



# Perinton Historical Society HISTORIGRAM

18 Perrin Street  
Fairport, NY 14450

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February 2007  
585-223-3989

## The Cox Shoe Factory Strike of 1890: The Company Part 1 of 3

In December of 2005 the village of Fairport received a significant grant to remodel the old Cox Shoe factory known to many as the American Can Company factory. The grant will be used to remodel the building for business and housing. Few people know that this building, built in 1884, was the site of a labor strike by Fairport workers that lasted 6 months and eventually affected nearly 60,000 union workers nationwide.

The Cox Shoe Co. was founded by Patrick Cox in the city of Rochester in 1871. The first factory building was on North Water Street. By 1883 the P. Cox Shoe Manufacturing Company was selling over a half million dollars worth of shoes annually and employed 400 workers. The company was known for making quality shoes especially for women and children.

In 1884 the company expanded and built a new branch factory in Fairport near the New York Central Railroad on Parce Ave. The company was given

a \$16,000 bonus to locate in Fairport on condition that the company stay in the village at least 5 years and hire a certain number of workers from the area.

The factory started out making high grade shoes but after a few years the company supervisors were directed to make a cheaper grade of shoe. A typical shoe made in the Cox factory in Rochester would sell from \$2 to \$4 whereas the same shoe manufactured in Fairport would bring between \$1.35 and \$2. The difference was in the number of coats of ink applied to the leather and the amount of polish and buffing used in the final process.

The work force in the Fairport plant was usually around 225. Most of the workers lived in Fairport and were largely unskilled laborers.

In January of 1890, the factory was purchased by a group of local Fairport businessmen. The company was renamed the Fairport Shoe Manufacturing Company. Despite the name change, Patrick Cox was still heavily involved in the company and was a major shareholder.

Business practices in the 19<sup>th</sup> century allowed for a six day work week and no benefits. Child labor was common and lay offs were frequent. It was well known by the workers in Fairport that they were paid much less than their counterparts working for the same company in Rochester.

In 1888 a union was created among the Fairport workers at the shoe factory. It was part of the Boot and Shoe Workers International Union. The union

### ≡≡≡ *Our Mission* ≡≡≡

*"The Mission of the Perinton Historical Society is to promote Community interest in the preservation of local records, structures and artifacts for posterity, and for the enlightenment of the people of our town of Perinton."*

represented all the workers and was used mostly to express grievances to management. A wage scale for the Fairport workers that would have brought their earnings close to that of the Rochester workers was submitted to the company managers on July 22, 1890. It was ignored...that is, until May 31.

Next month: *The Strike*

### ***Fairport Facts***

In 1820, about 20 people in Fairport died of "Genesee Fever" now believed to be malaria. At that time North Main Street was a cedar swamp which was later drained for the Erie Canal in 1825.

## **Mark Your Calendars**

- ~ **February 20** - Auction and Pot Luck dinner, Tuesday February 20 at 7:30 p.m. in the Perinton Community Center 1350 Turk Hill Road. For more details call Peter or Bernadette at 223-7991. For directions call 223-5050.
- ~ **March 13** - A trip down historic New York State by photographer Andy Olenick photographer of the new Landmark Society book *Historic New York*. 7:30 p.m. in the Fairport Museum.
- ~ **April 29** - Spring House Tour. Fairport's West Street neighborhood. 1:00 to 5:00.
- ~ **May 15** - Annual Perinton Historical Society Picnic at Perinton Park.

## **Rochester City Directories Now On-Line**

For researchers and genealogists looking for past family members, directories have long been a good source of information. The city of Rochester has directories that go back as far as 1827 and are still being published today.

Directories typically list people alphabetically by their last name. Some of the early directories includes the person's occupation, their home address, and sometimes the address of their business. In the back are vintage advertisements for companies and stores in the area.

Up until last October, if you wanted to consult local directories, you would have to find a library that had a collection of these books. Now, through the Rochester Public Library's web site, you can search these directories from the 1820's to the 1890's. You can get there by going to <http://www2.libraryweb.org/> and then clicking on Central Library, resources, department and then local history & genealogy.

If you are not computer savvy yet, you can still

find these books in several libraries. However, unlike the computer records, some libraries may not let you make copies of selected pages because of the fragile nature of some of these old books.

The Fairport Museum Library has several of these early city directories from 1876, 1888, 1896, 1900 and 1902. Our library also has copies of directory pages concerning Perinton and Fairport residents from 1864 to 1918. Unfortunately, directories of rural areas are much sketchier than the city directories. The directories list people by their last name, includes their occupation and, if they are a farmer, list the amount of acreage they have. No addresses are listed. The reason for this was that in a community as small as several hundred people, everyone knew each other and there was little need for a numbered address. Houses were known by their occupant not the house number.

So, if you're looking into your family history, take advantage of this new resource.



## Perinton Historical Society Auction in February

On Tuesday February 20 at 7:30 PM we will hold our “world famous” auction and pot-luck dinner. It will be held at the Perinton Community Center on Turk Hill Road. The center has plenty of parking and the facility is handicap accessible.

Please bring a dish to pass and your set of service. Coffee, tea, juice and napkins will be provided. Most important please bring an item to auction off. No baked goods please. The item should be old, in good shape, clean and most important, interesting. All proceeds benefit the Perinton Historical Society and our programs.

Join us for a wonderful evening of fun and laughter, good companionship and great conversation. This is a members-only event.

## Fairport Facts

There is a lot of talk these days about global warming. Some volcanic eruptions in the past have had the effect of dramatically cooling the earth for a relatively short period of time.

In July of 1816 the ground was frozen in Fairport. This was the “year without a summer” that occurred in the northeast United States and northern Europe. Theory has it that the eruption of the Tambora Volcano in Indonesia threw up so much ash into the atmosphere in 1815 that it blocked out much of the sunlight causing the cooling of the earth by several degrees. The Tambora eruption is estimated to have been the biggest in 10,000 years and threw up as much as 8 times more ash than the Krakatoa eruption in 1883.

## Volunteers Needed for Spring House Tour

Our House Tour this year will be on Sunday April 29 from 1:00 till 5:00 p.m. We could use your help as a house tour guide. Volunteers can sign up for a 2 hour slot; either 1 - 3 p.m. or 3 - 5. p.m

For your time, you’ll get a free House Tour pass. If you are a member and you have a friend that would like to go on the tour for free, this is a marvelous opportunity. Contact Bernadette McDonough at 223-7991 for more information and to volunteer.

## Early Streets in Fairport & the Year They Were Laid

Beardsley Street ~ 1870

John Street (now known as Lift bridge Lane)  
~ approx. 1833

Cemetery Street (now known as Orchard St.)  
~ 1868

Cherry Street (now known as West Ave.) extended to Prospect Street ~ 1873

Church St. (known as Rochester Road) ~ 1814

Cole Street ~ 1871

Elm Street ~ 1874

Frank Street ~ 1875

Hansford Street (now known as Prospect St.)  
~ 1872

Main Street ~ 1817

Perrin Street ~ 1853

Potter Place ~ 1886

Sanford Street (now known as East Ave.)  
~ 1872

South Avenue ~ 1885

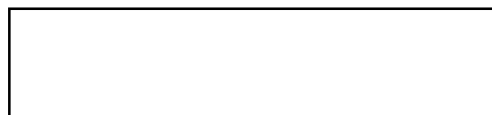
Summit Street ~ 1873



Perinton Historical Society  
18 Perrin Street  
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## FAIRPORT HISTORICAL MUSEUM

18 PERRIN STREET, FAIRPORT, NY 14450

### REGULAR HOURS

*The Fairport Museum will be closed during February*

Tuesday 2 p.m. - 4 p.m.

Thursday 7 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Sunday 2 p.m. - 4 p.m.

The first two Mondays of every month the Archives open for Researchers only.

Visit our website:

[www.angelfire.com/ny5/fairporthistmuseum](http://www.angelfire.com/ny5/fairporthistmuseum)

*Group tours, presentations and special projects by appointment.*

*Call 223-3989 and leave a message.*