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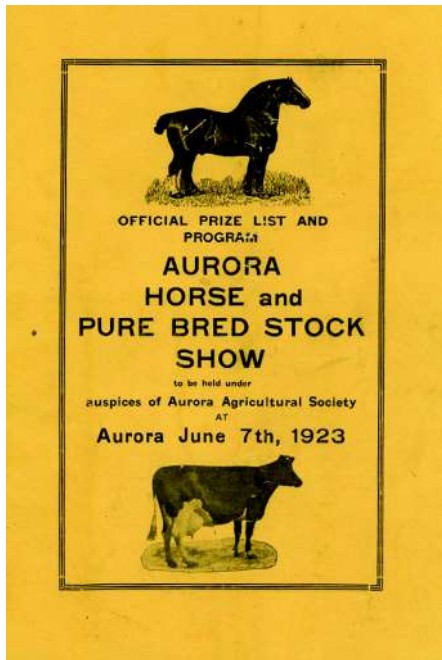
# Horse Show drew crowds, spurred community spirit

*By Ronen Grunberg, Director*

When our daughter was very young, our family made it a point of attending the Aurora Fair and Horse Show in Machell Park. Held in June, it signalled the unofficial start of summer.

We went to see the horses, of course, but there was so much more. There were the entertaining SuperDogs, the midway rides, the popcorn, and the sheer joy of mingling in the park with friends and neighbours after a long winter.

The Aurora Fair and Horse Show has a long history of bringing people together. Originally, the event was called the "Horse and Pure Bred Stock Show." Held in the Town Park (at least as early as 1922, records show), it included exhibits of quilting, baking, and horticulture. Many horse events were a part of the show including Junior Jumping Class, Beautiful Pony Contest, as well as four and six horse teams. A notable year in the show was 1962 when "Bleu Beau", ridden by Tom Gayford, won the J.H. Crang Trophy as well as the Town of Aurora Shield. Bleu



Beau also cleared a seven-foot, one-inch jump at Madison Square Garden prompting the Aurora Banner to say that Bleu Beau is "the best horse in the world."

The Aurora Fair and Horse Show was just one of the many fairs that were part of the fabric of Ontario in the 1900s. Given the fact that life on a farm could be lonely and isolating, fairs held a social significance. They allowed farmers and their families to share their experiences and knowledge and feel a sense of community.

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## Upcoming Events

- Speaker Series
- Strawberry Tea
- How to Care for Series
- Scotch Tasting
- Victorian Harvest Tea
- Hillary House Ball

See page 3 for more information

# President's Message

Patricia Wallace, AHS President

We're almost there! It looks like we are close to knocking this pandemic on the head here in Ontario. And not a minute too soon. It can't be said often enough how grateful we all are to those who have worked tirelessly to see us through this and our hearts go out to those who have lost in so many ways.

For the AHS, it's members, volunteers and staff, things have been ramping up since the last edition of The Attic! We are doing our very best to continue heritage programming through virtual events like the **Speaker Series**, our **new How To Care For Series** and a **Strawberry Tea!**

Some fabulous fundraisers are in the works, too, such as a **Scotch Tasting** and, yes, the **Hillary House Ball 2021!** Both of these are virtual events. We are planning at least one in-person event for September (if allowed). We will bring back the sold-out **Victorian Harvest Tea** on the lawn at Hillary House.

Also, we are excited to refresh our relationship with the **Aurora Sports Hall of Fame**. Leaders from our organizations have been discussing ways to collaborate for the betterment of our community. The first of such efforts with take place in September.

Speaking of collaboration, we are so pleased to partner with the **Toronto Railway Museum/Toronto Railway Historical Association** for our July speaker. Check out the Speaker Series list to find out more about both of these.

Partnerships are a key to increasing the profiles of all involved parties. To this end, we have established a **Sponsorship Program** that will offer advertising opportunities to local and regional businesses and, at the same time, increase the profile of the AHS and bring in much-needed maintenance dollars for Hillary House. Contact me for more information.

Finally, a big welcome to our summer staff, with gratitude to Canada Summer Jobs for making this possible. Also, thank you to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for providing a Resilient Communities Fund Grant that will allow us to purchase goods and services as we get back in the swing of things.

"See" you soon!  
Patricia Wallace

# Shape a Young Mind through Your Sponsorship

An important purpose of the Aurora Historical Society is to promote the study of history. The AHS History Award is available to five secondary schools in Aurora. The schools are Cardinal Carter CHS, Dr. G.W. Williams SS, St. Max Kolbe CHS, Aurora High School, and Ecole Secondaire Catholique Renaissance. The award consists of \$75, as well as a family AHS membership. It is given to students who show a keen interest in the study of history.

For the upcoming academic year, the AHS invites businesses or individuals to sponsor this important award. By doing so, an individual or business can have an important impact on a young student who has an interest in the study of history. Your contribution will be acknowledged on the AHS website and will be featured in an upcoming edition of The Attic.

If you're interested in becoming a sponsor, please contact the Aurora Historical Society at 905-727-8991.

## AURORA HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2021

### Board of Directors 2020

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<b>Aurora Sports Hall of Fame Rep</b> .....	Bob McRoberts

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<b>Newsletter Editor, Volunteer</b> .....	Christine McLure
<b>Newsletter Layout, Volunteer</b> .....	Brenda Snape

We invite members to submit suggestions for inclusion in the newsletter. Please email [community@aurorahs.com](mailto:community@aurorahs.com).

# Events

## Strawberry Tea - June 26th

Break out your fascinators, it's Tea Time! Treat yourself to a strawberry-themed afternoon tea to celebrate the start of summer. Indulge in freshly baked desserts from local Maple Teahouse and Bake Shop, farm fresh strawberries, a beautiful assortment of teas, a specially selected gift from our Gift Shop and more. While enjoying your goodies, get steeped in the history of tea with a virtual presentation by Lianne Harris, History & Culture Specialist.



Tickets are \$31.50 per person and include a Dessert and Tea package as well as the Zoom link for the presentation. Package pick-up is Saturday, June 26th between 10am - 12pm. The online portion of the event will take place from 2pm - 3pm.



## How to Care for Series



Proper care and maintenance of the heirlooms in your personal collection will ensure that they stay safe for future generations. Show and brag about your favourite family items while learning the simple tips and tricks to preserve them at home. These events will be virtual,

pre-registration required.

### July 8th at 7pm

Care of photos/film, books, and documents

### August 12th at 7pm

Care of textiles, furniture, paintings, hanging works of art

### October 7th at 7pm

Care of glass, ceramics, and metal objects

These events are admission by donation.

Click here to register.



## Speaker Series

Our virtual Speakers Series has been a great success so far. Check out the upcoming speakers.

### June 23rd

The Bachelorette New France: Bigamy, Incest, Witchcraft and Murder with Dawn Kelly & Carol Ufford.

Tickets are \$7.35



### July 21st

"Rails Through Aurora" with Adam Peltenburg.

Presentation in partnership with the Toronto Railway Historical Association.

Tickets are \$10.50



### September 22nd

Life Adventures from 0 to 140 km/h with Karen Stemmler, 2016 Aurora Sports Hall of Fame inductee.

Presentation in partnership with the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame.

Tickets are \$10.50



## Scotch Tasting

Mark your calendars for the virtual Hillary House Scotch Tasting on **September 9, 2021**.

Presented in collaboration with the Aurora Whisky Society. Sip on a hand-picked selection of 5 premium scotches guided by a master taster and brought to you from Hillary House, all from the comfort of your own home. Tickets \$125/person.





# Horse Show drew crowds, spurred community spirit

*Continued from page 1*

In time, Aurorans headed to the Town Park not only to attend the fair and horse show but also to plunk down 25 cents to see Dr. Ballard's Mutt Show. Housed in the adjacent Armoury, dogs from all over Canada and the U.S. came to compete in the show. According to The Aurora Banner, in 1933 the show broke records in that it was "the first one-day show in Canada ever to afford four championship points to its winners."

Later on, Dr. Ballard's Mutt Show was incorporated into the Aurora Horse Show. While it was not as big as the original show, it nevertheless delighted children who were now allowed to enter their dogs into various contests, including best dressed, longest tail, shortest tail, fastest eater and others.

The Aurora Fair and Horse Show ran without pause until 1942 when it was suspended due to a shortage of resources and because farmers were needed to help with the war effort. They couldn't be spared for frivolous things such as agricultural fairs. The show resumed in 1946, drawing a record 4,000 to 5,000 attendees.

Despite its popularity, the Aurora Fair and Horse Show struggled financially. In 1955, the show made a profit of just \$4.50 because the prizes exceeded the profit from the entry fees. Regardless, Aurora Agricultural Society executives decided to continue with the show and, in 1971, the show moved to Machell Park, where it could more easily accommodate the crowds.

The show eventually met its demise in 2006. I was so saddened to read the news. The Aurora Agricultural Society's president Andy MacPherson cited a "chronic shortage of volunteers and funding" in The Aurora Banner as the main problem.

Even though the Aurora Fair and Horse Show is no longer, we still have the need to gather as a community (as COVID-19 pointedly reminds us). To this end, the show has been replaced by popular favourites such as the Aurora Farmers Market, concerts and movies in the park and the

Haunted Forest. These events don't replace the historical significance of the Aurora Fair and Horse Show but, like the show, they engender a sense of belonging. And that is what makes Aurora strong.

The Aurora Historical Society is partnering with the Aurora Museum and Archives to plan a 100th-anniversary celebration of the Aurora Fair and Horse Show in 2022. If you have stories, memories, and/ or objects related to the Fair and Horse Show and would like to share, please email Alicia Cherayil at [ACherayil@aurora.ca](mailto:ACherayil@aurora.ca)



*Image courtesy of Aurora Museum & Archive*

The Aurora Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the financial support of:



Fondation  
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Parks  
Canada

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# AHS Road Trip!

Ontario's historic sites and museums have so much to offer the history buff and the tourist. Take a virtual road trip and explore these two featured sites. We hope to make this a regular feature in The Attic. Enjoy!

## Dundurn National Historic Site

Once home to Sir Allan Napier MacNab, railway magnate, lawyer and Premier of the United Canadas (1854-1856) and his family, today Dundurn Castle tells the story of the family who lived above stairs and the servants who lived and worked below stairs to support their affluent lifestyle.

Learn more about this site and take a virtual tour of it and other Hamilton Civic Museums here:

<https://museumshamilton.com/#/pano/dundurn-main-frontentrance>

## Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site

At a bend in the Sydenham River near the town of Dresden stands Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site. The museum – built on the site of the Black settlement that Rev. Josiah Henson helped found in 1841 – preserves the settlement where Henson and his wife Nancy lived. Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site takes its name from Harriet Beecher Stowe's successful 1852 anti-slavery novel Uncle Tom's Cabin, featuring a character named Tom (loosely based on Josiah Henson).

Learn more about this site and take a virtual tour here:

<https://www.heritagetrust.on.ca/en/index.php/properties/uncle-toms-cabin>

## Save the Date

### Victorian Harvest Tea

Save the Date for the 2nd Annual Victorian Harvest Tea on **September 18th**. Enjoy an autumn themed afternoon tea menu on the beautiful grounds of Hillary House.

Tickets will also go on sale soon. Watch your inbox!



*Congratulations*

to AHS member and supporter,  
**Eric McCartney** on being named  
**Aurora's 2021 Citizen of the Year!**

*Well deserved, Eric!*



## Hillary House Ball 2021 House Party Edition

Save the Date

**Saturday, October 23rd.**

**IT'S BACK!** In a virtual format.

More info to follow.

# Focus on Artifacts

By Kathleen Vahey, Curator

## ***Mysterious artifact in the Hillary Collection***

While walking through the rooms in Hillary House, it isn't uncommon for an object to catch my eye... and curiosity. Recently I was in the Study and noticed an interesting box sitting on a bookshelf. As a Curator, I am always eager to learn more about the artifacts on display, so I picked up this box to see if there was something special inside and to my surprise, it wouldn't open! I was perplexed. What was this object? Luckily, it was catalogued into the AHS collections database, so off I went to my computer where I found the answer.



It is a puzzle box! A decorative box that can only be opened by moving and shifting parts of the box in a certain order, like a puzzle!

In the Renaissance period, furniture and jewellery boxes with hidden compartments were common; however, puzzle boxes only became popular across Europe and Asia in the 19th century. Boxes like the one at Hillary House were a common souvenir for tourists visiting the hot springs of Japan. In Japan, these boxes were originally used to keep children safe from dangerous items like needles, for workers to safeguard their belongings, or to send secret messages. The decoration on these boxes is also important. The mosaic style is representative of a Japanese handicraft called parquetry, in which the artist uses wood and varnish to create a thin decorative sheet that is then attached to the outside of the puzzle box.

Initially, there were only three artisans who made Japanese puzzle boxes: Mr. Takajiro Ohkawa, Mr. Tatsunosuke Okiyama, and Mr. Kikukawa. Eventually these men took on apprentices who carried on their



work. At the height of production, there were 150 artisans and apprentices in the Hakone region of Japan. Unfortunately, Japan's involvement in the Second World War led to a dramatic decline in the tourism industry and many of the puzzle box artisans were conscripted into the army. Today, there are only nine puzzle box masters!

Simple Japanese puzzle boxes can have as few as four moves, while elaborate ones can require 70 or more. With this new knowledge, I set out to open the one I had discovered. With a little luck and a lot of patience, I solved the five-step puzzle and opened the box to reveal a small elephant figurine and a flyer from Japan inside. Proud of myself, I carefully closed the box, placed it back in the Study, and went back to my desk only to discover we have another puzzle box in the Hillary Collection! A challenge for another day...

Griffin, A. (2014). *History of Puzzle Boxes*. Heartwood Creations. <https://heartwood.com/blogs/history/history-of-puzzle-boxes>

Joy, A. (2017). *A Brief History of Japanese Puzzle Boxes*. Culture Trip. <https://theculturetrip.com/asia/japan/articles/a-brief-history-of-japanese-puzzle-boxes/>



# Headlines from History

## Aurora Banner June 1904

"A portion of the smoke stack on the shoe factory was blown down during the heavy gale one evening last week. It is the intention of the company to build a brick smokestack for the new boiler which will be installed as soon as possible."

## Aurora Banner June 1921

"Arrangements are well underway for the big annual field day here on July 1st, under the auspices of the Veterans Club. A Football Tournament has been arranged and already some of the best clubs in the country have entered. [...] One of the chief attractions will be the exhibition of hurdling by horses from Sir Amelius Jarvis' farm. [...] The day will conclude with a big boxing bout and dance. The Veterans are anxious to have the hearty cooperation of every citizen to make this the biggest and best celebration ever held here."

# The Great Canadian Giving Challenge!

This June, every \$1 you donate through CanadaHelps is an automatic entry for the Aurora Historical Society to win \$20,000.

You can click on the link below, or call the Aurora Historical Society office today at 905-727-8991.

*A big thank you to all the 2020 AHS Donors and Volunteers! You truly make a difference.*

<https://aurorahs.com/canadahelps-donation-page>



# Gift Shop



Recently, we received a donation of Dorothy Clark McClure illustrated plates, featuring historic landmarks in Ontario. Dorothy was a gifted and influential artist, and also a past President of the Aurora Historical Society. The plates are gold trimmed and feature places of interest such as Hillary

House (The Manor), Aurora United Church, Casa Loma, the Flatiron Building, Union Station, Old Massey Hall, Black Creek Pioneer Village, the Stephen Leacock Home, Old City Hall in Toronto and Airlie United Church. These are available for purchase. Call the office to inquire.

## DONATIONS ACCEPTED

We are accepting donations of new and gently used giftware. We have a no-contact/after-hours drop off area available for your convenience. Call for details.

*(Thank you, but we cannot accept books, clothing, or cracked/broken items.)*

PLUS, watch our website for featured items!

## In Memoriam

Sadly, Robert (Bob) James Hillary passed away on Sunday, May 2, 2021, at 80 years of age. Robert's parents were Holly (son of Robert Michael and Edith Hillary) and Mary Hillary. Robert used to visit his parents at Hillary House and noted it was always a special occasion. We extend our condolences to Robert's family.



# Welcome to Emerging Museum Professionals

*The AHS is fortunate to have two summer employees join our team for the season, thanks to a federal grant from Canada Summer Jobs.*

## Grace Armstrong



Grace is a recent graduate of Western University and a lover of history and books. Having studied both Media Studies and Museum and Curatorial Studies, she is excited to work on Aurora Historical Society's social media pages and help

around the museum in any way she can, especially if it involves programming and anything craft-related. Grace looks forward to spending another great summer as a Museum Educator for the AHS!

## Simone Bevilacqua



Simone Bevilacqua is a recent graduate from the University of Glasgow with a Masters in Museums Studies after completing a degree in Anthropology at the University of Guelph. After living in Scotland for a year and developing a love for jaffa cakes, she is now back in the

GTA. Simone is excited to join the AHS as the Assistant Museum Curator and to meet the community throughout the summer!

We will also be joined by an intern from Fleming College's Museum Management and Curatorship program in August!

## Juliana Marcantonio



Juliana is a current Museum Management and Curatorship student at Fleming College. Her interest in history began at a young age and led to completing an undergraduate degree in history and political science at the University of Ottawa. She loves learning about local histories and hopes to be involved in efforts to

make museum collections more accessible to the public. Juliana is very excited to be starting an internship with the AHS, where she will gain more knowledge and experience in the museum field.

## Many Thanks to:

- Our awesome volunteers and supportive local businesses
- Spring cleanup team: Marjorie and John Bare; Alan and Nathan Lambert; Mike and Owen Norris
- Sonia Koczekan who ensures that our indoor plants stay healthy, and is a frequent volunteer at our many events
- Joan Gardner for stopping in regularly to work on the lawn.
- John McIntyre for always offering his expertise and writing skills to help us update the AHS website.
- Brenda Snape for her contribution in layout and design of the Attic.
- Christine McLure for proofing the articles in the Attic.
- Benjamin Moore and Klein Paint who kindly donated the paint for our Ballroom floor and walls, along with the hallway and stairwell.
- The Town of Aurora for lending a bin for clean-up, and the lovely hanging baskets they provide every year.
- And finally, our Transcription Project volunteers who have donated over 200 hours so far this year.