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History in the jeans: Royal Alberta Museum launches Piece by Piece: The GWG Story

Edmonton... Cowboy King. Red Strap. Scrubbies. Its signature-brand jeans may not be available anymore, but the Great Western Garment Company (GWG) is fondly remembered by generations of Canadians.

The Royal Alberta Museum's new virtual exhibition presents a colourful, evocative and nostalgic look at GWG's clothing, producers and customers. This online exhibition was developed in part by the Royal Alberta Museum and the Virtual Museum of Canada, an initiative of the Department of Canadian Heritage. A host of national partners also provided funding and expertise. The exhibition can be viewed at: www.royalalbertamuseum.ca/virtualExhibit/GWG/en/index.html.

Founded in Edmonton in 1911, GWG became Canada's largest work-wear manufacturing company and a cultural icon. After nearly 100 years of operation, GWG manufacturing moved to Bangladesh in March 2004. Visitors to the virtual exhibition will get the inside scoop from former employees through a collection of interviews; trace the evolution of the jean jacket; find out why new jeans used to be as stiff as cardboard (until Scrubbies came along); and see original advertising images, including the controversial Bum Jeans TV ad from 1980. The website also features curriculum-based programs for junior high and high school students, emphasizing themes of immigration and globalization.

In creating this virtual exhibition, the Royal Alberta Museum depended on the assistance and expertise of the Provincial Archives of Alberta, Alberta Labour History Institute, D. Active Productions, and Catherine C. Cole & Associates. Funding was provided by The Virtual Museum of Canada, Alberta Francophone Secretariat and Young Canada Works.

The project would not have been possible without the assistance of the many former GWG and Levi Strauss workers who agreed to be interviewed and provided information, artifacts and photographs. Initial research was funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, the Alberta Museums Association, the City of Edmonton, the Edmonton Cultural Capital Community Arts Program, the Edmonton Community Foundation and the University of Alberta.

For information on the Virtual Museum of Canada, visit www.virtualmuseum.ca; for the Royal Alberta Museum, visit www.royalalbertamuseum.ca.

Museum, located at 12845-102 Avenue, Edmonton.

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