

Doors Open: Wellington Street East



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Some fine day ? possibly on August 17, Doors Open Aurora day ? take a walk along Wellington Street between Yonge Street and the railway crossing and have a really close look at what is to be seen.

Development along Wellington received a great impetus in the early 1850s when it was decided that a new rail line would pass through the eastern edge of Aurora, with a station at Wellington Street.

On May 16, 1853 the first regular run of the Ontario, Simcoe and Huron Union Railroad was made from Toronto to what was then Machell's Corners, and for a few weeks the future Aurora was head of rail.

In anticipation of an increase in Aurora's population with the coming of the railway, Richard Machell and John Mosley, owners of the land along the north and south sides of Wellington between Yonge and the station, had their landholdings subdivided into village building lots in 1853.

As was typical of ?subdivisions? in small towns well into the twentieth century, development was haphazard.

A speculator might purchase a few lots and erect a group of similar homes, but for the most part, houses were built by or for individuals at different dates and to suit individual tastes.

A number of the older homes along Wellington are the second houses on their sites, the first buildings having been removed to make way for bigger and better homes (a not uncommon phenomenon in the early twenty-first century, too).

As a result, Wellington Street East is one of Aurora's most varied streets from the residential architecture point of view. In these few blocks we can see modest frame dwellings from the 1860s, relatively grand brick homes from the 1880s, sturdy red brick Edwardian houses, charming Arts and Crafts houses from the 1920s, and more.

On the day of Doors Open Aurora, August 17, it will be possible to actually go inside one of the older homes, the Absalom Blaker House at 86 Wellington Street East.

This home displays a number of the typical features of the Gothic Revival style, popular in this part of Ontario from the 1830s to the 1880s. The prominent central roof gable attracts attention with its 'droop' bargeboarding, which in this case extends along the front and side eaves of the roof.

Bargeboard or vergeboard or gingerbread was designed to hide and protect the ends of roof rafters, but many a carpenter used his skills to add a purely decorative element to this basic function.

Within the gable is a pointed arched door opening, giving access to a balcony set into the roof of the verandah below. The vertical line of the door echoes the verticality of the gable, and this is reinforced by the decorative king post at the peak of the gable. The tracery within the glazing in the peak of the arch is of an unusual design. Be sure to look up!

While the plaque at 86 Wellington Street East lists the home as the Absalom Blaker House, Mr. Blaker may never have lived there. A carpenter and iron-founder (and later farmer) who worked with Joseph Fleury in the early days of the Fleury foundry in Aurora, Mr. Blaker had this house built about 1865. In fact, he may have even built it himself, as he was a carpenter. It was already rented out by 1868, and Mr. Blaker sold it in 1870.

The first long-term owner/occupier was a widow, Mrs. Martha McCallum, who owned the property from 1890 until 1912.

The Hill family also had a long association with the house. John James Hill purchased the property in 1920 and it did not pass out of the family until 1962. Mr. Hill worked at the Sisman shoe factory, just a few minutes' walk away down Berczy Street. He and his wife Mary Ann raised five children at number 86.

On Doors Open Aurora day, August 17, visitors to the Absalom Blaker House will be able to admire the many Gothic Revival details of this old home and to hear stories of its renovation.

For additional information about Doors Open Aurora and to print a copy of the Doors Open Aurora 2013 Map Guide, please visit www.aurora.ca/doorsopen2013

Map Guides will also be available at the Doors Open Aurora headquarters booth at Town Park, located at Mosley Street and Wells Street and other Doors Open Aurora participating sites on the day of the event.