

TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY

By Erika BairdCurator, Hillary House National Historic Site

A time traveller in Aurora in 1911 may find themselves looking up on a new sports club forming right before their eyes when walking by Trinity Anglican Church, the Aurora Lawn Tennis Club. (Aurora Banner, 1911). An annual membership cost \$2.00 for man, and \$1.00 for women (it being one of the few sports women were allowed to play!).

Although the game has origins in 12th century France, tennis was only popularized world-wide in 1873 when Englishman, Major Walter Clopton Wingfield, standardized the game. He wrote an instruction book and sold it with a kit that contained everything needed to play, making it easy to ship around the world. But its journey to Canada was not a direct one.

In early 1874 a group of British army officers stationed in Bermuda were seen playing by a Mrs. Mary Outerbridge of Staten Island, New York.

Mrs. Outerbridge was so thrilled with the game, she had a kit ordered to her home and built the first court in the United States. It was at her home that Canadian Isidore Fredereick Hellmuth saw his first tennis match, it was 'love' at first site, and it was he who played in that first match in Toronto later that same year.

Tennis then spread quickly across Canada, with clubs being formed across the country throughout the last decades of the 19th Century.

When Aurora established its club, it rotated meetings between Trinity Anglican Church and Hillary House, because the Hillary's had had a court on their property since the 1880s.

For his contributions, Dr. Robert Michael Hillary was named honorary club president in 1912. As membership increased the Hillary's later installed two clay courts at the back of the property to accommodate all those who wished to play.

By 1937, the club had become too large to be held at either Hillary House or at Trinity Anglican Church, and a new home was found at McMahon Park, at the corner of Spruce Street and Maple Street, Aurora.

The club still resides there today, now known as the Aurora Community Tennis Club.

Tennis still lives on at Hillary House, in 2015 funds from the Pan-Am Games Community Celebration Fund allowed for the revival of the original grass court, found on the north lawn. Now everyone can be a time traveller, and experience tennis as it was played over 100 years ago. The court is open

Wednesday to Sunday, 10 am to 4 pm.