

The *Aurora Standard* was East Aurora's first community newspaper, published between 1835 and 1838. (From the archives of the Aurora Town Historian's Office).

East Aurora Has Rich History Of Short-Lived Newspapers

by Robert Lowell Goller
Town and Village Historian
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The *Advertiser* will make history on Aug. 9, as the only East Aurora newspaper to reach the 150-year mark. In fact, it's the only local newspaper to have reached 40 years.

East Aurora has a rich journalism history, but most of the community's many newspapers dating back to 1835 were short lived, closing after a few years due to competition from the *Advertiser*, poor economic conditions, questionable management, or in some cases the need or desire of the publisher to move on.

The *Advertiser* wasn't East Aurora's first newspaper when C.C. Bowsfield published the inaugural issue on Aug. 9, 1872.

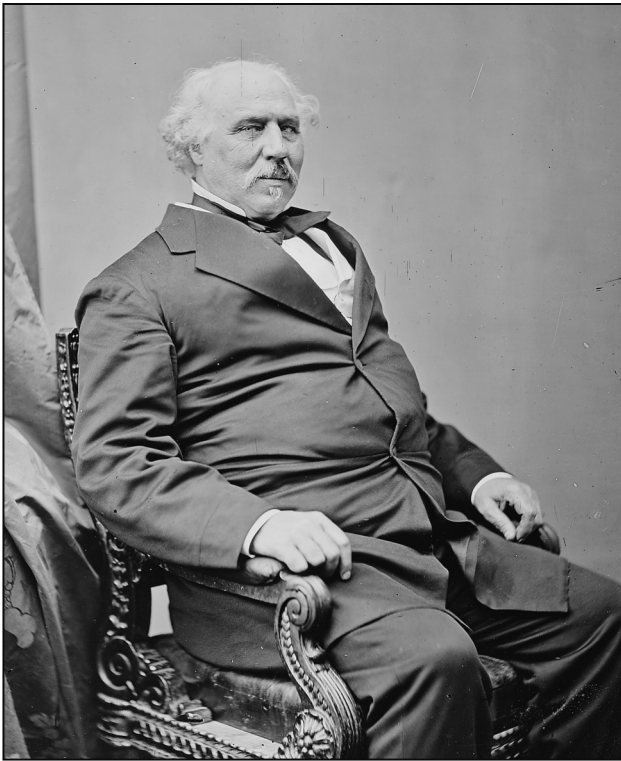
Thirty-seven years earlier, on Aug. 1, 1835, Almon M. Clapp founded the *Aurora Standard*. It was published on Wednesdays and usually consisted of four pages. Most community newspapers of the time carried very local news, relying heavily on pre-packaged dispatches and short stories from other areas. However, the *Aurora Standard* surprisingly contained many birth, wedding, death and social announcements from the Town of Aurora and surrounding communities.

In its early issues, the *Standard* claimed to remain politically neutral, but later leaned toward the Whig party.

After three years and frustrated with the community's stagnant growth, Clapp closed the *Standard*, all but blaming delinquent subscribers and advertisers for its demise. Subscriptions were \$2 per year, a hefty sum in those days, but Clapp advertised he'd take "all kinds of country produce and lumber" as payment.

Circulation was large enough, Clapp claimed in his "valedictory" message printed in the final issue on Aug. 1, 1838. But many subscribers and advertisers failed to pay their bills, he said. "Many pay, and to those we owe our ability to prosecute our business thus far, but there are many more who do not pay when due, and some who have never paid, and probably never intend to."

The financial recession of the late 1830s and early 1840s, touched off by the Panic of 1837, no doubt played a role in the *Standard's* demise. East Aurora's small population and businesses community at the time didn't help matters, either. The Town of Aurora's population had yet to reach 3,000, and economic prosperity brought by the railroad was still 30 years away.



Almon M. Clapp, publisher of East Aurora's first newspaper, the *Aurora Standard*, in a portrait captured by famed photographer Matthew Brady. (Photograph from the National Archives and Records Administration).

Democratic party. In addition to national and local politics, the *Democrat* covered several local news stories at the west end, including the early efforts to establish a cemetery.

After the closing of the *Standard* in 1838, it is believed no one attempted another newspaper in East Aurora for more than 30 years. Less than a year before the birth on Aug. 9, 1872 of the *Erie County Advertiser* (later named the *Aurora Advertiser* and then *East Aurora Advertiser*), H.B. Millar and Co. in Willink at the west end launched the *Bazaar Advertiser* on Nov. 1, 1871. Although it looked like a newspaper and contained some local news, the *Bazaar Advertiser* was nothing more than an advertising tool for H.B. Millar's existing commercial businesses at the west end. Unlike the inaugural issues of other newspapers, in which publishers shared their journalistic mission statements, the introductory message published in the *Bazaar Advertiser* was pure advertisement, and the proprietors didn't seem intent on publishing it regularly. "If the wants of the people demand further issues of *The Bazaar Advertiser*, it will be issued semi-occasionally," the publishers noted in the inaugural issue. Apparently, there wasn't a demand.

The first competition arrived for the eight-year-old *Aurora Advertiser* on April 2, 1880, when Charles A. Hamilton established *The Weekly Times* at the west end of the village.

While most newspapers of the time promoted—officially or unofficially—one political party, in Vol. 1, Issue 1 of *The Times*, Hamilton promised a politically independent, but progressive newspaper, "an independency that recognizes no party or creed as its master or dictator; it will aim to be the reflex of public sentiment, to correct existing evils and guide to a higher standard of intellectual and moral excellence. In politics, in religion and in local matters, *The Times* will not be neutral, but impartial and just to all parties, creeds and men, keeping for its motto the greatest good to the greatest number, and ever striving to be just, as well as independent."

Although *The Weekly Times* was scheduled every Friday, Hamilton, who later went on to become a well-known Washington, D.C. newspaper correspondent, struggled to publish consistently. Less than a year-and-a-half after the first issue, Hamilton conceded that the newspaper's "existence has been varied, it's errors many, and its punctuality very uncertain." In the summer of 1881, he entered into an agreement with businessmen John Williamson and Frank S. Bartlett. Beginning with the Aug. 26, 1881 issue, the new owners changed the name to *The Aurora Times*. Although eager to "make a good paper of *The Times*," the new publishers also struggled. Williamson left the partnership the following October, and *The Times* was no more just two months later.

The publishers of the *Advertiser* couldn't help but gloat.

"We had hoped when we commenced this publication that it might succeed and far outlive him who had watched over it in its infantile years," Clapp noted. "The prospects of this village were then flattering, and the hopes of its citizens beat high, but it has shared the common fate of our country. Hopes everywhere have been blighted, prospects ever so bright have been darkened, and the current of national and individual prosperity has become stagnant and motionless. We leave this place with the best possible feelings toward its worthy and intelligent citizens."

Clapp moved to Buffalo but remained in the newspaper business. Shortly after closing the *Standard*, he became co-editor of the Buffalo *Commercial Advertiser*, where he remained until he founded the Buffalo *Express* in 1846. He later entered politics, serving in the New York State Assembly in 1853 and as Buffalo postmaster in the early 1860s, before moving to Washington, D.C. to become the first Public Printer of the United States in 1876.

At the time, what is today the Village of East Aurora was two separate communities: Aurora on the east end; and Willink on the west end. The *Standard* was published on the east end. A few months after the *Standard's* first issue, a rival newspaper, the *Aurora Democrat* was launched on the west end by Deloss E. Sill. It didn't last very long. Only a year later, Sill moved to Ellicottville, where, according to the 1860 *New York Gazetteer*, he became involved in a number of newspaper publishing ventures. Though short-lived, the rivalry between the *Democrat* and *Standard* was heated. The officially non-partisan, but Whig-leaning *Standard* welcomed the arrival of the *Democrat* in the autumn of 1835 by publishing a list of criticisms toward the newspaper's politics, which, as its name suggests, leaned heavily toward the



The Weekly Times didn't just focus on local news. This is the top of the front page after President Garfield was shot in Washington D.C. (From the archives of the Aurora Town Historian's Office).

newspaper in this place it will be more profitable to purchase this (newspaper), already established, even though they are obliged to pay a little more than they think it is worth, rather than going to the expense of establishing a new (newspaper) on an uncertainty of life.”

In 1886, despite the public warning from the *Advertiser* five years earlier, brothers W.J. and George Dietrich of Attica thought they saw an opportunity to open another newspaper in East Aurora. They launched the *Aurora Enterprise*, which, according to a later article, “continued with declining fortunes for some five-and-a-half years.”

The struggling newspaper then was sold to a company at the west end of the village. After three months, a man named D.A. Denison purchased it. “That gentleman made a heroic struggle for a year to render it a success,” according to a newspaper account, “failing which, he suddenly left town and the plant was sold under a chattel mortgage.”

A firm known as Bertrand and Till became editors for six months, and for several weeks in January 1894, the paper was suspended altogether. Newell Q. White and Harry Waggoner, a former reporter for a Bradford, Pa. newspaper, purchased the printing plant later that year, and the newspaper was revived as the *East Aurora Citizen*. (This printing plant, located in Main Street at the eastern end of the village, published Elbert Hubbard’s early articles. This led to *The Philistine* and Hubbard’s other published works after Hubbard established The Roycroft on South Grove Street).

The *Citizen* lasted less than two years. The publishers decided there were not enough people in the area to support two newspapers, so they announced in September 1896, that the printing business would continue, but the *Citizen* would consolidate with the *Aurora Advertiser*. For several months, the merger was reflected in the name of the town’s newspaper: *Aurora Advertiser and East Aurora Citizen*. But with the March 18, 1897 issue, the newspaper dropped *Citizen* from its name and added “East” to become the *East Aurora Advertiser*, a name it has held ever since.

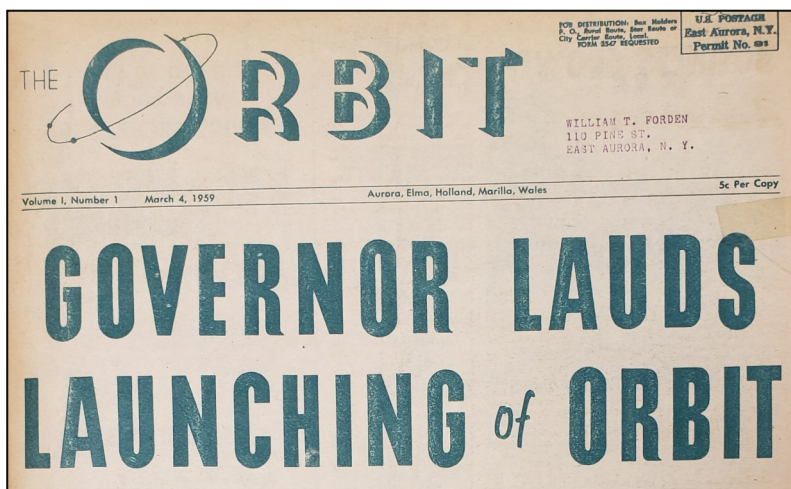
Before moving to Colorado, where he engaged in a successful newspaper career in the 1890s, young East Aurora native and local printer Harry Persons Taber is credited with publishing a short-lived, and very small, weekly newspaper, *The Comet*. Very little is known about this publishing venture early in Taber’s career. According to one unverified source, subscriptions were 25 cents per year and it was devoted to local, mostly school, news. Upon his return from Colorado to East Aurora, Taber collaborated with Elbert Hubbard on *The Philistine* and other Roycroft publications, before working for newspapers in Buffalo and Massachusetts.

Little also is known about *The East Auroran*, which began publishing in February 1905. The editors of the *Advertiser* welcomed the journalistic competition with a small announcement in the Feb. 9 issue: “The first number of *The East Auroran* came out the first of the week. It is to be a four-column, sixteen-page paper, issued on Fridays. Nelson & Humphrey are the publishers, and John Nelson the editor. Success to the new venture.” Despite the well wishes, it doesn’t appear to have lasted very long.

“An experiment which is frequently tried and invariably fails, is that of publishing two newspapers in a village of less than two thousand inhabitants,” the *Advertiser* boasted in the Dec. 30, 1881 issue, adding, “During the past two years this village has been the scene of such an experiment, and last week witnessed its termination. *The Weekly Times*, which was started with a great noise and blare of trumpets some 20 months since, quietly dropped from the field without even bidding its subscribers an affectionate adieu.”

The Times had attempted to undercut the *Advertiser*’s yearly subscription price by 25 cents, a fact the *Advertiser* editors claimed led to its demise: “The lesson clearly teaches the absurdity of expecting a country newspaper to make a living at the bare pittance of one dollar a year for each subscriber.”

The *Advertiser* publishers concluded with a word of caution for anyone else thinking of launching a second newspaper in East Aurora: “Just a word will be appropriate here. When any person wishes to publish another



A proclamation from the governor dominated the front page of the first issue of *The Orbit* on March 4, 1959. The newspaper published for four years. (From the archives of the Aurora Town Historian's Office).

A Knox Road barn was the birthplace of the *Shopping Guide* on July 1, 1938. Oliver and Mary Bailey felt the need for a strictly advertising newspaper. However, it often featured a front page full of news items, local features and photographs of area happenings. In fact, between September 1950 and October 1952, the publication was known as *The Suburban Reporter and Shopping Guide*, before reverting back to simply the *Shopping Guide*. The paper was delivered to homes free of charge and had a healthy run for over 30 years.

Community Views was launched on May 15, 1946 from the home of M.C. Northrup at 443 Girard Ave. Delivered free via mail to homes in East Aurora and surrounding towns, the small newspaper included local events and "Chamber of Commerce" news. The publication lasted only a few months. "Publication ceased when Mr. Northrup moved out of town that fall," a 1955 newspaper article noted.

Although not a newspaper in a technical sense, the *East Aurora PennySaver* was launched in 1961 by Ralph C. Waterhouse. By design, its pages were dominated by advertisements but also included community events and press releases. The final issue of the *PennySaver* was published in December 2019. Similarly, the *Suburban Shopper*, published in area towns in the 1960s, contained some news but prioritized advertising.

The Orbit focused heavily on local news during its four-year run between March 4, 1959 and Feb. 13, 1963. "It is felt that this community has reached the period of time at which a more dynamic newspaper was bound or destined to come on the scene," editors noted in the first issue. The newspaper office was located across the street from the *Advertiser*, at the current site of Grover's Barber Shop. Though short-lived, *The Orbit* contained a great deal of local news and photographs to entice readers. *The Orbit* called itself "Western New York's Fastest Growing Weekly," until the final issue, when in a bit of self-deprecation, "Western New York's Fastest Dying Weekly" appeared under the name on the front page.

Little is known about another small newspaper at this time, the *Country Chronicle*, but the Library of Congress lists its debut in February 1963 and H.B. Nelson as publisher.

The Auroracle was published for a short time in the 1970s by a committee of residents who felt the need for another voice besides the *Advertiser*. The monthly newsletter mostly featured reports of local town, village and school board meetings. "The Auroracle has developed and reached you out of concern of a group of Aurora residents for the availability of complete information about issues and actions taken by the units of local government," the editors noted in the first issue, published July 1976. "The type and quality of decisions made for our community and tax dollars by the village and town boards frequently go unnoticed. Most citizens remain uninformed and unable to express educated opinions to elected representatives." *The Auroracle* lasted just over a year; the final issue was published in October 1977.

Some folks might still have copies of *East Aurora News*, a monthly "newspaper," published for a few years in the mid-1920s. Despite its name, *East Aurora News* contained no local news. It was published by the East Aurora Savings & Loan Association headquartered on the Roycroft Campus and contained mostly banking information and financial tips.

Some local newspapers were small operations published out of local homes. On Aug. 22, 1935, John Henry Coles launched *The Country Press*, "a periodical devoted to human betterment," from his house at 546 Oakwood Ave. In addition to general lifestyle articles, *The Country Press* also included a community events calendar and advertising. "We believe there is room for a weekly publication which makes no attempt to print the current news—a periodical devoted to the betterment of our community, and offering, gratis, space to anyone who has something constructive to say." *The Country Press* published for about three years.



The Orbit office was located across the street from the *Advertiser*, at the current site of Grover's Barber Shop. (Photograph from the archives of the Aurora Town Historian's Office)

Goller's Gazette was launched Aug. 8, 1987, by a bored Prospect Avenue 11-year-old. The newspaper remained quite small—circulation reached about 250 households—but it covered village, town, school meetings and community events with an emphasis on the neighborhood surrounding Hamlin Park. After a run of seven years, the *Gazette* published its final edition on Aug. 8, 1994, so its publisher and editor, Robert Lowell Goller, could go away to college. Goller's newspaper career included serving as editor of the *Advertiser* from 2003-2006. He's currently the Town and Village Historian.

In more modern times, East Aurora has also been served by newspapers published outside of East Aurora. In November 1987, the *East Aurora Bee* was launched. Part of a newspaper chain, the *Bee* is still published from offices in Williamsville. The *Southtowns Citizen* included the Town of Aurora and Village of East Aurora in its coverage area until the final issue in March 2008; and for a few years in the mid-2010s, *The Sun* included the community in the coverage area for its Orchard Park and East Aurora edition.

In addition to microfilm and digitized versions for research purposes, original samples of most of these newspapers are preserved in the archives of the Aurora Town Historian's Office and will be featured in an upcoming exhibit at the Aurora Municipal Center at 575 Oakwood Ave. The exhibit will open the week of Aug. 1 and will be on view through the end of October. This and other historical exhibits may be viewed during regular Municipal Center hours, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Visit www.townofaurora.com/departments/historian for more information.

Robert Lowell Goller is the eighth Aurora town and East Aurora village historian since the office was created in 1919. The Historian's Office is open for research Wednesdays and Thursdays from 1-4 p.m., and by appointment. Visit www.townofaurora.com/departments/historian for more information. The Office of the Historian can also be found on Facebook at "Aurora Town Historian" and on Instagram at "auroratownhistorian."