

LIVINGSTON COUNTY
DEPARTMENT ANNUAL REPORT SUMMARY
REPORT FOR YEAR ENDING 2021

DEPARTMENT: County Historian

2021 PROGRAM SUMMARY:

It is a privilege to submit my 18th annual report as County Historian. 2021 will be etched in the history books for many reasons, most significantly as Livingston County's bicentennial year that took place amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic that wreaked havoc and caused upheaval in the lives of people in every corner of the state and around the world.

Despite immense challenges, the County Historian's Office succeeded in presenting multiple programs and events throughout the year that drew people of all ages together (albeit virtually and/or socially distanced) to celebrate and commemorate the county's 200th anniversary. Several county departments, community leaders, and dozens of individuals (including students) volunteered their time assisting with many of the programs that helped to make the milestone bicentennial year inclusive and memorable. A full list of bicentennial related programs and events is included in this report.

In addition to bicentennial programming, the County Historian's Office completed a major book project. *Women's Biographical Review: Achievers, Leaders, and Role Models* features 200 women associated with Livingston County from all eras, all towns in the county, and from all walks of life. The book is available (2022) for sale in the office, from Sundance Books, and on Amazon.

The Research Center operated smoothly by appointment only with Covid-19 protocols in place for most of the year that included masking and limiting the number of researchers in the office at any given time. Occasional walk-ins were accommodated. 2021 saw the highest number of research requests received via email, phone, and through the digital form on the website. Throughout the year the website was updated, the online database was continually expanded, hundreds of original documents were scanned, and archival collections were processed. For more details see Deputy Historian Holly Watson's report attached.

While I take great pride in what was accomplished by this office in 2021, I look forward to 2022 and new opportunities. I am confident the office will continue expanding services, improving preservation of the archival collection, and making historical information more accessible. My sincere thanks and appreciation goes to Holly Watson, volunteers Doreen DeCamp, Jane Oakes, and Madeline Friedler, and SUNY Geneseo student intern Kaylee Hill. I am grateful to the Board of Supervisors and the county administration continuing to support this office and respecting Livingston County's history and culture.

I. Office Management, Collection Development

1. Preservation and expansion of historical records collection:

- a. **Public Research Room:** In 2021 approximately 23 people utilized the research room and **about 300** 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. Doreen DeCamp – processing of James Jeramiah Wadsworth (JJW) collection
 - c. Madeline Friedler – indexing and digitizing historical records
 - d. Kaylee Hill – SUNY Geneseo Intern – assisted with collection

II. Community Outreach and Advocacy

- a. **SUNY Geneseo 150th anniversary community advisory committee**
- b. **COVID-19 documentation project (on-going)**

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.

- b. **Livingston County Bicentennial** - 2021 list of programs and events.

Official launch of Livingston County's Bicentennial – Special BOS meeting February 23rd - meeting was streamed live on Zoom. The program included: Pledge of Allegiance led by Lauren & Piper Wadsworth – 7th generation descendants of pioneer James Wadsworth. “American the Beautiful” – performed by Felicity Thomas, granddaughter of the late Honorable J. Robert Houston, County Judge. Video montage with congratulatory greetings from the New York State Historian, several county historical societies, town historians, community leaders, and organizations.

“Commemorating Our Past” speech by County Historian Amie Alden. “The River Listens” – an original poem written and presented by Albert Abonado, poet and SUNY Geneseo Professor. The program concluded with a recorded rendition of “Over the Rainbow” performed by The Genesee Valley Children's Choir.

Historical marker dedications – 3 grant funded markers were placed on county properties

- **Courthouse** on April 28th, included a performance by the Livonia High School Wind Ensemble
- **County Poorhouse** on June 30th, included the reading of 327 names of people who died at the poorhouse and are buried in numbered or unmarked graves in the two poorhouse cemeteries.
- **Murray Hill** - September 2nd in front of Building 1

Livingston County Bicentennial - 2021 list of programs and events continued

OnCell Heritage Trails - 4 new trails at Livingston.oncell.com

- Historical Markers trail
- Churches and religious sites trail
- Around the Towns trail
- Saints & Sinners Cemetery trail

Cheers to 200 Years trail - May – November craft beverage releases led by Maureen Wheeler of the Livingston County Economic Development and local breweries, wineries, and cider makers.

Bicentennial Geocaching Trail – includes 36 sites across Livingston County, went live on July 4th. The trail attracted over 100 “cachers” from 10 states plus 2 “world travelers.” The geocaching trail was project led by Marty DeMarte.

Livingston County weekend at Genesee Country Village & Museum – held July 24-25th and included discounted admission and guided tours of the 17 buildings from Livingston County,

Classic Car Cruise and Car Show – held August 15th, included 100 of cars from all eras. 60 cars participated in the morning cruise winding through every town in Livingston County and an additional 40 cars participated in the afternoon car show at Millennium Drive, Geneseo. Heather Ferrero of the County Planning Department led this project.

Bicentennial tree distribution project - October 13th with 170 trees distributed to county supervisors in collaboration with the Genesee Valley Conservancy.

Book project: *Women’s Biographical Review: Achievers, Leaders, & Role Models* was co-authored by Amie Alden and Holly C. Watson – features 200 women from all eras, all towns in the county, and all walks of life. Arrived January, 2022.

Exhibits

- “Art and History Affair” exhibit at the Genesee Valley Council on the Arts. September 2 – 25th. More than 30 paintings relating to people, places, and scenes from the collections of nine historical society museums in the county were displayed along with some artifacts.
- Livonia Library - An exhibit on the bicentennial was mounted in the main area. October 12 – November 12th.
- Photographs and biographies of numerous Livingston County veterans from all eras were featured on the county Facebook page throughout the month of November.

Other - Public programs promoting the county bicentennial (presented in person)

- Livingston County Seniorama, May 22nd
- Dansville Historical Society Annual Meeting, October 2nd
- Geneseo Monday Evening Class, October 4th
- Springwater Historical Society.

Livingston County Bicentennial - 2021 list of programs and events continued.

Media interviews

- Western New York podcast, March 11th
- WGSU SUNY Geneseo radio interview, March 25th
- NYSAC podcast, May 20th
- WHAM TV-13 interview, December 15th
- Livingston County News, several throughout 2021

Time Capsule: A metal box once belonging to William A. Brodie (1841-1917), who served as county treasurer in the late-1800s, was placed in the safe at the County Treasurer's Office on December 15th after the last Board of Supervisors' meeting of the year. The box contained mementos of the bicentennial year, a scroll with signatures of county supervisors and others, and additional items related to Livingston County over the last 200 years. It is intended to be opened in 50 years coinciding with the county's 250th anniversary.

III. Board/Organization Involvement

- 1) New York State Historical Records Advisory Board (SHRAB) - member since 2014, term expired April 2022.
- 2) New York State 250th Revolutionary War planning committee
 - a. participated via Zoom

2022 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 of new online search engine software program.

Submitted by Amie Alden, Livingston County Historian

March 1, 2022

Attached: Deputy Historian annual report

Holly C. Watson

Deputy Livingston County 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 researchers in person in the Research Room: 23
 - Number of research requests received via CivicPlus online form: 21
 - Number of research requests received via e-mail, letter, or phone: 161
 - Total number of research requests in 2021: 205
 - Total number of requests for digital materials fulfilled over e-mail: 97
- Attending quarterly staff meetings;
- Tidying the research and storage areas as needed and monitoring climate control and pests;
- Accessioning and describing acquisitions and maintaining reference binders with relevant resources;
- Attending to ongoing digital files management;
- Creating finding aids for collections and records series;
- Maintaining an online presence on the County Historian's website with announcements, links, photographs, articles, and resources, and writing social media posts as needed;
- Managing OnCell Heritage Tours, including updating and creating new maps and trails;
- Assisting county historian with planning and executing exhibits, publications, and events.

Other Related Activities

- Served as secretary for Government Appointed Historians of Western NY (GAHWNY) (Jan-Dec)
 - Maintained GAHWNY website and Facebook page, added announcements and links; established Instagram page
 - Managed Western NY historians' list with current contact information
- Attended Iroquois Genealogy Society virtual meeting (Apr)
- Attended NY Archives Conference (NYAC) online (Jun)
- Participated in OCLC Research focus group regarding a national finding aid aggregator (Jun)
- Attended dedication of Burke's Tavern historical marker in Mt. Morris (Dec)

Projects

Completed projects

Bicentennial Year

- Assisted county historian with monthly events and projects (copyediting, attending meetings and events, technological support, photography/videography, website management and social media posts, other communications, preparing documents, etc.)
- Researched and wrote biographies for the *Women's Biographical Review*; conducted interviews, collected images/info from relatives and scholars, copyedited, book layout, created index, etc.
- Finalized list of 326 known burials at the Livingston County Poorhouse cemeteries and assisted with organizing dedication and remembrance event
- Selected electronic equipment assets for improved virtual engagement (camera, tripod, PA system, etc.);
- Recorded, produced, and edited several videos, including of Gail McGuire and Classic Car Day;
- Created four new OnCell Heritage Trails

Finding Aids – Involved creating relevant descriptions and lists for collections and series to improve accessibility of information.

Completed the following finding aids in 2021:

- Historian's Office Internal Inventory descriptive aid
- Lockwood R. Doty (1885-1937) Papers (revised)
- Genesee Country Historical Federation Collection
- Isaac and Hannah Alsop Riley Family Collection
- Letters to Charlie Collection

Indexing – Entering index terms onto the County Historian's Online Records Index to improve accessibility of various small record groups.

Completed the following indexing projects in 2021:

- Portage GAR Post No. 343 Descriptive Book, 1883-1907

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

Completed the following major digitization projects in 2021:

- Bernarr Macfadden collection, Dansville Area Historical Society (171 images)
- Portage Town Historian's Collection, including:
 - Completed the photograph series, (771 total images)

- GAR Collection items
- Church records (record books, correspondence, programs, annual reports)
- School attendance registers and publications
- Erie Railroad employee record book, 1913-1946

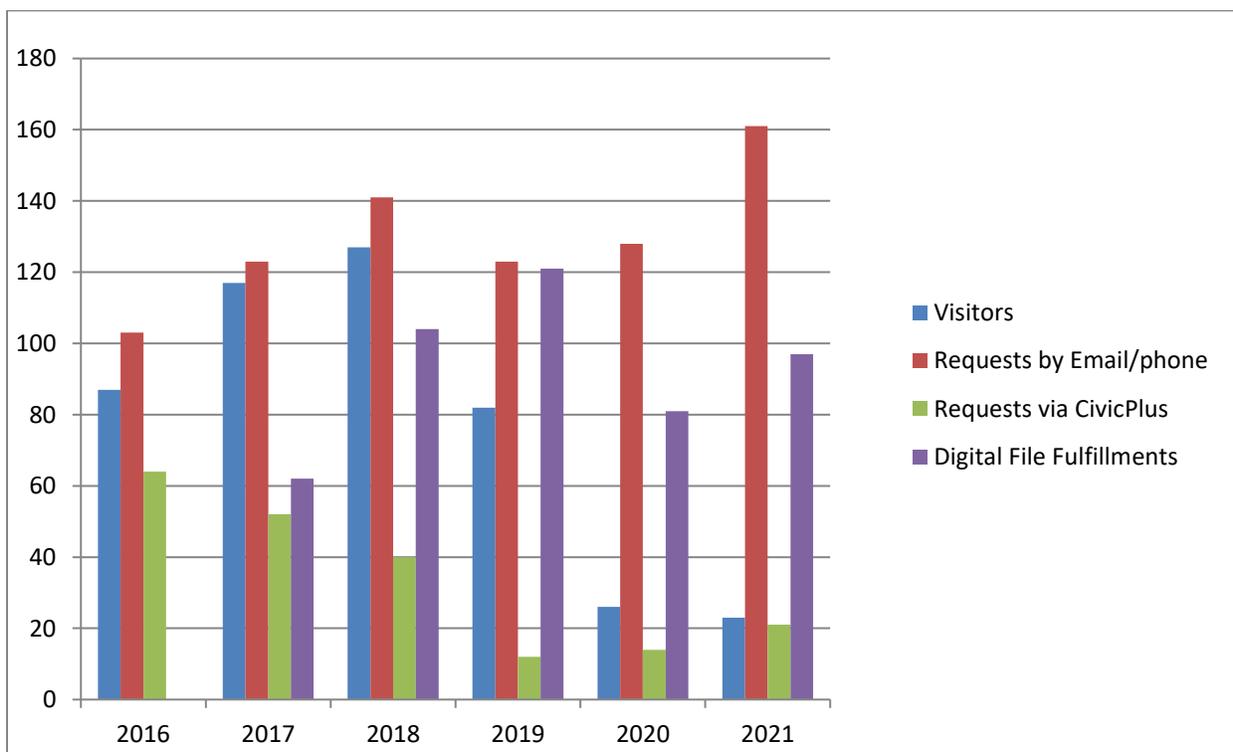
Other Projects and Highlights

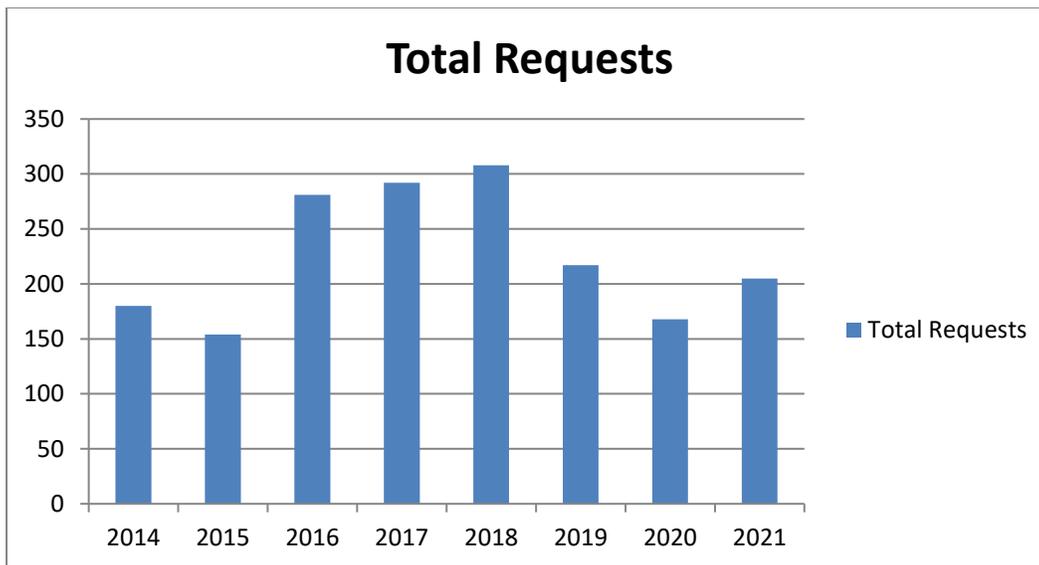
- Maintained coronavirus pandemic timeline throughout year, with statistics and milestones;
- Established a YouTube channel for Historian’s Office media;
- Researched and selected third-party software developer for migration of Historian’s Online Records Database to new platform;
- Helped supervise weekly volunteer and intern projects.

Projects in Progress

- Continuing to document coronavirus pandemic via timeline with statistics and milestones
- Digital files management, including organizing digitized newspapers and migrating files from CDs and DVDs onto the network drive;
- Supervising intern and volunteer projects.

Charts





Comments

The numerous bicentennial events dominated my year, especially researching, writing, and editing the *Women's Biographical Review: Achievers, Leaders, and Role Models*. As one of my main projects from August 2020 until December 2021, the book was a major accomplishment to wrap up. The burial list for the poorhouse cemeteries was another culmination of work over several years' time. All told, the bicentennial year felt busy and successful despite the ongoing pandemic.

Due to the pandemic, the office continued accepting visits by appointment, but the number of in-person research visits was the lowest yet recorded since 2016. In contrast, requests received by phone and email were the highest yet recorded, showing an overall improvement in historical interest after a disappointing 2020.

These numbers, along with modern circumstances, are a reminder of the importance of accessibility via online resources and prompt remote service. As another example, OnCell Heritage Tours garnered over 6,000 unique visitors from across the country during 2021, with western NY well represented. When new trails were launched, the site was visited hundreds of times.

As I look toward the coming year, I eagerly anticipate the implementation of a new interface for the hundreds of thousands of records in the Historian's Online Database. It is expected to be easier for the public to use, expand possibilities for informational offerings, and be more secure and stable than the old system.

Finally, as a historian who uses amassed historical resources daily, and always wishes there were more, the rapid development of current events also serves as a reminder to seek out and collect relevant resources about present topics. These include the coronavirus, the impact of national politics and social justice events and movements, and local decisions about cannabis establishments. I plan to continue collecting relevant information on these and more topics with an eye toward under-documented topics and groups whenever possible.

