

Historical Society's Speakers Series begins with Distant Relations

By Brock Weir

Easter's over and chances are you spent at least a portion of the holidays with some of your more distant relatives.

This week, however, you're invited to come out to Hillary House to spend a couple of hours with Victoria Freeman's 'Distant Relations', which kicks off the Aurora Historical Society's second annual Speakers Series.

Ms. Freeman, a Canadian Studies professor at Glendon College, comes to the National Historic Site this Thursday, March 31, with her talk 'Distant Relations: How My Ancestors Colonized North America.'

'Victoria Freeman is a previous professor of mine and I thought the topic of the talk, colonizing North America and having ancestors in it would be a great fit,' says Leigha Cooney, Education, Public Programming and Outreach Officer for the Historical Society (AHS). 'When I was taking her class, she brought in a new aspect of bringing colonization to a personal level. Within that class, she did an assignment on 'How do you relate to colonization?' That got everyone thinking about how they relate in society and how colonization is a central focus in all our lives, not something that is removed from society. That is something I really want to get across.'

Ms. Freeman's talk begins in Salisbury, England in 1558 and follows different branches of her family tree down through the ages to when they arrived in New England, migrated to what is now Ontario, established 'societies that claimed jurisdiction over and oppressed the peoples who were already here,' before turning to her own travels to various places around Canada where her forebears interacted with Canada's indigenous peoples 'including her own grandfather who was involved in a residential school near Kenora, ON.

In her role with the AHS, Ms. Cooney is focused not only on getting history out into the community, but also looking at the education curriculum set out by the province to see how the material at Hillary House can be brought into the classrooms as well as tailored for programming within the building itself.

'We have connections to Family Studies, connections to Social Studies, and I am examining science right now to see the connections, as well,' she explains. 'It is a matter of connecting with the schools, re-establishing those connections, and communicating with them.'

Following Ms. Freeman's talk, the Speakers Series continues May 4 with Dr. Marianne Fedunski, who will be discussing the social history of medicine and how medical education changed between the late 19th and early 20th Centuries 'particularly fitting for a building housing the Koffler Museum of Medicine.

Holly Stewart comes to Hillary House on June 14 with a talk on Casa Loma, and long-time local historian and curator Jacqueline Stuart returns to the Historic Site on September 21 with 'Aurora and the Great War: The Home Front.'

Tickets for Distant Relations: How My Ancestors Colonized North America are \$7 each, or \$5 for AHS members. For more information, visit aurorahs.com.