

Culture Days takes over Aurora this Saturday, including Hillary House



By **Laura Fedynyszyn**

This weekend, Aurora Historical Society will collaborate with several other local organizations to bring various cultural experiences to the community on September 27 as part of the fifth annual Culture Days celebration.

Culture Days is a series of events across Canada with the aim of raising awareness, accessibility, participation and engagement in Canada's arts and cultural scene.

Built in 1862 and lived in by four doctors over the years, Hillary House has something for everyone. While much attention is paid to the medical and domestic collections at Hillary House, the Hillarys were also heavily involved in fine arts, music and other cultural pursuits. Visitors exploring the gardens might see hints of this from outside as a plaster Venus de Milo, sculpted by Beatrice Hillary, peers out the drawing room window. Her painted portrait hangs close by, surrounded by various paintings collected by her husband, Guy Roberts of the Roberts Gallery, whom she met while studying fine art in Toronto.

Decorative arts were not to be ignored either. Small woodworking projects done by Dr. Robert Michael Hillary can be found throughout the building, such as Moorish supports for the two adjustable card tables in the study. A small needlepoint sampler brightens the old kitchen downstairs and is a testament to the skilled hand of Ellen Kelly, future wife of Michael Hillary. Finally, an ornate 19th century sewing machine sits at the ready on the top floor landing. Areas of wear on the painted finish show it was well used by the Hillarys' nimble fingers.

As well as being strong proponents of the visual arts, the walls of the Hillary family home often echoed with the sweet sound of musical instruments. A 19th century square piano resides in the drawing room, while a small reed organ, called a portable melodeon, occupies the study.

Robert William Hillary was a renowned violinist. He would often travel around town to play violin at dances and special occasions while his daughters accompanied him on the melodeon. Today this musical tradition continues as a generously donated grand piano in the ballroom is played at special events.

For those with more modern tastes, Hillary House is also proud to present its annual Art at the Manor exhibit. This year, AHS invited the Aurora Public Library Camera Club to come and interpret the grounds through their photographic lenses. From lawn bowling balls to porcelain pitchers, these contemporary photographers have found beauty in some of the most unexpected places.

Hillary House is located at 15372 Yonge Street, about a block and a half north of Wellington. On Culture Days, guests will be treated to guided tours of the house and a special artefact handling session where you can closely examine some of the objects enjoyed by the Hillary family.

Children are welcome to complete a scavenger hunt inside the house as they discover Aurora's past. We look forward to seeing you

then!