

The ATTIC

A PIERCING TALE: THE HISTORY OF SYRINGES AND NEEDLES

By: J. Elyse Richardson, Summer Assistant Museum Curator

It is estimated that between 3 - 10% of the world's population has trypanophobia—the fear of needles. It is understandable to dislike the idea of something piercing your skin. However, like it or not, syringes are an essential medical tool with a fascinating history.

Modern disposable syringes have come a long way from their rustic roots. However, before delving into that, we should first differentiate between syringes and needles. Syringes can come with or without needles. Originally, syringes were only comprised of a barrel or tube and a plunger-piston mechanism. Before the addition of needles, syringes were used to dispense ointment and suction fluids out of the body.

The concept of using thin, sharp objects as needles for medical purposes has been around since the 1400s, when Native Americans used hollow bird bones, reeds, and goose quills as needles. These early needles were used mostly for delicately cleaning wounds with water and did not pierce the skin. The first hypodermic needle, as we know it today, was created by Francis Rynd in Dublin in 1844. He made it by heating and folding a strip of steel into a thin tube. The word “hypodermic” comes from

Greek, with *hypo* meaning “under” and *derma* meaning “skin”, which is exactly what hypodermic needles do - pierce beneath the skin.

It was Scottish Doctor Alexander Wood who, in 1853, combined the hypodermic needle with a syringe to specifically inject medication into the body. Wood's hypodermic syringe was made of a metal needle attached to a glass barrel, which allowed Wood to not only inject medication but also monitor the amount of medication being injected. The same year, Charles Pravaz also invented his own medical syringe; however, his version was made of silver and used a screw mechanism to dispense fluids rather than the usual plunger device. Wood's syringe was more functional, and thus he was credited with the invention and his design was used widely.

... continued on page 4

SUMMER OPEN HOURS



Tuesday to Saturday, 10am to 4pm
Come for a tour, see the exhibitions, or find that perfect item in the Gift Shop.

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The Attic is
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CO-CHAIR’S MESSAGE

By: Geoffrey Dawe & Alan Lambert

It's been a busy Spring at the Aurora Historical Society and Hillary House, so we are a bit tardy in getting our summer edition of the Attic out. If nothing else, the plus 30 degree temperatures are a forceful reminder that we are in full summer mode.

First, we would like to thank the volunteers who assisted us with:

- the Aurora Chamber of Commerce Home Show in April, and the Street Sale in June. Both events were well attended.
- our spring cleanup day as well as general landscaping. Hillary House grounds are looking great!
- our Mother's Day teas, which as always, were a great success.

We are absolutely delighted to welcome four new Board Members! Wendy Browne, who is a previous Board member; Tim McCutcheon and Jai Nargas, both of whom are newcomers to Aurora and keen to get involved in the community; and Angela Trevivian, a long-time volunteer and enthusiastic member. We are now at our full complement of nine Board members for the first time in many years. They have already started to contribute and we look forward to profiling our new members over the next few editions of the Attic.

We continue to successfully participate in the Richmond Hill Halls Charities Association (Bingo), and we were recently invited to participate in charity bingo hosted by Market Brewing in Newmarket. This has proven to be welcome source of revenue to support our operations.

We welcomed summer staff Elyse and JJ, supported by the Canada Summer Jobs grant program. CSJ is a federal initiative designed to help young Canadians gain meaningful, paid work experiences during the summer months. We benefit greatly from this program.

And, finally, we conducted a follow up Special Members Meeting on June 9th, as an update to the SMM held in February, 2024. At the 2024 meeting, the Membership authorized the Board of Directors to engage with the Town of Aurora to explore options with respect to the financial sustainability of the Society and Hillary House. Unfortunately, the Town declined to participate in offering any direct assistance. The complete information package as well as the minutes of the meeting may be found [here](#). While we were quite disappointed with the Town's decision, the Board has resolved, along with strong endorsement of our members, to meet this challenge head on. Stay tuned for how you can help!

As always, a huge thank you to our staff and our many volunteers!

Al & Geoff

AURORA HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2025

Board of Directors

Co-Chair Alan Lambert
 Co-Chair Geoffrey Dawe
 Treasurer Dan McGeown
 Secretary John Green
 Director Angela Trevivian
 Director Jai Nargas
 Director Michelle Primeau
 Director Timothy McCutcheon

Committees

Grounds Maintenance Alan Lambert
 ToA Heritage Advisory Committee Rep John Green

Staff

Curator / Manager Kathleen Vahey
 Administrative Assistant Julie Preston

Newsletter Team

Production Julie Preston
 Editor Kathleen Vahey
 Review Christine McLure

We invite members to submit suggestions for inclusion in the newsletter. Please email community@aurorahs.com

HIGHLIGHTS FROM HILLARY HOUSE

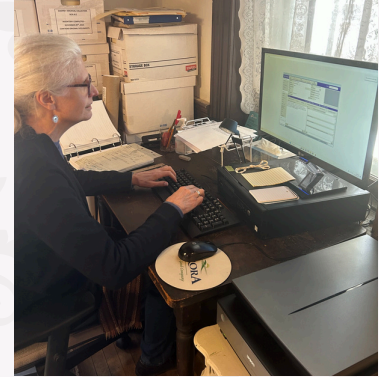
Have a look at what the AHS has been up to since the Spring! Did you attend any of our events?



Volunteers and Board Directors Michelle (L) and Angela (R) at the Aurora Home Show.



Bridal Shower hosted at Hillary House in April.



Collections volunteer Kate working on the Archives digitization project.



Family celebrating at the Mother's Day Tea. Photo by Glenn Rodger.



Curator/Manager Kathleen (R) and Board Director Michelle (L) preparing for the Mother's Day Tea.



First Annual Pride Festival at Aurora Town Square.



AHS Treasurer Dan at the Aurora Street Festival.



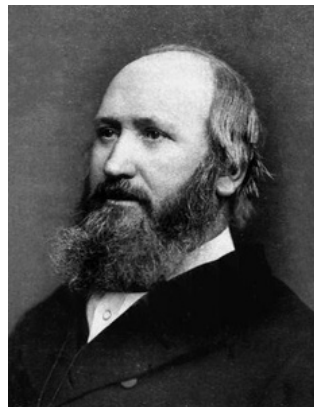
Guests displaying their art at the Paint Night workshop, hosted in partnership with Royal Rose Gallery.

Want to be involved at the AHS? Contact us to be a volunteer, intern, or to join our Board of Directors! (Click here)

continued from pg. 1...

With the invention of the hypodermic syringe, medical professionals could now provide patients with more precise dosages, targeted directly where needed in the body, and the effects were faster acting due to being absorbed into the bloodstream. The only downside of these devices was the question of hygiene: how could doctors keep their syringes clean?

As syringes were carefully designed tools made of glass and metal, it would not be an option to throw them away after a single use. Instead, syringe manufacturers made them easy to dismantle so that they could be sterilized by boiling or with chemical cleaners.



Alexander Wood, 1873.

*Photo courtesy of
Wikimedia Commons.*

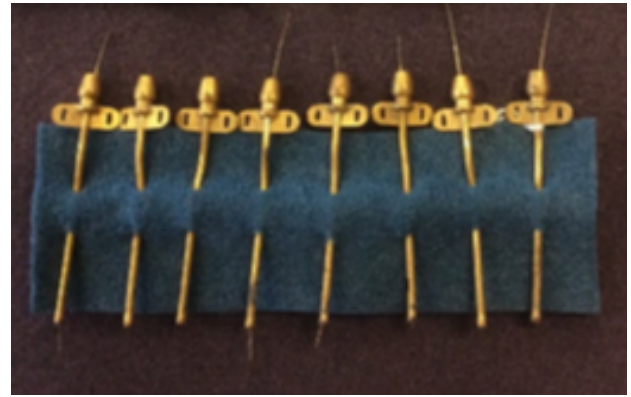


Glass and metal syringe, circa 1870.

AHS Collection, HA2016.12.20.

Some needles were even made of gold, as it was believed to promote sterility. However, there was still a significant risk of infection from reusing needles even after sterilization. Another issue with reusing syringes was that the needles dulled over time, making them more painful and less accurate. Doctors would often have to sharpen their own needles so syringe kits began being sold with carborundum sharpening stones in them similar to knife blocks.

The development of disposable syringes was kick-started by the World Wars. Morphine and penicillin were needed constantly on the battlefield, and conditions did not allow for time-consuming sterilization processes. Specifically



Hamilton Bailey type infusion needle, ca. 1900s.

Photo courtesy University of Queensland, Australia

designed syringe kits with multiple needle tips that were easy to switch out were created and sold to the military such as the one seen below. By the Second World War, the United States military invented Syrettes; a small hypodermic needle attached to a squeezable tube with a single dose of medication inside. Development was further accelerated by the need for widespread immunization against polio.



Military use syringe case and needles, ca 1900s.

AHS Collection, HA2011.12.29.

In 1956, New Zealand pharmacist Colin Murdoch created the first fully disposable plastic syringe. Disposable syringes made of plastic tubes and stainless steel needles were soon widely adopted, drastically reducing the risk of infection from receiving an injection. Since the mid-20th century, the design of syringes has not changed significantly, but advancements have looked towards making needles as sterile and safe as possible. From needles that automatically retract after injection to experiments with micro-silicon-based needles that you can barely feel, syringes have come a long way from reeds and quills. So, the next time you feel uneasy about getting a flu shot, remember the years of work and innovation that made such a feat possible!

EXHIBITIONS ON DISPLAY



AHS' newest exhibition, *Pills, Poisons, & Painkillers*, curated by Assistant Curator, Elyse Richardson, is now on display at Hillary House. This exhibit takes us back to the 19th century to explore the rapid medical advancements of the century and examine how individuals received treatment in an era where poison and medicine were often one in the same!



I-and-Place is a poetry art installation by Cassandra Tremblay, as part of her Master's in English degree at McMaster University. Taking inspiration from how we relate to our surroundings through language, place-based poetry, and public humanities, *I-and-Place* brings these elements together for community engagement through the arts. Visit the Hillary House Drawing Room to engage with the art, add your experiences, insights, memories, poems, and stories of Aurora to take part in this community-built project.



On display at Aurora Town Square, *A Glimpse of Aurora's Historic Places* highlights a selection of the town's notable heritage buildings through artwork, photographs, and artifacts. This exhibition offers a chance to get familiar with the unique elements of these sites, which continue to shape the look and feel of Aurora today. Whether they're part of your daily routine or new to your eyes, these places offer a glimpse into the heritage that continues to define Aurora's character.

Hillary House National Historic Site is featured as part of this exhibition, curated by AHS' Kathleen Vahey and Elyse Richardson.

On view Wednesday, July 23, 2025.

The Aurora Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the support of



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UPCOMING EVENTS

Join us at Hillary House for one of our upcoming Summer events. Click on the images below for more information.



Slow Museum Tours

Get a mindful, guided or self-guided tour of Hillary House at a gentler pace.

Spend time in your favourite historic room and take a moment to yourself or do a quiet activity

Saturday, July 19
1:00pm to 4:00pm

FREE
 Drop-ins welcome.


 Aurora Historical Society, Hillary House National Historic Site, 15372 Yonge Street, Aurora
 www.aurorahs.com | 905-727-8991 | community@aurorahs.com

Slow Museum Tours
 Saturday, July 19th
 1:00pm to 4:00pm



PAINT NIGHT

Friday, July 25
 7PM to 9PM

\$30 per person

A fun and casual evening of guided painting! Participants aged 16+ only.
 All materials provided.
 Light refreshments available.

**In partnership with
 Royal Rose Art Gallery**

Paint Night
 Friday, July 25th
 7:00pm to 9:00pm



The Aurora Historical Society presents...

A VICTORIAN GARDEN PARTY

INCLUDES

High Tea Service
 Scones, sandwiches, desserts
 &
Access to the Grounds
 Dress up in the Victorian Style
 Take photos around the beautiful property

SATURDAY, AUGUST 16 2025
12PM TO 3PM

Optional Included Activity Stations
 Learn a dance step
 Play croquet and badminton
 Play Victorian parlour games
 Learn the basics of a heritage craft

Tickets
 Adult \$40.00
 Child \$25.00

Hillary House National Historic Site
 15372 Yonge St. Aurora, ON L4G 1N8
 community@aurorahs.com | 905.727.8991 |
 www.aurorahs.com

Victorian Garden Party
 Saturday, August 16th
 12:00pm to 3:00pm

IN RECOGNITION OF ALL OUR VOLUNTEERS,
 THE AURORA HISTORICAL SOCIETY INVITES YOU TO CELEBRATE

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION DAY

August 23, 2025
 1:00-4:00pm
 Hillary House National Historic Site
 15372 Yonge Street
 Aurora, ON

REGISTER TODAY!



Volunteer Appreciation
 Saturday, August 23rd
 1:00pm to 4:00pm

SAVE THE DATE

Senior Active Living Fair

Saturday, September 6th
9:00am to 1:00pm
Aurora Seniors Centre

Victorian Harvest Tea

Saturday, September 13th
Two Seatings: 12:00pm and 2:30pm
Hillary House National Historic Site

Multicultural Festival/ Culture Days

Saturday, September 20th
9:00am to 12:30pm
Aurora Town Park

Doors Open

Sunday, September 21st
10:00am to 4:00pm
Hillary House and other historic Aurora sites

WELCOME SUMMER STAFF

The AHS is fortunate to have two emerging museum professionals join our team for the summer season, thanks to grants from the Canada Summer Jobs program and Summer Employment Opportunities Grant.

Hi there! My name is Elyse Richardson and I joined the AHS staff in May as Assistant Curator, thanks to a Summer Canada Jobs grant. I went to Queen's University for my undergraduate degree, studying Classics, Archaeology, and Art History. I then did my Masters in Museum Studies with the University of Toronto. My areas of focus are collections management and exhibit design. I enjoy learning new things about the local history of every town I work in, and I've enjoyed getting to learn about the life of Hillary House! I look forward to the rest of my timing working with the AHS, and seeing the next exhibit *Pills, Poisons, & Painkillers* come to life.

Hello! My name is JJ and this summer I am working as the Education and Museum Assistant. I grew up, and still live locally, with learning about history and the past being one of my biggest passions. I obtained my undergraduate degree in History and North American Studies from Wilfrid Laurier University, Master of Information Studies from the University of Toronto, and I am currently half way through teacher's college, with my hope to teach History at the high school level. This summer I am providing tours to visitors of Hillary House, assisting with events, as well as helping to expand the education programming.



Elyse Richardson, Assistant Museum Curator (L) and JJ Doran, Museum Educator (R)

We are social! Follow us for more updates through our social media. Click the logos below.



GODFREY COLLECTION UPDATE

Kathleen Vahey, Curator/Manager

In the early 2000s, the Aurora Historical Society acquired the “Godfrey Collection”, an extensive research collection relating to the history of medicine and the social and cultural history of early Ontario compiled by the late Dr. Charles Godfrey. The collection is comprised of three sub-collections containing a total of 21,268 items housed in 151 boxes. The three sub-collections of the Godfrey collection include the archival, artifact, and book collections.

In 2022, the AHS decided that a full inventory of the Godfrey Collection was needed to determine an appropriate future course of action for the collection. It was moved to Hillary House from off-site storage in March - April 2023, and an intern was hired to spearhead the project with assistance from the Young Canada Works grant program and the Town of Aurora. The inventory took place from August 2023 to March 2024.

At the conclusion of the inventory, AHS staff conducted a review of the collection based on: relevancy to AHS mission/mandate, resource utilization, limitations of the AHS, and capacity for access and long-term preservation. Staff analyzed these factors and initiated discussions with the Aurora Museum & Archives and other museum stakeholders and colleagues to make an informed decision. As a result, it was the recommendation of staff that the collection be offered to another institution that would be better equipped to manage, store, and preserve the important artifacts within the Godfrey Collection and provide better access for researchers.

AHS staff entered into discussions with the Archives of Ontario regarding transferring ownership of the collection. After several months of negotiations, on May 29, 2025 the archival and artifact sub-collections of the Godfrey Collection, totalling approximately 19,000 artifacts, were transferred to the Archives of Ontario where they will be digitized and stored in a state of the art facility.

The remaining book sub-collection has been offered to a number of other relevant institutions; however, the majority of the collection is comprised of common publications that can be found in other publicly accessible libraries around Ontario or digitized online. At the conclusion of those discussions, staff will follow the AHS’ deaccession procedures to complete the project.



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IN MEMORIAM

Ted McClenny (April 29, 1936 - September 28, 2024)

After a lengthy battle with illness, Marvin Edward “Ted” McClenny passed away on Saturday, September 28, 2024 at the age of 88 with his family by his side. Ted was born in Aurora, Ontario to Kenneth and Alma McClenny.

David Stephen Mills (June 12, 1936 - April 19, 2025)

Passed away peacefully on April 19, 2025, at the age of 88. A lifelong resident of Aurora and Richmond Hill, Steve was a thoughtful and engaged member of his community. He contributed meaningfully to local decisions and town development, always taking a genuine interest in the well-being of others.

Joan Boyington (February 25, 1936 - June 1, 2025)

Passed away on June 1, 2025, at the age of 89. A Past President of the AHS. As soon as Joan and her husband Stan moved into their house on Spruce Street, just down the street from Leslie and Mary Jeanne Oliver, it was almost inevitable that they would be invited to join the Aurora Historical Society. The house they bought had been carved up into several small apartments, and Joan and Stan immediately set about to restore it and transform it into a gracious family home. “When we moved in, we had four kitchens!” Joan said.

It didn’t take long until Joan was invited to serve on the AHS Board; and then soon after that, Joan became president. “Don’t worry,” we said, “we’ll all be there with you.” Little did she know that that this was a time, the late 1970s and early ‘80s, of tremendous challenges for the AHS. Not only were we fighting to save Aurora’s Church Street School from being torn down and replaced by “a parking lot we can be proud of,” as one Town Councillor put it, but we were also faced with the huge challenge of determining how we might save Hillary House from being dwarfed by a proposed motor hotel development to the north. Joan must have wondered what she had gotten herself into! Fortunately, dedicated Board members, AHS volunteers, an enlightened Town Council, the generous Hillary family, and other generous donors prevailed. Joan Boyington proved to have a steady hand throughout it all and somehow also found time to volunteer with the Aurora Horticultural Society, the Yellow Brick House Women’s Shelter, and the Cancer Society. Eventually, Joan and her family moved to Caledon, but her contributions to Aurora and to the AHS will not be forgotten.

By: John McIntyre, AHS Past-President

Claire Granie (2024)

The AHS is deeply grateful and honored to have received a generous \$10,000 bequest from the Estate of Claire Granie. Claire was a dedicated member of the Board of Directors from 2015-2018 and AHS Life Member. Her contributions as a part of the Fundraising and Hillary House Ball Committees helped to raise thousands of dollars for the AHS and Hillary House. She will be missed.

A VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO THESE GENEROUS PEOPLE

- Donna Lewis and the Spring Clean-Up volunteer crew for their efforts in prepping the grounds for Summer.
- Town of Aurora for the yard bins and our lovely hanging baskets.
- John Bare and Glenn Strype for looking after our lawns, keeping the grass tennis court in shape, and fabricating and installing a new tennis net.
- Marjorie Bare, Kate Brewitt, and Terry Laurin for taking care of the gardens and making the property look beautiful.
- AHS Collections volunteer team for their hard work with the archives digitization project.
- Everyone who helped in both big and small ways at the Home Show, Mother’s Day Afternoon Tea events, Paint Night, and Street Sale.
- Our wonderful partner organizations, including Aurora Public Library, Aurora Museum & Archives, and Royal Rose Art Gallery & Gifts

The Aurora Historical Society would not be able to accomplish all that it does without the help of our wonderful volunteers. We seek out volunteers of all age groups, as well as student co-ops and intern placements.



VOLUNTEER

WITH THE AHS!



VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Board of Directors

Gardens & Grounds

Collections & Exhibitions

Facilities & Maintenance

Gift Shop

Administrative

Tour Guides & Programs

Special Projects

Special Events

Have a different opportunity in mind? Let us know!

Contact us for an Application Form, or click the image above.

YOUR DONATIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE



The AHS is a non-profit, volunteer-led organization that has been operating Hillary House National Historic Site as a museum and centre for heritage education for more than 40 years. As a supporter, you can take pride in your meaningful contribution to the preservation of one of Aurora's most significant historic landmarks.

Help us continue that legacy! We need your support.

- Consider Making a Donation by visiting our website and clicking the Donate Now button. Make a greater impact by choosing “Monthly Giving”. You can target your donation to an area you wish to support.
- Purchase or Renew your Membership in September for 2026
Visit our website and click Become a Member or fill out and return the enclosed form
- Attend an Event and Shop in our Gift Shop for that hard-to-buy-for person.

RENTALS

Did you know that you can rent Hillary House for your next event? Book your upcoming wedding photos, parties, or meetings at Hillary House. Please contact us for rental rates and packages available year-round.



BROWSE THE HILLARY HOUSE GIFT SHOP

Are you having company this summer and are in need of a punch bowl, veggie tray, or a fun piece of jewellery? Visit the Gift Shop at Hillary House!

Pick up some teacups, or honey to sweeten your summer tea party! We carry locally supplied Absolutely Pure Honey so you can wow your guests with one of the refreshing recipes from The Honey Board [here](#).

The Gift Shop hours are 10:00am to 4:00pm from Tuesday to Saturday. After you have browsed the Gift Shop you can take a guided tour of Hillary House and learn more about the rich history of the families and doctors that resided here.

The Aurora Historical Society will accept Gift Shop donations of items that are gently used and in good condition. We do not accept textiles, books or large pieces. Please feel free to contact the office if you have items to donate.



VISIT US

The Aurora Historical Society is an independent, volunteer-led, non-profit organization dedicated to heritage education for all ages. Stop by to see us!



Hillary House National Historic Site
15372 Yonge Street, Aurora, Ontario, L4G 1N8

905.727.8991

community@aurorahs.com

www.aurorahs.com

Open Tuesday to Saturday, 10AM to 4PM