

Photography exhibition extended, coinciding with upcoming 150th anniversary

Aurora residents will have more time to get up close and personal with the community of the past as the Contact Photography Festival has been extended through September 9 at Hillary House National Historic Site and the Aurora Armoury – just in time for the latter landmark to usher in its 150th anniversary this fall.

Local exhibitions that are part of the Contact Photography Festival launched this past spring, part of a GTA-wide exhibition showcasing the medium. In Aurora, in efforts spearheaded by the Aurora Museum & Archives and Aurora Historical Society with students from the University of Toronto, images have focused on Aurora's past.

Photos at the Armoury include evocative vintage images that tell the landmark's storied history as home base for the Queen's York Rangers Regiment, before they moved to Industrial Parkway South and the Armoury was taken over by Niagara College as a campus for their Canadian Food and Wine Institute.

Over at Hillary House National Historic Site, the exhibition has served as an extension of their Growing Up Aurora project, which aims to collect memories of the Town's distant and not-so-distant past. The Museum's exhibition, on the other hand, was hosted at the Royal Rose Gallery at Yonge and Wellington, appropriately showcased the changing Yonge streetscape.

"We worked with the University of Toronto, specifically the Faculty of Information with the student group there and this was part of their capstone project for their Media Studies degree," explains Michelle Johnson of the Aurora Museum & Archives. "When we presented the project to the faculty, we had themes that were identified (portraiture, transportation and the military collection) and the students were tasked with finding archival photographs in our collection related to those themes.

"We have our collection (of historic photographs) here at Town Hall and for us it is a really heavy use of those archival photographs to show those stories and help illustrate those themes. Portraiture and transportation lean themselves very nicely to Royal Rose, where we had a display that was facing out to Yonge Street, really connecting to the road as the historic and current main artery to Aurora, along with portraiture inside the gallery."

Over at the Aurora Historical Society (AHS), organizers had a bit of a head start as Growing Up Aurora has been an ongoing project.

"We have been trying to gather stories," says Kathleen Vahey, Curator-Manager for the AHS. "It has been kind of curated by the people who submit their stories. We wanted to see what stories came in and what photographs were submitted, and it naturally fell into our sub-themes. Some of it is Town-wide events, stories around the Horse Show, Canada Day parades and things like that. The other themes were sports and clubs, local attractions, and schools."

If those submitting stories were unable to provide photos, it was the Museum and the students they were working with to the rescue.

"We were thrilled with the presentation, of course, and the students' vision for putting all this together," says Johnson.

Aurora Through the Archives, part of the Contact Photography Festival, can still be viewed through September 9 at the Aurora Armoury and Hillary House National Historic Site. For more information, visit auroramuseum.ca.

By Brock Weir