

Find out why Ontario is 'A Place to Grow' at Hillary House



Hillary House National Historic Site has been a green oasis in Aurora's downtown core for generations, but a new travelling exhibition which recently opened at the iconic red-brick building is highlighting just how Ontarians of the past made their gardens grow.

'A Place to Grow' is an initiative of Burlington's Royal Botanical Gardens highlighting the history of Ontario seed companies which helped the Province to become a leader in both agriculture and horticulture.

The exhibition was developed just prior to the arrival of COVID-19, according to Hillary House curator Kathleen Vahey, with the intention of taking it around the Province, but the pandemic, of course, put up several hurdles before the exhibition could reach Aurora.

'A Place to Grow' highlights the history of gardening from 1850 to around 1950 in a Canadian context,' she says. 'Some of it talks about agricultural crops that shaped the economic development of the country and the second half talks about ornamental plants that influenced social history.'

The exhibition is open at Hillary House through April 29 and is free with admission to the building and grounds.

Its themes highlight the Aurora Historical Society's permanent outdoor exhibition, which was launched this past fall using QR codes that allow visitors to scan and find out more about the natural heritage on the Hillary House grounds.

Adding a further local angle to A Place to Grow's time at Hillary House, Garden Aurora 'formally the Aurora Garden and Horticultural Society' has mounted a small exhibition of its own at the National Historic Site.

'We have a small display on the history of Garden Aurora because that seemed to really fit in well if we're going to be talking about the history of gardening,' says Vahey. 'We have some things on display as well borrowed from the Aurora Museum & Archives dating back to the 1920s, which was in Garden Aurora's early history. It connects so well with the outdoor exhibition we installed last year talking about how the Hillary family used their grounds as well.'

'This year has actually been proclaimed the Year of the Garden by the Canadian Garden Council and in the spirit of that, I would like people to take away the history of gardening in Canada as well as the local tie-ins on how the Hillary family used their property, how the Garden and Horticultural Society began, and I hope it will spark an interest in gardening. It has been so relevant during

COVID, too ? people getting out into their own gardens ? but no matter what year it is, gardening can be such a beneficial part of everyone's life just by being outside and enjoying nature.?

The exhibition is free with admission.

Now that spring is about to, well, spring, a busy season is on the horizon for the Aurora Historical Society and Hillary House.

On Saturday, March 19, the Historical Society will host An Introduction to Cross Stitch Workshop from 1 ? 3 p.m., with tickets set at \$25 per person

The following week, on Wednesday, March 22, the AHS will host a virtual instalment of its Speaker Series with ?Embedded: Two Journalists, A Burlesque Star, & The Expedition to Oust Louis Riel? hosted by Ted Glenn.

Easter is also on their minds with an Easter Egg Decorating Worksop on April 9 from 1 ? 3 p.m. at Hillary House. Tickets for this event are \$20 for adults and \$10 for children.

For more information on these and other upcoming events, visit aurorahs.com.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter