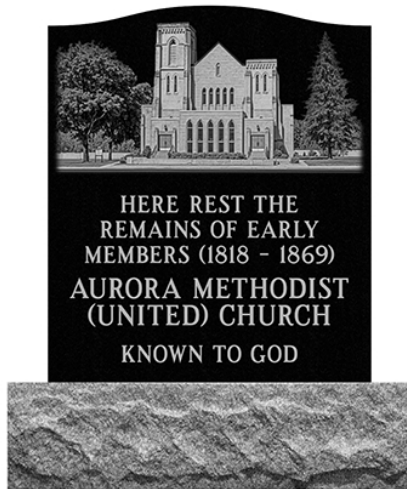


Two-hundred years of Aurora's history to be commemorated Sunday ceremony



From the Town's most prominent founders, to the man who oversaw the construction of the Empire State Building, to the paternal grandparents of beloved actress Betty White, many of Aurora's great and good have found their final resting places in Aurora Cemetery ? and, on August 24, more than 150 community pioneers, the names of which have been lost to history, are set to join their ranks.

This Sunday, at 3 p.m., Aurora United Church will host a special memorial service and re-interment ceremony at Aurora Cemetery, for an estimated 180 early settlers whose long-forgotten graves were uncovered on the site of the previous church building, which was destroyed by fire in the spring of 2014.

The sheer number of graves uncovered came as something of a surprise to those involved in the Aurora United Church's (AUC) rebuilding efforts as they were related to an earlier church building that previously stood on the northwest corner of Yonge and Tyler Streets.

Before the church destroyed in the blaze was built in the 1870s, it was believed that many families who had loved ones buried on site had moved their remains to the then-new Aurora Cemetery in the Town's south end, but that turned out to be not quite the case.

?We had an archeological study that took two years and we uncovered all these remains ? about 180 sets that were then stored at the Aurora Cemetery,? explains Rev. Andy Comar, who has led AUC with his wife, Rev. Lorraine Newton Comar, for more than a decade.

Several hurdles had to be cleared with the Bereavement Authority of Ontario before any re-interment could take place, but all the details were hammered out about a month ago, leading the AUC to act quickly ? with Thompson Funeral Home donating the monument, which will be placed on a yet-to-be-determined date following Sunday's memorial.

?In 1869, the Church Board of Trustees at the time received permission to level the land and that was when the new Aurora Cemetery opened,? Comar continues. ?People could move their loved ones to Aurora Cemetery, which some did, but others just left their loved ones at the old Methodist Cemetery. There [was the indication] that some remains were left in a history book done by the church in the 1960s or 70s, but we didn't realize we would uncover so many more.?

Sunday's service will bring a nearly 150-year reinterment effort to completion.

"This will be an uplifting spiritual service," says Comar. "We're now going to remember these people who are part of our heritage and part of the heritage of the Church, and to finally lay them to rest in a permanent place. We'll have a scripture reading, prayers, and a little bit of history of the people who were there, who were part of the congregation, and how we arrived at this point. This is to remember those people who lived here in Aurora those many years ago and were part of the Methodist Church, and while their spirits were already offered to God, we can remember them in this way ? faithful people, faithful in the community."

The entire community is invited to attend the service, regardless of religious or spiritual affiliation.

Sunday's ceremony will be one of the final acts of leadership by the Comars.

The long-time pastors have led the church through one of the most challenging chapters of its history, including the immediate aftermath of the fire and efforts to keep the congregation together in their shared space at Trinity Anglican Church ? a "temporary" stop-gap that is now in its eleventh year.

They will bid the AUC congregation a fond farewell at August 31's Sunday Service.

The new AUC building, located on the site of the previous church, is slated to be complete on December 31, 2025, with a formal move-in date eyed for January 2026.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter