

LIVINGSTON COUNTY
DEPARTMENT ANNUAL REPORT SUMMARY
REPORT FOR YEAR ENDING 2019

DEPARTMENT: County Historian

2019 PROGRAM SUMMARY:

It is a privilege to submit my 16th annual report as County Historian. As in years past, I crisscrossed the county to do numerous programs and provided advice, assistance, and historical information for several county departments, the town historians, historical societies, schools and other organizations. To further strengthen the role of local government historians and advocate the role of NYS and local history, I represented this office at several events at the regional and state level as Past- Executive Chair of the Government Historians of Western New York and as a member of the New York State Historical Records Advisory Board.

In 2019, my primary research focused on documenting the history of the County Poorhouse and County Farm operation from 1829–1960s. By the end of the year I reached the end of the 19th century and the project will continue into 2020. The bulk of my programming and planning activities centered on the County Bicentennial as the foundation was laid this year for several projects. This year also saw the Historical Art Survey come to fruition as my deputy historian and college intern and I traveled to every historical society museum in the county to survey original paintings and drawings in the collections.

Times have changed the way the research center operates as the vast majority of requests are submitted digitally through our online form linked to the county website. Positive public feedback with regard to access to historical records has propelled us to continue to add more resources to the website and more data to the search engine. This change opens up new opportunities to provide more efficient services to the public and undertake additional projects to keep up with demand for information.

Despite the continued increase in online requests, visitors from around the county and out of state still seek out this office to do hands on research. The office has also provided historical information to many county departments. Holly Watson, Deputy Historian has done an admirable job keeping up with the requests, maintaining the webpage and archiving collections.

The County Historian's Office remains an active component of county government and I am honored to have the opportunity to promote, preserve and interpret Livingston County history and look forward to a bright 2020.

I. Office Management, Collection Development

1. Preservation and expansion of historical records collection:

- a. **Public Research Room:** In 2019 approximately **82** people utilized the research room in addition to **170** requests for information received via our online request form, phone, and email. The subject binders were routinely updated with references to current events from weekly newspapers and with documentary materials deemed to have permanent value for local history research.
- b. **Expansion of the County Historian's Web page and Online resources:**
 - i. Web page: Updates and resources were added throughout the year
The County Historian's Online Records Index: The search engine increased by over **9526** entries in 2018 and now includes approx. **350,000** entries.

(See Deputy Historian Holly Watson's report attached for specific references.)

- c. **Archives and Manuscript Inventory - indexing, cataloging updates, volunteer projects, donations, etc.**
 - i. Newly acquired documents, manuscripts, etc. were continually accessioned, arranged, described, and appraised to determine long-term use and protection needs and then housed in archival quality storage containers and enclosures. Donations accepted included numerous archival documents, photographs, and scrapbooks related to people, places, and local historical events.
 - a. Digitization projects – **731** documents and photographs were digitized this past year.
 - b. Finding aids – existing finding aids were updated and several new ones created
 - c. Indexing projects – numerous ledgers, church records, census special schedule, and many others
(See Deputy Historian Holly Watson’s report attached for specific references.)
 - ii. Volunteer projects
 - a. Doreen DeCamp – Finished labeling documents in the Archival Files series.
 - b. Jane Oakes – Transcription of Hartman diaries
 - iii. Ryan Peace, SUNY Geneseo intern – Toured several county historical society museums to assist in Historical Art Survey project; also entered about 800 businesses providing services and supplies to the county poor house.
 - iv. Donations – significant donations included:
 - a. West Sparta election registers (c. 1895-1912 poll lists, tally sheets, school tax rolls, etc.)
 - b. Groveland High School Recorder (c. 1937-Feb. 1938)
 - c. Manuscript reference binders – Author Wayne Mahood Wadsworth research
 - d. Alice Sliker Pavlove Denneville papers collection
 - e. Jane Schryver digital files collection – 50,000+ images

II. Community Outreach and Advocacy

1. **Town Historian meetings** – Throughout the year this office provides guidance and support for the town historians. David Palmer, West Sparta Historian retired in February 2019 after serving in the position for more than forty years. Three luncheon meetings were held at various locations around the county:
 - April 17 – Nunda United Methodist Church
 - August 13 – Livingston County Conference Center, Murray Hill
 - December 12 – Livingston County Historian’s Office

2. Special Projects

Livingston County Bicentennial - 2019 was a year of planning and preparation. Several projects are in progress.

- In January, Scott Gillette, owner of American Engraving in Geneseo, was announced the winner of the Bicentennial Logo contest and recipient of \$200 gift card for his design.
- In February, I presented *Countdown to the Bicentennial: The evolution of Livingston County to 1821* for the Mt. Morris Dam Lecture and to the several other groups.

- I met with multiple organizations to discuss ways to collaborate on projects and events related to the upcoming bicentennial including: Chamber of Commerce and Tourism directors, Livingston County Librarians, Geneseo Rotary, Livingston area Boy Scout leaders, Genesee Valley Conservancy, Livonia area Girl Scout leaders, and the Geneseo Garden Club.
- The first Bicentennial Event sponsored by the County Historian's Office was an opportunity for the public to bring personal photographs, historical documents, and other records to have digital copies made. Free scanning days for county employees were scheduled July 15-19 and open to the public July 22-26.
- Approximately 30 individuals have volunteered to record narrations for the upcoming *Local History Our Loud part two – from the Civil War to the Industrial Revolution*. Narrations are being prepared to begin recording short excerpts in January 2020. Anticipated completion and release is spring 2020.
- In collaboration with the Office of the Aging Senior Nutrition program, I visited sites in Avon and Mt. Morris in July to talk about county history, the upcoming bicentennial and the importance of senior's participation.
- I met with Bill Mann and several Central Services employees to discuss construction of a float to take to various locations and events throughout the Bicentennial year.
- In October I addressed the Board of Supervisors meeting and gave office and bicentennial updates, coincided with the opening of the Historical Map exhibit in the lobby of the Government Center.
- Photographer Todd Baker completed the Livingston County Doors photography project that includes about 100 images of doors and entrances of public buildings in every community in the county. The images will be used for posters and other programs.
- County Geo-Caching Trail is being developed led by Marty DeMarte and Holly Watson.

Historical Art Survey: Commenced June 2019 and completed November, 2019. This is a new documentation project initiative that includes a survey and identification of original paintings and some drawings in the collections of the 12 historical societies in the county. The outcome resulted in an inventory of approximately 200 paintings, description of medium with a digital image, a brief bio of the artists when available. Eventually a finding aid will be created with an abstract posted to our web page. Phase two in 2020 will be to apply for a community arts grant to hire a professional art consultant to review the survey, appraise the individual paintings and prioritize the historical society's collections for conservation.

Poorhouse/County Home and Farm research project: For the last several years the massive poorhouse collection has been processed, arranged, described, indexed and cataloged. This year I went through Superintendent of the Poor record book (1829-1865) and the Board of Supervisors' Proceedings beginning in 1849 (earliest available) – 1898, to compile a comprehensive historical timeline of the management and operations of the home and farm. The project is still in progress, with the goal of publication and a dedication of the poorhouse cemeteries during the Bicentennial in 2021.

Local Woman Suffrage Movement research project: My extensive ongoing research on the Impact of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Livingston County was published in the Fall 2019 edition of the *Livingston County Historical Society Review*. Copies were distributed to society members. Additional copies are available upon request. The complete essay will also be posted on the County Historian's web page in 2020.

Grants for Historical Markers: I submitted two grant applications offered by The William Pomeroy Foundation for historic markers to be placed at Murray Hill and the Courthouse. Both applications were approved. Installation is planned to coincide with the Bicentennial in 2021.

Exhibit: A Historical Map Exhibit was curated from the County Historian's archival collection and on display in the County Government Center October – November.

Portage Town Historian Records: see Deputy Historian report.

3. Public Speaking – various presentations

February 16 – presented a new power point program for the annual Mt. Morris Dam Lecture, *Countdown to the Bicentennial Part One – The formation of Livingston County.*

May 18 – Participated in the veterans program with the Blue Devils in Vietnam authors at Little Lakes Community Center, Hemlock.

May 21 - presented *Doing Research in Livingston County* program for the Genesee Area Genealogy Society at the Holland Land Company Museum in Batavia.

June 6 – participated in the New York State Archives Conference held at St. John Fisher College in Pittsford in a panel program on doing research in Livingston County with the Chautauqua County Historian and the Wyoming County Historian.

July 9 – presented a program and information on the upcoming County Bicentennial at the Mt. Morris Senior Nutrition Center.

July 11 – presented a program and information on the upcoming County Bicentennial at the Avon Senior Nutrition Center

July 11 - visited the Avon Area Historical Society Museum to conduct a historical art survey.

September 15 – presented *Livingston County and the Local Woman Suffrage Movement* program at the Livingston County Historical Society Museum.

September 21 – presented *The Sullivan Campaign of the Revolution* the Impact on Livingston County for the Penn Yan, Yates County Historical Society.

September 23 – addressed the Genesee Rotary and gave an overview of planning for the County Bicentennial.

October 9 – addressed the Board of Supervisors meeting and gave office and bicentennial updates, coincided with the opening of the Historical Map exhibit in the lobby of the Government Center.

October 20 – attended a historical marker dedication in honor of local poet Jessie Belle Rittenhouse at the Tuscarora Cemetery.

October 27 – presented Countdown to the Bicentennial program for Ossian Historical Society.

4. Other meetings/ events

March 21, 6/20, 9/12, 12/11 – attended Department Head meetings at EOC

May 7 – visited Portage Town Hall and transported Portage Town Historian's collection to County

Historian's Office to rehouse and describe.

May 13, 20, 23, 6/26, 10/22 – ERP Computer Training at the EOC

May 21 – Nunda Historical Society to conduct a historical art survey

June 11- 12 – conducted research at the New York State Archives and Library in Albany

June 21 – Dansville Area Historical Society Museum to conduct a historical art survey

June 25 – Big Springs Historical Society in Caledonia to conduct a historical art survey

June 26 – Board of Supervisors Employee Recognition Ceremony

June 27th – Visited the New York State Historic Site at Ganondagan in Victor, NY

July 1 – Livingston County Historical Society Museum to conduct a historical art survey

July 16 – met with Angela Ellis, Deputy County Administrator to discuss the pros and cons of obtaining a listing on the State and National Register of Historic Places for the Livingston County Campus at Murray Hill.

September 7 – attended the York Bicentennial event at Hillcrest in York.

September 24 – visited the Springwater Historical Society Museum open house and to conduct a historical art survey.

October 25 – visited Lima's Tenny Burton Museum and the Livonia Historical Society Museum to conduct a historical art survey.

November 12 – visited the Mills Mansion in Mt. Morris to conduct a historical art survey.

December 19 – Met with Marty DeMarte from County ITS to discuss logistics of establishing a Geo-Caching Tour in Livingston County for the Bicentennial.

December 19 – Met with Bill Mann, Co. Deputy Administrator to discuss the county contracting a firm to conduct a geo-physical survey of the county poorhouse cemetery properties.

III. Professional Development, Board/Organization Involvement

- 1) Government Appointed Historians of Western New York** - This regional organization was formed in 2009 to provide assistance and support to officially appointed local government historians for 11 counties in Western New York. The organization maintains a membership database and sponsors meetings with a variety of educational and training programs.

Founding member, appointed treasurer (2008-2010), Elected treasurer for 2-year term (2010-2012). Elected Executive Chair September 2012 for 2-year term (2013-2014); re-elected Chair September 2014 for 2-year term (2015-2016).

Currently serving as Past-Executive Chair and manage the GAHWNY website (GAHWNY.ORG), Facebook page, and assist with nominations for the organization's Julia Reinstein Career Achievement Award and Student History Award.

September 28 – hosted the Government Appointed Historians of Western New York Annual Meeting at the Conference Center on Murray Hill. October 23 – attended the Government Appointed Historians of Western New York Executive Board meeting at Chautauqua County Courthouse.

2) New York State Historical Records Advisory Board (SHRAB) - member since 2014

October 29 – attended the New York State Historical Records Advisory Board meeting and the annual awards ceremony at the Cultural Education Center in Albany.

3) New York State Documentary Heritage Program (DHP) Grant Reviewer: January - February I read

and reviewed eight grants from various historical repositories in the state.

March 6 - met with the full review panel in Albany for the final review.

2020 PROGRAM SUMMARY:

1. Prioritizing and processing of more series collections for digitization.
2. Further expansion of the County Historian's web page to include more resources.
3. Planning and organizing for Livingston County Bicentennial 2021

Submitted by Amie Alden, Livingston County Historian

March 9, 2019

Attached: Deputy Historian annual report

Annual Report Form: January – December 2019

Holly C. Watson

Deputy Historian

General Responsibilities

- Answering the phone, directing calls and resolving questions;
- Assisting visitors in the research room with queries and fulfilling online research requests.
 - Number of research request received in person in the Research Room: 82
 - Number of research requests received via CivicPlus online form: 12
 - Number of research requests received via e-mail or phone: 123
 - Total number of research requests in 2019: 217
 - Total number of requests for digital materials fulfilled over e-mail: 121
- Attending quarterly staff meetings and Town Historian meetings;
- Tidying and cleaning the research room, work area, and storage areas as needed and attending to ongoing digital files management;
- Accessioning new acquisitions and donations, and describing items and specifying locations in master inventory;
- Creating finding aids for collections and records series and posting abstracts to County website;
- Maintaining an online presence on the County Historian’s website with announcements, links, photographs, and lists of resources;
- Assisting County Historian with exhibits.

Other Related Activities

- Attended meeting at SUNY Geneseo regarding Geneseo History Center (February)
- Participated in webinar presented by DHPSNY entitled “Legal Issues: Ethics” (March)
- Attended New York Archives Conference (NYAC) in Rochester (June)
- Visited local museums and sites:
 - Seneca Art and Culture Center at Ganondagan (June)
 - William Pryor Letchworth Museum (September)
- Attended Livingston County Department Head meetings (June, September, December)
- Attended Tastings Through Time: Town of York Bicentennial (September)
- Attended Government Appointed Historians of Western NY (GAHWNY) conference (September)
- Attended Researching New York Archives Conference at SUNY Albany (November)

Completed projects

Finding Aids - Created finding aids for collections and series; projects involved calculating date range and extent, creating abstract, subject lists, biographical and arrangement notes, and contents list for each collection or series.

Completed the following finding aids in 2019:

- Nancy Farnum O’Dea Collection
- Wadsworth Family Records
- Paine and Halsted Photograph Album
- Captain Festus Cone (1784-1875) Family Letters
- William B. Wooster (1828-1912) Papers
- Downtown Partnership Collection
- James B. Harrison (1838-1924) Diary Collection
- Daniel A. Fink (1938-1995) Collection
- County Historian’s Cemetery Survey (1944-1947)
- State Survey Photographs, 1947-1948
- Emmett H. Jennings (1865-1921) Collection

Indexing – Involved indexed various small record groups, entering them onto the County Historian’s Online Records Index to improve accessibility of information.

Completed the following indexing projects in 2019:

- *Ledgers Series:*
 - Craig Colony Patient Property books, c. 1912-1947 (3 books; 770 entries)
 - Town of York birth, marriage, and death records, 1847-1903 (466 entries)
- *Poorhouse Series:*
 - Alms House Register, 1877-1921 (7,182 entries added in 2019 for a total of 10,082 in the register)
 - WPA Survey of Employable Cases on General Relief, 1937 (333 entries)
- *Other indexing projects:*
 - William B. Wooster Civil War Papers (70 entries of probable Civil War enlistees)
 - Updating matched grave numbers to Craig Colony patient burials in Craig Colony Old Cemetery (205 entries)
 - Updating veterans’ entries from Centennial History of Nunda (approx. 500 entries)

Digitizing – involved scanning, verifying images, and digital filing of digitized material.

Completed the following digitization projects in 2019:

- *Photographs Series* – Digitized 72 folders of photographs relating to Livingston County government and general topics (731 items)
- *Collections Items*
 - Groveland Correctional Facility Collection (C136) patient medical histories and patients' property books, c. 1912-1947
 - County Historian's Cemetery Survey (1944-1947) Collection (C167)

Other Projects

- Portage Town Historian Collection (May-September)
 - Inventoried and organized approximately 22 cubic feet of jumbled records, including scrapbooks, photographs, archival materials, organizational and church records, maps, and more
 - Rehoused materials by collection or subject in new archival boxes; created subject binders; made recommendations about which items to dispose of
 - Periodically reported on project progress to Town of Portage Historian and Town Board and submitted summary report on completion of processing
 - Estimated 225 hours spent on project.
- Updated Disaster Response Pocket Plan; disseminated it and posted it around office
- Participated in Art Survey Project (May-September)
 - Oversaw summer intern who was assisting with project
 - Took photos and recorded details of original art works at all nine local historical societies
- Assumed management of OnCell audio tour website and app
- Assessed and consolidated office and archival supplies to maximize storage space
- Overhauled categorization system in master inventory to ease access and began new system of digital files management and labeling protocols

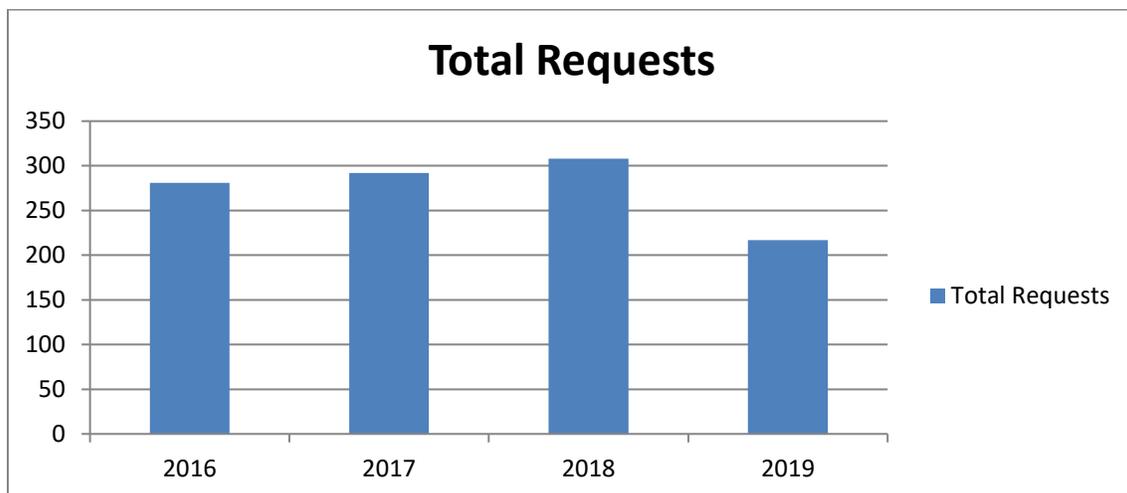
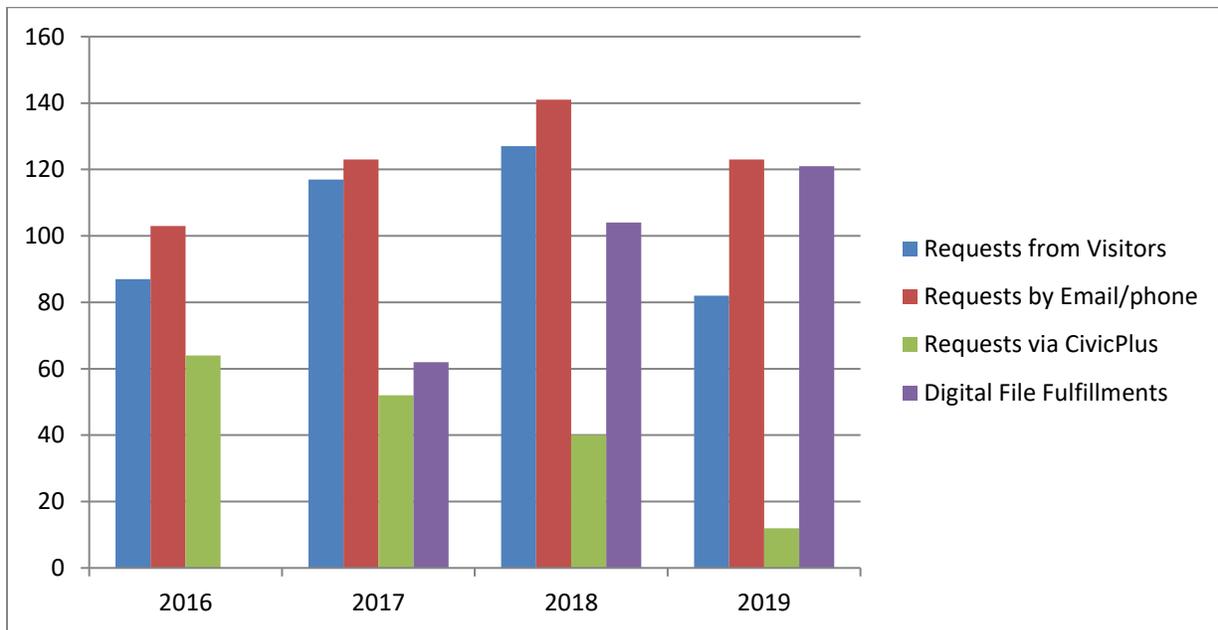
Projects in Progress

- *Poorhouse Records* – Continued to process and assess collection; this included:
 - Identifying and describing collection to the folder level
 - Inventorying to the item level materials mentioning any deaths and burials
 - Researching individual cases to locate burials where possible, and creating master list of those who passed away while residents at the County Home from 1839 to 1940, indicating burial information where possible
 - Researching Geneseo Town Clerk's burial permits record series
 - Beginning to formulate finding aid for collection
 - Engaging in background research on Public Welfare Law and other changes to the almshouse and welfare systems with special focus on the 1910s through 1960s.
- *Local History Out Loud: Part Two* – Began assisting County Historian with project

Comments

It was a substantially quieter year in the research room, with total requests down 29% from 2018. Comparing numbers of requests via all avenues from 2016-2019, there was a trend of increasing requests from 2016-2018 with a marked decline in 2019. Interestingly, however, the number of digital file requests fulfilled from 2017 to present has grown steadily. This suggests that researchers have identified items that they wish to request via the online database or website and specifically ask.

The other notable trend is a significant decrease in researchers submitting requests via the Research Request Form and opting for phone calls or direct emails to staff.



With fewer researchers coming in person and the trend in desiring access to digital materials, 2019 was a good year for digitizing and creating finding aids. Working to document topics that have been historically overlooked was also a focus, and 2019 felt like a concentrated, productive year with more community outreach than usual, especially in light of the upcoming Bicentennial.