

What do I do now?

Getting started as a New York State
Local Government Historian
APHNYS 2023 Annual Conference
Ithaca, NY

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Why have a historian

- "...in an age when the contents of entire libraries can be made available to anyone with an internet connection, does having a town historian still matter?" Amanda Erickson, *The Atlantic Cities*
- "Google can bring you back 100,000 answers. A librarian can bring you back the right one." Neil Gaiman



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**KEEP
 CALM
 AND
 ASK A
 HISTORIAN**



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Why Should Local Governments Have a Historian?



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Why Should Local Governments Have a Historian?


- To promote history, thus promoting community and attracting visitors and new residents.
- To help the county/city/town/village work through historic preservation issues.
- To assist in the event of a disaster
- To answer a range of questions from town officials, town residents and the public at large.



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NEW YORK STATE'S CENTURY-OLD LAW REQUIRING EVERY CITY, TOWN AND VILLAGE TO HAVE A HISTORIAN

- Approved by NYS Legislature in 1919
- Why?
 - 1909 - New York State celebrated the 300th anniversary of Henry Hudson's discovery of Manhattan
 - 1911 - State Capitol fire
 - 1914-18 - World War I



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**NYS Consolidated Laws
Arts and Cultural Affairs, Article 57**

§ 57.07 Local historian; maintenance of historical edifices. 1. A local historian shall be appointed, as provided in this section, for each city, town or village, except that in a city of over one million inhabitants a local historian shall be appointed for each borough therein instead of for the city at large; and a county historian may be appointed for each county. Such historian shall be appointed as follows: For a city by the mayor; for a borough, by the borough president; for a town, by the supervisor; for a village, by the mayor; for a county, by the board of supervisors...



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**NYS Consolidated Laws
County, Article 8**

§ 400.
4. (a) Appointive. There shall continue to be appointed in the manner prescribed by law a clerk of the board of supervisors, a county attorney, county superintendent of highways, sealer of weights and measures and county historian.



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Duties of the historian

§ 57.07
1. (cont.)...Each local government historian shall promote the establishment and improvement of programs for the management and preservation of local government records with enduring value for historical or other research; encourage the coordinated collection and preservation of nongovernmental historical records by libraries, historical societies, and other repositories; and carry out and actively encourage research in such records in order to add to the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the community's history.



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New York State should have:

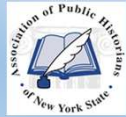
- 61 City Historians
- 567 Village Historians
- 938 Town Historians
- 57 County Historians
- 5 Borough Historians
- 12 Community Historians (Manhattan)
- 1 State Historian
 - 1641 Historians across the State



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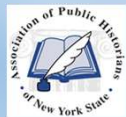
Problems with the law

- Lack of awareness
- Duties not well-defined
- No requirement that historians be paid
- No minimum qualifications
- Hard to enforce - no penalties





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So You Are Appointed Your Local Government's Historian




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- Get an Appointment letter and take an oath of office
- Make sure a Personnel file is created
- Have a job description (sample available on State Historian Website - <http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/common/nysm/files/duties-functions-local-government-historians.pdf>)
- Meet with:
 - Mayor or supervisor; board/council members
 - County historian
- Contact your APHNYS Regional coordinator

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- Contact/meet with neighboring historians
- Attend Board/Council meetings
- Establish Office hours for public
- Establish a budget
- Make sure to review the Employee handbook; Code of ethics
- Conduct an Inventory of records/materials in your office




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- Local government records issues
 - Meet with your Records Management Officer (RMO)
 - Review the Records retention schedule (LGS-1)
- Keep a work log
- Join APHNYS
- Attend next regional meeting and statewide conference
- Become a Registered Historian
- Submit your annual report to the State Historian and to your local board/council




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Set up your office

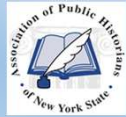
- Desk and workspace
- Telephone with voicemail; call log
- Computer and printer with internet access and email
- Camera and scanner



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Set up your office

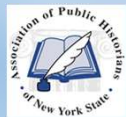
- Fireproof file cabinet and map cabinet
- Reference library
- Workspace for visitors and volunteers
- Posted office hours
- Get your New York State Library card (need to submit your appointment letter and renew every two years)



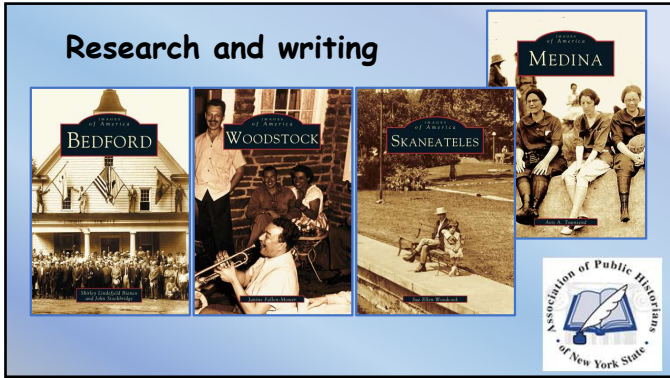
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What does a local government historian do?

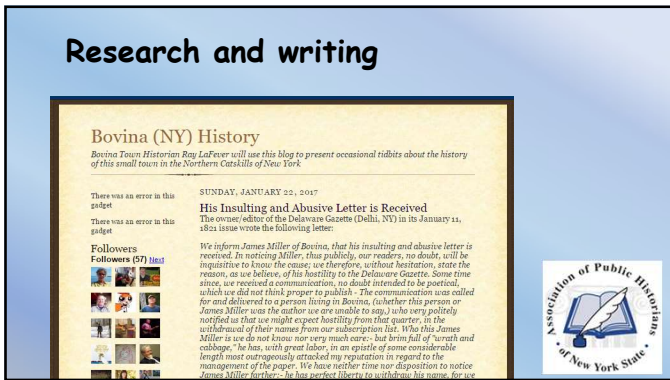
- Research and writing
- Teaching and public presentations
- Historic preservation (Buildings and materials)
- Organization and advocacy



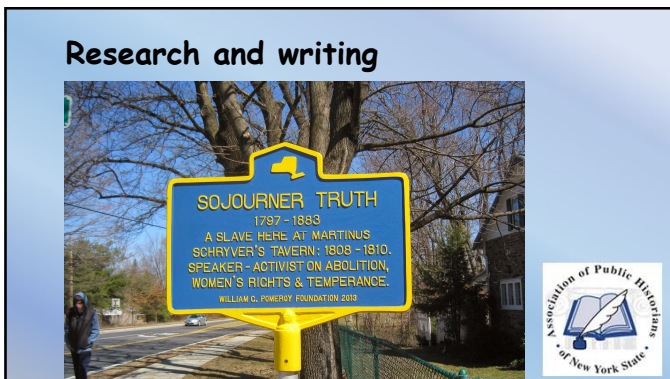
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Teaching and public presentations

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Historic preservation

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Organization, Advocacy and Tourism Promotion

50TH ANNIVERSARY 1907-57

Get Ready to Celebrate Women's Suffrage in NYS!

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What a government historian is NOT

- Antiquarian (collector of facts)
- Collector of artifacts
- Archivist
- Genealogist for hire
- Member of historical agency staff or executive committee
- Partisan political functionary



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My ancestors didn't come over on the Mayflower,
but they were there to meet the boat.

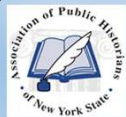
(Will Rogers)

izquotes.com

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Conferences

- New York History Conference (June 2024/Albany)
- APHNYS Regional conferences (Spring)
- National Council on Public History
- American Association for State and Local History, September
- APHNYS (Fall)



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Useful Web sites

- www.aphnys.org
- www.nysm.nysed.gov/research-collections/state-history
- www.aaslh.org
- www.ncph.org
- newyorkhistoryblog.org/



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Questions



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