

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE Streets: Remembering Our Veterans

By Stephen Somerville

There was an interesting headline and story in the Canadian Press a few weeks back.

The headline was 'Montreal renames Amherst Street to Atateken Street to honour Indigenous Peoples.'

According to the story, the mayor says the name change is meant to be a step toward reconciliation between the city and Indigenous Peoples.

The City of Montreal has officially changed the name of Amherst Street to mark National Indigenous Peoples Day.

Montreal Mayor Valérie Plante unveiled the new moniker, Atateken Street, on Friday, saying it means 'brothers and sisters.' She described the name change as a step toward reconciliation between the city and Indigenous Peoples.

The street was long named after British general Jeffrey Amherst, who led the capitulation of Montreal in September 1760. He is accused of using blankets he knew were contaminated with smallpox to quell Indigenous rebellions.

It was former mayor Denis Coderre who announced the city's plan to change the name in 2017. The Plante administration then formed a committee in fall 2018 to find a new, suitable name for the downtown street.

I believe that Aurora does a great job in both preserving and protecting our local institutions and our heritage.

It is equally important that we both honour and remember those who have gone before us.

Through areas like Sheppard's Bush and the McKenzie Marsh we have sought to protect our green spaces.

By designating some of this Town's oldest homes as 'heritage houses' we have sought to preserve our history.

We have also tried to remember those who have gone before us. Probably most every school in Aurora

does something to commemorate Remembrance Day and any idea, be it display cases, or slide shows, or plays, or bringing in Veterans to address the students, is a tremendous way of engaging students by trying to bring history to life.

Every modest step that we take ? like giving the cenotaph's two edifices much-needed face-lifts a couple of summers ago and also keeping the area clean of garbage ? shows that, collectively, we care.

I add another small suggestion to honour our past. It is one that the young children of our community, the Aurora Historical Society and Town Hall may be able to get behind.

It's about street signs.
Street signs?

Yes, street signs.

We all live on streets that are named, for the most part, for either a particular individual or for some special event.

But I'll bet that most of us don't know the reason why our own street was named the way it is.

Or even if we did, what happens in fifty years when new people are living on the street?

I submit that it would be a good idea to affix a small sign on top of these signs signifying whom the person or event was.

I'm not sure about how this would square with current municipal bylaws but this has been done elsewhere. Look at downtown Toronto; there are small signs that sit on top of the street signs signifying the fashion district, little Italy and, if memory serves, the Greek culture of the Danforth. We could do the same here.

For instance, Timpson Drive is named after a friend of mine, George Timpson, who was, until he moved away, a long-time resident of Aurora. The sign could say ? ?Aurora Councilor from 1973-76, 1986-94, 2001-03; Mayor of Aurora 1977 ? 1982?.

Or how about the following for the Chadburn Crescent street sign named after Aurora's Lloyd Chadburn: ?WWII Fighter Ace ? 14 enemy airplanes destroyed -DSO, DFC, CdeG avec Palme, Legion d'Honneur.?

With such a small sign in

place, every time we would walk past these streets we would be reminded of their particular accomplishment.

This is where the kids' participation comes in. I think this would be a great project for the little tykes to learn something about Aurora and the folks who contributed to making this the great place it is to live.

In fact, I kindly challenge the elementary schools in Town to take this project on.

I don't think such a project would be that big of an undertaking. Just start with a few streets every year.

The Grade Two or grade three children could team up in pairs and prepare a small research project on a street name and then present their findings to their classmates.

Then copy the presentation and go around to the homes on the street and solicit, say, \$1 or \$2 from each household as a contribution to the sign.

Some business in Town could sponsor the project and make the signs at a reasonable cost.

The Town Hall types could ensure that all the signs look nice and are based on the same template while the Aurora Historical Society and the teachers could ensure that the brief facts on the signs are right.

Then the individuals living on the street could have a little ceremony ? or what have you ? and affix the sign above the respective street sign.

This is a small and simple way of bringing history to life and remembering our past.

Now, we just need someone to sponsor the project and lead it.

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