

SPEAKEASY

By Jane Taylor & Reccia Mandelcorn

This past week's Speakeasy featured Erika Mazanik, Curator/Communications and Development Coordinator at the Aurora Historical Society/Hillary House National Historic Site. We were curious to hear about the culminating heritage exhibit in a trilogy of linked shows on The Great War. Erika's vast knowledge and her deep local connection and involvement made for a fascinating conversation.

A few years ago, Erika came across an Extra Edition from the Toronto Daily Star. VICTORY was splashed across the top of the fold, in a gigantic font that so clearly indicated the magnitude of this moment. The date was Monday, November 11, 1918. The paper only cost two cents, but for Mazanik, this was priceless. Found amongst a disparate collection of papers not related to WW1, she knew she had the perfect centerpiece for the exhibit.

WW1: Canada, Star of the Empire, currently on display through November 11, traces the effects of a protracted war experience that was felt far beyond the battlefields of Europe. Starting during the Hundred Days Offense that lead up to the Armistice, Mazanik talked about the battle-hardened Canadian soldiers, who saw action at the Battle of Amiens at the start of this offensive, right through to the last moments of the war.

In the course of her research, she unearthed the fascinating story of a local boy who carefully hid his underage status in order to be able to go and fight alongside his brothers. She also spoke about the effects of what was then called shell shock, which were further exacerbated by the propaganda machine on the home front that ensured the real horrors of war were not communicated back to families across the ocean.

How could the battle-hardened soldiers possibly explain how difficult it had been, when the news so often seemed to be in our favour?

In looking at the immediate postwar period, Mazanik and her research team were amazed to discover the speed at which the Aurora Cenotaph was constructed, from the genesis of the idea through to fundraising and consecration in mere months. This exhibit is a bonus in making a summertime visit to Hillary House to learn more.

Each year, Aurora Public Library hosts a community reading initiative where everyone is invited to read the same book and participate in related events. This year's selection, Strangers with the Same Dream by Alison Pick, provides the spark for two contests that will enhance your creative expression over the summer months.

For the photography contest The Auroran newspaper challenges you to capture your personal relationship with the land, with the winner's photo published in the paper. For the writing contest Alison's opening line in the novel ? This story begins with a lie ? creates the perfect launch to use the author's words and spin your own tale as fiction, memoir, poetry or even in song. For details and prizes, visit onebookoneaurora.com or aurorapl.ca.

The Aurora Cultural Centre summer arts camps are in full swing, and include the addition of two new camps focusing on musical theatre and acting skills. Taught by actress Mandy Roveda, these full day camps are in addition to the Centre's signature half-day visual arts camps for children ages 4 ? 12. The studios are filled with creative energy bubbling up through the old school floorboards! Later this summer, the Nearly World Famous DuffleBag Theatre returns to the Centre with a merry version of Robin Hood for all ages on August 22 with special family pricing. For all camps and family theatrical performance information, visit www.auroraculturalcentre.ca.

Jane Taylor is Events & Communications Manager at the Aurora Cultural Centre, and Reccia Mandelcorn is Manager of Community Collaboration at Aurora Public Library. They co-host The Speakeasy on the first Wednesday of each month on CHOP-FM 102.7.