



New exhibits were unveiled as part of the re-opening of the Aurora History Museum in May 2013, following the relocation of Town Hall the previous fall. Among the new exhibits are “The Greatest Mothers of World War I,” which chronicles the efforts of the East Aurora chapter of the American Red Cross; and “Taking Shape,” a photo history of The Circle.

Above: The West End of Main Street is shown about 110 years ago, when “The Circle” was a series of ovals. McDonald’s now occupies the site of the West End Hotel. The building on the left still stands, and the old tower from the fire hall building (now Willink Financial) can be seen at the far left of the photograph.

Left: Francis A. Little was an American Red Cross worker in East Aurora during World War I. She died from complications of the flu in 1918.

Annual Report of the Historian



2013



Town of Aurora and Village of East Aurora, New York

Robert Lowell Goller
Historian



OFFICE OF
THE TOWN HISTORIAN
Town of Aurora & Village of East Aurora, New York

22 January 2014

Town Supervisor James J. Bach
The Southside Municipal Center
300 Gleed Avenue
East Aurora, New York 14052

Mayor Alan A. Kasprzak
East Aurora Village Hall
571 Main Street
East Aurora, New York 14052

Mr. Supervisor and Mr. Mayor:

Pursuant to Section 57.07 of the New York State Arts and Cultural Affairs Law, which requires the Town and Village Historian to file an annual report each January with his or her appointing officer and the State Historian, please find on the following pages my annual report for 2013.

I never take my appointment for granted, so I thank you for your continued confidence. As always, if you ever have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at any time. The Historian's Office is open each Friday from 1-4 p.m., but I am always available.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert Lowell Goller".

Robert Lowell Goller
Town Historian

cc: New York State Historian Robert Weible; Members of the East Aurora Village Board; Members of the Aurora Town Board; Village Administrator Bryan R. Gazda; Susan McBurney, president of the Aurora Historical Society; Aurora Town Clerk Martha Librock; Village Clerk Joyce Jezewski; Erie County Legislator Joseph Lorigo

The Town Historian also serves as director of the Aurora Historical Society. While the positions of Town Historian and Historical Society Director are separate and unique, both the Town Historian's Office and Historical Society have similar missions. In fact, the town and village's main purpose in appointing Historian Robert S. Persons in 1950 was to establish the Historical Society in order to preserve artifacts and operate museums. While the missions of both positions sometimes overlap, the hours during the workweek are separate. Working hours for the Town Historian are generally on Fridays: in the morning I work on responding to email and mail requests for information; in the afternoon I assist visitors to the office. This report highlights the activities of the Town Historian's Office. The activities of the Aurora Historical Society, including those at the Elbert Hubbard Roycroft Museum and the Millard Fillmore Presidential Site, are not included in this report, but will be included in a separate report from the Aurora Historical Society.



The installation of the Rix Jennings Murals in the main hallway of the Town Offices at the Southside Municipal Center has greatly enhanced their visibility.

New Office Space

A major highlight of 2013 was the official opening of the new Town Historian's Office on May 30, following the relocation of Town Hall from the Roycroft Chapel to the Southside Municipal Center the previous autumn. Thanks to assistance from Aurora Historical Society volunteers and town crews, the new museum and research center was opened after only about eight months of transition. It was a great collaboration between the Town and Historical Society. Aurora now has a handicapped accessible research center and museum in one location. Thanks to great assistance from the town, the Rix Jennings murals depicting the history of the community were installed in the main corridor of the Southside Municipal Center, after they were moved from the Roycroft Chapel. This has greatly enhanced their visibility: the location allows more people to see them, and the lighting is greatly improved.

Problems regarding smells from the nearby cafeteria coming through the heating and air conditioning system into the Historian's Office and Recreation Department have been eliminated with the installation of a new system. The efforts of the town to fix this problem are greatly appreciated. Separate thermostats allow for a stable temperature in the Historian's Office and Museum, which greatly enhances efforts to preserve artifacts, photographs and paper records.

While there was initial concern that the location of the History Museum and Town Archives (in the back of the building) would cause great difficulty, attendance has actually increased. The designation of town parking spaces in the back parking lot has helped tremendously, and many residents who may not have otherwise visited have noticed the office and stopped in while passing through to the Explore and More Museum and other offices within the building.

Research Library

One of the main functions of the Town Historian's Office is to assist residents with historical research. The Town Historian's Office serves as a research library of town history and includes many photographs, original documents, books, school yearbooks and a comprehensive collection of the community's newspapers.

The office and museum are open each Friday (excluding holidays), from 1-4 p.m. The office saw a dramatic increase in the number of requests for information. The number of requests in 2012 (51) was lower than average, which makes the year-to-year increase between 2012 and 2013 more dramatic, but even still, 112 is still the highest number of requests we have received since I was appointed Historian in 2007.

	2012	2013
Visitors	157	170 + 19* = 189
Requests for Information Via Email or U.S. Mail	51	112

* 19 visits were to the History Museum without use of the Research Center

These visits represent both Friday afternoon office hours and special appointments. Some are simple requests for information; others are more involved, such as special projects that require more time pulling and copying files. Most research involves genealogy and house histories, but other office visits have included home-school students conducting research for school projects, High School students, authors working on a book, and (the largest portion) researchers working on family history.

The 112 requests for information do not include general e-mails that have included requests for general information about East Aurora, directions to various historic sites and referrals to other agencies.

In most cases I am able to provide information within one week of the request. If I cannot find the answers or help someone, within a week I try to refer the requestor to the proper agency in the community. Town Clerk Martha Librock and I continue to work closely to assist with requests, as New York State Health Dept. regulations place responsibility for Vital Statistics records with the Town Clerk and the Town Historian handles newspaper, cemetery and other similar records. The Assessor's Office has also been extremely helpful in providing information regarding the history of land and buildings. Due to time constraints, I do not personally conduct genealogical research unless the information requested is easily accessible and brief. The office is open for citizens to conduct their own research.

On a weekly basis I continue to clip and file newspaper articles, including news articles by topic, obituaries and marriage announcements. On a weekly basis, I also provide photographs to the *East Aurora Bee* and—when requested—to the *East Aurora Advertiser*.

The purchase of an all-in-one scanner and printer late in the year has greatly enhanced the efficiency of the office, and I no longer need to leave visitors in the office in order to make copies in another department.

Other Highlights from 2013:

Regional Historians Conference

On Saturday, October 5, the Southside Municipal Center hosted the fall conference of the Government Appointed Historians of Western New York. The organization consists of town, village and county historians from communities west of the Genesee River. The day included workshops about grants and research opportunities, and concluded with the attendees touring the Town Historian's Office and Rix Jennings Murals. About 80 historians attended the conference. The auditorium of the Southside Municipal Center was an ideal setting for the event—plenty of parking, handicapped accessible, and equipped with a projector and other audio-visual equipment. Several attendees commented that it was the best venue we have had for our conference. Thank you to County Legislator Joseph Lorigo for officially welcoming the group to our community.

Purple Heart Returned

On Monday, December 2, I attended a ceremony in Buffalo at which a “lost” Purple Heart was returned to the great-niece of Kendall Morrow. A box containing Morrow's Purple Heart, letters and photographs was found in 2001 by the son of Vietnam veteran Kenneth Hamilton. Hamilton's daughter, Kristin, conducted extensive research in an attempt to return the Purple Heart to Morrow's family, but she was unable to locate any relatives. The Hamilton family recently reached out to the Patriot Guard Riders motorcycle club after seeing a media report about their Veteran Recovery Program's efforts to locate the relatives of another soldier, whose Purple Heart turned up at a Goodwill.

Representatives of the Patriot Guard Riders contacted local newspapers, government agencies, the Aurora Historical Society and the Aurora Town Historian's Office, among other groups, in an attempt to locate Morrow's family members.

Using clues from the contents of the box (and through a search on Facebook), the Patriot Guard Riders located Morrow's niece, Nancy Cederman, in Akron a few months ago. In addition to the Purple Heart, the box contained a photograph from Kendall and Florence Morrow's wedding day, as well as a stack of letters, most which were addressed to the home of Morrow's in-laws, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Nestell, at 764 Oakwood Ave. Morrow's wife was living with her parents while he was serving overseas. It also was during this time that Florence Morrow gave birth to their daughter, whom Kendall Morrow never met.

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Long-lost Purple Heart is restored, as niece receives late uncle's WWII medal

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CUS: HISTORY & ANTIQUES East Aurora Advertiser, Thursday, December 26, 2013



Photo by Robert Lowell Goller

A stack of letters addressed to his wife, who lived on Oakwood Avenue in East Aurora, and a photograph from his wedding day were among items returned to the family of the late Staff Sgt. Kendall L. Morrow during a ceremony on Monday, Dec. 2. Thanks to the efforts of the Patriot Guard

Riders, Morrow's Purple Heart, which was also found among the items in a box in a Rochester apartment complex, was also returned. Morrow, shown in the framed picture, was killed in action on Dec. 11, 1943.

East Aurora Plays Role in Return Of World War II Purple Heart

by Robert Lowell Goller
Aurora Town Historian

There's an East Aurora connection to the recent return of a World War II soldier's Purple Heart and other personal items that were found in a storage bin in a Rochester apartment complex more than a decade ago.

The Patriot Guard Riders held an emotional ceremony on Monday, Dec. 2, at the Iron Island Museum in Buffalo, to return Staff Sgt. Kendall L. Morrow's Purple Heart to his family.

Morrow was killed in action 70 years ago this month—on Dec. 11, 1943—while serving with the U.S. Army Air Corps. Born in Canada in 1915, Morrow became a U.S. citizen before enlisting in the Army on Nov. 21, 1942. Although he was from Snyder, Morrow was connected to East Aurora through his marriage to Florence Nestell of Oakwood Avenue the previous April.

A box containing Morrow's Purple Heart, letters and photographs was found in 2001 by the son of Vietnam veteran Kenneth Hamilton. Hamilton's daughter, Kristin, conducted extensive research in an attempt to return the Purple Heart to Morrow's family, but she was unable to locate any relatives. The Hamilton family recently reached out to the Patriot Guard Riders motorcycle club after seeing a media report about their Veteran Recovery Program's efforts to locate the relatives of another soldier, whose Purple Heart turned up at a Goodwill site.

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Using clues from the contents of the box (and through a search on Facebook), the Patriot Guard Riders located Morrow's niece, Nancy Cederman, in Akron a few months ago. In addition to the Purple Heart, the box contained a photograph from Kendall and Florence Morrow's wedding day, as well as a stack of letters, most which were addressed to the home of Morrow's in-laws, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Nestell, at 764 Oakwood Ave. Morrow's wife was living with her parents while he was serving overseas. It was during this

Fortress Gunner Reported Missing

Wife Informed Sgt. Kendall Morrow is Missing Since Dec. 11 in Raid on Germany

Mrs. Kendall Morrow of Oakwood avenue received a telegram from the War Department Monday, Dec. 27, informing her that her husband, Sgt. Kendall Morrow, has been missing in action over Germany since Dec. 11. He is a waist gunner on a Flying Fortress.

Mrs. Morrow is the former Florence Nestell, daughter of Frank Nestell of Oakwood avenue. Sgt. Morrow's parents are Mr. and Mrs. Edwin H. Morrow of Snyder. They were married in April, 1942.

Inducted into the Army in November, 1942, Sgt. Morrow received training in various air bases throughout the country to qualify him as a gunner on a B-17. He received his wings upon graduation from aerial gunnery school in Laredo, Texas, and received his armament training in Lowry Field, Denver, Colo.

Following training in Salt Lake City, Utah; Moses Lake, and Walla Walla, Wash.; and Scott Field, Ill., he left for overseas duty in England last September. Mrs. Morrow said that the telegram said she would be notified when more information was known about her husband.

Sgt. Morrow is the second serviceman from this area to be reported missing in action. Flight Officer Cornelius G. George was reported missing in a telegram received by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. George, last Aug. 8. They received a letter from the Adjutant General a few days before Christmas explaining the circumstances under which their son was reported missing.

time that Florence Morrow gave birth to their daughter, whom Kendall Morrow never met.

The box also contained a prayer book from the East Aurora Christian Church, where Staff Sgt. Morrow's father- and mother-in-law were active.

Because Morrow wasn't a Town of Aurora resident, he wasn't included in Aurora's Honor Roll list of World War II service members (and those killed in action). After his connection to East Aurora recently came to light, his biography and service information was added to the World War II files in the Aurora Town Historian's Office.

According to a front-page article in the *East Aurora Advertiser* on Jan. 6, 1944, the War Department had sent Florence Morrow a telegram just two days after Christmas informing her that her husband, a waist gunner on a Flying Fortress, had been considered Missing in Action ever since his plane went down over sea waters near Germany during a bombing raid on Dec. 11.

"Mrs. Morrow said that the telegram said that she would be notified when more information was known about her husband," the *Advertiser* reported.

Morrow's body was never found.

Florence Morrow later remarried; a change in last name for her and her daughter made efforts to locate family members nearly seven decades later more complicated.

Nancy Cederman said she hopes a military museum will accept her uncle's Purple Heart, so it will never be lost again. However, she plans to keep the letters. A few of them are still sealed, and Cederman said she hasn't yet decided whether or not to open them.

Aurora Town Historian Robert Lowell Goller is also director of the Aurora Historical Society. The Aurora History Museum and Town Archives are open from 1-4 p.m. on Fridays and by appointment by calling 652-7944.

This article about Morrow's Missing in Action status (at left) appeared on the front page of the *East Aurora Advertiser* on Jan. 6, 1944.

East Aurora High School Film Academy

In the spring, about a dozen students from the Aurora Film Academy at East Aurora High School conducted research in the Historian's Office and interviewed the Town Historian for documentaries they produced for a unit of study. Films produced by the students were shown during a special evening at the Aurora Theatre.

Digitization

The Town Historian's Office continues the massive project of digitizing its files to make them searchable and easier to send via email and other electronic means. Thanks to private contributions, *The East Aurora Advertiser* is digitized and searchable through 1969. With the final \$1,000 contribution from the Aurora Historical Society, the remainder of the Advertisers, as well as earlier newspapers—including the Aurora Standard from the 1830s and The Orbit from the 1960s—will be digitized. Digitization allows every word of the newspapers and other documents to be searched. We are currently investigating software programs to make the searches of these documents more efficient.

During the summer, I had the pleasure of working with Kelly Anderson, an intern from the Museum Studies Program at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Thanks to her hard work over several weeks last summer, we have created a digital—and searchable—card catalogue of every file in our office. This will make finding files much easier. Miss Anderson also created digital databases of all our scrapbooks and property titles, allowing researchers to cross reference surnames, addresses and property owners. Cemetery listings, and obituary and marriage listings from the newspapers, are now digitally searchable. The digital lists are currently only available in the office, but our goal in 2014 is to include these lists and the digital card catalogue on a website to save researchers time when they visit the office. (The card catalogue will indicate the exact drawer or shelf on which a file is kept, allowing us to locate it quickly.)

Special thanks to the town for assisting with the installation of computers, which were donated a few years ago, to enable this project to proceed so quickly.

Programs

Throughout the year, I presented programs to a variety of groups. They included two programs at the Aurora Public Library about Aurora's role in the Underground Railroad; the History of West Falls, a program presented at the West Falls-Colden Community Library; and a History of the National Historic Landmark Millard Fillmore House, which was presented to the Aurora Historical Society and several civic groups, and will be presented during WinterFest 2014 in February. All these programs—and others that are in development—are available for any civic group that requests them.

Other Activities

—Attended two conferences, including the Oct. 5 conference in East Aurora, of the Government Appointed Historians of Western New York, of which I am the Erie County liaison. The spring conference was held in Batavia.

—Continued to maintain the “Aurora Town Historian” Facebook page, regularly posting vintage photos of the town. The page continues to grow in popularity.

—Separately from my duties as Town Historian and director of the Aurora Historical Society, I am working on a second book about the history of East Aurora. Arcadia Publishing is scheduled to publish *Legendary Locals of East Aurora* in November 2014.