



Town Supervisor James J. Bach, Ed Adams, Bill Adams, Erie County Legislator Joseph C. Lorigo and Aurora Town Historian and Historical Society Director Robert Lowell Goller display the musket of Revolutionary War veteran Joel Adams, who was one of Aurora's first settlers. The musket, donated in March by members of the Adams family, is on exhibit in the Aurora History Museum at the Southside Municipal Center. Joel Adams, who served in the Revolutionary War, and his three sons were among a handful of pioneers to purchase land in Aurora in 1804.

# Annual Report of the Historian



## 2014



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*

13 January 2015

Town Supervisor James J. Bach  
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

Mr. Supervisor and Mr. Mayor:

Pursuant to Section 57.07 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 2014.

I never take my appointment for granted, so I thank you 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 black ink that reads "Robert Lowell Goller".

Robert Lowell Goller  
*Town Historian*

*cc: New York State Historian Robert Weible; Members of the East Aurora Village Board; Members of the Aurora Town Board; Village Administrator Bryan R. Gazda; Susan McBurney, President of the Aurora Historical Society; Town Clerk Martha Librock; Village Clerk Joyce Jezewski; Erie County Legislator Joseph Lorigo; Erie County Historian Douglas Kohler.*

Since October 2012, the Historian has also served as the director of the Aurora Historical Society. While the positions are separate and unique, both the Town Historian’s Office and the Historical Society have similar missions. In short, the Historical Society generally maintains the community’s museums and artifacts; the Town Historian’s Office maintains paper records, photographs and other related archives and operates the Town Archives in order to make these files accessible to the public. Part of the missions of both the Historical Society and the Town Historian is to promote the history of the Town of Aurora and Village of East Aurora. While the missions of both positions—Historian and Historical Society director—sometimes overlap, the hours during the workweek are separate. Generally, office hours for the Town Historian have continued to be on Fridays, when I work on filing, email and requests for information, as well as assist visitors to the office. However, I work on Historian duties at other times, when necessary, since there is generally not enough time to complete all the duties on Fridays.

This report highlights the activities of the Town Historian’s Office. The extensive activities of the Aurora Historical Society, including those at the Elbert Hubbard Roycroft Museum and the Millard Fillmore Presidential Site, are not necessarily included in this report, but will be included in a separate report from the Aurora Historical Society.

## The Archives

One of the main functions of the Historian’s Office is to assist residents with historical research. The archives and museum are open each Friday (excluding holidays) from 1-4 p.m.

The office once again saw a dramatic increase in the number of visits over the previous year:

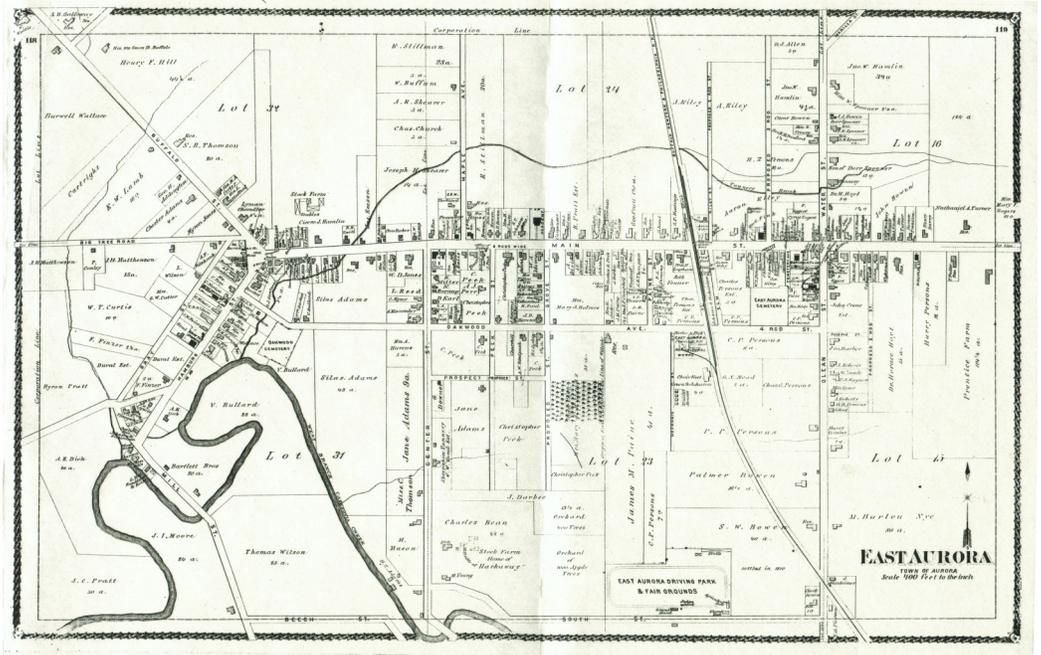
	2012	2013	2014
<b>Visitors</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>253</b>

These visits represent both Friday afternoon office hours and special appointments. The number of visits—253—is by far the largest number we have received since I was appointed Historian in 2007. As has always been the case, most research requests involve genealogy and house histories, but other office visits this year included assisting an attorney with research related to a legal proceeding; assisting members of the village’s Historic Preservation Board with research related to local buildings and homes; responding to media interview requests related to various aspects of local history; assisting Buffalo Bites Food Tours with information for a new walking tour they are now presenting in East Aurora; and assisting students with their research projects, including one college student who was completing her project on the history of the Price family of Fisher-Price; another who is completing his doctoral dissertation on Elbert Hubbard and the Roycroft Movement in East Aurora; and yet another college student who completed a research paper on an East Aurora religious movement. In addition, we also helped a citizen seeking information about a potential future burial in Pioneer Cemetery.

In addition to in-office visits, we also continue to respond to requests via email and U.S. Mail. The number of requests in 2014 was down over the previous year, but up from 2012. For reasons unknown, this statistic has traditionally been inconsistent from year to year.

	2012	2013	2014
<b>Requests for information via email or U.S. Mail</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>75</b>

*A major focus of the Town Historian's Office in 2014 was cataloguing and properly storing the vast collection of maps, including originals of this 1880 map of the village. (All the maps are now stored in acid-free sleeves and catalogued properly for easy access.)*



The Town Clerk's Office and I continue to work closely to assist with requests, as New York State Health Department regulations place responsibility for Vital Statistics records with the Town Clerk and the Town Historian oversees obituaries, cemetery burial lists, newspaper files, family histories and other similar records. We also continue to work closely with—and take referrals from—the Aurora Town Public Library, where some members of the public begin their research.

Due to time constraints, the volunteers and I do not personally conduct genealogical research unless the information requested is easily accessible and brief. Much like a public library, the Historian's Office is open for citizens to conduct their own research and we do our best to assist them in locating the information they need.

Because the staff of the Town Historian's Office is extremely limited (a very part-time Town Historian), the office relies heavily on the generosity of volunteers. Nancy DeWitt volunteered nearly 100 hours during the year. A college student volunteered his time over the summer to help us scan photographs. Thanks to these volunteers, we have been able to make a great deal of progress on several projects that have been on the back burner.

Some of these projects included:

- An update to the digital catalogue and additional archives converted to a digital format.
- The cataloguing and proper storage of the vast collection of maps. (All the maps are now stored in acid-free sleeves and catalogued properly for easy access.)
- Rearrangement of the furniture in the archives area to use the space more efficiently. A new double-sided bookshelf, from the public library, has made a big difference.

## Ceiling Leak After the November Storm

Unfortunately, melting snow on the roof of the Municipal Center caused a major leak in the ceiling along the north side of the Town Historian's Office. It was discovered Monday morning, November 21, during the major thaw following the storm. Although the research computers and several other items were located along this wall, only one irreplaceable item—an 1800s ledger book—sustained water damage. Piles of newspapers sustained the most damage, but they had already been filmed and digitized. Additionally, although the computers had gotten wet, they were unharmed. Special thanks to town staff for helping me hastily move items—including furniture—out of the way. It appears the repairs made to the roof have, at least temporarily, solved the problem. However, the office was in disarray for several weeks, and a few additional maintenance matters will need to be addressed early in the new year.

## National Attention for the Millard Fillmore Presidential Site

The National Historic Landmark home of President Millard Fillmore was featured on “CBS Sunday Morning” in February. The show's popular and witty correspondent, Mo Rocca, created quite a buzz in East Aurora when he visited the



home of the 13<sup>th</sup> U.S. President on Shearer Avenue Thursday, January 16, to tape interviews for the segment. A presidential history buff, Rocca is known for highlighting the careers and lives of the nation's less-known presidents. He spent most of the day at the Millard Fillmore Presidential Site before enjoying lunch at Tony Rome's Globe Hotel and heading to Forest Lawn Cemetery, where Millard Fillmore is buried. Rocca took particular interest in the items at the museum that belonged to Millard Fillmore, including a bookcase from the first White House library, the president's law desk, and a lock of the president's hair. The night before his visit, Rocca mentioned the Millard Fillmore house

and East Aurora during an appearance on “The Late Show With David Letterman.” To capture video for the upcoming segment, a crew from “CBS Sunday Morning” attended the Aurora Historical Society's annual Millard Fillmore Birthday Party at The Roycroft Inn a week earlier.

## Notable Donations

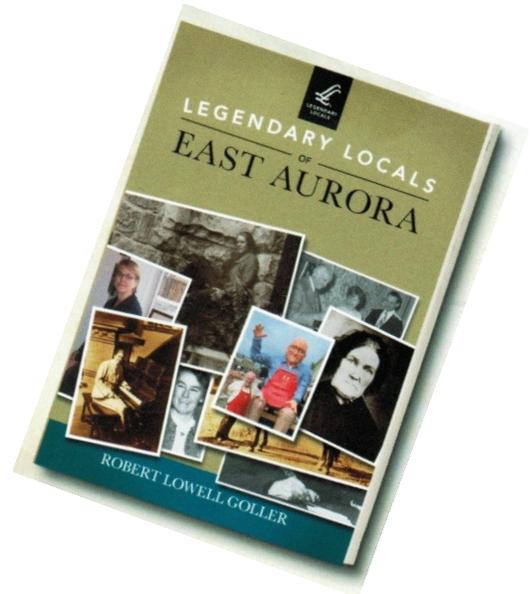
Many of the items in the archives have been donated by local families throughout the years. This year, a number of items were donated and added to the collection, including photographs from the Godfrey family and papers from the Allen family. Jabez Allen was a pioneer doctor in the community. In March, members of the Adams family on Olean Road donated the musket of their ancestor, Revolutionary War veteran Joel Adams, who was the first settler to spend a winter in the Town of Aurora. The musket is on exhibit in the Town Historian's Office as part of the Aurora History Museum.

## Government Appointed Historians of Western New York

In 2014 I expanded my involvement in the Government Appointed Historians of Western New York. At the fall conference, I was elected treasurer of the organization, which consists of town, village and county historians from communities west of the Genesee River.

### *Legendary Locals of East Aurora*

Separately from my duties as Town Historian, I published in 2014 a second book about the history of East Aurora. Arcadia Publishing released *Legendary Locals of East Aurora* in October. I thank everyone for their support of this project, and enjoyed highlighting some of East Aurora citizens—both and present—who have made our community such a wonderful place in which to live.



### Other Activities

—Throughout the year I continued to offer programs on a variety of topics at local civic group meetings and other events. Topics include Aurora’s role in the War of 1812; “Abolition in Aurora,” which highlights the community’s role on the Underground Railroad; the History of West Falls; and “The Little House That Could,” a history of the President Millard Fillmore House, which was presented during the town’s Winterfest celebration in February.

—On Oct. 25, I participated in a panel discussion at the Griffins Mills Presbyterian Church, as part of the church’s annual War of 1812 commemoration.

—Each January, a delegation from the Aurora Historical Society and I attend the University at Buffalo’s annual graveside service at President Millard Fillmore’s burial place in Forest Lawn Cemetery. The event is held on his birthday each January 7.

—In June, I once again delivered the keynote address during the East Aurora Middle School’s Eighth-Grade Moving Up Ceremony.

—On the Saturday of Reunion Weekend in July, the Historian’s Office hosted the Class of 1954. The alumni enjoyed looking through the old yearbooks and school photographs.

—Throughout the year, I have continued my monthly history column in the *East Aurora Advertiser*, as well as updates to the Town Historian’s Facebook page, which includes vintage photographs and continues to grow in popularity.

—We continue to expand the number of files we have available in a digital format. Eventually, we hope to have some of the files also available on the Internet. We continue our efforts to expand our digital card catalogue, which helps researchers more easily identify and locate documents and photographs in the collection.

## 2015 and Beyond

The next few years will be particularly busy ones for the Town Historian's Office and the Aurora Historical Society.

In May 2015, the Historical Society will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the *RMS Lusitania*, which took the lives of Roycroft founder Elbert Hubbard and his wife Alice. The full list of events is available at [www.aurorahistoricalsociety.com](http://www.aurorahistoricalsociety.com).

The Aurora Historical Society also continues its *Millard Matters!* capital campaign to expand the Millard Fillmore Presidential Site at Main Street and Shearer Avenue to include a sculpture of the 13th U.S. President and a modern recreation of his 1820s law office.

This year, the Historian's Office will also begin reaching out to town officials, local organizations and surrounding towns to begin preliminary plans for the Town of Aurora's Bicentennial Celebration in 2018. The towns of Wales and Holland will also celebrate their 200th anniversaries in 2018. A great deal of planning and volunteer effort will be needed in the next three years.

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*East Aurora Advertiser,  
Thursday, February 27, 2014*

### *Andersen was a Friend to Village History, Architecture*

Dear Editor:

Among the files in the Town Historian's Office are two large boxes labeled "Peter Andersen's Village." They contain a treasure trove of information, carefully gathered by Peter Andersen, related to the architectural heritage of the village he loved.

Peter Andersen's quiet demeanor hid a talented artist, whose attention to detail is evident in the hundreds of drawings he created of East Aurora's landmarks. Additionally, in the 1970s, he spent countless hours on an architectural survey, evaluating and recording important details about nearly every historically significant house and commercial building in East Aurora.

Peter Andersen's long, contemplative walks around the village, and his careful examinations of our wonderful architecture, led to well-researched renditions of our important landmarks. He made weekly appointments with several people around town to show us his latest drawings. With each visit to the Town Historian's Office came the addition of another drawing or two to the town archives. He has preserved an important part our community for future generations.

"Peter Andersen's village" has lost a remarkable citizen.

Robert Lowell Goller  
*Aurora Town Historian*