

Historic log house gets some official kudos



By Brock Weir

A 'labour of love' got some official recognition as the historic Petch House was officially dedicated last week.

Mayor Geoffrey Dawe, along with Councillors John Abel, Evelyn Buck and Sandra Humfryes were joined at the reconstructed heritage building at the entrance of the Aurora Community Arboretum right behind the Aurora Seniors' Centre, by Al Downey, Director of Parks and Recreation and Parks Manager Jim Tree.

The plaque outlines the long and, at times, complicated history of the Petch House, which began life as a log cabin in what was then Whitchurch Township in the early 1840s.

With that land eventually incorporated into Aurora, the home was moved further and further west as properties changed hands and it languished for the better part of a decade on Leslie Street just south of Wellington until Councillors figured out what to do with it.

\$146,000 later, it's now ready for a new lease on life awaiting someone to come forward with a use.

'This was a labour of love for the Parks and Recreation department,' said Mr. Downey, noting the length of time the house has been in the hands of the Town. 'I am happy to say that through a year's worth of work, we created a new site for Petch House. It is back to its original state, and with a replica of its original cladding ready for its next life. I am not quite sure what it will be, but it is home, safe, and available for whatever the future use might be.'

From the inside, the original log construction is available for all to see. It incorporates much of its original beams and expansive loft space. The exterior cladding, however, has been a bone of contention to some, as it is quite obviously new and not what they necessarily expect of a log house.

Not to fear, says Mr. Tree.

'Back when they built these homes, they covered them up because nobody wanted to be seen as living in a log building,' he said of the wood siding originally installed by Jonathan Petch, original owner of the building. 'We remember it always as a log house, but when we started to peel back the old remains, we started to find this style of siding. This is exactly what was on it originally, but it was all up in the peak and covered up.'

Added Mr. Downey: 'It is hard to believe that in 800 square feet, families were born and raised here, families that cleared the land when it was originally nothing but farmland. This plaque will give the public a little bit of history, they can peak in the windows, see what is going on, and we hope one day there will be full public access for them to enjoy and get a little bit of feeling of what it was like when settlers first came here and started Aurora.'

Following the unveiling, Mayor and Council adjourned to the Council chamber for Tuesday night's meeting, there Councillor Buck ? at one time Council's strongest proponent for simply setting a torch to the building as it languished on stilts on Leslie ? celebrated the finished result.

?I take great satisfaction in this, considering how long it has been in the making,? she said. ?I argued against spending any money on that old wreck sitting at the side of the road on Leslie but I take great pleasure in seeing the building completed. If anyone has a use for it, come forward now or forever hold your peace.?