

Two centennial buildings...

The First Spiritualist Temple of East Aurora, left, was constructed on Temple Place in 1911. The congregation, which dates back to the 1860s in East Aurora, held a celebration in November 2011. It is one of the few Spiritualist churches in the world originally built for use as a Spiritualist church. The First National Bank of East Aurora building at Main and Church Streets, above, was constructed in 1911-1912.

*Annual Report of the Historian
for the year 2011*

Town of Aurora & Village of East Aurora

Robert Lowell Goller

Town and Village Historian



OFFICE OF THE TOWN HISTORIAN

Town of Aurora & Village of East Aurora, New York

Aurora Town Hall
5 South Grove Street
East Aurora, NY 14052

Robert Lowell Goller
Town & Village Historian

30 January 2012

Town Supervisor Jolene Jeffe
Aurora Town Hall
5 South Grove Street
East Aurora, New York 14052

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

Madam Supervisor and Mr. Mayor:

The New York State Arts and Cultural Affairs Law requires the town and village historian to file an annual report with his or her appointing officer and the state historian. On the following pages, please find my annual report.

Thank you again for your continued confidence. I thoroughly enjoy serving the citizens of Aurora and visitors to our community who are in search of information.

I appreciate the opportunity to work in such a historically active community and consider it a true honor to serve as the community's municipal historian. It's a responsibility I do not take lightly. As always, if you ever have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me or visit the Historian's Office at any time. My regular office hours are 1-4 p.m. on Fridays, but I am always available by cell phone at [REDACTED]

Sincerely Yours,

cc: Members of the Village Board
Members of the Town Board
Village Administrator Bryan R. Gazda
Susan McBurney, President of the Aurora Historical Society
Town Clerk Martha Librock
New York State Historian Robert Weible

Research Library

As you know, a large part of the Town Historian's mission is to maintain and operate the research library at Town Hall.

As in past years, I kept a log of visitors to the office during 2011. There were **126 visits to the office** throughout the year, both during Friday office hours and during special appointments. Some were simple requests for information; others were much more involved, such as special projects that required more time pulling and copying files.

These visits do not include requests for information sent via email. I have kept a separate log of email requests for information from our research library. There were more than **100 e-mail requests**, as this has become a more popular way for people to request information. **This represents a steady increase; we received more than 50 in 2008, more than 75 in 2009, and more than 100 in 2010.** Again, these requests vary in scope, some requiring more time than others.

These figures do not represent general emails that include requests for general information about East Aurora, directions to various historic sites and referrals to other agencies.

Due to the volume of requests we get (and the fact that I am only in the office for a few hours per week), it does sometimes take a few weeks to respond to a research request. I do try, however, to send immediate replies to all inquiries with an estimated timetable for when the information will be available.

Also due to time constraints, and the number of requests we receive, I am unable to extensively help people with genealogical research beyond looking up an item or two in our files. The office is open for citizens to conduct their own family research.

Interns and Volunteers

Due to our limited staff of one very part-time Town Historian, the office relies heavily on volunteers and interns.

In the spring of 2011, an intern from the history department at the University at Buffalo assisted me up to 10 hours per week in the office. His main project was to catalogue and file the recently donated archives of the Toy Town Museum, which had disbanded. That collection is now part of the town's historical collection.

In the fall, four Orchard Park High School students each completed 20 hours of community service with the Town Historian's Office. They assisted with filing.

For the spring 2012 semester, another intern from the University at Buffalo is assisting on Fridays. Her main project is completely overhauling the file drawers, making sure the filing system is accurate, that all the files are properly preserved and that any missing files are located. This is vitally important as we plan our move to the new Town Hall on Gleed Avenue.

Digitization Project

After about two years of preparation, we are ready to begin the digitization of the community's newspapers and other documents. This project was a priority in 2011, and as a result, more than half of the cost has already been funded through donations and grants.

As I have explained previously, currently, in order to look up anything in the local newspapers, one most often turns to microfilm. The process is tedious, and microfilm machines are becoming more and more time-consuming, especially when it comes time to print a selected article. I have met with the firm that produces and stores our microfilm records to determine

the feasibility of converting the microfilm to digital .pdf files that will be accessible on any computer. The best part of the digital format is that newspapers will be searchable! This will allow a citizen to look up a particular name (family, business, street or otherwise) and find all mentions of it in more than 130 years of our community's newspapers, particularly *The East Aurora Advertiser*. We also plan to digitize the *Aurora Standard*, which was published in the 1830s and 1840s and contains a great deal of local information from that time period. This will be much quicker and fool-proof than the current process, which includes separately searching through family, obituary, marriage and other records. Finding dates of events will be much easier; currently, if someone does not know the date of a particular event, finding it in the newspaper records is almost impossible. This could also assist in leading citizens and public officials to official records and documents, because a search could be conducted to find specific dates in the newspaper of official proceedings and notices.

Thanks to the help of the local newspapers, I was able to get the word out to the community about this project. As a result, generous donors have stepped forward, which will enable us to finance the project with no taxpayer money:

- **The Aurora Historical Society has made a three-year pledge to fund about half of the \$8,000 cost.**
- **Geoffrey Gunner of Badger & Gunner donated \$1,000 for the project in 2011.**

I thank both of these initial donors, as their generosity will allow us to begin the first phase of the project this spring. We plan to digitize more than half of the newspapers in our collection during this first phase.

Additionally, **Endion Hospitalist Systems of Orchard Park** donated three computers in October for use in the Historian's Office. Once we move to the Gleed Avenue Town Hall, we plan to set up computer stations, at which visitors will be able to access and search any of our digitized documents. I also hope to have at least one of the computers connected to a scanner, at which an intern or volunteer could, on an ongoing basis, scan the many documents in the office and add them to the "digital collection." Nearly all of this work could be completed in-house, and documents such as maps, telephone directories and family histories could be easily accessed and searched via computer rather than in file drawers and boxes. This would also help the town preserve original documents, as the digital reproductions would be used for everyday research.

LEISURE *East Aurora Advertiser, Thursday, August 11, 2011*



Photo by Jeremy Morlock

Digitizing the Advertiser

Aurora Town Historian Robert Lowell Goller, Historical Society President Susan McBurney, and Advertiser Publisher Grant Hamilton look over editions of the East Aurora Advertiser from the 1890s. The Historian's Office, in cooperation with the Aurora Historical Society and the Advertiser, has embarked on a project

to convert the microfilms of the Advertiser and other local newspapers of the past to digital files that will be accessible from a computer rather than a microfilm machine. For more information about the project, or to support the effort financially, contact Goller at historian@townofaurora.com.

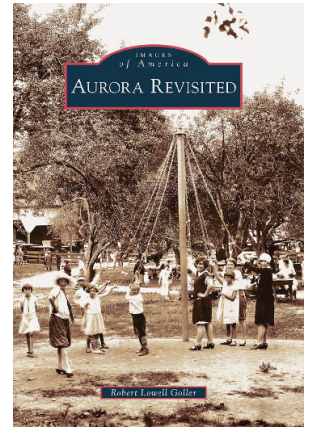


Digitization Donation

Geoffrey Gunner, left, of Badger and Gunner Insurance looks over old editions of the East Aurora Advertiser with Aurora Town Historian Robert Lowell Goller while discussing plans to digitize all the old newspapers and other documents in the Town Historian's Office. Gunner recently donated \$1,000 to the project. Old newspapers, which are now on microfilm, will be converted into a digital format that will be accessible—and searchable—on computer. The Aurora Historical Society and the East Aurora Advertiser have also supported the effort. Gunner's donation will allow the first phase of the project to move forward. "I feel it's important to maintain the community record and make it accessible," Gunner said. Anyone who is interested in supporting the project, which is being funded without any taxpayer dollars, may contact the town historian at historian@townofaurora.com.

Aurora Revisited

Separate from my duties as Town Historian—but very much related—I completed work on *Aurora Revisited*, a book on the town and village’s history. Arcadia Publishing of South Carolina published the book in September. I hope I accomplished my goal of providing an interesting timeline of how our community has progressed over the past two centuries. As a result of this project—and the book signings and events that have come with it—I have been able to meet many more people in the community. I hope it has generated excitement about local history, which was my goal. Thank you to everyone who supported the project, especially the Aurora Historical Society, *East Aurora Advertiser*, the Book Worm, Roycroft Campus Corporation and Tony Rome’s Globe Hotel, as well as town and village leaders and citizens.



Other Activities

The other activities of the Town Historian in 2011 have included:

- Attending two conferences of the Government Appointed Historians of Western New York, of which I am the Erie County liaison. The spring conference was held in Batavia, and the fall conference was held at the Chautauqua Institute.
- Serving as master of ceremonies for the town’s 10th anniversary commemoration of Sept. 11, in Hamlin Park.
- Assisting the owners of the Elm Street Bakery, who wanted to decorate their new restaurant with vintage photographs. They reproduced from the Town Historian’s Collection a large photograph of Sinking Ponds for their loft dining area.
- Wearing two hats (as vice president of the church and Town Historian) attended the 100th anniversary celebration of the First Spiritualist Temple’s building on Temple Place in November. Special thanks to the Mayor and Town Supervisor for attending the rededication ceremony.
- Serving as an ex-officio member of the Aurora Historical Society board, attending twice-per-month meetings and offering input where appropriate. I also serve on the Programming Committee, which plans speakers and presenters for various programs.
- Serving as moderator for a panel discussion at the Roycroft Chapel about local preservation efforts, during the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Conference in October.
- Maintaining the “Aurora Town Historian” Facebook page, on which I include old photos of the town. It’s a great way to generate excitement about local history, especially among our younger citizens.



First Spiritualist Temple’s 100th anniversary



Congressman Brian Higgins addresses participants at a National Preservation Conference field session in East Aurora on Friday. Entitled “East Aurora: Protecting Small-Town Identity,” the session offered conference-goers a chance to explore the village, take an interactive bus tour, hear a panel discussion at the Roycroft Chapel, and visit local museums.