

INSIDE AURORA: 63 Years and Counting

By Scott Johnston

A lot has been said about last week's milestone of Queen Elizabeth II surpassing Queen Victoria as longest reigning monarch. She's now been on the job for 63 years, 7 months, and counting.

That's a lot of official papers reviewed, meetings presided over, awards presented, public engagements attended, charitable events supported, corgis petted, and well, the list goes on.

This is even more impressive when you consider that based on statistics, the average person is in the same job for about four years. I guess this means the Queen's single-handedly bringing up the average.

Granted, it's not like she can change jobs as easily as the rest of us. That's a little more difficult in the monarchy, in which the Head of State is chosen more based on their DNA than their resume.

But that's still a long time.

You can get a good idea of just how long 63 plus years is if you take a look back at what Aurora was like at that time.

In the early 1950s, the population was around 3,700, or about one person for every 15 we have here today.

The lower number of people meant that green space wasn't the issue it is today. In fact, pretty much everywhere we now call Aurora consisted of fields, farms and forests.

Helping to make up all that green was one of the key tree species found in great numbers in Town in the early 1950s, the elm, which would not be killed off locally by Dutch elm disease until the following decade, leaving the few scattered survivors we see today.

The most populated part of Town was the central area from Yonge over towards the train station.

Despite the fact the railway had been a key feature in the growth of the Town, and in 1953 had been around for exactly a hundred years, there were no commuter trains.

If you wanted to get to Toronto, you could always drive, but it took a bit longer. The extension of Highway 404 up to Aurora was still several years away.

Communication was a bit different in those days. Lots of people had phones, but the rotary phone would not be introduced until shortly after the Queen's inauguration. Of course, cell towers were an issue for the following century.

In an interesting twist, there was no door-to-door mail delivery anywhere in Town until the next decade. So, I suppose one could say that the decision to eliminate today's door-to-door service is just returning Aurora to its roots, perhaps even to the good old days that some people so fondly recall.

Of course, many of today's key buildings were not even on anyone's drawing boards back then, such as Town Hall, the Aurora Community Centre, the Stronach complex, and not only the current library, but its predecessor, as well.

Even some structures we think of as old were not yet in place, such as the long abandoned emergency bomb shelter in the north end of Town recently featured during Doors Open. Similarly, the Altar of Sacrifice, the memorial to those killed in World War II that is located in Aurora Memorial Peace Park near the cenotaph, was not built until the 1960s.

The Aurora Tigers, Theatre Aurora, the Food Pantry, the Larter mural (which currently includes the Queen)?lots of things that we think of as having been around for a long time were still well in the future when the Queen began her reign.

And that includes many of the people reading this column.

As for The Auroran, we're celebrating our own milestone. Next month we'll have been here for 15 years.

That feels like a lot of time to us, but we have at least another 48 years to go to catch up to the Queen.

And she's still going strong.

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