

Archive Guide & Answers to FAQs

Aurora Town Historian's Office



The Southside Municipal Center
300 Glead Avenue,
Entrances #5 & #6
East Aurora, NY 14052

716-652-7944

historian@townofaurora.com

www.townofaurora.com/departments/historian

Open Wednesdays, 1-4 p.m.
and by appointment

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we have a Town Historian?

What does he or she do?

In an effort to ensure that the important heritage of each community wouldn't be lost, New York enacted the "Historian's Law" on April 11, 1919. Each town, village, city, county—and even the state as a whole—is required by law to appoint an official historian to promote the history and heritage of the community; maintain and preserve the archives; and to advise local officials, boards and residents on issues related to the history of the community. New York State is unique in its requirement that each municipality appoint a historian. In Aurora, the Town Historian also serves as historian for the Village of East Aurora. Politically non-partisan, the historian is appointed by the town supervisor and village mayor. Robert Lowell Goller, who was appointed Jan. 8, 2007, is the eighth town historian since the office was created in Aurora in 1919.

What's the difference between the Town Historian and the Aurora Historical Society?

The Historical Society is a non-profit membership organization chartered by the State of New York to operate museums and "to collect, preserve and interpret" artifacts related to the history of the Town of Aurora. Among its many activities, the Aurora Historical Society owns and operates the Elbert Hubbard Roycroft Museum and the Millard Fillmore Presidential Site. The Historian is a government official who works with all agencies and organizations, including the Historical Society, to promote the town's history.

Is the Historian available for presentations?

Yes. Sharing the community's history with local civic and school groups is a primary mission of the Town Historian. A list of available presentations appears online at www.townofaurora.com/departments/historian.

Where is the Historian's Office?

The Historian's Office is located in the Southside Municipal Center, 300 Glead Avenue. It's best to park near entrance #5 or #6 on the south side of the building. (There's a ramp at entrance #5). Once inside, follow the signs for "Historian." The Historian's Office shares space with the Historical Society's Aurora History Museum, which includes artifacts from the community's pioneers.

What's in the Town of Aurora archives?

Contents of the office include indexed file boxes; obituary files; marriage records; cemetery records; general historical reference books; scrapbooks; Census records; family group files on more than 500 surnames; high school yearbooks dating back to the 1870s; photographs; maps; and newspapers, both in digital and microfilm format. Most of the collection is related to the Town of Aurora, but there is also some information on surrounding towns. While the collection is comprehensive, the Town Historian's Office certainly does not contain everything related to the history of the town (some items are housed in other government offices, libraries or historical society collections). If we do not have the information for which you are looking, we will do our best to refer you to the correct office or agency.

Where did all of these items come from?

Most of the material was donated by generous local families over the past 200 years. The Town Historian's Office rarely is able to purchase items and instead relies on generous donations of photographs and documents.

Why isn't the office open every day?

The Town Historian is a part-time position and the office is open limited hours, on Wednesdays, from 1-4 p.m. However, special appointments may be made at other times by contacting the office at 716-652-7944 or historian@townofaurora.com.

Is there someone at the Town Historian's Office who can help me with my research?

Absolutely! The Historian and volunteers are on hand each Wednesday from 1-4 p.m. (Please check the website for any changes, especially during holiday weeks). To request an appointment at other times, email historian@townofaurora.com. It's helpful, but not necessary, to contact us ahead of time so that files pertaining to your research may be retrieved from the archives—and waiting for you—ahead of your visit.

I am not able to visit the office; can you conduct my research for me?

We are happy to answer a few questions or look up information for you. However, due to limited staff we are not able to conduct extensive research. Requests for information may be sent to historian@townofaurora.com. We will do our best to answer your requests in a timely manner, in most cases within a week. However, depending on the volume of requests, it might take longer.

Can the Town Historian find my ancestors for me or conduct my genealogical research?

The research library, including cemetery listings, obituaries and family files, is available for visitors to conduct their own genealogical research. We are happy to help you conduct your research and locate files, however due to limited resources and very limited staff we are unable to conduct extensive genealogical research for you beyond looking up a name or two. If you are from outside the area or cannot come to the archives yourself, there are many researchers and genealogists for hire; we'd be happy to refer you. We can also assist you in finding websites and other archival libraries that will help in your search for your ancestors.

Why aren't the archives on the Internet?

With the help of volunteers, we have digitized many items in the collection. Unfortunately, the collection is just too vast. We are slowly expanding our digital card catalogue, which includes a listing of the items in the collection, as well as cemetery, obituary and family name lists. We invite you to visit the Town Historian's Office to see the documents and photographs in person.

May I borrow items from the archives? I'll return them! Don't you trust me?

We trust you, but we still cannot allow you to borrow items from the Town of Aurora archives. Many of these items are irreplaceable and we simply cannot allow them to leave the research room. When possible, we'd be happy to copy or digitally scan items for you for a small fee. Visitors also are welcome to take photographs of documents with a digital camera for research purposes.



Can you help me research my house's history?

We can. If you own your home, you probably already have a great deal of information about the history of your property. In most cases your Search and Title, which you and/or your real estate attorney should have received when you purchased your property, has the names of each owner and information about each time the property was sold. If you have that document, bring a copy in to the Historian's Office (please keep the original in a safe place; they are difficult and expensive to replace!). With the information contained in that document, we can help locate information in the archives and on the maps that will help uncover the story of your property and the people who lived there. Please note that, as is the case with any research project, the process takes time and requires patience. You'll probably want to plan more than one visit to the archives.

I heard a rumor that you have photographs of every house in the Village of East Aurora and Town of Aurora. Is this true?

We wish we did! We have photographs of many homes in the community, but not all of them. The photographs we do



also send us an email at historian@townofaurora.com, and we can let you know if we have photographs of your home.

I found a great photograph in the town archives. May I share it on Facebook? May I include it in a book I am writing?

Yes, in most cases. However, we simply ask that you properly credit items from the collection. This helps honor the many volunteers and donors who over the past century helped catalogue and preserve the items, and it enables people to easily find the original source of your material. Even when casually posting photographs or documents on social media websites, please credit the archives of the Aurora Town Historian's Office. Some items in the archives have special citation requirements, many of which were placed on them by the generous donors. Additionally, while many of the documents and photographs in the collection are in the public domain, some may be subject to

copyright. Those who reproduce such items (even casually on the Internet) are responsible for ensuring that copyright laws and courtesies are followed. Please refer to the "Copyright Notice & Guidelines for Reproduction of Photographs and Other Materials" on the Town Historian's website for additional information.

My son or daughter is working on a school history project; can the Historian help?

Absolutely! The archives contain many primary and secondary sources. Simply stop by during office hours or contact us to set up an appointment. Even if the project is related to state or national history, we oftentimes can find local documents that will help illustrate the national or statewide topic.

Do I have to wear white gloves when I visit the Town Historian's Office?

White gloves help prevent oil from your fingers from damaging documents. In most cases, white gloves are not necessary, but we may ask you to wear them when handling more sensitive items from the collection.

May I use my favorite pen or marker?

We encourage the use of pencils instead of pens or markers. This prevents inadvertent ink marks on important papers and documents. We have pencils available.

I have a box of old newspapers and photographs that I found in the attic. How may I donate them to the archives?

Simply contact us at 716-652-7944; stop by the office on Wednesdays, from 1-4 p.m.; or email us at historian@townofaurora.com. However, we kindly reserve the right to dispose of items that are duplicative or do not meet the mission of our collection. Sometimes we will re-donate the items to another library or archive where they would be better suited. Due to space constraints, the Town Historian's Office is only able accept documents, photographs, family histories, maps and books related to the history of the Town of Aurora, Village of East Aurora and surrounding area. The Town Historian's Office does not generally accept "three-dimensional" artifacts (furniture, etc.), but we'd be happy to refer you to the Aurora Historical Society or another organization that considers these types of donations for their museum exhibits.