Every year, when I set out to find new stories to use in our Saints & Sinners tours, I inevitably come across at least one really amazing local story that I can’t wait to use, with one problem – I can’t find anyone connected to the story that’s buried in Lake View Cemetery. As wonderful as Lake View is, I am always so frustrated when I find a story that I’d really like to tell, but can’t find a way to include it. With this newsletter, though, I finally have an outlet! Tickets for our tours are on sale now, and to convince you that you need to come to hear all the weird and/or inspiring stories of the people who are buried in Lake View, here’s a forgotten story of Jamestown featuring some folks who aren’t there.

On November 28, 1897, the news from Jamestown made the front page of the Buffalo papers, with the headline “City Shocked – Walter L. Sessions Burned in Disorderly House – Two Others Also Perish.” A disorderly house, also called a “sporting house” in the article, is a polite euphemism for a brothel – this one was evidently on the second floor of a building near the historic Train Station in Jamestown. The sporting house was operated by a woman named Jessie Oakley, and had three other women staying there.

The gentleman who got top billing for his untimely demise in the fire was Walter Sessions, a lawyer from a prominent family in Panama, New York. His father, also named Walter, had moved to Chautauqua County in 1835, and had been a schoolteacher and lawyer before being elected to the New York State Assembly in the 1850s and the Senate in the 1860s. Walter, Jr.’s uncle, Loren Sessions, was also a State Senator in the 1870s and 1880s, and his sister, Edith Sessions Tupper, was a renowned writer and playwright. The Sessions were a very well regarded and prominent family in Western New York, and Walter, Jr. had announced his candidacy for State Senator just before the fire.

The other two who perished in the flames were less well-known, but still recognized. August Jordan was a fireman on the New York Central Railroad, and an active volunteer in the Buffalo YMCA system – one acquaintance noted after the fire that, “Jordan was well liked around here by everyone. We didn’t know he was that kind of a man.” Jordan was found asphyxiated next to a woman named Sadie Voss, who also went by Sadie Reunie at times. Sadie was the daughter of a wealthy contractor in Buffalo – despite her “highly respectable family,” Sadie was “wild” from a young age. She was placed in a reform school, but after leaving it, she entered “her life of shame.” She and August had met evidently brought their antics to Jamestown at some point.

The fire was discovered at 9:30 p.m. by a Volunteer Fireman, Jordan, and had three other women staying there. The fire was found asphyxiated next to a woman named Jessie Oakley, and had three other women staying there. The gentleman who got top billing for his untimely demise in the fire was Walter Sessions, a lawyer from a prominent family in Panama, New York. His father, also named Walter, had moved to Chautauqua County in 1835, and had been a schoolteacher and lawyer before being elected to the New York State Assembly in the 1850s and the Senate in the 1860s. Walter, Jr.’s uncle, Loren Sessions, was also a State Senator in the 1870s and 1880s, and his sister, Edith Sessions Tupper, was a renowned writer and playwright. The Sessions were a very well regarded and prominent family in Western New York, and Walter, Jr. had announced his candidacy for State Senator just before the fire.

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Hall, was putting out the lights in her home. The cause was thought to be faulty insulation on one of the wires supplying electricity to the building. Jessie Oakley was found shortly after, surrounded by flames, mildly burned, and screaming for help. She and a couple other residents were rescued from the blaze, but it was too late for the other three. A jury was convened to see if anyone should be blamed for the tragedy — while they didn’t find anyone in particular to blame, they did rule that this event was “one of the unfortunate but unavoidable consequences of a life of dissipation.” As people began to walk to work a few hours after the blaze was extinguished, word spread quickly, and a crowd formed at the Jamestown Morgue to gawk and gossip, with many people wondering how Mrs. Sessions, Walter, Jr.’s mother, would react to the news. Later reports indicated that this was a severe blow to Mrs. Sessions, and that she found herself “prostrated” by grief at the nature and environment of her son’s death.

A gripping tale, to say the least. And that is just one story of one day of a small group of people from Jamestown’s long and fascinating history! Want to hear more? Sign up now for our Saints and Sinners tours through Lake View Cemetery, happening this year on October 9th and 16th (and Mausoleum Tours on the 17th!). There are stories that are even more shocking than this one, that have never been told on our tours before, just waiting to be portrayed by our talented actors this year. Don’t miss out! Call the Fenton at 716-664-6256, or stop by the Museum, Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., to get your ticket today!

Walter Sessions, as he appears in the Buffalo Courier-Record newspaper, published on Sunday, November 28, 1897. The original caption for it was: “The young man burned to death in Jamestown early yesterday morning.”

CURATOR’S CORNER

by Victoria Parker  
CURATOR

Fall is almost here. We are busy preparing the Fenton History Center for the fall and winter months ahead. October will feature our annual Saints and Sinners Cemetery Tours of Lakeview Cemetery. Both carriage tour and walking tour tickets are available now by calling the Fenton History Center.

Decoration are going up for our annual Halloween Open House. The mansion gets a little spooky mid-September through October 31st. Come visit us and learn about the history of some of our Halloween traditions, and get in the spooky mood for Halloween.

There is still time to see the featured exhibit for 2021 Protest and Pride the LGBTQ+ Community in Chautauqua County. The exhibit will close October 31st. Come see it before it’s too late.
The Fenton History Center presents the 16th Annual Saints & Sinners Cemetery Tours and Mausoleum & More Tours at Lake View Cemetery in Jamestown at the corner of Buffalo St and Lakeview Ave. Hear Costumed Actors tell revealing stories about Jamestown's famous- and infamous- former residents.

**Walking Tours**
- Saturday, October 9th
  - 6pm-10pm
- Saturday, October 16th
  - 3 pm-6 pm
Tours starting every 30 minutes

$10 adults presale/$2 children
(Adults at the gate $12)
Fenton Members ONLY $5
Join Now!
Group sizes will be limited!

**Carriage Tours**
- Saturday October 9th
  - 3, 4, & 5pm
- Saturday October 16th
  - 6, 7 & 8pm
Tickets $20

**Mausoleum and More Tours**
Back by Popular Demand.
Sunday, October 17th, 2021
8 pm
Learn about the "residents" of Lakeview Cemetery's Mausoleums in this behind-the-scenes tour.

Events sell out fast! Buy your tickets now.
Tickets available at Fenton History Center- 67 Washington Street (Rte. 60 and Main St.)- Jamestown NY
For Information and Reservations call (716)664-6256 or visit www.fentonhistorycenter.org
A Call for Board Members!

The Fenton History Center is governed by a Board of Trustees. We are a “working board,” meaning we discuss, plan, strategize, and work with staff to coordinate activities at the Fenton. We currently have two open positions on the Board and are always looking for new members, with diverse skills and backgrounds that can help aid in the Fenton’s mission.

If you are interested in joining the Board of Trustees, the only eligibility requirement is that you need to be a dues-paying member of the Fenton. Members of the Board of Trustees are elected at the annual meeting, usually held in February of each year. If you are interested, fill out the application on our website at the link below. Prospective Board Members have also been typically invited to meetings of the Board of Trustees to get a better idea of how the Board operates.

fentonhistorycenter.org/joinboard
The Fenton History Center’s Genealogy Support Group serves to support both experienced and amateur researchers. 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

Saturday, September 11, 2021 @ 10:30 AM
New England Workshop IV: Town Records*
  *presented by Rhonda Hoffman

Saturday, September 25, 2021 @ 10:30 AM
New England Workshop V: Online Resources*
  *presented by Janet Wahlberg

Wednesday, September 29, 2021 @ 6:30 PM
WorldCat and Interlibrary Loan
  *presented by Vince Courtney

Wednesday, October 27, 2021 @ 6:30 PM
Ellis Island Film
  *presented by Barry Keller
A recent query brought to mind an archival donation from 2011. The materials themselves, several inches thick in total, pertain to local events in the late 1940’s. An out-of-town researcher called our research department when I happened to be nearby. He was researching rural schools and had noticed several mentions of the “Kiantone school controversy.” He wondered what it was all about and if we had any materials about it. Our researcher turned and asked me. I answered “plenty.” Several weeks later the caller visited the research center, and we had the materials set out for him. In addition, we have recently digitized two very rich scrapbooks the researcher has not yet seen, part of the same collection.

The concept of universal formal education for children is a modern one. Its deepest roots go back to a Catholic religious order in the Netherlands in the 16th century where our New England Pilgrims were later exposed to it before they boarded the Mayflower. Those earnest Congregationalists wanted their children to grow up able to read, especially able to read sermons and the bible. It was in Massachusetts and Connecticut that the American tax supported district school system evolved. Then around the turn of the 19th century when talk finally turned to action in New York State, we adopted the New England pattern, the classic one room rural schools that became the subject of so much nostalgia, stories, poems, and songs.

These schools offered education up through 8th grade. The education imparted could be impressively good or appallingly bad, depending on the skills of the teacher, the co-operation and support or the parents and the extent the taxpayers could and would provide. But both locally and statewide there were also various forms of private schools functioning both as alternatives and supplements to the public elementary schools and, more rarely, providing additional education for what are now the high school years.

By the 1850’s movements had already begun to create public secondary education and to consolidate the rural districts into larger institutions that could provide a wider range of educational options plus more modern and urban oriented socialization. In the early 20th century, when the horse and buggy or walk-to-school era was ending and motorized transport on improved roads was becoming standard, the school consolidation movement gained much more support. In the depression of the 1930’s, educational progressives saw an opportunity. The federal emergency employment agencies, particularly the Works Projects Administration (WPA) were set about constructing combined central grammar and high schools in the cities and villages of Chautauqua County as elsewhere in the state. Clymer Central was the first in 1935. However, Chautauqua County at the end of that decade was still a far more rural environment than it is today, and most children still attended one room schools in the elementary years then went on to high school in a nearby village or city at least until they were 16 as required by law.

The movement went into hiatus through World War II (1941-1945) but during that time meetings were held in Albany and plans were made for the complete centralization of schools...
in the entire county, indeed, the whole state. A county-wide map was drawn up in 1943.

But a great many local people were thoroughly happy with the way the one room rural schools provided for their children. These districts were run by taxpayers in the district. They assembled in annual and special meetings and elected trustees and conducted business by direct democracy. These districts were the most democratic and the smallest civic units in Western Civilization since ancient Greece and the people there did not all look kindly on the new, increasingly militant and radical education professionals who were replacing them under an ever-growing variety of heavy-handed new state laws and policies designed to coerce abandonment of their beloved heritage.

Most history consists of similar tales of new elites shoving aside inconvenient traditionalists, as the Indians were not the last to discover. But in tiny Kiantone a few individuals stood up and resisted enough to make some noise, attract some attention, and seriously distress the Leviathan, to put it in mythic terms. Many of the residents of Kiantone district 2 saw the ultimately nonconsensual union of their school with Frewsburg Central as un-American and unjust, not the democracy they had been taught in that little school.

There is a cliché, “history is written by the winners.” There is much truth in it. It is not easy to document initial resistance to movements or innovations that are now universally accepted as good and inevitable. Secondary materials, to what extent they even acknowledge lost causes, often dismiss them or caricature and revile them. This is why it is important to preserve primary materials so subsequent generations can reach conclusions independently about the ideas and the people involved in the passions of past controversies.

---CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6---

The New England Genealogy Workshops will continue in the Fall with the following programs.

Part IV: Using Town Records for New England Research (Sept. 11, 2021)
Part V: Online Resources for New England Research (Sept. 25, 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.
Since the introduction of Fenton Canteen in April of 2015, Veterans have had the opportunity to come together one Saturday morning a month to connect with each other.

They enjoy sharing service memories, where they worked, and anything else that comes up over a cup of coffee and cookies. Some Vets have become good friends and meet up in between Canteens.

Two such men are both WWII Navy Vets who enjoyed the first Honor Flight that VFV participated in - Sept. 23, 2017. Paul Arnone is the spring chicken who turned 97 in July, and Omer Post is 99 years young. Omer now lives at Magnolia in Frewsburg and although Paul still lives at home, neither one is still driving.

Canteen and Research Center Volunteer Sue Ellen Nelson and I have gotten them together several times, and a few days before Omer's Aug. 7th birthday we all got together at Magnolia. Since they both trained at Sampson Naval Base, a generic photo was used for their cake. They thoroughly enjoyed their joint birthday party.

They enjoyed themselves so much, (and we did as well) that I decided that the Aug. 14th Canteen at Christ First UMC should be a birthday party for the Canteen Vets who meet there monthly. The Delta Variant was ominously reminding us all that things change everyday, and we all enjoyed the party knowing there may be another hiatus for Canteen, as a way to keep everyone safe in order to meet again another day.
Don’t Miss Our Final Brown Bag Lecture of the Year!

Wednesday, October 13, 2021
at Noon via Zoom and Facebook Live

Tom Greer, Fenton Archaeology Director, will talk about the 2021 archaeological dig results.

www.patreon.com/FentonHistoryCenter
This summer we have had two young ladies that have been working at the Mansion. It has been a delight to see their enthusiasm in sharing the Fenton and our local history with our visitors.

Aalyah Burkes

Aaliyah is from Bemus Point and attends Randolph Academy. She plans to attend JCC and study Physical Education. Meeting new people and forming relationships with them is one of the things that she enjoys most from school. She is currently a Junior and is active in Track and Chorus. When Aalyah is not studying, she enjoys dancing, singing, working out, hanging out with her friends, and shopping.

She describes herself as a happy person who loves kids. While at the Fenton she has enjoyed learning more about our local history.

Hailey Caylor

Hailey is from Jamestown and just graduated from Jamestown High School. She has not yet settled on a college but plans to work hard in order to meet her goal of becoming a doctor.

Hailey really enjoys hanging out with her friends and family. She also enjoys sleeping and eating. While at the Fenton she enjoyed talking to new people and opening up to them.

We have been privileged to have these two young women helping out at the Fenton and offering them the opportunity to interact with the public.
PROTEST AND PRIDE: THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY IN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY

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
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