

The ATTIC

AURORA'S POSTAL JOURNEY: LINKING A SMALL TOWN TO THE WORLD

By: Michelle Johnson, Collections & Exhibitions Coordinator, Aurora Museum & Archives

Formalized postal service in Aurora began in 1854, when the community's first post office opened under Charles Doan, the man credited with naming Aurora. Doan oversaw mail service until 1882, during a time when letters were the backbone of communication. In those early years, mail arrived in Aurora by stagecoach along Yonge Street, the main route connecting Toronto to communities in Upper Canada.

A stagecoach was a horse-drawn carriage designed to carry passengers and mail over long distances. Before railways became widespread, these coaches were essential for delivering letters between towns, often traveling rugged roads in all seasons.

As Aurora grew, so did its postal needs. By the early 20th century, Canada was modernizing its mail system. On February 10, 1914, the country introduced parcel post service, allowing Canadians to send packages through the mail for the first time. The inaugural parcel, sent from Ottawa by Postmaster-General Louis-Philippe Pelletier, contained a leather mailbag inscribed "First packet sent by Canadian Parcel Post, Feb. 10, 1914" and was delivered to Rideau Hall for His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught.

Aurora marked this milestone in its own way. On that first day of service, Mr. W.C. Towns became the town's first resident to send a parcel. Addressed to his daughter in St. Mary's, the five-pound package cost 26 cents to mail; a modest sum for a service that would transform commerce and communication. The popularity of parcel post was immediate, and by March 1914, plans were underway for a new Post Office and Customs building on Yonge Street.

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WINTER/SPRING OPEN HOURS



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

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MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

By: Geoffrey Dawe & Alan Lambert

Happy spring to our AHS community!

We wanted to start this edition's message with "Spring has Sprung!".

After being lulled into a false sense of "finally, winter is over," we plunged right back in, and the only thing that seemed to spring was our patience with the never-ending snow. But at long last, the sunshine has tiptoed back, the temperatures are climbing, and we're crossing our fingers that this time spring won't change its mind again.

Notwithstanding our weather disappointment, we want to share a number of developments here at AHS.

Building Foundation Restoration - We are moving ahead with our foundation restoration project. This is a project critical to the future of Hillary House and is considered to be our highest priority project. We understand this will be

a "delicate" project (in more ways than one) and are working with both Town staff and the Ontario Heritage Trust to ensure optimal results. In addition to Town funding, we have applied to the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Province for a capital grant, and one of our Board members is working on dedicated fundraising as well.

AHS Strategic Plan - as our current plan is coming to an end, we are moving forward to put in place a strategic plan that will serve the community well for the coming years. The Board is working hard on the plan and we have been reaching out to gain perspectives across the community. We are also guided by the results of the survey last year, along with member input gained through special members meetings and the recent AGM. The Board is meeting again in April and we will keep everyone updated with progress.

Fundraising - The Board is maintaining a focus on how we can raise funds given our ongoing financial challenges. We have a few really fun ideas (more to come) and as always welcome your ideas.

Volunteer opportunities - As always we welcome anyone who has a few hours to spend to help out - whether it's supporting our events (like teas and programming) or grabbing a rake to help us maintain the grounds - call or email the office if you have time to help out.

Programs - we are looking forward to the spring and summer to welcome people to drop by or participate in some of the programs being planned - watch the website for details

And finally, as always, a big thank you to Kathleen, Leena, and Julie for all their hard work. And to our dedicated volunteers. You do make the difference!



Al Lambert and Geoff Dawe at the Aurora Home Show.

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
Programming & Outreach Coordinator	Leena Bethune

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 Fall! Did you attend any of our events?



Through our charitable gaming partnership, AHS volunteers like Claude & Agnes (pictured) raise funds for the AHS at Bingo World & Gaming Richmond Hill.



AHS Board of Directors engaged in a collaborative strategic planning session, aligning priorities for the years ahead.



Parade-goers stopped at Hillary House for a cozy cup of hot chocolate during the Santa Under the Stars parade.



Garden Aurora volunteers after decorating Hillary House for the holiday season, bringing festive charm to the historic site.



Leaders from the local Girl Guide Trefoil Guild participate in a holiday workshop at Hillary House.



Participants show off their beautiful holiday wreaths during the co-hosted workshop with Garden Aurora.



Kalena and Leslie show off their creations at the Introduction to Paper Quilling Workshop.



Guests enjoying a Galentine's Day paint night workshop co-hosted with Royal Rose Art Gallery.

Want to be involved at the AHS? Contact us for more information on volunteering. [\(Click here\)](#)



EXHIBITION ON DISPLAY

AHS' current exhibition, *Pills, Poisons, & Painkillers*, curated by Assistant Curator, Elyse Richardson, is 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!

WELCOME TO THE AHS

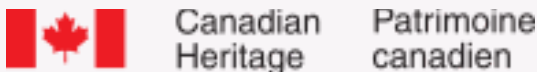


Eileen (Leena) Bethune is a museum and heritage professional with a background in historical archaeology. She also currently works with the Oshawa Museum as a Visitor Host. Leena holds a Master's Degree in Historical Archaeology from Memorial University and a postgraduate certificate in Museum and Cultural Management Studies from Centennial College. She previously worked with the AHS in 2023 as the summer Assistant Curator and is excited to return as the Programming & Outreach Coordinator.

Jack Patterson is a teacher candidate at Lakehead University currently completing his final placement with the Aurora Historical Society. With a background in Geography and Political Science from Trent University, he is developing educational programming for the AHS that connects local history with curriculum-based learning. Jack is passionate about creating engaging experiences that help students connect with the past in meaningful ways.



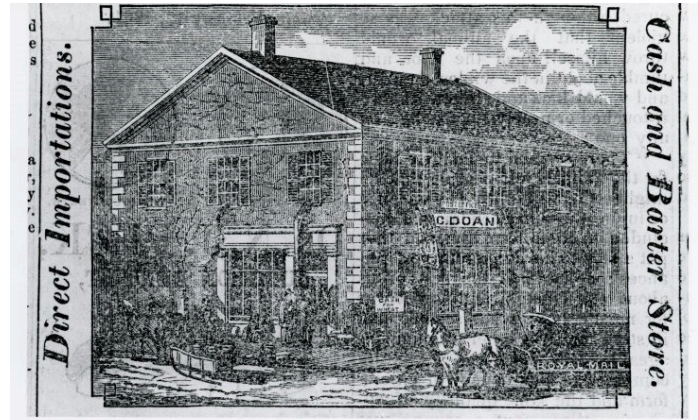
The Aurora Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the support of



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Another leap forward came on August 11, 1939, when Aurora received its first piece of international airmail from England. The letter traveled aboard Imperial Airways' Short S-30 Flying Boat, departing Southampton on August 5 and making stops in Ireland, Newfoundland, New York, and Montreal before reaching Aurora. Mayor J.M. Walton accepted the historic delivery, which cost one shilling and three pence to send. This event was front-page news in the Aurora Banner and signaled the dawn of faster global communication, only weeks before the outbreak of World War II.

From Aurora's first post office under Charles Doan to the era of overseas airmail, the town's postal story reflects the nation-wide transformation from stagecoach routes to transoceanic flights: a journey of progress and connection that linked local lives to distant places and helped shape a community reaching far beyond its borders.



Artistic rendering of Charles Doan's General Store and Post Office, published in the February 26, 1864, issue of the Aurora Banner. Courtesy of the Aurora Museum & Archives.

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

informative and entertaining contributions. To read previous articles, visit

<https://www.auroratoday.ca/columns/aurora-then>



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UPCOMING EVENTS

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

AURORA CHAMBER
Home & ACTIVE
Living Show

WE'RE A VENDOR!

STRONACH AURORA RECREATION COMPLEX
APRIL 11 & 12, 2026

Aurora Home Show

Saturday, April 11th - 9:00am to 5:00pm

Sunday, April 12th - 10:00am to 4:00pm

AURORA HISTORICAL SOCIETY **2026**
SPEAKER SERIES

WILL POWER:
THE MOST BAFFLING BEQUESTS, LUDICROUS LAST WISHES, AND DAFT DECLARATIONS IN FINAL TESTAMENTS

From a one-page will fought over for two decades by three generations to a will that left a mansion and its grounds to a parrot (developers could do nothing until it died – and parrots have long lives) author Susan Goldenberg shares these stories and more in her new book, *Will Power* (2026; Dundurn Press).

THIS MONTH'S SPEAKER IS
SUSAN GOLDENBERG

Author of eleven narrative non-fiction books published on a wide variety of topics and has won a Canadian Author's Award. She spoke to the AHS in January 2023 on her book, "Deadly Triangle: The Famous Architect, His Wife, Their Chauffeur, and Murder Most Foul," published in October 2022.

The book is available in both paperback and eBook formats at your favourite [independent] bookstore, Indigo, and Amazon.

THURSDAY
APRIL 16, 2026
7:00PM TO 8:30PM
VIRTUAL PROGRAM

General Admission: \$12.50

www.aurorahs.com 905-727-8991 community@aurorahs.com

Speaker Series

Thursday, April 16th

7:00pm to 8:30pm

THE AURORA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESENTS...

MOTHER'S DAY
AFTERNOON TEA

Saturday, May 9, 2026

ASSORTED TEA SANDWICHES
 FRESHLY BAKED SCONES WITH JAM AND WHIPPED CREAM
 VARIETY OF DESSERTS
 TEA

TICKETS:
\$37.50/ADULT, \$22.50/CHILD
 ADVANCE PURCHASE REQUIRED.

Hillary House National Historic Site
 15372 Yonge St. Aurora, ON L4G 1N8
 For ticket purchases, contact us at 905-727-8991 or visit our website www.aurorahs.com

***INCLUDES A CRAFTING AND COLOURING STATION FOR CHILDREN!**

TWO SEATINGS:
 12:00PM
 2:30PM

Mother's Day Afternoon Tea

Saturday, May 9th. Two seatings: 12pm or 2:30pm *with special children's ticket and crafts

THE AURORA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PRESENTS...

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**2026
SPEAKER SERIES**

THE SIMCOE COUNTY FOREST: A CENTURY OF GROWTH AND RENEWAL

In the 19th century, vast quantities of virgin timber in much of south and central Ontario was harvested by European settlers. They also cleared the land for farming with no regard for the impact. By the early 20th century, a severe lack of forest cover caused devastating consequences. Today, the Simcoe County Forest, spanning 33,000 acres, is the largest and one of the most productive forests in Ontario.

**THIS MONTH'S SPEAKER IS
GRAEME DAVIS**

A Registered Professional Forester with the County of Simcoe, Graeme is responsible in ensuring the Simcoe County Forest remains one of the most highly respected municipal forestry programs in Ontario, ensuring long-term growth and sustainability, while maximizing environmental, social and economic benefits.

www.aurorahs.com 905-727-8991 community@aurorahs.com



**THURSDAY
MAY 21, 2026**

7:00PM TO 8:30PM

HYBRID PROGRAM

General Admission: \$12.50

Speaker Series
Thursday, May 21st
7:00pm to 8:30pm

WINE AND PAINT NIGHT



Friday June 12th

7pm to 9pm **\$50 per person**

A fun and casual evening of guided painting of lemons on a vase for Italian Heritage month.
All materials provided.
Participants aged 19+ only. Pre-registration required.
A glass of wine and light refreshments available.



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



Wine & Paint Night
Friday, June 12th
7:00pm to 9:00pm




AUTHOR TALK:

Lokum by Selin Kahramanoğlu

Saturday, May 2, 2026
1:00 PM – 3:00 PM
Q&A
Book Signing

Library Living Room
Aurora Public Library



We're delighted to share that former AHS Programming & Outreach Coordinator Selin Kahramanoğlu has published her debut book, *Lokum*. This captivating new book is already generating buzz, and Selin will be sharing more about her writing journey at an Author Talk hosted by the Aurora Public Library on Saturday, May 2, from 1–3 p.m.

Don't miss this wonderful opportunity to support a local author and reconnect with a familiar face from the AHS community.

IN MEMORIAM

John Sanders (September 1945 – October 2025)

Beloved husband of Rhonda for 55 years and loving father of Robb. Born in Mariahaut, Netherlands, his family immigrated to Kapuskasing in 1953 and moved to Aurora in 1957. John and Rhonda joined the AHS as members in the 2000s and were frequent guests at the AHS Speaker Series. In lieu of a service, memorial donations may be made to Epilepsy Canada or the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust.

Christian Desenclos (2026)

Christian was a valued AHS Life Member and supporter of the Hillary House Ball.

Mary Jeanne Oliver (1930 – 2026)

With passion for music, education, and volunteerism, Mary Jeanne (MusBac., A.R.T.C., R.M.T.) taught kindergarten, sang in choirs, and, as a piano teacher, brought music to generations of students in Aurora. She and her husband, Leslie, shared a long connection to the AHS dating back to its early years in the 1960s and 70s, when Leslie served as a founding president and Mary Jeanne served on the Board of Directors. Donations will be gratefully received by Grey Bruce Hospice Foundation and Brightshores Health System, Owen Sound Foundation.

CONGRATULATIONS ERIC!

On October 24, 2025, Eric McCartney, AHS member and dedicated supporter, was awarded the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers, one of Canada's highest honours for exemplary volunteer service. Eric's commitment spans multiple organizations and decades, and his leadership and generosity have made a lasting impact in Aurora and beyond.

In 2021, Eric was named Aurora's Citizen of the Year and he has also received the Award of Merit and two official citations from the Canadian Red Cross Society, reflecting the depth of his contributions.

We congratulate Eric on this well-deserved honour and are grateful for his continued support of the Aurora Historical Society and Hillary House National Historic Site.



Eric McCartney and Valerie Taylor at the 2022 Hillary House Ball.

We are social!

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



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 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 “Get Involved” and “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.



DISCOVER SOMETHING SPECIAL AT THE HILLARY HOUSE GIFT SHOP

Looking for a punch bowl, a veggie tray, or a unique piece of jewellery to brighten your home or your next gathering?

The Hillary House Gift Shop offers a charming selection of practical items and one-of-a-kind finds.

Browse our unique selection of housewares, greeting and post cards, teacups, history books, and locally supplied Absolutely Pure Honey, perfect for adding a little sweetness to your day.

Gift Shop Hours:

Monday to Friday, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

After exploring the shop, enjoy a guided tour of Hillary House and learn more about the remarkable families and physicians who once lived here.

Donations Welcome

The Aurora Historical Society gratefully accepts gently used, good-quality items for the Gift Shop. Please note that we are unable to accept textiles, books, or large pieces. If you have items you'd like to donate, feel free to contact the office.



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