

Display is top priority for Aurora Collection's new owners



(Witnessing the agreement come to fruition on Wednesday afternoon were (first row) AHS founding president Dr. Leslie Oliver, current president Suzanne Reiner, Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, Councillor Evelyn Buck, (back row) former councillor and AHS board member Bob McRoberts, Aurora CAO Neil Garbe, AHS curator Catherine Richards, Councillor Sandra Humfryes, Parks and Recreation director Al Downey, and Town Clerk John Leach. Auroran photo by Brock Weir)

By Brock Weir

With the exchange of a shiny new loonie and a flurry of pens signing multiple 500+ page agreements, the Aurora Collection came under the ownership of the Town on Wednesday.

The Collection comprises of nearly 16,000 historical artefacts and documents curated, collected, and received in donation by the Aurora Historical Society (AHS). For the AHS, it was a matter of transferring the collection to the municipality, which has the resources to see it through the next 50 years and beyond. It is also the first step in re-establishing a permanent museum for Aurora.

Once the ink was dry on the agreements and the celebratory photographs were taken with Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, AHS president Suzanne Reiner, and assorted Councillors, Town staff, and AHS board members, priority number one for the proud new owners was getting the collection out for all to see.

"We have to find a place to display it, otherwise why would we have it?" said Mayor Dawe, taking into account the Aurora Room, a space at the Aurora Cultural Centre which will become permanent home to the Aurora collection this January.

"We do have a home at this point, maybe not as large as some would like, but we will certainly be making as much use of the room as we can with an eye of seeing how we can make that space, perhaps, a little more effective for us."

He said he would also like to see Aurora look at new and creative ways show the artefacts, including in community spaces and even grocery stores.

"We have to be a little more creative in where we put these things [and] get it out there to where people come to congregate."

Before any of this takes place, however, Council has to decide just how ? and by whom ? the collection is going to be curated. Council authorised staff this summer to look for third party groups to manage and curate the collection. Finding these "pre-qualified third parties" is the top priority for Al Downey, Aurora's Director of Parks and Recreation. Once a short list is in place, it will then be presented to Council in the hopes of taking it to the next level of getting firm proposals.

"Managing the collection isn't all about displays," said Mr. Downey. "There is a lot of behind-the-scenes work that needs to be done in order to ensure we preserve this collection and provide educational opportunities and access to the public to the archives. We hope

to get a number of changing displays each year so we can theme the displays and get more of the collection out to the public.

?If we would get 15 per cent of the collection presented in the year I would be thrilled. That would mean in six years we would have almost every artefact the collection has on display at some point.?

Once the ball is rolling on the third parties, the next steps are drafting a work plan on what Aurora wants the new curators to do, including addressing previously identified concerns over the textile collection and proper storage, the nitty-gritty on displays, as well as plans for marketing and sponsorship.

For the AHS, Ms. Reiner's signature ushered in a brave new world. The AHS has, after all, maintained and curated the collection since the Society's establishment 50 years ago this year. As the ownership of the collection is taken off their hands, there is not a sense of a weight being lifted, but one of excitement.

?There is a sense of excitement as this is a step forward in the re-establishment of the Aurora Museum and [an opportunity] to refocus,? said Ms. Reiner.

Addressing the assembled crowd, she said, ?Now that we have officially signed over the Aurora Collection to the wonderful hands of the municipality, I know that you will take very good care of it.

?It is always going to be very dear to our heart. We will always be here to support your endeavours and the recreation of the Aurora Museum.?

The AHS' founding president, Dr. Leslie Oliver, said his mind ?went in several directions? as he watched the incumbent president sign over the collection.

?The important thing is this is a benchmark,? he said. ?What I see this event as is building a formal alliance with the Town, with the municipality, which provides the kind of resources we need to move ahead and new directions because that is what the times require of us.?

Added Ms. Reiner: ?Times are changing and we have to change with it.?