

Get a glimpse into Aurora's winters past with the Aurora Museum and Royal Rose



Winter is just around the corner, and if you're looking for ideas on how to stay warm or make the most out of the cold, head over to the Royal Rose Gallery to see how Aurorans of the past fared.

A new exhibition curated by the Aurora Museum and Archives is on display now at the Gallery, located on Yonge Street just south of Wellington, looking back at some of Aurora's snowier days, how residents of the past made the most of them, and yes, how they stayed warm.

The exhibition showcases a number of items from the Museum including stylish winter hats from the 1920s; photos from local Santa Claus parades going back some 70 years; images of every day Aurorans tobogganing, dogsledding, or showing off their latest winter duds outside their homes, some of which are still recognizable to this day; and an array of Christmas cards sent and received locally.

‘We’re always looking for things that are compelling and are going to speak to the link between the present and the past, where you can look at a picture of children sledding and it isn’t so different from what is happening today,’ says Jeremy Hood of the Aurora Museum & Archives. ‘Right now, we’re limited in our ability to display artefacts and we have very few artefacts with us until we’re back at our new home [in Aurora Town Square] so we wanted to find the correct combination of physical and archival items that speak to this collaboration and speak to the season.’

This exhibition is the third such collaboration with the Royal Rose Gallery and this one is particularly poignant to the space as its earlier incarnation of Mary’s Flower Shop is well-represented in images of Aurorans getting out into the snowy historic downtown core in parade, on sleighs, or pulling sleds.

‘I have been spearheading this collaboration between the Aurora Museum & Archives and Royal Rose Gallery and it has just been so fun to come up with themes together and also to see what the team puts together at the end,’ says Kaitlyn Ceren, Assistant Gallery Manager at the Royal Rose. ‘I know the gallery itself is in a historic building so I was really excited to see if they had any archival photos of what this place looked like in past winters, seeing how it was treated by Aurorans in the past, and they actually did find something, which I am really excited about.’

What Alessandra Ruberto of the Aurora Museum & Archives found particularly interesting was exploring some traditions of the past that have not necessarily followed us into the present, including traditions surrounding the Twelfth Night celebrations.

‘It was kind of a hangover from the Middle Ages in Britain and Canada really had ties with their mother country, so to speak,’ she says. ‘After the 1920s and 30s, we started ebbing away from that. Twelfth Night was more boisterous than Christmas Day because it

was the last night, the hoorah, where you just give it your all. There [is advice] on how to give a party, maybe make a wonderful Twelfth Night cake ? and there are also some stories here and it speaks to the traditional close link between Canada and Britain at the time.?

?I was also in charge of giving a little bit of context to these postcards,? she adds of the process of researching more about the writers, the cards' origins and their intended destinations. ?Some of the stories are about family, other things are cheeky? but that's history. You find a piece of something and you just go and dig. That's the magic of history for me, anyway.?

It's also emblematic of the magic of the season.

?It was a real rags-to-riches on Christmas when we dug in (to the Archives) and really looked at what we had,? Ruberto adds. ?It was a lot of working with what we had and that almost speaks to that essence of what Christmas used to be, that tradition of crafting something for somebody. I think a good museum worker or a good historian does this all in service to show people and to give to people. We have never showcased these things in all these years, that I am aware of, and it really is something special. It speaks to the merriment of the holidays.?

The Royal Rose Gallery is located at 15210 Yonge Street.

For more on the Aurora Museum and Archives, visit aurora.ca/en/Museum.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter