firearms Regulations (SOR/98-203)*<sup>1</sup>, related to the disposition and transfer of firearms in the service of police, which came into effect on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2008. Henceforth, the only museums, coast to coast, in a position to acquire public agency weapons were those directly attached to a police service — such as The Calgary Police



This S&W Model 13 .357 Magnum Revolver, formerly owned by the Lethbridge City Police, was donated to the museum by a retired member in 1996. The revolver was in service with the Police from approximately 1987 to 1995.  
Photo: Courtesy of the Galt Museum & Archives.

“I was, and still am, concerned that if the regulations are not amended, a significant, tangible representation of law enforcement — its service weapons — will begin, through regulation, to disappear from the historical record on a national scale.”



The image is a representation of a staged Police Range Qualification taken in Lethbridge in 1998, to promote the Service to potential recruits. Note that no hearing protection is being worn. (L-R include: Const. Rich Kurina, Const. Scott Penich and Const. Darcy Murray.) Photo: Courtesy of the Lethbridge Regional Police Service.

Interpretive Centre, or the RCMP. Even the fact that the Galt was a municipal government department — like the police — had no bearing on its being assigned “Public Service Agency” status. A firearms officer told me that museums, and their role in the preservation of the country’s law enforcement history, were “likely not even considered when the regulation was crafted”.

I was, and still am, concerned that if the regulations are not amended, a significant, tangible representation of law enforcement — its service weapons — will begin, through regulation, to disappear from the historical record on a national scale. The only present means by which a museum can acquire a public agency firearm post-October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2008 is if it is deactivated in advance of its transfer, which diminishes its intrinsic historic/scientific and educational values.

The issue has been made known by Galt staff to the Canadian Museums Association and, with their support, it is hoped that the RCMP will review the

regulations with regards to the impact they have on the preservation of law enforcement’s material culture across Canada. Until then, the LRPS and the museum are committed to the two handguns’ future stewardship at the Galt. The museum is presently in possession of the handguns and acknowledges the Lethbridge Regional Police Service’s current legal ownership via an indefinite loan agreement. **M**

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#### Note

1. For more information, readers can reference the regulations on the Federal Department of Justice’s website <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/F-11.6/SOR-98-203/index.html> and the RCMP’s website [www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/information/ppa-pap/faq-eng.htm](http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cfp-pcaf/information/ppa-pap/faq-eng.htm).

