

The ATTIC

PAY YOUR WAY: TOLLS ALONG YONGE STREET

By: Kathleen Vahey, Curator/Manager

Originally published in the Aurora Then column on September 27, 2025 at AuroraToday.ca.

Imagine this, you have an appointment in Toronto and want to run some errands beforehand, so rather than take the highway, you decide to travel along Yonge Street. You leave from Yonge and Wellington streets headed south, and before too long you're stopped at a toll booth on the edge of town near the Aurora Cemetery. You pay a toll and continue on. On the way to Toronto, you are stopped at five toll booths, each requiring a small fee to continue on. It is hard for us to imagine this situation today, but it was reality for those living here 175 years ago.

In the early 1800s, roads were sparse and difficult to navigate. In Upper Canada (today's Ontario), the 1793 Act of Parliament made it the responsibility of landowners to maintain the roadway in front of and to their acreage; however, many properties lay vacant, some had absentee landowners, and others belonged to the government, leaving large sections of roads almost impassable. Complaints grew over the years with the increase in settlements in Southern Ontario, but the government had very few revenue sources and did not have the resources to fund large scale road-building projects.

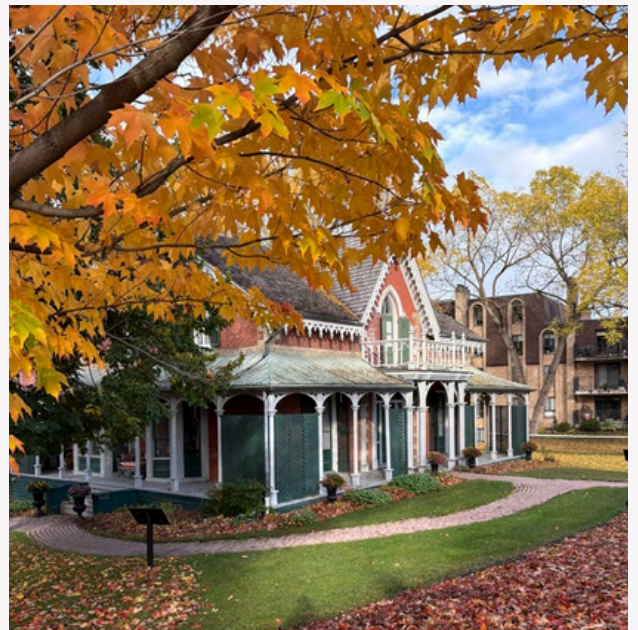
... Continues on page 5



The Aurora toll booth, located at the southern end of town where the railway crosses Yonge Street, can be seen on this 1860 Tremaine's Map of the County of York, Canada West.

Image courtesy of the University of Toronto

FALL/WINTER OPEN HOURS



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

This issue of The Attic is generously sponsored by

DELMANOR
 Aurora
 Inspired Retirement Living™

CO-CHAIR'S MESSAGE

By: Geoffrey Dawe & Alan Lambert

Welcome to the Fall season!

As you will read in the rest of the newsletter, we have been very busy over the last few months – programming, exhibitions, and landscaping (at this time of the year, it seems that landscaping is the most challenging with all those pesky falling leaves).

Two very exciting things have happened over the last few months. First, we had a great response to our request for Board directors, and we now have four additional members, bringing our Board compliment up to nine (which, under our By-Laws, is the maximum). It was great to welcome new members Angela, Jai and Tim, and to re-welcome Wendy to our Board. Their election was confirmed at the recent AGM.

The second, is that as a result of Treasurer Dan McGeown’s initiative, the AHS will be receiving a

one-time capital infusion of \$150,000 through the 2026 Town of Aurora Budget. This is in addition to our annual operating grant, and will be used to address some much needed work at Hillary House, as identified in the 2023 Enhanced Condition Assessment.

This Fall, the Board is launching a strategic plan review, with a conclusion planned for the Spring. Keep your eye out for future communications.

We have some great events coming up over the next little while and we encourage you to check them out and participate if it fits your schedule.

And lastly, as always, a big thank you to our staff, Kathleen and Julie, for all your hard work, and to our incredible volunteers for your dedication. You make the difference!

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
 Director Wendy Browne

Committees

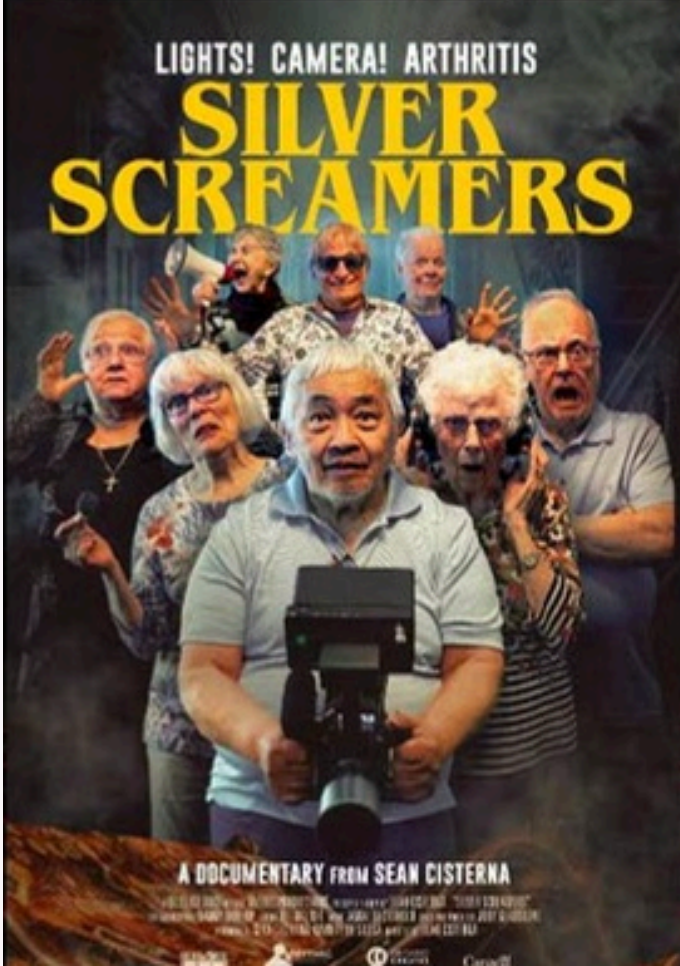
Grounds Maintenance Alan Lambert
 ToA Heritage Advisory Committee Rep John Green

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

Filmed at Hillary House! *Silver Screammers* - Aurora Premiere. Nov. 16, 2025 at 6:00pm. Get your tickets [here](#).

HIGHLIGHTS FROM HILLARY HOUSE

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



Guests enjoy a relaxing evening at the AHS Paint Night in partnership with Royal Rose Gallery.



Elyse, Assistant Museum Curator installing a Hillary House display at Aurora Town Square.



AHS Volunteers pose in the Ballroom at the Volunteer Appreciation.



Board Director Angela poses with Bingo winner at Market Brewing event supporting AHS.



MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy enjoying afternoon tea at the 6th annual Victorian Harvest Tea.



Board Director Michelle sharing history with visitors during Doors Open.



Co-Chair Geoff, MP Sandra Cobena, and Curator Kathleen during MP Cobena's first visit to Hillary House.



Curator Kathleen, MP Costas Menegakis, and Co-Chair Geoff during MP Menegakis' first visit to Hillary House.

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

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 that time 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. Inspired by 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 become 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.

The Aurora Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the support of



Canadian Heritage
Patrimoine canadien

AURORATODAY .ca



electronic.recycling.association



continued from page 1...

By the 1830s, the Upper Canada government had to pass legislation allowing private companies to construct the roads and recoup their costs by placing toll booths along the route. In York County (today's Toronto and York Region), the government provided starter funds to these companies and oversaw their progress along Yonge Street, Kingston Road, and Dundas Street.



A toll gate on Yonge Street at Hogg's Hollow, near present-day York Mills Road, is shown in this painting by John McPherson Ross, circa 1880s.

Image courtesy of the Toronto Public Library

Although this system seemed like a good option to have passable roads built and funded, many people were opposed to paying the tolls. Newspapers across the region published articles from frustrated editors and reported on toll runners who blazed through the gates to avoid paying the fee and vandalism at the toll booths, including in Aurora.

In December 1855, a Newmarket newspaper described that the Aurora toll booth gate was broken twice and the carpenter who fixed it had his windows broken. Two weeks later, the whole booth was burned down! Many protested paying tolls while the conditions of the roads deteriorated.

This article is part of a column created in partnership between the AHS, Aurora Museum & Archives and published by Village Media - AuroraToday.ca. The AHS would like to thank the AM&A staff and AHS volunteers Jacqueline Stuart and John McIntyre for their

Yonge Street Road.

Considerable feeling has been manifested of late by the people travelling Yonge Street, in consequence of the increased tariff imposed at each gate. We learn that the Gate near Aurora has been twice broken down, and the carpenter who repaired it the first time, also, had his windows smashed. The arguments used for this manifestation, are first, the toll-gate is placed at the entrance of the Village; secondly the tariff has been raised, while the road is in worse repair than ever. The object of the proprietors, appears to be, to make all they can without regard to public convenience. We find, on looking at a "return to an Address from the Legislative Assembly," dated 29th Nov. 1854, that the proprietors are set down as defaulters to the amount of £861 10s 6d. How is this? They are neither keeping the road in repair, or paying the principal. Surely it is high time Government was looking after the matter. Something ought to be done.

An article from Dec. 14, 1855, in Newmarket's New Era on vandalism at the Aurora toll booth.

Image courtesy of the Newmarket Public Library

This problem seems to have been prolific around the country as Cornelius Krieghoff, one of Canada's early artists, has a series of paintings featuring people running through the toll booths without paying.

Needless to say, the construction costs quickly outgrew the revenue brought in by the tollbooths, construction halted numerous times, and the government had to take back control of the roads on multiple occasions. By 1865, the County of York assumed control of all roads in the county and their affiliated toll booths. Over the next 30 years, discontentment continued to grow, as the tolls were no longer directly funding road construction but rather were collected as general tariffs, and tolls were abolished in the 1890s. This remained the case in Ontario for nearly 100 years until the opening of Highway 407 in the 1990s.

informative and entertaining contributions. To read previous articles, visit

<https://www.auroratoday.ca/columns>

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

AURORA HISTORICAL SOCIETY 2025 SPEAKER SERIES

Barn-Raising, Threshing, & Quilting Bees

Cathy Wilson shares her recent book, *Being Neighbours*, about barn raisings and quilting bees in Ontario. She takes the audience into families' daily lives to uncover the subtle social politics of mutual dependency, the expectations neighbours had of each other, their relationships, and ways of managing conflict and crisis.

Wednesday
November 19, 2025
7:00pm to 8:30pm
ONLINE ONLY

Catharine Wilson
Catharine Wilson is a Professor Emerita of History at the University of Guelph and Founder and Director of the Rural Diary Archive. A Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, her recent book, *Being Neighbours* is the study of cooperative work and was published by McGill-Queen's University Press in Fall 2022.

General Admission: \$12.50
AHS Members: \$10.50

[REGISTER NOW](#)

www.aurorahs.com [905-727-8991](tel:905-727-8991) community@aurorahs.com

Speaker Series

Wednesday, November 19th
7:00pm to 8:30pm

November 29th
10AM TO 12PM
OR
2PM TO 4PM

\$50 per person
Advance purchase required.

Guided by
GARDEN AURORA

Happening at:
Hillary House
National Historic Site

15372 Yonge Street
Aurora, ON
www.aurorahs.com
905-727-8991

HOLIDAY WREATH WORKSHOP

AURORA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Holiday Wreath Workshop

Saturday, November 29th
2:00pm OR 4:00pm

The Aurora Historical Society presents...

VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS AFTERNOON TEA

Saturday, December 6

Tickets \$35/person

Two Seatings
12:00pm
2:30pm

Offering a delicious menu of:
Tea sandwiches · Freshly baked scones
A variety of seasonal desserts · Tea & warm apple cider

Happening at
Hillary House National Historic Site
15372 Yonge St. Aurora, ON L4G 1N8
905-727-8991 or www.aurorahs.com for tickets

AURORA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Victorian Christmas Tea

Saturday, December 6
12:00pm OR 2:30pm

A FAMILY CHRISTMAS

GAMES.FUN.HISTORY.CRAFTS

SUNDAY DECEMBER 14

TICKETS: \$5 PER PERSON
Timed ticket entry.
Pre-register on our website to guarantee your spot.

Hillary House is decorated for the holidays!
Visit to enjoy festive treats,
family-friendly crafts, and
say hello to Santa Claus!

Hillary House National Historic Site
15372 Yonge Street. Aurora, ON
www.aurorahs.com
905-727-8991

AURORA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A Family Christmas

Sunday, December 14th
10:00am to 4:00pm

We are social!

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



Be our guest

JOIN US FOR A
LUNCH & TOUR

Book your tour today!

DELMANOR
Aurora
Inspired Retirement Living™

25 BUTTERNUT RIDGE TRAIL
AURORA

905-503-9505
DelmanorAurora.com

THANK YOU!

The AHS was fortunate to have two emerging museum professionals join our team for the summer season, thanks to a federal grant from Canada Summer Jobs.



Elyse joined the AHS team as the Assistant Museum Curator. She curated two exhibitions, accessioned and catalogued over 250 artifacts, cleaned up the database, and assisted with tours and events.



JJ joined the AHS team as the Museum Educator. She created some of our engaging social media content, lead tours of Hillary House, and assisted with the various events and youth programming.

We thank Elyse and JJ for their hard work and wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

INTRODUCING NEW MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Angela Trevivian

What inspired you to join the Board?

I love Hillary House! I have volunteered for various events over several years. I decided to join the BoD to be a part of the solution to keep the Hillary House going. I have a Master's Degree in Healthcare Administration, those are transferable skills that I believe can be of use to the HH BoD.

What's a fun fact about you?

I make all my own toothpaste, deodorant, laundry detergent, and cleaning solutions to live a healthier life.

What's one goal you hope to achieve during your term on the Board?

I want to dive deep into developing a sustainable funding solution so that the Hillary House can function at its best. I want to have the freedom to run programs to engage and to the teach the public, so that all can enjoy our Hillary House.

Timothy McCutcheon

What inspired you to join the Board?

I moved to Aurora last summer, and in the process of figuring out things in my new home, I came across, and attended the AHS Speaker Series event with Ted Barris about his book on The Battle of Britain. I have always been a big history buff and I thought I would join the AHS Board to help and participate in the Society.

What's a fun fact about you?

I was a two-time NCAA fencing team champion for Columbia University.

What's one goal you hope to achieve during your term on the Board?

I would very much like to get AHS's financials in the best possible shape to ensure the Hillary House is in good condition for generations to come.

Jai Nargas

What inspired you to join the Board?

As a newcomer to Aurora, I wanted to learn more about the town's roots and give back by using my experience in customer engagement and fundraising. I've always believed history should be preserved, celebrated, and shared with future generations.

What's a fun fact about you?

My wife stood me up on our first date because she didn't think I was serious when I asked her out (she knows better now!).

What's one goal you hope to achieve during your term on the Board?

I hope to inspire more young people to get involved and help showcase the beautiful Hilary House as a true treasure of Aurora's past.

Wendy Browne

What inspired you to join the Board?

I previously served on the Board for over 10 years. It was a fun and productive time. I saw a request for board members across several different media platforms, so I wanted to join the board to see what support I could offer at this time.

What's a fun fact about you?

I have been in the same mixed baseball league for 38 years.

What's one goal you hope to achieve during your term on the Board?

I hope to help create a fundraising core that focuses on Hillary House and grounds.

IN MEMORIAM

Erica Anna Green (March 22, 1940 – October 22, 2025)

Erica touched the hearts of many people. She was a loving wife to John and they recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. She was the mother of two daughters, Annette and Denise. She had many loyal friends who she cherished and with whom she loved to meet and discuss areas of common interest. Erica was an avid gardener, hostess and sports person. Her favourite sports were Tennis and Pickleball. She loved to play Bridge and Canasta with friends. She will be sorely missed.

John Green, AHS Secretary and his wife Erica Green at the 2019 Hillary House Ball.



A VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO THESE GENEROUS PEOPLE

- The Fall Clean-Up volunteer crew for their efforts in prepping the grounds for Winter.
- Our wonderful partner organizations, including Aurora Public Library, Aurora Cultural Centre, Aurora Museum & Archives, and Royal Rose Art Gallery & Gifts.
- AHS Collections volunteer team for their hard work with the archives digitization project.
- Everyone who helped in both big and small ways at the Paint Night, Sr. Active Living Fair, Victorian Harvest Tea, and Doors Open.
- Donna Lewis for her hard work removing invasive species from the back lawn - come take a look!
- Town of Aurora for the yard bins and our lovely hanging baskets.



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 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 over this holiday season 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 tea! We carry locally supplied Absolutely Pure Honey so you can wow your guests.

The Gift Shop hours are 10:00am to 4:00pm from Monday to Friday. 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 who 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 Monday to Friday, 10AM to 4PM