

Doors Open 2017: Snapshot Aurora -- A Front Yard Portrait



By Michelle Johnson

On August 19, the Aurora Museum & Archives will be exploring the history and custom of the front yard portrait as we launch our Canada 150 legacy project, Snapshot Aurora: A Front Yard Portrait.

Join us in Brevik Hall, located at 22 Church Street, where we will feature historical displays of front yard portraits from the archives.

What is the front yard portrait?

During the middle of the nineteenth century, life was rapidly changing. Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, 1867 marked Canadian Confederation and during the 1870s Thomas Edison's inventions ushered in a new electric era. Another huge step forward was the invention of portable cameras and the rise of photography as a hobby.

During the mid-1880s, photography became accessible to everyday people thanks to a new technology that used a readymade dry gel-on film. Up until this time, photography was limited to professional photo artists who used fragile plates, complicated chemical kits, and heavy equipment to capture images.

In 1900, the Eastman Kodak Company produced the first inexpensive hand held camera known as the Brownie. With the invention of the Brownie the masses could now own a portable camera, take pictures outside of a professional studio setting and send the camera back to Kodak to be developed.

Some of the earliest photos show families on their porch, or in front of their homes, posing for a front yard portrait. There are many reasons why people posed in the front yard, some technical (lighting requirements and exposure) as well as some aesthetic (barrier free space and nicer backgrounds).

Beyond the technical and aesthetic reasons, photographs were captured in the front yard for a much simpler reason, the front yard was an extension of the indoor living space. Families would regularly gather on their front porch or in their yard and it was only natural to capture a portrait in these surroundings.

The Aurora Museum & Archives has partnered with the Aurora Public Library Camera Club to create a photographic time capsule of Aurora in recognition of Canada 150.

This legacy project is designed to create a record of what front yards in Aurora looks like in 2017. Visit us in Brevik Hall at the Doors Open event to see some of Aurora's historic front yard portraits and learn more about how you can be a part of history by participating in Snapshot Aurora: A Front Yard Project.