In the blink of an eye, we have made it very nearly to the end of the year! As we pass our time of giving thanks, and enter into the season of just plain giving, I have found myself feeling reflective about this past year, and the many gifts that we have received during a very difficult time. I’m incredibly grateful to our wonderful community that has stuck with us through this strange year, and given us the confidence to continue on with our mission to preserve Jamestown’s unique history and share it with all of you.

After the Fenton Museum had to shut down in mid-March, our first priority was to meet with staff and volunteers to strategize about how we could get our content out to you without compromising on quality. I was amazed and gratified by the response from our volunteers and several of our Trustees, who set about learning new formats and techniques; within a couple weeks of our closure, this group had put together a schedule of virtual workshops and lectures on genealogy and local history that we could, and did, rely on for months of uncertainty. I was also proud of the Fenton staff, who took the transition to working from home with grace and resolve, and who put in long hours in our last few days at the Museum to ensure that we would still have content and smooth operations, even when we couldn’t reliably get to our usual resources. It is always an honor to lead such a distinguished organization, but I feel especially humbled when I see the diligence, integrity, and commitment that our many supporters have towards the Fenton.

All of this effort would have fallen short, however, if our community (that’s you!) hadn’t come along with us and embraced our new pursuits. For those of you who have found so many ways to support us, whether by reading this newsletter and staying up-to-date with us, going to our programs this year, renewing your memberships, exploring our new website content or Patreon subscriptions, or any other ways that you find to engage and help us, to you I give a sincere and heartfelt thank you in this last month of 2020.

You are the core of everything we do and everything we seek to accomplish, and it is only with your continued support that we can move forward.
Christmas has arrived at the Fenton. The 2020 Holiday exhibit the Nutcracker is up and ready for visitors! Come experience the story of The Nutcracker with costumes from the Chautauqua Regional Youth Ballet. We worked hard to open an additional exhibit space which has been closed to the public for almost 30 years to allow extra space for the Nutcracker exhibit.

On December 10th at 7pm we will be hosting our third Virtual Paint Night Fundraiser, painting a winter scene. Call the Fenton at 716-664-6256 or stop in to register and pick up your painting kit. Cost is $20 or $15 if you provide your own paint and paint brush.

We are also hosting a Christmas Open house on December 19th from 10-4. There will be make and take activities for the kids, and some fun holiday photo opportunities around the house. Standard admission rates apply.

If you are doing some online shopping this year consider making a practical gift to the Fenton from our Amazon wishlist (see link below) or making a donation to our annual fund. Gifts purchased from other places are welcome as well.

CURATOR’S CORNER
by Victoria Parker, Curator

Consider the Fenton History Center when you do your Christmas shopping this year! We have put together an Amazon Wishlist with a few items. Of course we accept gifts purchased in other places, or monetary donations too!

www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/1PU3BVS0HQ5E0
A Curveball Becomes a Blessing!

Our Vets Finding Vets Program, no surprise here, has been just as affected by COVID-19 Restrictions as all of our other Fenton programs. Something we share with the rest of America and the world!

Through the generosity of our local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, our monthly Fenton Canteen, which had not been meeting for 3 months, was invited to temporarily meet at the DAR House on Prospect St. One of their members, Cindy Reidy, who is Project Coordinator for the Joseph P Dwyer Veteran Program, was using the facility and gained permission to invite Canteen Veterans as well. Wonderful!

We have been meeting in this larger space since July, observing COVID restrictions in order to allow the brave/healthy Veterans to connect - if only once a month.

Just before our November Canteen, with heavy hearts, the DAR members notified Cindy that they normally do not use the DAR House during the winter due to high heating bills associated with homes built in the 1840’s. Whoever thought COVID would still be so prevalent this late in the year when they made the offer in the spring? We totally understand, and are so grateful to have had this opportunity.

Almost immediately, another venue was offered, Christ First Church on the corner of Buffalo and Lake View Ave. Cindy’s young Vets have several weekly events and the large area offered is perfect for them. Likewise, for Canteen Vets who are mostly WWII, Korea, and Vietnam Vets, the entrance right from the parking lot into the large room with round tables is perfect. We have room to grow here as well.

The attached photo was taken at the November Canteen, and was visited by only our Vietnam Vets for the first time in 6 years, due to the ticking up of case numbers in our area. As we have been finding all along, silver linings have been found in the dark clouds of this virus. Our sincere and whole hearted appreciation to the DAR and Christ First Church for coming to the rescue, all of our Veterans agree! Stay safe everyone!

P.S. If there are any Veterans reading this who would enjoy the company of other Veterans, please join us! Canteen is held the second Saturday morning of each month, from 10 - 12. We wear masks, forego shaking hands, distance at the tables, have changed how we distribute our coffee, cookies, etc - and are determined to keep everyone safe. We think you’ll enjoy it, we are a happy group!
The Nutcracker

2020 Christmas Exhibit

The Fenton History Center is partnering with the Chautauqua Regional Youth Ballet to present The Nutcracker Holiday exhibit.

From E.T.A. Hoffman's "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" to Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker" Ballet, this classic holiday story is a Christmas tradition for many. Learn more of the story, get a close-up look at some of the costumes used locally in the CRYB's Nutcracker, and experience the holiday tradition in a new way!

Holiday exhibit opens on Black Friday November 27th, and runs through January 6th.

Museum Hours are:
Monday through Saturday 10-4
Admission:
$10 adults
Children Free!
Fenton History Center Members are always free!

Fenton History Center
67 Washington Street
Jamestown NY, 14701
716-664-6256
www.fentonhistorycenter.org
The Fenton History Center’s Genealogy Support Group serves as a support to both experienced and amateur researchers by acting as an educational offering our members. Meetings feature invaluable lectures, discussions and are an excellent way to become familiar with the Fenton History Center’s impressive collection of resources. The Support Group typically meets on the last Wednesday of each month at the Fenton History Center in the historic Hall House building, located at 73 Forest Avenue in Jamestown, New York. Doors open at 6, and the meeting begins at 6:30 with a brief business meeting followed by a program. Program topics and speakers are subject to change.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday, December 30, 2020 @ 6:30 PM
Christmas Party

Saturday, January 9, 2021 @ 10:00 AM
Virtual Lock-In

Wednesday, January 27, 2021 @ 6:30 PM
MyHeritage - presented by Andrew Kolstee

Wednesday, February 24, 2021 @ 6:30 PM
African American Research - presented by Tina Scott
The Fenton Historical Society was formed in 1963 and the museum first opened to the public in 1967. The Chautauqua County Historical Society had been active since 1886. In the 1940’s and 50’s New York State encouraged an interest in local history through Yorkers clubs in the schools. Jamestown and Sherman had active chapters. The State also provided for official county, town, city, and village historians by a law of 1919 but many localities had no appointed historian for decades and even then their support, financial and otherwise was embarrassingly low. It wasn’t until the 1970’s and the run up to our national bicentennial that small town local history surged forth with numerous formal societies.

In mid 20th century local history was sort of a men, women, and children phenomenon. The men were often either private collectors or seen as eccentrics or both. Those inclined to organization gravitated to the county historical society. Women were usually involved with the Daughters of the American Revolution, with a strong genealogical emphasis. The children were in the Yorkers clubs.

George C. Fowler (1881-1971) was Town of Harmony Historian from 1951 until his death. His notes were arranged by Irene Nagel and published as the History of the Town of Harmony in 1976. I never met Fowler. He died just about the time I was becoming interested in local history. Unfortunately, I never got out and met any of that older generation of local historians when I was a child or young man.

We recently received a collection of envelopes, mostly empty, addressed to Fowler. These were stamped with extremely common stamps and were probably intended as discards by Fowler although a few have small town local postmarks which we will retain. Fowler was a farmer, justice of the peace, and stamp collector. In mid 20th century coin and stamp collecting were popular hobbies, mostly for boys and men. In 1930 the Chautauqua Coin, Stamp, and Curio Club was formed. Several of the members were also interested in local history and the club’s programs reflected that if the postcard meeting announcements from 1939-1942 in this collection are any indication.

The collection also has some local return addresses of interest as well as a few postcard meeting announcements for the county historical society. I’m showing a Coin, Stamp, and Curio Club announcement for a 1939 field trip at the astronomical observatory then on Marlow Road near Willow Avenue. This observatory was a predecessor to the current Martz-Kohl Observatory. The location now has an historical marker. I might also note the CS and C Club was a predecessor to the Reuben E. Fenton Philatelic Society, no longer formally functioning since about 2005, that formed in October, 1966 in the Mansion. The Philatelic Society was not formally linked to the historical society but, as with CS and C and CCHS, there were a number of men active as members of both organizations. Even today at least one regular Fenton volunteer is a coin collector and one active member a stamp collector.
I was born in Bangor, Maine in 1948 and lived until age 23 in Brewer, Maine, across the Penobscot from Bangor. Got a degree in education from the University of Maine at Orono but didn’t really like the idea of teaching after experiencing student teaching. I had to think about a new career choice, and found myself remembering how much I loved museums and books. (I was always a reader from grade 2 onward.) After investigating programs in museum sciences and library science, I decided I’d love to be a professional librarian. I visited Simmons College in Boston, Mass., but found it to be a very expensive program, and I had used up almost all of my savings for tuition in Maine. In those days one could actually get their degree without having loans if they saved their pennies. I also looked into the Master’s program at SUNY Albany, which was a good program and wouldn’t break my bank! My mother surprised me by telling me she’d pay for my graduate schooling because I hadn’t cost them anything for my college.

I had a fantastic time at Albany, enjoyed my classes and found that I not only loved the cataloging courses, but took to them like the proverbial duck taking to water! I seemed to be the only student at Albany who actually liked those courses, and I was good at it so I became the mentor to all my classmates who couldn’t comprehend what the RULES were all about. There were rules for every aspect: filing, determining the main author to have at the beginning of the catalog card (which was soon to become the online record!), for describing the physical aspect of an item, selecting and forming the subject headings, figuring out what other authors deserved credit, and creating a call number, etc. I LOVED the Library of Congress Subject Headings book and the rules for using the headings. I LOVED discovering the intricacies of the then brand-new Anglo-American Cataloging Rules. I loved the rules for creating call numbers, whether Library of Congress or Dewey Decimal, or Universal Decimal or Bliss or. I really enjoyed being able to bring order to the chaos of all the information that is in a library. I worked in the Library School Library as my work-study job, and learned so much from that practical experience. For my entire career, I was a sort of backroom nerd, ultimately expanding my portfolio into library systems as well as cataloging and acquisitions.

After graduating, I first worked at Maine Maritime Academy in Castine a small library of about 30,000 titles. I gained my footing working at that small library and learning at the foot of a very wise head librarian (who was also the Episcopalian Priest in the town where he lived, Blue Hill,) One of the experiences at MMA that helped me as my career developed was the decision by my forward thinking boss to join NELINET-- the New England Library Information Network. During those years, use of computing in libraries was just developing. NELINET was one of several regional library consortia that were trying to lay the ground rules for things like computerized catalogs that we see everywhere today. But in 1973 the idea was just a twinkle in some people’s eyes, but everyone knew that before we could actually have an online catalog, we needed to convert catalog cards into catalog data. NELINET and the other consortia eventually coalesced and joined OCLC (then known as the Ohio College Library Center). It turned out the OCLC would become the surviving entity, which now has its data on the web as WorldCat, and thousands of libraries worldwide contribute their computerized catalog data and their holdings information to WorldCat so we all can find what we want or need and hopefully have it sent to us via interlibrary loan. Going to NELINET meetings was kind of a heady experience for me, even after a rather elitist librarian from the U of Southern Maine asked quite directly, “What would a small library like MMA’s be doing joining NELINET?” I told him that we were doing just what his institution was... contributing records from our specialized collection in the hope of eventually having a computerized catalog. He looked shocked, as if no small library could ever hope to have a computerized catalog. Well, it was early days, so I forgive him! After three years at MMA, and chafing at the need to wear a quasi-military uniform for work (it was the early 70s), plus having my first child on the way, I got a job at the University of Maine at the Farmington...CONTINUED ON PAGE 8
It was a bigger library, slightly bigger and somewhat quirkier staff, and my first experience working with a government documents repository. During my time at Farmington the faculty and professional staff experienced a lot of morale-depressing actions due to low budgets and several decisions of the system Board of Trustees and the state legislature, a segment decided to try to form a union. Guess who got involved? Yep, yours truly! That was a fun time, and helped me become more adept at working with colleagues to fulfill common goals. We also began a two-year Library Technical Assistant program in which I taught the two cataloging courses. Ultimately, with two children now and my last one on the way, and working in a relatively poorly funded state university system for the past eight years, I decided I had to find greener pastures. I began searching other job openings that would offer a better salary level.

What I eventually found was a school that had all the things I loved: architecture by a world-famous architect, a well-known and well-regarded School of Music, a large library (well technically it is medium sized by academic standards, but it seemed larger than life to me!) of roughly 500,000 items, and a large and very good staff. At Fredonia, I started as the Head of Cataloging, with a staff of six or seven under me. Then as computers began to take hold for real in libraries, I became the Head of Systems, and moved on to become the Head of Technical Services (covering systems, cataloging, and acquisitions). I found Fredonia to be a wonderful workplace, and western New York (and especially Chautauqua County) to be a great place to live and raise children. I do still miss the smell of the ocean (Acadia National Park was an hour from my childhood home.) I also miss the truly vibrant colors of the New England fall foliage, but there are years like this year here, when we have a foliage spectacle of our own. I worked at Fredonia for 28 years, retiring on St. Patrick’s Day in 2010.

Having been retired for 10 years now, I find that life is richer because I get to set what I do every day. I can read my favorite books (Loise Penny, anyone?), do my genealogy, listen to my various music streams (no more long play vinyl or CDs!), cheer for the Bills during football season, nap when I feel like it, and so on. I also enjoy cooking for family gatherings, and playing cards with friends. Jack Ericson got me to volunteer at the Chautauqua Historical Society in Westfield, where he wanted to revamp their library collection, and (what else?) get it computerized. He corralled me and we worked for about 2 or 2 and 1/2 years on that project one day a week. Did I mention that I’ve also learned to say “No” once retired? Then Karen retired from Fenton History Center, and I was told they needed someone to help catalog materials for the Hall House Library, so I decided I could work on that as long as FHC could live with my erratic schedule. They could, and I did. So now once a week (usually) I spend time cataloging materials and hopefully bring new information to light for the library’s users. I enjoy putting my expertise to work, as long as I don’t have to drive from Brocton to Jamestown in bad weather.