

Auroran Debuted in 1936, But It Wasn't EA's First Yearbook

by Robert Lowell Goller
Town and Village Historian
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East Aurora students this month continued a longtime high school tradition when they passed around the latest edition of the yearbook for well-wishes and signatures. The *Auroran* made its first appearance at East Aurora High School in 1936, but it wasn't the school's first yearbook.

The East Aurora High School "yearbook" has evolved from a paperback, brochure-sized school "catalogue" in the 1880s, to a special issue of the student magazine each June in the 1910s and 1920s, to the more modern, hard-cover yearbook of today.

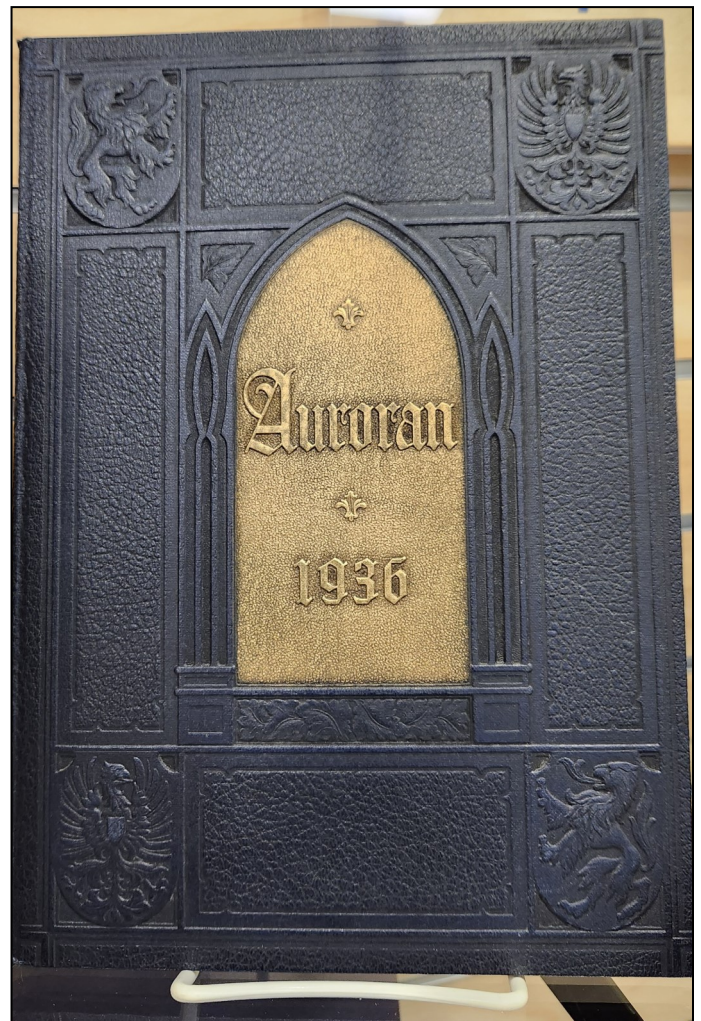
Regardless of its name or format, the annual yearbook is an important historical documentation of East Aurora High School and all those who attended it.

"The purpose of a yearbook is to serve as a record," noted an editorial in the East Aurora High School student newspaper, *High School Highlights*, on April 24, 1927. "It tells the story of a year's activities and achievements and your part in them."

The history of the East Aurora High School yearbook is the subject of a featured exhibition, "We'll Ne'er Forget Our High School Days: The Yearbooks of East Aurora," on view in the Aurora History Museum outside the Historian's Office at the Aurora Municipal Center, 575 Oakwood Ave., through Sept. 8. Thanks to donations from graduates and their families, the collection of East Aurora High School yearbooks in the archives of the Aurora Town Historian's Office dates back to the earliest days of the East Aurora Union District in the 1880s.

It wouldn't be considered a school yearbook by today's standards, but until 1902, the school "catalogue," published at the beginning of each school year, contained many of the same features: Names of students and faculty, and information about academic classes and extracurricular activities. There were no photographs, however. Original copies of the earliest editions of these catalogues, dating back to the first graduating class of two students in 1887, are preserved in the archives of the Aurora Town Historian's Office.

The term "yearbook" appears for the first time on the cover of the annual publication in 1903, but it was just the catalogue by a different name.



The 1936 yearbook was the first to use the modern name, *Auroran*. However, the name doesn't appear to have become permanent until the early 1940s. (From the archives of the Aurora Town Historian's Office).

While not an official yearbook, after around 1912, the June issue of the East Aurora High School student magazine, *The Optimist*, was dedicated to the senior class and included student names, clubs and other common features of a yearbook.

The June 1923 issue of *The Optimist*, published 100 years ago this month, was the first to include senior portraits, making it the first to resemble a modern-day yearbook.

More formal yearbooks, known as *Borealis* and the *Senior Annual*, were introduced in the early 1930s. However, yearbooks do not appear to have been published annually during this time period.



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The modern name, *Auroran*, was first used for the yearbook in 1936, on an ornate hard-cover volume printed at The Roycroft Shops. However, the name doesn't appear to have become permanent until the early 1940s. There is no mention of the *Auroran* name in the 1939 yearbook, which was titled *Past Perfect*.

The 1936 *Auroran* was also the first yearbook to include an image of the Blue Devil, which was introduced as the school mascot in December 1934.

Early yearbooks were almost always devoted to the senior class, but by the mid-1940s, underclassmen were also included.

"This year the *Auroran* is not devoted entirely to the senior class," noted an article in the April 27, 1944 issue of the *East Aurora Advertiser*, "but includes candid shots of under-grades, as well as pictures of school sports and extra-curricular activities."

Students in the early years sold magazines and Christmas cards, and held other fundraisers to pay for the yearbook, and in some years sales of the yearbook were opened to community members to raise additional funds.

"Never before has the yearbook been put out for the general public as well as the students," noted an editorial in the high school newspaper about the 1942 yearbook. Part of the reason for this might have been the introduction of a special section in the yearbook, titled "Know Your School," aimed at the taxpayers, "to show in pictures just where the taxpayer's dollar goes, and how far it goes. The senior class believes that the townspeople are vitally interested in how their children are educated. It is also believed that the townspeople would much rather look through a pictorial record of the placing of the school budget than to scan a sheet of printed facts and figures."

In 1946, students hosted an indoor fair, the *Auroran* Bazaar, in the west gym of the Main Street school to raise funds for the yearbook. Advertisements were also re-introduced that year after a multi-year hiatus.

Most of the East Aurora yearbooks throughout history have been blue and white, but there have been exceptions. East Aurora adopted Yale blue and white as the school colors in 1901. Each class, however, also adopted its own colors, and the early yearbooks often followed suit. For instance, rose and gray were chosen by the Class of 1923, violet and white by the Class of 1927, and red and white by the Class of 1928.

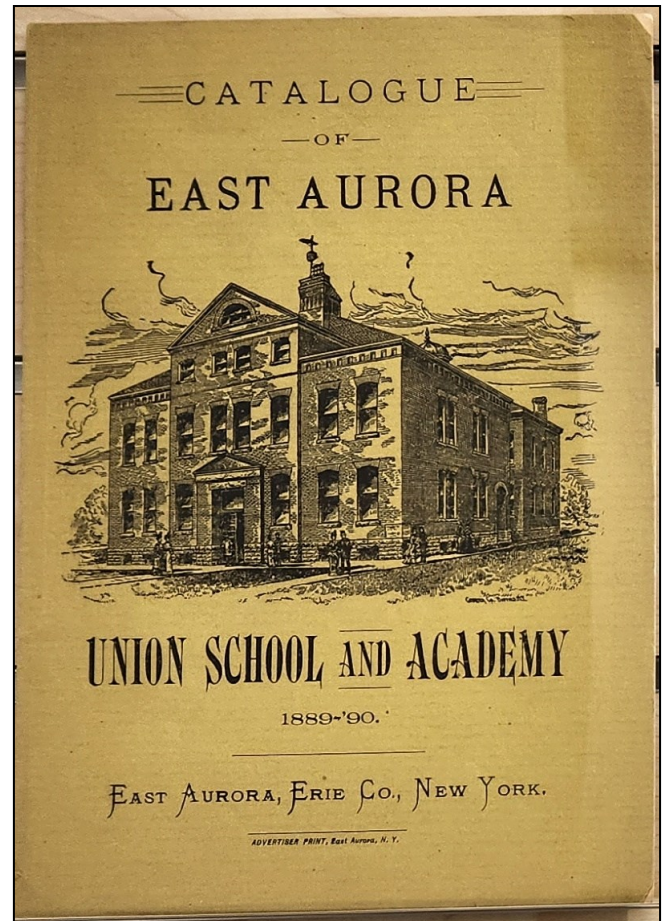
Most of the yearbooks after the first *Auroran* in 1936 have been hardcover. However, during times of austerity in the 1930s and World War II, paperback versions were published.

The *Auroran* editors often chose a theme for the yearbook, from a thespian motif in 1948, and nautical themes in 1953, 1954 and 1983, to "The Wonder Years" in 2004.

Patriotic themes were selected during World War II.

Shakespeare donned the cover of the 1955 *Auroran*, which contained excerpts of the Bard's plays as themes for each section.

The Roycroft was also a popular theme throughout the years. The 1957 *Auroran* was produced under the guidance of longtime faculty advisor Carlo A. Nisita, a well-known local artist who studied illumination under a Roycroft craftsman.



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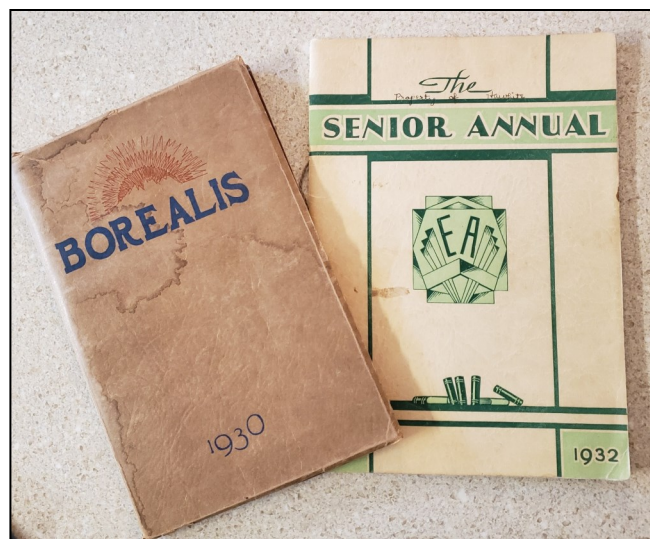
“The book liner, sectional headings and motifs in the publication are reminiscent of the Roycroft era,” the *Advertiser* noted in an article about the unveiling of the 1957 yearbook.

The tradition of a yearbook dedication appears to date back 100 years, to the June 1923 issue of *The Optimist*, which in addition to being the first to include senior class portraits, was dedicated to Assistant Principal Mabel E. Reed. Nearly all yearbooks since then have been dedicated to respected faculty members.

There have been a few exceptions.

For instance, the 1930 *Borealis* was dedicated “to the future,” and the 1943 *Auroran*, published while many graduates were serving in World War II, was dedicated to “the alumni of the East Aurora High School, who are courageously and steadfastly defending with your lives all we believe in and hold dear.”

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 Town Historian's Office can also be found on Facebook at "Aurora Town Historian" and on Instagram at "auroratownhistorian."



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