The wheel comes full circle, and with it, the seasons change and the landscape becomes brighter, more vibrant and ever hopeful.

Each new day here at the Fenton I greet with much enthusiasm and vigor as there is much to see and do. The mansion displays superb craftsmanship in marble, wood, metal, and glass and is representative of a true Victorian life experience of which I am in complete wonder. As with any stately home, its origins and pedigree provides a unique window of opportunity for visitors to be a part of our preservation efforts.

Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman in the Decoration of Houses, 1897 reflect on the following, “Changes in manners and customs, no matter under what forms of government, usually originate with the wealthy or aristocratic minorities and are thence transmitted to other classes.” Author John Mass in his work entitled The Victorian Home in America stated, “The design for living was set at the turn of the twentieth century. Almost every new house was connected to water and sewer pipes and was wired for electric light and telephone. The railroad network was complete from coast to coast, the automobile was on the road, the airplane was three years away. The present had arrived.” Clearly, the spirit of ingenuity, discovery and progress are at the forefront of our experience here in terms of what we glean from the past and how we continue to move forward in the present.

Literally, as I move from one room to the next within the mansion I am struck by the Victorian sensibilities of window and swag drapery treatments, parlors, sitting rooms, high ceilings, marble fireplaces, and unique light figures. The present has indeed arrived. As many homes of many rich Americans were designed to look like a Scottish castle, and English manor, a French chateau, or in the case of the Fenton’s local architect, Aaron Hall’s inspiration, an Italian villa derived from rural estates in Italy, there remains the need to continue to preserve and yet embrace change in merry measure.

Our volunteers continually contribute countless hours to our preservation efforts here.

We recently undertook a painting and plasterwork project on the second floor of the museum in keeping with the monumental task of maintenance and repair projects. This year we will con-
The Second Annual Chautauqua Regional Genealogical Conference

Saturday April 30, 2022
Fluvanna Community Church
3363 Fluvanna Ext.
Jamestown, NY 14701
9am-4pm

This one-day conference is an exciting opportunity for anyone interested in Genealogy, from novice to expert. Visit our website crgconference.com for information on speakers and topics. Registration opens March 15, 2022. Visit crgconference.com or call 716-664-6256 to register.
This month, at the urging of some of our members, I want to give everyone a peek into what we do here at the Fenton History Center. This month’s article will feature a couple stories of items identified or located in February 2022.

One of the requests that came into our Research Center this month was someone looking for a date for a particular photograph featuring several of the Steamboats that used to grace Chautauqua Lake. The photo was taken in the boat landing. After some discussion the photo was passed to me, since I scanned our collection of steamboat photos in 2016. After months of scanning, labeling and sorting I have become quite familiar with the steamboats, and unexpectedly learned to identify them.

This particular image, shown here, looked familiar. After searching through the scans of our collection I found several copies of the same image, labeled 1890’s or 1893 or 1890-1900. This particular researcher was looking for something closer than this, so I consulted the Chautauqua Lake Steamboats book by the Fenton History Center, last published in 2012. Using the book, and the boat names listed on the photograph I was able to narrow it down. The large steamer the Jamestown is easily recognizable with its large stern wheel. The Jamestown met an untimely demise in October of 1892 when it caught fire, so this photo has to be taken before October 1892. The next biggest clue to dating this photo was an identifier labeling one of the boats as the City of Cleveland. This ship was built in 1891 and cruised the lake under the name the W.C. Rinearson for the first year. It became the City of Cleveland in 1892. The photo you see here could not have been taken before 1891 or after 1892. Copies of the Chautauqua Lake Steamboats book are still available for...CONTINUED ON PAGE 5
We have a need for volunteers of all skills and talents. There is a need for people to photograph textiles, those who can type, those who are willing to file articles and clippings and those who can scan.

We also need volunteers to man the Gift Shop and generally assist at the mansion. Those willing to help put up displays are most welcome.

Tour guides and actors can be used year-round but are especially needed at the time of the Cemetery tours.

If you are not sure of your skill level, training is offered for each position. If you would like to be a part of the volunteer brigade, call the Fenton at 716-664-6256.
One of the many types of requests we get at the Fenton are request to see artifacts for historical research. Last week one of our members drew a sketch of an item he was hoping we had an example of, and asked if the Fenton had one of these items. I recognized it immediately from his sketch as a torch for fishing. This iron torch attached to the front of a boat and held pine knots that were lit on fire to allow the fishermen to spear fish at night. The torch was on exhibit in the Chautauqua Lake Room at the Fenton until that exhibit closed in 2018. Since then it had been sitting waiting to be properly identified, photographed and stored away. This particular request was for a photo of one for an upcoming book about the fishing industry, as he had only been able to find photos of one other example online. I was very excited to be able to quickly provide an example of a torch, and I look forward to seeing it in print in the near future.

This is just a small sampling of the research and requests that are conducted and fulfilled at the Fenton Research Center on a daily basis. If you have questions like these please consider contacting our staff and volunteers at the Research Center.

As we sow, we shall reap...plans in 2022 will revolve around growth. Our campaigns moving forward will focus on “Growing With Us” as we engage the community with our outreach initiatives. Our desire to grow, stimulate growth and our quest for knowledge inherently brings us full circle.
Last month I wrote about the first 1,300 years of Chautauqua County prehistory. At least two dozen chert projectile points and some other flake tools from this period have been found in Chautauqua County, although none are in the Fenton collection.

The Pleistocene (Ice Age) ended and the Holocene (modern era) began 9 or 10,000 years ago. Climate changed zigzag but trended decidedly warmer. The glacier retreated. Plant and animal populations progressed toward the composition that persisted to present times. About the dates and details, there is disagreement. There is more disagreement about the local human population. It was very small for several thousand years even by prehistoric standards. It may have dropped below that of the previous era. There is no agreement but evidence is even more rare than for the Paleo period. Studies have been made on the Niagara Frontier, in northwestern Pennsylvania and farther afield in central New York and Southern Ontario. But from about 10,000 years ago to about 3,000 years ago, whoever was here left little trace to study beyond a few rare bifurcated and other styles of projectile points.

Life got a little better starting around 3,000 years ago. Pottery was introduced. Food and possessions could be stored much more conveniently provided they were not constantly moved. Animal fat that had always dripped into the fire and burned away could now be recovered from boiled stew and eaten for precious calories. Populations grew. People stayed in one location longer and began to try cultivating certain plants for supplementary food. These were native weeds, no corn, beans, or squash yet. At some time, the bow and arrow was introduced. Think how that must have made life better for hunters.

Starting around 500 B.C. in the lower Ohio valley, a new belief or social system apparently
developed. It had many variations through time and territory but it always included mound burials. Archaeologists identify two major manifestations: first Adena and later Hopewell (The later Mississippian did not affect this area. The designation “Mound Builders” fails to make these distinctions and is no longer used.). These same people also developed an impressive trade network for materials from far away, items sought primarily for ritual and artistic purposes: exceptionally pretty stone, mineral mica, copper, sea shells. This was trade by trail and canoe and the trails were probably very bad. There were no wheels or vehicles, and no pack animals. There is disagreement among archaeologists about whether this trade was done by a hand to hand chain or by professional traders who made long treks, or both. There is evidence for some long distance travel. If this is so, there had to be some rules or understanding over much of the continent that strangers would not automatically be killed or enslaved.

The ideas and the trade did extend into Chautauqua County. At least 16 mounds in 13 locations were constructed, all much lower and less impressive than those downstream. Only one still exists. We were at the far reaches of Hopewell influence from around year 1 to 300 or so A.D. One has to wonder how many people it took and how long it took them to build even the small local mounds with elk shoulder hoes rather than shovels and baskets instead of wheelbarrows. What gods or beliefs or leaders impelled such effort? How were they organized? How were they fed?

We know little about how these people died and less about how they lived. All but one of the local excavations was done by 19th century amateurs or workmen wanting to get the mounds out of the way. Most of them were just plowed over until they vanished. Observations were rarely made, poorly recorded, and worse preserved. The bones crumbled or were discarded. Much, very much, could be learned if we had access to them today but we would still be denied the opportunity. The information would be destroyed and forever lost because of reburial and “repatriation” laws. Among the questions it might settle would be, was it the people with new ideas who moved in or just the ideas themselves. If it was actual migration, where from and how rapid?

The whole thing seems to have collapsed rather abruptly. We don’t really know why. But people gave up long distance trade and made do with what they had nearby. They didn’t come together any more for extravagant rituals and burial work parties for favored individuals and they expended much less effort on art.

Corn - maize - showed up not much later (The date is still very much in question.), maybe first just the grain as a curiosity, a rare trade item. Maize is native to tropical Mexico. It took thousands of years to develop varieties that could mature in our short northern growing seasons. But slowly it changed people’s whole way of life. Someone had to stay home to weed, hoe, and chase deer away. Someone had to plant and harvest and prepare storage locations. There were whole new ways of cooking followed by whole new ceremonies and myths and new gods. People clumped together into the first villages to work together and the villages stayed put for a few years or as long as firewood could be found and soil fertility held up and neighbors could tolerate one another. Archaeologists call this the Late Woodland era. I will discuss it next month.
Cindy Rodgers has been an incredible asset to the Fenton over many years. Those of you attending the Cemetery tours have had the opportunity to enjoy her dramatic and sometimes humorous portrayals of some of our former Jamestown residents. Cindy served on the Board of Directors for several years and as the president for 2 years. Her leadership was invaluable. Now let us hear Cindy’s story from her own pen.

I was born in Rochester NY where my grandparents lived. My dad was in the Navy, stationed in Maryland, but was on a submarine when I was born. My mother traveled to her parents’ home in Rochester for my birth and first month of life.

I have lived in many different places. My dad was in the Navy until I was 5 years old, so we were stationed in many port towns in the mid and northeast. At the end of the Vietnam Conflict, the Navy found my dad a job in Valparaiso, IN where I attended school until 6th grade. My grandfather was diagnosed with cancer, and we moved to Bemus Point, NY, where I attended my remaining years of school.

I have had many jobs, most in this area - lifeguard, waitress, short order cook, even professional mime (really). After college I moved to the Washington DC area and worked at a hotel. Upon returning to the area so my husband could work for his family’s business, I worked at a bank then was a stay-at-home mom. For the last 22 years I have worked for my husband’s Land Surveying business, first as Office Manager and now also as a surveyor.

I am not sure how I actually started volunteering at the Hall House. At some point Norman Carlson recommended me as a new member of the Fenton’s board. My interest in the Fenton has always been Genealogy. I began attending the Genealogy Support Group meetings about 22 years ago.

Lately, I do not have much spare time, but I like to knit, read, bike/hike and work on my family history.

The Fenton is a local treasure. It is important to make sure it is here for another one hundred years!

View the 2021 Annual Report

fentonhistorycenter.org/annual-report
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.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Wednesday, March 30, 2022 @ 6:30 PM
News and Updates Regarding the 1950 U.S. Federal Census
presented by Andrew Kolstee

Friday April 1, 2022
1950 U.S. Federal Census Launch Party (details TBD)

Saturday, April 30, 2022
Chautauqua Regional Genealogical Conference

Wednesday, May 25, 2022 @ 6:30 PM
Introduction to the 1921 Census of England and Wales
presented by Janet Wahlberg

Wednesday, June 29, 2022 @ 6:30 PM
Immigration and Naturalization
speaker to be announced
Last month I strived to cover the welcome surprises found among the many documents and items found at the Jamestown Armory during my very favorite Covid project, documenting the National Guard enlistments. In Part 1 I had expounded on a puzzling letter from our own collection to Reuben “Earle” Fenton from the Capt. of the Fenton Guards thanking him for the gift of a metal cabinet for the storage of firearms. After mentioning the item to SSG Weaver an ensuing search had turned up no results, but a later search for yet another Fenton related item unexpectedly turned up the pistol safe made by Fenton Metallic, a company owned by Earle. The end of part 1 was the joyous announcement that the NYS Director of Military History approved the loan of the safe from the Armory to be part of the Fenton Furniture Exhibit, and that it had arrived. Very exciting!

Little treasures of the Fenton family connections were found here and there - like the “Duties Performed by the National Guard” - Ho Hum, right? Well, mostly, but, as I read the documented duties performed on July 4, 1934, my eyes were bulging, I’m sure. The Guards took part in a Parade, not unusual for the Fourth of July. But, the parade ended at the Fenton Mansion where they stood at attention for the unveiling ceremonies of Gov. Fenton’s statue, a gift in memoriam to the Gov. and City as instructed in Lillian Fenton’s recent will, a pact she and Earle undoubtedly had made before his death.

From our own resources we know that the Guards were also officially present years earlier in August 1885 when Gov. Fenton died and was “Laid out” in the Drawing Room niche until his burial. During public hours a Guard was posted at the head and foot of the coffin, while others were posted at the doorways and entrances. They kept vigil at the outside entrances at night, and all Fenton Guards escorted the funeral procession by forming a rectangle around the outer edge of the bereaved family and invited guest portion of the procession.

This same process was repeated when Earle contracted a fever and died just prior to his 30th birthday, while traveling abroad with his wife, Lillian, in May of 1895. Additionally, the Fenton Guards also posted a 24 hour Guard at the Fenton Mausoleum in Lake View Cemetery for a month because Lillian also became ill and couldn’t travel...
...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

home from Naples, Italy with Earle's body. When she returned, the final funeral obsequies were observed. The whole contingent of Fenton Guards were present for each of Earle’s funerals.

A room at the Armory, which has been set aside for historical items, also contains a memorial to CPT. Gordon Hess, whose suspicious death occurred at Fort Knox, KY, in 1998.

This same room has a large portrait of Gov. Fenton hanging on the wall, and was a surprise to me. It was painted by William A Greaves in 1878. Many prominent residents of the area have been the subject of this prolific artist.

Coincidentally, or not, a portrait of Daniel Post resides in the Fenton collection, also painted in 1878 by Greaves. Post was the editor of the Jamestown Journal from 1877 to the early 1880's and went to Europe in 1878, as then Ex-Senator Reuben Fenton's Private Secretary, to attend the International Monetary Conference in Paris. He may have been best known in Jamestown as Capt. Daniel Post, a member of the Fenton Guards 13th Separate Company when it was called into the service of the Federal Government in 1898 during the Spanish American War.

Stay tuned for Part 3 in the April Walnut Press Newsletter.

Happy Spring!

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RESEARCH CENTER REPORT

by Barb Cessna
RESEARCH ASSISTANT

We are so excited to be putting the final touches on the upcoming Genealogy Conference - Finally! We have a great slate of speakers and are so grateful that after two misses, they are ready and eager to join us on April 30th! PS - Early Bird Registration opens March 14th!

The March Genealogy Support Group Meeting will be a Pre-Release Party for the 1950 Census. Join us on Wednesday, March 30th at 6:30 for goodies and pointers on what to expect when this census is released in April. This brings back so many memories of the release of the 1940 census and the wealth of information it provided.

Happily, we now have Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday coverage in the Research Center as our research volunteers are more comfortable with waning Covid dangers.

Spring makes everything better! Enjoy!
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

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- Paula Bechmann Office Manager
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