

# Annual Report of the Historian



## 2015



Town of Aurora and Village of East Aurora, New York

Robert Lowell Goller  
*Historian*



Top and left, exactly 100 years after the original memorial procession down South Grove Street for Elbert and Alice Hubbard, community members joined members of the Hubbard family for a centennial memorial procession. (Bottom photo courtesy of the East Aurora Advertiser.) Bottom right, the time capsule that originated at the East End Fire Hall on Olean Street.





OFFICE OF  
**THE TOWN HISTORIAN**

*Town of Aurora & Village of East Aurora, New York*

29 January 2016

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

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

Mr. Supervisor and Mr. Mayor:

Pursuant to Section 57.07 the New York State Arts and Cultural Affairs Law, which requires the 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 2015. As I hope you will see from this report, the year was quite eventful and transitional on many levels, and we are about to embark on a number of exciting projects.

I never take my appointment for granted, so I thank you for your continued confidence. It is an honor and a privilege to serve the community as Historian. This annual report serves as a means to officially share with you (and with the public and future generations) the activities of the Town and Village Historian, but I appreciate our open dialogue throughout the year. As always, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time if I can be of assistance with any project.

Best Regards,

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

Robert Lowell Goller  
*Town and Village Historian*

*cc: Acting New York State Historian Jennifer Lemak; Members of the East Aurora Village Board; Members of the Aurora Town Board; Village Administrator Bryan R. Gazda; the Aurora Historical Society; Town Clerk Martha Librock; Village Clerk Joyce Jezewski; Erie County Legislator Joseph Lorigo; Erie County Historian Douglas Kohler.*

**The Southside Municipal Center, 300 Glead Avenue, East Aurora, New York 14052**  
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The year 2015 was a transitional and milestone one for the Town Historian’s Office. There were a number of exciting anniversaries, including the centennial commemoration of the sinking of the Lusitania. The tragedy off the coast of Ireland 100 years ago took the lives of Roycroft founders Elbert and Alice Hubbard. The year also marked the end of my employment as director of the Aurora Historical Society. Funding for the position expired in July. Although I am no longer an employee of the Historical Society, which is a distinct and separate entity from the government function of the Town Historian’s Office, we still work very closely with one another. My new part-time position as secretary to the Town Supervisor complements my position as Town Historian very well, and as a result we will be able to better serve the public.

This year was also marked by sad news. My immediate predecessor, Donald H. Dayer, who served as the seventh Town Historian from 1996-2007, passed away on July 23. He was a tremendous resource and his expertise and guidance certainly will be missed.

This report is divided into three sections, which represent the main functions and missions of the Historian’s Office:

- The Archives and Research Center at the Southside Municipal Center
- Community Outreach, including newspaper articles, presentations and social media
- Events

## **The Archives**

One of the main functions of the Historian’s Office is to assist residents with historical research and maintain the archives. With my new position in the Town Supervisor’s Office, we were able to change public research hours from Friday afternoons to Wednesdays, 1-4 p.m., effective Jan. 1, 2016. This allows the office to be open at the same time as other museums throughout the community during summer months, enabling visitors to stop at all the historic sites throughout the community on the same day. Of course, special appointments are still available for those who are not able to visit the office during regular office hours.

Visits to the office for research in 2015 remained about the same as 2014, when we experienced a dramatic increase. The office was closed for two additional holidays that landed on Fridays in 2015 (Independence Day and Christmas).

	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Visitors</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>231</b>

These visits represent both office hours and special appointments. As has always been the case, most research requests involve genealogy and house histories, but other visits included members of three local churches researching the history of their congregations for important upcoming anniversaries; a volunteer researcher compiling sports statistics from the *East Aurora Advertiser* digital archives for an upcoming project at the school; a variety of miscellaneous questions about local history; assisting the East Aurora Fire Department with its history for the opening of the new Central Fire Station on Center Street; and researching and providing information to the village’s Historic Preservation Commission and other governmental boards for their reviews of proposals under consideration.

Additionally, our office assisted and provided Tops Friendly Markets with photo scans for the East Aurora store’s remodeling project in 2015. The entrance of the store now includes nearly 50 large historic photographs from the collection in the Town Archives. In previous years, other businesses, including Mighty Taco restaurant and Tony Rome’s Globe Hotel, sought image scans, which they had enlarged and printed to put on display. This has been a great way to share with the community images that would otherwise remain in the archive drawers.



*Historical photographs at Tops Friendly Market*

In addition to in-office visits, we also continue to respond to requests via email and U.S. Mail. The number of requests increased dramatically in 2015 and it was the highest number since I became Town Historian in 2007.

	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Requests for information via email or U.S. Mail</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>133</b>

Due to time constraints, the volunteers and I do not personally conduct genealogical research unless the information requested is easily accessible and brief. Much like a public library, the Historian’s Office is open for citizens to conduct their own research and we do our best to assist them in locating the information they need.

Because the staff of the Town Historian’s Office is extremely limited (a very part-time Town Historian), the office relies heavily on the generosity of volunteers. Nancy DeWitt has once again volunteered nearly 100 hours during the year. A college student, Lucas Dana, volunteered for his second summer, and helped us scan and organize a number of photographs. Thanks to these volunteers, we have been able to make a great deal of progress on several projects. These projects included:

—An update to the digital card catalogue, which allows citizens and researchers to easily find out what files we have in the collection and where they are located in the archives.

—The cataloguing of property and building information by street. Previously, if someone sought information or photographs about a particular home or building, that information was located in three or four different files. Now all the information we have on a particular property is located in one file.

—Throughout 2015 we have prepared a number of items, including the digital card catalogue and answers to Frequently Asked Questions, that will be added to the Town Historian’s website in early 2016. This will save visitors a great deal of time because a lot of groundwork for their research will be able to be completed before they visit the office.

In addition, Joseph “Potts” Stapleton has digitally scanned a number of photographs from the collection, many of which have been well received on Facebook.

## Community Outreach

A major focus of the Town Historian is to “get out of the office,” and take our community’s history out on the road. The Town Historian’s Facebook page (“Aurora Town Historian”) has been a great way to share photographs, old newspaper articles and other tidbits of local history with a much broader audience several times per week.

I also write a monthly “Historian’s Corner” column for the *East Aurora Advertiser* (usually the last week of each month) and provide information and interviews to all the local newspapers several times throughout the year.

Topics of the monthly “Historian’s Corner” column have included:

**January:** Change of Village House Numbers in Mid-1920s Still Poses Challenges for Researchers

**February:** When Doctors Made House Calls

**March:** East Aurora Survived the Great Telephone War of 1906

**April:** Presidential Pardon Sealed Elbert Hubbard’s Fate

**May:** What Happened to the Hubbards? Roycroft Founder’s Son Spent Decades Trying to Find Out

**June:** EA’s Fourth of July Airplane Show Struggled to Get Off the Ground

**July:** Hamlin’s Gift Saved East Aurora’s “Central Park”

**August:** Touch-Tone “Phone of the Future” Made its East Aurora Debut 50 Years Ago

**September:** Does East Aurora Legally Exist? Village Leaders Panicked After a Judge Said ‘No’ in 1968

**October:** A Century Ago, Men in New York Said “No” to Women Voting

**November:** Longtime Chief Robert O’Neil’s 1945 Retirement Ended an Era in the East Aurora Police Dept.

**December:** Community Groups Hosted Holiday Dance for Returning Service Members in 1945

I continue to serve as treasurer of the Government Appointed Historians of Western New York, and I attend (and help organize) the group’s twice-a-year training meetings in the region. The group consists of municipal historians from 10 Western New York counties.

I also worked with the Roycroft Campus Corporation to organize and moderate a program with *East Aurora Advertiser* Publisher Grant M. Hamilton (in March about the history of the newspaper industry) and an autumn panel discussion with local women artists. On September 19, during an event sponsored by the Village Historic Preservation Commission, I presented a program—“A Tale of Two Villages”—on the history of the Village of East Aurora (and its early days as two communities).

Throughout the year I continued to offer programs on a variety of topics at local civic group meetings and other events. In 2015, I presented more than 20 programs to a variety of groups, including the Aurora Historical Society, the East Aurora Kiwanis Club, the Wales Senior Citizens, Aurora Senior Citizens, the East Aurora High School Class of 1959 for their reunion in July, to the residents of Greenfields Retirement Community in Lancaster and three times to the residents of Fox Run in Orchard Park, where many East Aurora residents now live. (*On the next page are the programs that are available. More are added as I research and prepare them.*)



# **Presentations by Robert Lowell Goller**

## ***Aurora Town and East Aurora Village Historian***

Please email [historian@townofaurora.com](mailto:historian@townofaurora.com) for more information or to schedule a presentation.

All the presentations are about an hour long, including time for questions.

### **East Aurora After the Lusitania**

*An examination of the intriguing transitions at the Roycroft and in East Aurora following the deaths of Elbert and Alice Hubbard aboard the RMS Lusitania on May 7, 1915.*

### **A Tempest in the Village Teapot**

*An examination of Roycroft founder Elbert Hubbard's love-hate relationship with the Village of East Aurora. Elbert Hubbard was a controversial and eccentric character, whose personality and writings were often at odds with the leaders and residents of the small village in which he founded the Roycroft.*

### **The Little House That Could**

*An examination of how President Millard Fillmore's honeymoon cottage, built in 1826, went from near destruction to National Historic Landmark.*

### **Abolition in Aurora**

*This presentation examines the Town of Aurora's unique role in helping runaway slaves reach freedom in Canada and explores the validity of some of the local Underground Railroad stories that have been told over time.*

### **Aurora and the War of 1812**

*The Town of Aurora was in a unique geographic position during the War of 1812. Discover how the war impacted the early settlers and the development of this small community.*

### **The History of West Falls**

*This small hamlet on the southwestern edge of the Town of Aurora has a unique history of settlement, several name changes and industrial development.*

### **Who Is the Town Historian and What Does He or She Do?**

*Did you know that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was also his town's official historian? New York is the only state in the U.S. to require municipal historians by law. Learn about the origins of the Historian's Law, on the books since 1919, and the resources available from the Historian's Office.*

### **Legendary Locals of East Aurora**

*Robert Goller discusses his 2014 book, which tells the stories of some of the community's more interesting citizens—both past and present.*

### **A Tale of Two Villages**

*Before 1874, the Village of East Aurora was two distinct communities. This presentation examines the events that led to the merger of them into one village and the great community debate over what to name it.*

### **Does East Aurora Legally Exist?**

*For nearly a century, no one had any reason to question the existence of the Village of East Aurora, but for a few weeks in February 1968, East Aurorans were worried that their village might not be real. Learn about the uproar that followed a judge's decision that called into question the village's legal existence.*

## Events and Other Highlights of the Year



Photo courtesy of the UB Reporter



### January

On Jan. 7, I was honored to deliver the Memorial Address at the annual birthday commemoration service for President Millard Fillmore in Forest Lawn Cemetery. It was the first time in the event's 50-year history that the Memorial Address was delivered by a member of the community not affiliated with the University at Buffalo. Jan. 7 also included interviews about President Fillmore with two radio stations from other areas of the country.

### April

On Saturday, April 25, with the Aurora Historical Society, we hosted the annual meeting of the Erie County Federation of Historic Agencies, which includes historical societies and organizations from throughout the county. The event was held in the auditorium of the Southside Municipal Center, which served as a perfect venue. During the meeting, I presented a program on East Aurora's historic preservation efforts.

### May

Throughout the month, the Aurora Historical Society organized and hosted several events to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Lusitania, which took the lives of Roycroft leaders Elbert and Alice Hubbard. As part of the month's events, I presented a program on the impact of the Lusitania tragedy on the Roycroft and East Aurora. Other events included talks by renowned authors, an "Evening Aboard the Lusitania" dinner at the Roycroft Inn, and a memorial procession down South Grove Street and memorial service at the Roycroft Pavilion in Hamlin Park on May 23. The procession and service were held exactly 100 years after—and in the same locations—as the original memorial procession and service for the Hubbards in May 1915. Special thanks to the mayor and town supervisor for taking part in this special event.



### October

When removing the plaque from the former Central Fire Station on Oakwood Avenue, a member of the East Aurora Fire Department discovered a small copper time capsule that had long been forgotten. With the resources of the digital newspaper collection in the Town Historian's Office, we were able to quickly piece together the history of the time capsule dating back to 1889. During a ceremony on Wednesday, Oct. 21, at the new Central Fire Station (witnessed by a large group of village residents and several television news cameras), we carefully opened the time capsule. The items found inside, from 1889, 1933 and 1954, will be resealed in a new time capsule along with items from 2016 and hidden again next summer for someone in the future to discover. *(A timeline prepared for the event appears on the following page).*



Photo courtesy of the East Aurora Advertiser



# Time Capsule Timeline

## 1889 - 2015



- **August 3, 1889:** A time capsule box is placed in the cornerstone of the new East End Fire Co. building on Olean Street. The box contained, among other items, papers from the organization of the fire company in March 1877.
- **September 19, 1933:** Long forgotten, the time capsule is discovered in the cornerstone during a remodeling project at the East End Fire Hall. It is opened, and additional materials are placed inside.
- **October 21, 1933:** The time capsule is placed back in the newly remodeled East End Fire Hall.
- **April 30, 1954:** In anticipation of the dedication of the new Central Fire Station on Oakwood Avenue, the box is opened during the annual banquet of the East End Active Hose Co., at The Roycroft Inn.
- **August 12, 1954:** After additional materials from 1954 are added to the box, it is resealed and placed behind the dedication plaque of the new Central Fire Station on Oakwood Avenue, where it is forgotten about for more than 60 years.
- **October 2015:** The “lost” time capsule is discovered once again, this time when the dedication plaque is removed from the recently de-commissioned Central Fire Station on Oakwood Avenue.
- **October 21, 2015, 7 p.m.:** The time capsule is opened at the new Central Fire Station, 33 Center Street.

—On Saturday last there was deposited in the corner stone of East End Fire Co's new building a box containing a list of the members who organized the company March 19th, 1877, 25 in number; a list of the present members and 20 copper pennies—one for each member; the names of the chief of the department, and assistant chief, the names of the building committee, a copy of the Aurora ADVERTISER and the Aurora Enterprise. The building will be opened with a grand entertainment and prize fair. Several valuable prizes have already been donated.

*East Aurora Advertiser,*  
Friday August 9, 1889

### Old Times Renewed As Cornerstone Box of Fire Hall Found

#### East End Volunteers Remodel Building Put Up in '89

Remodelling of the East End Fire Hall is nearly completed, with George Helm in charge of the work. An interesting find was made when the corner stone was uncovered Tuesday morning by workmen, who did not know it contained a box of notes and coins.

There were 22 pennies all of the 1800's, apparently deposited by members of the company, then the East End Fire Company, which was organized March 19, 1877. The building was dedicated in August, 1889, and the box contained, besides the coins and a list of the officers and members of the company, a copy of the Aurora Advertiser, Aug. 2, 1889, predecessor of the East Aurora Advertiser, and the Aurora Enterprise, Aug. 1, 1889, its younger competitor.

Contained in the issue of The Advertiser

*East Aurora Advertiser,*  
Thursday, September 21, 1933

Following this ceremony a copper box containing records will be placed behind a plaque on the building. This box was removed from the corner stone at East End Fire Hall. The sealed box was originally placed in the corner stone in August, 1889, when the East End Hall was built.

#### Copper Box Opened

During renovation of the building in 1933 the box was reopened and additional data placed within before resealing and placing in the corner stone Oct. 21, that year.

Data in the box when opened April 30, this year, at the annual banquet and installation of East End Active Hose at Roycroft Inn included a copy of The Aurora Advertiser, now the East Aurora Advertiser, dated Aug. 2, 1889.

Also in the box were the constitution and by-laws of East End Fire Company of 1877-78, officers and a roster of members of 1877, a poster announcing the fifth annual ball of the fire ladders Feb.

13, 1885, in the Persons House, a copy of the East Aurora Advertiser of Sept. 21, 1933, and a roster of the company of that year.

Additional data enclosed in the copper box before resoldering this morning was a copy of today's East Aurora Advertiser and a roster containing names of members of the East Aurora Fire Department, together with an illustrated brochure prepared for the dedication.

*East Aurora Advertiser,*  
Thursday, August 12, 1954



East End Fire Hall, Olean Street