

LIVINGSTON COUNTY
DEPARTMENT ANNUAL REPORT SUMMARY
REPORT FOR YEAR ENDING 2020

DEPARTMENT: County Historian

2020 PROGRAM SUMMARY:

It is a privilege to submit my 17th annual report as County Historian. As with all aspects of government, 2020 was unlike any other year as the Covid-19 virus turned into a global pandemic and quickly spread to the United States. With the exception of a few in-person events in January and February, all planned public speaking programs were cancelled and travel ceased. The Historian's research room closed to the public on March 16, after the county issued a state of emergency. Deputy Historian, Holly Watson, was temporarily reassigned to assist with the Covid-19 immediate response and then worked primarily from home with the exception of June and July when she was furloughed. Volunteer projects and new interns were put on hold.

Despite the pandemic progress was made in several areas. The services the County Historian's Office continued as requests for research were answered promptly and the webpage was expanded and kept current; thousands of records were entered into a searchable data base and hundreds of records were digitized; and a new video documenting the second half of the 19th century in Livingston County was produced; a Covid-19 documentation project and a Women's Heritage Trail were launched; biographies of women from all eras were compiled for a book project to be published in 2021; grant funding was received to purchase a historical marker for the Poorhouse Farm and County Home; and planning continued for Livingston County's Bicentennial in 2021.

2020 presented huge challenges for this small office but overall the year allowed time to evaluate and update operations and to envision ways to manage services in the post-pandemic world going forward. My sincere thanks and appreciation goes to Holly Watson, the Board of Supervisors, County Administrator, Department of Health, the first responders, the essential workers, and all those people connected to the management of Livingston County's governmental services. Their leadership in this time of crisis will help future generations understand the magnitude and impact this historic event

I. Office Management, Collection Development

1. Preservation and expansion of historical records collection:

- a. **Public Research Room:** In 2020 approximately 26 people utilized the research room before it closed to the public. 200 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: (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 – several hundred 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. Jane Oakes – Transcription of Hartman diaries (on-going)
- b. Collin Lagios – SUNY Geneseo intern (project cancelled)

II. Community Outreach and Advocacy

1. **Town Historian meetings** – no town historian’s meeting occurred in 2020 due to Covid19.
2. **Special Projects**

Livingston County Bicentennial - 2020 was a year of planning and preparation with contingency plans in case public gatherings are still prohibited in 2021. The bulk of activities will be either virtual or outdoors.

- In February, I presented *Countdown to the Bicentennial* program for the Mt. Morris Dam Lecture and to West Sparta Historical Society. (Only in-person programs of 2020.)
- I met virtually or by phone with several people and organizations to discuss ways to collaborate on projects and events related to the upcoming bicentennial including: County Administrator, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors, Central Services, Economic Development, Genesee Valley Conservancy, and Livingston County Historical Society.
- Several Bicentennial Moments were shared on the county’s social media sites and posted to the County Historian’s webpage
- Some collaborative events include County Departments include: County Geo-Caching Trail being developed led by Marty DeMarte and Holly Watson; a classic car tour of Livingston county being developed by Heather Ferrero; and Cheers to 200 Years being developed by Maureen Wheeler of Economic Development. Also a Bicentennial Tree Planting event is being coordinated by Ben Gajewski, Genesee Valley Conservancy.
- The draft calendar of events for 2021 was presented to the Board of Supervisors in October

Local History Out Loud video project: 35 individuals recorded narrations in January for the new video *Local History Our Loud part two – from the Civil War to the Industrial Revolution*. The video was written and produced by the County Historian with the assistance of Deputy Historian. Audio was recorded at Holt Studio in Leicester. The hour-long video was released in September 2020.

Grant for Historic Marker: Grant funding was awarded by The William Pomeroy Foundation for a historic marker to be placed at the site of the former Poorhouse Farm and County Home. Installation is planned to coincide with the Bicentennial in 2021.

COVID-19 documentation project: The office launched this effort in April to collect experiences and reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic through words, photos, and/or voice or video recordings. A form for the public is on the office webpage.

3. Public Speaking

- February: Countdown to the Bicentennial – West Sparta Historical Society and the Mt. Morris Dam Lecture
- March: Zoom interview with Channel 13 Good Day Rochester on the new Women’s History Trail and Bicentennial Plans
- April: Radio interview with a Batavia station on the history of the Mt. Morris Tuberculosis Hospital

III. Professional Development, Board/Organization Involvement

- 1) **New York State Historical Records Advisory Board (SHRAB)** - member since 2014
 - a. **Met via Zoom**
- 2) New York State 250th Revolutionary War planning committee
 - a. Met via Zoom

202 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. Implementation and participation in the Livingston County Bicentennial 2021

Submitted by Amie Alden, Livingston County Historian

March 8, 2021

Attached: Deputy Historian annual report

Annual Report: January – December 2020

Holly C. Watson

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 requests received in person in the Research Room: 26
 - Number of research requests received via CivicPlus online form: 14
 - Number of research requests received via e-mail, letter, or phone: 128
 - Total number of research requests in 2020: 168
 - Total number of requests for digital materials fulfilled over e-mail: 81
- Attending quarterly staff meetings;
- Tidying and cleaning the research room, work area, and storage areas as needed and attending to ongoing digital files management; monitoring humidity and pests;
- Accessioning new acquisitions, describing items, and specifying locations in master inventory;
- Creating finding aids for collections and records series;
- Maintaining an online presence on the County Historian’s website with announcements, links, photographs, articles, and lists of resources;
- Managing OnCell Heritage Tours, including updates and creating new maps and trails;
- Assisting County Historian with planning and executing exhibits, publications, and events.

Other Related Activities

- Attended program hosted by Avon Historical and Preservation Society, “Hops Growing and Brewing in the Genesee Country” (Jan.)
- Was reassigned part time in March to the County COVID-19 task force as Internal Public Information Officer, acting as assistant to County Administrator Ian Coyle and Public Information Officer Julie Barry. Tasks included:
 - Collecting news and health bullet points to include in daily email communications from the County Administrator to staff and local leaders (Mar. 16 – Mar. 27)
 - Creating a chronology of actions the County Government had taken, reaching back to about February 2020, to address the crisis; documenting national and international actions that potentially impacted Livingston County (Mar-May)
 - Assisting with updates to the County COVID-19 information and news webpage as well as County social media (Mar-May)
- Was reassigned part time to assist with Foodlink emergency food box distribution events (early Apr-May); responsibilities included:
 - Answering phones to register clients for distribution events

- Maintaining up-to-date lists of registrants, including confirming information, making alternative arrangements, and communicating with clients by phone and email
- Identifying solutions to improve logistics of registration and distribution
- Attended APHNYS online conference sessions on documenting current issues and inclusivity and diversity in history (Sep.)
- Was elected secretary of Government Appointed Historians of Western NY for 2021-2022 (GAHWNY) (Oct.)

Projects

Completed projects

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

Completed the following finding aids in 2020:

- Woman's Relief Corps Collection (C170)
- Revisions to the Glass Negatives Series Finding Aid – adding two new collections
- West Sparta Election and Tax Collection (C189)
- Alberta Z. Rosebrugh Collection (C145)
- Veterans' Services Agency Collection (C146)
- Peabody Diaries Collection (C116)

- Created a new Finding Aids page on the Historian's website with abstracts of 49 special collections and 30 full finding aids.

Indexing – Involved indexing various small record groups and entering them onto the County Historian's Online Records Index to improve accessibility of information.

Completed the following indexing projects in 2020:

Church Records Series:

- Springwater Sunday School Circuit Book, 1842-1871 (2,757 entries)

Poorhouse Series:

- County Home Monthly Reports, 1926-1955 (1,927 new entries; series complete)

Other indexing projects:

- Groveland Town Clerk's Book, 1797-1833 (4,053 entries)
- Livingston County Anti-Slavery Society minutes, 1837-1839 (294 entries)
- Mt. Morris Anti-Slavery Society minutes, 1835-1837 (44 entries)
- Up and Down the Hemlock, by W. B. Waite, 1883 (356 entries)

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

Completed the following digitization projects in 2020:

- Record of the Proceedings of the Nurse Association of the Village of Geneseo, 1914-1920
- Livingston County Anti-Slavery Society minutes, 1837-1839
- Up and Down the Hemlock, by W. B. Waite, 1883
- Additions to postcard series (approx. 72 new items)
- James Jeremiah Wadsworth Collection photographs held by LCHS (60 items)
- Town of Portage Historian's Collection (ongoing):
 - Church records, 1828-2003 (22 items)
 - Erie Railroad records, 1913-1946 (1 item)
 - Photographs (340 items)

Other Projects

- Overhauling Historical Markers reference binder, re-inventorying all historical markers
- Creating new OnCell trails: Historical Markers (several tours grouped by subject) and Women's History Trail
- Researched and attended online meetings and demos in search for new software to support the County Historian's Online Record Index; so far, no ideal candidates have been identified

Projects in Progress

- Town of Portage Historian's Collection digitization
- Coronavirus pandemic documentation: statistics, local, state, and national timeline
- Women's Biographical Review: researching and writing biographies of Livingston County women for October 2021 publication

Comments

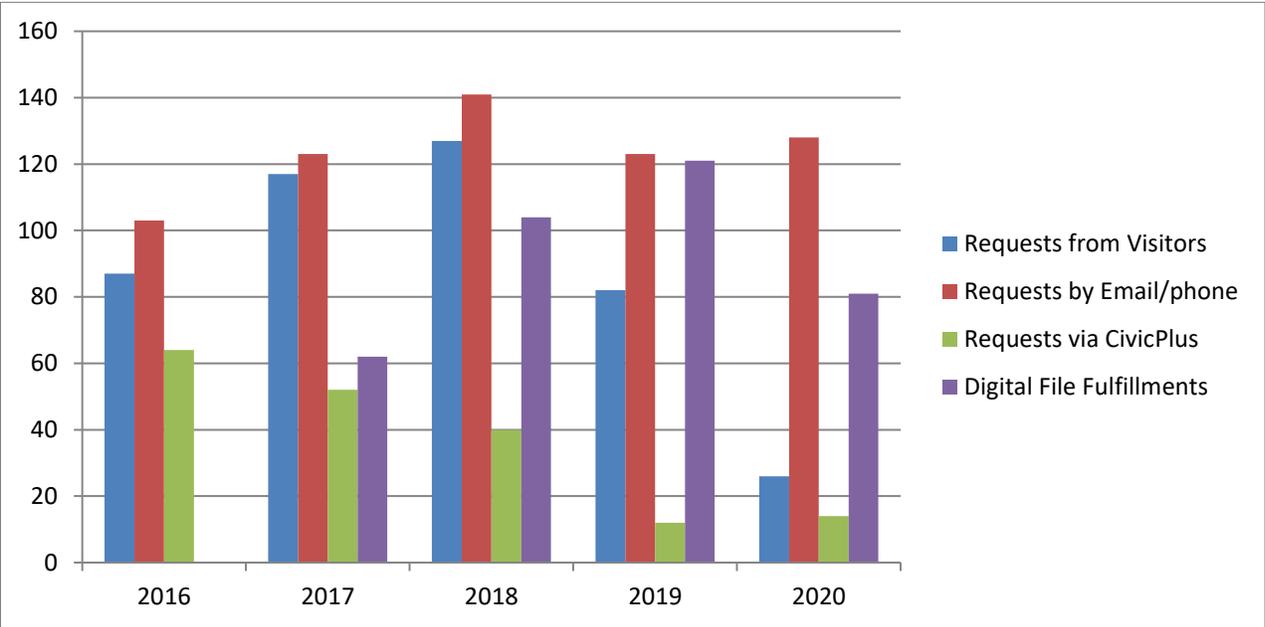
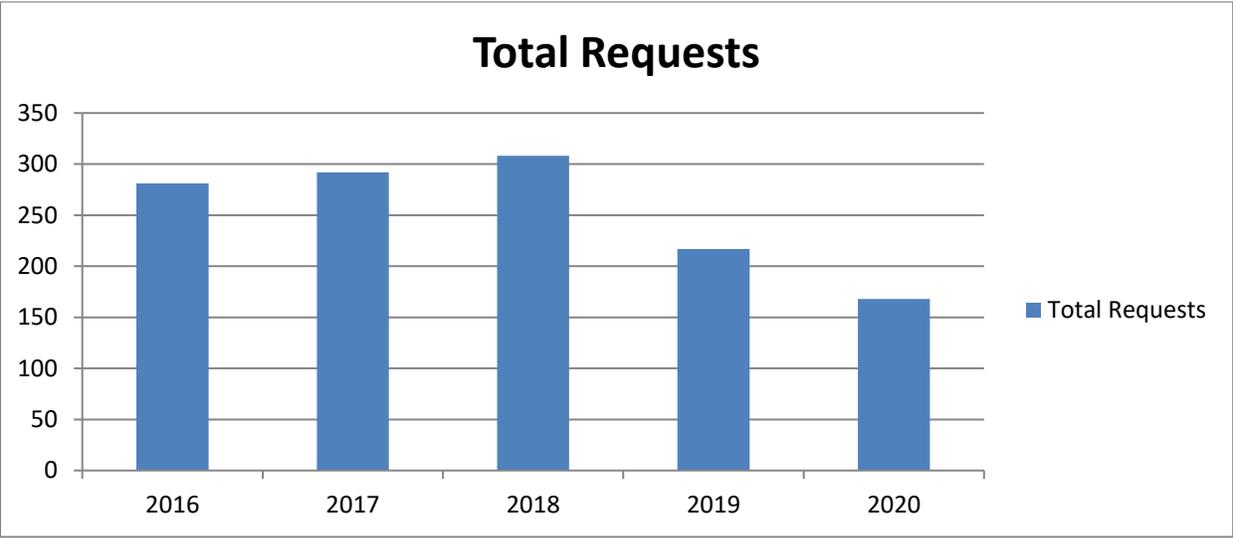
2020 was indelibly marked by the coronavirus; the Research Room was closed to the public on March 16, remaining closed until August 24, 2020 and then closing again on November 16 through the end of the year. I was furloughed from May 26 until July 31, 2020.

The total number of research requests was significantly fewer this year, especially those requesting in person. Considering the furlough, however, the overall impact to the number of requests was not tremendous.

The slower rate of in-person researchers this year provided time to digitize, index, research, and write. Providing information and resources online was a focus, as was broadening my understanding of the historian's strengths and shortcomings in documenting underrepresented topics and voices.

Looking toward 2021, I hope to continue working on finding aids, bicentennial events, and providing excellent service to researchers in person, when conditions allow, and from afar. Expanding web offerings will continue to be a focus, and putting energy into sharing resources with the GAHWNY membership will be a new role. I also plan to create an inventory of pre-1900 records housed at Records Management.

As ever, I am grateful for the flexibility and work environment of the Historian's Office!



N.B. There may have been an error in reporting Requests from Visitors vs. Requests by Email/Phone in past years. Comparisons to 2020 therefore may not be accurate.
