

Hillary House Ball will take you back to 1867

By Brock Weir

150 years ago, Queen Victoria was on the throne, John A. Macdonald was just settling into his new gig, and the former Provinces of Canada, along with the colonies of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were going through the growing pains of becoming a new blended family.

Canada was but a mere infant and Hillary House was just four, but the Aurora Historical Society will take you back to these early days of our collective history this month with the Hillary House Ball.

Set for Saturday, October 21, at King Valley Golf Club, the sixth annual Hillary House Ball will celebrate the sesquicentennial of Canada's nationhood with a night of dancing, music, and good food ? all in the name of raising funds for the upkeep and much-needed repairs of Aurora's only National Historic Site.

?Canada 150 has been a big theme throughout our year, but we wanted to make sure it was incorporated into our biggest event of the year,? says Erika Mazanik of the Aurora Historical Society. ?You will see it as soon as you go in and see the décor. Our volunteers, instead of the typical black and white clothes will be dressed appropriately. It's all in the details.

?There will also be a special surprise from our collection on display [working with the theme]. I don't want to give too much away, but it will be one of the first things you see.?

The historic accents will also be found at the tables as volunteers have been hard at work reviving the tradition of hand-made paper flowers.

And traditions abound. One of the artefacts on display this year will be related to Aurora dances of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Dances and balls have a long-standing heritage in Aurora, with Hillary House boasting a ballroom of its own.

From there, Mrs. Hillary would play chatelaine to Aurora's great and good as they came together for an evening of celebration.

This month's ball, in Ms. Mazanik's view, is the continuation of a storied past.

While the music, food, dancing and silent auctions have all been integral to the success of the Ball five years running, the success of the Ball has been integral to the ongoing maintenance of the house.

This year alone, the Aurora Historical Society has spent nearly \$25,000 in restoration work on the 1863 house, which is celebrated as one of the finest examples of Victorian Gothic architecture in the country.

Individual tickets are set at \$150 this year, and organizers are hoping to raise approximately \$20,000 from the Ball.

?We feel that is attainable and it all goes towards the restoration of the house,? says Ms. Mazanik. ?The house is 155 this year and it is constantly needing TLC here and there. We're in the midst of getting reports done to find out exactly the areas of greatest need.

We want to make sure we're spending money strategically and not just on anything we think needs to get done next. We're in the process of making sure whatever we raise is well-spent and the Historical Society is fiscally responsible.?

Tickets are on sale now. For more information, visit aurorahs.com/hillary-house-ball.