

TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY: Aurora's Customs

By Jacqueline Stuart

The time traveller stepped out briskly as he went down Yonge Street on a cold January afternoon in 1916. He was brought to a stop, however, when he was about halfway between Wellington and Mosley. What was that sound? Then he remembered: the clock had at last been installed in the tower over the new post office building. The clock, the chime, and his pocket watch all agreed that it was two o'clock.

He crossed over to the west side to have a better view of the building and its latest feature. Looking up, he saw the new clock in place, with a face on each side of the tower. But even people out of sight of the clock could hear its chime from just about anywhere in the town of about 2,000 people.

The traveller's gaze moved over the rest of the imposing red brick structure.

As a traveller in time, he was pleased to note that the year in which the construction of the building had started, 1914, was inscribed on a stone panel for the information of the passers-by of the future. The official opening had taken place late in 1915 but on that November day the tower clock had not yet arrived from England: the local paper had had to draw the clock's features onto its proud photo of the new post office. But now all was in place.

And ?all? included a customs office, with its own stone panel above its entrance. A customs office for dealing with imported goods had been established in Aurora in 1900, thanks to the efforts of William Mulock, the local Member of Parliament.

Andrew Yule of Aurora (a highly respected businessman and, possibly not coincidentally, of the same political persuasion as Mr. Mulock) was appointed Collector of Customs. The customs house served merchants and manufacturers and others in both Aurora and Newmarket and Mr. Yule took the train up to Newmarket almost every weekday to deal with customs business there.

Mr. Yule would continue in the new building as Collector until 1918 when he retired because of ill health; he was seventy-nine years old (he did have an assistant by that time).

A few months later it was announced that the Aurora customs office would be closed down but, thanks to the efforts of the Municipal Council and the local MP, J. A. M. Armstrong, it continued to function until 1929. At that point the office did shut down and customs services were available only at the outport in Newmarket.

The Yonge Street post office became ?the old post office? when a new federal building was opened on Wellington Street just east of Yonge in 1968. That building, in turn, closed in 2012 and today over-the-counter postal services are to be found in two convenience stores and a drug store.

The old ?old post office? on Yonge Street is now privately owned and accommodates various businesses, including The Auroran. The Customs sign is still there, the tower is still a useful landmark, and the clock still chimes.