



ANNUAL REPORT 2025



LIVINGSTON COUNTY
HISTORIAN'S OFFICE



LETTER FROM THE HISTORIAN

Dear Livingston County Board of Supervisors, Administrator, and residents:

It is a privilege to submit my fourth annual report as County Historian. Each day I am humbled to be the eighth county historian in a lineage reaching back to 1933.

This year, the County Historian's Office completed several signature projects while simultaneously providing prompt and friendly customer service and continuing daily mission-based activities.

A few of the office's highlights included documenting a long-forgotten African M.E. Church in Geneseo; surpassing last year's number of public presentations; cracking the generations-old mystery of Cal-Mum fly-tier Sara J. McBride and publishing an article for *Dark Skies Fly-Fishing* magazine; and recognition from Assemblywoman Bailey at the NYS Capitol during Women's History Month (as seen in photograph above).

Deputy Historian Madeline Friedler built additional skills this year, including learning the intricacies of several new software tools. She continues to process collections tirelessly, whether they are digital or physical acquisitions. If you have contacted the Historian's Office, you have likely talked with Madeline, as she manages the research room and responds to daily queries, always going the extra mile for patrons.

Over the summer, the historian's office hosted Caleb, an intern through SUNY Geneseo. He indexed and digitized naturalization records and newspapers, organized postcards, and created metadata. Weekly volunteers Jane and Ron transcribed diaries and indexed hundreds of obituaries, church records, and Civil War records. Thanks to our volunteers' time, these valuable collections are online and more accessible to the public.

In the coming year, I plan to develop additional programming and enhance resources, partner with others to commemorate the nation's 250th birthday, and continue utilizing technology to improve access to archival collections and information.

My sincere thanks and appreciation goes to the Board of Supervisors and the county administrator for their continued support of the County Historian's Office. The department is proud to grow, learn, and continue to offer unparalleled access to historical information. Thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Holly Watson".

HOLLY WATSON

Livingston County Historian



MISSION

The mission of the County Historian's Office is to collect, preserve, and interpret the County's documentary heritage and manage historical records for the public.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Collecting, preserving, and interpreting historical information
- Assisting county departments and the general public with research
- Offering displays and programming on topics of historical significance
- Providing guidance to the 17 town historians of Livingston County
- Attending events

PUBLIC RESEARCH ROOM AND ARCHIVES

In 2025, the Historian's Office received 330 research requests online or by phone about people, places, and events. The continued movement toward remote information-seeking is undeniable. This strong trend directs the office's focus on making information readily available online and providing excellent customer service.

IN-PERSON VS. REMOTE REQUESTS



TOTAL RESEARCH REQUESTS, 2014-2025



SIGNATURE PROJECTS



1

NEWSPAPER ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT

Thanks to ARPA funds allocated to preservation and access, over 291,000 pages of local newspapers were rescanned to archival standards and will soon be available on NYS Historic Newspapers.

This round of newspapers is mainly from the 20th century and will multiply the existing online holdings by a factor of four or more, supporting the Historian’s Office’s mission to preserve documentary history and and provide free patron access to information.



“HARD AT WORK” PHOTO PANELS

2

Through partnerships with the Highway Department Sign Shop and Central Services, the Historian’s Office installed two large photo collage panels on the first floor of the Government Center.

The collected images, dating from the 1800s to present, celebrate the innovation, expertise, and dedication of hardworking Livingston County residents and the development of our communities.

3

ONLINE CATALOG LAUNCH

For the first time ever, patrons can conduct online searches for items in the county archives. Over 49,000 items, including books, letters, maps, and photographs, are described and now searchable for the public. Previously, researchers had to ask the Historian’s Office what items were available.

In 2026, the focus will turn to linking digital items to the catalog entries for even better accessibility.





WEBPAGE AND ONLINE RESOURCES

- The County Historian’s Office webpage was updated throughout the year to reflect new resources, links, and announcements.
- New subpages about the Sullivan Campaign, local Civil War regiments, and indigenous history were added.

RECORDS INDEX AND CATALOG

In September, the County Historian’s descriptive catalog was added to the fully searchable Record Index platform, allowing the public to **locate historical items like never before.**

The database **expanded by over 60,700 new entries** this year, or 14%, thanks to additional volunteer and intern work and integrating the new Catalog record type. The office anticipates hitting **half a million records** by Q1 2026.

During 2025, **more than 3,000 users performed over 15,800 searches**, an increase over last year.



PRESERVICA

The Historian’s Office is pleased to offer Preservica, a brand-new platform for sharing high-quality images online while helping ensure their proper digital preservation in the background. Recognizing today’s trends, it is imperative that patrons can easily find what they need online. Additionally, security and preservation of digital files in a technologically fast-paced world requires powerful tools--this what Preservica does best.

The Historian’s Office anticipates an official launch of Preservica in Q1 2026.





HISTORICAL RECORDS PRESERVATION AND ACCESS



900+
ITEMS DONATED

- Donated items were appraised, arranged, and described. Physical items were housed in archival-quality storage containers and digital items were stored on the secure county server.
- Accepted donations included maps, directories, photographs, newspapers, and record books, all related to people, organizations, places, and local events.



295,000+
PAGES DIGITIZED

- Hundreds of thousands of documents and photographs were digitized, including newspapers, Craig Colony and CCC photographs, fire department records, and naturalizations. Digitization is vital in the preservation, retrieval, and sharing of information.



7
SCANNING
PROJECTS
FACILITATED

- Organizations, individuals, and town historians often wish to have items digitized but do not have the proper equipment. The Historian's Office undertook or facilitated several scanning projects for local historians, historical societies, organizations, and individuals, resulting in thousands of digital images that are now backed up and accessible.



11,700+
NEW INDEX ENTRIES

- Thousands of entries from obituaries, business ledgers, tax rolls, Civil War records, and church records were typed up for the County Historian's online Record Index.
- Hundreds of obituaries from local papers were indexed.



425
VOLUNTEER HOURS

- Jane Oakes – Transcription of James B. Harrison diaries (Jan.-Dec.)
- Ron Browne – Indexing historical records and obituaries (Jan.-Dec.)
- Caleb Secor – Indexing newspapers and naturalizations, digitizing naturalizations, and describing collections (May-Jul.)



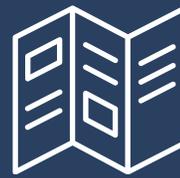
COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ADVOCACY



26
PRESENTATIONS



570
IN-PERSON
ATTENDEES



900+
POORHOUSE
BROCHURES
DISTRIBUTED



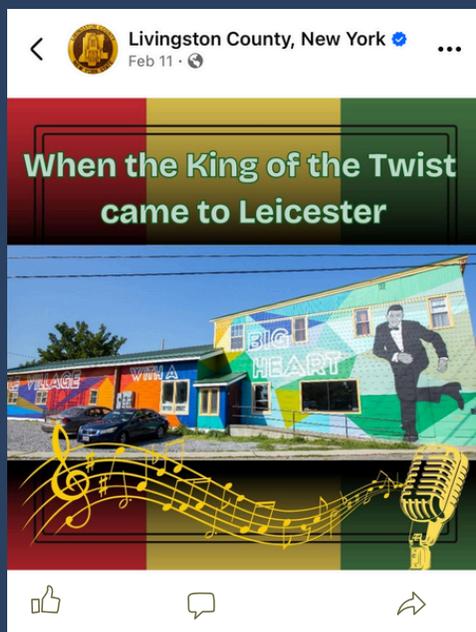
25
SOCIAL MEDIA
POSTS



3,770+
ENGAGEMENTS
ON ALL POSTS



175+
MURRAY HILL
BROCHURES
DISTRIBUTED



The year's top Facebook post reached over 33,500 accounts, gathered 390 reactions and over 50 comments, and was shared 90 times.



The historian visited Cal-Mum Central School to present to the League of Extraordinary Middle Schoolers about 19th-century entomologist and fly tier Sara J. McBride.

Based on their research, the group is planning to dedicate a historical marker in front of McBride's childhood home in Mumford in spring 2026.



COMMITTEE AND ORGANIZATION INVOLVEMENT

County Historian Holly Watson

- Served as president for GAHWNY (Government-Appointed Historians of Western NY); handled communications, updated social media, and assisted with planning and execution of annual conference.
- Served on county SHAPE Advisory Board.
- Served as ex-officio member and secretary of Livingston County Information Governance Board.

Deputy County Historian Madeline Friedler

- Served on Al Lorenz Family Fest planning committee and participated in Family Fest.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



38
TRAININGS AND
EVENTS

- Staff attended in-person and online conferences and trainings related to archives, historical topics, business processes, and emergency preparedness.
- Attended networking and commemorative events, including Avon Driving Park kiosk dedication, opening ceremonies for the Moving Wall at the National Warplane Museum, Hometown Histories at GVC&M, and the Town of Conesus bicentennial celebration.



PATRON COMMENTS

“These documents are like gold for our family records. It is possible that I am the first one in the family to see these in one hundred years or more. I will share them with family members. Thank you so much for your research. It is very much appreciated!”

“You have some wonderful resources at your disposal and I am so grateful that you have shared the index online and are willing to send copies of the original records. Thanks!!”

“Thank you so much for sending [the photographs]. ...It really is a trove of family history. I cannot thank you enough for the service you provide. It is so appreciated.”

“Your photographs are more helpful than I thought possible, and I'm thrilled with them. ... You and your office are much appreciated. Sending my gratitude and virtual snacks for everyone!”

“Thank you so much. The letter ...is a true gem! So glad I reached out. Very excited to have this info.”





2026 GOALS



Commemorating the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in partnership with several county departments and organizations and documenting related activities throughout 2026.



Launching another round of digitized local newspapers and unveiling Preservica, a new online platform for digital collections.



Publishing the book on the history of Murray Hill with former County Historian Amie Alden.



LIVINGSTON COUNTY HISTORIAN'S OFFICE



Holly Watson, County Historian
Madeline Friedler, Deputy Historian



livingstoncounty.gov/162/county-historian



historian@livingstoncountyny.gov
madelinefriedler@livingstoncountyny.gov



5 Murray Hill Drive
Mount Morris, New York 14510



(585) 243-7955



Monday-Friday, 1:00pm-4:30pm
Closed legal holidays
Appointments encouraged

