

A Life and Times Story of Perinton, a Canal Town  
HISTORY SHEET  
General Information

Name: Town of Perinton

Location: County of Monroe, New York State

Topic: Development in this Canal Town in the 19th Century

Description:

The town of Perinton is one of many such canal towns that sprung up along "Clinton's Ditch", today's Erie Canal. When the canal opened the local economy came alive. The canal opened a broad market for local products—farm produce was shipped along the canal in both directions, ideas spread, entrepreneurs sprang up.

Several of the history sheets in the Perinton pages tell the story of local people going west to stake their claim during the California gold rush, families relocating to the mid-western states (including some of the cobblestone masons), the revival of religious enthusiasm during the period of the "Great Awakening". These trends spread through many New York state communities settled along the canal and railroad lines.

It's the story of the life and times of the people in the canal towns as they transformed from a traditional agrarian community lifestyle to more urban, industry-driven economic pursuits.

Below are copies of two newspaper articles which tell of Perinton's story, referencing the cobblestone houses and schoolhouses and the people associated with them.

# The Monroe County Mail.

The Largest Circulation of Any Paper in Monroe County, Outside the City of Rochester.

VOL. XLII, NO. 30.

FAIRPORT, N. Y., THURSDAY, JULY 27, 1922.

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## Fairport 100 Years Old; Its Real Growth Began in 1822

### Opening of the Erie Canal Gave it Start--Was Trade Center and Shipping Point--Its First Merchant Was a Silk Grower.

The editor of the Mail is indebted to Charles B. Hawkins of Rochester, for the following interesting article concerning the village of Fairport, in which he shows that the real birth and development of the town dates back to 1822, just one hundred years ago, and that the opening of the old Erie canal was what put Fairport "on the map," as the saying goes. Among other interesting facts related is that the first real merchant in the town was a silk grower, who had an extensive cocoonery, and also that the village became noted as a trade center and shipping point.

On April 15, 1817 the legislature of New York authorized the construction of canals connecting the Hudson river with Lake Champlain and Lake Erie. The work was begun on the following Fourth of July with the breaking of ground at Rome by Governor DeWitt Clinton. Two years later in 1819 the Champlain canal was open and a section of the Erie canal from Rome to Utica had been built. The year 1820 saw the work progressed to the Seneca river (Montezuma). In 1822 Rochester was reached and the first cargo of flour was shipped from there to Little Falls. In the following year, 1823, the great rock excavation at Little Falls was finished and navigation opened from Rochester through to Albany. The aqueduct over the Genesee river at Rochester was also completed in 1823. Two years later the final completion of the great chain of locks at Lockport brought the opening of the entire waterway in 1825. This epoch-marking event was commemorated in October of that year by the triumphal progress of Governor Clinton on the packet boat Seneca Chief from Buffalo to New York, where water from Lake Erie was poured into the Atlantic ocean. The voyage was truly one of triumph as the Governor had been fiercely opposed and in 1822 was driven from office by the foes of his canal policy. He was reinstated by the election of 1824 and was enabled to celebrate the completion of the great work he had chiefly inspired and directed.

The route of the canal through Rochester was surveyed in 1819 and construction work east of the Genesee river was in progress in 1820 and 1821. The year 1822 which saw the actual beginning of navigation to Rochester may be fairly taken as the birth year of Fairport and some of the other places on this section of the route. Palmyra and Pittsford, Fairport's neighbors on either hand, were older. Both were established trade centers before the canal came. They began very soon after the Phelps and Gorham settlement at Canandaigua in 1789. Perinton, the township of Fairport, received its first settler, Glover Perin, in 1790. His lands were in the southern part of the town as were the lands of the settlers who followed him. A road was opened from Palmyra to Pittsford through that section and the village of Egypt became a station for stages and mails. There the first town meeting was held at the public house of Ulysses Packard in 1813.

#### Canal Route Through Fairport

The canal route was laid a mile north of Egypt through the lands of Caleb Lyndon, Benett Joy and others and continued in a westerly course to the site of Fairport. There it turned to the south for several miles to the Irondequoit valley which it crossed on a great embankment after resuming its westerly course to Pittsford.

The advent of the canal brought a material change in Perinton affairs. The northern part of the town settled rapidly. The packet boat soon superseded the stage coach and Fairport began to supplant Egypt. At most of the highway bridges, stores, warehouses and boat barns were established. The first of these were at the Lyndon bridge, north of Egypt and near the eastern town line, later known as Knapp's bridge. Then at three of the bridges in the present limits of Fairport; the Peters bridge afterward known as Baker's bridge and now as Cobb's bridge, the Main street bridge and the bridge at Fullam's basin. Beyond the Oxbow on the southerly reach were the bridges of the Perinton Center road and of the Palmyra-Egypt-Pittsford road, known as the Wapping and Wilmarth bridges. The last one in the town was at Hartwell's Basin, later called Bushnell's Basin.

#### Fairport's First Enterprise

Business at all these localities was considerable. Fairport, however, soon became the principal shipping and receiving point. The waterpower of Thomas creek had been developed by Peter Ripley and a sawmill established. This was Fairport's earliest enterprise. Peter Ripley was supervisor of Perinton in 1816. His lands comprised the present northwest section of the village. Other original landholders were Solomon Ralph in the north; Amos Chadwick, Jesse Hanford, Nathan Weston, Solomon Mallett, Willard Fullam, Andrew Northrup in the west; Abner Wight, Martin Sperbeck and Lary Wilcox, south; Isaac Beers, John Peters, Oliver Tomlinson and Jesse Tredwell in the east part. The first town meeting held in Fairport was in 1828 at the public house of Colonel John Peters at Peters' bridge. Reuben Willey presided as supervisor and was chosen to succeed himself for the ensuing year. The growth of the place was considerable in the first few years as the town meeting of 1829 voted for the location of the Perinton post-office there. The town meeting of 1830 was held at the public house of Munson Mallett and chose Jacob D. Thompson supervisor. This house with subsequent enlargements became the Prichard Hotel. It had been built several years previously by Cyrenus Mallett with Charles H. Dickenson as its first proprietor. It is said that at the raising of the structure a bottle of good and sufficient percentage was broken over the framework and the building was christened the Fair Lady of the Fair Port. It is the only legend surviving regarding the origin of the village name.

The chief farm products of the time were wheat, wood-ashes and live stock. Home spun wool and flax were articles of barter with the merchant. The warehouse, the store and the ashery were the first commercial buildings with the tavern, school and church in their wake. Cattle were gathered by dealers and driven in large herds to Albany. Gideon Ramsdell and Milton Budlong were the leading buyers. Grain, potash and other produce began to be shipped by boat. Many boats were built in Fairport. The firm of Stillson and Panfield were in the business for some years building both cargo boats and packets. The boats of the first canal were small. Planking of a length for the entire boat was cut by the mills from timber of the neighborhood. One of the earliest boat line owners and operators was Anson Beardsley. He bought grain and some of the first apples grown about Fairport and later extended his operations to the new territories of Michigan and Indiana.

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Another early buyer was Oliver Tomlinson who was also a merchant. The first merchant and postmaster was Abuisha Goodell. He was also a silk grower having a row of mulberry trees and a cocoonery on his premises. He was succeeded by Charles H. Dickenson who with his brother Thomas W. Dickenson were the leading merchants for a long term of years. The first millers were Channey Ray and Ebenezer Lewis—Henry Amsden and Joseph Eldridge were the first blacksmiths. Abel Judson was the first carpenter and Paris Bradford the first tailor. Murrin and Zerah Burr were the pioneer fruit growers and nurserymen. Their famous cherry the "Burr Seedling" became widely known.

#### First School and Church

A school was started in 1826, it being the ninth district established in the town. Several church bodies had been formed in Perinton. Their locations in Fairport were Congregational 1834, Methodist 1826, Universalist 1834, Baptist 1842, Free Will 1848, Catholic 1866. After the first development the growth of the place was slow. In 1840 the population was less than three hundred. It was the period of the early westward migration. Thousands of settlers from New England and Eastern New York were carried through Fairport on the packets. They were destined to the new fields of Ohio, Michigan and the other territories of the near west. Many families from Perinton joined the movement with a resulting loss to the progress of town and village. The building of the Rochester and Syracuse railroad in 1853 and the beginning of the DeLand soda business in 1852 gave Fairport a new impulse and in 1860 the population had more than doubled. The canal enlargement began in 1836 and was finished in 1832.

The year after the Civil War, 1865, saw the incorporation of the village with an estimate of one thousand inhabitants. The first officers of the corporation were Charles H. Dickenson, President, Henry H. VanBuren, Daniel B. DeLand, Joel Y. Parce and Harvey S. Perry. Trustees—Jeremiah Chadwick, Erastus Herrington and John H. Ives, Assessors. John R. Howard, treasurer, Joseph Stubbs, collector and Louis E. Moore, clerk. Some of the business interests of the period were Chadwick & Moseley, Hill & Hamilton and Hawkins & Howard, merchants; Willard K. Goodrich, Vanderhof & VanNorman, Ansel A. Howard and Chadwick & Wilbur, produce dealers; Edward P. Ward and George L. G. Seeley, hardware; Henry H. VanBuren and Morey & Hodskins, drugs; Albert Parker and Philip Mc-

Gaffery, grocers; Storms & Shults, tailors; James DeLand, wholesale confectioners; Jones & Newman and Lothario Hunt, lumber; John H. Ives and William McAnaney, shoes; E. H. and L. M. Shaw, undertakers; Theron R. Prichard, hotel; Jacob Holmes, market; M. S. Northrup, buyer; Ballard & O'Brien, fruit; William Kershaw, harness; Sidney Piwni, barber; Orlando P. Simmous, marble works; L. T. and J. E. Howard, George G. Brown and Thomas Kelly, carriage makers; Luther Hutchinson, drayman; Lucina Brown, millinery; George R. Sanford, real estate; Bonaparte Jones, veterinarian; Atkinson & Company, woolen mills; James Perrin, stave factory; H. S. Bushnell, foundry; George C. Taylor, medicines; Jarvis & Zephaniah Eddy, railroad agents; Mortimer Wilcox, postmaster. In the professions were Nathan Bsworth, Jeremiah Butler, D. C. Tomlinson, John Miller, Philip McGrath, David G. Holmes, Robert Cameron, I. Fargo, Merrill Forbes, Eben Little, Eleazer Savage and David McFarland; clergymen, Edward Cook, E. V. DeGraff, Ezra H. Griffith, Theodore S. Hill and Josephine Shaw; school principals, Thomas V. B. Durand; Drs. Huntley, Brown, Cady and Clark, David Chaffee, Mathias L. Lord and Winfield S. Fuller, physicians; James VanBuren, William P. Chase, Charles E. Yale, Seymour G. Wilcox and Thomas I. Hulbert, lawyers.

#### Chief Fairport Industries

The chief industry of Fairport at this period and for many years after was the manufacture of soda by the DeLand Chemical company. Daniel B. DeLand, its founder and his brother, Henry A. DeLand were the early directors of the business. They were succeeded by Levi J. DeLand and Wayland M. DeLand. All were men of fine public spirit and contributed much to Fairport's upbuilding. The family name is widely known now through the beautiful town of DeLand in Florida founded forty years ago by Henry A. DeLand and first settled by Fairport people. The fruit preserving business was started in the early seventies by A. S. Edgett. He was succeeded by Amos H. Cobb. The present large plant of the Cobb Preserving company, the Douglas Packing company and the American Can company are outgrowths of that beginning. George W. Cobb has been an important factor in the development of this industry.

The West Shore railroad was built in 1882 and 1883. The Rochester and Syracuse Electric road came in 1906. It has facilitated business of all kinds and has increased greatly the town's availability as a place of suburban residence.

Fairport now numbers approximately five thousand. It closes its first century the leading village of Monroe County and one of Western New York's most progressive towns. The canal which gave it its first impulse of growth is entering on a new era assuring to our State, the supremacy which DeWitt Clinton and his associates gave it a century ago.

# Herald-Mail

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THE FAIRPORT HERALD-MAIL, Fairport, N.Y., Wednesday, May 10, 1978, 107th Year No. 14

## Canal Workers Built Our Cobblestone Homes

Residents of New York State should be aware of a heritage of which we can take pride, our cobblestone buildings. Perinton is about the center geographically of their area. It has been said within a hundred mile radius one can locate 750% of the cobblestone buildings.

Most cobblestone buildings were built between the time the Erie Canal was finished in 1825 and up to the Civil War. After that the construction time was too slow, wages were too high and some of the older masons had died without leaving the secrets of their construction.

Carl F. Schmidt who has written and lectured extensively on cobblestone architecture has said there were 3 periods from 1825-35, 1835-45 and 1845 to 1865. The earlier period shows stones of various sizes as they were gathered from the fields. Later more care was used in the selection of stones.

During the building of the canal, stone masons flocked here, some from Europe, as their skills were needed in building the locks and aqueducts. After its completion, if they did not move on to other canal sites, they stayed and built stone buildings.

Perinton folks prospered as they sold land, dirt for the canal, and timbers, they rented their horses and wagons, and even worked with pick, shovel and wheel barrow for hard cash. As the canal was opened the price of wheat jumped from .30 to 1.50 a bushel. Monroe Co. was the largest wheat growing county in the state and after the canal was in use, much of the wheat was shipped from New York to Europe. In 1845 Monroe Co. grew 1.4 million bushels. Farmers here found new markets for all their produce and with the new income, better living conditions were found and better homes were desired, some of these were brick, stone and grout.

In 1870 there were ads in the Fairport paper for quarried stone by George Freeman which were sold at Chadwicks Flour & Feed store. Unfortunately, there is no record of who bought this stone.

The 1855 census lists 5 stone houses, 9 brick houses, 16 log cabins, 40 shanties and the rest frame houses. There is a question about what shanty meant in this report. According to the dictionary of that period, it meant a rude temporary building but as our shanties held from 10 to 15 persons, it was suggested that it was a slang term for a poor frame house.

Lehuel Wight was listed as our first stone mason and family records tell us that Abraham Conklin and Ira Palmer were also early stone masons. In 1865, John Foley and William Vance were listed as stone masons. It has been said that the masons who built our early cobblestone buildings moved on west.

Very few of the many stone buildings in Perinton before 1860 remain today. At one time, there was a beautiful cut stone house on the east side of Pannel Rd. built by Russel Slayton. He came here in 1836, purchasing 320 acres in lots 2 & 11. He built this home in 1837 but did not enjoy it for long as he moved away around 1843. It had very deep window ledges, a balcony across the 2nd story in the rear and had an air of elegance. The Marvin Wilson family lived there around 1870. It burned down in the 1880's.

Andrew Swinterton came to town about 1834 and purchased 100 acres on the east side of Foley Rd. Here he built a lovely cobblestone home. Shortly after his death in 1868, the house burned down. A frame house was built on the site.

In 1855, Michael Hoff was living in a stone house near Austin Rd. The first school house in Fairport on East Church St. was of cobblestone. A new brick school was built next to it and the old building was sold. On the south east corner of John St. (State) and Main, there was an old cobblestone blacksmith shop.

Perhaps the best example of a cobblestone house still standing in town is at 438 Macedon Center Rd. The home was built on a high point giving it a view of the valley below with the canal and R.R. tracks. The original house was 75 x 22 feet. The front was built of stones from Nine Mile Point. The other 3 sides were field stones carefully sorted and graded. The corner stones were sandstone. They gathered lots of field stones as even the cellar floor was cobblestone. Many of our old homes have stone cellar floors. Between the wall and the inside mud wall, there was an air space left for insulation. The walls were 18" thick. It was said a Scot mason laid up the walls laying a row all the way around before starting the second row. Timbers were beech, floors ash and pine. The newel post was unusual in that it went through the floor into the cellar.

The house was built in 1844 by Lorenzo Hunt for his son who was living in Michigan. Evidently it was not enough of an inducement as young Hunt refused to come back. In 1853, the Howard brothers bought the house, later Marshall Howard bought out his brothers and he gave it to his married son, Dr. Wm. Howard. His son Lloyd inherited it and in time sold it to the Harry Beilers who live there now.

Robert Frash of the Rochester Museum has spoken of the herring bone effect of the cobblestones on the Palmer House at 254 Huber Rd. Arch Merrill gives credit to John Wetherill for originating this pattern of laying the stones. Ira Palmer born in 1780 came here in 1807 and on his 68 acre farm, he built this cobblestone house between 1835-9. He died in 1863. Three old stone fireplaces were found by the present owners, the Stanley Buczowskis.

A neighbor at 311 Furman Rd., also a stone mason, built another lovely cobblestone home which is still standing. Abraham Conklin and his son Jacob, came to Perinton about 1815. On their 74 acres, they built this home which it is said took 3 years just to pick up the stones for it. Abraham often told of his experience as a prisoner of the English and how he had to clean their boots. He died in 1859. Today, the William Olivers occupy the old home.

Close mowing demanded a stone free field as a single sweep across a stone was a disaster. So stones were picked up with scrupulous care, stones down to the size of an egg. They were gathered by the women and children who in after-years often complained of back troubles caused by this hard labor. The stones were used in cellar walls, wells, smoke houses, fences, fireplaces, and in a few cases, homes. One barn in Egypt had beautiful stone walls and today, it has been converted into a home.

Perhaps the most beautiful cobblestone home in this area is just over the Perinton line, in Victor opposite East View. The home was built by Bonsteel who owned a great deal of property in Perinton.