

Historical Society hit by multiple thefts last week



You may not have known it to look at it, but a humble wooden bench sitting on the verandah of Hillary House National Historic site was an important piece of Aurora's sporting history.

First donated more than a century ago by Trinity Anglican Church to the Hillary Family, it was a gift with a special purpose: spectator seating for the Town's first organized tennis club, which was then meeting on the family's sprawling Yonge Street lawns.

It served the tennis community and the Hillary family and, in more recent decades, the Aurora Historical Society and its myriad supporters and patrons ? now, following a series of thefts, its whereabouts are unknown.

The Aurora Historical Society (AHS) was hit by a series of thefts last week.

In addition to the historic bench, thieves also made off with a large set of patio furniture and an antique wooden wheelbarrow donated to the AHS from nearby Horton Place before it was gutted and transformed into an insurance office.

The thefts, according to AHS President Patricia Wallace, took place over two days.

?After [last Saturday's powerful storm] we took all of our green metal lawn furniture ? a round table, four chairs and two loungers ? and placed them out by the barn as we waited for the grass to get cut,? says Ms. Wallace. ?They were conveniently stacked all in the same place. The storm was Saturday and we know they were there. On Sunday, volunteers were here, including myself, to do some planting and we know they were there then [but] on Tuesday (AHS Curator Kathleen Vahey) and I were out in the back of the property to look at those fallen trees and I thought, ?Where's the furniture?' We know it had to have been Monday night that they were stolen.

?We checked with everybody. Who is going to take them? You would have needed a truck and two people because there's no way some of those things could be lifted on a truck with a single person from the sheer size of them I would highly doubt it and the space it would take up.?

After filing a police report, more bad news hit the AHS on Wednesday when Ms. Vahey called to say the bench, which was being stored at the side of the house due to ongoing restoration work on the veranda, had gone missing as well.

?One would assume that those same people who took the stuff on Monday night had a look around to see what else they could take

on a second trip and come back ? I can't imagine it would be two random people,? says Ms. Wallace.

?The bench was donated to the Hillary Family in the early 1900s. That bench has been sitting outside on this property for over 100 years untouched. It was donated by Trinity Church because in those days they would play tennis on the Trinity Church lawns and then when tennis became more popular and they began playing it on the Hillary House lawns, Trinity donated the bench for spectators. Now, 100 years later it is gone. Of all the things that were stolen, that is probably what hurts us the most.?

The thefts came after the AHS put new security measures in place on the property, including floodlights so the property can be well-seen from Yonge Street and the surrounding areas. Now, the non-profit is ?taking the opportunity to review our security measures.?

?We are trying so hard to keep the doors open to the community, to continue to provide this service and education to the community but resources only go so far,? says Ms. Wallace. ?I hope the community that is outraged by this remember (our ongoing campaign for restoration funds) and continue to support with their funds as well as their kind words and volunteer hours because all of that is important to us. We are very sad and a little unnerved by this, to be honest. [What was stolen] is worth a lot more to us and this historic community than it would be in any small dollars that you might get from it. Consider returning it.

?We are touched by the outpouring of support and outrage from the community. Heritage in our community clearly matters.?

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