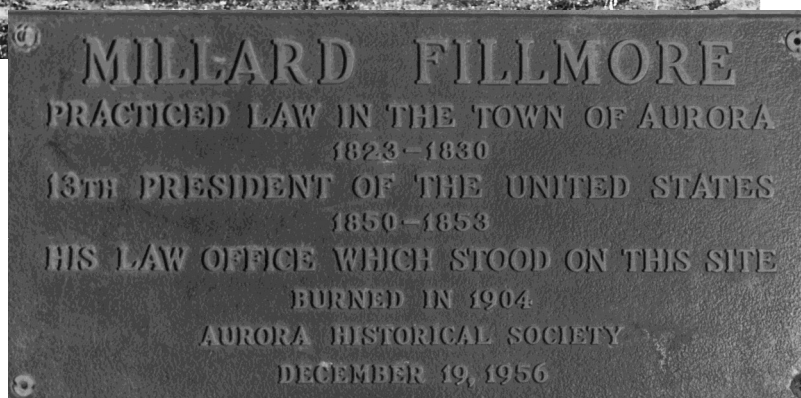




*Above is the earliest known photograph of President Millard Fillmore's Law Office, which was located on Main Street at the present site of Vidler's. A bronze marker, which was recently discovered in storage, was rededicated by the Aurora Historical Society on December 19, 2012, the 56th anniversary of the first plaque dedication. The Aurora Historical Society is embarking on a project that will include construction of a replica of the law office at the Millard Fillmore Museum site at Main Street and Shearer Avenue.*



# Annual Report of the Historian



## 2012



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*

8 January 2013

Town Supervisor Jolene Jeffe  
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

Madam Supervisor and Mr. Mayor:

Pursuant to the New York State Arts and Cultural Affairs Law, which requires the Historian to file an annual report with his or her appointing officer and the State Historian, please find on the following pages my annual report for 2012.

Thank you again for your continued confidence. It is an honor and a privilege to serve the community as Historian. 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.

Sincerely Yours,

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

Robert Lowell Goller  
*Town Historian*

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  
Village Clerk Joyce Jezewski  
New York State Historian Robert Weible

## 2012—A Year of Transition



**With the help of volunteers, more than 100 boxes of files were packed up and moved to the new Historian's Office at the Southside Municipal Center. While there is still a lot of work to do before the office and museum are completely put back together this spring, the research library was reopened within a month of the move.**

### Town Hall Move

The year 2012 was a significant transition year for the Town Historian's Office in two major ways. First, as was the case for every department in Town Hall, the Historian's Office moved to its new quarters at the Southside Municipal Center in late September. Cataloguing, packing and then unpacking the historical archives was a major undertaking that would not have been possible without the help of interns and volunteers from the Aurora Historical Society. More than a year was spent cataloguing and preparing the files for a smooth transition. An intern from the University at Buffalo assisted in completely overhauling the file drawers, making sure the filing system was accurate, that all the files were properly preserved and that any missing files were located before the move. The research library was closed for three weeks following the move but was once again functional by the end of October. However, it still will take a little more time to get completely settled in. The public's patience during this transition has been greatly appreciated.

Just a few weeks after the relocation of the town archives, movers for the Aurora Historical Society transported the artifacts, display cases and furniture from the Historical Museum to the Southside Municipal Center, where they will be on display as part of a new Historical Museum that will be incorporated into the Historian's Office. The Rix Jennings murals that were along the wall in the Roycroft Chapel were also moved and will be installed in the main corridor outside the town offices at the Municipal Center. The Historical Society also moved the large "Prayer for the Lost at Sea" painting that hung among the rafters at the Roycroft Chapel. The renowned painting, by one-time Roycrofter Sandor Landeau, will be exhibited in the new Town Museum at Southside. Though the new Historian's Office is not as historically charming as the Roycroft Chapel building, the Town Archives and Historical Society's collection will be properly preserved and displayed, which will allow the Roycroft Chapel to be renovated by its new owner. The new location is also handicapped accessible and better suited for the preservation and display of our collection. It is taking some time for citizens and visitors to find the new office in the back of Southside, but directional signs have helped tremendously.

The Town and the Historical Society aim to have the museum back up and running by spring. The Historical Society plans to take this opportunity to refurbish and modernize the display cases and provide a better system for the exhibits. The goal is to introduce additional rotating exhibits to keep the museum more attractive for citizens, visitors and school groups. The Rix Jennings murals will also be installed over the winter in preparation for what we hope will be a grand reopening sometime in the spring.

## Historical Society Director

The Aurora Historical Society entered an exciting new era with the appointment of its first director, and I was extremely honored to have been asked to help lead the Society into what no doubt will be an unprecedented period of growth. Hiring a director has been a years-long goal of the Society. In fact, the creation of the position in September capped off the first phase of the Society's Strategic Plan, the second phase of which the Society will be entering in 2013. 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's main purpose in appointing the first Town Historian, Robert S. Persons, in 1950 was to establish the Historical Society in order to preserve artifacts and operate museums. My appointment to this new position will only enhance our ability to serve the public, promote local history and properly preserve and display our records and artifacts.

As Town Historian, I continue to hold office hours Friday afternoons from 1-4 p.m., to assist anyone who wishes to research the town archives. Additional hours will likely be considered—in consultation with both the Town and Historical Society—after the Town Museum re-opens in the spring.

## Research Library

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.

As in past years, I kept a log of visitors to the office during 2012. Even though the office was closed for three weeks in October, the number of visits increased over the previous year:

**2012—157 visits**

**2011—126 visits**

**2010—156 visits**

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, assisting a local business in finding photographs of their building for an upcoming wall display, and assisting with projects regarding Knox Farm State Park and the East Aurora Fire Department.

These logged visits do not include requests for information sent via e-mail and U.S. Mail. In 2012, I responded to **51 requests via email**, which is consistent with previous years. This does 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, however many requests were delayed in September and October due to the move. 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*.

## Digitization

After several years of planning and fundraising, the first phase of the digitization of newspaper files has been completed. With grants totaling \$4,000, the East Aurora Advertiser has been digitally scanned from the first issue in 1872 through 1969. Because the project cost less than first estimated, we believe we can digitize the remaining newspapers—including earlier newspapers from the 1830s—and other documents with the remaining \$1,000 contribution from the Aurora Historical Society.

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. The best part of the digital format is that newspapers will be searchable! 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.

Generous donors have stepped forward, which enabled us to finance the project with no taxpayer money.

**As noted in last year's annual report, the Aurora Historical Society made a three-year pledge to fund \$4,000 of the cost, and 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 complete a majority—of not all—of the project.

Additionally, **Endion Hospitalist Systems of Orchard Park** donated three computers for use in the Historian's Office. Now that we have moved to the Southside Municipal Center, in the next few months we plan to set up computer stations, at which visitors will be able to access and search any of our digitized documents. There has been great anticipation among visitors about the digitization project and the ability to search newspapers and other documents.

We 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. We are also working on an online “card catalogue” of documents in the town's collection, to greatly assist citizens with their research. The digitization process takes a great deal of time, but now that we have moved to the Southside Municipal Center, we anticipate that scanning and converting documents will move along much more quickly.



**The “Prayer for the Lost at Sea” painting was removed from the rafters of the former Town Hall at the Roycroft Chapel at Main and South Grove Streets in November. The painting was among the many items in the Aurora Historical Society's collection moved to the Southside Municipal Center when Town Hall relocated this fall. The Historical Society's collection, including murals by Rix Jennings and artifacts from the community's earliest settlers, will be on display at the new Town Hall, where a re-opening of the Town Historical Museum is planned for the spring.**

## Other Activities

—Attended 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 SUNY Brockport.

—Served 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.

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

NOVEMBER 23, 2012

### D LOCAL NEWS

# Aurora Historical Museum enjoys enhanced capabilities in new home

By KAREN ROBINSON  
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

The Town of Aurora's museum — with its Roycroft memorabilia, mix of vintage sketches of early East Aurora and various tidbits of town heritage — has a promising future in a new home.

After town offices relocated recently to the new Southside Municipal Center from the old chapel building on the Roycroft Campus, the museum has more space and a dedicated mission to better focus its exhibits and enhance the town's historical presentation.

“At the chapel, the [historical] area served as a meeting room and public space,” said Town Historian Robert L. Goller. “Here, it's a little more controlled space and more open hours. We can have this open a lot more. There is definitely a demand for it. People are calling.”

Goller said the museum will be better organized, with improved displays, and more protected. It will also be more user-friendly, in that it will be handicapped-accessible, which was problematic when town offices were at the chapel.

Goller is excited about his task and said the “re-grand opening” of the Aurora Historical Museum is slated for May, when the Historical Society's other two museums — the Millard Fillmore House Museum and Elbert Hubbard Roycroft Museum — open for the regular season from May through October. The town's research library, however, is open Fridays from 1 to 4 p.m. at the Southside Municipal Center.

Also tied into the move is the intertwining of the historian's office and the museum together in the same space. The room is three times the size of the former historian's office, which was tucked upstairs in the Roycroft chapel with odd, little spaces and very tall ceilings.

“I know some people were concerned about the town museum moving out of the Roycroft [Campus],” Goller said. “But I think the Roycroft needs to be the Roycroft, with the town museum being separate in another place.”

“The town museum has a lot more beyond the Roycroft. This can be a general museum for the town.”

Since moving day occurred earlier this fall, Goller's office and new museum space is chock-full of Roycroft artifacts and many other goodies.

There is a jumble of boxes and files, Roycroft furniture, a medicine bag from one of the town's earliest doctors, a detailed scrapbook of residents who served in World War I, diaries written by residents in the 1800s chronicling daily life, toys from Toy Town and from some of the smaller, earlier toy companies that didn't last long, as well as artifacts from East Aurora's early settlers and a Native American tool collection.

Also noteworthy are vintage murals of East Aurora by locally famous artist Rix Jennings, who also designed the town's logo and was an artist-in-residence for East Aurora years ago.

“Locally, these things are priceless because they tell the story of East Aurora,” Goller said of Jennings' works, which

included murals showing the area before the settlers came, 19th century homes, Millard Fillmore's influence, and a look toward the future, which has since become part of local history itself. The murals will be displayed more prominently.

“We're not sure when they're going to go up, but we want to do it right,” said Goller, who also was recently hired as Aurora Historical Society director.

“Prayer for the Lost at Sea,” a 10-by-6-foot painting by Sandor Landeau, an artist on the Roycroft Campus, also will be part of the town museum. The painting, which won a gold medal at the Paris Salon of 1907, had been on display in the meeting room, but was much too high to view properly.

The Historical Society has two rotating exhibits, but Goller said fresh exhibits will be done in the new space.

The Roycroft sideboard that was in the old chapel made the move to the new Town Hall, as well as six Roycroft mission chairs that were commonly used at town meetings in the chapel and were donated to the high school by the Classes of 1919 and 1920.

The Historical Society, which owns many collections, is dedicated to the general history of the town and runs the three museums.

“People don't even know what we have,” Goller said of the town museum. “There are a lot of projects that had to wait because there wasn't enough space before.”

email:  
krobinson@buffnews.com

**The Buffalo News**  
November 23, 2012