



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”

I first saw this on a poster when I was in college in the ‘70s. It initially struck me as kind of funny, but I learned as time went on that it was a great way to deal with tough and unexpected situations. Certainly, this was a great way to look at what we faced in 2020.

After a very promising January, we were starting to gear up for our usual season when the full impact of COVID-19 hit us. Like other institutions, we were faced with some serious issues including lack of programming and the corresponding loss of revenue we needed to sustain the organization. I am so proud to say that our staff rose to the challenge in so many ways. A lot of creative thinking and brainstorming went on over the subsequent weeks to come up with ideas that we could implement with the restrictions that were in place. We worked hard to come up with re-opening plans that would fit all the guidelines, and to use our resources to come up with virtual events that would still help us be connected to the community and allow the community to connect to us. These events, along with support from our membership in the form of membership renewals and donations, helped us move forward.



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With very careful planning we were so pleased to be able to offer our largest in person event, the “Saints and Sinners” event, live and in person. We were not able to offer the carriage tour part of the event due to social-distancing guidelines, so the event had to be scaled down some. However, people were very appreciative that we were able to do this, and we had an excellent turnout nevertheless.

It became clear to us as the year went on that we have some wonderful supporters in the community. I’d like to make a special shout out to our volunteers, who went above and beyond many times for work both in the Hall House research center and the Mansion.

As we move forward into 2021, I know we are all in hopes of returning to much more of a normal situation in our country and our community, and especially in what we do for our community. We have some exciting new exhibits and programming planned, so please stay in touch, and make sure you don’t miss anything!

So, raise your glass of lemonade, and here’s to a wonderful 2021!



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FROM THE DIRECTOR, NOAH GOODLING

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 entranceway 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 entranceway was a major project and an important symbolic step towards realizing one of my pressing goals – to make sure that our history is 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.

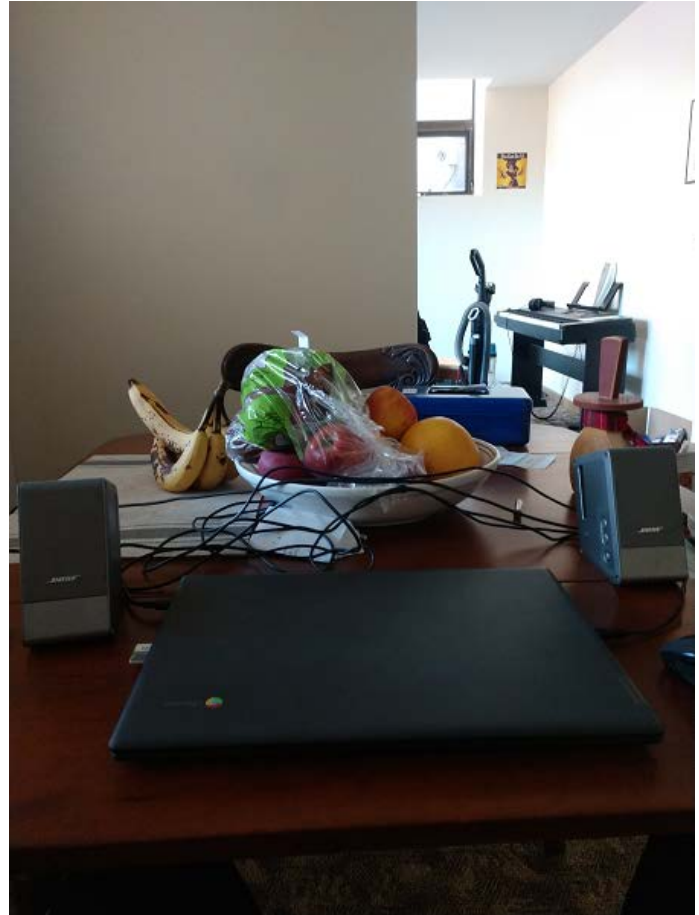


Our programming for the year was arranged around a similar theme of inclusivity. To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the national passage of women's suffrage, we had a slate of lectures, tours, and conversations scheduled, including a very exciting partnership with regional Girl Scout troops to help 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.

This closure of the Museum's physical site would have been a much bigger crisis if we didn't have such an amazing team of staff, volunteers, and Board members who care about the Fenton and the preservation of

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local history. Even as I felt twisted about by rapidly changing circumstances and a slew of information coming in, our dedicated crew was looking at the situation pragmatically and coming up with a new calendar of programs that we could work on remotely. Board members Andrew Kolstee and Janet Wahlberg on our Research Center Committee had a new plan for keeping our genealogy programs together faster than I would have believed possible, and were coordinating with speakers and researchers in what felt like minutes after we closed the Museum. Our Curator, Victoria Parker, who had been in that role for all of three months, also rallied very quickly, shooting dozens of short videos around the Fenton in the week before we had to start working from home, and updating our website with hours of quality historical content that families could do from home. To date, over 100 of these short videos have been created, enough that a new one was shown every weekday that we were forcibly closed, keeping our audience engaged by giving them a reason to keep coming back to our social media posts.



The office looked a little different for parts of 2020.

The rest of our staff and Board also deserve significant acclaim for helping to keep the Fenton together during the difficult four months that we were closed in 2020, and for helping me to manage the reopening and subsequent months. All of our staff showed flexibility in modifying their projects to work from home, and finding innovative ways to keep our volunteers and our community engaged with our mission. For our Board, I owe major thanks to our Building and Grounds Committee, consisting of Board President Rick Lundquist, along with Kurt Johnson and Dave Painter. In many ways, these three literally kept the Fenton together, keeping our lights on, our buildings weather-proof, and, in one memorable moment, rescuing us from a mini-flood in the Museum basement. Mike Rohlin also gets a ton of credit for faithfully coming to the Hall House each week and mowing our yard, saving us money in lawn maintenance and keeping our grounds looking neat and tidy. Guy Ditonto and Marie Carrubba helped with marketing ideas, and gave me constructive feedback on developing our programs. Steve Johnson and Julie Hewitt have been faithful program volunteers, lending their great knowledge and outstanding acting talent to many of our endeavors. Ang Cimo helped me with the finances, always made sure our checks were signed, and kept my spirits up with a friendly face and a great conversation whenever he stopped by. One of our newest Board members, Ashley Senske, took on the Vice President role almost immediately, and has lived up to it by filling in every time I ask for volunteers or support or anything else. All this is just a small piece of how my Board has supported me this year – the Fenton is blessed to have such devoted caretakers.

We also owe a substantial debt to our community this year, for their ongoing belief that our mission is important and our organization deserves support. A big thank-you goes out to Arthur Pearson at the Roger Tory Peterson Institute, Kristan McMahon at the Robert H. Jackson Center, and Leigh Rovegno at the Audubon Community Nature Center – all of these community leaders helped me to wrap my head around the deluge of information that came with the pandemic, to strategize effective ways to reopen safely when we were allowed to do so, and were generous with their time when I needed to talk through a complex issue. Thanks are also due to the local foundations, who acted quickly to make sure that funding was available for organizations like the Fenton that needed to cancel programming during this year. The Ralph C. Sheldon Foundation, the Chautauqua Region Community Foundation, Humanities New York, the Arts Services Initiative of Western New York, and the United Way of Southern Chautauqua County were especially instrumental in making sure we kept afloat throughout 2020.



Portions of the Fenton resembled film sets as we put together our virtual programs.

I was gratified last year to be able to mention the debut of the Jean Vandewark Olson Stowell Genealogy Research & Education Fund, a memorial set up by Fenton supporter Karen Olson to commemorate the time she spent researching at the Fenton with her mother. This fund was of crucial importance to keeping our genealogy programs going throughout 2020, and I have been deeply grateful to see that Karen has continued to direct friends and family to contribute to the fund to keep it going. As 2020 drew to a close, I was surprised and humbled to see the Fenton named as a beneficiary of another newly created fund, the Dr. Thomas L. and Sally D. Greer Charitable Fund. The Greers picked Giving Tuesday, which was in early December, as a particularly fitting day to let me know about the creation of this gift. Members of the Fenton may be most familiar with the work that Tom and Sally Greer have done for the Fenton via the archaeological dig that's occurred on our grounds for quite a few years now, but that project is only the tip of the iceberg. Their

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love for local history and selfless support for the Fenton has been overwhelming since long before I came on as Director, and I feel incredibly moved that they would trust me through the creation of this new fund to carry on their vision and passion for the community. We already have plans in place for both of these funds in 2021, so stay tuned to see the impact that these generous individuals will have on our community.

Beyond these individual donors, I have also been grateful and relieved to see that so many in our community have followed along with our changing circumstances this year. Along with our increased online presence this year, through social media and our website, we launched a few new ways for our audience to follow along with us and learn about our history. One of these is the Walnut Grove Press, a monthly newsletter featuring articles from staff, Board members, and volunteers, which has chronicled the happenings at the Fenton each month since August. We've received great feedback since launching the newsletter, which is helpful – it's easier to be convinced to write an article each month when you know someone is going to read it! Another method was through the launch of the WNY History Podcast, a collaborative effort between the Fenton, WRFA, and the Jamestown City Historian. This podcast currently has over 10 episodes, and features over a dozen hours of free content on topics of significance in local history. Finally, we have launched a series of virtual programs this year, some of which were brand new and some of which were modified from existing programs into a virtual format. Learning to create these virtual programs has required a huge amount of dedication from volunteers and staff, so having our community continue to support them has been a welcome relief on our side. Thank you to everyone who took a chance on our virtual programs and were patient with us as we figured out new technologies and methodologies. Thanks also to the Museum Association of New York, which has

started to support our efforts at creating virtual programming, and has committed towards helping us to improve those programs in the future.

Though it wasn't the year we were expecting, 2020 did have some wonderful moments for us at the Fenton. In a touch of normalcy, we held our Saints and Sinners tours through Lakeview



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Cemetery, and had some really bizarre and amazing stories to tell this year. Though we had to cancel the carriage tours, almost all of our walking tours were sold out, and we had a great crowd at the Mausoleum Tours, with many commenters saying this was their favorite year yet, despite some of the restrictions we had to put in place. Just as 2020 was getting started, we received a competitive grant from the New York State Council on the Arts and the Greater Hudson Heritage Network that let us start working on putting together an archive for our local LGBTQ+ community, and planning an exhibit around what we collected, which will debut in late March, 2021. I'm grateful to Jamestown Pride and the many individual supporters of this project for patiently working with me and the Fenton staff throughout 2020 to ensure that we could move forward, pandemic or not. This effort has been supported again recently by a grant from Humanities New York, which is a much-needed boost. The Fenton has found a rich wealth of resources by getting access to Catchafire, a site that matches professional volunteers with non-profits, which was gifted to us by the

Sheldon Foundation. Beyond support for everything from our guidebook to our website, this service gave me the chance to get mentored by a truly inspiring individual, Dr. Kathryn "Kit" Matthew, a former head of the Institute for Museum and Library Services. I also had fun getting a chance to talk to program developers from Turner Classic Movies, who were putting together content on Lucille Ball, which will hopefully come out in 2021. Every year in this job brings such amazing and unique experiences to my life.

Jamestown and Chautauqua County are truly exceptional places. As crises burst out all across our nation, our community leapt into action like never before. When I talked this year with peers across the country and around the world, I was struck by how fortunate I am to serve in this position and in this location. There is a palpable sense of relief in seeing the end of 2020, as symbolic as that may be, but it would be incorrect to say that it was a disastrous year at the Fenton. 2020 was a year that brought great challenges and great opportunities; I owe many thanks to this community for helping me to overcome the first and see the potential of the second. The Fenton is only great because we're all in it together.

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EXHIBITS AND EDUCATION, CURATOR, VICTORIA PARKER

2020 was a noteworthy year. I took over the position of Curator in early 2020. We were able to do a few events in the first part of 2020, including Servant's House tours, and our first Girl Scout event, which we called the "Women's Suffrage Tour." We also revisited our 2017 exhibit, "Why Not New York: The Road to the Vote," to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th amendment.

While the shutdown forced us home, it did not stop the Fenton. I began posting videos featuring some of our collections items every weekday at the start of the closure. These videos have continued on a weekly basis since reopening. There have now been over 90 videos posted featuring our collections and exhibits. I also made free children's activities available on the Kids Corner page and started Virtual Paint Night fundraisers.

Fall saw a re-imagining of some of our normal events. Virtual cemetery tours and a virtual Halloween tour were very successful and well received. We were able to host a Halloween open house in October as well.

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The 2020 Holiday exhibit, The Nutcracker, went up in November. The Chautauqua Regional Youth Ballet loaned us costumes from their annual performance to enhance our exhibit. We were also able to open an additional exhibit space this year for the holiday exhibit, which had not been open to the public since 1991.

2021 is a promising year. I look forward to creating new events and welcoming more visitors to the Fenton History Center!

HALL HOUSE RESEARCH CENTER, BARB CESSNA

As you can imagine, COVID-19 restrictions hit the Research Center hard and we closed completely for a while. We worked from home checking the emails and helping people outright if we could, or coming in to do the research since nobody else was here.

When we reopened, most researchers made appointments so that we could control how many would be here at one time. When others stopped in, we could sometimes just fold them in by having them do their research in a different room, or make an appointment for another day.

People have been very understanding throughout.

December became a problem when I was quarantined for the whole month (first my husband, then my own) and we could no longer cover the Research Center for my extra 2 days a week plus the other days. Even though we have been closed during January as well, we were able to do research needed to keep up with inquiries, and make a plan for the thorough cleaning during the last two weeks of January.



COVID has forced us to formulate other ways of still having our genealogy programs, like Fenton Genealogy Support Group (because genealogy is addictive and we all need the help and support of others to get through it all!). We started using Zoom for GSG meetings, and as restrictions loosened up, we began to go hybrid, with 2 or 3 people at the Research Center and the rest on Zoom. We are still in this stage - but we are continuing to plan events into 2022, because we know that if things have not normalized, we can come back to the lessons we have learned. We were very happy to be able to offer the annual Library Lock-In on January 9th by having three of us at the Research Center and Zooming with interested members.

Sadly, even though best attempts were made to save our Genealogy Conference in April, and then making plans for a

virtual Conference with those same speakers, the COVID numbers kept ticking up and we were unable to make that all work while keeping everyone safe. We are hoping for the best in the spring of 2022!

In the meantime, the Research Committee has exciting plans for the 2021 Genealogy Support Group, so stay tuned!

GENEALOGY SUPPORT GROUP, JANET WAHLBERG

As with every other organization during this pandemic year, the Genealogy Support Group has had its challenges. However, we have risen to these challenges and created many creative programs. When Noah was required to shut down the Fenton and the Hall House, we wondered what we would be able to do to keep up an interest in the group. Fortunately, we are blessed to have two very talented young people associated with our group, Victoria Parker, Curator and Andrew Kolstee, Trustee. Both are very tech savvy and helped us to transition to Zoom programs. In addition, Andrew streamed our programs to Facebook. This allowed members from Florida and Washington to join our monthly meeting.



As restrictions began to ease up, we were able to do blended programs beginning in July that allowed us to have a limited number of participants at the Hall House while others joined us on Zoom or Facebook. Both of these platforms are interactive, allowing participants to ask questions and join in discussions. While we had to cancel our Spring Workshops, we were able to plan and hold 3 Workshops this fall on DNA. They were offered in the blended format of Zoom and in person. In addition to this, Andrew worked his magic to provide a video of each program available until the end of December.

I have attached a photo from our November meeting on the War of 1812. Steve Johnson, a Trustee and a re-enactor, brought his War of 1812 Uniform and Sandy Johnson spoke on researching War of 1812 veterans. She also spoke on the newest chapter of the Daughters of 1812, a group that focuses on the War of 1812. So, we have been busy and are looking forward to 2021!

COLLECTIONS DEPARTMENT, NORMAN CARLSON

103 new donations were assigned numbers in 2020. Six additional items found in collection were recorded.

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The major deaccessioned item was 2010.173.1, a couch in poor condition. Work was started in 2019, but the item was removed in 2020 and given away. Poor condition was the reason for removal. Approximately 290 items from the Form C books of 1972 to 1974 were transcribed into PastPerfect. Seven items from 2019 or earlier from backlog were also entered. Six temporary custody items were taken in awaiting decisions on adding them to the collection.

A four item incoming loan was arranged with the New York State Armory. These were scrapbooks sent out one by one to Rick Roll for scanning.

A loan was made by the Chautauqua Regional Youth Ballet of costumes, posters, programs and nutcrackers for use in our 2020 Holiday exhibit The Nutcracker.

Three outgoing loans have been made: snapshots from the Mayor Teresi collection for identification, photos and documents on the Makanari Home for reference in writing an article, and photos from the Barkstrom collection for indexing. The large 2019 incoming loan of death files from the Post-Journal continues to be scanned and processed by a volunteer. He is currently working on the last of the original 14 drawers. The clippings are being straightened and pieced together before scanning, then cropped and image-adjusted after scanning, and finally are rendered searchable.

One day a week work with a volunteer on oversized photos continued effectively. A considerable portion of the material intended has been processed: accessioned where necessary, recorded, and properly housed.

Progress was made in itemizing and recording the large Mayor Teresi collection from last year.

Indexing of the large collection of Barkstrom Realty photos begun several years ago has resumed and is making good progress.

A notable large donation in the past year consisted of hundreds of negatives and prints of the recently terminated Leveson Agency and photographic studio. These are primarily negatives and prints from advertising and catalogs of local industries and businesses. One of our new volunteers is a good possible match for this task.



VETS FINDING VETS PROGRAM, BARB CESSNA

Vets Finding Vets was launched on Nov. 11, 2014, in honor of Gov. Fenton and the Fenton Mansion's history of welcoming Veterans, from 1865 through the purchase of the Fenton Home by the City of Jamestown to be used as a Soldier and Sailor Memorial in 1919.

Chautauqua County Veterans can obtain free memberships to the Research Center in order to use our resources, computers, and expertise to begin or continue family genealogies, focus on the Veterans in their family, help document other Chautauqua County Veterans, etc.

The year 2020 started out much the same as other years. With unpredictable temps and driving conditions, wintertime is when the event list consists only of our monthly Fenton Canteen, while I am busy scheduling special events, speakers, and generally two bus trips. Beginning in mid-March, however, the usual plan switched to trying to hang onto events by reshaping them with COVID restrictions, and then eventually canceling most. We did manage to hang onto two Hero Tours at Lake View Cemetery and were invited to have Canteen Veterans meet at the DAR House by Cindy Reidy, whose Dwyer Chautauqua Veterans had been meeting there already.

While the dark clouds were many, there were also silver linings. One of the most compelling silver linings was gaining permission to document National Guard enlistments, which are housed at the Jamestown Armory. The Fenton Guards, who formed in 1875, were named in honor of Gov. Fenton. Reuben Earle Fenton, the Governor's son, became a member. "Earle," as he was known by his many friends, was best known as the founder of Fenton Metallic, where vaults and metal furniture were manufactured. They also manufactured bicycles, two of which are on display at the Fenton History Center. Fenton Metallic was the predecessor of Art Metal.



A recent surprise at the Armory was the discovery of Earle's Christmas gift to the Fenton Guards, just months before his untimely death in Naples, Italy, on Mar 25, 1895, while traveling with his wife. A correspondence showed the intended use was storage of firearms, and the photo shows its perfect size for storage of pistols.

Documentation of the enlistments and service records of our local Guards are a perfect COVID project and will be a wonderful asset for family researchers.



FENTON HISTORY CENTER STAFF

Noah Goodling, Executive Director

Victoria Parker, Curator

Norman Carlson, Collections Manager

Barbara Cessna, Head of Library; Vets Finding Vets Program Coordinator

Phoebe Forbes, Volunteer Textile Manager

Paula Bechmann, Office Manager & Housekeeping

WHAT WE DO

The mission of the Fenton History Center – Museum & Research Center is to provide educational and cultural opportunities for the residents of Chautauqua County and its visitors through the collection, preservation and exhibition of artifacts and archival materials pertaining to Jamestown, New York.

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	YTD Actuals thru Dec 31, 2020	2020 Budget	\$ Over/(Under) Budget	% to Budget
Income				
Hall House	\$4,435.00	\$8,350.00	(3,915.00)	53.11%
Fundraising	\$22,367.86	\$26,180.00	(3,812.14)	85.44%
Donations	\$39,457.00	\$22,750.00	16,707.00	173.44%
Endowment	\$21,253.94	\$22,380.00	(1,126.06)	94.97%
Sales	\$244.00	\$5,500.00	(5,256.00)	4.44%
Membership	\$16,378.01	\$20,750.00	(4,371.99)	78.93%
Grants	\$104,942.50	\$69,700.00	35,242.50	150.56%
Admission	\$3,034.00	\$8,250.00	(5,216.00)	36.78%
Miscellaneous	\$1,042.94	\$1,750.00	(707.06)	59.60%
Total Income	\$213,155.25	\$185,610.00	27,545.25	
Expense				
Hall House Expense	\$10,707.89	\$10,395.00	312.89	103.01%
Advertising	\$2,429.63	\$3,600.00	(1,170.37)	67.49%
Fundraising & Programs	\$4,144.96	\$14,550.00	(10,405.04)	28.49%
Maintenance	\$7,842.99	\$10,250.00	(2,407.01)	76.52%
Insurance	\$11,013.27	\$12,100.00	(1,086.73)	91.02%
Postage & Delivery	\$557.95	\$450.00	107.95	123.99%
Professional Fees	\$3,049.74	\$850.00	2,199.74	358.79%
Telephone & Internet	\$1,822.73	\$1,750.00	72.73	104.16%
Payroll Expenses	\$116,163.62	\$129,715.00	(13,551.38)	89.55%
Miscellaneous Expense	\$8,702.38	\$0.00	8,702.38	100.00%
Supplies	\$4,290.16	\$1,950.00	2,340.16	220.01%
Total Expense	\$170,725.32	\$185,610.00	(14,884.68)	
NET SURPLUS/DEFICIT	\$42,429.93	\$0.00	\$42,429.93	



SERVING THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM

For every paid staff member 16 people volunteer their time and services.
The research center volunteers averaged about 100 hours per month!

Board Officers 2020

Richard Lundquist,
President
Ashley Senske,
Vice President

Andrew Kolstee,
Secretary

Angelo Cimo,
Treasurer

David Painter
Michael Rohlin
Kurt Johnson
Guy Ditonto
Janet Wahlberg
Steven Johnson
Julie Hewitt
Marie Carrubba

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