

# The Advocate Newsletter

Volume 40; Number 5; September 2016

## Aurora Historical Society

Aurora, Colorado



### Embrace your city, your past

President's Letter September, 2016

Must be fall...school's back in session and thoughts are turning to cooler weather and fall color. *Think we're ready!*

Those of you that were able to visit Riverside had a lovely afternoon and learned so much about early Colorado history. Many thanks go to Garry O'Hara for a wonderful tour of our early history.

I do hope a lot of you will take the Rocky Mt. Arsenal Bus tour, another special event. To quote "*The land has a unique story-it has survived the test of time and transitioned from farmland, to war-time manufacturing site, to wildlife sanctuary. It may be one of the finest conservation success stories in history and a place where wildlife thrives.*"

Our guide will be Terry Wright, who will be retiring soon, so last chance to hear him. Be sure and RSVP as seating is limited 303-854-4249 or [livelyline@aol.com](mailto:livelyline@aol.com). We look forward to seeing you there.

Our program committee is still exploring some great speakers and programs. One of the upcoming programs at our annual meeting in January will be Leigh Jeremias who will speak on the **Colorado Historic Newspaper Collection**, an incredible wealth of Colorado History – not to be missed. We will also be voting on by-law changes for our Society. Many thanks to Dexter and Julie Harding.

Stay tuned for more info.

Sandy Sweeney, President Aurora Historical Society

### Historical Society Officers

**President:** Sandy Sweeney (303-854-4249)

**Vice President:** Nadine Caldwell

**Secretary:** Dolly Gray

**Treasurer:** Michael Lockwood

**Directors:** Dexter Harding, Carolyn Brassell

**Membership:** Larry Wilterdink

**Hospitality:** Nadine Caldwell

**Historian:** Michael Lockwood

**Newsletter, Website, & Publicity:**

Lynne Evans 303-671-0874

**Program Committee:** Dolly Gray, Lynne Evans, Sandy Sweeney, Caroline Brassell

**Education:** Vacant

**If anyone is interested, please contact Sandy Sweeney @ 303-854-4249 or [livelyline@aol.com](mailto:livelyline@aol.com)**

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**Join the Aurora Historical Society for a tour of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal Sunday, September 18, 2016 from 1-3 P.M.**

Members can meet at the Visitor's Center for the guided tour with Terry Wright U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Rangeland Management Specialist and Bruce Hastings, Deputy Refuge Manager.

Come early and spend some time before the tour at the exhibits in the Visitor's Center. The bus can only hold 29 people so please RSVP to Sandy Sweeney at 303-400-0123 or

[livelyline@aol.com](mailto:livelyline@aol.com)



**IT'S TIME TO PAY YOUR 2016 MEMBERSHIP DUES**

On January 1, 2016 it is time to send your dues payments for year 2016 to Larry Wilterdink at 15163 E. Bethany Place, Aurora, CO 80014-3804. Our membership dues come due in January each year now and with the New Year arriving please send your dues payment.

	Memberships
Family	\$15.00
Contributing	\$30.00
Business/Corporate	\$200.00
Life	\$200.00

**Because of the increased costs of postage and printing, we are asking that you add \$5.00 to your membership cost if you wish to have the newsletter mailed to you.**

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**Remembering Aurora**

*Michael Lockwood, Aurora Historical Society*

An Aurora native, a graduate of the Aurora Public Schools (Vaughn Elementary, North Middle School & Aurora Central High School) and still living less than 2 miles from where I grew up, Aurora has been a big part of my life ever since I was born. Having grown up here, I have several memories that I'd love to provide for your reading pleasure via The Advocate newsletter. For those of you who have Aurora connections that go back as far as the 1950's the recollections presented may bring back waves of nostalgia. And while I have 60 years of memories to relate, if you have some stories you'd like to share, please feel free to contact us at the Aurora Historical web site:

[www.aurorahistorical.org](http://www.aurorahistorical.org)

**REMEMBERING: Watching Planes at Stapleton**

I can still recall an early summer evening, parking my car just south of Havana and 23<sup>rd</sup> to watch the planes come in for a

landing at Stapleton. No, it wasn't with a young lady, although there were several romantic encounters that took place there over the years. For me it was just a relaxing place to contemplate life as a 16-year old. I can remember lying on the hood of the car with my back against the windshield, eyes closed. For those of you that weren't around back then, once you passed 23<sup>rd</sup> heading north, there was an open spot off to the east that wasn't fenced in and there was room for several cars to park on the dirt where the planes would come in overhead as they approached the runway moving east to west. Of course, back then security wasn't too concerned with cars parked there. The local police, however, might have checked out the steamed up windows of the cars for other suspicious activity.

And thanks to Jenn Webb and her Facebook page of "You Know You're From Old Aurora When..." there were people sharing their memories of watching the planes taxi out and crossing over I-70 as the cars passed underneath.

And I have many, many memories of seeing people off or waiting for them to arrive at Stapleton where, again before security was such an issue, you could go to the terminal even though you weren't flying. As a kid I would plaster my face to the window and be in awe of the planes. And when the plane would land that we were waiting for, I would be the first one to run over to Mom and let her know the plane had arrived. Such excitement to watch the people coming through the gate and looking for the familiar face you were waiting for.

Time waits for no man and our history eventually becomes shared memories of people and places. Preservation can help to keep those memories a little more tangible so that we can share with future generations.



This article appeared in an old edition AHS Advocate. We have found many of these articles interesting and worth another look. So we will be reprinting some in this and future newsletters.

### **“History in the Making: Aurora Public Schools Technical Center”**

First printed July 1982 in the *Advocate*

#### **“History of Vo-Tech”**

The story of Vo-Tech began many years ago with the development of School District 28J under William J. Hinkley, Superintendent of Schools 1949-1968. His training and experiences in addition to the educational field had been in the vocational field. He had been a pattern maker, a machinist, and a cabinet maker; and he realized the need for training in the vocational trades.

In 1949, the school district was employing two people in the vocational field--- Gladys Mills, the home economics teacher; and “Slim” Place, the industrial arts teacher.

The district had no money except for essentials. The industrial arts shop was in a metal structure behind West Middle School, but this facility was used for only two years because it burned. Slim had provided the hand tools; Hinkley, his own power tools. (See Volume 2, No. 5 July 1977 for the story of William C. Hinkley.)

Vocational training remained a limited field for many years, but it was always in the back of Hinkley’s mind. Minimal vocational education was not good enough for Ellin Mrachek, who was elected to the School Board in 1963. Her main campaign issue was to have more vocational education in order to reduce the drop-out rate and to meet the employment needs of 60% of the high school students not going on to college.

On the Board she found support from Don Sessions and Hinkley, but no available funds. At budget time, she would request that \$50,000 be set aside each year, but it was never approved.

When the Southwest Metropolitan Board of Cooperative Services was organized (Aurora, Cherry Creek, Englewood, Sheridan, and Littleton), Ellin was appointed the Aurora representative. A priority was to establish a five-district technical center. Cherry Creek had the land, but no construction funds. Legal limitations prevented the other districts from using their funds to build on the acreage. Aurora had to find its own solution.

In 1965, Hinkley, through his aviation interest, found a way to secure some Buckley Field land by developing a student aviation program. The plans for the runway and a building were cancelled when the Army Corps of Engineers stated it might construct a dam on the site.

Retiring in 1968, Hinkley continued to work on the land acquisition. Involved were all of Colorado’s Congressional officials, Buckley military personnel, Secretary of the Air Force, and the General Services Administration.

Ellin, representing the district, accepted the 112.9 acres of Buckley land from the GSA in 1969.

One of the provisions required construction to begin within two years, but there were no funds. Then Superintendent J. Roland Ingraham, Jr., planned a \$11.7 million bond issue that included \$1.6 million for Phase I of the Center. The voters approved it in March 1969.

After Board members visited many vocational schools, William Blurock and Associates of California were selected to design the building and Aurora architect Roland “Bud” Johnson, to coordinate the construction.

To determine the curriculum, Harold Dunning, director of vocational education, conducted a community survey. Dr. Ingraham, a national expert in vocational building programs, completed the educational planning before leaving the district in 1971.

One cold, windy day in September of 1971, ground was broken. Financed entirely with local money, Phase I opened in 1972 with 17 programs in an attractive flexible, 65,931 square-foot building. In 1975, Phase II added 100,000 square-feet to accommodate 20 more courses and a post-secondary program directed by Dr. Paul Miller.

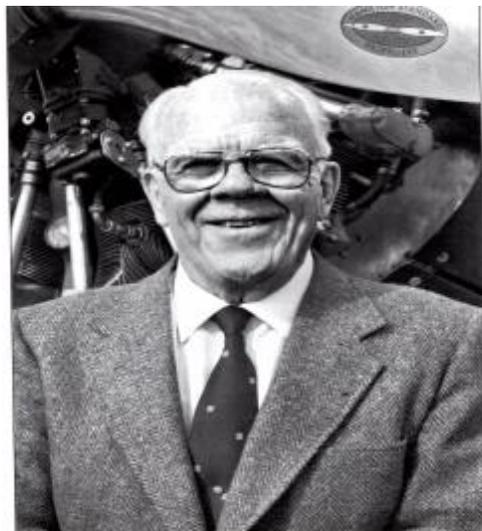
Through contractual agreements with Deer Trail, Strasburg, and Bennett schools, and legislative action by the Colorado General Assembly; Aurora became an area vocational school receiving federal construction money.

Because of the foresight, determination and leadership of the School Board, Orville Schisler, Dr. Robert Hughes, Roy Krieger, John Craig, and Ellin Mrachek, Vo-Tech became a reality.

*(The Aurora Historical society newsletter was set and printed by Vo-Tech students starting in 1976 under the direction of teachers Errol Hilborn and Karen Neumann. Errol and Karen were awarded honorary memberships in the Aurora Historical Society at the annual meeting in January of 1982 for their contributions in helping to make the Society’s newsletter successful.*

*Aurora Public Schools Print Services Department is again publishing the Aurora Historical Society’s Newsletter.)*

#### **School Board Member Ellin Mrachek**



William Hinkley was only a boy when he first visited Aurora. He worked a lot of odd jobs as he was growing up, and he also learned to fly. He worked on a pilot for Eastern Airlines, helping to train other pilots on the instruments. In 1947, Hinkley was offered the job of superintendent for Aurora public schools. He decided to stay where he was, but in 1949, he finally accepted the position, which he held until his retirement in April 1968. He went on to become a lobbyist for Colorado school districts and did not actually retire until 1971. Hinkley High School was named



Mrachek Middle School was named for Ellin Mrachek and her husband, Col. Harry Mrachek. The Mracheks were heavily involved with the community. Ellin taught as a substitute and also worked passionately to establish a vocational and technical school. She was the driving force to establish the Community College of Aurora, the Aurora Mental Health Center, and T. H. Packer Vocational Technical School. She was a member of the Aurora Public School Board for many years. (Courtesy Aurora History Museum)

The daughter of Waltgen and Mary Grace Smith, Ellin was a native of Colorado. After moving around in the state with her parents, she graduated from high school in Durango. She earned a B.A. degree in economics and sociology from C.S.U. and an M.A. degree in sociology and archeology from C.U.

In 1935, she married Harry J. Mrachek in Ft. Collins. They had two children, William and Lin.

In 1940, the Mracheks purchased the stucco house on the corner of Iola Street and Colfax Avenue. The year before her mother had bought part of a farm at Havana Street and Colfax Avenue which Ellin's father remodeled into a trailer court.

Since Ellin's husband was in the military, their Aurora house was their home base for the family. They purchased their present house in 1955.

When asked what accomplishment satisfied her the most, Ellin responded: "My twelve years on the Aurora School Board." As a member, she was able to obtain a Mott Foundation Grant for community use of the schools, a "teen mother" program, an alternative school (the first one was the street academy on Boston Street), handicap and special education programs, and last, but not least, the Vo-Tech Center.

Another Satisfaction is her part in setting up the Mental Health program in Aurora. "You never do anything alone; there are always many, many people involved." Ellin stated.

She spent six years on the Community Colleges and Occupational Education Board and was its representative to the Colorado Commission on Higher Education.

Not too many Aurora Schools have been named for people, but the Mrachek family has one---Mrachek Middle School at 2055 South Telluride Street. It was proposed to the School Board that a school be named for Harry because he set such a fine example for young people.

An immigrant boy, he became a full colonel in the U.S. Army, and upon retirement, a teacher in Boulder Valley school system for 10 years. He organized the Aurora Council for the Elderly, out of which grew the Commission for the Elderly. He was also a talented musician and fluent in several languages. His life was spent in learning.

Harry, however, wished that the school be named for the family. It was so named in May of 1975 and dedicated on October 7, 1976. Its name is indeed fitting, for Ellin, too, is a fine example for young people of a volunteer worker, who has enriched the Aurora Public Schools and her community immeasurably.

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**Please Join us at the Aurora History Museum on November 29th at 7:00pm to hear James O'Neal Hughes, who will give us a history of Fort Logan National Cemetery.**

Thanks to all who attended the Riverside Cemetery Tour. Garry O'Hara gave us a great history of Riverside. Those who attended were: Larry & Carol Wilterdink, Dick and Norma Ziegler, Barbara Vincent, Sharon Tomlinson, Dolly Gray, Lynne Evans, Nadine Caldwell, and Karen Schwieder.



**Aurora History Museum Programs  
Fall 2016**

**Exhibits**

**Gateway to the Rockies Art Show**

Sept. 20-Nov. 5

View a juried exhibit of paintings, photography and miniatures. Co-sponsored by the Aurora Artists Guild. Artwork is for sale.

**Wine & Cheese Reception**

Fri., September 30, 5-7:30pm

**17<sup>th</sup> Annual Festival of the Wreaths**

November 8-December 11

Get in the holiday spirit with this colorful and decorative display. Local businesses, organizations, and individuals decorate and donate the wreaths for you to bid on. Proceeds go to the Aurora Museum Foundation.

**To sponsor a wreath, call 303-739-6660.**

**Political Cartoons: The Herblock Collection**

July 12-September 16

**Events**

**Antique Appraisal Fair**

September 24, 9am-3pm

Local appraisers evaluate your antiques and collectables. Call 303-739-6705 for event entrance time.

No Walk-ins Accepted \$5/item; 5 item limit

Aurora Central Library

Hosted by Aurora Museum Foundation

**5<sup>th</sup> Annual Parol Lantern Making Workshop**

October 15, 9am.-12pm

7 to adult. \$12/Lantern (materials provided)

Decorate your home with traditional star-shaped lantern made by you. Learn how to make this delicate and beautiful holiday decoration from the Philippines.

Advanced registration required. Anyone under 14 must be accompanied by an adult. To register call 303.326.8650

**125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary GeoCache!**

**Collect'em All**

Twelve geocaches are hidden throughout Aurora. Find all 12 and win a special 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary coin. The caches expire December 31. For details visit [Auroragov.org/aurora125](http://Auroragov.org/aurora125).

**Upcoming Programs**

**Ukulele Lessons & Talk Story Presentations**

3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month: September 17, October 15, November 19 1-3 pm

Explore Hawaiian culture and history through music.

**Tea at AHM: How the West was Sung**

October 22, 2-3:30pm

\$26 (\$20 Resident)

The Central City Opera brings the adventurous lives of Margaret "Molly" Brown, Horace and Baby Doe Tabor and Clara Brown to the Aurora History Museum

**Lunch Lecture Series**

**Brown Bag & White Linen Lecture Series**

Sponsored by the Aurora Historical Society

**Wednesdays \* 12-1pm**

**\$4 (\$3 Residents)**

Free for Aurora Historical Society Members.

Bring your lunch.

**Rocky Mountain Railroad Club**

**September 21**

A representative from the Rocky Mountain Railroad Club discusses the railroad in the Denver Area.

**The Footprint of the Iron Horse**

**October 19<sup>th</sup>**

Each Colorado rail line has an interesting history all its own. Elizabeth Nosek, from the Colorado Railroad Museum, explores the history and impact of rail travel in Colorado.

**Denver's Transit System History**

**November 16**

Kevin Snow, author of the book, "Riding Denver's Rails: A Mile-High Streetcar History," shares the history of Denver's public transportation system.

**Aurora's Historic Newspaper  
Digitization Project**

The first reel is now online check it out at  
<https://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org/>

1912- & 1913 *Aurora Democrat* is online and searchable. 8 more reels are being processed and should be online soon. Please keep supporting this project until we have all the Aurora papers digitized.

**Our Corporate Sponsors**



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**18000 E. Smith Road, Aurora, CO, 80011**

If anyone would like to receive the newsletter by email and let the Aurora Historical Society save the postage, Please contact Lynne Evans at 303-671-0874 or [lyevans@comcast.net](mailto:lyevans@comcast.net)

Also-If you have questions, comments, or suggestions about the newsletter you can contact me as well.

Please check out the AHS Website:  
<http://auroracohistoricalsociety.org>

*We need your help!*

**\$1/page!**

For just \$1/page you can help digitize Aurora's historic newspapers and ensure history doesn't get lost just because microfilm is hard to use!

Newspapers like the *Aurora Democrat* are saved on microfilm reels. Digitizing this film creates an online and searchable database to look for photos, articles, or anything else you might find interesting!

Sponsored by the Aurora Historical Society & the Aurora History Museum Archives

View the first pages online Spring 2016!



Help Aurora participate in the *Colorado Historic Newspapers Collection*. For more information please visit [www.auroracohistoricalsociety.org](http://www.auroracohistoricalsociety.org)

**Historic Aurora Newspapers - Digitization Project**

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