I have been chewing on a quote I read in Smithsonian magazine recently, by the acclaimed Yale historian David Blight. In the article, Blight draws a clear line between history and memory, saying: “Memory is often owned, history interpreted. Memory is passed down through generations; history is revised. Memory often coalesces in objects, sites, and monuments; history seeks to understand contexts in all their complexity.” In other words, memory is subjective and usually pretty difficult to change once it has been established, whereas history tries to be objective, and, in pursuit of that, will keep changing and introducing nuance through different debates and interpretations, which are based on the best studies of what will always be a spotty archival record.

Part of what I’ve been thinking about with this quote is where museums fit into this paradigm, especially locally focused museums like the Fenton – are we here to present nostalgia, commemorate milestones, and establish a community identity (that is, activities associated with memory), or should we be continually re-evaluating the narratives that we tell based on new sources to present an ever-changing story (a strict historical approach)?

I believe that the answer lies somewhere in the middle, that we take on elements of both of these processes in our work. Museum exhibits can be a difficult place to tackle historical complexity, because of their fixed nature (once we print something, we don’t often change it while the exhibit is up) and also due to the limited space that comes with designing indoor experiences and with relatively small exhibit panels. New technological tools like QR codes give us the luxury of being more dynamic and more comprehensive with our exhibits, but the Fenton staff usually doesn’t have the time to add in every little detail to each of our exhibits, or to change what we’ve created when a new donated item adds another small piece of the story.

Beyond the physical constraints, we also want to tell stories that feel representative of our communities – we want to talk to our residents and get first-hand accounts of working in the furniture industry or serving in the military or anything else. It is inevitable that memory will feature...
prominently in what we do, that we’ll celebrate our community and its accomplishments, that we’ll give our residents a stage to tell their stories, and that we’ll look to build a sense of pride and belonging for our area based on these shared experiences.

On the other side of the spectrum, however, we have a mandate to be historical, and to be factual even when it feels uncomfortable, or when it distorts the pleasantness of some remembered narratives. This part of our mission gets expressed more in the archival and collections side of our operations, where we collect primary and secondary source materials that give us as full of a story as possible. Each of these sources will come with its own biases and inaccuracies, but the hope is that if we collect enough information about certain subjects and eras, that we may be able to dig through the sometimes conflicting accounts and arrive at narratives that have a higher likelihood of ringing true to the complexities of their time period – this continual, circular process of collecting, researching, and interpreting is what Blight, the Yale scholar above, is referring to when he talks about the practice of history.

Given, then, that our collections are the historical keystone that lends support to all of our other offerings, it is vital that we are active and vigilant about ensuring that the information we have is as comprehensive as possible. Part of how we do this comes from maintaining strong community connections – we want people to know that if they have historical information that they want to see preserved, that the Fenton is the reliable place that they should turn to. Another part comes from internal analysis, assessing what we have and what is missing from the story that we can tell. When gaps in our historical record are brought into view, (like in 2019, for example, when we discovered that the Fenton had not collected any information on the local LGBTQ+ community), it is vital that we are active about finding what we can of that history within our region and adding those records to our collection. When gaps are allowed to remain in our archives, we are forcing future researchers to have to rely only on memory, because the historical record will not have been preserved, and we are reducing the complexity, and likely the accuracy, with which we can tell the story of our community. Collecting with both history and memory in mind is the best way that we can ensure that future generations will understand what it was like to live in 2021.

...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

July is another exciting month at the Fenton History Center. July 4th marks not only Independence Day but the 202nd Birthday of Governor Reuben Fenton. If you haven’t been here to see the museum recently, the Governor’s Birth month is a great time for a visit.

We have 2 more walking tours in July, the 10th is the Jamestown Churches Walking Tour, and the 26th is the Industrial Tour. These are a great way to see the city, learn some history and get some exercise. Meet at the Fenton at 10 am to start the tours. Cost is $10 adults, $5 for members, and children 17 and under free. Please note that the Church tour will be entirely outside this year due to the ongoing restrictions.

We have another Virtual Brown Bag lecture this month on July 14th. Joni Blackman, Executive Director at the Chautauqua Blind Association, will be speaking about the organization’s history. To join us, please watch our Facebook page for the live video or email collections@fentonhistorycenter.org to request a link to the Zoom meeting.

CURATOR’S CORNER

by Victoria Parker
CURATOR

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Walking Tours

Saturday, June 26, July 10, 24, August 7, 21, and September 4, 2021
10 AM-noon
$10 per person
$5 Fenton History Center Members
Children 17& under: Free

Tours leave from the Fenton History Center parking lot.

*Riverwalk tour meets in front of the National Comedy Center
**Allen Park Tour meets at Allen Park Band Shell.

Masks and social distancing are heavily encouraged for these tours.

For more information or to reserve your spot call 716-664-6256
The New England Genealogy Workshops will continue in the Fall with the following programs.

Part IV: Online Resources for New England Research (Sept. 11, 2021)
Part VI: Resources of the New England Historic Genealogical Society (Nov. 20, 2021)

Non-Members: $20 per session or $100 for all 6 sessions*

Members: $10 per session or $50 for all 6 sessions*

All sessions are held in-person at the Hall House Research Center and on Zoom. Each session begins at 10:30 a.m. and is finished by 12:30 p.m. In-person participants are asked to wear a mask during the workshops. Space is limited. Please call the Fenton History Center at 716-664-6256 to reserve your spot.

* Recordings of the first three sessions, “Formation and Settlement of New England, “Migration Out of New England,” and “Local Resources for New England Research” are available to those who paid for the workshops individually or all 6 sessions as a whole.

www.patreon.com/FentonHistoryCenter
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 upcoming New England Workshops are the fourth and fifth in a series of six on the topic.

UPCOMING EVENTS

**Wednesday, July 28, 2021 @ 6:30 PM**
Chautauqua County Poor Farm  
*presented by Michelle Henry*

**Wednesday, August 25, 2021 @ 6:30 PM**
Holland Land Company Records  
*presented by Karen Livsey*

**Saturday, September 11, 2021 @ 10:30 AM**
New England Workshop IV: Online Resources*  
*presented by Janet Wahlberg*

**Saturday, September 25, 2021 @ 10:30 AM**
New England Workshop V: Town Records*  
*presented by Rhonda Hoffman*
A 172 year chapter in Chautauqua County bank history came to an end in 2003 when Marine Midland Bank sold the property at 201 North Main where the first bank in Chautauqua County had been established to a non-banking buyer. Banking operations had ceased the previous year.

We recently received a donation including the earliest records of this first bank. They had remained in the possession of the bank and its successors in the same location for that entire period of time.

By 1831, thanks to the timber industry and some secondary value-enhanced wood products, pearl ashes, and a few other agricultural products, Chautauqua (then so spelled) County had become a significant business area and the home of quite a number of wealthy men. At that time the American banking industry was far different from what it became by the 20th century. Banks were few in number and many of them were “wild cat” banks instituted mostly for the profit and political advantage of their founders. They issued notes that could serve in place of cash but they lacked reliable value or even guaranteed redeemability. Their value varied not only with time but with distance from the bank. In 1831 there were fewer than 50 banks in New York State and the closest bank to Chautauqua County was 90 miles away by horse and buggy in Buffalo. The banks provided few services for the average citizen and it was mostly a cash world in 1831.

Buffalo was where merchants or businessmen had to go for large quantities of either real government cash (which included gold or silver coins ["specie"] or paper bills) or bank notes needed for payrolls or other expenses.

Elial T. Foote, who did so much for early Jamestown and who was also the county’s first major local historian, is rightly credited with creating the bank. In fact, the magnitude of his effort has been seriously understated. Bank charters were granted and renewed, or not, by the state legislature and were enmeshed in a corrosive miasma of politics and corruption. This was a period when national politics were in confusion and New York State politics were considerably more tangled and complex than the national field. On top of this and regional and local competition and conniving, we were in the midst of the anti-Masonic panic. Foote was a prominent Mason and a favorite of the Albany Regency (a faction of the Democratic Party) which dominated the state legislature, but all the new legislators from this end of the state were Anti-Masonic Party members. At the local scale, Jamestown was riven by personal animosity between James Prendergast and Foote. Foote also had conflict with William Peacock, the local Holland Land Company agent. Jamestown had a population under 1,000 and had only been organized as a village four years. Other villages in the county had men who didn’t readily acquiesce to Jamestown becoming the location of this potential bonanza. Among them was Walter Smith of Dunkirk, the richest man in the county.

Probably the most historically important item in the collection is the compilation, made and indexed by Foote’s son, Horace, of correspondence Foote kept in his effort to transcend all these conflicts and passions to create a serviceable bank for the county. It could be a rich source for scholars of this pivotal and confusing era in New York State history from many perspectives. Horace Foote even provided an index and his father had included brief biographies of the correspondents.

Prendergast was persuaded to sell the bank some land immediately adjoining his house and yard, and at a generous discount. Foote and his bankers then proceeded to stick their finger in Prendergast’s eye by building their little brick bank tight to the
property line and blocking his windows. This was the start of Prendergast’s souring on Jamestown and eventually (1837) selling out and moving away.

Once the bank was chartered, the scramble was on between local but not prosperous anti-Masons and well to do Democrats down state for controlling interest. The locals managed quite well in the struggle. The bank officials were generally well trained and responsible, especially after the first year or so, and the bank went on to endure and mature in a long and complex history ultimately involving five successive structures on the same property and many mergers and renamings.

These precious records were collected and preserved in mid 20th century by Charlotte Lindsey (1904-1995). She was one of Jamestown’s first woman bankers. In all my years in local history, I had never heard of her. She wrote an apparently unpublished, impressively sophisticated history of the early years of the bank in 1931. All her efforts and the original documents might have been lost at the end of the bank’s life had it not been for the efforts of one of the final officers, Roger Lane, a former Fenton board member.

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**Now Available in our Giftshop:**

History In a Box Club kits contain all you need for some good, history-inspired fun. **Spring 2021 Aviation Themed** boxes are available for only $20 in the Fenton Gift Shop. **Summer 2021 boxes coming soon!**

Recommended for age 7 and up for reading comprehension, or younger with adult guidance.
When a historical organization receives a donation, they rely on information from the donor which helps in the decision process of whether the item should be accepted or whether to recommend to the donor that another historical organization would be a better fit.

In mid June, I arrived at Carroll Historical Society where I spend Tuesday afternoons documenting recent donations. I was excited to learn that some items had been donated by a former Fentonville resident whose family had owned a restaurant now known as Miller's Grove, and that these items included an oval framed photo of the donor’s Grandfather in his WWI uniform, and some immigration papers. The donor was moving immediately and therefore needed to include his Grandfather’s photo and was hoping it would be accepted, but that he had lived in Warren.

The soldier’s name was Samuel Saeli and I knew that there was a Saeli family among the first Italian families, so I began to hope that Samuel would connect with the Jamestown Saeli families and we could recommend that the Fenton History Center should receive the photo.

You can see that Samuel is in uniform, but it didn’t take long to notice it was not a typical WWI uniform. A little computer research showed that Samuel Saeli was indeed a Veteran of WWI - a member of the 153rd Depot Brigade from May 1918 to July 1918, and then he became a Bugler until his discharge in Jan 1919. Perhaps he was photographed in his musician uniform, but that didn’t work with the crossed axes insignia.

A quick phone pic of Samuel was sent to Norm Carlson, who knew immediately that the uniform belonged to a member of Woodmen of the World. How exciting! (To me, the W.O.W. on his collar looked like W.Q.W.) An online newspaper search of Samuel Saeli soon produced an article of the first meeting of the newly formed Woodmen of the World Columbus Camp # 247. Samuel was one of 15 charter members, all Italian, and the date of the article was Dec 23, 1913!

Also included were Certificates of Naturalization for Carmelo Lupica (dated 1926) and his wife Sarah Papaleo Lupica (dated 1944), who were owners of the Cocoanut Grove Restaurant in Fentonville. Sarah’s Declaration of Intention (dated 1931) shows that all of their children were born in Jamestown and they still resided on Glenview Ave, in Jamestown at that time. In 1926, Carmelo and his family lived at 41 Derby St, Jamestown. For that reason, it makes sense that these 2 original documents should become part of the collection at the Fenton History Center, along with Samuel’s photo. CHS has supplied a scan of Sarah’s Certificate of Naturalization and will keep her original, as her address was R # 2, Frewsburg, in 1944 when she received it. Her name is spelled “Sara” on this document.

These items are a valuable part of the history of both communities and it has been a privilege to be involved in the preservation process for the Saeli family.
VIRTUAL BROWN BAG LECTURES

Please join us for another exciting year of interesting local history topics!

This year's lectures focus on underserved and under recognized populations in and around Jamestown and Chautauqua County.

May 12: Michelle Henry, Chautauqua County Historian, on local poor relief

June 9th: Greg Rabb, JCC Professor of Political Science, on the LGBTQ+ community

July 14th: Joni Blackman, Executive Director of the Chautauqua Blind Association, on the history of the Chautauqua Blind Association

August 11th: Noah Goodling, Executive Director of the Fenton History Center, on George Lawn and the Original Human Rights Commission

September 8th: Deb Long, President of the Jamestown/Warren Deaf Club, on the history of the local deaf community, and advocacy for it

October 13th: Tom Greer, Fenton Archaeology Director, on the 2021 archaeological dig results

STARTING MAY 12, 2021 | THE SECOND WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH 12 NOON VIA ZOOM AND FACEBOOK LIVE
Early in 2020, the Hall House Research Library at the Fenton History Center received a wonderful gift from one of its patrons, Karen Olson, in the form of a Research & Education Fund in her mother’s memory. The reason for this donation goes back several years, and starts with a shared interest in history, mysteries, and puzzles held by Karen and her mother, Jean Vandewark Olson Stowell. It turned out to be the perfect combination for several rewarding years of genealogical ancestor sleuthing. Along the way, they also learned more about Jamestown—their mutual birthplace—and the surrounding area, while uncovering information about their relatives, both known and unknown before the research. Karen’s trips continued even after her mother’s passing in 2009.  

After the passing, Karen shared with us that memories of the time they spent looking for clues and mulling over discoveries in their family tree continued to be incredibly special to her. So, when the time came for her to begin making required withdrawals from her IRAs a few years ago, Karen decided it was the perfect opportunity to use her first annual withdrawal for a donation honoring her mother. She knew the perfect recipient for that donation would be the Fenton History Center Library and, specifically the Hall House Research Library, where she had discovered so many genealogy resources and received dedicated help and expertise from the Fenton staff and volunteers who so willingly helped them.  

Karen met with the Executive Director of the Fenton, Noah Goodling, to create the Fund to honor her mother in October 2019. During her meeting with Noah, she told him that she was looking for a way to encourage others to think about supporting the Fenton, and the Hall House in particular. By the end of the meeting, Karen knew that the Fund would meet her goal of honoring her mother while benefiting others in their genealogy endeavors, “a pursuit my mother and I enjoyed together for several years before her death.”  

Karen said, “I have found creating a fund to honor my mother to be a most rewarding decision and am grateful to the wonderful genealogy team at Fenton’s Hall House who continue to help me uncover new clues to my ever-expanding family tree!”  

To date, two computers have been purchased with money from the fund. They are proving to be priceless in assisting the staff and volunteers at the Hall House. In addition, the fund allowed the Fenton to purchase several resource books on New England and Sweden and has also allowed us to reimburse speakers at our monthly Genealogy Support Group meetings.
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!

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JAMESTOWN NY 14701
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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