

VILLAGE OF AURORA

Office of the Board of Trustees | 456 Main Street, Aurora, NY 13026

October 14, 2026

Dr. Betty Rosa, New York State Commissioner of Education

Brian Keogh, Archivist of the State of New York

SUBJECT: Inquiry Regarding Wells College Archival Transfer and Request for Accounting of Local Village Holdings

Dear Dr. Rosa and Mr. Keogh,

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Village of Aurora concerning the disposition and preservation of historical and archival materials during the wind-down of Wells College.

As part of the institutional closure and asset transition, a significant collection of historical documents and archives previously held in the Wells College collections was transferred to Hobart and William Smith Colleges [HWS]. While we value efforts to preserve institutional records within the higher education system, the Village of Aurora holds a vital public interest in specific municipal and regional historical artifacts that belong to the local history of Aurora and Cayuga County.

Under New York Education Law and state archival oversight guidelines for chartered higher education institutions, local community records and municipal artifacts should be properly inventoried and, where appropriate, repatriated or preserved in coordination with local municipal authorities.

In December, 2024, the Wells College Board of Trustees wrote on its website FAQ:

“Where will Wells’ historic documents be stored?” Some of the materials such as those pertaining to the history of Aurora will be given to the Village of Aurora. Hobart and William Smith will receive items such as some archives, catalogs, theses, publications, artworks, and athletic related materials. Other items will be sold or auctioned.”

To date, the Village of Aurora has received no information from the College about what material, if any, will be transferred to the municipality. We have not experienced the College being “responsive to the public interest in the distribution of these items,” as cited in the NYS Education Department’s No Objection letter of August 31, 2026. With Judge Lind’s September 25, 2026, approval of the sale and transfer of all tangible personal property,

we are concerned that locally significant items may be lost in lots auctioned for sale by Stair, Grace and Bostwicks. Specifically, we request a formal accounting and status report regarding a number of irreplaceable items known to have resided within the Wells College collection. Four important examples are:

- **1795 Benjamin Ledyard Map and 1794 Seth Phelps Map:**

The 1795 map of today's Village of Aurora (Military Tract Lot 34 with adjacent parts of Lots 43 and 54), was drawn by the first County Clerk Benjamin Ledyard. In addition to individual parcels by owner's name, Ledyard included sketches of frame buildings, several of which are still extant and recognizable. The map is framed with the 1794 Seth Phelps map that shows only lot assignments by name. We understand that these maps were not transferred to HWS.

- **Two (2) Original Issues of the *Aurora Gazette* (1805–1806):**

Rare early local newspapers documenting the initial civic, political, and economic activities of the Village during its earliest years of settlement, with legal notices as the newspaper of record; Aurora was then the County seat.

- **The Edwin Barber Morgan Collection:** Business and personal papers of Aurora native and life-long resident E. B. Morgan, an entrepreneur and politician of national significance who was a charter trustee of Wells College. He also served on the boards of Cornell University and Auburn Theological Seminary. We believe his papers have not been transferred to HWS.

- **Samuel D. Mandell, A History of the Houses in Aurora:** The handwritten original of a thorough documentation by a primary source on which designations of both National Historic Register and Local Landmarks rely.

These are not the only items in the Wells College Archives that are integral to Aurora's history, and/or are of current governmental significance to the built environment of Aurora. Additional items of significance include but are not limited to ones drawn from the NYS Library database, enumerated in the Appendix.

We respectfully submit the following inquiries to the New York State Education Department and New York State Archives:

1. Did NYSED or the State Archives review, audit, or approve the specific transfer inventory from Wells College to HWS or to any other entities?
2. What mechanism exists for the Village of Aurora to request the physical repatriation, or alternatively high-resolution archival digitalization and legal custodial deposit, of items that pertain strictly to the founding, municipal, and social history of our Village?

The Village of Aurora recently acquired a large building with ample room for additional climate controlled storage of municipal archives plus dedicated space for public access. On March 24, 2026, the Village approved a second ten year Memorandum of Understanding with the Aurora Ledyard Historical Society regarding the protection and management of our historical resources. **Therefore, the Village of Aurora has the means to provide more than adequate care and public access for an expanded archival collection.** Yet without knowing what, if anything, will be transferred to the Village from Wells College, we cannot move ahead with our plans.

The Village of Aurora is committed to protecting its local historical heritage. We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter and look forward to receiving an accounting of these and other vital community artifacts.

Sincerely,

Janet Murphy
Mayor, Village of Aurora

cc:

Adrian Hale, 7th Judicial District Regents
Office of Counsel, NYSED
Kathy Killius Regan, Office of the President, HWS
Brandon Moblo, Archives & Special Collections Librarian, HWS
Melanie Sage, Executive Director of Alumni and Alumnae Relations, HWS
Ed Thompson, Assistant Attorney General, Syracuse Regional Office
Rachel May, New York State Senator, 48th District
Jeff Gallahan, New York State Assemblyman, District 131
Tracy DiGenova, CNY Regional Representative for Governor Hochul
Congressman John Mannion
Board of Trustees, Village of Aurora
Wells Legacy Society, Inc.
Aurora Ledyard Historical Society

Appendix

Aurora was settled concurrently with the Military Tract of Central NY starting in 1789, that is, sixty-one years before Henry Wells moved to Aurora and another eighteen before he opened Wells College in 18. Many important documents pertaining to the early history of the Village of Aurora, such as the maps from 1794 and 1795 cited above and records from early settlers and their descendants, were given to the College for safekeeping while Prof. Temple Rice Hollcroft served as Historian for

both the Village and the College. . Still other records fell to the College by chance at the time of Hollcroft's death, because they were in his campus office. The NYS Library lists a partial inventory of the Wells historic archives, and appears to include boxed records only; the total is larger.

Sample topics include Aurora's Cayuga Lake Academy, its Quaker school Briar Cliff, the Presbyterian Church, the Aurora Country Club, its electric light company, post office, residents, houses, regatta days, women's discussion club called the "Thursday Club", etc.

Miscellaneous collections: 18, 22, 24, 27, 30, 49

Papers of other educational institutions in Aurora: 33, 45, 60, 61

Individual people, families, and social history: 31, 38, 41, 44, 45, 47, 48, 57

Aurora buildings and maps: 36, 59,

Municipal government and services: 40, 42, 46, 50, 52, 63