

FRIENDS OF AUCHMAR Chair's Annual Report for November 2019 to October 2020

I am pleased to present the FRIENDS OF AUCHMAR Chair's Annual Report for November 2019 to October 2020. I will highlight events and accomplishments and provide some insight into the year ahead. My full report will be available on our website.

As you know last year the Friends of Auchmar Annual General Meeting was held on **December 4th 2019** from 5 to 7pm at the Hamilton Club. The meeting began with board reports followed by Secretary John Kajaste reading the approved changes in the Friends of Auchmar Constitution and By-Laws. Following approval of board reports and the slate of officers, board member, Richard Allen, introduced and welcomed Ian-Kerr-Wilson, the keynote. Ian who had just retired as Manager, Heritage Resource Management had worked closely with the Friends of Auchmar for many years. So with his background knowledge and expertise, we were delighted Ian agreed to present the story of "*My Life in Heritage.*"

Following Ian's address Councillor John-Paul Danko was welcomed to the podium to thank Ian for his outstanding and informative presentation and to provide an update of ward activities. Councillor Danko then invited Carrie Brooks-Joiner, the City of Hamilton's new Director for Tourism, Culture and Planning to say a few words. The 2019 AGM ended with a cake cutting by Ian in honour of his many years of service. .

One of the Friends of Auchmar's most successful members' meeting entitled ***The War Years at Auchmar*** took place on **November 6, 2019** at the Westdale Theatre. This premier film screening was in remembrance of Canada's WWII RCAF Air Fighters. It was in 1943 that Dr. Philip Voelker set up a convalescent hospital at the Auchmar Estate for recovering WWII RCAF Airmen. Dr Voelker was responsible for the care of the airmen and perhaps to validate the patients' progress, it was Dr Voelker who filmed their daily activities. The film also documents the life of the airmen to educate others about the effectiveness of their individual therapies. There are images of men with badly burned hands stretching and flexing, dipping their hands into a wax bath and toning their muscles.

A panel discussion included ninety-five (95) year old Doug Embleton who spoke about growing up in the Auchmar Gatehouse and how the film came to be. The other panel guest was Bill Carey Jr., son of the late Warrant Officer Bill Carey Sr. a patient at the Auchmar Convalescent Hospital. Bill Carey Sr. is interviewed in the film and had direct involvement with the film from various perspectives.

A brief vignette of Reunion of Giants, the film produced by the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum which details the rendezvous of the two remaining flight worthy Lancaster bombers in England, was shown. The audience, through door prize draws, had the opportunity to attend a screening of Reunion of Giants and to visit the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum.

One of the reasons for the success of our event at the Westdale Theatre was thanks to a meeting in July 2019 with David Simpson, President of the Head of the Lake and the Westdale BIA who had previously hosted an event at the Westdale. David recommended a run through at the theatre, well in advance of our event, to ensure the film that had been transferred from old rolls of film to DVD format years ago was of good quality and that speakers test their slides. David explained that he had not tested his film and the quality was not as good as he had hoped. This advice was greatly appreciated.

Our event flyer was created by Richard Allen, John Kajaste and Debra Mills. The large turnout was thanks to media coverage by Mark McNeil, Spectator journalist and to Shelley Falconer President and CEO of the Art Gallery of Hamilton and to Ryan Ferguson, Curator, Film Program, Art Gallery of Hamilton for distribution of our flyer during the Art Gallery's fall film events. A huge thank you went to Dan Fournier, General Manager of the Westdale Theatre and history buff, who immediately stepped in to provide the historical and architectural background of Auchmar when Shannon Kyles, architectural historian and speaker, hurt her back the day prior to our event and was unable to walk. Pat Saunders, Christine Begley and Debra Mills manned the welcoming table, recruited new members and distributed Auchmar Logo cookies at the end of the event.

Sponsors included Judy Marsales Real Estate, ibglobal, the Concession Street B.I.A., Anne Bermingham. Martha Mitchell, the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum and Ward 8 City of Hamilton. Bob and Karen Wilkins, owners of La Caniche Bakery, donated dozens of shortbread cookies decorated with the Friends of Auchmar logo. David Rohrer, President and CEO of the Heritage War Museum and Al Mickeloff, Marketing Director participated in this event and donated tickets to visit the museum. Hamilton author John Soyka donated books as door prizes.

Friends of Auchmar board members Richard Allen and Terry Geissler took charge of videotaping the event. Terry ordered Auchmar T-shirts to assist guests identifying board members.

Huge thanks goes to Fred Fuchs restorer of the Westdale Theatre and Chair of the Westdale Theatre board who agreed to sponsor our ***The War Years at Auchmar*** event, to Bob Cowan, Host of *CHCH TV Morning Live*, who acted as Master of Ceremonies, and to Mark McNeil, Hamilton Spectator reporter and Les Smith who provided songs and music to a packed 300 plus Westdale Theatre audience. Mark and Les played the original song Private Riley (R.H.L.I.) to close out the evening.

In the **Spring of 2019**, the Dept of Culture City of Hamilton invited the Friends of Auchmar to be the hosts at **Doors Open** Saturday May 4th and Sunday May 5th from 10am to 4:00pm. Bill King author of *Buchanan of Auchmar* set up a table in the Manor House to speak with guests and sell his book, Artist Norris Podetz set up his easel and chatted with guests while he painted. Visitors were interested to purchase his drawings of the Auchmar Estate. Bill King and Diane Dent provided Jane's Walk tours of the

grounds of Auchmar. Richard Allen interviewed visitors and provided video presentations of past Auchmar members' meetings entitled "*Voices from Auchmar.*" These activities seemed to attract even more interest than in former years.

In the summer of 2019, board member Bob Gill, webmaster, updated the Friends of Auchmar Auchmar webpage. Terry Geissler, board member responsible for Social Media, updated Facebook and Instagram. Board Members met with mountain councillors, John-Paul Danko, Terry Whitehead and Esther Pauls to provide an Auchmar update and confirm support for the preservation of the entire Auchmar Estate.

An important **initiative** took place at City hall with Councillor John-Paul Danko and Ian Kerr-Wilson, when they met with Friends of Auchmar board members Richard Allen and Diane Dent to discuss mutual goals for the Auchmar Estate via a Letter of Collaboration or a Memorandum of Understanding. We learned from Ian that the Friends of Battlefield House and the Friends of Fieldcote have similar agreements. Ian also informed us that the St James Preservation Society in Toronto and the Madill Church Preservation Society in Huntsville have such agreements. Our board is now working on the Friends of Auchmar Letter of Collaboration with Carrie Brooks-Joiner and John Summers.

February 2019 a very important staff report to the General Issues Committee (GIC) concerning the Auchmar Estate was released. Glen Norton, Director of Economic Development, reported that the 13th Battalion Auchmar Heritage Trust failed to advance its business case for funding. Glen wrote and I quote - *'It's time to move on. We cannot just let things sit any longer. The Trust now wants to change its original plan. The Trust not only wants direct financial assistance from the city via a loan, it also wants the city to pay for all water and sewer upgrades to the building. Staff believed the trust's scheme is too tentative to look at loans and grants. Instead, the city intends to develop its own work plan.'* end of quote. Norton says that includes looking at other potential tenants and city-generated alternatives. Norton says staffers were initially "optimistic" about the trust's visions. He agreed the trust did seem like a perfect fit because the estate was the home of Lt-Col Isaac Buchanan, the 19th Century founding commander of the 13th Battalion, now the RHLI. Even in March 2018 with lack of concrete progress and momentum, councillors opted to give the trust more time. The city spends up to \$27,000 a year to maintain the site. In 2017 it spent \$666,000 on repairs which were matched by federal funds. Previous reports suggest the building requires about \$8 million in repairs. It was confirmed that all potential plans must be compatible with legal preservation agreements with the Ontario Heritage Trust and that the city retain ownership of the estate, a position ratified by the last term of council.

The Board of the Friends of Auchmar suggested to Glen Norton, that the departments of culture, economic development along with the councillor of the ward tour examples of successful adaptive re-use of city owned heritage properties such as Bell Gairdner Estate in Mississauga and Annandale House in Tillsonburg. We understand that the tour has not yet taken place.

In **January 2020**, I was approached by McMaster University and Redeemer University to provide a tour of the Auchmar Estate for 4th year history students who were participating in a required Public History Practicum course. I was delighted to provide a tour of Auchmar Estate grounds. Thanks to Carolyn Samko, Heritage Resource Management, a tour of the interior of the Auchmar Manor House was also possible. The students were thrilled with the opportunity to learn so much from Carolyn about the history and architecture of the Auchmar Estate. To assist their Public History Practicum project John- Paul Danko Councillor of the ward provided the students with the *Auchmar Estate Landscape Improvement and Vegetation Assessment* report written by Wendy Shearer, award winning landscape architect and cultural heritage specialist.

The Friends of Auchmar board appreciates the importance of saying thank you. Thank you notes were sent to sponsors of all our events and to the Hamilton Public Library for the donation in memory of Larry Maughan, a member of the Friends of Auchmar and to Francine DiBacco, Assistant Production Manager, Cream Productions, Toronto for a donation to the Save the Dovecote Campaign as thanks for using photos in a television series where Auchmar was featured. Bill King verified the images and the copyright. A special thank you note was sent to Anna Bradford, Director of Tourism and Culture, when she retired. Anna had a long relationship with the Friends of Auchmar It was very sad for us to say good -bye. She will be greatly missed.

In closing - I know many of you will ask --

Do you have news to share for the future use of the Auchmar Estate?

We do not know what restoration plans or long-term lease arrangements are being discussed but as soon as we receive notification from Hamilton City Council **on the status of the city's business plan for Auchmar** we will email you and post that information on our website.

A very special thank you to members of the board of the Friends of Auchmar for their hard work and guidance this year and to you the members for participating in this virtual AGM and for your continued interest and support.

This report is Respectfully submitted
Diane Gower Dent
Chair Friends of Auchmar