

## 200 year old ?resident? honoured by Arboretum



**By Brock Weir**

Few living things can boast being here longer than Aurora has, but as the Town celebrates its 150th anniversary this year, the Aurora Arboretum has helped lend a voice to one otherwise voiceless individual that can make that very claim.

A dominating Burr Oak tree has stood strong and silent in place for what could well be over two centuries, and after 200 years of minding its own business and doing what trees do best, this prime specimen had its moment in the spotlight on Canada Day weekend, officially dedicated as Aurora's Sesquicentennial Tree.

‘This Burr Oak tree, which was already some 50 years old when the Town began, represents all of Aurora's fine old trees, still witnessing our changing times,’ says John Clement of the Aurora Community Arboretum, which spearheaded the process as a special Aurora 150 initiative. ‘We were looking for a tree that was here before Aurora, so that takes out most of the trees. Most of the ones we have in the arboretum are younger because this used to be an active farm.

‘Burr oaks are beautiful and we just love this tree,’ he adds, pointing around to some other specimens a short distance away which are not faring as well. ‘To dedicate a tree, we want one that will be here for a few more decades.’

This tree also had a few more things going for it than just age ? Mr. Clement hailed it for its beauty, accessibility to the public, as well as having the good fortune to be standing a stone's throw away from the main stage of the Canada Day Celebrations at Lambert Willson Park.

Formerly an active farm, as Mr. Clement notes, it was a farm worked by Lambert Willson and his family. When the tree was dedicated by the Arboretum and Mayor Geoffrey Dawe at the park shortly after the Canada Day Parade, they were joined by Robert Willson, a grandson of the property's original owner.

Mr. Willson shared memories of coming up to the farm on weekends, holidays, and summers during the 1940s and 50s from their home in Toronto. Now a resident of Thornhill, he has a certain degree of pride that his family's former land is put to such good use year after year.

?We're very proud that things are still happening here,? he said, noting he hadn't returned to the land since his last visit over a decade ago to try to find his family's long-since vanished farmhouse.

?My grandparents were on the farm along with my aunts and uncles and we would come up almost every weekend for the day and spend time with the animals in the barn. The best thing is they preserve part of the land as an arboretum. This was all pasture land at the time for the cows because it was too wet and mushy for farming.?

The commemorative sign, now sitting in front of the tree, was unveiled by Mayor Dawe. He told the crowd it will serve to show the public that a tree is ?more than just something tall with leaves on it.?

?A little bit of history is always a great thing,? he said.

Estimated to be between 190 to 200 years old, according to an arborist estimate. Faced with the challenge of going with the estimate, or the arborist's alternative of chopping the tree down to remove all doubt, they did, of course, go with the first option!

It was a busy time for the Arboretum to get everything in place, particularly as all the planning took place during their busy spring planting season. With that now out of the way, they're now focusing on maintenance within the arboretum, planning ahead for next spring, and also ahead to the next significant anniversary, having planted a young Burr Oak last year in honour of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

?We're already thinking about the Sesquicentennial for Canada in 2017,? says Arboretum chair Irene Clement. ?That's what we're looking forward to in seeing how we can mark that one. It has to be a maple tree, don't you think??

The Aurora Community Arboretum is a volunteer-led initiative and always welcomes volunteers, whether planting, performing maintenance or pruning, or some of the more pedestrian behind the scenes work such as web design and promotions. For more information on how to get involved, visit [www.auroraarboretum.ca](http://www.auroraarboretum.ca).