As the director of a history museum, it is maybe not surprising to hear that I think about history and museums a fair amount. One of the questions that I return to is a core one for my position – what is the purpose of a history museum for a community?

This is a question that I consider of the utmost importance when I'm working with the Fenton staff on developing programs or exhibits at the museum. My mind often turns to two reports presented by the National Awareness, Attitudes, and Usage Study in 2017 and 2019, which ranked museums, and history museums in particular, as some of the most trusted and credible sources of information for the American public, far ahead of traditional media, state and federal sources, or NGOs. A separate study by the American Association for State and Local History in 2018 showed that history museums are also trusted far more to deliver credible information than the Internet (thank goodness), high school history teachers, and non-fiction history books or textbooks. The summation of the studies is that somewhere between 76% and 81% of Americans have a high degree of trust in history museums as credible sources.

So how do we utilize that trust to assist our communities? In my experience, if you break museum work down to its most essential functions, we serve two roles: first, to collect and preserve the items that comprise the history of our community; and second, to use that collected information to tell the stories that are of importance to the growth and development of our community. Trust is everywhere in these roles. What we collect isn't just “stuff,” it is family heirlooms – diaries, photographs, and artifacts that resonate with meaning for the people donating them and the people who will get to appreciate them later. Without a strong, inclusive bond to all the members of our community, the materials we need to tell the rich story of our area will never be entrusted to us.

Of more relevance to the results of the studies above, though, is what we do with the information that we manage to collect. I find myself agreeing with an article called “History Museums and Social Cohesion,” from the Peabody Journal of Education,
in which the author, Tracy Jean Rosenberg, writes that “History museums...in particular, can serve communities by stimulating dialogue on difficult issues, accurately representing all the people of a [community], and creating forums for discussion among groups with disparate opinions.” We are doing our jobs when we provide educational experiences for our visitors, not just the information that they may expect to see. It is my hope that, as we continue to look for new stories from our community, we will find a few that members of our audience may not have thought about or encountered before. If you’ve got a unique local story to tell, please send it my way!

2021 is speeding by so fast I can’t believe it’s April already! We have several new, exciting events coming up.

First, if you haven’t been in to check out the 2021 featured exhibit “Protest and Pride: the LGBTQ+ Community in Chautauqua County” yet we encourage you to do so. It will be on exhibit on the first floor of the Mansion through the fall of 2021.

If you are a member of the LGBTQ+ community and would like to contribute your story to us we are still building an archival collection of stories, poems and artifacts that will help tell this story for future generations.

On the evening of Thursday April 22nd at 7pm, we are trying a new kind of event, in coordination with the Fenton History Center Gift Shop. “A Virtual Interview With an Author” with Mike Johnson, author of the new book “The History of the Jamestown Airport. This event is free, and will be presented over Zoom and Facebook. Join us as we learn about what inspired him to write this book about Jamestown’s Airport. There will be a question and answer time at the end of the interview.

Fenton History Center’s Amazon Wishlist

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
Introducing the 2021 feature exhibit. Learn about the history of the LGBTQIA+ community in Chautauqua County and hear stories from community members about their experiences in Jamestown and Chautauqua County.

Exhibit opens March 31st 2021 and runs through October of 2021

Visit us Monday through Saturday 10-4
Admission $10 adults
Members and Children 17 & under free!

Fenton History Center
67 Washington St
Jamestown NY 14701
www.fentonhistorycenter.org
Genealogy Support Group Presents:

New England Workshops
a 6 part series

Spring sessions: March 20, April 17, May 15 2021
Fall Sessions: September 11, September 25, November 20 2021
10:30 to 12:30.
$20 per session or $100 for all 6 sessions for non-members
$10 per session or $50 for all 6 sessions for Fenton History Center Members.
Please call the Fenton History Center to reserve your spot.
716-664-6256.
Workshops are being held both in person and on Zoom. In person participants are asked to wear a mask during the workshops. Space is limited.

Part 1: Formation and Settlement of New England

Part 2: Migration out of New England

Part 3: Local Resources for New England Research

Part 4: Online Resources for New England Research

Part 5: Using Town Records for New England Research

Part 6: Resources of the New England Historic Genealogical Society
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**

**Saturday, April 17, 2021 @ 10:30 AM**
New England Workshop II: Migration Out of New England*

*presented by Janet Wahlberg

**Wednesday, April 28, 2021 @ 6:30 PM**
Writing Your Family History

*presented by Marcia Kleinert

**Saturday, May 15, 2021 @ 10:30 AM**
New England Workshop III: Local Resources*

*presented by Barb Cessna, Andrew Kolstee, and Janet Wahlberg

**Wednesday, May 26, 2021 @ 6:30 PM**
Cluster/FAN Research

*presented by Janet Wahlberg
Fenton History Center
Education Intern
Karlie Blodien will lead us on
a virtual tour of the
Fenton History Center
focusing specifically on our
collections and connections
to Military History in
Chautauqua County.

This virtual tour will be
presented on
Saturday April 24th &
Friday April 30th at 7pm
Tour tickets are $10
Tour will be presented
over Zoom
Please visit
www.fentonhistorycenter.org
or call (716)664-6256 to
reserve your spot.

Login information for the Zoom event
will be emailed the day of the event.
Paper tickets are also available
at the Fenton Gift Shop.
Let’s face it, COVID-19 has put a serious cramp on life as we knew it, and the Vets Finding Vets activities, programs, Honor Flights, and social gatherings have been nearly at a standstill. We’ve all experienced the “you can’t do this” aspect of the last year.

But, amazing opportunities came forward, and this month’s article features one that has many facets.

Former Jamestown resident, Joan Cusimano Lindquist, was preparing articles of the Fenton family to be published in the Jamestown Gazette during the summer of 2020. She needed a photo of Reuben Earle Fenton, the youngest child of Gov. and Elizabeth Fenton, and wondered if the Jamestown Armory could possibly have a photo of him in his Fenton Guard uniform. He had become First Lieutenant in 1887, and we were hopeful that a photo would be found at the Armory. Contact with SSG James Weaver was made and being a history lover, he was intrigued by the request, and began a search of the Gordon Hess Room, where the history and artifacts of our local National Guard are kept.

Meanwhile, and because COVID had decimated almost all of the VFV scheduled gatherings and programs, I gained permission to document the National Guard enlistments from the late 19th century to the 1950’s.

Through correspondence in the Fenton Archives, we knew that “Earle” had gifted his comrades with a “metal cabinet”, made by his company, Fenton Metallic, for the storage of firearms. No measurements were alluded to and both SSG Weaver and I had in mind that it would be tall enough to store rifles. SSG Weaver made a check of the possible areas it could be kept, but nothing was found.

Another correspondence dated July 29, 1925 was found, this time amongst the enlistments and official papers, regarding a donation to the Fenton Guards from Jeanette Fenton Gilbert’s estate. It was the family’s hope that their $500 donation would be used for a plaque honoring Mrs. Gilbert’s husband, Capt. Albert Gilbert, for long and honorable service with the Fenton Guards whose name honored his father-in-law. Once again, SSG Weaver was on a mission, and this time he was successful - in
finding the “metal cabinet”!

Notice the size - much shorter, much more elaborate, and very heavy. This was used for the storage of their pistols. The painted inscription appears inside the door where one notices that the gift was made on December 25th, 1895. A few short months later, while traveling with his wife and niece, Earle Fenton became very ill with fever and passed away on March 25th, 1896, in Naples, Italy.

Fenton Metallic was reorganized after Earle’s death and became Art Metal. Two Fenton Metallic bicycles are on display at the Fenton History Center Museum.

Rick Roll, FHC Volunteer of many talents, photographed the pistol safe and SSG Weaver and Armory Employee Scott Carlson. He made a montage for the Armory and another to be displayed with the other Fenton Guard items in the Military Exhibit at FHC. I recently presented the montage to SSG Weaver and Scott Carlson, and they have decided to hang it just above the pistol safe.

Thanks, Rick, for your expertise and great ideas!

www.patreon.com/FentonHistoryCenter
Follow us on social media for more great local history content!
Thursday April 22, 7pm
Live on Zoom and Facebook

Join us for a fun, live virtual interview with author Mike Johnson about his new book about Jamestown’s Airport, what inspired him to write it, and more! There will be a question and answer time at the end of the interview.

This event is free and open to the public.

For more details visit our website www.fentonhistorycenter.org, call us at (716)664-6256 or find us on Facebook.
The telephone directory, useful though it is, is on its way out. Few things have changed as much in the last century as the telephone and all things connected with it. The recent donation of the November, 1954 Jamestown Telephone directory could demonstrate enough of these changes to fill a book. One reason some of us persist in keeping a regular telephone is because it comes with a directory and a listing. In 1954 you could choose to have your number not listed but at an extra charge.

In 1954 the telephone company owned your phone. You could buy your own phone, but you wouldn't be allowed to attach it to the system. The company even owned the directory. “Subscribers are forbidden the use of a binder, cover, or other attachments thereto.” Updated directories were issued twice a year. This one is 135 pages long.

You were not allowed to put any attachments on your phone or line either, not even an extra bell. Everything was installed by the company and you paid rent on it. There were no cordless phones, let alone cell phones. And phones were phones. They made and received calls, nothing else. There were no answering machines or voice mail, no caller ID, no call waiting, no memory for frequently called numbers, no screens, no pictures, no texting, no speakers. You dialed on a rotary dial, no buttons, real or virtual. The company did not provide internet, television, or security systems.

The Jamestown Telephone Corporation had purchased companies in nearby small towns. You could dial numbers in Lakewood or even as far as Salamanca with special codes explained in the directory but they were considered long distance calls with an extra charge, as listed in the directory. Calls to Westfield or anywhere farther had to go through an operator. Local numbers were four or five digits long. There was no 911. In rural areas you looked up the number and called the fire hall or a fireman’s home number. You might find a neighbor already using the phone line. Party lines for from four to ten homes were standard. There was a new law proclaimed in the directory that required you to relinquish the line for an emergency call. There was a complicated procedure required to call any of the neighbors on your line.

By 1954 the Western Electric 500 was the most common phone. Phones sat on a desk or table. They were heavy. They didn’t use batteries or a separate power source. They were almost indestructible and all were as black as a Model T Ford.
Ang is a long-time educator, volunteer, and Board member in Chautauqua County. He was born and raised in Jamestown and attended school in Jamestown, K thru 12. He then enrolled in JCC in a science program. Following his graduation from JCC, he transferred to Fredonia and graduated with a degree in Biology. Upon graduation, he found it hard to find a position in his chosen field. Eventually, he was hired at Gustavus Adolphus where he taught for two years.

Following his tenure at the GA Home, he moved to Filmore, New York, where he taught Special Education. On the spur of the moment, he had an opportunity to take a position at Southwestern teaching Special Education. As he did not have a certificate in Special Education, he went back to college at Edinboro. He really enjoyed this challenge. After completing his certificate, he spent the next 17 years teaching fourth grade science and history at Southwestern. This brought him to the Fenton for the annual Fourth grade field trip and helped him to develop a great love of local history, especially the Fenton family. He even created a notebook on local lore on the greater Jamestown area.

Joni Blackman brought him in as a volunteer for tours. He especially enjoys doing the Mausoleum Tours during our Cemetery Tours. Guy Ditonto approached him to be on the board which he accepted and has served in various capacities including Treasurer.

In his spare time, Ang enjoys traveling, especially to visit his four children who are scattered about the United States. He and his wife also enjoy traveling abroad. Two of his favorite destinations have been Hawaii and Italy. While here in Jamestown, he enjoys working in his yard. Over the years, many organizations have benefited from his time and talents. At his church, he has served on Church Council. In the community, he has been in the Lion’s club, the Lakewood Rotary, on the YMCA board, the School Board as Southwestern, and on the Town of Ellicott. He served his fellow teachers as a member of the negotiating committee for the Teachers Union. Needless to say, he has been a highly active member of the local community.

For those who know Ang, they enjoy his dynamic personality, so it would be no surprise that he has maintained close contact with many of the folks that he attended High School and College. He told me that he often calls his friends and acquaintances for long chats and the opportunity to catch up. Ang, another one of the Fenton’s valuable volunteers.