



# PERINTON HISTORIGRAM

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EDITOR

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## Calendar of Coming Events

- Tuesday, March 13 -- Talk by Laurel Gabel, "Historical Gravestones and Carvers," 7:30 p.m. in the Merriman-Clark Room at the museum, details below.
- Tuesday, April 17 -- Talk by Bill Latin, "Stained Glass Windows from Orleans County Churches," details next month.
- Tuesday, May 15 -- Annual Meeting and Picnic.

## March Meeting

Our meeting will take place at 7:30 p.m. at the museum with Laurel Gabel speaking on "Historical Gravestones and Carvers." Laurel is a recognized author of books on early old carved gravestones. She is a member of the American Gravestone Society and a volunteer at the Mount Hope Cemetery. Her presentation will include information on how the carver can be identified by certain carving characteristics. It should be a fascinating evening. Do come and bring a friend.

## Report of February Meeting

A large audience assembled at the museum to hear curator Bill Keeler talk about "Early Inventions from Perinton and Fairport -- 1859 to 1934."

President Bill Matthews used his "five minutes of history" to talk about the recently announced death of Anne Morrow Lindbergh at age 94 and her flight with Juan Trippe, founder of Pan American Airways, mapping out PanAm routes.

Bill Keeler, our speaker, reminded us that practically everything we use in everyday life has a patent -- patents add to the storehouse of our knowledge. A patent is good only for 20 years and then it becomes part of the public domain. The main classifications are utility, design (usually for new or original ideas) and plant patents. The first patent in the United States was issued in 1790. Originally, when people applied for a patent, they had to provide a scale model, but this is no longer required.

In order to obtain a patent it is not necessary that the idea works or that it is useful. Bill showed us a series of ideas which had been patented which were really hilarious, such as the alarm clock that shakes the bed to throw out the sleeper.

Seventeen patents were applied for from this area in the period 1859-1934. Some of the inventors were Chauncey Hart, who patented a clothes pounder for washing clothes; James McMillan who had a driving well; William Evans Robinson, a doctor who lived on South Main Street in Fairport, who mixed up patent medicines; Ezra Griffith, a West Street resident, whose invention was a microscope turntable; Joseph Yale Parce, whose house still stands on the west side of North Main Street, who in 1859 patented

a crane used by the DeLand Chemical Company for loading materials on or off boats in the canal at their factory. Rand and Wadhams perfected a barrel which tumbled gunpowder to dry it; the blasting powder was produced at their mill in Powder Mill Park. One invention that is still used today is Certo (or Sure-Jell), produced in Fairport in 1913 in what is now the box factory. Robert Douglas of Certo left a number of shares of stock at his death to the Fairport Library. They were cashed in to help produce the money to build the library on Perrin Street which is now the Fairport Historical Museum. You will see his name on the plaque in the lobby of the building.

At the time of the Titanic disaster, a ship lifesaving device was invented which was very ingenious. Maybe it could have helped some of the survivors of this ship.

The most prolific local inventor was Dr. Trescott, a dentist. He invented a fruit separating machine used to grade fruit by size, and in 1934 an apple brusher machine to clean off apples. The museum actually has one of these machines. Bill also showed us a number of inventions which were part of the process of creating the solderless can which were produced at the Cobb Preserving Company in Fairport.

Bill used two screens to illustrate his talk. One, using an overhead projector, displayed drawings of the patents; the other showed slides of the places where the inventor lived in Fairport or else the factory that manufactured the products produced by his invention. It was a very ingenious method of presentation. Everyone in the audience was amazed to learn that so many inventions originated in our small area.

The refreshments served after the talk were delicious as always. Many thanks to all who helped produce them.

#### Our Own Museum Treasure -- Bill Keeler

We are indeed fortunate to have Bill at our Fairport museum. He has done an amazing job of inventorying and bringing to light many of the articles we own. He has spear-headed the writing and publication of the book Fairport, Perinton and the Erie Canal. Many people may not realize he also works as a curator at the Landmark Society. A recent article by an intern at the Landmark Society mentioned how very helpful she found him in making her time there so educational, fascinating and enjoyable.

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February was designated as "Black History Month". We want to be sure at this time to pay tribute to some of the black people who lived in Fairport and Perinton in the late 1800s. Much of the material below is taken from an article written by the late Helen Butler when she was Perinton Historian.

The article states that in 1827 New York state passed a law which made every black child born in the state free and also made any slave who was brought into the state a free person. The first record of former slaves brought into Perinton was in 1832 when the Ellsworth family arrived and bought the land on the corner of Turk Hill and Ayrault Roads. They had former slaves with them. In back of the house is an old cemetery called the "slave cemetery." A descendant of one of these slaves was Julie Rose, who became a cook and moved to the Baptist Home when she retired.

In 1835<sub>3</sub> the John Jackson family bought land in lot #3 along the canal and not long afterwards black man named Sharpe lived west of the village near the canal. He was called "Doc" perhaps because he had a knowledge of herbs and their use in curing illness.

The John Parkers were a black family who lived here for years. He was a "tonsorial" artist and Mrs. Parker was known for being very active in church work. At one time she introduced the famous Sojourner Truth when she spoke here. The speaker addressed the audience sitting in a chair on the pulpit.

Frederick Douglass came to Perinton several times to talk. We have one record of when he was to speak in the Egypt Methodist Church and the doors were locked against him. Another time people who opposed him stuffed the stove in the hall with paper which smoked so much when lit that the audience was driven out.

Abe Taylor and his family came to Fairport soon after the Civil War. In 1896 he secured a job of porter to the State Legislature. When he had to be in Albany he would hire someone to look after his barber shop. He lived on Main Street and his daughter Mamie went to school here. She worked for a time at the Sanitary Can Company and then as a sales lady in Rochester at Forman's.

Extremely tall Charlie Hull was another black barber in Fairport. He lived on Filkins Street. With his long legs and arms he was at one time a good boxer. He also loved a good card game. Later, when he became lame, he was always given a place to ride on the fire truck in parades.

An article in the Monroe County Mail, dated March 6, 1890, tells of a black woman who is reputed to be the "oldest resident of western New York," having reached the age of 107. Her name was Nancy Armstrong, and her story is especially interesting to Matson and Ruth Ewell since the house she lived in is their home at 182 West Church Street. Nancy came to Perinton in 1833 with William Cook. When William's son, J. Wesley Cook, was married in 1847, she went to live with him in his newly built house on West Church Street. The article describes her at 107 using a cane but still being able to thread a needle, keep her own wardrobe and room in order and requiring very little care or assistance from anyone. She was said to have a smooth placid face, long finely shaped hands and quiet dignity.

Then, in the Fairport Herald-Mail of February 28, 1894, there is an article stating that Nancy Armstrong had died at the home of J. Wesley Cook on West Church Street. She had faithfully cared for five generations of the Cook family. The article concludes, "Her mind was as strong as her body and, until recently, both maintained their vigor. Her loyalty to the family was truly remarkable, and their love for the old and faithful nurse was equally worthy of note. The remains were interred in the old cemetery in the Cook family plot."

Nancy gave much to the community as she often spent time with other families who needed her. Her skill and industry were utilized by the Butts, Palmers, Slocums and Knickerbockers, as well as the Cooks.

The Ewells often wonder which room in the house was hers and can sometimes feel her presence in the house.

Perinton Historical Society  
18 Perrin Street  
Fairport, New York 14450

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