

## Learn more about the History of Aurora at Doors Open Aurora



By Bob McRoberts  
Aurora Heritage Advisory Committee

### **Hartman's Corners School (118 Wellington St. E.)**

The Hartman's Corners Schoolhouse has strong historical significance as the oldest surviving schoolhouse in Aurora and York Region. Built ca. 1838, it is likely the third or fourth oldest remaining schoolhouse in Ontario.

It was originally located in the community of Hartman's Corners at the corner of Bayview Avenue and Wellington Street East. One of the first teachers in this one-room schoolhouse was Joseph Hartman. Joseph, born in 1821, was the son of Quaker immigrants from Pennsylvania, and went on to become one of Aurora's most prominent citizens.

In addition to teaching and farming, he was a temperance advocate, radical reformer, a leader in the Methodist Congregation, first Reeve of Whitchurch Township (1850-1859), County Warden, and a Member of Provincial Parliament for York County.



When a new brick schoolhouse was built in 1885 (now demolished), the Hartman's Corners Schoolhouse was sold to George W. Graham, for \$45.

George moved the one-storey frame building to its present location at 118 Wellington Street East in Aurora, on the north side near the railroad. The building was used as a private residence for over 120 years. Most schoolhouses of this era were torn down, so it is definitely a rarity. Several years ago, the building was completely restored and converted for commercial use.

The architectural significance of the Hartman's Corners Schoolhouse is its vertical plank construction. This early form of construction was used in communities in Ontario and Quebec. The Hartman's Corners Schoolhouse is the only known surviving schoolhouse built using this technique.

The building has been altered over the years, yet a number of its original features remain intact. Although hidden under aluminum siding, these include the clapboard siding, original fenestration, and trim. This simple rectangular structure has a low-pitched gable roof, positioned with the gable end facing the street. Come by the schoolhouse on August 16 for a brief ?lesson? in local history.

### **Absalom Blaker House (86 Wellington St. E.)**

The first train arrived in Machell's Corners 1853. The railroad's coming here led to the expansion of both population and business in the village. The following year, Charles Doan, the postmaster, suggested ?Aurora? as a better name for the emerging new community. Part of this growth was the construction of subdivisions along Wellington Street East between Yonge Street and the railway station.

Absalom Blaker built this charming Gothic revival, known as the ?Ontario House? ca. 1865.

Absalom Blaker was born in Pennsylvania in 1808 and came to Canada in 1821. He initially worked in the post office, later in the Fleury foundry, and later still, he farmed in the Snowball area. He subsequently purchased this lot in 1859 for \$160, built this house, and sold the property at the end of 1870.

From 1920 to 1963, the family of John James Hill owned the house. John James worked at the Sisman shoe factory.

Visitors will learn about the house's long history throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and see historical documentation and photographs of recent renovation projects.

### **Brome House (71 Centre St.)**

This modest 1890s Georgian cottage-style house is named after Walter and Annie Brome, owners from 1941-62. Originally used partially for commercial purposes, it was converted to a residence in 1910. According to the Aurora Banner of November 29, 1951, this was the last house in Aurora to be electrified (?last week?). Today, the house is fully restored and serves as a small elegant residence in the Northeast Old Aurora Heritage Conservation District.

To help plan your route, be sure to check out [www.doorsopenontario.on.ca](http://www.doorsopenontario.on.ca) to see a full list of participating sites for the Doors Open Aurora event as well as other Doors Open events across Ontario.

Note: Bob McRoberts pieced this article together and would like to thank Jacqueline Stuart for her energy in doing most of the research for it. Also, during Doors Open, there will be a continuous presentation at the Aurora Cultural Centre of Bob's postcard collection of old Aurora.