

TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY: Mother Nature's Fury

By Shawna White

All of the wild weather that we have been witnessing over the past few weeks has us at the Museum reminiscing about other occasions when Mother Nature has unleashed her fury within Aurora's boundaries. The damage caused by the freak windstorm that collapsed the soccer dome, brought to mind the cyclone (tornado) that tore through Aurora 125 years ago, almost to the day. On May 23, 1893 the storm ripped through the centre of town taking the steeple off the United (formerly Methodist) Church and causing tremendous property damage. James Reynolds was seriously injured when his horse and rig were thrown across Yonge Street. The cyclone would continue to move eastward lifting the steeple off St. Andrews Presbyterian Church before dissipating.

In August of 1946, it was a severe thunderstorm, and the resulting floodwaters, that raised the alarm. The event was recorded as 'the worst-flood in the history of the town' (Aurora Banner, August 8, 1946), which is an apt description as both the tannery creek and cousin's creek were turned into rushing rivers. At one point, Yonge Street was covered in two feet of water while the storm caused multiple trees to be uprooted and blown to the ground. One residence on Wells Street was struck by lightning and the force was so strong that it propelled bricks from the chimney to the ground. Interestingly, it seems the storm only had Aurora in its sights as neither Newmarket to the north, or Richmond Hill to the South, had a drop of rainfall.

Flooding again was a major concern when Hurricane Hazel made her way up the Atlantic coast in October of 1954. Most of the devastation took place in areas that directly surround the Holland Marsh but Aurora was by no means immune. The neighborhood near Gurnett and Connaught Street saw major flooding and a number of residents narrowly escaped with their lives. The most dramatic story involved Howard Pattenden and his daughter Shirley who were driving through that intersection after a barricade had washed away. Without any warning, the car went straight into the deep water causing the motor to stall. The force of the water was so strong that the door would not open. Fortunately, Mr. Pattenden was able to roll down the window and both he and Shirley escaped the car and quickly climbed onto its roof where they were eventually rescued.

Some of these stories are being brought to life through an interactive app that we will be launching at the Aurora Chamber Street Sale on Sunday, June 3rd. On this Spot Aurora is a new way to experience history by making history engaging, educational, and accessible to anyone with a mobile device. On This Spot takes people on guided walking tours through the history that surrounds them and uses then-and-now photos to ignite people's curiosity. Users are also able to create their own custom then-and-now photos and upload them to their favorite social media platform. Come visit us at Booth 139 to begin your own exploration.