

# Walnut Grove Press

JANUARY 2026

*The Official Newsletter of the Fenton History Center*

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 1



## NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR

by **Joni Blackman**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

“The best way to predict your future is to create it.”

— Abraham Lincoln

2025 was a busy year. Thank you to the staff, board of trustees and volunteers that helped me re-learn the ropes of managing this great organization. The events were successful because of their dedication to our local history.

This year we will fully launch the **Vision 2030** campaign to create our future:

1. **Promote** and build up the monthly donors to return \$1,500 per month in 2026, \$5,000 per month by 2030.

2. **Build** a third building to meet the growing needs of the organization; visible large collection storage, exhibit space, a second gift shop, staff workspace, 50-

seat presentation space, and a home for the restored #93 Trolley. We have some great momentum going into 2026!

3. **Sustain** the Education Coordinator position beyond 2026 and expand our educational programming, bringing more programs into local schools and increasing opportunities for families and community groups.

4. **Fund** additional collections staff, including a long, overdue and critical full inventory of our artifacts and archival materials.

5. **Complete** major restoration projects, such as the Mansion roof and windows, collaborating with our City of Jamestown partners.

6. **Build** the endowment funds at the Chautauqua Region Community Foundation to ensure we can continue to carry out our essential work. From preserving

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collections to running programs and maintaining operations, without financial strain, supported by strong infrastructure and reliable funding.

**Please let me know** how you would like to be involved in this much needed campaign. We need volunteers, donors and champions to share the exciting work being done at the Fenton.

## 64th Annual Meeting

The Fenton Annual Meeting will be held on Sunday, January 25 from 2 to 4 p.m. in the Mansion. While it is a business meeting to elect the new Trustees and Officers, and to review 2025, it is also a time

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to reflect on and enjoy the work the Fenton team accomplished in 2024.

### **13th Annual Library Lock-In**

Are you a researcher/genealogist? The Library Lock-In is for you! Bring your bag(s) and laptops, plus a dish to pass on Saturday, January 10 from noon to 10 p.m. The cost is \$30. Dive into the Hall House Research Center records to break your brick wall, find a birth, marriage or death date or your ancestor's first name. It's all possible at the 13th Annual Library Lock-in.

### **Fenton Cleaning Days**

Fenton is closed January 11-23 for its annual cleaning and behind-the-scenes repair work days. All volunteers are invited to lend a hand, a broom, or a paint brush. Please let me know if you would like to help. The to-do list is long. If you have hands and a few hours we would love to have you join us!

**Saturday, January 24 is Doors Open** day. It's a day to learn about your hometown. All the local tourist attractions are open for FREE. Please register online at [fentonhistorycenter.org/doorsopen](http://fentonhistorycenter.org/doorsopen). We are limiting the number of visitors each

hour to preserve the 162 year old Fenton Mansion.

**Fenton Trivia 2026 at Shawbucks is every Wednesday night in MARCH.** We moved it in hopes of better weather and attendance. This is a fundraiser for the Fenton and your support is welcome. More information to follow soon.

**Thank you for your continued support of the Fenton History Center through your donations and time. Without you there would be no Fenton History Center.**

**HAPPY NEW YEAR!!**

### **CORPORATE MEMBER ADVERTISERS**



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**FENTON  
HISTORY CENTER**

**FREE ADMISSION**  
to the Gov. Reuben Fenton Mansion  
67 Washington St., Jamestown, NY 14701

**SAT. JAN 24, 2026  
10 AM - 4 PM**



**LIMITED AVAILABILITY**  
**You must register in advance at**  
**[fentonhistorycenter.org/doorsopen](http://fentonhistorycenter.org/doorsopen)**

# Celebrations of WINTER

See How Jamestown Bundles Up,  
Plays, and Enjoys Winter

*Visit the Holiday Exhibit*

**at the Gov. Reuben Fenton Mansion  
67 Washington Street, Jamestown, NY 14701**

**Nov. 29, 2025 - Jan., 10, 2026**

FENTON HISTORY CENTER'S

13TH ANNUAL

# LIBRARY LOCK-IN

Saturday, January 10, 2026

12 PM - 10 PM

at the Hall House Research Center  
73 Forest Ave., Jamestown, NY 14701

Spend the day exploring your ancestry with help from the Fenton History Center's expert staff and volunteers, no experience needed! Enjoy up to ten hours of research, food, prizes, and fun at the Hall House. Come for part or all of the event, every dollar supports the Fenton History Center.

**Cost: \$30 per person**

Register at the Fenton, over the phone, or on our website.

register online: [fentonhistorycenter.org/lockin](http://fentonhistorycenter.org/lockin)

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**(716) 664-6256**

**FentonHistoryCenter.org**

# REMEMBERING LUCILLE BALL'S VISIT TO JAMESTOWN 70 YEARS AGO

by Cindy Dustin  
VOLUNTEER

As the calendar turned to the year 1956, Jamestown residents were all talking about the recent announcement that Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz would be coming to Jamestown in February for the world premiere of their latest movie *Forever Darling*.

Mr. and Mrs. Earle O. Hultquist and Mr. and Mrs. Alldor M. Nord were the leaders of the Planning Committee for the famous couple's visit. At the time, Mr. Hultquist was a leading Jamestown businessman and Mr. Nord was the president and treasurer of Union National Furniture Company. The Planning Committee had hundreds of other area residents who donated, organized, planned and helped make this event a roaring success.

Lucille had been back to Jamestown in earlier years, but this would be the first visit to her hometown since becoming the star of America's favorite television show *I Love Lucy* in 1951. Her husband and co-star, Desi Arnaz, had never been to Jamestown.

Lucille was born on August 6, 1911 to Henry Durrell and Desiree Evelyn Hunt Ball when the family lived on Stewart Avenue. Henry worked for Bell Telephone Company, and Desiree and the children traveled with him as he

...CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

## LUCILLE BALL IS OFF FOR GOTHAM AND HOLLYWOOD

Jamestown Moving Picture  
Actress Visits at Twelfth  
Street Relatives in This  
City.

### WILL BE IN FILM OF EDDIE CANTOR

Got Her Start Posing Photo-  
graphs for Cigarette Ad-  
vertising — Has Had  
Many Successes on  
Silver Screen.

Lucille Ball, first 100 per cent. Jamestown girl to crash the golden gates of Hollywood, last night received the press at the home of relatives at 20 Twelfth Street, just before she left for another year in filmdom. Miss Ball, who got her big chance in Eddie Cantor's "Roman Scandals," and who has appeared in several films during the last year, has been signed to start work Monday in Cantor's latest picture, "The Treasure Hunt."

Describing her work as hard, but interesting, Miss Ball exclaimed: "I just simply love and adore it. Mr. Goldwyn is a wonderful man to work for. It is so much fun meeting the people on the coast and they are so nice."

The local girl got her start in pictures through renown as a model for poster advertising and in three musical revues in New York City. She has appeared in several pictures; in one she doubled for Constance Bennett, whom she closely resembles. She has been signed for three pictures by United Artists, "Treasure Hunt," "Barbary Coast" and "Resurrection." These pictures will keep her busy from six months to a year.

Bound for California.  
Clad in silk pajamas, which  
were embellished with some kind  
of a gold braid of a design that

Movie Actr

1933



LUCILLE BALL

Jamestown girl, who left last night for New York, whence she will fly to California to appear in a

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**...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6**

was assigned to work away from home. Henry passed away in February 1915, and Desiree, Lucille, and baby Fred moved back to Jamestown to live with her parents.

When Lucille was eight years old, Desiree married Ed Peterson. Lucille and Fred subsequently lived with Ed's parents on the north side of Jamestown for a time. Viewers of *I Love Lucy* will remember a scene with Lucy and Ethel (Vivian Vance) were making coffee. When Lucy put the coffee grounds in the pot and then also threw in the egg shells, she announced "My grandmother was Swedish," referring to Mrs. Peterson.

Lucille attended but did not graduate from Jamestown High School. During her teenage years she loved acting, playing parts in various area productions and at home for her family. In 1926 at age 15, her mother borrowed money so Lucille could enroll in a drama school in New York City for the summer. In her biography *Love, Lucy*, Lucille wrote that at the end of the semester, the

school told Desiree that Lucille was wasting her time, and Desiree her money, because Lucille "doesn't have what it takes."

Lucille would return to New York City when she was 17, working as a model. After recuperating in Jamestown from a severe case of rheumatoid arthritis, she again went back to New York City in 1932, determined to pursue an acting career. She again worked as a model, a "Chesterfield Girl" and also did "chorus work" in Broadway shows.

In a chance encounter on a New York City street in 1933, an agent that knew Lucille said "Do you want to move to Hollywood?" Her biography said she ran to the agent's office and signed up immediately for the job. After getting established in Hollywood, she had small parts in several films, her first "credited role" coming in 1936 in the movie *Chatterbox*. She met Desi Arnaz while they were both filming the movie *Too Many Girls*, and they were married on November 30, 1940.

In 1948, Lucille was the star in a radio comedy, playing the role of

Liz Cooper in *My Favorite Husband*. In 1950, the CBS television network asked her and Desi to develop the show for television, and *I Love Lucy* premiered on October 15, 1951.

Obviously, there are many more details about the life of Lucille Ball, and many biographies have been written about her life and achievements. As we pause now to await the details of her triumphant visit to Jamestown in February 1956, we can also think of her as a little girl growing up without a father in early 20th century Jamestown and Celoron. We can see her walking to School #1 at East 8th and Pine Streets when she lived with the Petersons and as a brave teenager taking the train to New York City by herself several times to follow her acting dreams. She returns home, sick, at the height of the depression in 1930, and, with the help of her family, recovers and returns again to New York City in 1932, only 21 years old, determined to succeed, despite many odds against her.

And now the most famous comedienne in the world would be "coming home."

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**CORPORATE MEMBER ADVERTISERS**

# VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

We are always looking for volunteers for different tasks and projects.

Below are three major needs for volunteers.

Contact us at (716) 664-6256, [info@fentonhistorycenter.org](mailto:info@fentonhistorycenter.org), or stop in and fill out a volunteer form.

## LIST OF VOLUNTEER NEEDS

### GIFT SHOP RECEPTION

We need reception coverage on certain days. This involves starting tours and selling merchandise in the gift shop.



### SCAN LAB

We are in need of volunteers to help with digitization projects in the Scan Lab.  
No prior experience necessary.



### MOWING

We are also in need of volunteers to help mow the lawn at the Hall House Research Center.



### GARDEN

We need volunteers to help maintain the Blue Star Memorial Garden.

# 64<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING OF THE FENTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF JAMESTOWN, NEW YORK

## AGENDA

Election of Trustees

Election of Officers

Presentation  
of the Annual Report

**Sunday, February 1, 2026**  
**2:00 PM - 4:00 PM**

**There will be refreshments!**

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All are welcome to attend. All dues paying members of the Fenton Historical Society are entitled to vote in the elections.  
This notice satisfies the requirements of the bylaws.

# VETS FINDING VETS: DECEMBER CANTEEN

by **Barbara Cessna**  
VETS FINDING VETS COORDINATOR

Fenton Canteen is a monthly event for Veterans to meet other Vets and enjoy coffee, cookies, and camaraderie. It is held on the second Saturday morning of each month and is open to Veterans of all ages. Occasionally, we have a special guest speaker, which we did in December. Jack Anderson, of Jamestown, entered the Navy in September 1959 and was discharged in June 1967.

His power point presentation of his experiences on Assault Craft Unit Two during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 and the backstory of political powers involved was very inter-



esting. The release of the Kennedy Papers made it possible for him to put more details together during the 14-day standoff and realize that nuclear war was even closer than anyone realized.

We welcome other Veterans who are interested in sharing their experiences. If you are interested, please call 716-664-6256 and ask for Barb.



# Fenton Seeking Education Coordinator

## ABOUT THE FENTON

The Fenton History Center of Jamestown, N.Y. is seeking a part-time Education Coordinator. Under the supervision of the Executive Director, the Education Coordinator will be responsible for the development and implementation of hands-on, interactive educational programs for students, families and life-long learners.

The Fenton History Center is a small, vibrant local history museum with a professional staff and dedicated volunteer team. The Center is housed in a City of Jamestown owned 1863 Mansion and separate research center. The staff and volunteer team work together to lead and teach our local history to all ages, residents and visitors alike, through diversified programming.

## DUTIES

- Implementing outreach and field trip programs including oversite of museum teacher volunteers
- Marketing the outreach and field trip programs throughout the community
- Scheduling education programs for all ages
- Developing/implementing/overseeing on-site education programs using the 1863 Fenton Mansion's exhibits and period rooms
- Assisting with exhibit design and installation as needed
- Events coordination with the staff
- Maintaining program records regarding budget, supplies, attendance, evaluations

The Education Coordinator will work approximately 21 hours per week. Hours will be flexible but will include weekend days and some evenings as needed. This position requires driving in a personal vehicle, mileage outside the Jamestown area will be reimbursed.

Teacher certification is desired, additional hours in museum studies and/or past experience working in a museum setting for at least 3 years is desired. Candidate must have an interest in local history. Candidate must be comfortable in a classroom setting and understand the public education culture.

**Email cover letter, resume, and three references to  
Joni Blackman at [director@fentonhistorycenter.org](mailto:director@fentonhistorycenter.org)  
by Sunday, February 15, 2026**



**FENTON HISTORY CENTER**  
Stay up to date with the latest at the Fenton!

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**GET TEXT MESSAGE UPDATES!**  
[fentonhistorycenter.org/texting](http://fentonhistorycenter.org/texting)



# ATTENTION VETERANS!

Vets Finding Vets is a free program for Chautauqua County veterans at the Fenton History Center.

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- ★ **Research Services.** We provide family genealogy and local history research services, helping veterans discover their roots and also connect with those in which they have served.
- ★ **Fenton Canteen.** A monthly gathering for veterans to enjoy coffee, cookies, and camaraderie. Held the second Saturday each month from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. in the dining room at the Fenton.
- ★ **Buffalo Niagara Honor Flight.** We help facilitate the application process for veterans wishing to participate in the Honor Flight to see the war monuments in Washington, D.C.
- ★ **Quilts of Valor.** Family members can nominate veterans to receive a handmade quilt through this program.
- ★ **News and Events:** We share information about veteran-related events and happenings in the community.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Barb Cessna, Vets Finding Vets Project Coordinator

(716) 664-6256 | [veterans@fentonhistorycenter.org](mailto:veterans@fentonhistorycenter.org)

Fenton History Center | 67 Washington Street | Jamestown, NY 14701

# GENEALOGY SUPPORT GROUP

HELD AT THE HALL HOUSE RESEARCH CENTER

73 Forest Avenue, Jamestown, New York 14701 Phone: (716) 664-6256

## 2026 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Sat., January 10, 2026	12 PM - 10 PM	Library Lock-In
Wed., January 28, 2026	4 PM - 8 PM	Research Night
Wed., February 25, 2026	4 PM - 8 PM	Research Night
Thurs., March 26, 2026	4 PM - 8 PM	Research Night
Wed., April 29, 2026	4 PM - 8 PM	Research Night
Wed., May 27, 2026	4 PM - 8 PM	Research Night
TBD June 2026	TBD	Field Trip TBD
Wed., June 24, 2026	4 PM - 8 PM	Research Night
Wed., July 29, 2026	4 PM - 8 PM	Research Night
Wed., August 26, 2026	4 PM - 8 PM	Research Night
Wed., September 30, 2026	4 PM - 8 PM	Research Night
Wed., October 28, 2026	4 PM - 8 PM	Research Night
Wed., November 18, 2026	4 PM - 8 PM	Brick Walls
Wed., December 30, 2026	4 PM - 8 PM	Christmas Party

\*contact us if you would like to go!

### About the Genealogy Support Group

The Fenton's Genealogy Support Group serves to support both experienced and amateur researchers. We offer lectures, workshops, discussions, and research nights. These events are an excellent way to become familiar with the Fenton History Center's impressive collection of resources. Our Research Night expands the hours of operation of our research center to one evening per month.

LEARN MORE:

[www.FentonHistoryCenter.org](http://www.FentonHistoryCenter.org)

# NEXT FENTON CANTEENS

AT THE GOV. REUBEN FENTON MANSION

**SAT. JAN. 10, 2026 10 AM - 12 PM**

**SAT. FEB. 14, 2026 10 AM - 12 PM**

**SAT. MAR. 14, 2026 10 AM - 12 PM**

## 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.

Questions? Call Joni Blackman at 716-664-6256

**[fentonhistorycenter.org/joinboard](http://fentonhistorycenter.org/joinboard)**

# *In Memoriam*

# R. Wayne Leamer

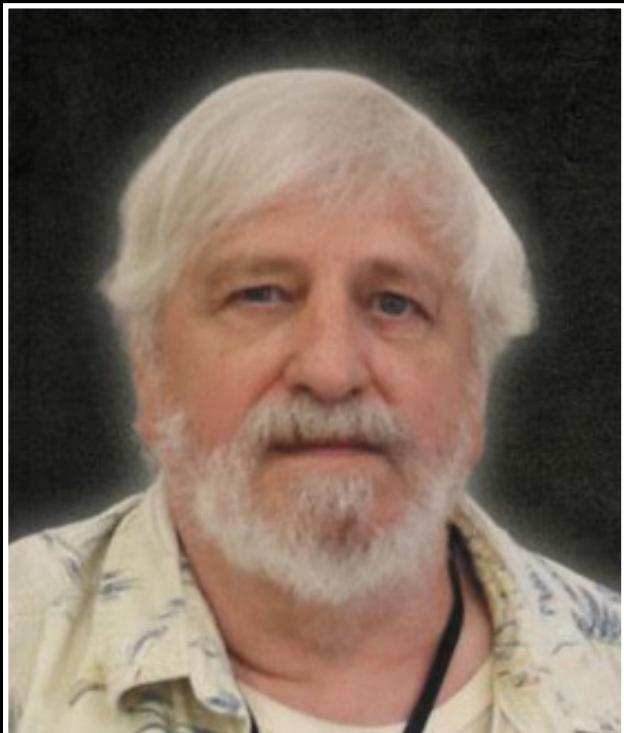
## 1950–2025

The Fenton History Center mourns the loss of Ralph Wayne Leamer, who passed away unexpectedly on December 8, 2025, at his home in Ashville at the age of 75.

Wayne was born on May 22, 1950, in Dunkirk, New York, and spent his early years in Ripley, where he graduated from Ripley High School in 1968. He operated an electronics repair business for several years. After purchasing his first computer, he began entering family birthdays and anniversaries, which led to a growing interest in genealogy. Over the past several years, he worked on numerous projects involving the scanning, indexing, downloading, and preservation of local historical records.

He was a member and volunteer at the Fenton History Center, where he worked on numerous projects over the years. Wayne was also an active member of the Chautauqua County Genealogical Society, serving as Membership Chairman since 2001 and as publisher of *The Chautauqua Genealogist* newsletter since 2007, among many other contributions. More recently, he volunteered weekly at the Chautauqua County Historian's Office.

Over many years, Wayne provided the Fenton History Center, the Chautauqua County Genealogical Society, and other organizations with a wide range of research materials, often delivered on disks, flash drives, or in bound volumes. These included scanned documents, compiled records,



and large, searchable PDF files that brought together hundreds and sometimes thousands of pages of historical material. His work emphasized accessibility and long-term usability, allowing researchers to locate information efficiently within otherwise unwieldy collections.

Much of Wayne's work was quiet and behind the scenes, but the resources he created and shared will continue to support research and preservation for years to come. His absence leaves a void that is felt across the Chautauqua County historical and genealogical community.

# Local Trivia

Q1. What year was the trolley system converted to electricity?

Q2. On what street was the Jamestown Alpaca Mills built in 1874?

Q3. Who enforced the air raid drills during World War II?

Q4. Did fire chief George E. Larson wear glasses?

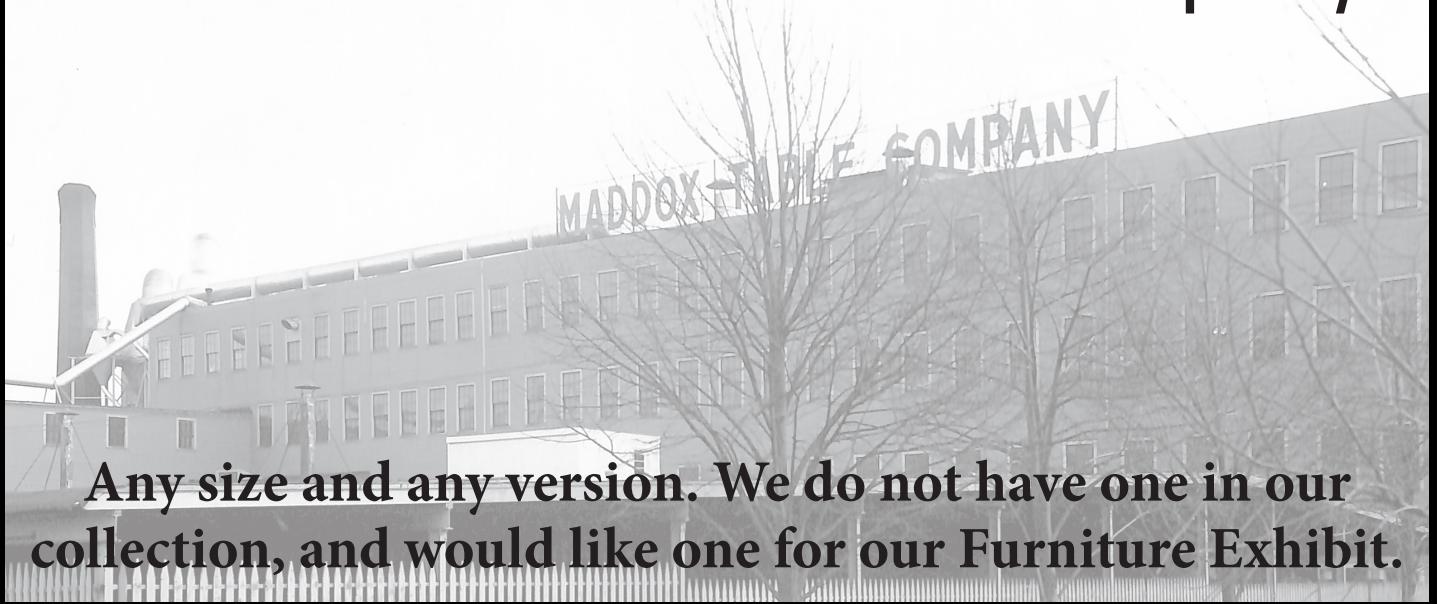
Q5. Who opened the first tavern in Jamestown?

See page 18 for answers.



## WANTED: A Table

from the Maddox Table Company



Any size and any version. We do not have one in our collection, and would like one for our Furniture Exhibit.

# FENTON HISTORY CENTER MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

## GENERAL INFORMATION

- Your membership is vital for keeping the museum and research center running!
- Memberships run January - December. Memberships purchased between September 1 and December 31 are good through December 31 of the following year.

## MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

- Unlimited complimentary admission to the Governor Reuben Fenton Mansion.
- Unlimited access to the Hall House Research Center.
- Reduced fee for Fenton events and programs unless specified.
- A 10% discount to the museum gift shop.
- Members only e-mail updates.

## GENERAL MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

- Student \$15
- Senior (age 62+) \$30
- Veteran \$30
- Individual (under age 62) \$40
- Family \$75. Includes 2 adults. All children in the household under 18 are included.

## SUPPORTING MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

- Supporting \$120. Includes 4 complimentary admission passes for guests.
- Friend of Fenton \$250. Includes 6 complimentary admission passes for guests.
- Representative's Circle \$360. Includes 8 complimentary admission passes for guests.
- Senator's Circle \$500. Includes 16 complimentary admissions for guests, lunch with Executive Director, and a behind the scenes tour of the Gov. Reuben Fenton Mansion for up to four people, a free book from our gift shop, and a Fenton branded t-shirt.
- Governor's Circle \$1,000. Includes unlimited complimentary admissions for guests, lunch with Executive Director, a behind the scenes tour of Gov. Reuben Fenton Mansion for up to four people, a behind the scenes tour of Hall House Research Center for four people, a free book from our gift shop, and a Fenton branded t-shirt.

You can also process your membership payment online and have the option to set your membership to automatically renew each year. Thank you for your support!

**FENTONHISTORYCENTER.ORG/MEMBERSHIP**

Trivia answers from page 17.

(A1) 1891 (A2) Harrison Street (A3) Air raid wardens  
(A4) Yes (A5) Jacob Fenton

# Thank You to Our Supporters!

*Ralph C*  
SHELDON Foundation, Inc.

## THE LENNA FOUNDATION

CHAUTAUQUA REGION  
**COMMUNITY**  
**FOUNDATION**



RALPH C. WILSON, JR.  
FOUNDATION



Community Foundation  
for Greater Buffalo

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR GENEROSITY

## Support the Fenton through recycling!

Bring your plastic and aluminum beverage containers to Southside Redemption Center in the name of the Fenton History Center. Proceeds will directly benefit the Fenton History Center. Plastic and aluminum must be separated. Just drop them off in the name of the Fenton and that's it!



Southside Redemption Center

1752 Foote Avenue  
Jamestown, NY 14701

Mon-Wed 9 AM to 5 PM  
Thursday 9 AM to 2 PM  
Friday 9 AM to 5 PM  
Saturday 10 AM to 4 PM



## FENTON HISTORY CENTER

### STAFF MEMBERS

Joni Blackman Executive Director  
Andrew Kolstee Office Manager  
Barbara Cessna Hall House Manager,  
Vets Finding Vets Coordinator  
Matthew Tsitso Collections Manager

### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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William Reynolds III City Representative non-voting

### LEARN MORE

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. - Fri. 10 AM - 4 PM  
(716) 664-6256  
[www.fentonhistorycenter.org](http://www.fentonhistorycenter.org)



# 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](http://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/1PU3BVS0HQ5E0)

### Admission Prices

*Includes entry to Gov. Reuben Fenton Mansion & Museum and William Hall House Research Center*

Members .....	FREE
Adults (18+) .....	\$10
Children (under 18) .....	FREE
Veterans (with military ID) .....	\$8
Seniors (62+, first Tuesdays only) .....	\$5
Active Military and Family (May 16-Sept. 7, 2026).....	FREE

*Become a member today and your admission to the museum and research center is free!*

