

Director's Report 2007
Fenton History Center-Museum & Research Center

"The best thing about the future is it comes one day at a time." **-Abraham Lincoln**

Dear Fenton Members and Friends,

At the Fenton History Center, we must always be looking outward into the community and toward the future. What does a historical society have to do with the future? The short answer is to provide a foundation for future decision-making. You may have noticed that many young people, not all, but many have very little regard for their "elders" advice. However, a miraculous change comes over these same young people when they are out in the world and begin making independent decisions. They need to discuss the decision making process with their "elders" because they have no basis to form a decision upon. That is the relevance of history. Local history repositories and museums, such as the Fenton History Center, are important because the world is moving at a faster pace than ever before. The Fenton provides a place to slow down, learn some new information about your hometown and gain a sense of belonging. I heard many visitors talk about the importance of tradition this past holiday season. They were re-connecting to their past and feeling a sense of place.

In 2007 the community came forward in record numbers to learn about their local history at the summer *Old Fashioned Day* and the *Saints and Sinners Lake View Cemetery Tours*. Thank you to all who helped make both events so successful. The staff, Board of Trustees and society members gave of their time and talent to build on the previous year's events and bring them to a new level. Also, thank you to the NYS Council on the Arts Decentralization grant program for providing the support to create period costumes we can use for our events. Our own Board of Trustee President Julie Hull was the "artist-in-residence" who designed and created the costumes. A new event in 2007 was the *Red, White & Blue Patriotic Tribute* concert/dance. While it did not bring in large crowds it was enjoyable and exhibited a number of Civil War, WWI and WWII letters, photographs and music. Hopefully you will be able to attend this year.

Education is the Fenton's over arching mission. The events above are perfect examples of folks of all ages having fun while learning some of their local history. Another way we are reaching outward, trying to provide for the community is through our weekly **Hometown History** articles in the Post-Journal. They have been very successful at raising awareness and interest in our great hometown stories. Perhaps you have been receiving a weekly email from us about "**This Week in Local History**"? Last summer we started sending a local history fact out to our members via email. Again, this has helped raise awareness of our local history and it's importance in our every day life. If you would like to be on the email list, let us know at information@fentonhistorycenter.org.

In the classrooms of Chautauqua County the Fenton teachers have been using a re-designed and upgraded version of the well-established Local Lore program. Thanks to the Holmberg Foundation for supporting the upgrades! We were partners with two Chautauqua Opportunities after-school programs in 2007 and are contracted to be in four programs in 2008.

The Chautauqua County Historical Society and the Fenton partnered in 2007 to reach more residents and visitors. We hosted a joint luncheon/lecture about the **Emigrant Train** presented by County Historian Michelle Henry and Village of Panama Historian Pam Brown. The CCHS loaned the Fenton a dozen dolls for the *Living Dolls* exhibit during the Deck the Halls exhibit this past Christmas season. There are plans to work together throughout 2008 to continue to build interest in our county's history. One of the projects is a jointly produced illustrated history of the County, which will also serve as a fundraiser for the two societies. The coffee table sized book will be a must-have for every home in the county.

The Fenton has been working with the City of Jamestown to develop an Art/History trail through the downtown area to further teach our rich local history. This is a big project with many partners that will serve to reach many more visitors and local residents. It is part of the newly adopted Urban Design Plan. Along these lines, the "Ticket to Jamestown" combination ticket is starting to really sell. For \$15 you can see six local attractions! What a deal! The six attractions and the Arts Council for Chautauqua County are working together to develop a

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marketing strategy to bring more visitors (and dollars) to our county. This is a very exciting project that you will be hearing more about in the future.

Another way we can serve the community is through grass roots born interest groups. One such group, interested in historical textiles, held their first meeting last fall and has already scheduled other meetings and trips into 2008. If antique quilts, coverlets and samplers are your passion or interest, give us a call and we will connect you with the group. I encourage other special interest groups to contact me if they would like to start-up a like-minded group. I would love to see a Civil War roundtable discussion group – anyone willing to take it on?

The Fenton's success is measured a number of ways; in people through the doors, financial support from the community, number of volunteers and finally, the effect a visit made on a visitor's thinking and/or actions. Compared to 2006, our attendance figures were even, our donations from the community were up, the staff to volunteer ratio was 1:16 compared to 1:6, and our fundraisers were more successful. I thank you for your generosity! However, we still ended 2007 in the red. As you can see in the year-end financial report on page 4, we were short 3% in our income line. This was due to lower than expected membership renewal income and fewer grants.

In 2008 we again will strive for a balanced budget. The adopted 2008 budget is inline with the 2007 income. The Board of Trustees and myself will continue to take a pro-active approach to monitor and adjust the budget on a monthly basis. One of the main goals for 2008 is to build the membership base to support the professional work of the Fenton. Payroll, supplies, insurance and other expenses are increasing. In a city of 29,000, we should have at least 2,000 members. We currently have 400! This is where you can be of great help in saving your local hometown history. *Please share your interest and passion for the Fenton's mission to help build our membership.* If you know of someone who would love to be part of the Fenton family, someone who would enjoy the museum and the events for free or a discount rate, please encourage them to become a member. Bring them in for a free tour of the museum or test-run of the research center. Perhaps you could give the gift of membership for a birthday present or other occasion. We have gift packages all set to go!

Another priority in 2008 is the Fenton's need for more work, storage and programming space. The Board of Trustees and I have taken steps towards the acquisition and renovation the neighboring Hall Home. We are also pursuing funds to restore and conserve portions of the Fenton Mansion. Without enough space to work or to hold programs, we cannot continue to meet the needs of the community.

Finally, **thank you** for your support and **interest** in your local history. Together we can save, preserve and teach about our significant part of New York State. As always, I invite you to drop in or give me a call anytime (716-664-6256).

Sincerely,

Joni