

Aurora Town Square Preview: Museum showcases 'Echoes of Aurora' in new exhibition at Church Street School



Aurora Town Square blends the past and the present with the new addition to the historic Church Street School and a bridge to the Aurora Public Library – and this theme of bridging gaps in time flows into the Aurora Museum & Archives as they gear up for the grand opening of Town Square (ATS) on September 21.

Echoes of Aurora: Bridging Past & Present will be the Aurora Museum & Archives inaugural exhibition in their renovated and restored space inside the heritage element of ATS.

The show will be a largely permanent display in the second floor Aurora Room, which was previously used by the Museum as their primary exhibition space – and will complement heritage displays in showcases throughout the new complex.

‘This will be a thematic display of Aurora’s history that attempts to bring the past and present together as one,’ said Michelle Johnson of the Aurora Museum & Archives during a sneak peek on Monday afternoon, standing before the Victorian double doors of Inglehurst, the Yonge Street mansion of the storied Fleury Family which was razed in the 1980s to make way for Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church. The unique doors have found a permanent home within the space.

‘We have items from architectural salvage that have belonged to the Museum since the buildings were torn down and renovated, and we will be showcasing five to six of Aurora’s most well-known architectural styles through these salvage items. These doors are the main part of the salvage collection and we’re very happy to have them. We also have other items like bannisters, cornices, brackets and little decorative pieces that were saved from buildings that were deemed too good to go away, but the buildings were still torn down.

‘As people move through the space, they will encounter other concepts like Health & Healing, Made in Aurora, Pastimes and Connecting the Dots. They all lead into one another and tell different stories that showcase Aurora’s history and present day.’

Health and Healing will take viewers from pre-contact to present day, bringing together medical materials like the tonics and salves of the Victorian era, examples of traditional Indigenous healing methods, and ‘how they’re in conversation with one another,’ said Johnson, noting that the Museum has received significant loans of material from Traditional Anishinaabe Grandmother Kim Wheatley that will inform not just the Health & Healing component of the exhibition, but many other planned displays and shows.

'It's all about Connecting the Dots,' said Johnson, tying it in nicely to what she described as probably her favourite part of the exhibition.

'That is something we're looking to do throughout this space,' she continued. 'You look at a map and you see dots of communities and people connecting to other communities through roadways, waterways, by walking. How do we get to one another? How is it that we connect with one another. One step further in our technological world is what does IT mapping look like? How do we connect with one another through radio and telecommunications? If we can't physically travel to these routes, how can we travel them through technology?'

'How people move and what strives them to stay connected' is one of my favourite concepts because after the pandemic, we realized how important those connections are. I think that urge and impulse to connect is a tale as old as time and the material culture left behind stands the test of time because of our desires to connect.'

Some examples of archival items that help Connect the Dots is a 'This Way to Toronto' sign that was part of the Radial Railway that came up the centre of Yonge Street and remnants of pioneering radio towers that used to stand in Aurora's south end.

'It's a timeless concept and that's one of the ways we're approaching this space' that's why it's called Bridging Past and Present,' she added, noting Made in Aurora will look at some products Aurora is famous for, like the Fleury Plow, and some lesser-known business connections, including Ty, the Beanie Baby-producing company that was once headquartered in Town.

'We're treating this almost like a buffet' many exhibits we've had have been full on stories about topics, but since this is the grand opening of the building, we want it to be a sampling of all these different areas and themes where people can walk in and just fuel that curiosity.'

By Brock Weir