

Ada Johnson dies at 109



By Brock Weir

Ada Johnson, the Grande Dame of Aurora, has died at 109.

Park Place Manor, Mrs. Johnson's residence, confirmed that the Town's eldest resident died early Sunday morning.

Mrs. Johnson was born in Purpleville, now part of the City of Vaughan, in 1903 and after her father died when she was just a toddler, her family settled with her grandfather in Aurora, making her not only Aurora's eldest but also longest resident.

She was an invaluable resource for both historians and interested citizens alike eager to learn more about the early days of their community, and this eagerness was returned as she shared stories of an Aurora that is now a distant memory.

When she celebrated her 108th birthday surrounded by over 30 family members spanning four generations of descendants, from her son David to her great-great grandchildren, she told *The Auroran* the best advice she could give fellow residents was to "laugh and enjoy yourself."

"Enjoy each day and make the most of it every day because that day never comes again," she said.

Mrs. Johnson said at the time she planned to follow her own advice and laugh and enjoy herself on her birthday, and added that she was heading into her 109th year with goals she still wanted to accomplish. In offering her key to a long and healthy life, Mrs. Johnson said it is the simple things that keep one going.

"Try to keep enough food in the crock so that you have enough to do your daily work," she said, noting that money was often tight in her youth. "When we had the whole family fed and clothed, we felt we did alright."

Mrs. Johnson was born Ada Kerr. After her father's death, they settled with her Grandfather Robson in a house located near what is now Yonge Street and Aurora Heights Drive.

After making her way through school, she went to business college before beginning her working life in a number of Aurora businesses, including Collis Leather.

She married Norman Johnson in 1924, and they settled on Connaught Avenue, where they raised two sons. Norman was an integral part in what is now Dr. G.W. Williams High School, eventually working his way to the position of principal. There, his wife was also an important part of the school community, instigating such initiatives as a precursor to what would now be known as

continuing education.

On hearing the news of Mrs. Johnson's death, Mayor Geoffrey Dawe extended his sympathies to her family.

'I think Ms. Johnson showed a zeal for life that can be an example for all of us,' he says. 'Physical age is only half the battle!'

To mark her 100th year of living in Aurora, Ada Johnson Park was dedicated by then mayor Phyllis Morris along with Mrs. Johnson's son, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

'Ada Johnson was so much more than Aurora's oldest citizen,' says Ms. Morris. 'Over more than a century of life, she was much loved and respected by her family and many friends. Ada was a practical woman with progressive ideas; ahead of her time in many ways.'

'Because of her many contributions to the Town, it was fitting that the most significant community park developed since the original Aurora Town Park should bear the name of such a special woman.'

Newmarket-Aurora MPP Frank Klees also recalled the many stories she shared over the years of growing up in Aurora when it was little more than a village.

'I don't think there is anyone left in the Town of Aurora that can tell the stories that she did, such as when she herded a cow up Yonge Street,' he said. 'I remember her saying that she thought when her time came that it will simply be a continuation of here. She once said, 'when the time comes, I'll be ready.' She certainly had many years to prepare.'

'She has left her mark on this Town and I think that every time someone passed the Ada Johnson Park there was a recognition of her contribution to this Town and our community.'

Former deputy mayor Bob McRoberts referred to Mrs. Johnson as his 'grandmother-in-law', as her son David was married to his aunt, Ruth. Mrs. Johnson prepared him well on the road to also becoming an educator and, later, entering politics, by typing his university essays on his behalf.

'I have known her all my life, as have many people in Aurora,' says Mr. McRoberts. 'I remember as a youngster in my grandparents' house listening to my grandmother chat away with Ada on the telephone. When I was very young, she knit a Christmas stocking for each of her grandchildren and me, and mine is still hung each year.'

She was also a valuable resource to Mr. McRoberts as he compiled his collection of vintage Aurora postcards into a book to honour the Town's Sesquicentennial, providing much needed assistance identifying the people in the photographs dated well before the 1920s.

'I believe my fondest memory is how I would feel after having had a visit with her,' says Mr. McRoberts. 'She was truly interested in what you had to say and she had a powerful knack for making you feel good about yourself. She put a positive spin on everything and everyone around her. I'm sure that's what helped to carry her to 109.'