

TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY: The Best Assortment of Fancy Goods

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Today you can find paint and oils at your local hardware store and medical supplies at the pharmacy.

In the 1870s, you could find all of those items at the drugstore, which was known as a Medical Hall. Aurora's first Medical Hall opened in 1873, on the west side of Yonge Street, just south of Wellington. The store was owned by Dr. Robert Hillary and was later purchased by Henry Connor in 1876. Medical Hall was open seven days a week and carried a variety of items for medicinal purposes, such as: stationary, perfumery, cigars, tobacco, pipes and much more.

By 1880, Henry Connor had become ill and could no longer operate the business. At some point over the summer of 1880, Henry J. Hartman purchased the business from Mr. Connor. Before purchasing Medical Hall, Mr. Hartman had managed a small pharmacy in the Doan General Store, located on the north-west corner of Yonge and Wellington.

A few years later Mr. Hartman was looking to build a new Medical Hall and decided to buy the property across the street at what would become 15233 Yonge Street. When it was completed in December 1885, the new Medical Hall had three floors and was the tallest building in Aurora! Not only was the new Medical hall a one-stop-shop for various medicinal and household goods ? it quickly became an Aurora landmark. Soon after the building was finished, Mr. Hartman sold the business (not the property) to Dr. J. R. Rutherford, a local physician, and moved to California in hopes of treating his ongoing health issues.

When Medical Hall opened in 1886, Charles Willis was hired by Dr. J.R. Rutherford to manage the store. Mr. Willis was not a licensed pharmacist, but at the time regulations did not require a licensed pharmacist to run a drugstore if it was owned by a qualified physician. Advertisements from the time promise the best assortment of fancy goods including the ?largest and best assorted stock of toilet soaps ever offered to the people of Aurora.?

In 1910, Charles Willis's son, John Francis Willis (a licensed pharmacist) took over the manager duties. Business must have been good for in 1921, the Willis family purchased the property at 15233 Yonge Street and became owners of both the business and the land.

Keeping with the family tradition, in 1955 John Francis Willis was succeeded by his son, John Farrar Willis, who became the owner and manager of Medical Hall. Impressively, the drugstore business remained in association with the Willis family for over eighty years until 1968 when it was sold to someone outside of the Willis family.

While the uses for the Medical Hall building have changed over the years its architectural features, remain in tact. In her book, An Aurora ABC, author Jacqueline Stuart, precisely states that the building ?stands as a monument to the vision of its builder, Henry J. Hartman.?