

Saratoga County Municipal Historians

By Lauren Roberts, Saratoga County Historian

As I am sure all of our astute readers know, we are very lucky to live in New York State for (at least) one particular reason, and that is our state recognizes the importance of collecting and preserving our history. This year, 2019, is the 100th Anniversary of New York State passing what is commonly referred to as “The Historian’s Law” (NYS Arts and Cultural Affairs Law 57.07) stipulating that each municipality (town, city and village) within the state shall appoint an historian to collect and preserve documents that are important in telling the history of our communities. County historians, like myself, have their duties defined a bit later in NYS Arts and Cultural Affairs Law 57.09.

Here in Saratoga County we are very fortunate to have elected officials who support municipal historians and their efforts in historic preservation. Nearly all of our municipal historian positions are filled throughout our cities, towns and villages with people who are active in their communities and work tirelessly disseminating information to the public through research, writing and presentation. In the past few years we have said goodbye to some wonderful municipal historians and welcomed in newcomers to carry on their work. I would like to introduce you to some of our more recent appointments:

Russ Vandervoort, Town of Waterford Historian

As a lifelong resident of Waterford, Russ is a perfect fit to take on the historian position in this community. Russ is a wealth of knowledge on canal history and can be found giving many public presentations on Waterford’s history throughout the year. He has written two books and is currently working on a third focused on the history of fire service. When not serving as historian, he can be found in his role as Trustee and Deputy Mayor of the Village of Waterford and serving as a 50+ year member of the fire department.

John Cromie, Village of Ballston Spa Historian

John was first exposed to Ballston Spa’s history as a 5th grade member of The Yorkers Club. He has since become a “go-to source” for village history. John is the owner of a few historic buildings and enjoys possessions from past generations and the decorative arts they represent. He has also written articles related to the history of the village and architecture. John is a self-employed general practice attorney which has allowed him to work with many people across the county and with groups such as Friends of Saratoga Battlefield, Galway Preservation Society and Hudson Crossing Park. He has also volunteered on several non-profit boards in the area.

Karen James, Town of Wilton Historian

Karen was working part-time in the Wilton Town Clerk’s Office when she decided to volunteer for some of the town’s 2018 Bicentennial Celebration events. It was around then that longtime Wilton Historian Jeannine Woutersz expressed interest in retiring and Supervisor Art Johnson thought that Karen was a good candidate to continue Jeannine’s work. Karen was honored to be

chosen and began working with Jeannine to learn the ropes before officially taking on the position. Outside of the historian’s office, Karen is a retired IT Manager with New York State and keeps very busy with family activities, volunteering and gardening.

Karen Staulters, Town of Milton Historian

Karen Staulters is a lifelong county resident who has lived in the Town of Milton for over 30 years. She has great interest in genealogy and local history and has worked on several volunteer projects over the last three decades. Karen is one of the founding members of Saratoga County’s genealogical organization, Heritage Hunters, and she has also served as a volunteer archivist for the Upper New York Conference of the United Methodist Church for over thirteen years. Karen has recently retired from her position with Saratoga Bridges as a registered dietician which she held for 15 years.

We welcome these new historians and are excited to see them continuing the work of their predecessors. If you have not yet visited your local historian’s office, you can find their contact information and office hours on their municipality’s respective websites. If you are interested in learning more about your community’s past or have information to share please contact them!

Along with welcoming new historians here in the county, we are proud to honor accomplishments of long-standing municipal historians. This year, Town of Galway Historian **Phyllis Keeler** is celebrating 50 years of serving her community as town historian. Phyllis has been extremely active in her community over the last five decades including working with children in the Galway school district and helping researchers find information on the history of the community.

Phyllis is a retired school teacher who has continued her passion for teaching in her role as a municipal historian. Congratulations to Phyllis on her 50 year dedication to local history and the Galway community!

The Malta What-is-it?

Several accounts have appeared from time to time in relation to some sort of a wild animal, whose cries have been heard, but which has not been seen. Our Malta correspondent writes as follows concerning the mystery: The Malta hippocriff has been heard again. For more than a year we have heard occasional reports that the cry of a wild animal has been heard in various parts of the town. At first a few children were frightened from a berry patch that was near a piece of woods. Then we began to hear of men and women being startled, if not frightened, by its strange, peculiar cry, but as nothing definite could be learned concerning it, some one named it the Malta hippocriff. On the morning of the 16th quite a number of people in this vicinity listened to the cries of this much talked of wild animal. Two of the men started out accompanied by a dog in the direction from which the sound proceeded. They found its tracks on the low land belonging to Joseph Phillips, William A. Collamer and John L. Brownell, but the depth of snow was so great, that after following it for a while, they were obliged to abandon the pursuit. The cry of the animal and the appearance of the tracks indicate that it is not a hippocriff, but something real and substantial though not belonging to this part of the country. Judging from the way it broke through the crust, it was heavier than a fox, but not as heavy as a panther. There were plenty of fox tracks near, and a comparison of the two showed not only the difference in heft, but that this animal had a differently shaped foot. While we wait for further developments we will call it the Malta what-is-it.

From the Feb. 24, 1885 - Saratogian