

TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY: Sugar, We're Going Down

By Rachel Dice

Summer Intern

Aurora Museum & Archives

With summer in full swing and appetites turning to cool summer treats, Aurora is once again enjoying the sweet tastes associated with long days in the sun. Ice cream, popsicles, iced coffee and other deliciously frosty indulgences find their way into willing hands and bellies, and once the sweet flavor hits your tongue, you can't help but think that this is the taste of summer.

However, one hundred years ago in 1918, Canadians were in the grip of World War I, and were suffering after the loss of 13,000 tons of sugar when the ship carrying the precious cargo was sunk by German U-Boats off the coast of Cuba.

Aurorans were cautioned to ration their sugar consumption, and The Banner urged all patriotic households to do their best not to hoard extra sugar, and to stick to the mandated household amount of 1 ½ pounds of sugar a month. This equated to roughly 2 ½ teaspoons of sugar per day. Importing sugar was not high on the list of priorities for the Canadian government, as the ships that imported sugar were now carrying Canadian soldiers to France.

Importing sugar from Europe was virtually impossible, as "the sugar beet fields of France and Belgium that once added to the world's sweetness are now fields where the harvest of world freedom is reaped in blood." (The Aurora Banner, Friday August 9, 1918)

With no extra sugar to be found, what were Aurorans to do? Practicality was the order of the day, and while some advice was to avoid using a full teaspoon when a half teaspoon of sugar would do, another suggestion recommended substitutions for plain old granulated sugar. Making griddlecakes or waffles? Use leftover juice from canned or stewed fruit instead of sugar syrup! Eating some cereal and want it sweeter? Add some dried fruit like currants, figs, dates, or raisins! Feel like having some ice cream? Well, that one was a bit of a pickle.

Food manufacturers were under similar restrictions to household consumers. While Aurorans had plenty of access to ice cream, the Canadian Government released new regulations limiting the amount of sugar and fat allowed in ice cream. Per the new regulations, manufacturers were only allowed ten per cent fat and six pounds of cane sugar to eight gallons of the icy treat.

The new regulations made the sweet summer treat a bit more difficult to make, and to buy. Luckily local ice cream manufacturers were given a recipe from the Dairy Department of the Ontario Agricultural College which would hopefully reduce costs of production and produce about eight gallons of plain ice cream of good quality.

So, next time you plan on having a scoop of delicious ice cream, or even feel like adding that extra spoonful of sugar to your morning coffee, take a moment to remember just how sweet you have it!