

Perinton Historical Society HISTORIGRAM

18 Perrin Street
Fairport, NY 14450

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585-223-3989

The Fairport Canal Riot of 1871: The Prelude Part 1 of 4

One of the more infamous days in Fairport's history was the riot on May 5, 1871 at the Erie Canal break near the Oxbow off of West Church Street. A Democrat and Chronicle reporter put the incident in perspective when he wrote: "If the 'Ox-Bow' was never immortalized before, it certainly must be now. When the Erie Canal shall have been swept away by some great flood or when it shall have become a ruined ditch, either through mismanagement or by reason of the decline in inland navigation, at least one page in its eventful history will be devoted to 'The Ox-Bow-its break and repairs.'"

Everyone knows about the "Great Embankment" near Bushnell's Basin. This man made earthen aqueduct carries the Erie Canal 67 feet above the valley below. What is not commonly known is that there is another embankment in Perinton at the Ox-Bow that rises 40 feet above the surrounding landscape to the south.

The nature of the soil in Perinton is that it is very sandy and washes away easily. At both the Great Embankment and the Ox-Bow more substantial soil was brought in to keep the banks from washing away. Even with this precaution, breaks occur from time to time most often attributed to burrowing muskrats.

From 1825 when the canal first opened to 1871 there had been nine breaks at the Ox-Bow. The previous one to the 1871 break was just seven years earlier in 1864.

Before the huge break on April 27th of 1871, there was a minor breach that occurred several days earlier on April 25th on the tow path side (west side) one hundred yards south of the Ox-Bow. The Union and Advertiser reported that "A leak was discovered by several persons who reported the matter, but not to persons who appeared to have any interest in the canals..." By 10:00 the next morning there was a break eighty to ninety feet in length and two feet below the bottom of the canal. Unlike today where there are gates built in the canal every ten miles that are lowered when breaks occur to keep the entire canal from draining through a breach, there were no gates installed in 1871. In this case, 17 miles of water from the locks at Pittsford to the locks at Macedon rushed out onto Mr. Strong's farm fields just south of the canal. Mr. Strong did not sustain any damage to his buildings and there was no loss of life.

It took until 5:00 that evening for the water to be drawn down enough so that repairs could be made. Even though the locks were closed, a lot of water still managed to flow through the leaking locks. So much water leaked out that several boats from a grain fleet from Buffalo went aground in Rochester to the west and a significant current could be seen flowing through the city.

The breach was repaired by late evening of the 25th and by noon on the 26th water was being let in

✧ Our Mission ✧

"The Mission of the Perinton Historical Society is to promote interest in preserving and sharing local history."

again and boat travel resumed. Everything was quiet on the 26th. The canal was again filled with water and extra checks were being made at the former breach to

ensure that the repairs were holding. Things went well until 11:00 p.m. the next day April 27, 1871.

Next month: *The Break*

The Historigram to Take a New Direction

by William Keeler, editor

Whether we like it or not, we all are affected by the information super highway. Old forms of communication, like letters, newspapers and even face to face conversations, have been replaced by web sites, e-mails, text messages and twitters. Information that took days to reach us now does so in a matter of minutes or seconds. This also raises our expectations as we now want things faster.

The Historigram has fallen victim to these new forms of communication. The United States Post Office has told us that they can guarantee delivery of our newsletter in 20 days. Add another 10 days to put the publication together, edit, format and send it, and the information is already 30 days old by the time it reaches your door. This situation has put a strain on the Society. If you went to the picnic last May, you will have noticed that the slate of candidates for the Board and changes in the by-laws were not in the Historigram prior to your arrival at the picnic. That was because these two items had not been voted on by the full Board until after the Historigram had been published and sent out.

As a result of these new changes in technology, it has been decided by the editor and Board of Trustees to change the focus of the Historigram from that of a newsletter to a monthly periodical. If you have enjoyed the articles on Fairport and Perinton history in the past, you will continue to get these articles in the mail. Guest essays from Board members or subcommittees will be included and if any member of the Society would like to submit to the editor an article about an historical aspect of Fairport or Perinton, they may be included as well.

On the last page of our "new" Historigram will be a monthly feature entitled "Happenings at the Society." In that space will be meeting notices, requests for volunteers, meeting dates, speakers and their topics and other items of interest to the members. At the top will be the url to our new web site. You may go

there to find a much more detailed and up to date description of some of the items mentioned in the column. There will also be a phone number to the museum for those who do not use the internet and still have questions. Questions will be received at the museum and directed to the proper people in the Society.

This new experimental format will be used for at least two years (or until my historical articles run out.). At that time, the Board of Trustees will decide the fate of our newsletter. It's a brave new world out there, and your Society is striving to meet its challenges.

Greetings from your President

Your Board of Trustees and I are continuing to strive to provide our members with a tremendous value during these challenging times! We have maintained our dues levels again this year. Where else can an entire family join us for only \$15 a year and yet reap many benefits including stimulating monthly educational speakers, access to extensive collections and documents in our museum, free research assistance, a monthly newsletter, and tours of historic homes! I encourage you to take advantage of all these benefits and share your excitement of local history with your friends and neighbors. Ask them to join you as a member of our society.

Consider volunteering to serve on one of our committees (like our Historic Tours Committee, Structure Committee, Education Committee, Finance Committee, or Maintenance Committee). Consider helping to support us financially with a contribution above and beyond your basic dues. Consider sponsoring a youth or young adult's membership to help foster their interest in local history and bring them along with you to one of our meetings.

I was especially pleased that we had a PHS float in
(continued on next page)

Landscaping Changes at the Fairport Museum

If you have been by the Museum this summer, you may have noticed some startling changes to the grounds. The hedges in the front were drastically cut to 12 inches in height.

Looking through some of the Museum building plans from the 1930s, Bill Keeler found the original landscape drawings. In 1937 Edward Lawson a Landscape Architect from Ithaca, NY, drew up a planting plan for the new Fairport Library, which is now the Fairport Museum. Lawson was a 1913 graduate of Cornell University and later in life taught at his alma mater. He was a student at the American Academy in Rome and won the "Prix de Rome" in Landscape Architecture in 1915. The planting plan called for 165 *Ligustrum Amurensis* plants (privets) to be planted 15 inches apart in front of the property and along the sides even with the front entrance. They were to be 18 inch specimens, and they were to be trimmed and maintained at a height of 12 inches.

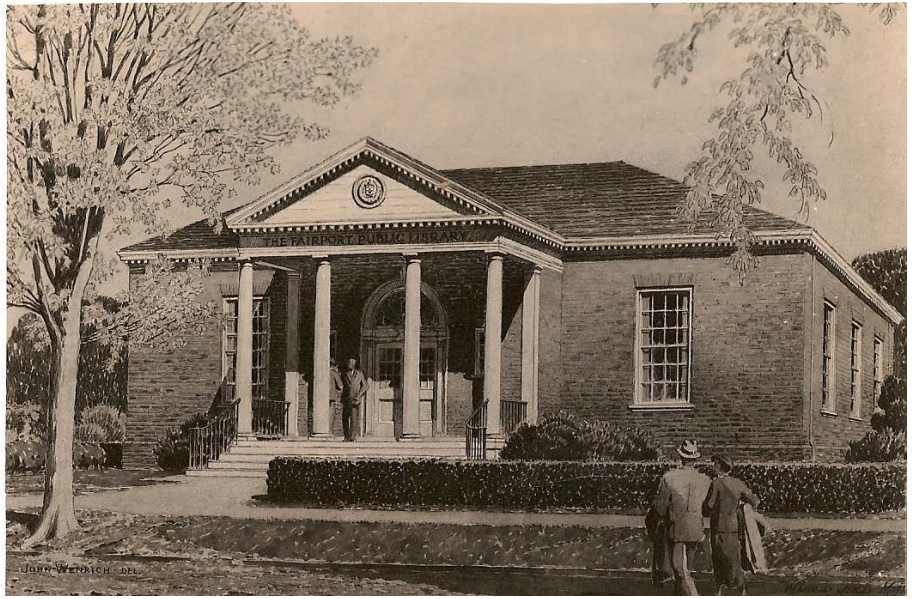
Over the years these hedges had grown to a height of four feet and had obstructed the view of pedestrians on the sidewalk, which was a safety concern for cars exiting our driveway. Alan Keukelaar, Board Vice President, suggested we revive the original planting plan and trim the hedges to their original height. After the motion was passed by the Board at their April meeting, Bill Keeler trimmed the hedges the following week.

Greetings from Your President


(cont.)

this year's Fourth of July parade, which was a great opportunity to increase our visibility among local residents. And be sure to take a look at our brand new website at www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org. I think that you will find it very helpful and informative.

A few things that you can look forward to are: our



Conceptional drawing of the Fairport Public Library by John Wenrich circa 1935. Notice the low hedge in front of the building.

The ground cover was allowed to grow up past the height of the hedges to keep the roots cool and then  in the summer. The hedges recovered from their drastic haircut and are now at 16 inches in height so they can survive the winter. Next Spring they will be cut back to 12 inches and a new, lower ground cover will be introduced. It is also interesting to note that the Saucer Magnolia tree on the north lawn was part of the original landscaping plan.

The changes are dramatic for some, but they are in keeping with our constant effort to bring the former library building back to its original glory.

museum getting a new roof early this fall, a house tour in the village next April, and some exciting new ideas for raising additional funds to support our operating budget.

Finally, you are invited to call me at 944-5160 and let me know your thoughts of how we can support your passion for history better and in new and exciting ways.

~ President Clark King

Happenings at the Society

For more information go to www.perintonhistoricalsociety.org or call the museum at 223-3989

- **September 15 at 7:30 PM (Tuesday) Perinton Historical Society meeting at the Fairport Museum. The speaker will be Kathy Kanauer, Penfield Historian and Local History Room Coordinator. Her topic will be "Interesting People in Penfield's Past."**
- September 8, 7:00 PM Perinton Historical Society Board of Trustees meeting at the Museum.
- Thanks goes to the members of the Greenbriar Garden Club who have done another outstanding job in maintaining our gardens at the Museum this summer.
- Thanks goes to the members of the Fairport History Club for their generous donation in support of the Society.
- Thanks go to Dr. James Sayre and the Sayre Family Fund for their donation to the Society through the Rochester Area Community Foundation.
- Thanks go to Mike DeGoey and his son Patrick for trimming our hedges this year.
- Thanks go to Art Wilson for repainting the trim and reglazing the windows on the outside of the museum.
- Thanks go to Fritz May who cut the lawn at the museum this summer.
- Thanks go to the Canal Days volunteers who helped run the booth last June. They were Pat Wilcox, Deb Mabry, Harold and Ann Castle, T.C. Lewis, Bill and Irene Poray, Clark King, Margaret Kerr, Frank Angevine, Sharon Cantonese, Lucy McCormick, Sue Tholstrup, Janet Marchbanks, Bob and Gail Black, Bill, Carol and Anna Keeler, and Chris Heisman.
- Thanks go to the monthly Museum Volunteers who have come in to open up the museum and assist researchers for this past year. They are Gail Black (Volunteer Coordinator), Milly Blaylock, Sally Connors, Flora Hosenfeld, Bob and Cathy Speciale, Charlotte Danneker, Peg Clark, Ruth Post, Fritz and Georgia May, Rose Marie Hoffman, Patrick Mulich, Toni and Gerald Thompson, Jane Kiely, Bill Hartigan, Eileen Slocum, Stuart Barone, Martha Schafer, David Wild, Suzanne Scheirer, Carol Alvut, Janet Marchbanks and Jean Caracci
- Thanks go out to the society members and others who organized, set up, and rode on our float for the Fourth of July Parade. Harold and Ann Castle (organizers), Lucy McCormick (teacher) and her husband John, May Thomson, Heather Bauer (the dunce) and her husband, Anne Johnston, Shela Cormack, and the five students Seona & Alex Gadow, Taran & Tristan Bauer and Kelsey Cormack. Thanks also go to Ricki's Towing Co. for lending their tow truck, and Whatcha Got Cookin for lending their pot belly stove.



Membership Renewal for 2009-2010

If there is an asterisk (*) next to your name on the mailing label for this issue, we had not received your renewal form by the time the newsletter was mailed. If you haven't already renewed your membership, we hope that you will, using the form below.

Membership dues and contributions support our community programs, publications and operation of the Fairport Historical Museum. As a non-profit organization, your donation to the Society may be tax deductible.

Dues support the following:

- ~ Educational programs - Monthly lectures featuring stimulating local and regional speakers, 4th grade program and tours for visitors and local youth groups
- ~ Admission to the Museum and access to its extensive collections and research documents
- ~ Acquisition of historical artifacts and documentation

- ~ Research assistance (by appointment)
- ~ Historic tours
- ~ Picnic in the park
- ~ Historigram Newsletter-Articles about local history, events and exhibit news
- ~ Website at: www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org

Volunteers are always needed to continue and expand our work in the community. We invite you to learn more by visiting our web site. If you wish to help by serving on one of our committees or on the board of trustees, please check the appropriate box below, or write in your own ideas about how you would like to be involved.

If you would like to speak with someone directly please leave a message for the Museum Director and Curator by calling the Museum at 585-223-3989.



*I would like to join the membership of the Perinton Historical Society.
I understand that my membership will be in effect from September 1 to August 31.*

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address _____

_____ State: ____ Zip: _____

E-mail Address: _____ () E-mail Historigram

_____ () Mail Historigram

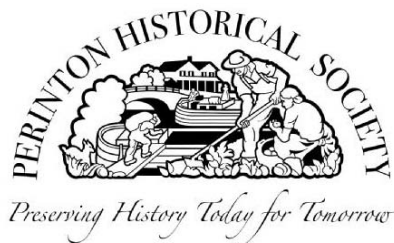
Please check the level of membership you prefer:

- () Individual\$10
- () Family\$15
- () Senior Single [65 or older]..... \$5
- () Senior Couple\$8
- () Patron\$40
- () Extra Contribution \$_____

To make our programs a success and to meet our goals we depend on your generous gift of your time and talents. Chair a committee or serve on the board of trustees. Please volunteer to help by checking areas of interest:

- () Board of Trustees - Governing body for Society
- () Finance Committee - Budget & fund raising plans
- () Education Committee - Includes 4th grade program & tours of the Museum
- () Maintenance Committee - Light repairs, painting, grounds maintenance
- () Museum Docent - 2 hours per month
- () Historigram - Articles, production, mailing
- () Historic Toms Committee
- () Structure Committee - Update landmark surveys
- () Other-Give us your ideas _____

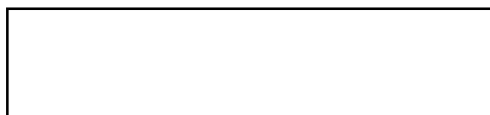
Please make checks payable to:
Perinton Historical Society
and mail to 18 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY 14450



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FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED

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FAIRPORT HISTORICAL MUSEUM

18 PERRIN STREET, FAIRPORT, NY 14450

REGULAR HOURS

Sunday	2 p.m. - 4 p.m.
Tuesday	2 p.m. - 4 p.m.
Thursday	7 p.m. - 9 p.m.

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

Visit our website:
www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org

*Group tours, presentations and special projects by appointment.
Call 223-3989 and leave a message.*