

Annual Report of the Historian



2017



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

21 January 2018

Town Supervisor James J. Bach
The Southside Municipal Center
300 Gleed 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 2017.

As you will see in the report, in addition to the regular duties of the office, a great deal of time in 2017 was spent on preparations for the bicentennial celebration in Aurora, Holland and Wales. We have a great committee in Aurora, as well as a joint commission with representatives from the three towns. There will be much more publicity about the commemoration as we draw closer to the official launch on April 15, and we invite the community to visit the bicentennial webpage and calendar events, which may be accessed at www.townofaurora.com.

This annual report serves as a means to officially share with you (and with the public and future generations) the activities of the Town and Village Historian in 2017, but I appreciate our open dialogue throughout the year. As always, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time if I can be of assistance with any project.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert".

Robert Lowell Goller
Town and Village Historian

cc: New York State Historian Devin Lander; Erie County Historian Douglas Kohler; Members of the East Aurora Village Board; Members of the Aurora Town Board; Village Administrator Bryan R. Gazda; the Aurora Historical Society; Aurora Town Public Library Director Robert Alessi; Town Clerk Martha Libroek; Village Clerk Mary Ann Arnold; Erie County Legislator Joseph Lorigo.

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

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 continue to be open each Wednesday, from 1– 4 p.m., and by special appointments. This allows the office to be open at the same time as other museums throughout the community during summer months, enabling visitors to stop at all the historic sites throughout the community on the same day.

We keep a log of the number of visitors and the topics that are researched. The number of visitors to the office has remained relatively steady in recent years. However, requests via email, Facebook message and U.S. Mail have continued to increase.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Visits	157	189	253	231	189	212

As has always been the case, most research requests involve genealogy and house histories, but other visits included assisting members of the village's Historic Preservation Commission and other governmental boards with reviews of proposals under consideration; providing photographs and background information for local businesses; and assisting students with class history projects. We assisted one student who completed a video documentary on the Halloween incidents of 2002. Another researcher is attempting to document all service members from Elma who gave their lives in all wars and conflicts. The *East Aurora Advertiser*, which we digitized a few years ago, have greatly aided this gentleman's project, which is ongoing. Also in 2017, at the request of the Town Board, I conducted research and a detailed report on the history of 559 Oakwood Avenue, the house and parcel immediately west of the proposed new Town Hall. The number of visitors noted above do not include two group tours: On July 14, a group of exchange students from Spain, and on December 11 a group of about 25 Boy Scouts. Both groups visited the office to view the museum artifacts and learn more about the archives. There was a particular interest by both groups in the digitized newspapers.

In addition to in-office visits, we also continue to respond to requests via email, U.S. Mail and social media. The number of requests continued to increase in 2017 and it was the highest number since I became Town Historian in 2007.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Requests via email	51	112	75	133	156	222
U.S. Mail and social media						

The office relies heavily on the generosity of volunteers. Once again in 2017, two volunteers, Lucas Dana and Marian Halperin, have assisted in the office on a regular basis, sharing more than 150 hours of volunteer time in 2017. Thanks to these volunteers, we have been able to make a great deal of progress on several specific projects, including:

—Scanning the extensive collection of Roycroft photographs and documents.

—Organizing and cataloguing the collections related to Fisher-Price and the Roycroft. As a result of many hours of volunteer effort, we continue to add more and more documents into acid free binders rather than in loose folders.

In addition, Joseph "Potts" Stapleton continues to visit the office on a nearly weekly basis and has digitally scanned a number of photographs and articles from the collection, many of which have been well received on Facebook.

Community Outreach

FACEBOOK...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 from the past. We have seen a marked increase in the popularity of the posts and the number of people "liking" the page. In addition, Joseph Stapleton posts many photographs and other items from the archives on the "You Know You're from East Aurora, NY If You Remember..." Facebook page.

MONTHLY HISTORY COLUMN...I have continued the monthly "Historian's Corner," which is usually featured on Page 2 of the *East Aurora Advertiser* on the last week of each month. I also continue to make myself available for interviews, and encourage local newspapers to use the Historian's Office as a resource for historical material.

Topics of the monthly "Historian's Corner" column in 2017 included:



January: Horse-Drawn Plow Cleared Village Sidewalks for Decades



February: Nation's Last War of 1812 Widow was a 'Good Neighbor' on King Street.



March: In 1917, Three Fires in Two Months at One Village Intersection: Main and Riley.



April: Annual Field Day Drew 4,000 to Hamlin Park Each Spring



May: Salute from the Porch by EA's Last Surviving Civil War Veterans was a Memorial Day Tradition



June: Ice was a Hot Commodity on East Aurora's Elm Street



July: Famed Covered Mile Racetrack Torn Down 100 Years Ago



August: Solar Eclipses Have Brought East Aurora to a Standstill



September: Intrigue Surrounded Debut of Blue Devil Mascot in 1934



October: With Influx of Cars, Village Turned to Diagonal Parking



November: EA's Frances M. Reed Earned Place in History By Delivering the Mail



December: The Time Susan B. Anthony Didn't Come to East Aurora

SPEECHES AND PROGRAMS....Throughout the year I continued to offer programs on a variety of topics at local civic group meetings and other events, including historical societies and the Road Scholar program, which consists of history enthusiasts from across the globe who visit East Aurora a few times per year.

I presented **“The Pioneers of Aurora,”** a new program for 2017, twice at the Town of Aurora Public Library, on February 21 and May 2.

“Abolition in Aurora,” a program about our town’s unique role on the Underground Railroad, was presented February 23, at the Aurora Senior Center, as part of the 2017 Winterfest.

“East Aurora After Lusitania” was presented twice to the Road Scholars groups at The Roycroft Inn, on September 22 and October 20. Three Road Scholars programs already have been scheduled for 2018.

In a new project for 2017, I joined the Aurora Historical Society and Forest Lawn Cemetery in presenting **President Millard Fillmore trolley tours.** Visitors learned about the life of President Fillmore while riding a trolley through Forest Lawn Cemetery before coming to East Aurora to visit the 13th President’s home on Shearer Avenue and enjoy lunch at The Roycroft Inn. I joined the tour to take visitors past other, lesser-known sites in the village and town related to Millard Fillmore, including his parents’ farm at Olean and Lapham Roads, his father’s second home on East Main Street, and the original location of his law office and home on Main Street near Church Street. These tours have been very popular and successful, and Forest Lawn Cemetery and the Aurora Historical Society plan to continue them in 2018.

A complete list of history programs that I offer are available on the Town Historian’s Office website.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTED HISTORIANS OF WESTERN NEW YORK...I continue to serve as treasurer of the Government Appointed Historians of Western New York, and I attend (and help organize) the group’s annual meeting.

The group consists of municipal historians from 10 Western New York counties. The 2017 meeting was held October 14 in Batavia, and it is a great opportunity to network with other historians, as well as attend valuable training workshops. At the 2017 meeting I was asked to present a program, “Make History With Your Annual Report,” during which I led a discussion among historians about improving our annual reports. Following the presentation, New York State Historian Devin R. Lander asked me to assist in the development of a annual report template in an effort to help historians across the state document and report their yearly activities. In addition to the annual meeting, I also attended two executive committee meetings, one in Panama, N.Y., and the other in East Aurora.



New York State Historian Devin R. Lander speaks at the annual meeting and conference of the Government Appointed Historians of Western New York in Batavia on October 14.

ERIE COUNTY HISTORICAL FEDERATION...I am also a member of the Erie County Historical Federation, which consists of historical societies and agencies from around Erie County. I attended the group’s annual meeting and training on April 29, at the Buffalo Niagara Heritage Village in Amherst.

Bicentennial

A major focus of 2017 was planning for the upcoming bicentennial celebration. In late 2016, we formed a committee to plan Aurora's celebration. We also formed a joint commission to plan events with Holland and Wales, which will also celebrate their 200th anniversaries in 2018 and 2019. Committee members have spent many hours developing ideas and coordinating the logistics for the celebration. The work of both committees has led to the development of bicentennial logos for all three towns, an online calendar that features bicentennial events from all three towns, and a publicity campaign to promote the upcoming commemoration, which will take place from April 15, 2018 through March 2, 2019.

In Aurora, in addition to a celebration on July 3, we are encouraging local organizations to plan their own bicentennial-themed events. We have asked local groups to fill out a simple form with the details of their events and projects, and that information is publicized on the bicentennial calendar. Throughout the year I have attended meetings of local organizations and churches, including the Kiwanis Club, in an effort to promote the bicentennial. The bicentennial website, which can be accessed through the town website at www.townofaurora.com, is regularly updated with new information. We also have a Facebook page at "Town of Aurora 200." The website, calendar and Facebook page are the best ways to keep up to date on the bicentennial events as the commemoration draws closer.



Members of the Joint Committee on the Bicentennial met at the spot near South Wales where the Towns of Aurora, Holland and Wales come together, to continue discussing plans for the upcoming celebration. Pictured, from left, are, from Holland, Town Supervisor Michael C.



Kasprzyk, Town Councilwoman Karen Kline and Joy Bucknam, president of the Holland Historical Society; from Wales, Town Supervisor Rickey Venditti and Town Historian Dee Zeigel; and, from Aurora, Town Supervisor James J. Bach and Town Historian Robert Lowell Goller. Absent from the photo is Holland Town Historian Sandra Smith.

Events and Other Highlights of 2017

January

FILLMORE'S BIRTHDAY...On January 6, I joined members of the Aurora Historical Society and others from the Western New York community at the graveside service sponsored by the University at Buffalo at Forest Lawn Cemetery, to commemorate the birthday of President Millard Fillmore. Also for the President's birthday in 2017, I joined the Aurora Historical Society at the Millard Fillmore Presidential Site for our now-annual early-morning interview on WGRZ-Channel 2.



February

MILLARD FILLMORE DINNER...On February 8 at The Roycroft Inn, I 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 sponsored by the Aurora Historical Society for the Millard Fillmore Presidential Site in East Aurora.



April

COUNTY RECOGNITION...In April, I was honored to receive a proclamation from the Erie County Legislature on the occasion of my 10th anniversary as Town and Village Historian. Special thanks to Erie County Legislator Joseph C. Lorigo for this honor, and thank you to the Town Board for the recognition during the Town Board meeting on April 24.

August

ERIE COUNTY FAIR...Once again, the Aurora Town Historian's Office was invited to provide exhibits at the Erie County Fair's Historical Building. In keeping with the exhibit theme, "Christmas Traditions in Our Towns," the Aurora Town Historian's Office highlighted the history of East Aurora's Christmas Carolcade. Items in the exhibit were from the archives of the Aurora Town Historian's Office, the personal collection of the Town Historian and Vidler's 5&10. Special thanks to Vidler's 5&10 for loaning items for the exhibit. We also exhibited vintage Christmas cards from the archives, as well as took the opportunity to promote the upcoming bicentennial celebration in Aurora, Holland and Wales. 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.



Budget

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

Office Expense—\$500

In 2017, we 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. Many of these documents have been stored in folders or boxes, making them susceptible to damage. This new system provides better protection and more accessibility for the documents. We also continue to purchase large protective sheets for our collection of maps, some of which date to the 1800s.

Expense and Travel—\$200

These funds were used for travel to three training conferences and meetings; April 7 in Panama, N.Y.; April 29 in Amherst; and October 14 in Batavia.

Historian's Salary—\$5,514.

Thank you for the town's continued financial support of the Town Historian's Office. I extend particular appreciation for the \$5,514 annual salary.

Goals for 2018

BICENTENNIAL...Helping to finalize and execute the plan we developed in 2017 for the Bicentennial commemorations in Aurora, Holland and Wales, as well as publicizing the events, will be a focus of 2018.

DIGITIZATION...Thanks to generous donations, \$1,000 remains earmarked for digitizing our newspapers. With previous donations, we were able to digitize the *East Aurora Advertiser* through 1969. With these funds, 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. This project was slated for completion in 2017, but due to the prioritization of the planning for the bicentennial, it will become a new priority for 2018.

PREPARING FOR THE MOVE...The planned move of town offices from the Southside Municipal Center to the former fire hall on Oakwood Avenue may seem like a long way off, but the Historian's Office is already preparing for the move. If the move from the Roycroft Chapel in 2012 is any indication, this upcoming move will be a challenge. Relocating archives is not an easy task, but our goal is to make sure the documents are organized in a way to make the move as seamless as possible when the time comes. We already have been working with the architects and designers on unique ways to exhibit the collection of town-related artifacts in the new building. The Aurora Historical Society, which owns the three-dimensional artifacts in the Town Museum, and I have already begun discussions about finding a better way to exhibit the museum items in the new facility, as well as finding more appropriate homes in the community for a few of the artifacts. We also are taking steps to design the new Town Historian's Office in a way to provide better public access and security for the archives.