

Last chance to explore history of one of Aurora's founding businesses

By Brock Weir

It might be a safe bet to wager there haven't been that many members of the Fleury family in Aurora for the better part of a century, but local heritage came full circle last fall as generations of one of the Town's founding families gathered to open The Plow in the Crest.

Named for the image of the iconic Fleury Park in The Town of Aurora's official emblem, The Plow in the Crest is the name of the latest exhibition hosted by the Aurora Museum & Archives and curated by Ann, David and Bill Fleury, great-great grandchildren of the founders of the Fleury Implement Works.

Launched last fall, it is set to close to the public this Sunday, April 8.

Featuring a wide array of products produced by the agricultural implement works, now home to Bacon Basketware on Wellington Street West, as well as artefacts saved from Inglehurst, the family's Yonge Street mansion, bulldozed in the 1980s and now owned by Our Lady of Grace Church, the exhibit charts a century of farming innovation that occurred right here in Aurora.

"This exhibit has been in the works for about two years since Bill and David showed up wanting to see a Fleury bible that had been given to Herbert by the employees," said Shawna White, Curator of the Aurora Museum & Archives at last November's opening. "It didn't even look like it had been opened at all! And there was nothing there."

Nevertheless, the Fleurys were on a quest to fill in the blanks in their own family's history, and this blank, un-cracked bible was just one of many springboards prompting them to plough ahead and get the job done.

2,600 compiled pages of family history later, the results - condensed, of course - are now up on the walls of the Church Street School for all to see.

"It is a thrill for Ann, David and me to be here and to work with Shawna and Michelle [Johnson] on this project," said Bill at the exhibit launch. "We are delighted to be here today as those lucky witnesses in the pioneering manufacturer Joseph Fleury, the successor, our great uncle Herbert Fleury, and in our gifted sportsman, craftsman, and lawyerly grandfather Billy, as he was known. It is a good story of innovation and service to Aurora, so today is a very joyous homecoming for us."

Speaking before a packed house of family and friends - some of whom had flown in from various parts of the United States for the occasion, Bill gave his appreciation to the Town for supporting the project, as well as local historians like Jacqueline Stuart and John McIntyre, who paved the way for them. Thanks too went to Ms. White and Ms. Johnson for their "professional, thorough and imaginative work."

"Shawna saw that the recipe of something worthwhile could be created by combining what the Aurora Museum Collection has with material our family had squirreled away - and we had never seen it by the time our dad passed away in 1983," said Bill. "We rescued it and over the past two years, we stirred hundreds of hours of archival and online research into the pot. The result, we hope, is a fresh and well-presented look at the Aurora agricultural works, its workers, its managers, its owners and its machinery in the context of what was going on in Aurora and Canada at the time. This project has been a labour of love for our family and we have made wonderful new discoveries."

Many branches of the Fleury family tree were represented not only on the walls of the exhibition, but also in the crowds who attended the opening. One such branch was represented by a seventh generation member of the family, Emma Fleury, who spoke on behalf of her grandfather, Bruce, chair of the Fleury Board.

"I am so excited to bear witness to this with all of you today," said Emma. "It is an amazing, unbelievable display put on by Shawna and Michelle and we are so touched you have taken such an interest in Fleury history and we are so proud of our illustrious lineage. Thank you so much for doing this for the community so that this legacy can continue on. My grandfather helped me develop a passion for my Fleury family lineage. We have an illustrious history and so much of it took place in this beautiful town of Aurora. The tie that bonds this story together is Joseph Fleury Senior, who grew up in Lower Canada and in his teenage years, he travelled [to Upper Canada and met wife Mary and] they moved to Temperanceville, ON, where they had eleven sons, all of them blacksmiths, and it was Joseph Junior who opened a blacksmith shop on Wellington west of Yonge Street. The partnership soured and he decided to branch off and open a farm and plow implementation originally known as the Fleury Foundry, but eventually came to be known as J. Fleury and Sons.

"Nothing gives me greater pleasure than driving down a country road and seeing a Fleury Plow sitting on someone's lawn. The Fleurys have a rich legacy and I feel bestowed with a great sense of duty to continue to share our ancestors' unique history. I promise I will continue to hold the torch."

Once the exhibition closes early in the month ahead, however, that will not be the end of the story. Once the artefacts are returned to storage or back to their owners, the Aurora Museum & Archives plans to publish a book on the history of the Fleury Implement Works.

This book is slated for publication in 2019.