

June opening eyed for new Aurora museum as curator aims to 'inspire' community

By Brock Weir

The curator behind the newly re-established Aurora Museum aims to open their doors to the general public as early as this spring.

Housed in the Aurora Room at the Church Street School, home to the Aurora Cultural Centre, the new museum's inaugural exhibition will be a tribute to the very building it sits in, and the development of education in Aurora, according to curator Shawna White.

Ms. White announced her plans, as well as her vision for the future last month at the Annual General Meeting of the Aurora Historical Society.

This was a room of people who know the Aurora Collection, the basis of the museum, well after curating the artefacts for the better part of 50 years. Since ownership of the items was transferred to the Town, the artefacts and archives have been kept in storage until the foundations could be formed for a new museum space.

'It has been a long journey, full of many twists and turns, and I personally could not be happier to be here tonight,' said Ms. White. 'There would not be a museum return to celebrate without the original foresight and considerable efforts of the [Historical Society] who founded and ran the original Aurora museum. Your efforts, determination and unwillingness to give up on a collection, despite external pressures and a constant lack of funding, are truly remarkable.'

Ensuring public access to the Aurora Collection is a primary priority for Ms. White, but this goal is not limited to the relatively confined space of the Aurora Room. While she plans for one exhibition per year, there are further opportunities in utilizing exhibition cases in venues such as the Aurora Public Library to maximise the collection's exposure to the community.

In addition, there is a drive to unroll the collection onto the internet and significantly boost its online presence, as well as through social media, tweeting long-forgotten, quirky, yet intriguing footnotes of Aurora's history to generate interest in Auroran social lives in days of yore.

'We have an incredible amount of content, and I am more excited about the archives than I am by the collection because most people haven't see the archives,' said Ms. White. 'There are such nuggets in there. The other day I came across a story about when they first laid the sidewalk on Yonge Street and the contractors were so thrilled to have a level surface they got drunk one night and took the bedpans and pots from the Queen's Hotel [which once stood on the side of the Yonge and Wellington branch of TD Canada Trust] and they had an impromptu curling match right there on Yonge Street.'

'They smashed everything, but I think they still continued [with the job]. That is really interesting stuff that is gone.'

The development of an app is being explored by the Town of Aurora to integrate maps and other community services with historical details, as are 'Night with the Collection' events along with an 'heirloom identification' session that would be somewhat like Antiques Roadshow, to build awareness of what is currently being held in the collection. If the Aurora Collection strikes your fancy, opportunities will be available down the line to volunteer your services to ensure the future of the artefacts.

'I would like to provide opportunities for people who are interested,' said Ms. White. 'It doesn't matter that you don't have any experience; I can train you on the proper handling of the art and artifacts to actually do some meaningful research and to contribute. I am interested in working with individuals who may have ideas for an exhibition and may want to curate their own show with different points of view.'

First and foremost, however, will be to determine the overall vision and identity of the Aurora Museum ' and the 'Aurora Museum?

moniker of days gone by might be just that.

?I need to ensure everything is there, starting with an appropriate mission and mandate ? starting with what we're calling this entity,? Ms. White said. ?It has been the Aurora Museum in the past and right now I am referring to it as the Aurora Collection and Archives. I have to go through it and develop what it is we're doing, what we are collecting, why we are collecting it.?

However it shakes down, the vision got the seal of approval from Jacqueline Stuart, who curated the collection when the Church Street School was the Aurora Museum.

?Is the Aurora Collection now in good hands? Absolutely.?