

Rising Sun brings local perspective to new Freemasonry exhibition



By Brock Weir

Freemasonry has been a part of Aurora's heritage since before Aurora was even on the map.

Indeed, Aurora's Rising Sun Masonic Lodge pre-dates the formal establishment of Aurora by over three years, and Lodge members shared this pride last Saturday at the official opening of *Freemasonry: A History Hidden in Plain Sight*, a travelling exhibition spearheaded by the Bruce County Museum & Cultural Centre, that is now on through April at the Hillary House National Historic Site.

Co-hosted by the Aurora Historical Society (AHS), the owners and operators of Hillary House, as well as the Aurora Museum and Archives, the exhibition is designed to promote the knowledge, appreciation and understanding of masonic history in Canada and around the world, as well as its influence on society today.

'Since [the transfer of the Aurora Collection artefacts from the Historical Society to the Town in 2014] we have been working very closely [with the AHS] on ways we can work together, because we kind of have the same sort of mandate talking about the history of Aurora, and how we can do it in a way that we're collaborating and partnering, not competing with each other,' said Shawna White, Curator of the Aurora Museum & Archives, at last weekend's opening.

'When I looked at this exhibition, I said, 'We need to have this here' tying it in with our Lodge here. Unfortunately, at the Museum, we're in between shows right now and our new one is not opening up until March and there is a limited opportunity. At one of our meetings with (AHS Executive Director) Erika Baird, I said, 'What do you think about this?' They had an opening and we pooled our resources to make it happen ? and it all happened very quickly because we started talking about this in December and here we are now at the beginning of February. I am so thrilled.'

Also thrilled were members of the Rising Sun Masonic Lodge, who were on hand to share a bit of their local history in the wider context of *Freemasonry: A History Hidden in Plain Sight*.

'We're thrilled to participate in the opening of this exhibition,' said Bert Tellier, Sitting Master of the Rising Sun Masonic Lodge.

'Ancient free and accepted masons around the world, particularly in Aurora, have been major contributors to society by living the principles of brotherly love, relief and truth. We have a very proud and rich history in Aurora. Our lodge has been in existence since 1860, that is 159 years of making good men better men. We have a very special connection to the Hillary House specifically. Some of our past Masters lived in this house.'

Past Master and current Lodge Historian Ted McClenny expanded on this history.

'It has been said that Aurora's Masonic Lodge has been here forever,' said Mr. McClenny. 'That is not exactly true, of course.

Aurora's masonic lodge is the oldest uninterrupted organization in Aurora's lengthy history, having been chartered in 1860, three years prior to the incorporation of the Town of Aurora, and seven years prior to confederation. We're old!

'The first Master of the lodge in 1860, was a Scottish immigrant by the name of Robert Lyon. Robert farmed at the southeast corner of Wellington Street and Leslie Street near where the Shell station is now. He was our first Master, like the president of the club. He had a busy year that year, bringing the lodge into its being, getting everything organized and so on, but it was also a difficult year for

him because he had five children and in that same year his wife passed away. What a tragedy that was for him with everything he had on his plate. Throughout the years, the lodge brethren had their meetings at three different locations in Town, one of which was the scene of a fire where all the lodge records were unfortunately lost. In 1885, the 25th anniversary of the lodge, the brethren of the lodge purchased the property and the building now occupies at 57 Mosley Street in Aurora. They bought that property and the building for \$1,800.?

That building, adjacent to Town Park, was originally built in 1877 as a Methodist Episcopal Church before finding new life as home to the Lodge.

?Throughout the many years as home to Aurora's masons, many prominent citizens of the Town and surrounding area have chosen to become members of this lodge: doctors, lawyers, town councillors, mayors, provincial and federal representatives, shopkeepers, educators, members of the military, factory workers, and perhaps the most prominent of all, being Sir William Mulock, Canada's first postmaster general,? Mr. McClenny concluded. ?We're pretty proud of that. The Rising Sun Lodge has a proud and distinguished history and a bright future.?