Enjoy a Simpler Time in East Aurora

BY LAURA WATILO BLAKE

The historic community of East Aurora, New York, may be firmly rooted in the past, but it has a vibrant dynamism that appeals to 21st-century visitors looking for unique museums, shops, eateries, and entertainment—all concentrated in one area.

Just 20 minutes from downtown Buffalo, East Aurora certainly evokes an era where simple values governed small-town life. It was at one time home to Millard Fillmore, the 13th President of the United States (tour his home at 24 Shearer Avenue). Later, it became the center of the thriving Roycroft Arts and Crafts movement led by Elbert Hubbard, a Buffalo soap salesman turned printer, writer, and philosopher.

In 1895, Hubbard laid the foundation for a self-sustaining community of artisans that eschewed the age of industrialization in favor of handmade decorative arts. Today, original Roycroft goods—from furniture to metalwork, and from leather to pottery—command high prices from antique collectors, and Hubbard's spirit lives on in the large number of craftspeople that live and work in East Aurora.

Hubbard's Historical Hub

When you arrive in town, head first to the Elbert Hubbard Roycroft Museum (363 Oakwood Ave.), which features an extensive collection of Roycroft books and Arts and Crafts furniture (open June through October on Wednesdays and weekends from 1 to 4 p.m.). To gain a better understanding of the Roycroft way of life, the Roycroft Campus (corner of Main Street and South Grove Street) has guided tours ($10).

The building that once housed Hubbard's printing operations is now part of the Roycroft Inn 1 (40 S. Grove St.), built in the early 20th century to house campus visitors. Today, there are 28 refurbished guest rooms featuring reproduction and original Arts and Crafts-style furniture (rooms starting at $130). Take in a meal on the inn's covered porch 2, or listen to live jazz on Friday nights in the same room where Hubbard's press churned out copies of his immensely popular essay, *Message to Garcia.*

An even better way to experience Hubbard's legacy is by taking an art class at the Copper Shop 3 on the Roycroft campus, which doubles as a museum and gift emporium. Artisans also teach courses in painting, stained glass, metalsmithing, and jewelry.

If you're low on talent, but high on art appreciation, the Copper Shop Gallery (open seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.) is a great place to start hunting for the perfect piece of art to bring home with you. Look for the double R mark, which indicates the workmanship of the artist upholds the Roycroft standards.

PHOTOS: LAURA WATILO BLAKE EXCEPT 3: ROYCROFT CAMPUS CORPORATION

You'll find more shops filled with unique gifts and original works of art at Ashwood Artisans 4 (726 Main St.) and the Schoolhouse Gallery 5 (1054 Olean Rd.), located a short ride out of town. The latter features beautiful pieces of furniture, both reproduction and original, created by Tom Harris and his partner, Ben Little, Jr.

Kidding Around

With all the fanfare over East Aurora's Arts and Crafts connection, you might be surprised to hear that the town has other attractions that appeal to a younger demographic. East Aurora is also known as Toy Town U.S.A., home to more than ten toy manufacturers over the years, including Fisher-Price, which is still headquartered here. Children of all ages will enjoy strolling through the Toy Town Museum 6 (636 Girard Ave.), which features a working Erector set, a 12-room antique dollhouse, and a miniature train that travels throughout the 8,000-square-foot space (open Thursday to Sunday).

More curiosities can be found at Vidler's Five & Dime 7 (690 Main St.), which still looks like it would have when it opened in 1930. Buy a bag of popcorn for 10 cents at the front of the store, then get lost amid aisles filled with toys, candy, craft supplies, housewares, and much more.

"Everyone needs to have the Vidler's experience," says Kit Howard, who has lived in East Aurora for three years. "My grandchild loves it there. It's got creaky wood floors, with the old counters and candy bins. And it has items that are very

Horse Play

"When Elbert Hubbard came to East Aurora, it was a horsy town," says Kit Howard. "And it still is."

Get up close to horses and other farm animals at Knox Farm State Park (437 Buffalo Rd # C), located on the northwest side of town. The 633-acre farm—the former country estate of Buffalo's renowned Knox Family—offers plenty of outdoor recreation opportunities. Visitors to the farm can hike, cross-country ski, ride bikes, or go horseback riding along scenic nature trails.

The park also offers interpretive programs that highlight the park's fiber arts program. Learn how to spin wool on a drop spindle, make a basket, or crochet a scarf using yarn made from wool shorn from the park's sheep. So you know exactly which animal donated its wool to the ready-made handicrafts for sale there, the names and photos of the sheep are affixed to the products.

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—KIT HOWARD

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difficult to find. When my tea strainer died, I hopped in the car and went right to Vidler's."

And when you've worked up an appetite, locals recommend Taste 8 (634 Main St.), a self-described "sandwich bar" with a penchant for giving their menu items quirky names like Fish for a Price, Millard Fill-Me-More, Hubbard-in-the-Cupboard, and Vidler on the Roof. Bar Bill 9 (185 Main St.) also gets high marks. "It is a biker bar turned patio dining," explains Vickie Insley, who recommends regional specialties, such as buffalo wings or "Beef on Weck," a slow-roasted beef on a salted kaiser roll with caraway seeds. If you're looking to hear the town gossip, then try Charlie's Diner (510 Main St.). "That's where all the locals hang out," Insley says.

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