COMMUNITY UPDATES

by Noah Goodling, Executive Director

To say that 2020 hasn’t gone exactly as we planned is probably the understatement of the century. With the cancellations of many planned events, the forced closure of our physical sites for three and a half months, and the new protocols and procedures that structure our present operations, our organization has been sent through a jarring series of transitions. But we have carried on!

With the onset of the pandemic, we have adjusted our programming to make sure that we are still serving all our favorite history buffs, with the added benefit that many of our programs are available now from home, wherever home might be for you. This newsletter, which will be monthly, is being made to help keep you all in the loop, to provide a reliable source every few weeks for our supporters to find all the exciting news about what we have been working on, and what we are planning to do in the future. Stay tuned!

Our most exciting recent update is: the Fenton is back! Both our Museum and Research Center are open again to the community, and ready to teach you something new and fascinating about our awesome local history. The Museum is open for our full regular hours, Monday – Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; the Research Center is by appointment only—please call us at 716-664-6256 to reserve your spot.

We need the support of our community now more than ever, as we face the effects of our closure and cancelled programming, so if you haven’t stopped by the Fenton recently, now’s the time! If you can’t make it out to our physical site, send us a research or genealogy question that you could use a hand with, renew your membership, follow us on Facebook, recommend us to a friend, or just do your best to make sure that the world appreciates the awesome history of Jamestown and Chautauqua County. Anything that you can do to promote our cause will help.

As we move closer towards resuming normal operations, we are also trying to broaden our focus beyond where we were before, so that everyone who visits our organization can find a relevant piece of local history. Our first project in this new initiative is the Fenton’s first-ever exhibit devoted to the local LGBTQ+ community, which we are gathering materials for, and which will debut in early 2021.

We are also working with community leaders and grassroots activists to better capture the history of Black and minority populations in Jamestown. If you have suggestions or contributions to make to any of these projects, please reach out to the Fenton at information@fentonhistorycenter.org, or at 716-664-6256. With your help and support, we will continue to move closer to our mission of serving everyone in our community to the highest degree possible.

Thank you for being part of our wonderful Fenton community!
In March, I was promoted to the position of Curator at the Fenton. I immediately began working on some new exciting projects, and was doing fine, until about a week later when the shutdown hit. Despite that, the Fenton has continued to produce some exciting projects. Here are some of them that I think you should know about.

**COVID-19 History Collection**

We have come up with a few new ways to contribute to the Fenton collection. We want to record the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on local residents for future historians to study. If you’re having trouble getting your story organized, there is a Google form survey to help you. A link to the survey can be found on our homepage www.fentonhistorycenter.org. Though we are always living in historic times (technically), 2020 has provided some especially notable moments, and we want to make sure that future generations understand what it was like to live through it. Help us make history!

**2021 Exhibit: Fenton Pride**

We also launched the project for an exhibit for next year, with the help of funding from the New York State Council on the Arts/Greater Hudson Heritage Network Creativity Incubator Grant. Since late 2019, our organization has been working with leadership from the Jamestown Pride organization to start an archive at the Fenton devoted to the local LGBTQ+ community in and around Jamestown. This effort will be celebrated with an exhibit in early 2021, utilizing all the materials we’ve been able to gather up until that point. If you are a member of the local LGBTQ+ community and would like to contribute to the project, there is a survey form created in partnership with the Jamestown Pride Committee to inspire responses. The link can be found at our website www.fentonhistorycenter.org.

**#MuseumFromHome**

Since we were closed, and visitors couldn’t come to us this Spring, we created some free resources to keep people involved with local history. For our families, we have interactive activities for children and parents available on our website, www.fentonhistorycenter.org/kids-corner. For those who want a deeper dive into local history, we also started a video series taking a close-up look at some of our collections, both on exhibit and off. These #MuseumFromHome videos can all be found on our Facebook page, YouTube, and on our website (www.fentonhistorycenter.org/museum-from-home-2). Videos have been posted every weekday from mid-March through our re-opening, so there is quite a collection to choose from! No matter what your interest is in local history, there’s at least a video or two (or a dozen) that is sure to connect. And if the perfect one for you hasn’t been made yet, stay tuned! #MuseumFromHome videos are continuing weekly, every Wednesday at 3pm on Facebook and Youtube.

**Teachers and Educators**

For any teachers in our audience, please consider filling out our teacher survey, available via a link on our homepage, www.fentonhistorycenter.org. We need your help to figure out the best ways to continue to connect with you and your students as we move forward into an uncertain year.
COVID-19 has put a big cramp in most facets of our lives, and Vets Finding Vets (VFV) members have really missed getting together with their veteran friends.

Several get-togethers, a bus trip, an Honor Flight, and now the new Honor Flight date have all fallen by the wayside. The WWII and Korean War veterans are all wondering if they will live long enough to see things get back to normalcy.

Fortunately, Cindy Reidy, Project Coordinator of the Joseph P. Dwyer Veterans Program, came up with a great solution for our Fenton Canteen dilemma. We have been meeting at the Mansion in the dining room/meeting room since the addition of the new ramp, and it was going really well. COVID-19 restrictions made getting together in that room impossible, but Cindy is a member of DAR, and uses the DAR House on Prospect St as a coffee hour venue for her Vets. She offered it as a temporary solution for Fenton Canteen, so we had our first Fenton Canteen since closing for COVID-19 on Saturday, July 11th. We had eight Veterans happily social distancing, wearing masks, and using disposable gloves for handshaking.

On that same day, at 1 p.m., we kept a scheduled Hero Tour at Lake View Cemetery. Hugh Golden met with us at Soldier’s Circle where he shared the history of this stunning final resting place for so many local veterans. Hugh was sadly interrupted by a wind and rain event, but he had provided a tent, chairs, and umbrellas just in case.

We had such a good time, we are eager to have our second scheduled Hero Tour on Saturday, August 8th, this time at Monument Hill, where veterans of the Revolution, War of 1812, Civil War, and the Spanish American War are buried. With any luck, Mother Nature will allow us to get to the end when Fenton President Rick Lundquist will play Taps. This will be particularly poignant because George Schwob, who played Taps for so many Veteran funerals, is buried at Monument Hill.

The Veterans were all so happy to see each other and catch up, despite the restrictions, that we knew the DAR House was the perfect setting during this time. Since we only had eight and one guest, we easily fit into one room.

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- but we have another large room, a patio, and even a front and side lawn to spread into when we have more of our regulars back. Since DAR members assist Active Military Members and Veterans on a regular basis, they are so happy that they can supply a safe meeting place for veterans of all ages.

COMMUNITY TREASURES
by Norman Carlson, Collections Manager

Work has continued in the collections department despite the emergency shutdown. We have directed efforts at addressing our backlog, organizing everything from storage to computer files, and listing and updating volunteer projects. At the same time donations continue to arrive. They come in the door and in the mail and are processed as usual.

One especially interesting donation was brought in by one of our few remaining living charter members, a man who has done a great deal for local history all his life. He brought in the equivalent of four large banker boxes of books and documents, largely photocopies. For the most part the documents consist of more complete and more organized sets of papers and clippings about some of the most interesting and frequently asked about subjects in local history such as the Civil War, Jamestown-made automobiles, steamboats, fires, and many other topics. Several of the books are rare and early products foundational to understanding local history. Others are more recent publications that give a deeper, more accurate, or more contextualized view of some of the familiar people and events in local history. They benefit from the vastly more powerful modern tools for historical research.

This donation not only will enrich the quality of our research library and archives, it will also provide an opportunity for our staff and volunteers to give a better, more deeply informed account of our local heritage to the public.