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. 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 Wiiterink
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

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
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.

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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.auroracohistoricalsociety.org

REMEMBERING: Watching Planes at Stapleton

I can still recall an early summer evening, parking my car just south of Havana and 23rd 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 23rd 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.
“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 dropout 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 Service 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

[Photo of William Hinkley, first principal of the school, and Ellin Mrachek]
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 archaeology 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, 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.

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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

17th 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

5th 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

125th Anniversary GeoCache!
Collect'em All
Twelve geocaches are hidden throughout Aurora. Find all 12 and win a special 125th Anniversary coin. The caches expire December 31. For details visit Auroragov.org/aurora125.

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 19th
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

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.

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the Aurora Historical Society save the postage,
Please contact Lynne Evans at 303-671-0874 or
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