

Victorian tea with Victorian gothic backdrop is a winning recipe for Hillary House



A high tea was an art perfected by the Victorians, and it is art that has only been kicked up several notches by the Aurora Historical Society as they prepare to host a Harvest Tea on the grounds of Hillary House next week.

On Saturday, September 18, the Aurora Historical Society will welcome guests to the lawns of Hillary House for two seatings of a traditional tea, with the Victorian gothic architecture of Aurora's only National Historic Site providing the perfect ambiance and backdrop.

The second annual Victorian Harvest Tea will not only include a pot of tea, sandwiches, scones and desserts, but a free tour of Hillary House and the Koffler Museum of Medicine as well.

"This year we will be offering a full afternoon tea menu, including the regular tea sandwiches as well as harvest-themed scones and desserts, fruit, tea, apple cider and juice," says Aurora Historical Society (AHS) curator Kathleen Vahey of the menu that has been designed with Aurora-based caterers Catharina's Kitchen, a mainstay of the Aurora Farmers' Market. "With COVID last year, we weren't able to get together as often as we would in a regular year, but by having the event outside it really gave us the opportunity to have that because we still couldn't get inside with the numbers we were hoping for. We were able to enjoy the grounds, the weather held up, and last year's tea was kind of a peek into what might be."

Health restrictions still don't allow the AHS to welcome scores of people inside at the same time, but they have loosened enough that this year they can increase capacity and ticket sales "with the same important COVID health protocols firmly in place.

"Tables will be separated, you will only be put at a table with the people you bought tickets with or groups of four, and everyone will be spaced out on the lawns," says Ms. Vahey. "You'll still have the opportunity to come inside the house for a COVID-friendly sneak peek at the house, the gift shop will be open and it is a way to get together and showcase Hillary House in a fun way with lots of yummy food.

"We hope that through events like this we're reaching a broader audience and the tea brings people out to Hillary House who haven't been here before and it puts the House on their radar and that they engage with us."

As Hillary House is nearly 160 years old, it is a building that requires significant upkeep. The Victorian Tea is a fundraiser for just such repairs and, if you have been by recently, you will have noticed fencing and scaffolding around its Yonge Street façade.

This is the result of extensive restoration work currently being carried out on the verandah to ensure it endures for generations to come.

By the tea, maybe the restoration work will be complete, but maybe not, so this provides us with a good opportunity as well to explain the restoration work the AHS is currently undergoing, says Ms. Vahey. I think it is important to bring to light things the AHS does. Not only do we do teas and events, but there is a lot of behind-the-scenes work and a lot of in front-of-the-scenes work as well with the verandah.

If you're looking for a unique afternoon or a perfect setting, with some delicious food, and want to support heritage in the community and a community partner, come on out! It's a chance to enjoy company, eat some food, and learn something about history in Aurora.

Tickets for the Victorian Harvest Tea on September 18 at 12.30 p.m. and 2.30 p.m. are on sale now at the Aurora Historical Society for \$31.50 per person. For more information, including ticket purchases, visit aurorahs.com/Victorian-harvest-tea-1.

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