

Albion Bolton Historical Society hopes to inspire curiosity in local history

By Rob Paul

It won't take long for new residents at the recently opened condo building at 50 Ann Street to learn a little bit about the history of Bolton. All they'll need to do is check out the piece on the wall upon entering their building.

The new condo is on the site of the former Legion building in downtown Bolton and features a display on the wall in its entrance that represents local history.

The piece commemorates buildings and scenes from Bolton's past using modern materials and original photos from the Albion Bolton Historical Society's collection.

The resulting artwork, which was installed in mid-November, provides an introduction to Bolton's past as well as a welcome to new residents, most of whom are not from the area.

The six featured photos include: Albert Street School, O.M. Hodson Hardware (later Smith & Schaefer's), Ontario Hotel, Balmoral Hotel (the former Masonic Arms Hotel), Bolton's 1908 Railway Station, and Queen Street, circa 1915.

Society member Derek Paterson spearheaded the collaboration between developer Brookfield Residential and the Historical Society. After speaking with Brookfield Director of Customer Experience Katarina Rodgers, the pair decided to team up on the project.

"In the beginning I met Katarina Rodgers through a mutual friend, and she'd been talking about doing something in their new building at 50 Ann Street," said Paterson. "She reached out to me and asked what kind of idea I had for putting together some sort of visual display within the foyer that initially just represented where the building sat? what was on the land before."

"Through evolution and discussions and brainstorming, it came to what you see today in the lobby of different pictures from around the village, but not necessarily specific to that location. The reason we decided to do it that way was I reached out to Valerie Mackie? another society member? and she and I worked together to develop the final concept that was created. We supplied all the photographs and verbiage that accompany the piece and Katarina took it to her person doing the plaque and they developed the layout using what we provided."

Putting photos that are over 100 years old onto a display and having them pop in a way that attracts people isn't an easy task, but Paterson says, thankfully, the historical society had photos that would work for what they were going for.

"Initially we provided probably somewhere between nine to 12 photographs, and we sat down with Katarina and thought what would have the best visual impact and we needed it to be with some of the better pictures," he said. "For putting photographs onto a plaque, they need to be high-resolution images and at the turn of the century you didn't particularly have that many high-resolution images. We were lucky to have some glass plate that yields high resolution so it was sort of limited to the higher photograph quality because you can only get as good of a photograph as the original you have."

This wasn't a project that came together overnight; it took months of prep and working together to produce an aesthetically pleasing piece that would both ignite conversation and drive curious minds while fitting into the look of the building.

"We started at the beginning of the summer and by the time we were through everything and the time it took to have everything produced, it probably took us from May or June to November," Paterson said. "We're super excited it's finally up and I think for a modern building they chose great materials that still give a modern feel while reflecting something from the past. In essence, I feel like it melds the past and present together while displaying it in an attractive way. Despite it being a modern building, it doesn't feel like a historical society has come in there and just put up something that feels like it belongs at your grandma's house."

With a brand new building in Bolton, the idea was simple: give people the opportunity to learn about the historical relevance of the area and make them feel more at home, even if they're not from around Caledon.

“The overall concept of what we wanted to achieve was?50 Ann Street has around 80 per cent occupancies of residents that are new to the area?we wanted to give the people of the building a sense of place,” Paterson said. “When they come in it's the first thing they see and it's not just a blank green field?like when you move into a subdivision, and you don't really know what was there before. Since we have the village and the historical district, we hoped we could give a sense of place so when the residents come in they feel like they're part of a community that has a deep historical significance and it can give them that first inkling and peak their interest to look more into what their new community is all about and motivate them to take part in it more.”

With the success of this piece at 50 Ann Street, Paterson says there's potential for more new buildings to follow suit, but in the meantime the historical society has been connecting with new businesses to provide them with a little piece of history in their own buildings.

“As a result of this, Katarina was going to try and propose for Brookfield developments that they adopt this policy of trying to reflect the history,” he said. “Outside of that, we as the Albion Bolton Historical Society have been approached by a number of new businesses in Town and supplied them with different images so that they can put up pictures within their new environments to give you a sense of the history.”

“Say you're at one of the new restaurants on the strip, you can sit down and look at something from the Village's history and it's a conversation starter. It plants the seed, and you see where it goes because everyone has a certain degree of interest in local history and that can cause someone to think the photos are neat or it could trigger them to go look into it deeper. It's also good because with the bicentennial it will allow newer residents to identify with it more.”