

# AURORA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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ANNUAL REPORT  
2020



# BACKGROUND & MISSION

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Founded in 1963, Aurora's centennial year, the Aurora Historical Society (AHS) was created to serve the public and bring to its attention the history and accomplishments of the community of Aurora.

The AHS strives to provide interesting and educational programs and exhibitions that illustrate Aurora's history and heritage and to make these available to all people and age groups.

Additionally, the AHS owns and operates Hillary House National Historic Site, a historic home dating back to 1862, with a rich history rooted in Aurora. Not only does this beautiful house serve as the base for all AHS operations, it is also a historically and architecturally significant structure and museum housing a vast collection of artifacts and archival records.

## **Mission Statement**

*To preserve, interpret and promote the social, cultural and material heritage of the community of Aurora for the education, enrichment and enjoyment of present and future generations.*

## **Board of Directors**

### **President**

Patricia Wallace

### **Vice-President**

John Green

### **Treasurer**

Geoffrey Dawe

### **Secretary**

Anna Kroeplin

### **Directors**

Ronen Grunberg

Al Lambert

Jeff Thom

Peter Styrmo

Stan Neal

Paul Martin

Although 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic brought many challenges, the Aurora Historical Society persevered and there were a number of changes and achievements worth highlighting.

# STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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In 2020, the AHS revised its staffing structure and welcomed two new permanent staff members.

## **Curator**

As part of the review, the position of Executive Director/Curator was changed to Curator. Executive Director/Curator Peter McKenzie departed in May. Kathleen Vahey joined the AHS in June as Curator. Kathleen has a Master of Museum Studies from the University of Toronto and comes to the AHS with experience from museums in Uxbridge, Scugog, and Clarington.



Kathleen Vahey,  
Curator

## **Education, Public Programming, and Outreach Coordinator**

The Education, Public Programming, and Outreach Coordinator position (vacant) was not filled and combined into the Curator position.

## **Administrative Assistant**

The position of Administrative Assistant was created to replace the position of Membership and Administrative Coordinator. This was done to facilitate a more comprehensive job description. Rita Surman departed in 2019. Julie Preston joined the AHS in January as the Administrative Assistant. Julie comes with extensive administrative and non-profit/charity experience.



Julie Preston,  
Administrative  
Assistant

## **Temporary Positions**

The AHS was fortunate to facilitate two summer contract positions, Assistant Curator and Museum Educator, funded through Canada Summer Jobs. Additionally, a student from Fleming College Museum Management and Curatorship program completed their internship at Hillary House during the fourth quarter of the year.

# MAINTENANCE

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The continuous maintenance of Hillary House and the grounds is a top priority of the AHS.

## Interior

Small maintenance projects inside Hillary House were completed by staff with assistance from volunteers. Larger projects were completed by industry professionals.

- The walls of the Gift Shop were repaired, including new plaster and paint.
- The upstairs kitchen was reorganized for inventory control.
- The east Basement was reorganized. New shelves were purchased for better accessibility of programming supplies and AHS business and financial documents were moved from the Collections Room. This created more space in the Collections Room and made the AHS documents readily available.



Gift Shop

## Exterior

Landscaping maintenance was completed on the grounds of Hillary House by a dedicated group of volunteers. Larger projects were completed by industry professionals.

- Enhanced exterior lighting and electrical access was added to the outside of Hillary House. This enhances the security of the property and visibility of the house from the street.
- Replanting and weeding in gardens around Hillary House, Mary's Garden, and at the west end of the property.
- Front brick walkway was levelled and re-laid.
- Bushes along Yonge St. were lowered and trimmed back from the pathway. This was replaced by new sod.



Mary's Garden

## Large Scale Projects

In 2020, the Board reviewed the 2017 Condition Assessment with the assistance of ERA Architects. It was determined that the priority was remediation of the verandah which has seen significant degradation. This project falls within the budget available and is projected to commence in 2021.

# CURATORIAL ACTIVITIES

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## Exhibitions

Since Hillary House was required to close in the first quarter of the year with no known re-opening date, the two exhibitions that were planned for 2020 were cancelled. Staff focused on re-imagining the 2021-2026 exhibition schedule to better align with existing strategic partnerships and continued COVID-19 restrictions.

Throughout 2020, the AHS continued to focus on collections management projects which were unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Donations

Seventeen items from two separate donations were accepted into the collection. These artifacts are properly stored and are in the process of being catalogued.

## Ongoing Cataloguing

Projects involving inventorying and cataloguing the permanent collection continued. Over 200 archival pieces, many of which were used for the Transcription Project, were re-catalogued, added to the database, and re-housed. Over 130 medical artifacts were properly catalogued, photographed and added to the database.

After moving the collections storage space to another room in order to reveal the Nursery in 2019, it was necessary to conduct a collections inventory to update artifact locations; better document objects catalogued in the past; and accession 'found in collection' items. Work on this project began in 2020 with over 125 objects inventoried and photographed for the database.



New  
Acquisition



Collections  
Storage

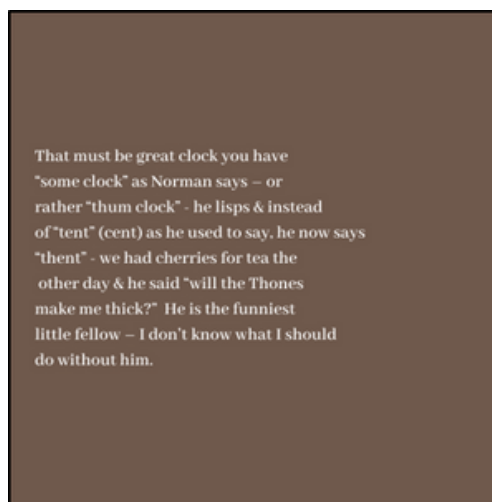
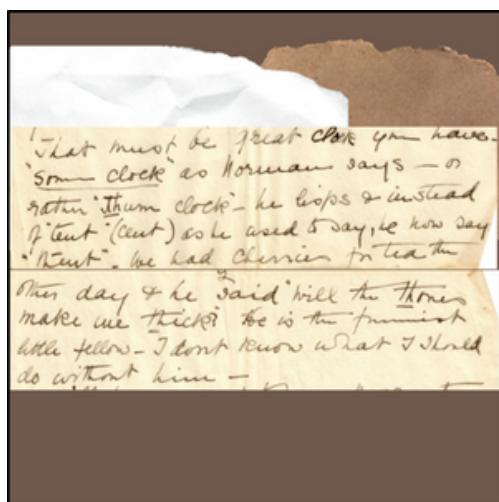
# PROGRAMMING & OUTREACH

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of many of our 2020 programs and outreach opportunities. Despite the challenges, we were able to reach approximately 350 people in-person throughout the year. This included tours and events that took place early in the year, before the lockdown, and others during the pandemic that had to be limited due to safety precautions. We were able to host:

- three of our popular Speaker Series events
- an indoor Jazz in the House musical event
- an outdoor Victorian themed Tea event as our contribution to Culture Days in Aurora



Jazz in the House



Transcription Project

The AHS was acutely aware that the pandemic was going to affect how we would be able to interact with the public and our volunteers. To engage them in a meaningful way, a volunteer transcription project was initiated mid-year. Archival letters from the Hillary Collection were scanned and sent to volunteers to transcribe. This project opened up new information and possibilities for future initiatives. The project was so successful, it will continue into 2021.

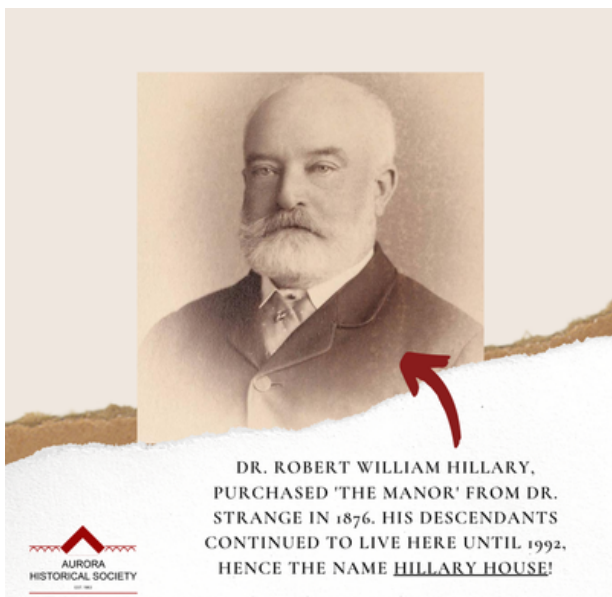


Victorian Harvest Tea

# WEBSITE, SOCIAL MEDIA, & I.T.

When the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were announced, the AHS quickly pivoted to engaging our audience with increased online initiatives.

- Created the 'Around the House' video series to show online audiences inside Hillary House. These videos were posted on social media and the AHS website and promoted extensively on both.
- Through enhanced social media content and an updated strategy to interact with our existing and new audiences, we have seen an increase in followers and engagements over most of our platforms. Our Facebook likes are now at 626, Twitter followers are 7,218, Instagram followers are at 1,156.
- Recorded approximately 13,000 online engagements through social media.



DR. ROBERT WILLIAM HILLARY, PURCHASED 'THE MANOR' FROM DR. STRANGE IN 1876. HIS DESCENDANTS CONTINUED TO LIVE HERE UNTIL 1992. HENCE THE NAME HILLARY HOUSE!



Trivia Tuesday on  
Social Media

## Around the House Videos



This short video highlights one of the oldest artifacts on display at Hillary House -- a mid-19th century square piano.



In this video you'll get a brief history of how and why Hillary House got its name.



This video is a tour of the Koffler Museum of Medicine located inside Hillary House.



This video discusses the features that make Hillary House a designated national historic site.

'Around the House'  
Video Series

The AHS launched an updated website in early 2020 and continues to make improvements to ensure the best visitor experience is achieved.

# MARKETING & PUBLIC RELATIONS

In early 2020, the AHS revealed a new easily identifiable logo for the Society. Additionally, the banners flying on the pole at Yonge St. in front of Hillary House were redesigned to clearly identify the property as a museum.



Banners on Yonge St.



MPP visit to Hillary House

Hillary House was visited by local MPP and Minister of Health Christine Elliott as well as MPP Michael Parsa to announce and promote the safe re-opening of Hillary House in July.

The AHS also welcomed local MP Tony Van Bynen to Hillary House in August. MP Van Bynen enjoyed a full tour, meeting with Board members and staff.

Two editions of the AHS newsletter, The Attic, were published and made available to members and supporters to update them on the status and activities of the AHS during the pandemic.

The AHS was grateful to participate in at least three post-secondary student projects focusing on topics such as public history, museum management, and historical architecture.

## Volunteers

The AHS relies heavily on a dedicated group of volunteers for all aspects of operations. The AHS recorded more than 3,260 hours of work contributed by 65 volunteers. This equates to 1.5 full-time employees and reflects the community's deep commitment to heritage.



Volunteer, Wayne

# COMPARATIVE STATISTICS

Performance Measure/Metric	2018	2019	2020
Exhibitions	2	2	0
Collections: Accessioned/Catalogued Artifacts and Archival Materials *	209	509	458
Number of Programs and Outreach Events	69	32	7
Hillary House Guests	2,054	2,370	349
Individuals Reached through Outreach Initiatives		1,183	0
Individuals Reached Through Online Presence**	9,459	9,523	9,430
Total Memberships	301***	191	150
Total Volunteers	40	42	65
Total Volunteer Hours	3,837	4,340	3,260
Number of Sponsors and Event Donors	94	61	4
Revenue from Fundraising Events/Donations/Other	\$62,000	\$54,000	\$21,000
Grants Awarded	4	3	4
Grant Revenue	\$102,000	\$103,000	\$106,000 + \$41,000 in COVID-19 Emergency Funding

\* Number of items catalogued each year is dependent on staff and volunteer availability

\*\* This number represents followers on social media platforms

\*\*\* This number was derived prior to a large clean-up of our membership cataloguing software and may be inaccurate.

# GOVERNANCE & POLICY

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The AHS remains committed to maintaining strong governance practices. In 2020, the Board of Directors undertook two large scale reviews of important governance documents.

In early 2020, the Board initiated a review of the AHS Constitution and By-laws to bring the document into conformity with Federal and Provincial regulations and in accordance with Federal guidelines. Further revisions were made to reduce duplication and increase consistency and clarity of language. This new document will provide the AHS with a stronger governance foundation for the future.

The review of the Strategic Plan initiated in 2019 continued through 2020. This was done to update the document for relevancy and to reflect the current strategic direction of the AHS.



MP visit to Hillary House



Hillary House in the Fall

# FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Predictably, the AHS finances were greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. A decline in attendance, memberships, community events, and of course the cancellation of the Hillary House Ball all contributed to a significant loss of revenue.

This loss was mitigated by the receipt of several government emergency support grants and an overall reduction in expenses; staffing levels were maintained, maintenance work on Hillary House was postponed, and there was a reduction in fundraising expenses due to the cancellation of events, including the Ball. It is important to note that the majority of this funding was received in the second half of 2020 and will assist in carrying AHS operations through 2021.

It is anticipated that the auditor will confirm an Excess of Revenue over Expenses of \$43,761 in 2020.

It was proposed that approximately \$22,000 be moved to the Restricted Building Fund at the end of 2020, as per a Board motion. This will be done upon the completion of the 2020 audit.

## SUMMARY

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Revenue	\$156,721	\$148,152	- \$8,569
Expenses	\$144,973	\$104,391	-\$40,582
Excess Revenue/Expenses	\$11,748	\$43,761	\$32,013

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>
Admission & Community Events	2.9%	0.6%
Donations & Fundraising	2.9%	9.3%
Hillary House Ball	23.0%	0.0%
Government	65.4%	83.1%
Memberships	3.0%	1.2%
Other	2.0%	5.9%

\*Please note: the 2020 numbers are from the unaudited financial statements

# FUNDING

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## Fundraising & Donations

Like so many other aspects of our operations, our fundraising capacity was greatly impacted by COVID-19. Our major fundraiser, the Hillary House Ball and other smaller in-person events were cancelled due to safety concerns and public health restrictions. Fortunately, we have a generous membership base and supportive community as we received **\$13,800** in donations, a significant increase from previous years. We sincerely thank all of our donors for their contributions!

## Gift Shop

The Gift Shop continued to do well in 2020 with the help of volunteers and many generous donations from our members and the general public. To prepare for the Gift Shop renovations, we held a successful online auction through MaxSold which, with a generous donation from MaxSold of waiving all their fees and help from volunteers, netted **\$3,300**. The Gift Shop was restocked with donations and continued to be open until the lockdown in December.

## Grants

The AHS received several grants in 2020 which were integral to its continued operation:

- Community Museum Operating Grant (CMOG) from the Province of Ontario. This year required a fast-tracked application for an expedited delivery of funds. Further reporting will be due at a later date.
- Canada Summer Jobs through the Government of Canada. This funded two, 9-week positions for the summer season.

The AHS was also fortunate to be granted emergency funding:

- Museum Assistance Program – COVID-19 Emergency Support Fund through the Government of Canada.
- Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy and the Canada Emergency Business Account through the Government of Canada.
- COVID-19 Business Support Grant – Energy Cost Rebate Grant through Province of Ontario



Canada Day



Wedding photography

# 2021 PLANNED ACTIVITIES

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## **Staffing**

The AHS expects to retain the current staffing complement through 2021, a full-time Curator and part-time Administrative Assistant. Funding will be sought for contract employees through granting programs, as has been done in the past.

## **Maintenance**

The AHS will continue to prioritize the maintenance of Hillary House in 2021. Small maintenance projects will continue to be remediated in-house while larger restoration will happen in collaboration with industry professionals. Work on the verandah restoration is planned to commence in 2021. Further restoration work will be prioritized based on a budget and needs assessment. Improvements will continue to be made throughout the property by the AHS Landscape Committee, Board, and Staff.

## **Curatorial Activities & Exhibitions**

Staff will continue to make progress on collections management projects including cataloguing, digitizing the collection, and updating the collections database.

A 2021-2026 exhibition schedule has been developed which includes two exhibitions for 2021. The first will be a semi-permanent outdoor exhibition showcasing the historically significant architectural features of Hillary House and the various ways the Hillary family used their lawns and gardens. The second will be the return of Art at the Manor, which will feature art from local artists.

## **Programming & Outreach**

In 2021, staff intends to implement up to 30 programs and special events. We recognize that COVID-19 is still impacting usual operations so virtual programming will be offered until it is safe to return to in-person programming. The AHS Speaker Series will return in 2021 and work will continue to increase the AHS' online presence.

The AHS will continue to work with our community partners and develop new relationships offer outreach programs in new ways.

# 2020

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## **Annual Appeal and General Donations:**

Alan Lambert

Alice Cuttler

Allegro (Danny & Titi DeCarlo)

Andrew Kipfer

Angela Ford

Angela Grattage

Angela Trevivian

Arlene Adams

Barry / Julie Smith

Beth (Hillary) McEwen

Bill Newman

Bob and Nicole Langdon

Bob McRoberts

Brad Keates

Brian & Patricia Roberts

Catherine & Greg Hart

Catherine Davis

Cathy McConnell

Claude Arcand

Darlene Mathews

Darryl Gray

Donald Hutchinson

Elizabeth McEwen

Eric McCartney

George & Rosalyn Gonsalves

Helen Roberts

Helen Yielding

Ian & Linda Nielsen-Jones

Irfan Zaki

Jacqueline E Stuart

James & Darlene Binns

James & Sonia Peters

James Campbell

James Webb

Janet & Frank Russell

Janet Wilson

Jim & Mary Hunnisett

Joan Gardner

Joan Harman Murray

Joan Patterson

John & Deborah Smale

Jonathan Watkins

Karen & Thomas Roberts

Kelly Mathews

Kelly McLure

Lawrence & Vivienne Strong

Lawrence Crump

Lorraine Hill

Lynn Weller

Margaret Blackie

Marion Hillary

Mary Auzam

Mary Beth & Richard Hess

Mary Cragg

Maxine Nisbet

Nanci Dow

Neil Johnston

Oliver Woods

Patricia Wallace

Paul van Nostrand

Penelope Heath-Eves

Peter Hodgkinson

Rhonda & John Sanders

Robert Hillary

Roberta Whitmore

Ron Crabtree

Sharon Nisbet

Shirley Binns

Shirley Pattenden

Susan & Chad Hanna

Susan Miller

Suzanne Reiner

Tom Wasley

Victor (Peter) Styrmo

William Hillary

### **Government Funders:**

Town of Aurora  
Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport,  
Government of Ontario  
Department of Canadian Heritage,  
Government of Canada  
Canada Summer Jobs  
Community Museum Operating and Pay  
Equity Grant

### **Community Groups:**

Aurora Museum & Archives,  
Aurora Garden and Horticultural Society  
(Garden Aurora),  
Aurora Chamber of Commerce  
Aurora Legion Branch 385, and the  
Aurora Public Library,  
Aurora Cultural Centre

### **Corporate Supporters:**

The Auroran  
Glenn Rodger Photography  
Type by Design  
Hurst Bakery  
North South Management  
Pine Farm Orchard  
KleinPaint Decorating Centres  
Benjamin Moore & Co.  
Wood Brothers Drywall  
MaxSold

### **Volunteers:**

Adrienne Levy  
Al Oliver  
Alan Lambert  
Alessia Spagnuolo  
Allison Collins-Mrakas  
Angela Trevivian  
Anna Kroeplin  
Betsy McIntyre  
Brenda Snape  
Cara Colangelo  
Christine McLure  
Cindy Scythes

Donna Gage  
Elisha Gennara  
Elizabeth Bishenden  
Elizabeth Evans  
Elizabeth Mick  
Faygie Noble  
Geoffrey Dawe  
Gloria Reszler  
Helen Burlanyette  
Helen Roberts  
Jacqueline Stuart  
James Hoyes  
Jasmine Gavigan  
Jeffrey Thom  
Jennifer Zsolt  
Jessica Tse  
Joan Gardner  
John Bare  
John Green  
Julia Marren  
Kate Tarini  
Kathee Roy  
Len Bulmer  
Lissa Dwyer  
Marjorie Bare  
Nadia Gargaro  
Pamela Pal  
Patricia Wallace  
Paul Martin  
Peter Styrmo  
Pippette Eibel  
Ronen Grunberg  
Sandy Bundy  
Sharon Mitchell  
Sharon Sutton  
Sonia Koczekan  
Stan Neal  
Ted McClenny  
Terri Briggs  
Tricha Rasmussen  
Vikki Mikkola  
Wayne Burlanyette