



# THE HISTORIAN'S EXCHANGE

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## 2018-2019: Years of Anniversaries, Celebrations, and Commemorations

As 2018 draws to a close, we note with great interest the various events to denote the 100th anniversary of the conclusion of World War I.



That "War to End All Wars" brought a peace that was short-lived and threw the world toward solutions that would be neither peaceful, nor long-lived.

That period of unsettled time also resulted in local historical groups being created to document regional participation in the Great War.

It was also one of the factors that would promote the adoption of the appointment of local historians by state law beginning in 1919.

There is much more of this discussion in Devin Lander's excellent piece starting on Page 3 of this issue.

At the recently concluded Annual Conference of the Association of Public Historians of New York State (APHNYS), we were reminded that the year 2019 also represents the 20th anniversary of the merger of two historian groups.

This writer was there that day when the boards of the Association of Municipal Historians of New York State (AMHNYS) and the County Historians Association of New York State (CHANYS) worked for about eight hours to form the crux that would become the constitution and bylaws for the new organization.

It had taken many people working vigorously to make these two groups come together in harmony.

I had the distinct privilege to serve as APHNYS' first president. It seems nearly impossible to conceive that it has been two decades since that day sitting in the Carol Huxley Theater and working through every page of the new rules for this new organization.

So, as 2018 ends and 2019 beckons, we as historians have much work ahead of us.

We need to continue to document, preserve, and promote history. We also, however, need to make time to celebrate — celebrate the 100th anniversary of the historian's law in this state and celebrate 20 years of APHNYS.

Gerald Smith, Editor

## A Message from Our President



Another APHNYS conference has concluded. Thank you to all who assisted in the planning, set-up of equipment, attended, gave programs, and set up exhibits. Plans for the 2019 Conference are underway. The dates are September 9, 10, and 11, 2019, with the Board meeting scheduled for 6pm Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>. The venue is the Desmond Hotel in Albany with room cost at \$130.00 per night. The conference will be hosted by historians from Region 5 (Counties of Albany, Rensselaer, Schenectady, Saratoga, Warren, and Washington). More information as it develops.

I remind our Regional Coordinators to be sure to keep me updated with names of historians, contact information, etc. within your region. Work with all the county historians in your region to get the information. Regional Coordinators are to encourage historians to join APHNYS and to attend regional meetings and the annual conference.

Historians, if you are not sure who your Regional Coordinator might be, you can find the information on the APHNYS website: [www.aphnys.org](http://www.aphnys.org). Regional Coordinators may change in early January 2019 so be sure to keep an eye on the website.

The 2019 dues form is included in this issue of the newsletter. It will also be emailed in late December. For those who do not have email, the form will be mailed to you. If you do not complete all of the form and leave off phone numbers and/or email addresses, we will remove that information from the database. The form needs to be completed each year, even if there are no changes for you. Watch for it; it should be out by late December 2018.

If you ever have questions about APHNYS, whether your dues are current, or other concerns, contact me at: [aphnys@yahoo.com](mailto:aphnys@yahoo.com) or by mail: APHNYS, PO Box 55, Groton, NY 13073. You can call me on my cell phone: 607-280-3322. I no longer am using a land-line so remove the 607-898-5867 phone number.

Rosemarie Tucker  
APHNYS President





## **2018 State of New York History: Address Given at the Annual Association of Public Historians of New York State Conference**

**Devin R. Lander, NYS Historian**

We are nearing several major New York anniversaries in 2019, including the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the New York Mets and New York Jets becoming world champions, and the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Woodstock Music Festival. There are of course other anniversaries to be celebrated next year across New York State and the country, including the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Volstead Act and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the moon landing.

As interesting and important as those anniversaries are, I would like to talk today about the anniversary that is possibly the most important to those of us in this organization. Of course, I am speaking about the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Local Government Historian's Act. This law had its genesis in the ideas of Dr. James Sullivan, who was named New York State Historian in 1916. Dr. Sullivan was the first trained historian to be named State Historian and received his Ph.D. in history from Harvard University. From the earliest beginnings of his time as State Historian, Sullivan was concerned about the state of historical records in New York. In an October 23, 1916 article in the *Utica Herald Dispatch*, Sullivan was quoted as saying that "it is the many and not the few which fashion the customs of ages...and therefore it is most essential that the ways of living occupation, habits and ambitions of the people as a whole should be studied by historians rather than the individual lives of the illustrious men who lived through the periods being scrutinized." Sullivan was certainly ahead of his time in 1916 by, essentially, calling for social history to be undertaken decades before it became a popular subfield of history in the 1960s and 1970s.

He was also ahead of his time by realizing that the system in place in 1916 with regards to the management of local historical records and collections was slipshod and far from uniform. Sullivan had spent time in Europe in 1914—before WORLD WAR I broke out—and believed that both the English and the French had a better appreciation of their collective history than did Americans. Sullivan saw this shortage of historical appreciation and knowledge as a dangerous lack of patriotism in a world threatened by war. In an address given before the Montgomery County Historical Society on June 20, 1917, Sullivan said that "a nation or a people which does not take an interest in its local history is not going to fight for its land," and "our local historical societies in many cases go out of existence because of no local support and our children are brought up in schools with no knowledge of the history of the community in which they live." Sound familiar? And this was in 1917!

Sullivan's first idea to confront this problem was to beseech historical societies to act as their local historical records repositories and work with teachers to increase the amount of local history taught

in schools. When the U.S. entered WORLD WAR I, Sullivan set aside this pursuit and took a leave of absence to become the domestic coordinator of an educational program for soldiers in Europe created by the American University Union and the YMCA. He raised material and recruited teachers to take part in the "Post Schools" that were established in an effort to better educate soldiers after it was realized during the mobilization for war that many were undereducated and even illiterate.

He did not give up his day job, however, and by the spring of 1918 was again involved in attempting to better collect the history of New York State, this time focusing on the role each locality was playing in the war. Again, Sullivan realized that the current system, or lack thereof, made collecting these records by a centralized location such as the Office of State History nearly impossible. Sullivan attempted to remedy the situation in February 1918 by mailing letters that were, according to the *New York Post*, sent to "every county librarian, to school libraries, to historical societies, to teachers of history and other educational groups, asking them to feel personal obligation to preserve significant documents every day," specifically those related to their community's role in the war effort. "This is our time," Sullivan was quoted as saying, "We must stay on the fighting line now. History and archeology are running away from us with invaluable matter—living, breathing records."

Despite Sullivan's best efforts, however, this system of outreach was lacking. Others across the state were beginning to realize that local history was being lost through mismanagement and general carelessness. A November 13, 1918 article in the *Watertown Daily Times* noted that a suggestion had been made in its pages when American first entered the war to appoint a county historian to keep the records of the county's involvement in the war, but that nothing was done. It was not until Clarence L. Fisher published his book *History of Lyons Falls*, part of which was published in the *Daily Times*, that the dire situation related to the preservation and recording of local history came to the attention of Louis M. Martin, Assemblyman from Clinton in Oneida County. Martin was a lawyer and politician with an interest in local history. His original legislative plan was to permit every town to appoint a historian if the town board so desired. Newspaper accounts from the time publicized Martin's plan, and James Sullivan soon took note. He wrote to the assemblyman on December 5, 1918, offering his complete support and assistance in seeing the legislation passed.

The first thing Sullivan did was send copies of his December 5<sup>th</sup> letter to various newspapers in the assemblyman's district in an attempt to drum up support. Next, he reached out to local historical societies for suggestions as to what types of qualifications would be needed for the position of town historian. He received no reply, and in a letter to Assemblyman Martin dated December 26, 1918, bemoaned this fact by saying of the historical societies, "they are very likely to be negligent in this matter now, yet when the bill appears to be extremely critical of any method which is proposed." Martin asked Sullivan to compose some suggestions as to what the content of the legislation should be. His suggestions, outlined in a letter dated December 30, 1918, were as follows:

- There should be a local historian in each town, incorporated village, city of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> class, and borough of cities of the first class.
- They should serve without remuneration or receive such honorarium as the local unit will be willing to provide. Expenses for postage, stationary and cost of materials to be met by the local political unit.
- The appointment to be by the supervisor, president of the village board, mayor and borough pres-



*ident upon nomination by the executive officers of the local historical society, where there is such a society, or by the executive officers of the county historical society, where there is no society for the smaller political unit, and by the executive officers if the New York Historical Society and the State Historian, where there is no historical society for the local unit or the county.*

- He or she shall be a resident of the local political unit in which the service is rendered.
- It shall be his or her duty, in cooperation with the State Historian, to collect and preserve material relating to the history of the political unit for which he or she is acting as historian, and to file such material in fireproof safes or vaults in the town, village and city offices.
- He or she shall look into the condition, classification, and safety from fire of the public records in the public offices of the political unit for which he or she acts as historian and shall call to the attention of the local boards and the State Historian any materials of local historical value which should be acquired for preservation.
- He or she should make an annual report to the appointing official and to the State Historian of the work which has been accomplished during the year.
- He or she should hold office for an indeterminate period and subject to the efficient fulfillment of his or her duties.
- He or she may be removed from office for cause and on the presentation of charges by the nominating officials or the State Historian.
- He or she shall upon retirement or removal from office turn over to the local town, village, city or borough offices all materials gathered during his or her incumbency and all correspondence relating to it
- Notice of official appointment shall be sent to the local historian upon forms provided by the State Historian, signed by the local appointing official and countersigned by the State Historian.
- The local town, village, city, or borough officials shall provide the local historian with sufficient space in the safe, vault or other fireproof building for the preservation of materials which are collected.
- The State Historian shall at regular intervals, not less than once a year, indicate to the local historians the general lines along which the local history material is to be collected.

As we know, several of these items did not make it into the final bill including borough historians (which would come later), the concept that municipalities should be responsible for “cost of materials,” any role that local historical societies, the State Historian, and/or NYSHA had in appointing local historians, provisions for removal from office, and notice of official appointment. Originally all these provisions were added by Assemblyman Martin to the bill, as a letter from Sullivan to Martin praising their inclusion attests from January 22, 1919. So, what happened with the changes?

The answer is that Sullivan got a first-hand look at how the “sausage is made” in Albany. Somewhere between January 22, 1919 and April 18, 1919, and after the bill passed the legislature and was sent to Governor Al Smith, it was recalled for amendment. Sullivan was shocked when he found out and was disappointed that the assemblyman didn’t personally discuss them with him. “I am not at all optimistic about the kind of man or woman that our average supervisor or president of a village board of trustees is going to appoint as local historian,” Sullivan wrote to Martin on April 18,

1919. “Under the measure as originally drafted, the 110 historical societies of the State would have taken a very keen and professional interest in getting good nominees...As of now they will have virtually no interest in the matter, and I venture to predict that by January 1, 1920 scarcely more than 10% of the supervisors and presidents of the boards of village trustees will have appointed their local historians.”

Martin’s reply was short and said, basically, “don’t worry, people will hear about the bill being passed and I am sure local elected officials will act accordingly.” Martin was right, to a point, and many, but not all, municipalities did appoint local historians, a trend that continues 100 years later. From this (somewhat) confused origin sprang the Local Government Historians Law that we know today.

So, what to do about the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the law? How should the state and APHNYS celebrate? Coincidentally, the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Local Government Historians Law (2019) is also the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of APHNYS. The following are some suggestions that may be undertaken to celebrate both momentous occasions:

1. Work with the New York State Legislature to create a Legislative Proclamation acknowledging both the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Local Government Historians law and the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the formation of APHNYS.
2. Utilize the Office of State History website to feature a different local government historian monthly in the “Meet the Historian” section.
3. Local government historians can highlight their work and the work of their predecessors by writing pieces for local newspapers, blogs, the Office of State History website, and other media outlets throughout 2019. Historians could also write and publish the history of their position, who has held it in the past, and what the accomplishments have been up to and including their time in office.
4. Create an episode of the *A New York Minute in History* in 2019 dedicated to the position of local government historians, why it exists, and the work that has been done.
5. The State Historian can seek to publish an article on the origins of the Local Government Historians law in *New York Archives* magazine.
6. APHNYS and the Office of State History can partner with New York History Day to offer a prize at the state History Day competition on best project on local New York State history.

These are simply some suggestions and I am sure that there will be more moving forward. I would like to offer any assistance I can to help celebrate the important work that has been done by local government historians during their first 100 years.

Devin R. Lander  
New York State Historian

## We Want Your News!!

Do you have a meeting or an announcement you want to reach across the state? Send us your news items to be put into the next issue of ***The Historian's Exchange***. Do you have an historian who has been honored — then send us the information so we can spread the word. This is our newsletter and the more information we have, the better we are informed and can do our jobs.

The deadline for the next issue is January 15, and the issue will come out in February 2019. Send your item to Gerry Smith at [historysmiths@stny.rr.com](mailto:historysmiths@stny.rr.com).

## Editor's Thoughts



Once again, another year has come and gone. It was very good to be back at the APHNYS Annual Conference in Rochester. It was, as it has always been, a true honor to present to my colleagues — the many appointed historians from across the state. It was also good to refresh friendships that have grown over the many decades that I have served as City of Binghamton Historian (since 1984) and Broome County Historian (since 1988).

What, you ask, does this have to do with being the newsletter editor? A good question, for which I hope I have a good answer.

As I did several years ago, I made my usual plea as newsletter editor for “real news” that could be included in the newsletter. This is nothing new, nearly every editor asks for the same thing.

In the case of APHNYS, the newsletter is an important link for all of us across the state. I am heartened that the State Historian has made available items on his system that can be copied for use in our newsletter. It is one more avenue to pass information to the various parts of the Empire State. I will be using that access in future issues — to maximize our efforts to each other informed as to what is happening in our area.

What I really want, as you can see in the announcement above, is help from you. Send me articles about events, happenings, and so forth. Yes, we will add them to our Facebook page, but we can add them with more content in the newsletter. Since the newsletter is electronic, we make make any issue as long or as short as need be to accommodate the news. It allows us to add photos, graphics, or other items to tell the story. I want to have real content — stories that educate and entertain us by the February issue. Please help me out, and make our newsletter better.





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## 2018 Conference Views

Photos By Ray LaFever, more on our Facebook page



Registered Historian Award - Babette Huber,  
Dutchess County Historian Dr. Will Tatum  
(newly registered historian), Sandra Bradford,  
Chairperson of the Registered Historians



FDR Local Government Historian's Award winner Carol  
Fagnan, Historian for the Town of Catharine, with State  
Historian Devin Lander and Town of Clifton Park histo-  
rian John Scherer, chair of awards committee as well  
as her family.



APHNYS Award for Excellence in Promoting Local His-  
tory winner Town and Village of Canton Historian Linda  
Casserly, with State Historian Devin Lander and Town of  
Clifton Park historian John Scherer, chair of awards  
committee. along with Linda's family.





## 2019 Dues / Membership Form

For January 1—December 31, 2019

Please Type or Print Clearly and Fill Out Completely

### Member Information

**Membership Category:**

- ☐ Historian  
☐ Co-Historian  
☐ Deputy Historian  
☐ Assistant Historian  
☐ Affiliate Member\*  
 (\*Please provide your county)

**Appointed for:**

- ☐ County  
☐ Town  
☐ Village  
☐ City  
☐ Borough

**Date of Original Appointment:**

**Note:** If you are a new Historian, please provide the name of the previous historian:

**Municipality:** \_\_\_\_\_ **County:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Street Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **ST:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ **email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Municipal Mailing Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Annual Dues for Historians and Co-Historians are based on the Municipality's population; please circle the appropriate line.**

- \$25.00 = 0—1,000  
 \$30.00 = 1001—4000  
 \$35.00 = 4001—12,000  
 \$40.00 = 12,001—100,000  
 \$45.00 = 100,001—200,000  
 \$50.00 = 200,001—1+ Million

**Note:** If you are historian or deputy historian for more than one municipality, dues are to be paid for each municipality.

**Annual Dues for Other Memberships are:**

- \$25.00—Deputy and/or Assistant Historian  
 \$25.00—Affiliate Member  
 \$25.00—NYC Community District Historian

**Note:** An Affiliate Membership is for any cultural agency, educational institution, corporation, historical society, museum, or individual interested in NY State history and the work of the public historians of New York State. Per the APHNYS By-laws, Affiliates shall be non-voting members and shall not hold office.

Please mail this completed form with your check, payable to APHNYS, to:

APHNYS  
 P.O. Box 251  
 Vestal, NY 13851

APHNYS does hereby certify that the items of the account are true and correct; that no Federal or State taxes for which the municipality is exempt are included; and that no part of the same has been previously paid.

Questions? email us at [APHNYS@yahoo.com](mailto:APHNYS@yahoo.com) or [aphnystreasurer@gmail.com](mailto:aphnystreasurer@gmail.com)



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