

OFFICE OF
THE HISTORIAN

Town of Aurora & Village of East Aurora, New York

ANNUAL REPORT

FOR THE YEAR

2018

TOWN OF AURORA & VILLAGE OF EAST AURORA, NEW YORK



ROBERT LOWELL GOLLER
HISTORIAN





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

24th January 2019

State Historian Devin R. Lander
Office of State History
222 Madison Avenue
Albany, New York 12230

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

Mayor Peter M. Mercurio
Village of East Aurora
571 Main Street
East Aurora, New York 14052

Mr. State Historian, Mr. Supervisor and Mr. Mayor:

Pursuant to Section 57.07 of 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 2018.

As you will see on the pages of this report, in addition to the regular duties of the office, a great deal of time in 2018 was spent on the Town of Aurora's bicentennial commemoration. The Aurora Town Historian's Office is only a small part of the community team that organized celebratory events, educational historical programs, and exhibits. Thank you to all the community organizations that "hopped on the bicentennial bandwagon." The bicentennial commemoration will officially conclude on March 2, 2019, the 200th anniversary of the first Aurora Town Board meeting.

Also in 2018, to mark the 100th anniversary of the conclusion of World War I, I focused my research and projects on the Aurorans who served in the war effort here and abroad.

This annual report serves as a means to share with you (and the community) the activities of the Historian's Office in 2018. It also serves as a record for future generations. I appreciate our open dialogue throughout the year, so please do not hesitate to contact me or stop in the office if I can ever be of assistance. I never take this position for granted, and I thank you for your continued confidence.

Kind Regards,



Robert Lowell Goller
Historian



The Southside Municipal Center, 300 Gleed Avenue, East Aurora, New York 14052
www.townofaurora.com/departments/historian
historian@townofaurora.com
716-652-7944

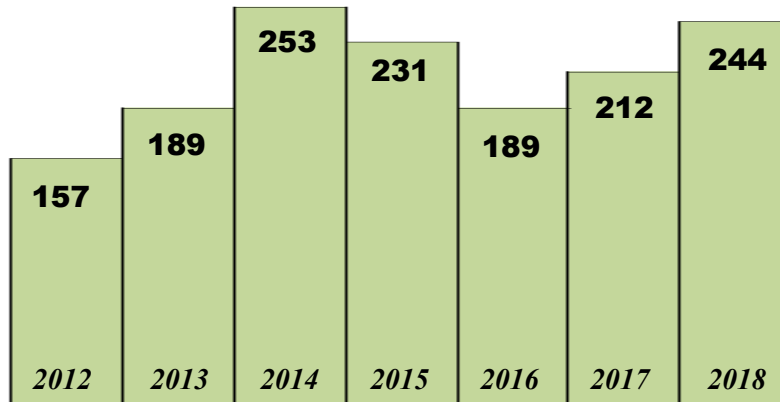


The Archives

A main function of the Historian's Office is to assist residents with historical research and to maintain the archives. The office and archives continue to be open each Wednesday, from 1– 4 p.m., and by special appointment. The office was closed for Independence Day and Christmas weeks, as well as unexpectedly on one Wednesday in April due to a power outage at the Municipal Center. We continue to experience an increase in the number of visitors and requests.

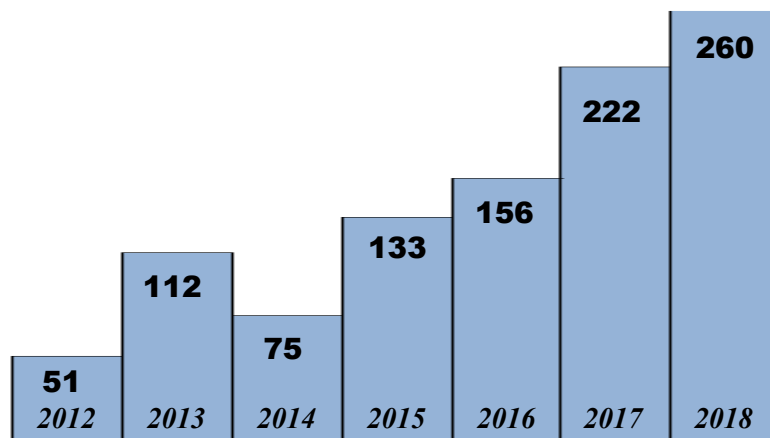
Office Visits

We keep a log of the number of visitors and the topics that are researched.



Requests via Email, U.S. Mail and Social Media

In addition to in-office visits, we also continue to respond to requests via email, U.S. Mail and social media. The number of requests in 2018 was the highest number since I became Town Historian in 2007.



The requests related to a vast number of topics. There were the traditional requests for information related to house histories and genealogy. The office also assisted other village and town departments in historical research. In 2018, we also assisted with the research for two historical markers, one outside the Griffins Mills Presbyterian Church, and another for Roycrofter Alice Hubbard, which the Aurora Historical Society will officially dedicate in 2019.

The Historian's Office relies heavily on the generosity of volunteers. Once again in 2018, two volunteers, Lucas Dana and Marian Halperin, assisted in the office on a regular basis, logging more than 150 hours of volunteer time during the year. In addition, Joseph "Potts" Stapleton continues to visit the office on a nearly weekly basis and has digitally scanned a number of photographs and articles from the collection, many of which have been well received on Facebook.

Community Outreach

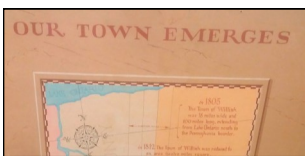
FACEBOOK...The Town Historian's Facebook page ("Aurora Town Historian") continues to be a great way to share photographs, old newspaper articles and other tidbits of local history with a much broader audience. A daily posting, which we started in 2016, features an interesting newspaper clipping, photograph or artifact. Photographs and other items from the archives are also regularly featured on the "You Know You're from East Aurora, NY If You Remember..." Facebook page. The posts reach a few thousand people on Facebook each day.

PRESENTATIONS...I have continued to offer presentations about historical topics, as well as meet with local civic groups to discuss a variety of topics. Specific presentations, events and meetings are included in the "Events and Activities" section of this report.

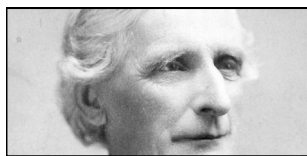
GOVERNMENT APPOINTED HISTORIANS OF WESTERN NEW YORK...In September, after four years in the position, I stepped down as treasurer of the Government Appointed Historians of Western New York. I made the decision in order to focus on other projects, but I will continue to remain active with the organization.

Publications

MONTHLY HISTORY COLUMN...I have continued the monthly "Historian's Corner," which is usually featured on Page 2 of the *East Aurora Advertiser* on the last week of each month. I also continue to make myself available for interviews, and newspapers continue to use the Historian's Office as a resource for historical material. This year for the first time, I also was interviewed regarding a variety of local topics for the *East Aurora Advertiser's* podcast, which was broadcast on the newspaper's website. Topics of the monthly "Historian's Corner" column in 2018 included:



January: Bicentennial Marks Anniversary of One Town Becoming Three



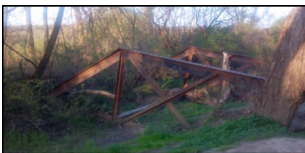
February: 'Marrying Minister' United More Than 650 Local Couples



March: 'Three Men in a Boat' Brought Moment of Humor to 1936 Flood



April: Safety Concerns Led to Hamlin Park Grandstand's Demise



May: Rusty Old Railroad Bridge Stirs Intrigue in Majors Park



June: Caps and Gowns Introduced During the Great Depression



July: Did Snakes Fall from the Sky Over East Aurora in 1896?



August: 'Aircar' Crash 80 Years Ago Drew International Attention



September: EAHS Football Struggled to Find a Permanent Home



October: Honoring Those Who Gave Their Lives in the Great War



November: Deadly Spanish Flu Outbreak Arrived in EA 100 Years Ago




December: Judge's Stand Has Become Symbol of EA's Horse History

Bicentennial

A major focus of 2018 was executing the town's bicentennial celebration. Planning began in 2016, and included a joint commission to plan events with Holland and Wales, which also celebrated their 200th anniversaries. The Aurora Town Historian's Office was only one of the organizations that stepped up to plan and execute the commemoration. Banners along Main Street became a reality thanks to a joint effort by the Town of Aurora, Aurora Historical Society, Bank of Holland and Village Department of Public Works. The Historian's Office provided materials and assistance for special bicentennial publications in the *East Aurora Advertiser* and *East Aurora Bee*, and also provided an article as part of a special section on the bicentennial in the summer issue of *Western New York Heritage* magazine. A bicentennial website and Facebook page were also maintained throughout the year. Highlights of the bicentennial year are included in the "Events and Activities" section of this report. Thank you to everyone who made the bicentennial commemoration a huge success. It truly was a community effort. The yearlong commemoration will end with a time capsule project, which the Town Historian's Office will lead in February and early March.





To the Residents of the Town of Aurora:

Congratulations! This year marks the 200th anniversary of the dawn of "Aurora," and thank you for helping us celebrate.

Although our town was home to Native American communities for tens of thousands of years, and to pioneer settlers since the early 1800s, our bicentennial this year marks the 200th anniversary of the State of New York dividing the former Town of Willink into Aurora, Holland and Wales. Between 1819 and 1827, the Town of Holland also included present-day Colden.

In other words, this year marks the 200th anniversary of Aurora becoming Aurora.

Thank you to everyone who has joined the commemoration of this important date in our history. Organizations, churches and businesses throughout the town have stepped up with bicentennial-themed events, to ensure that the bicentennial truly embodied the entire community. We have enjoyed working with our neighbors in the Towns of Holland and Wales, who join us in celebrating 200 years. The colorful bicentennial barn quilts that have appeared throughout the three towns are a testament to the bicentennial enthusiasm.

Holding celebrations such as this is an important way to commemorate our past, celebrate our present and lead us to the future. It's important to take a step back and appreciate our communities every once in a while. Thank you for joining us to do that.

Special thanks to the Bank of Holland for assisting with the bicentennial banners along Main Street, and to all the donors who contributed to the spectacular fireworks display in Hamlin Park on July 3. Thanks to the generosity of the many contributors, who were listed in previous issues of the *East Aurora Advertiser*, the Town of Aurora was able to celebrate the bicentennial with one of the largest fireworks displays ever. We also appreciate all those who came together to help make the Third of July parade and events in Hamlin Park a true old-fashioned Independence Day celebration. The Aurora Historical Society's Bicentennial Beard Growing Contest will be remembered for many years to come!

Although the Third of July was the highlight of Aurora's bicentennial year, the celebration is not over! The commemoration continues through March 2019. Please keep an eye on the bicentennial calendar, which may be accessed on the town's website at www.townofaurora.com. It will continue to include the dates and details of upcoming events in all three towns. We also invite you to "like" our Facebook page, "Town of Aurora 200." Plans are in the works for a community time capsule, as well as a meeting of the three Town Boards on March 2, 2019, the exact 200th anniversary of the first town board meetings.

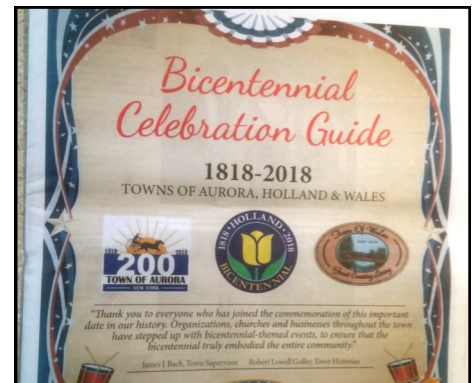
When we first embarked on plans for the bicentennial, our goal was to make the 200th anniversary a celebration of the groups and organizations that make our town a great place in which to live and work. Thanks to all the groups who hopped on the "bicentennial bandwagon," the celebration is achieving its goal.

Congratulations, and best wishes to the Town of Aurora for another 200 happy and prosperous years.

Bicentennially Yours,

James J. Bach
Town Supervisor

Robert Lowell Goller
Town Historian



Bank Donation

The Bank of Holland provided the \$3,000 donation to the Aurora Historical Society to purchase the Town of Aurora Bicentennial banners now along Main Street. Pictured, from the left, is Aurora Town Supervisor James J. Bach, Town Historian Robert Lowell Goller, Aurora Historical Society member Rachel Francis, Aurora Historical Society member Susan McBurney, Bank of Holland President Timothy Dickey, and Bank of Holland Vice President Peter Ertl.

The Historian's Events and Activities of 2018



January

JANUARY 3...Joined the Aurora Historical Society at the Millard Fillmore Presidential Site for our now-annual early-morning interview on WGRZ-Channel 2.

← **JANUARY 11...**Met with the Aurora Art Society to assist in planning a bi-centennial theme for their 2018 art shows.

JANUARY 20...Presented a program at the First Presbyterian Church of East Aurora in commemoration of the Town of Aurora and the church's 200th anniversaries.

February

FEBRUARY 7...I once again had the honor of providing the political satire, as "President Fillmore" and "a surprise singing guest," at the Millard Fillmore Dinner, an annual fundraiser at The Roycroft Inn sponsored by the Aurora Historical Society for the Millard Fillmore Presidential Site in East Aurora.

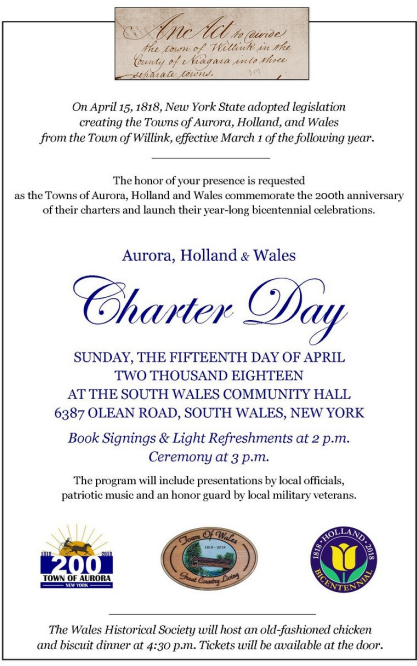
FEBRUARY 22...Presented a program, "Pioneers of Aurora," at the Aurora Senior Center, as part of Winterfest.

March

MARCH 8...Spoke at the Kiwanis Club's lunch meeting regarding the bicentennial commemoration.

April

APRIL 15...Participated as master of ceremonies for the "Charter Day" commemoration at the South Wales Community Hall. Special thanks to all those from Aurora, Holland and Wales, especially our military veterans, who came together to mark the 200th anniversary of the day New York State approved the charter for the three towns. This event officially launched the bicentennial year.



May

MAY 16...Presented a program about the Underground Railroad, "Abolition in Aurora," at the Griffins Mills Presbyterian Church, in honor of the bicentennial commemoration.

MAY 20...Opened the Town Historian's Office and Museum for a "Community Day," organized by the Aurora Historical Society. Members of the community were given a chance to see the Elbert Hubbard-Roycroft Museum, the Millard Fillmore Presidential Site, and the Town Historian's Office and Aurora History Museum on a Sunday afternoon.

MAY 23...Led a tour of the museum and Town Historian's Office for a local Girl Scout Troop.

June

JUNE 4...Served as the keynote speaker at the East Aurora Lions Club's annual Student Awards Night for East Aurora High School graduates.



JUNE 8...Presented a program at The Roycroft Inn, "Roycroft After the Lusitania," as part of Road Scholars, a group of scholars from across the United States and Canada.

July

← **MONTH OF JULY:** Designed a bicentennial-themed exhibit case at the Aurora Town Public Library.



← **JULY 3...**Participated in the Town of Aurora's bicentennial celebration, which included the bicentennial parade and serving as master of ceremonies for the Bicentennial Beard Growing Contest, sponsored by the Aurora Historical Society and Andrews' Barber Parlor.

JULY 18...Attended the second in a series of Living History programs at the Griffins Mills Presbyterian Church, featuring historical re-enactors.

August

AUGUST 8-19...Once again, the Aurora Town Historian's Office was invited to provide an exhibit at the Erie County Fair's Historical Building. The Aurora Town Historian's Office highlighted the bicentennial celebrations in Aurora, Holland and Wales. With hundreds of thousands of visitors, the Erie County Fair is a great way to share Aurora's history with a large and diverse audience, including many children. I also was invited to participate in two book signings at the fair.

September

SEPTEMBER 15-16...Attended the East Aurora Garden Club's Standard Flower Show, which adopted a special theme for the bicentennial, "A Day at the Races."

SEPTEMBER 19...Attended the dedication ceremony for a → Pomeroy Foundation historic marker at the Griffins Mills Presbyterian Church. The Historian's Office assisted in the research for the historic marker. The ceremony was followed by a historic presentation, "The Rev. John Spencer: Missionary to the WNY Frontier," presented by Traci Langworthy.



SEPTEMBER 22...Attended the annual meeting of the Government Appointed Historians of Western New York, at the Seneca Nation of Indians in Salamanca, NY.

October

OCTOBER 10...Participated in a video regarding the history of the Judge’s Stand. The circa-1880 Judge’s Stand was moved in the autumn from the rear of Absolut Care to the parklike area along Main Street. The project was a joint effort by Absolut Care and the Aurora Historical Society, which owns the Judge’s Stand.



OCTOBER 19...Presented a program at The Roycroft Inn, “Roycroft After the Lusitania,” as part of Road Scholars, a group of scholars from across the U.S. and Canada.

← **OCTOBER 24...**Attended and helped cut the ribbon at the formal re-dedication of the Judge’s Stand.

OCTOBER 27...Attended a planning meeting at the Aurora Town Public Library for Erie County’s upcoming bicentennial commemoration.

November

NOVEMBER 1...Attended the opening of the East Aurora Art Society’s annual show at the Aurora Town Public Library. The Art Society adopted a bicentennial and East Aurora history theme.



NOVEMBER 8...Presented a program, “Aurora and the War of 1812,” at the Aurora Town Public Library.

NOVEMBER 28: Attended the unveiling of sculptures at The Roycroft Campus, by renowned artist, Timothy Schmalz. These sculptures are inspired by Elbert Hubbard’s quotations.

December

DECEMBER 15...At Carolcade, we celebrated → the 200th anniversary of “Silent Night,” which was composed in 1818, coincidentally the same year the Towns of Aurora, Holland and Wales were formed.

The History of “Silent Night”

The singing of “Silent Night” is always a special moment at East Aurora’s Carolcade, but this year it will take on special meaning.

The Town of Aurora and “Silent Night” both mark their 200th anniversaries in 2018, and Carolcade will be the perfect opportunity for our community to celebrate both milestones at the same time.

Although Aurora, Holland and Wales were home to Native American communities for thousands of years, and to pioneer settlers since the early 1800s, this year’s bicentennial marks the 200th anniversary of the division of the Town of Willink into the three new towns in 1818. The New York State Legislature and Gov. DeWitt Clinton approved the legislation in April of that year.

Meanwhile, across the globe in Austria, Franz Xaver Gruber composed “Silent Night,” to the lyrics of Joseph Mohr. According to historians, Mohr delivered the words to Gruber and asked him to compose a melody for the Christmas Eve mass at a small village church in 1818. The song was first officially published 15 years later, in 1833, and has since become one of the most popular Christmas carols of all time.

It has become a Carolcade tradition to fill Main Street with several thousand voices singing “Silent Night” a cappella toward the end of the hour-long celebration. Help us make history this year by lending your voice to the singing of this 200-year-old Christmas carol on the 200th anniversary of our town!

--Robert Lowell Goller
Carolcade Master of Ceremonies
Aurora Town Historian

Budget

There are three main areas of the Town Historian's budget:

Office Expense—\$500

In 2018, we once again used a large portion of this budget line for acid free, protective sheets and binders, in our ongoing efforts to transfer more and more documents into acid-free binders.

Expense and Travel—\$200

A portion of these funds were used for travel to the annual Government Appointed Historians of Western New York Conference at the Seneca Nation of Indians in September. This budget line is also used for travel to other training opportunities, when available.

Historian's Salary—\$5,624.

Thank you for the town's continued financial support of the Town Historian's Office. I extend particular appreciation for the \$5,624 annual salary.

Goals for 2019

WRAPPING UP THE BICENTENNIAL...The bicentennial year will officially wrap up in March. The Aurora Town Historian's Office will lead a community time capsule project, "Letters to the Future," details of which will be publicized in late January and early February.

DIGITIZATION...We did not achieve this goal in 2018, so it will become a priority in 2019. Thanks to generous donations, \$1,000 remains earmarked for digitizing our newspapers. With previous donations, we were able to digitize the *East Aurora Advertiser* through 1969. With these funds, we plan to complete the digitization of the *Advertiser*, as well as digitize other newspapers, including the *Aurora Standard* from the 1830s, the *Weekly Times* from the 1880s, *The Orbit* from the 1960s, and begin digitizing the *Shopping Guides* from the 1930s-1970s.

CONTINUING TO PREPARE FOR THE MOVE...The planned move of town offices from the Southside Municipal Center to the former fire hall on Oakwood Avenue is scheduled to take place in two years. We have continued discussions with the Aurora Historical Society, which owns the three-dimensional artifacts in the Town Museum, about finding a better way to exhibit the museum items in the new facility, as well as finding more appropriate homes in the community for a few of the artifacts. Volunteers and I also continue to review the documents and materials in the archives to ensure they will be properly catalogued before, during and after the relocation to the new Municipal Center.

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF THE HISTORIAN'S OFFICE...April 11, 1919 marks the 100th anniversary of the "Historian's Law" in New York State, which requires the "office of local historian for each city, town or village..." We plan to host special educational and celebratory efforts to mark the occasion.