

OFFICE OF
THE HISTORIAN

Town of Aurora & Village of East Aurora, New York

TOWN OF AURORA & VILLAGE OF EAST AURORA,
NEW YORK



ROBERT LOWELL GOLLER
HISTORIAN



ANNUAL REPORT

FOR THE YEAR

2019



Above, with “Betsy Ross” during History Day at Immaculate Conception School, February 8. Right, celebrating a century of the Historian’s Office during the 2019 Independence Day parade.



24th January, 2020

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 2019.

“Collaboration” was a theme for 2019. As you will see on the pages of this report, in addition to the regular duties of the office, the Historian’s Office worked with a number of other community organizations on several projects. These projects included the “Letters to the Future” bicentennial time capsule; the re-installation of Ernst Place street signs at The Circle to honor fallen World War I veteran Lawrence Ernst; the naming of the Hospice Wing at Absolut Care in honor of World War I Red Cross nurse Frances A. Little; and nominating Richard S. Persons, Sr. for the East Aurora Educational Foundation’s Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame.



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



The commemoration of the 100th anniversary of New York State's Historian's Law also highlighted 2019, and we took the opportunity through exhibits, newspaper articles and social media to share with the public the purpose of and services offered by the Historian's Office.

Please let me take this opportunity to thank the Town Board for extending additional financial support to the Historian's Office beginning in 2020. The additional hours will allow the office to better serve the public and prepare for the upcoming move to the new Municipal Center on Oakwood Avenue.

Unfortunately, 2019 also was marked by sad news, with the passing of Edward W. Vidler on January 12, 2019, and Warren C. Moffet on September 26. Mr. Vidler, husband of former Historian Virginia Dawson Vidler, made significant contributions to the local historical record through his photography, a great deal of which is included in the archives. Mr. Moffet served as Historian from 1987 through 1995, as well as president of the Aurora Historical Society. Mr. Moffett was a strong advocate for East Aurora, Aurora and Western New York history. In addition to his many years of service to the community, he and Mrs. Moffett recently donated a number of documents, photographs and postcards to the archives of the Historian's Office, which will benefit the community and researchers for many years to come.

This annual report serves as a means to share with you (and the community) the activities of the Historian's Office in 2019. It also serves as a record for future generations. As always, 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 thank you for your continued confidence.

Kindest Regards,



Robert Lowell Goller
Historian



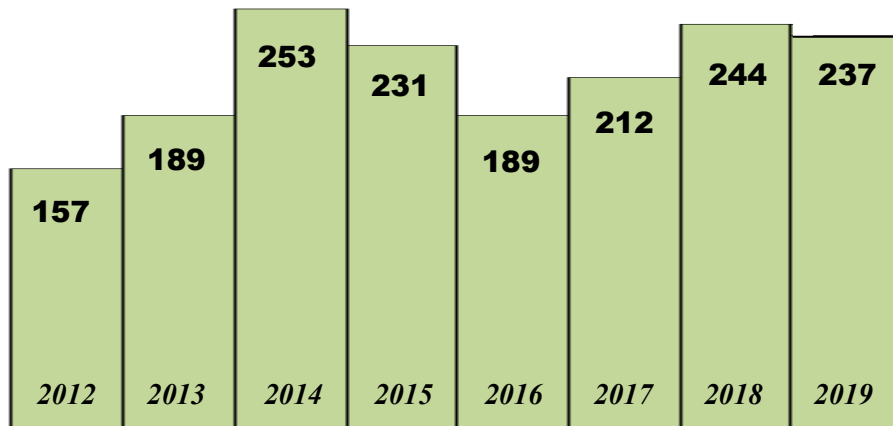
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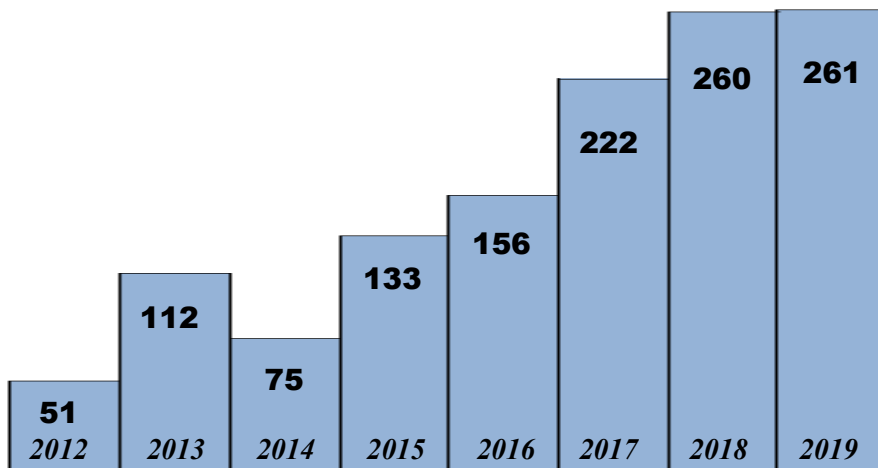
The Archives

A main function of the Historian's Office is to assist residents with historical research and to maintain the archives. The office and archives were open each Wednesday, from 1– 4 p.m., and by special appointment. The office was closed for Independence Day week and Christmas, as well as unexpectedly on Wednesday, January 30, due to a blizzard, and on Wednesday, September 4, due to a power outage at the Municipal Center.

OFFICE VISITS...We continue to 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 summer months (May-August) remain the busiest, both for office visits and requests for information. As always, the requests covered a vast number of topics, including the traditional requests for information related to house histories and genealogy. In addition to assisting residents and visitors with their research projects, other requests included assisting village officials with the history of the Hamlin Park baseball diamond; providing research to the Historic Preservation Commission for a handful of properties, including a house on Ellis Place; providing photographs to about a half-dozen local businesses for historic exhibits and research; and assisting Eagle Scout candidate Anthony Mercurio with historical information for his project at Hamlin Park. Officials in the Town of Elma also used the digital newspapers in our archives to conduct research for a plaque honoring Elma military service members who died while serving during wartime; the plaque hangs in the Elma Town Hall. We continue to keep a detailed log of topics in an effort to connect researchers who are researching similar topics.

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VOLUNTEERS...The Historian's Office benefits greatly from the generosity of volunteers, and the success of our efforts can be credited to the dedication of our volunteers. Three volunteers, Lucas Dana, Justin Jagodzinski and Marian Halperin, assisted in the office on a regular basis, logging more than 200 hours of volunteer time during the year. Their efforts have resulted in the cataloguing of our newspaper collection, East Aurora High School yearbooks and a portion of the genealogical collection. Ms. Halperin reached the conclusion of a three-year project to catalogue and preserve our collection of Roycroft materials. In addition, Joseph "Potts" Stapleton continues to visit the office on a weekly basis and has digitally scanned a number of photographs and articles from the collection, many of which continue to be well received on Facebook.



Over the summer, the Historian's Office also hosted an intern through the Center for Local and Municipal History at SUNY Geneseo. East Aurora resident and Geneseo student Phoebe Stucke logged more than 130 hours. Her projects included cataloguing and developing a preservation plan for our vast collection of scrapbooks, and assisting us in developing a plan to develop a digital card catalogue of the archives. Miss Stucke accomplished a great deal in just a few weeks. We will continue to work with SUNY Geneseo and other colleges to offer internships and help students gain experience in the archival and history fields. Local high school students are also welcome to complete their community service hours in the Historian's Office, and the expanded office hours beginning in 2020 will allow us to invite additional interns and volunteers to join us.

DONATIONS...We logged a number of significant donations to the archives in 2019, including glass photographic slides, a number of East Aurora High School yearbooks, and a book of advertising by Elbert Hubbard.

The donations also included several items of particular significance:

--A set of Elbert Hubbard's writings, donated by the Rev. Dr. Alan Charles Minarcik of Ontario, Canada.

--"The Complete Writings of Elbert Hubbard," donated by the Stott Family, descendants of Elbert and Alice Hubbard, during the annual Stott Awards at The Roycroft Inn in November.

--A large collection of receipts, letters and documents from local businesses, including Griggs & Ball, in the 1920s, donated by Melissa Dispenza. We have begun sorting and curating this collection, to make it available to the public for research purposes.

--Two guest registers from The Globe Hotel, 1892 and 1919-1923, contributed by Molly Flynn, owner of The Globe Hotel and Restaurant. These registers have joined three other original registers previously donated to the archives. Long-term plans include digitizing and preparing the ledgers for public exhibit.

Thank you to all the donors for providing these items for the benefit of our community and researchers, and for entrusting the Historian's Office with the care of these historically significant items.

Publications and Research

MONTHLY HISTORY COLUMN...I have continued the monthly “Historian’s Corner” column, which is featured on Page 2 of the *East Aurora Advertiser* on the last week of each month. The article also is featured on our social media pages and website. As a result of the research conducted for these articles, we uncovered new information about the history of several aspects of our community, including the 1872 death of circus employee George G. Gordon; East Aurora High School’s first black graduate Mary Taylor’s fight for the right to attend school; and the origin of the Hamlin Park baseball diamond, one of the oldest baseball fields in the region. I also continue to make myself available for interviews, and newspaper reporters continue to use the Historian’s Office as a resource for historical material.

Topics of the monthly “Historian’s Corner” column in 2019 included:



January: ‘Middle Road’ Led to Surge in Settlement in This Region



February: Barter Days Helped Locals Survive The Great Depression



March: NY’s Unique Historian’s Law Marks 100 Years on April 11



April: Unique Gravestone Honors Circus Man from 1872



May: First Black Graduate Fought for the Right to Go to School



June: Drivers Took Their Time Complying With License Law



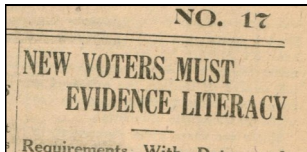
July: 1930s Debate: Can a Woman Serve On a Jury?



August: How Old is the Hamlin Park Baseball Diamond? At Least 126



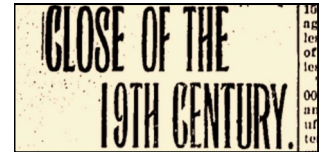
September: World War I Soldiers Given ‘Royal’ Homecoming in 1919



October: Literacy Rule Kept ‘Undesirables’ from Voting



November: Christmas Shopping Went ‘High-Tech’ 90 Years Ago



December: Celebrating the New Decade? History Says Wait Until 2021

Community Projects & Outreach

FACEBOOK AND THE INTRODUCTION OF INSTAGRAM...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. On April 2, we began also sharing photographs on Instagram.

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.



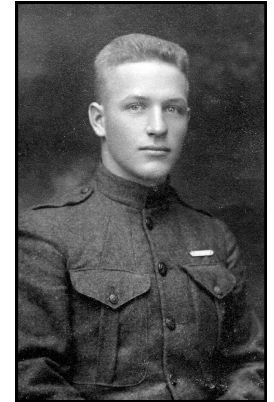
“LETTERS TO THE FUTURE” TIME CAPSULE...To conclude the year-long bicentennial commemoration, we invited community members and organizations to write a letter to the future as part of a unique time capsule project. Most time capsules contain things; this one contains our thoughts. We asked everyone to take out a piece of paper and write a letter to their counterpart 50 years into the future. We were thrilled with the response from the community and media. More than 150 letters were vacuum sealed during a ceremony at the Aurora Town Public Library on Saturday, March 2. The president of a civic organization wrote to the future president of that civic organization; families wrote to the future owners of their

homes; business owners wrote to the future owners of their businesses or buildings; and schoolchildren drew pictures depicting a typical school day in 2019. The letters will be placed in a box at the new Municipal Center on Oakwood Avenue, with instructions that they be opened on April 15, 2068, the 250th anniversary of the Town of Aurora. Special thanks to the Town Board, the Aurora Town Public Library and Library Director Paula Klocek for collaborating on this project, and for all those who contributed their “Letters to the Future.”

HONORING PVT. LAWRENCE ERNST...Thank you to Village of East Aurora officials for installing street signs on Ernst Place. In the autumn of 2018, the Historian’s Office sent a letter to Mayor Mercurio requesting a simple recognition of this often-overlooked street, named in



honor of Pvt. Lawrence Ernst, the first young man from our community killed in action overseas during World War I. Although part of it was reconfigured into The Circle in 1936, the street in front of McDonald's and Kwik Fill officially remains Ernst Place, in honor of Pvt. Ernst and all those from our community who gave their lives in service to their country. The village installed two street signs in February 2019. Thank you to the Village of East Aurora for bringing proper recognition to this short, but very important, street.



FRANCES A. LITTLE HOSPICE WING...The Historian's Office was honored to assist with the naming of the Frances A. Little Hospice Wing, which officially opened at Absolut Care of Aurora Park on July 9. Absolut Care reached out to the Historian’s Office requesting potential names for the facility that would honor the area’s history. We suggested Frances A. Little, a Red Cross nurse in East Aurora who died of influenza in December 1918 while treating victims of the Spanish flu epidemic that swept through the area during World War I. We are happy that Absolut Care officials agreed that naming the wing after a nurse and caregiver was an appropriate way to honor all our community’s nurses and caregivers throughout history.

The Historian's Events and Activities of 2019



Photos courtesy of Immaculate Conception School

January

JANUARY 3...Joined the Aurora Historical Society at the Millard Fillmore Presidential Site for an early-morning appearance with Kevin O'Neal on WGRZ-Channel 2, to commemorate President Fillmore's birthday.

February

← **FEBRUARY 8...**Was invited to present a program during History Day at Immaculate Conception School. A presentation to a student assembly about the history of East Aurora and their school was followed by visits to each classroom, where students completed their letters and drawings for the "Letters to the Future" bicentennial time capsule.

FEBRUARY 21...Spoke at the Senior Center as part of Winterfest activities, to discuss the "Letters to the Future" bicentennial time capsule project.

FEBRUARY 27...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.

March

MARCH 1...Through social media, commemorated the 200th anniversary of the official formation of the Town of Aurora on March 1, 1819.

MARCH 2...On the 200th anniversary of the first Aurora → Town Board meeting, we sealed the "Letters to the Future" bicentennial time capsule during a ceremony at the Aurora Town Public Library. The capsule will be opened April 15, 2068.

MARCH 6...Spoke at the Aktion Club meeting.

MARCH 14...At the invitation of Don Owens, toured the Heritage DiscoverY Center and the Western New York Railway Historical Society in Lackawanna. It's a fantastic facility with many historical and genealogical resources that would be valuable for research and collaborative projects.

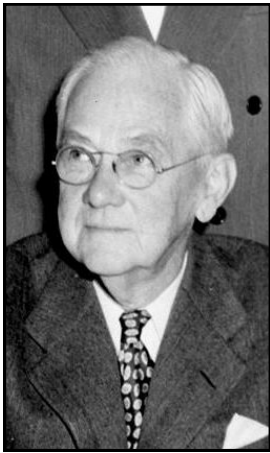


Photo courtesy of the Aurora Historical Society

April

APRIL 2...Launched an Instagram page, to complement our Facebook page, to share photographs from the archives.

APRIL 11...Through social media and articles, commemorated the centennial of New York's Historian's Law.



← **APRIL 12...**Delivered remarks at the East Aurora Educational Foundation’s Distinguished Alumni Hall of Fame breakfast at The Roycroft Inn in honor of Richard S. Persons, Sr., who I nominated for induction into Hall of Fame. Mr. Persons (Class of 1894) was posthumously honored for his years of public service to our community, including as Town Supervisor and later as Historian from 1950-1957. *(Pictured are members of his family).*

May

MAY 24...Presented a program at The Roycroft Inn, “East Aurora After the Lusitania,” as part of Road Scholars, a group of scholars from across the United States and Canada.

MAY 26...For the second year, we 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 tour, free of charge, the Elbert Hubbard-Roycroft Museum, the Millard Fillmore Presidential Site, and the Town Historian’s Office and Aurora History Museum on a Sunday afternoon.

June

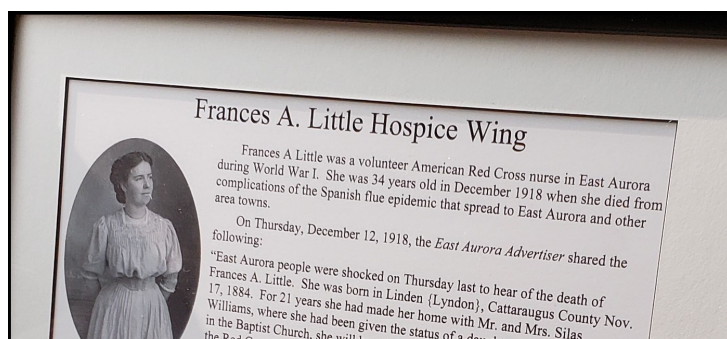
JUNE 7...Attended and delivered remarks during a ceremony at the Elbert Hubbard-Roycroft Museum on Oakwood Avenue to dedicate a Pomeroy Foundation roadside marker in honor of Alice Hubbard’s efforts in the Women’s Suffrage Movement. The Aurora Historical Society spearheaded this effort, and the Historian’s Office was able to offer research assistance.

JUNE 12...Attended the ribbon-cutting for the Roycroft Campus Copper Shop, which re-opened after a renovation.

JUNE 13...Spoke at the Kiwanis Club lunch meeting regarding the role of the Historian’s Office and potential future projects.

JUNE 20...Presented the program, “Abolition in Aurora,” at the Aurora Town Public Library.

July

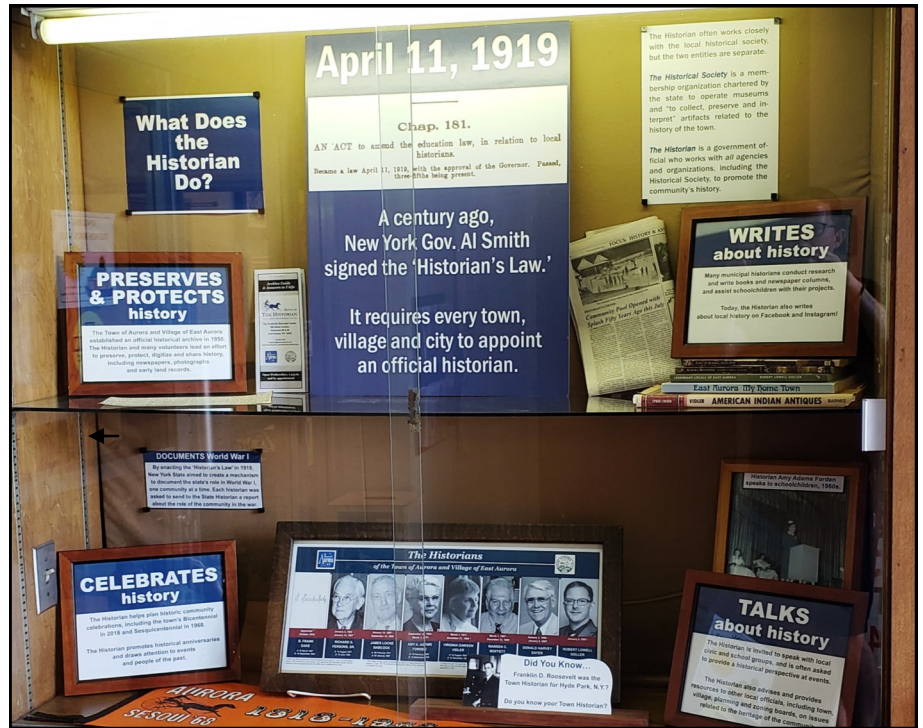


JULY 3...Participated in the Town of Aurora’s Third of July parade.

← **JULY 9...**Attended the opening of the Frances A. Little Hospice Wing at Absolut Care on Main Street.

August

AUGUST 7-18...Once again, the Aurora Town Historian's Office was invited to provide an exhibit at the Erie County Fair's Historical Building. We highlighted the 100th anniversary of New York State's Historian's Law and the role of the Historian's Office in our communities. 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. After the fair, the Aurora Town Public Library invited us to bring an abridged version of the exhibit to the display case in the library lobby.



September

SEPTEMBER 20...Presented a program at The Roycroft Inn, "East Aurora After the Lusitania," as part of Road Scholars, a group of scholars from across the United States and Canada.

SEPTEMBER 21...Attended the time capsule ceremony at the East Aurora Fire Department on Center Street. Items from a previous time capsule discovered at the former fire station on Oakwood Avenue were placed alongside new items in the new time capsule at the current fire station on Center Street. The Historian's Office provided research assistance and helped preserve and protect the time capsule objects for this project.

SEPTEMBER 28...Attended the annual meeting of the Government Appointed Historians of Western New York, at the Livingston County Government Center in Mount Morris, N.Y..

October

OCTOBER 23...Presented the program, "Becoming Your Own Historian," as part of the Roycroft Campus fall educational programs.

November

NOVEMBER 17...Attended the Stott Award presentation at The Roycroft Inn, and accepted a donation of "The Complete Works of Elbert Hubbard" from members of the Stott family, who are descendants of Elbert and Alice Hubbard.

NOVEMBER 21...Presented a program at the Aurora Historical Society's monthly speaker series, "Ballot Over the Ballot: East Aurora's Journey Through Women's Suffrage." This new program, the result of my continued research into the local women's suffrage movement, will be presented at least twice again in 2020, in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment.

Budget

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

Office Expense—\$500

In 2019, 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 Livingston County Government Center in Mount Morris in September. This conference provides invaluable educational and networking opportunities with other historians, college professors and experts in the field of preservation and historical research.

Historian's Salary—\$5,736

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 in 2019, and for the additional support in 2020, which will allow us to greatly expand the services offered to the public.

Goals for 2020

FINALIZING PREPARATIONS FOR THE MOVE...We have continued discussions with the Aurora Historical Society, which owns the three-dimensional artifacts in the Town Museum, about moving and exhibiting the museum items in the new facility, as well as finding more appropriate homes in the community for a few of the artifacts. We have formed a small committee, beginning in January 2020, to finalize an action plan. 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. Thanks to the additional hours afforded the Historian's Office, the volunteers and I will have more time to devote to this effort.

DIGITIZATION OF NEWSPAPER AND AUDIO FILES...Thanks to generous donations, 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. With additional hours afforded to the Historian's Office, we plan to focus on collaborative efforts and grant opportunities to begin digitizing the audio cassette tapes of interviews conducted with local residents and community leaders in the mid 20th Century. (Digitizing photographs remains an ongoing project).

COMMEMORATING THE CENTENNIAL OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE...2020 marks the 100th anniversary of nationwide women's suffrage. A particular effort will be made to further discuss the history of the women's suffrage movement (and the anti-suffrage movement) in our town.