

Aurora's forgotten stories are brought to you by the letter A (through Z)



By Brock Weir

Disturbing and moving: those are the two words that come to mind when local historian Jacqueline Stuart uses when telling how she uncovered the story of a little known Chinese immigrant who came to Aurora in the early 1900s and forged a successful career as a laundryman.

When he died in the 1930s, she found accounts of Aurora bigwigs saying he was a 'well-respected' member of the community. But, would any of them have gone as far as to call him a friend?

Ms. Stuart suspects not, but his story will soon be found under the letter 'I' for 'Isolation' in Ms. Stuart's new book, 'An Aurora ABC: Stories from Aurora's Forgotten Past.'

Set to be available to the general public at the end of the month, An Aurora ABC is published in association with the Aurora Historical Society and provides a unique look at the people, places and things that made Aurora what it is today, but stories that might be a little less conventional than your average Aurora history.

'A' might obviously stand for 'Aurora' in the book and detail how the Town got its name, but come 'B', all bets are off.

'This is part of my general wish to tell some stories that hadn't been told, at length, anyway,' says Ms. Stuart, the Society's former curator who retired in 2006, of the book that has been in the making for nearly a decade. 'I didn't want to go on about our first reeve and the obvious stories. When I heard about this man in particular several years ago, I was struck by the notion of isolation.

'[My first question in choosing my topics] was did it interest me? The second thing in the back of my mind was could I relate this story to something that people can see today so people who arrived in Aurora last week could drive around, see this building and read something more about it?'

She says she didn't meet that objective for all 26 letters, but the holdouts are no less interesting. One such example are commercial maps of Aurora versus their official counterparts. The commercial maps from a certain vintage can often be found with the word 'Cherry', for instance, overlaid on Aurora's southwest quadrant with little or no explanation.

'Did people who lived down there talk about living in Cherry?' Ms. Stuart ponders. 'I tried to find out some background on that.' In her 25 years working at the former Aurora Museum, Ms. Stuart was tasked with carrying out research enquiries as varied as the people who came through the door or picked up the phone to call them. Through the course of finding the answers to her questions, she would find interesting tidbits along the way she filed mentally for later.

By the time she was ready to retire, she decided it was time to clear out the mental notebook and set it all down to paper.

A book wasn't necessarily the intention, however, but the stories kept mounting. Aurora, she says, is not necessarily more 'interesting' than any other growing Ontario community, but it has that indefinable extra something that keep her coming back for more and delving deeper into its history.

'It is wonderfully satisfying,' says Ms. Stuart about sharing this history with readers. 'I don't want to sound too highfalutin about this, but it is not just personally satisfying but you think maybe someone else has acquired a little bit more interest in the history of

the Town, which might auger well for the future preservation or interpretation or exploitation in a positive way. Spreading the word is good.?

Also good: She thinks she just might have enough tidbits left over for a second book, but, like history, it's all a matter of finding the time.

?The Society is delighted and honoured to play the role of publisher of this amazing book - the first newly written general history of our town in decades,? says Bill Albino, President of the Society. ?The word is getting out and the enthusiasm is fantastic. We have already bumped up our initial print run twice.?