

TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY: Hidden in Plain Sight

By Michelle Johnston

Aurora Museum & Archives

The year is 1860 and a meeting is taking place above Lundy's Wagon Shop on Yonge Street. A group of men have gathered for the first official meeting of Aurora's Freemasons, known as the Rising Sun Lodge. The first Master of the Lodge was Robert Lyon and he would guide the group during their formative years. Members of the Rising Sun Lodge continued to meet above Lundy's Wagon Shop until 1865 at which point a large section of Yonge Street, including Lundy's Wagon Shop, was destroyed by fire. At the time, the fire was reported as being 'more destructive than any that ever preceded it' (Newmarket Era April 14, 1865).

Destructive indeed.

Along with the buildings, the fire destroyed all of the Lodge's early records and regalia, except for the Warrant of Constitution - the flames spared it.

With their meeting place in ruins, Aurora's Freemasons relocated to a room above the Fitzgerald Stove Factory on Wellington Street East. Soon after they acquired the northern half of this same lot and constructed Aurora's first purpose built Masonic Hall. This would serve as their home for twenty years until a unique opportunity arose...

In 1885, the three branches of Methodism united as one congregation at the corner of Yonge and Tyler Streets. This meant that the buildings of the New Connexion Methodist Church, located at 16 Mosley Street, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, located at 57 Mosley Street, were vacant. The Masons purchased the latter and the old Masonic Hall on Wellington Street was moved to Trinity Anglican Church where it was used as a Parish Hall. The Rising Sun Lodge continues to call the gothic revival building on the corner of Mosley and Wells Streets home.

Inside the building, large frames display modest portraits of every Master of the Rising Sun Lodge since 1860. When looking at portraits many of these men are recognizable as prominent figures in the Town's history, including: Aurora Banner editor Charles Lundy, principals J.G McDonald and J.H. Knowles, medical doctors Dr. Strange and Dr. Hillary, police chief W. J. Langman, and several Mayors and Councilors.

The meeting room features exquisite murals that were painted by Barbara Stevenson and J.T. Dowling in the early 1900s. The windows, now filled in with cement, have various tools affixed to them. The current Lodge historian, Ted McClenny, explains these as symbolic tools that members use to moralize on. The floor of the meeting room, referred as the Masonic pavement, espouses meaning through the contrasting colours that symbolize the uncertainty of life.

Currently, the Rising Sun Lodge provides accommodation for three other Lodges: the Mimosa, Delta and Robertson.

To learn more about Freemasonry, and see some artifacts from the local lodge, please visit the travelling exhibition, Freemasonry: A History Hidden in Plain Sight, on view at Hillary House until April 26, 2019.