

Capturing today's history ? one snap at a time



By Brock Weir

You all know the feeling when a photo turns out to have that certain special something that you want to share with the world. You send it out, let people know where you've been, who you've met and, in some cases, what you're eating.

A new phenomenon spawned by smart phones and social media? Think again.

No, think again ? back to the time of our great-grandparents or beyond when newfangled portable personal cameras changed the face of our documented history.

Up until the late 1800s, photography was a very formal affair where you'd get dressed up in your Sunday best ? no matter the day of the week ? and trek out to a photographer's studio to capture your stuffy family group.

The humble Brownie camera was a game changer, allowing people to capture informal moments that today stand as testimony to the everyday life of yesteryear.

Now, the Aurora Museum & Archives and the Aurora Public Library's Camera Club are teaming up to recreate this excitement, documenting the families of Aurora today for the historians of tomorrow with Snapshot Aurora: A Front Yard Perspective.

Launching next month, Snapshot Aurora is described as ?a photographic time capsule of Aurorans for Canada 150? inviting households and businesses to be photographed for future generations.

?Time doesn't remember everything,? says Michelle Johnson of the Aurora Museum & Archives. ?As time passes, some things get forgotten. I think this is a way of taking a couple of minutes to take a photo, knowing it is going into the museum collection, knowing it is going to be accessed by future generations as a reference. It is one way to visually leave your mark in the Town of Aurora and it will connect your family and your home.?

Snapshot Aurora was inspired by over 100 photos currently in the Museum collection which show everyday Aurorans simply standing outside their houses. They are photos that might look a bit stilted to today's audience, but there was an excitement behind each snap.

These front porch portraits were emblematic of a bigger trend going on where camera technology was becoming increasingly accessible to the average family.

Hand held cameras were on the scene and, if you happened to have a Brownie, you could send the entire camera off to Kodak for developing and your photos would be sent back to you along with your camera loaded with a fresh roll of film.

Sometimes these snapshots would be developed onto postcard stock, ready for you to send mementos of your travels or life back home to friends and relatives around the world ? as instantly as technology of the day would allow.

?Photography was able to become a hobby,? says Ms. Johnson. ?People could take photos in front of their homes, their yards, outside of the studio setting. A lot of historical portraiture are formal. You go from paintings to photography portraits. It is formal because people still took it very seriously, it was expensive and it was new, but it is more relaxed and casual. Seeing that side of history in that light makes it a little bit more approachable. You can relate to the subjects a little bit more: they are at home, they are in their personal setting, and it seems like there is a barrier gone with these photos.

?Thinking of photography as a hobby, Shawna [White, Curator of the Aurora Museum & Archives] thought why not partner with the

Aurora Public Library camera club and get some hobbyists, some skilled photographers to help us in capturing front yard Aurora and just putting the call out to see if residents will take a family photo in front of their home.?

Intended as a Canada 150 Legacy Project for the Aurora Museum & Archives, Snapshot Aurora is relatively unique because they do not have aspirations right now of publishing the photos either online or in a book. It is simply about getting these photos ? and each participant will be given a photo to keep! ? and adding them to the archives.

From there, the individual photos can be added to an existing file on a particular property or family already in the archives, or form the basis for a brand new file on your property or your family.

?We want to layer in the current, contemporary Aurora with the historic Aurora and get that continuation of history,? says Ms. Johnson. ?As much as this is a project of people today, I think of it as a time capsule project, a project for the people of the next century when they want to see what a house looked like 100 years ago and want to know about the people who lived in it.

?We would like everyone in Town to participate and take their photo, and we really don't have a scope limit on how many we can get. Thinking about how technology and culture evolves, we are encouraging people to submit their own photos too. Some might even be taken with a selfie stick so [a photographer] might be the ones in front of and behind the camera. That is a pretty stark contrast right there ? telling of how in 2017 this is how a lot of us used to get pictures not only of our family, but us with our family!?

For more information on Snapshot Aurora and to sign you, your family or your business up for the project, visit auroramuseum.ca.