

# Walnut Grove Press

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FENTON HISTORY CENTER

museum and research center

## 2020 Annual Report

*FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, RICK LUNDQUIST*

"When life gives you lemons, make lemonade"

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## 2021-2022 OFFICERS ELECTED; ANNUAL REPORT RELEASED

**by Andrew Kolstee**  
**TRUSTEE, EDITOR**

The Fenton Board of Trustees held their annual meeting via Zoom on Wednesday, February 3, 2021.

Nominating Committee Chair Ashley Senske presented the nominees for Trustee and officer positions. Ang Cimo and Andrew Kolstee were re-elected for a third 3-year term on the Board.

Rick Lundquist was re-elected to a third one-year term as President. Ashley Senske was re-elected to a second one-year term as Vice President.

Mike Rohlin was elected to a first one-year term as Secretary, succeeding outgoing Secretary Andrew Kolstee. Janet Wahlberg was elected to a first one-year term as Treasurer, succeeding outgoing Treasurer Ang Cimo.

Executive Director Noah Good-

ling presented the annual report.

Despite the complications of the pandemic over the past year, the Fenton has had several accomplishments, which are outlined in the Annual Report.

An excerpt from Executive Director Noah Goodling's report in the annual report can be found below.

### EXCERPT FROM ANNUAL REPORT

**by Noah Goodling**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

I started out my report last year by saying that 2019 was a year for the history books. I was being celebratory, elated to share all the wonderful things that we had done that year. Saying it again this year, though, I really believe it – I think we'll all be talking about 2020 for a long time. This

was a year that brought some real surprises, and some distressing moments for the organization and its supporters. In the midst of all of the uncertainty, though, there were also wonderful moments, instances where my commitment to this role and this community were reinforced thanks to the generosity, flexibility, and determination that was shown. 2020 was a year for the history books, but I felt fortunate to weather this year with a community that was bold and steadfast in the face of trying times.

2020 started off a hopeful note. We had a brand new entrance-way and ramp that made our building more accessible than ever, and, after resolving a few minor issues here and there with doorknobs and snow-melt systems and sensors, it has worked dependably to give our organization a fresh face. This entrance-way was a major project and an important symbolic step towards realizing one of my pressing goals – to make sure that our history is

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accessible and inclusive to everyone in our community – so it has been a great pleasure for me to walk through that door so many times this year.

Our programming for the year was arranged around a similar theme of inclusivity. To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the national passage of women's suffrage, we had a slate of lectures, tours, and conversations scheduled, including a very exciting partnership with regional Girl Scout troops to help earn badges for Scouts as far away as Rochester. One of these Girl Scout programming days ended up being our very last in-person public event before the full brunt of the pandemic hit – in mid-March we had a wonderful day of touring groups of Scouts around the

Fenton Mansion, introducing them to actors portraying some of the big names in suffrage from Chautauqua County. Within a week of that event, we had orders from the Governor to close down the Museum, and suddenly we were all at home, anxiously waiting for news.

*For the entire Annual Report, visit [fentonhistorycenter.org/annual-report](https://fentonhistorycenter.org/annual-report)*

# CURATOR'S CORNER

**by Victoria Parker**  
**CURATOR**

We have a new, exciting announcement. In addition to the regular self-guided tours of the

Fenton mansion there is now an additional virtual component! The new QR Code tour is up and ready for visitors. When you come to the Fenton History Center and tour the Mansion the guidebook will have instructions for the QR code tour. There will be a sign posted in every room, and maybe a couple bonus ones in the hallways with a QR code. Use your smart phone camera to read the code, or access the website directly from your phone's internet browser, and see a custom website with information and some of our #Museum-FromHome videos about the artifacts you are looking at. We are hoping this will make touring the Fenton a more fun and interactive experience, and we expect the QR code tour to have videos and content added periodically.



## FENTON HISTORY CENTER

museum and research center

A photograph of the Fenton History Center building, a large red brick structure with multiple arched windows. In the foreground, there is a statue of a man in a dark coat and hat, standing on a pedestal. The image is slightly faded to serve as a background for the text.

**View the 2020  
Annual Report**

**[fentonhistorycenter.org/annual-report](https://fentonhistorycenter.org/annual-report)**

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*One of the ways you can support the Fenton History Center is through our Amazon Wishlist. Of course we accept gifts purchased in other places, or monetary donations too!*

[www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/1PU3BVS0HQ5E0](http://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/1PU3BVS0HQ5E0)

# *Genealogy Support Group*

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. Meetings are also often held via Zoom.

\*The two upcoming New England Workshops are the first two in a series of six on the topic.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Wednesday, February 24, 2021 @ 6:30 PM**

African American Research

*presented by Tina Scott*

**Saturday, March 20, 2021 @ 10:30 AM**

New England Workshop I: Formation of New England\*

*presented by Andrew Kolstee*

**Wednesday, March 24, 2021 @ 6:30 PM**

Researching Areas That Have Changed Hands

*presented by Vince Courtney*

**Saturday, April 17, 2021 @ 10:30 AM**

New England Workshop II: Migration Out of New England\*

*presented by Janet Wahlberg*

# REMEMBERING JERRY NELSON

by **Steve Hatfield**

I remember seeing Jerry I don't even remember how many years ago. It was at a gun show (of course) in Kennedy and he had his display of locally made firearms. I had no idea such things existed! Nor that there were so many local gun makers! We did not become acquaintances then, but...

Fast forward to recent days, since I started volunteering at the Hall House. Jerry was a frequent visitor, usually on his endless quest to dig up more information on gunsmiths from Chautauqua County. He was not that good on computers, so I am sure he asked several volunteers to search census records for gunsmiths, gunmakers etc. He probably milked that cow dry. More than once he commented how people were farmers in the summer and gun makers in the winter because winter was when they had some spare time. He came in once looking for someone from Westfield. A little research showed that it was probably Westfield Massachusetts, so that subject got dropped.

H.V. Perry was one of Jerry's favorites. Perry was based in Jamestown starting about 1864. Despite having a large circle of

friends and an active public life, when Perry died, he was buried in an unmarked grave. It was Jerry who initiated a fund drive among gun enthusiasts, and in 2000 a marker was put on Perry's grave. The last time I saw Jerry, he was looking for James Riley Sutton of Kennedy. It seems as if Mr. Sutton may be in an unmarked grave. Research indicated that his wife is buried in Riverside Cemetery, in Kennedy. I was there last Memorial Day and yes, she is there. But no sign of James Riley Sutton. Another mystery that Jerry was working on.

Jerry showed me a coin he once picked up at a show. It is in a cardboard holder (a flip) with his JN monogram. He was told it was old and asked me if I knew anything about it. I can sometimes read Latin and so I told him it had the dates 1910 and 1935 on it – in Roman numerals. It appeared to be a 25th Anniversary medal for George V of England. I believe he was a bit disappointed, but he brought it in again later and gave it to me. I still have it and I guess I always will...

*Added note by Janet Wahlberg:*

*For those of you not familiar with Jerry, he was a bit of a fixture at the Hall House always there to*



Gerald W. "Jerry" Nelson (1938-2021)

*visit with Norman and hoping to find one more bit of information on a gunsmith who had taken his interest. He always arrived with his trademark knit red hat and a big smile. Three or four of his volumes of research are on the shelves at the Hall House. In addition to the work that he did researching, Jerry helped to set up a display of early firearms and gunsmiths at the Genesee Country Museum in Mumfords, New York and collected the tools necessary to the trade of gunsmithing. Jerry was known for quietly lending a hand to the Fenton History Center over the years including donating the antique gun that is in the case in the entry way to the Fenton Museum. Another recipient of Jerry's generous heart was the Busti Mill Project.*

*Jerry passed away Sunday January 24th aged 82. He will indeed be missed.*

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# COMMUNITY TREASURES

**by Norman Carlson**  
**COLLECTIONS MANAGER**

I keep saying history is a human activity. People, even historians, professional and amateur, look into the past and see a mirror with horribly simplified and distorted reflections of themselves and their passions. They neither suspect nor desire it could be any other way. Why study history except to divide the past like sports teams into fantasy factions of us and them?

One prominent pioneer family owned slaves but few, if any at the time thought ill of them because of it. Probably most of the secular Chautauqua County population of the first quarter of the 19th century disapproved in some measure of slavery but thought little of it or considered it none of their business. Probably most observing Christians (then the most influential and respected segment of the population) considered slave owning a sin but only one of many sins coming increasingly into focus. The relevant variable in the case of all those sins, but slave owning most of all, was the growth of the public activist movement. Elements of Christianity, followed closely by the general society, were growing more utopian and more coercive.

William Lloyd Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society founded in 1836 in New York City was

pivotal in transforming the slavery issue from a south vs north political power question into a moral crusade. In its first year it sent out 70 touring lecturers. They were stunningly successful. One of them, James M. Blakesly, a new graduate of Oberlin College, worked Erie (1836) and Chautauqua (then Chautauque) (1837) countries.

Blakesly spoke several times in Jamestown's First Baptist Church and also in Fluvanna. The accompanying riots constituted the second most dramatic and violent episode in Chautauqua County slavery and abolition history, eclipsed only by the Harrison Williams slave capture in 1851.

After the Civil War, nobody wanted to admit having been anti-abolition. The old historians didn't want to remember that part of our history and certainly would not mention names. In recent years even master historian Douglas Shepard quotes only two sources for this otherwise nearly forgotten bombshell. Gilbert W. Hazeltine in his 1887 *The Early History of the Town of Ell-cott* devotes one long paragraph to it. The anonymous 1915 *History of the First Baptist Church, Jamestown, N.Y., 1827-1915* devotes two paragraphs and is considerably more graphic. The old 19th century local historical patriarchs were embarrassed by

the anti-abolitionists and their behavior and didn't want them remembered. Edson devotes two sentences to the riots. Young mentions comparable events in other locations, but not here.

As to other sources, the contemporary Jamestown Journal was frustratingly tardy, elliptical, and non-forthcoming in its coverage. Helen McMahon found it and used it in her brief 1958 *History of Chautauqua County*. Bakesly himself wrote bland letters to *The Friend of Man* and possibly other abolitionist papers but before the internet these were nearly impossible for local historians to access.

Now a new source has been rediscovered. It is a 38 stanza poem "Composed by Miss Mary Smith, Feb. 28, 1838 of Busti, Chautauqua County, New York." About forty years ago I had seen a typescript copy of this. It and two copies I had made all disappeared. But in the Fenton annual "cleaning vacation" a photocopy of a printed version of unknown source and date pasted in a scrapbook appeared. I'm guessing it is from one of the Clayburne Sampson scrapbooks at the McClurg Museum. The poem is dramatic indeed, describing events just over a year previous, February 13, 1837. In one fashion or another the poem alludes to nearly 30 individuals,

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abolitionist and anti-abolitionist, Busti and Jamestown residents and others. Nine are identified by full (except no first name for Blakesly) name in footnotes. One pro-slavery man, Ben Runions, is identified by name in the poem text and several members of the

Busti Clark family are so mentioned. The poem is clumsy and it is often difficult to tell which side a stanza is talking about. It veers into a seemingly unrelated issue of child abuse. There were as many as six Smith families in Busti in the 1830's but I have not identified Mary. She may have

been a schoolgirl. Much research can be done on this poem and the names contained that will shed a lot of light on an obscured but pivotal episode in Jamestown history.

# VETS FINDING VETS

**by Barb Cessna**

## **VETS FINDING VETS COORDINATOR**

One of the most gratifying aspects of being the Project Coordinator for Vets Finding Vets, (besides personally getting to know so many Veterans of all ages), is the opportunity to help reach local Veterans who dream of going to Washington, D. C. on an Honor Flight.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 disrupted the usual spring and fall flights through Buffalo/Niagara Honor Flight during 2020, and also the spring flight for 2021. Fingers crossed for Fall 2021, as we have several Veterans waiting and hoping their health holds out in order to be on the next flight.

Huge thanks to Cindy Reidy, Project Coordinator of Dwyer Chautauqua Veterans, and Marlene Samuelson, a member of Blue Star Mothers, for their new project benefitting Honor Flight Veterans. While she had asked that the invitation to knit or crochet patriotic "quilts" be offered to Fenton members because she had purchased such a stockpile

of red, white, and blue yarn, the good news is that she has already needed to replenish the supply! The perfect project for the cold dreary months was a big hit and I will share the photos of the presentations of those quilts when that comes about.

On Dec 31st, 2020, the very first of our 34 Honor Flight Veterans passed away. Angelo Bonta, was a very proud 93 year old Navy Veteran who enjoyed Fenton Canteen, the VFV trips, Veteran talks, but especially the Honor Flight he participated in on May 4, 2019. He never tired of telling his friends or strangers his wonderful memories of the trip and seeing it all with so many other Veterans.

Angelo was also very proud to be among the first sailors to be trained to fight fires on ships, as much of Pearl Harbor's devastation could have been avoided had sailors been trained for attacks from above. Hindsight is always 20/20.

Having grown up and then be-



*Angelo Bonta*

coming a businessman in Jamestown, Angelo wrote down his Italian heritage experiences in depth, and even checked through many unidentified photos in the Fenton Collection in order to lend a hand.

We will gather for Fenton Canteen on Feb. 13, at Christ First Church from 10-noon, and we will be sure to "distance toast" with a cup o'Joe in celebration of the life of our friend Angelo.

Take care everyone!



### STAFF MEMBERS

**Noah Goodling** Executive Director  
**Paula Bechmann** Office Manager  
**Norman Carlson** Collections Manager  
**Victoria Parker** Curator  
**Barbara Cessna** Researcher

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**Fenton Historical Society**  
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**Hours: Mon. - Sat. 10 AM - 4 PM**

# GENEALOGY SUPPORT GROUP TO HOST PROGRAM ON AFRICAN AMERICAN RESEARCH PRESENTED BY TINA SCOTT



**by Janet Wahlberg**  
**TRUSTEE, TREASURER**

The Hall House Research Library at the Fenton History Center will present a program on African American Genealogical Research in honor of Black History Month. The Fenton is committed to helping everyone in our area connect with their family and community history, and we hope that this program will help spark an interest in the Black Community. Our presenter is Tina Scott, the former Director of the Prendergast Library who is a very skilled genealogist. She belongs to a Facebook group that

does African American genealogy and finds it to be a treasure trove of information.

The program is scheduled for Wednesday February 24th at 6:30 and will be in a Zoom format due to ongoing Covid issues. We will be recording it for those that are unable to join us on the 24th which will allow you to view it at your convenience. If you are interested, please call the Fenton at 716-664-6456 and provide your name, email, and phone number. There is no cost, and you will be provided with a Zoom link prior to the program.