

Last remaining horse barn to be preserved at Hillary House



By Brock Weir

It's Christmas and at this time of year you probably need no reminder that some interesting things can happen in a barn, and one of Aurora's last horse barns – well, theoretically, a garage – is set to be shaken up in the year ahead.

But this isn't your grandmother's garage. Maybe your great-grandmother's.

Chances are you pass it every day on Yonge Street taking little notice of the green-timbered barn, but this unimposing structure is, in reality, Aurora's oldest surviving garage – built specifically for a buggy and the single horse to power it.

Lying behind the historic Horton Place house at the corner of Yonge Street and Irwin Avenue, which is currently undergoing extensive interior renovations, the little barn is set to be dismantled from its current site and reconstructed just a couple of doors north at Hillary House National Historic Site.

"Our mission is to try and save the building from obliteration and restore it to its original splendour," says John Green of the Aurora Historical Society, who are spearheading fundraising efforts to make the move possible. "It is a coach house and the only remaining example in Aurora of a small barn or shed that was used to house a horse and buggy for use by the family.

"The lower area had a horse stall for the horse and storage for a buggy or sleigh. The upper loft was used to store feed for the horse. It has excellent proportions and represents a fine example of its type, built in 1876."

The coach house is currently located behind Horton Place, which was sold by local historian John McIntyre earlier this summer. The interior is currently gutted and being overhauled to office use by its new owners. They have given the AHS permission to dismantle the barn and move it as quickly as possible to its new abode to allow for more parking behind the house.

"The AHS wants to take advantage of this opportunity and in doing so, preserve and make use of the only remaining example of a coach house built in the late 1800s," says Mr. Green. "Our progress to date has been to organize a pre-planning meeting with representatives of the Ontario Heritage Trust to gain their approval to re-erect the coach house on the Hillary House property. Our goal is to be able to show the public an example of a car garage from the 1800s and also to be able to use the coach house for the storage of artefacts which we urgently need to free up space within Hillary House to allow the public to view rooms that are currently unavailable for public access as they are being used for storage."

Mr. Green brought his appeal to Aurora's Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) last week, which enthusiastically embraced the project – after assurances the \$14,500 bill to restore and reconstruct the building would be shouldered by the AHS and overseen by

Peter Van Nosterand, an expert in the field with a family connection to Hillary House, who restored and reconstructed Petch House, one of Aurora's oldest surviving dwellings, behind the Aurora Seniors' Centre.?

?I think it is wonderful you have salvaged this building,? said Councillor ? and HAC Chair ? Jeff Thom. ?It wouldn't have happened without the Aurora Historical Society coming forward. Everyone who loves heritage in this Town knows you do a great job.?

Added Councillor Wendy Gaertner: ?It is fantastic you want to do this.?

Following HAC's approval of the project last week, their recommendations are slated to be before Council for final ratification at the first Council meeting of the New Year, currently scheduled for January 26.