FAREWELL, NOAH!

by Andrew Kolstee
TRUSTEE, EDITOR

This month we bid farewell to our Executive Director, Noah Goodling as he leaves the Fenton for his next position. I asked members of the Board of Trustees and staff to send a message of farewell, and here are the responses I received by the publishing deadline.

“"In the 4 plus years Noah has been with us, he managed to maintain what we had been doing at the Fenton and introduced some wonderful new ideas as well. Every person brings some new perspectives to any job, and we have been the fortunate recipients of them, such as programming ideas and board/staff development. To say we will miss him is an understatement but we certainly wish him well and hope he will still be a part in some way of what we do here.”

- Rick Lundquist
President, Board of Trustees

“Good luck, Noah, and thanks for steering the ship these last few years!”

- Ashley Senske
Vice President, Board of Trustees

“While I am sorry to see Noah leaving us, I wish him much success in his new endeavor. When he came to us, he had such big shoes to fill, and he did it. His leadership through the Covid Crisis was well designed and implemented. His ability to keep us on a smooth financial footing during the Crisis was impressive. And over these times of limited contact with others, Noah made great contacts for the Fenton into the community. The fact that he doesn’t like Jig Saw Puzzles is just one of those things that I will have to overlook. (a private joke between Noah and I)”

- Janet Wahlberg
Treasurer, Board of Trustees

“Noah has been a true professional during his tenure as Executive Director of the Fenton History Center. His devotion and attention to all aspects of daily operations will be greatly missed.”

- Guy Ditonto
Member, Board of Trustees

“Thank you Noah, for your leadership and all you have done to streamline and move the Fenton more into the modern era! You will be truly missed here. Best of...

…CONTINUED ON PAGE 2
luck in your future endeavors!

- Andrew Kolstee  
Member, Board of Trustees

“Noah has been an essential worker for the Fenton History Center. He has gotten us through a lot of tough times since his arrival here four years ago. He’s a team player and will be missed but we hope he impresses his new team as much as he has here!”

-Paula Bechmann,  
Office Manager

“A funny thing happened on the way to Noah’s interview in 2017. It was a regular Friday at the Fenton Research Center with various staff and volunteers working on genealogy searches or special projects in preparation to close out the week. A concerned volunteer came to me and had me look out a window to the parking lot where an unknown man was scrutinizing the Hall House and jotting things down on his tablet. We watched the strange man a few minutes and he made me nervous as well. Why would he be so boldly checking out our building? The Volunteer pointed out his black suit and red tie, and suggested that nothing good could be connected with this man. Well, I didn’t know about that, but I had paperwork that needed to go to Paula, our Office Manager, at the Mansion. So, off I went to pretend I was just being friendly as I was on my way to the other building. When I asked the strange man if I could help him, he explained that he was soon to be interviewing for the Director position. He was a few minutes early, so he was going over his list of points he wanted to make. When I explained that his scrutinizing of our building was a little unsettling, he chuckled and remarked that he hadn’t even realized that he was looking at our building. He was just staring off as he went over things he wanted to discuss during the interview, lost in thought, but harmless just the same. We had a good laugh and I sincerely wished him good luck as we parted ways. Good thing too, since he became my boss. Once again, I sincerely wish him good luck as we part ways.”

- Barb Cessna,  
Researcher

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December is my favorite time of year at the Fenton. The house is festively decorated, the holiday exhibit is up, and the gift shop is full of gift ideas! The 2021 Holiday exhibit, Christmas At Santa’s Workshop is open now through January 6th and can be viewed any time the museum is open.

December is always full of events as well. This year we are holding special Candle light hours, from 6-8 on December 3rd and 17th so you can view the holiday display by the soft glow of candlelight.

On Thursday December 9th we are hosting our Holiday Virtual Paint Night. This month we will be painting gnomes! Kits are available for only $20 and include the canvas, paint and brushes, everything you need to paint along with us via Zoom. Kits are available at the Fenton History Center Gift Shop.

December 18th is our annual Holiday Open House. If you haven’t made it in to see the Holiday exhibit by then, we encourage you to come enjoy the exhibit, and we will have some fun games and take-and-make projects for the kids. Standard admission rates apply for this event.

If It’s unique gifts you are looking for come check out our gift shop! The Fenton History Center gift shop has something for everyone. From historic books, to jewelry, to hand made mittens, to Christmas decorations this is your one stop shop. Or give the gift of a Fenton History Center Membership this year. There is no charge to browse the gift shop, and it’s open all the time the Fenton Mansion is open. Monday through Saturday 10-4, closed Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day. Remember, Fenton History Center Members receive a 10% discount on gift shop purchases!
OPEN POSITION

FENTON HISTORY CENTER
museum and research center

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Since 1963, the Fenton History Center has been the place to go for local history education and preservation for the City of Jamestown and southern Chautauqua County. Utilizing two beautiful 19th century mansions in the heart of Jamestown, New York, the Fenton provides educational exhibits, research and genealogical support, diverse programs, and other forms of visitor engagement to get our community involved and interested in the history of our area. The work of the Fenton staff is supplemented by a dedicated and expansive network of volunteers, history practitioners, and partner organizations, who take our outreach and programming to the next level, and allow us to offer opportunities beyond the reach of many local museums.

As the Fenton nears its 60th anniversary, it is seeking a capable, experienced, and enthusiastic nonprofit leader to serve as its next Executive Director. Over the past few years, the Fenton staff and Board have worked on building financial stability for the organization, securing innovative community partnerships which created a strong reputation for the organization, and designing exhibits and programming that are equitable and engaging for the entirety of our community and its guests. These efforts have brought acclaim and funding from across New York State to the Fenton, and have set the stage for an exciting next phase of growth and opportunity for the organization. In conjunction with the Board of Directors, the Executive Director will be the core element of this new phase, providing forward-thinking, creative, and innovative leadership for the organization, in order to guide its mission and programming efforts.

fentonhistorycenter.org/executive-director-application
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!
I have been asked to make my newsletter contribution this month a reminiscence of Fenton Christmas past. Reminiscence and history are often confused, but they are two different things. The human mind and memory are far less capable of accurately perceiving and remembering than people realize so even the record of contemporary events is terribly prone to inaccuracy and disagreement. History has the passage of time further distorting perception of the past, but reminiscence, without an anchor of actual record, is even more prone to drifting off to realms of fantasy, wish, imagination, and error. That’s why I try to hew close to the line of history in these essays. But this month I will make an exception and reminisce without resort to Fenton records, my diary, or newspaper stories. These are my memories and impression. Keep those limitations in mind.

My first involvement with Fenton was a talk I gave about the Busti Mill project at the Fenton annual meeting in May, 1982. Then three winters in the mid and late 80’s I was in the photo department with Pete Flagg. No doubt somewhere in that decade I started coming in to enjoy the seasonal presentations at Christmas. When I first remember, the mansion was decorated by agreement with the Jamestown Garden Club. In later years this has been criticized for lack of period appropriateness. But at the time, I thought it was beautiful and as I remember, a lot of other people did also.

My first actual Fenton Christmas memory is encountering my sister’s friend, Sharon, a garden club member, when she and the others were installing decorations on the stairs and in the halls. Sharon looks like the stereotypical Swedish blonde. She has one of the brightest smiles in Jamestown and she really lit up the place with her Christmas clothing and obvious joy.

The education department may have been involved with the exhibit department in Christmas in early days. School tours at Christmas were a big, big thing. At some point, I think while Dolores Thompson was director, somebody came up with “The Tradition of the Trees” as a theme and Christmas at Fenton was integrated into our overall mission. It involved a lot of research and a lot of trees. I think Wendy Chadwick-Case, exhibit designer at the time, did the research which was distilled down to some very carefully worded labels and a thick companion guidebook for staff. There was so much material that different themes could be

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accented different years and material selected out of the packet to go with the exhibits. Different rooms held different subtopics and these were shifted around from year to year. Nancy Kerrin, Wendy’s assistant in the late 90’s, was a veritable wizard at creating both exhibit props and whole layouts. Wendy had several noteworthy assistants. Linda Cowan, for one, had a really deft artistic touch. Sarah Reale, before during, and after she was Education Chairman, contributed her own winter village setup which was really impressive.

We had Western cowboy Christmas, and we had science fiction space travel Christmas, and aluminum tree 50's Christmas, on and on year after year until the minds of our exhibit department women were a-scramble from exhaustion.

The trees were the adventure element of Christmas. When Dolores was Director, she and I would go out beyond Frewsburg next to the observatory where Elizabeth Pillsbury, our Genealogy Department head, had some land planted to trees. We would select and cut them and bring them back. I think Dolores had a small hatchback and we must have used my pickup truck too.

By the time Candy Larson was director, Tradition of the Trees had grown to 14 per year, all specified very precisely as to number and size up to 14 feet. Candy’s husband, Les, and I were sent out with our trucks to a tree farm in Gerry to cut and load huge loads that we carefully ferried back to the mansion.

At first every tree in the building was a real live tree. Authenticity, people. Authenticity! Eventually we started to replace one after another one year after another with artificial trees and finally state regulations required we spray the live trees with a special fire retardant or resort to artificial. Our erstwhile city employee, Harold Laurin, was assigned as our de facto caretaker of the mansion. Harold did the spraying. I may have done it or helped one or two years. I can’t remember exactly. Finally it got down to one live tree, the big 14 footer in the Family Parlor. One year Harold sprayed it and the always awful smell was worse than ever. Within three days every needle on the tree had turned brown and most had fallen off. It was a minor crisis and we had to replace the tree which for various reasons wasn’t easy. I don’t remember the details. Now all trees are artificial and we mourn authenticity no more.

One year somebody, Wendy probably, came up with the idea of the upside down tree. It harked back to Queen Victoria so it wasn’t just ok, it was a must. Harold climbed up on the ladder and took out the light fixture and established the tree in the center of the ceiling somehow. “What a nutty idea,” I thought privately. People loved it and they loved the silly pickle ornament on it. After Harold was gone, I performed the vexsome task a few times myself but mostly whatever woman was Exhibit Director did it. Now it has become a permanent fixture, off center, hanging from some purpose-made contrivance all year around.

We have hosted quite a variety of special Christmas events in the mansion over the years. Two really stand out in my mind. Many years ago our then Artistic Director, Helen Gilbert’s daughter presented a piano concert in the Drawing Room. She is a very talented woman. Just about two years ago we had a live recitation of Dickens’ A Christmas Carol. A Christmas Carol is always one of my favorite Christmas features and this gentleman, whose name I could look up, did a wonderful job.

In recent years, the staff gets a day or two off at Christmas and New Years. But when Cristin Stein was director we worked extra hours. Staff and volunteers even had half day duty on Christmas Eve. We had a free event something like Doors Open. I did parking lot duty some years and the place was jam-packed. We had overflow parking at Wahl green’s (Still St. James then) and maybe the lawyer’s office next door. Cars were double parked. They parked the fire lanes and exits full. I couldn’t control them.

TIMELINE

1976
Green Thumb Garden Club

1977
(first) Holiday Celebration of Our Cultural Heritage

1978
Decorations by Green Thumb Garden Club

1979
Holiday Celebration of Our Cultural Heritage at Walnut Grove, Green Thumb Garden Club

1982
(first) Tradition of the Trees
For $20 we provide everything you need to paint this, including the 11"x14" canvas. Call the Fenton or stop in to reserve your spot!

Call 716-664-6256 to register and stop by the Fenton Gift Shop to pick up your kit!
Many of you may be unaware that Noah has resigned from the Fenton as Director to take another position in the County. While we will miss his leadership, we wish him well in his new endeavor. As with any leader of an organization, he brought new ideas to the Fenton, and we hope to build on those ideas.

And now Noah’s story in his own words:

I was born in Warren, Pennsylvania in 1988. Growing up, I was surrounded by history and material culture, thanks in large part to my dad. He was the city planner for Warren, but his true passion was buying and selling antiques. No family vacation was complete without stopping at every antique store that we passed, and my brother and I have many eye-rolling memories of the time he bought something awkwardly shaped and spiky (like ski poles or a windvane) that we had to ride with for the rest of the trip. We moved to Corning in 1998, when my dad took a job as the city planner there, and he quickly settled into a new antiques routine in that town. There has never been a time in my life when he was not working with antiques.

I had an appreciation for my dad’s hobby, but I did not love history until I got to college. Thinking about learning history in high school, I often reflect on my freshman year, when my teacher used to fill four chalkboards with “history vocab words,” and have us write them down verbatim. Once we finished copying everything, we could goof around for the rest of class, provided we could regurgitate the information again for the test. It was hard to find much to like in a subject being taught like that. In my freshman year at college, though, I needed an elective, and settled on a modern Chinese history course, just because it was totally different from anything I had learned before. My professor had grown up in a China shaped by Mao Zedong, and his parents had lived through the violent Cultural Revolution, and I found myself captivated by the power of the stories he told about his life and his country. I have always loved stories, and I was struck by the ability that history could have to bring people together and create connections. I ended up majoring in history, graduating with a BA from Allegheny College in 2010.

After graduating, I was not sure what I wanted to do so I took an internship on a whim at the US Army Heritage and Education Center Foundation. One of the projects I was assigned to work on was a diary from a WWII soldier in the South Pacific named Willard Dominick. Willard had been going to school to be an art teacher but joined the Army after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He drew in his diary, and at first the pictures were beautiful – I remember an incredibly detailed picture of an AA gun in the jungle – but as time went on, both his writing and his pictures got more simplistic and violent. Seeing those drawings, I was struck again by the potential of empathy that could be gained by studying history. It is impossible to say what caused the change in Willard’s diary entries, but I felt that I understood the conflict better after working on that diary. And I felt encouraged that there was a path forward for me to find meaningful work in the field of history.

Following that internship, I came to Chautauqua County, and worked at the Chautauqua Institution Archives for about six months, while also volunteering in the archives at the Robert H. Jackson Center. I then applied to...
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grad school for public history, a field of study that aims to equip students with the ability to use historical skills practically in the world outside academia. I was lucky enough to get accepted to a few places and chose IUPUI in Indianapolis because their program emphasized practical experience. I worked for the Indiana Historical Society, the Indiana State Archives, and the National Council on Public History as a student and helped IUPUI professors and Indiana state employees design a class for undergraduates created to introduce students to archaeological fieldwork and archival research.

As I worked on my thesis, which was on the link between early 20th century attitudes towards the poor and the passage of the nation's first eugenics law in Indiana in 1907, I realized I needed a break. I had been working hard in academia for a few years and needed to clear my head before finishing my paper. I took a three-week job in the town of Griffith, Indiana, up near Chicago. They wanted a trained historian to write an action plan for their all-volunteer historical society, so that they could take care of their town's records properly. After a deep dive through their materials, I wrote up a plan and presented it to their Trustees. Twenty-four hours later, they called me with an issue – they loved the plan, but none of them actually wanted to do it. Instead, they wanted to hire me full-time to come do it for them. Telling myself I would get back to my thesis eventually (I would not), I took the job and started my professional career.

I ended up staying in Griffith for close to a year, at the end of which time we opened the first-ever exhibits on the city's history, in the basement of an old school. The volunteer squad was trained and capable by that point, and they are still carrying on the work of preserving and sharing history to this day. I went next to the Miami County Museum in Peru, Indiana, the birthplace of Cole Porter and a former winter quarters for traveling circuses, to serve first as the archivist and later as the curator. The circus collections were amazing, and I loved to just dig through the collection materials and find the many, many treasures. A change in leadership there made the job less fun for me, and I moved on to a role as the college archivist for Thomas Nelson Community College in Hampton, Virginia.

I liked the job at Thomas Nelson – the weather was summer-like for 10 months out of the year, the area was beautiful, the city was fun, and I had a supportive workplace – and I was intending to stay there for a while when my parents let it slip during a phone call that the head spot at the Fenton had opened up. During the change in leadership at the Miami County Museum, I had served as the interim director for a few months, and I had liked the feeling of leading an organization like that for a local community. I still was not sure I was qualified but thought I would apply to the position and see what happened. To my surprise, I got an offer, and found myself having to embarrassedly tell my supportive bosses at Thomas Nelson that I was leaving, less than a year after starting there. I started at the Fenton at the end of August 2017 and found a position that has consistently challenged me and pushed me to grow. I have never worked anywhere else that has demanded so much of me, or that has placed so much responsibility directly on my shoulders. I am grateful to the Board for allowing me to take on this position, and for giving me the patience to grow into it over the last 4+ years. Working at the Fenton reinforced again my belief in the power of stories and gave me the ability to focus resources to fill in the gaps in the stories that we could tell, to be directly involved with expanding the story we give to the future.

As I take my next steps forward, I hope that whoever works on this story next recognizes its importance and takes bold steps to help it move ahead even more successfully.
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.

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

Saturday, January 8, 2022
9th Annual Library Lock-In

Wednesday, January 26, 2022 @ 6:30 PM
Introduction to the 1950 U.S. Federal Census
presented by Andrew Kolstee

Wednesday, March 30, 2022 @ 6:30 PM
News and Updates Regarding the 1950 U.S. Federal Census
presented by Andrew Kolstee
Research Center and Vets Finding Vets Many things come to mind as the current year is coming to an end. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the Research Center was closed to the public for a while, but working from home we could go online and find many answers to start the research. Then, coming in to look at various resources to finish up inquiries was a bit different, but needed to be done. We were here alone, so there were no distractions (Squirrel!) keeping us from our list of various topics for each request. As you can all remember, people were stuck at home and checking some items off from their bucket lists was a wise use of time. Family genealogy was one of the projects many people chose to focus on and the inquiries were coming in regularly.

Vets Finding Vets was conducted by phone, email, and snail mail. No social gatherings were going on, but we managed to stay in touch by phone for most. Many of the active Vets in the program were panicked about the lack of vaccines in our area and I was on many area websites for pharmacies who were going to have vaccines at some point. Once they began scheduling appointments, the communications were fast and furious because the appointments filled up fast. What a relief when they were all vaxed!

This year I was able to focus on... CONTINUED ON PAGE 13
documenting many more Veterans of all ages from Chautauqua County. Two big Civil War inquiries came in while we were closed, and I was so grateful for the opportunity to have worked indepth on these two projects.

But, the huge project was documenting the National Guard enlistments from the 1800s, including the Fenton Guards, up through WWI and WWII. There are just a few enlistments during the 1950’s, which were all part of the “old records”. The beauty of this project is that info and documents were turning up about the Fenton’s, particularly Reuben Earle Fenton, who was a 2nd Lt. with the Fenton Guards. There are so many connections that it would take several pages to explain, but we also had information at the Research Center which explained the backstories of some mysteries at the Armory.

Much of the work was in organizing the many boxes of “Stuff” which had been stored since the 1930’s in the new Armory. I also had two short term volunteers, Cindy Dustin and Janet Wahlberg, who were a big help.

Victoria Parker and I are in the process of scanning the older scrapbooks, and the enlistment info has been entered into a database which is almost ready to be shared with the Armory and the NYS Military Museum and Veteran Research Center in Saratoga Springs, NY. The scrapbooks
range from the Spanish American War in 1898, the Mexican Border War during 1916 and 1917, and WW I from 1917 through 1918. The news articles chronicle the day to day activities and conditions on the ground, and each scrapbook included rosters of the Guards who served. Plaques honoring the fallen Guardsmen of WWI and WWII can be seen near the entrance of the Armory.

It is my goal to finish this all up before the New Year! Fingers crossed! Best wishes to all for a heartwarming Holiday season,

Barb Cessna - Research Assistant and Vets Finding Vets Project Coordinator

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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

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