

TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY: Yonge Street Landmarks

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Aurora Museum & Archives

It's 1878, and the last of three major construction projects along Aurora's Yonge Street is now complete.

Only fifteen years have passed since Aurora was incorporated as a Village and it's already time for a makeover, of sorts. Enter Toronto architects Langley, Langley & Burke, whose designs are greatly influencing Aurora's Yonge Street aesthetic. Let's start at the beginning?

A Modern & Mixed Use Town Hall

Aurora's Town Hall was originally located on the northeast corner of Yonge and Mosley Streets. By the mid 1870s the growth of the Town demanded an updated municipal office that could become the centre of political and social life. In 1875, the Toronto architectural firm Langley, Langley & Burke were contracted to design a new Town Hall and Marketplace.

The two-storey building was completed the following year and on the ground floor it featured four butcher stalls, a large marketplace, Council chambers, police offices (complete with two jail cells), and the fire engine room. The second floor consisted of a large public auditorium, which hosted various community events. The building had a grandiose appearance and boasted a 75-foot bell tower and intricate brickwork all around.

Inglehurst

The next project on the docket for Langley, Langley & Burke was Mr. Joseph Fleury's personal residence. In the manner of other leading Victorian businessmen, including Hart Massey, Timothy Eaton, Robert Simpson, and Edgar Jarvis, Mr. Fleury asked Langley, Langley & Burke to design his own grand Victorian residence.

Construction on Inglehurst began in the spring of 1876 on a three-acre property at the corner of Yonge and Maple streets, a ten-minute walk north-east of the Fleury Works. Inglehurst was more than a family home, it became a destination for distinguished guests and community events ? a source of local pride.

Aurora (Methodist) United Church

In the spring of 1877, a fire partially destroyed the Methodist Church located on the northwest corner of Yonge and Tyler Streets. After some debate about whether or not to rebuild, Langley, Langley & Burke were eventually hired to design a new church building. It goes without saying that Aurorans approved of the architects as this was the third time they were given creative control over prominent Yonge Street buildings.

The design for the new church was in the Gothic Revival style and featured a steeply pitched gable roof with two asymmetrical square towers. The south tower supported a 100-foot wooden spire, and the northern tower featured a much shorter one. The new church officially opened on October 1, 1878.

Fast forward to 2018 and unfortunately, none of these Langley, Langley & Burke buildings continue to stand ? they were taken down in the exact order that they were built up.

First, it was the old Town Hall, demolished in 1956 to make room for commercial development. Next up was Inglehurst, which was subjected to the wrecking claw in 1980 to create more parking space. Last, but not least, was Aurora United Church. In 2014, the church's roof was undergoing repair work and a wayward spark reached the old wooden shingles from the original building. Within moments, the entire roof was on fire and the building was left scorched beyond repair.

While the built legacy of Langley, Langley & Burke no longer exists along Yonge Street, there was a 136-year period where their designs acted as landmarks throughout Aurora's downtown core. What do you think is a landmark on Yonge Street?