

You'll look sweet upon the seat of a bicycle built for two



By Brock Weir

Daisy, Daisy
Give me your answer, do
I'm half crazy
All for the love of you.
It won't be a stylish marriage,
I can't afford a carriage.
But you'll look sweet
Upon the seat
Of a bicycle built for two.

Few people living today would have any idea what Daisy's honeymoon ride felt like, but you could get the next best thing at this Sunday's Aurora Street Festival.

Hosted by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce along Yonge Street from Wellington Street in the north, to Murray Drive in the south, the Festival is primarily a pedestrian affair, but, thanks to the Aurora Historical Society, you'll be able to try out some pretty sweet wheels.

Okay, you won't actually be going anywhere, but you'll be able to get up close and personal with the seat of a bicycle built for one. The Aurora Historical Society (AHS), which is based at Hillary House National Historic Site, will be wheeling out their latest acquisition for the festivities, an acquisition that not only fills a hole in their vast collection, but strengthens the links of the Hillary Family to local sporting history.

Festival-goers will be able to proverbially kick the tires on an original Gould Ladies Bicycle from 1896. Built in Brantford, a hub of Canada's cycling industry, it was donated to the Aurora Historical Society this Spring, complete with its original body, frame, pedals and chain.

Says AHS curator Erika Mazanik: "Brantford was the hot spot for bikes in the 1890s and the Good Bicycle Companies was one of the main companies down there.

"This is a rare condition bike to have and part of the reasons we wanted a bike is we know the Hillaries had one, but we didn't have one of our own in the collection. We don't know what happened to their original bikes, but our landscaping chair John Bayer was doing some extensive research on the history of the landscaping of the house and was looking at historic photos and found this picture of this bike leaning up against the front of the house and he got it in his head we needed a bicycle and, sure enough, shows up with a bicycle."

Mr. Bayer found the bike at a show in Brantford and thought it was the perfect fit for the HS.

Throughout the warm months ahead, the AHS plans on displaying the heritage bike on their porch so visitors to Hillary House can take photos and see how cycling was at the tail end of the Victorian Era.

‘It just seems to fit in with the whole story of the Hillary family,’ says Ms. Mazanik. ‘They were athletic, with the tennis courts being on their property and we have all their tennis equipment, all their croquet equipment, all their lawn bowling equipment, and equipment from all the traditional sports of the day’ and cycling was one of them. This really fills a huge gap.

‘We’re going to try and bring it to events and talk about it and we’re hoping to wheel it out during the Street Festival (weather permitting) this year and let people look at it. This is an artefact we care deeply about and want to preserve, but we also want it to be seen and loved. There is no point locking it up and having it not seen, so we want to show it off as much as we can.’

As much as they show it off, this is a look and touch situation, so resist the urge to hop on to feel ‘at one’ with Daisy. The bicycle is not rideable.

To get a gander, however, keep your eyes peeled for the Aurora Historical Society's booth at the Aurora Street Festival on Sunday, or watch for it as it might be wheeled past you!