ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

by Noah Goodling
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Getting near the end of any year at the Fenton is always enough to put me into a contemplative mood – what did we accomplish this year? How well did we do at meeting or exceeding our budgetary goals? What unexpected challenges did we face, and what new ideas have been put in play to overcome them and let us face next year on an even stronger note?

Getting near the end of 2021, that sentiment is stronger than usual, as I am looking not only to finish out this year, but also my employment at the Fenton. After an exciting few years as the Executive Director of the Fenton, I have decided to move on to pursue a new opportunity to work on strengthening the nonprofit sector across Chautauqua County.

Thinking back to the summer of 2017, when I started in this role, I’m proud to see both how the organization has grown within the community and how I’ve grown professionally. It has been a consistent joy for me to see how generous our community is – whether that be through our members sharing their resources and local knowledge; through our partnerships with a wide variety of organizations that shared talents and diverse skill-sets; through my many conversations with other local nonprofit directors, who patiently and supportively helped me tackle the complexity of this position; through the dedicated work of the Fenton Board, who go far beyond our monthly meetings in ensuring the success of the organization; through the tireless help of our many volunteers, who outnumber our staff by about 16-to-1 and have the incredible work output to prove it; or through the Fenton staff, who are always far too busy but somehow also available to pitch in when needed, usually on projects that go beyond their job description. It is amazing how much is accomplished at the Fenton – the organization is a testament to the power of a dedicated, talented group of people banding together to create something that is more than the sum of its parts.

I started working on a list of all the things that have happened at the Fenton since I started that I’d want to bring up, even briefly, in this newsletter article, and it quickly spiraled out of control. To help focus, I turned...CONTINUED ON PAGE 2
next to my Director’s reports in the Fenton Annual Reports from 2017-2020, and made a list of the major accomplishments I saw there, ending with a list of about 20 items. That’s probably still too many for this, so I went through and sorted the list into two major categories of accomplishments that exemplify how I’ve spent my time here – expanding our accessibility and equitable approach to the Fenton collections; and creating new ways for our audience to connect with the wonderful history of Jamestown and southern Chautauqua County.

Those two categories cover a lot of ground – whether that be building the new ADA-accessible entranceway to the Fenton Mansion in 2019; revamping and expanding our digital tools and strategies; working with dozens of local partners to plan and build the LGBTQ+ exhibit from 2019-2021; making admission free for those under the age of 18 to encourage family access to the museum; expanding our Veteran’s outreach and programming; hosting our first regional genealogical conference; spreading our historical materials out to other downtown locations; putting together new exhibits that celebrate major facets of the local history experience; creating a regional podcast with the help of some other great local organizations; or any of a huge number of other projects that I have so enjoyed getting to be a part of. We have raised and utilized over $1 million since I started in this position to support the growth of the Fenton and the preservation of local history and culture, an amount that feels staggering until I read a few sentences back here and realize all that we’ve managed to accomplish with it.

Reading back through the past Director reports, I saw a great line in the last report done by my predecessor, Joni Blackman: “One can have all the enthusiasm in the world, but without a vision, hard work, and cash – nothing would come of it.” I came into this position with lots of enthusiasm, and a willingness to do some hard work, but I have depended on the generous and supportive community here to help with the other two points. Thank you to the many, many, many people who have helped, guided, and worked with me to make all that has been accomplished possible. I hope that my work has helped some of you reading this to have a greater appreciation for the phenomenal history of our region, and to find new ways of connecting both with our local history and with your own personal history. To paraphrase one of my own good lines from a past report – the Fenton has only been great because we’ve all been in it together.
It’s time for the annual Hanging of the Greens! The Fenton is getting ready for Christmas! Halloween has been packed away, and the transformation for the holidays has begun. The stairway will once again be draped in garland as we anxiously await the holidays. On Black Friday, November 26th, our 2021 Holiday exhibit, “Christmas at Santa’s Workshop,” opens. Come see the Fenton Mansion transformed into the North Pole and learn about the history of the man known as Santa Claus across the globe. In addition to our regular hours, we will be open the evenings of December 3rd and 17th from 6-8, so you can view the exhibit by candlelight. Tours during this time will be self-guided. A fun Holiday Open House is planned for Saturday, December 18th. More details on this event to come.
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
Père Noël, Father Christmas, St. Nicholas, just a few of the names for Santa Claus. Learn about the history of Santa Claus and take a peek inside a Victorian Christmas Workshop in this year's Holiday exhibit.

St. Nicholas looks different all over the world. Learn about the traditions that helped make the Santa we know and love, and see the 1863 Victorian Mansion all dressed for the holidays.

The holiday exhibit opens on Black Friday, November 26th, and runs through January 6th.

The Museum is open
Monday through Saturday 10-4.

Special candlelight hours
December 3 and 17th, 6-8.

Fenton History Center
67 Washington Street
Jamestown NY, 14701
716-664-6256
www.fentonhistorycenter.org

Admission:
$10 adults
Children Free!
Fenton History Center Members are always free!
The impending inconvenience of having 10 digit dialing forced on me this month prompts me to go back to a 2005 donation and talk about telephone history and technology. It is a big subject that can and has been approached from many directions.

My family has been paying telephone bills since 1905 when we moved into our present home. At that time, in order to make a call, we turned a crank that rang a bell one mile south in the home of Jasper and Nellie Ball, Lucille’s future grandparents. Whichever one answered would connect us to someone else in the neighborhood or by wire to the Bell network in Busti and from there to Jamestown.

In the 1970’s or 80’s I used to receive an occasional mailing from a service that alerted people to coming things so we might “get in on the ground floor.” One mailing informed me that in a few years there would be portable “cellular phones” operating off radio towers built short distances apart everywhere. Then anyone would be able to talk to anyone else anywhere in the world at any time. I thought (sourly), “What? Are people going to be walking down the street talking on the telephone?”

What I had in mind was the kind of device we have in our collection. It is a Livermore LAP 1000 Attaché Phone, so called because it is contained in an attaché case. It was the personal and demonstration phone of salesman Benjamin Rosenberg of Jamestown who had an exclusive territory covering the whole northeast. He used it in cars and boats and even took it on fishing trips to Puerto Rico. It is not, strictly speaking, a cell phone. It is a portable radio phone that used an FM signal to connect to the AT & T system which then had a near monopoly of the telephone industry. It cost
$2,500 and weighs 13 pounds. The “National Mobile Telephone Service Area Listings” that came with it is dated March, 1977. The nearest listed channel availability is in Buffalo. To place a call, you opened the case, turned the phone on, checked a meter to see if your battery was charged, pressed switches until you found a channel someone else wasn’t already using, pressed a red button to alert an operator somewhere, then told the operator your number, where your phone was registered, and the number you wanted to call. If you watch movies or television programs from the 70’s through the 90’s, detectives and spies used similar phones.

In 1977, seven digit phone numbers were a relatively recent increment. They had come with direct long distance dialing in 1962. In that decade, one well known comedian, Red Skelton, had a shtick of going into a pay phone booth and dialing (we turned a dial rather than pushed buttons then) and dialing and dialing, 10 or 12 digits. He was probably playing off our then annoyance with the longer numbers. As I so often say, you can’t make a joke today because reality will always one-up you.

Historians, should probe and record how changes happen. The present change relates to a national shortcut number for suicide prevention. Historians should ask, did anyone do experiments or studies or make computer models to estimate how many lives or how many life/years this innovation will save and compare this with the cumulative life/years lost in constant extra button pushing. My guess is no. Most decisions of this nature are provoked by activists and career organizers, essentially salesmen, who are not frugal with the time and money of other people when it comes to good causes. They usually resent anyone questioning their programs, but that is exactly what historians should do, search out the motives and methods as well as the hidden costs and unintended consequences behind moments of change.
Genealogy Support Group

The Fenton History Center’s Genealogy Support Group serves to support to 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 Workshop is the sixth in a series of six on the topic.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, November 20, 2021 @ 10:30 AM
New England Workshop VI: NEHGS Resources*
   presented by Janet Wahlberg

Wednesday, November 24, 2021 @ 6:30 PM
Brickwalls
Open Forum - Bring your brickwalls!

Wednesday, December 29, 2021 @ 6:30 PM
Christmas Party

Saturday, January 8, 2022
9th Annual Library Lock-In
This month I am sharing our Board president’s autobiography. For any of you who know Rick, you can appreciate what an asset he is and has been to the Fenton. It seems that no matter what is going on, Rick is involved somehow. Below you will find Rick’s story.

“I was born in Jamestown New York and have lived here most of my life except for the years spent in Westfield New York, Carthage New York, and northern Vermont.

My K thru twelve education was completed in Jamestown public schools, graduating in 1973. I then moved to State University of New York at Fredonia, where I earned a bachelor’s degree in music education in 1977 and later a Master of Music Education in 2002. I also attended the State University of New York at Potsdam for a brief time. In addition, I have earned thirty-six graduate hours, mostly in music.

My working history began, during my junior high school days, when I acted as the Easter bunny for children at Wade’s Shoes in Jamestown! I then progressed during my in high school and college, to working as a Messenger and a Teller at First National Bank in Jamestown, and for the city of Jamestown recycling program. I taught Music for one year in Enosburg Falls Vermont, three years in Westfield, 13 years in Carthage, New York, and then return to the area in 1994 to teach at the former Chautauqua Central school and then Chautauqua Lake Central School until my retirement in 2012. I am currently adjunct faculty at both SUNY Fredonia and SUNY JCC for music. I have also worked for the 2020 US Census and NYSSMA (New York State School Music Association).

It is hard to come up with one exact reason why I began volunteering for the Fenton but, I think it was through my involvement with the Fenton History center and friends of mine that already did volunteer. I pretty much started shortly after we acquired the Hall House and started moving our items to that building including archives and the library.

My interests at the Fenton are not limited to just one area, but if I had to pin it down, I would say it is probably the history of the furniture industry in Jamestown. Or perhaps, being a part of the Saints and Sinners event, each year telling the fascinating stories of ordinary people who had extraordinary events in their lives.

In my spare time, I perform musically, travel, home improvement projects

I would like for everyone to know that the Fenton History Center and the Hall House research center are great organizations to be a part of. They are an important part of our community and the more we can support them through volunteering the more impact they can have. In my case I went from volunteer to board member to board president and when I complete my term on the board I will still volunteer!”

As Rick leaves his position as our Board president, we will need to find someone with endless dedication and energy to fill his shoes.
Eureka!!

The Honor Flight out of Buffalo Niagara Airport on Oct 9 was a grand success! Our flight times were earlier and later, since we were flying Southwest, however, they couldn’t have been more respectful and kind to our Veterans and the other passengers.

We started out at the Fenton History Center with four Veterans and guardians, and stopped in Dunkirk to pick up more. Two others drove up and met us at the Meet and Greet dinner at the Aloft Hotel where we stayed Friday night and Saturday night. The trip to Washington, D.C. was all day Saturday, then a wonderful dinner in Baltimore before flying back to Buffalo. We were back in the Fenton parking lot by noon on Sunday.

Huge thanks to the Chautauqua Region Community Foundation; Greg Carlson - Director of Chautauqua County Veterans Service Agency; Cindy Reidy – Dwyer Chautauqua Program Coordinator; and to CARTS for supplying drivers for the Veterans Van.

A good time was had by all!
Fenton History Center Museum
67 Washington Street
Jamestown, New York 14701
Hours: Mon. - Sat. 10 AM - 4 PM

Hall House Research Center
73 Forest Avenue
Jamestown, NY 14701
Hours: Mon. - Tues. 10 AM - 4 PM
Thurs. - Fri. 10 AM - 4 PM

(716) 664-6256
www.fentonhistorycenter.com

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