

Tugs through Fairport And their Need for Coal

By Keith Boas

In the late 1940s, when I was just a young boy, I remember watching the tugboats go by on the canal. My vantage point was from the Ayrault Road Bridge, next to the south end of Jefferson Avenue. About every 15 minutes, a tug would come chugging along, pushing a barge loaded with freight. I didn't realize it then, but I was seeing the end of the era, begun way back in 1918 with the opening of the enlarged Barge Canal.

By the late 1800s, aided by the railroad passing through Fairport, coal became readily available here as the major fuel for heating local homes and businesses. James Prichard was one of the first coal yard owners in Fairport. His business was located on High Street. In 1888, he sold his operation to Clemans & Hurlburt (see ad at right).

A. M. Loomis, who started his competing coal-supply business in 1881, was one of the largest local coal distributors. As more residents

became dependant on coal, it was no surprise to see—in a 1912 issue of the *Fairport Herald* newspaper, a reassuring reference regarding the availability of Loomis' coal for the rest of the winter. The sentence read, "Within three hours Monday A. M. Loomis unloaded two 50-ton (railroad) cars of coal into his steel storage."

Although there were reports of a few coal/steam-powered tugs on the Erie Canal in Lockport and Poughkeepsie as early as 1874 (*Fairport Herald*, January 16, 1874), tugs—and their

Having purchased the

COAL YARD

Formerly owned by
JAS. E. PRICHARD,
On High street, we are now prepared to furnish

Coal of all Kinds

At market prices, either at the Yard or delivered.
A share of the public patronage is solicited.
Clemans & Hurlburt.

Newspaper ad from 1888



The tug *Lorraine* and a barge tied up at Fairport's south side wharf.

1921 photo from the *Town of Perinton Archives*

constant need for coal—were not possible in our area until 1918, after the completion of the much larger Barge Canal.

About that time, local resident Herman L. Steffen came upon the scene as an enterprising businessman. In April of 1919, Mr. Steffen ran the following ad in the newspaper:

I have taken possession of the A. M. Loomis Coal and Produce Business. Have a big supply of Coal on hand, all sizes, and sell at the old prices. Now is the time to buy because Coal will go up soon.

H. L. STEFFEN, Parce Avenue

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HISTORIGRAM

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Perinton Historical Society

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board are Keith Boas, who will replace Ray Buchanan, and Pat May, replacing Joan Alliger as Director of Communications. Also reelected at the meeting, were Vicki Profitt, Vice President; Linda Wiener, Treasurer; Doug Whitney, Secretary and yours truly as President. We sincerely thank both Ray and Joan for their many years of service to the Perinton Historical Society. And thanks to all for attending and bringing the delicious dishes to share. It was a fun evening.

You may be aware that the Veterans Memorial at Potter Park is in need of repair. The Memorial was built in 1946 and recently has shown structural problems. The Fairport Foundation is leading the charge to raise funds to rehabilitate the memorial. What does that have to do with PHS? In early May, Ray Manard, Owner of Crystal Pix, documented stories from local veterans and used the museum for the filming. To see the results go to www.fairportfoundation.org, and the page that pops up will show a video from Crystal Pix: Click on the arrow to watch the video. A word of caution: Have some tissues close at hand.

Lastly, we have just finished Fairport's Canal Days festival, and PHS again had a booth to offer gifts from our museum and bring awareness of our organization to the community. It was an exciting weekend, weather-wise, as our tent moved around a bit on Saturday evening during the violent thunder storm, but we survived. Thanks go to Jim Unckless, who secured the tent after the storm. We sold about \$400 worth of merchandise, talked up the museum, and handed out many membership applications. My wife Cindy said she enjoyed chatting with returning locals about their memories of Fairport. Thanks to all who volunteered to work at the tent for the weekend.

As usual, thanks for your continued support of PHS, and we will chat again in our next issue.

Bob Hunt, President

585-415-7053 ~ rhunt1@rochester.rr.com



~ Bob Hunt ~

Comments from your President

It has been two months since I last chatted with you through the *HISTORIGRAM*. First, a bit of what Cindy and I have been doing. We have logged over 400 miles on our bicycles this spring and have just returned from Franklin, PA. We enjoyed the *Rail to Trails* biking found in that area, which includes

beautiful trails along the Allegany River going north, south and east from Franklin. It was a great three days of bicycling.

Now on to what is happening at PHS. My last article was just before our annual meeting and picnic, held at Perinton Park. The event drew the biggest crowd I've seen since my involvement with the society—almost standing room only. We all enjoyed great food, beverages and fellowship—a thoroughly enjoyable evening. We elected three board members, each for a three-year term, which runs from September of 2013 to August of 2016. The elected officers include Dave Wild, for the board seat he has held for a number of years. New to the



WE WANT YOU!

The Fairport Historical Museum wants you! We are looking for additional docents to staff the museum on Thursday evenings from 7:00-9:00 pm, and on Saturday mornings from 9:00-11:00 am. Please consider volunteering your time for just one shift per month.

Contact Volunteer Coordinator Gail Black at gblack@rochester.rr.com or Director Vicki Profitt at vprofitt@rochester.rr.com (tel 585-223-1204) for additional information about making a difference at the FHM!

2013 Peter McDonough Memorial Scholarship Winners

Jessica Wurzer:

Incoming Freshman: University of Notre Dame

Samantha Broking:

Incoming Freshman: SUNY at Albany



Congratulations to Jessica Wurzer and Samantha Broking, the two winners of the 2013 Peter McDonough Memorial Scholarship Award.

Earlier this year, fifteen Fairport High School 12th grade students submitted research papers related to an aspect of Fairport or Perinton history. Jessica Wurzer (2nd from left) won a \$1,000 scholarship for her research on the life of Albert Knapp, businessman, volunteer and community leader. The topic of Samantha Broking's (2nd from right) paper was early settler Hiram Moseley. Samantha, who has lived in the Moseley home since she was born, also won a scholarship for \$1,000.

Presenting the award at the Fairport Dollars for Scholars awards ceremony were Catherine Angevine (left) and Bill Poray (right).

The scholarships are made possible by donations to the Perinton Historical Society's scholarship fund. The research papers submitted by students will add to our collective knowledge of the history and people of Fairport and Perinton.

Please consider supporting the 2014 Peter McDonough Memorial Scholarship. For further information or to make a donation, call the Fairport Historical Museum at 223-3989 or email Bill Poray at wporay@rochester.rr.com.



Kate Richburg, an eternal resident of Perinton's Elmwood Cemetery.

Photo courtesy of the Perinton Historical Society.

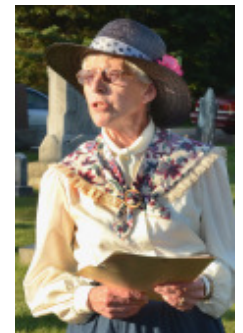
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Cemetery Tour

By Vicki Profitt, Fairport Museum Director

The annual *Illuminated History* cemetery tour was held the evening of June 18th at Elmwood Cemetery. The efforts of our actors who portrayed twelve residents of this early burying ground are truly appreciated. Thank you to Craig Caplan, Ann Castle, Anica Harris, Wes Harris, Niels Hansen, Terry Holt, Bob Hunt, Cindy Hunt, Anne Johnston, Kara Lee, Suzanne Lee and Lucy McCormick on the exceptional job they did bringing the stories of these cemetery residents to life.

We would also like to extend our appreciation to Suzanne Lee for assisting with tour planning and script writing, and to Suzanne Scheirer and the Elmwood Cemetery Association for their support.



Cemetery Tour photos by Keith Boas

"Tugs..." continued from page 1



The *Lorriane*, pulling a barge through Fairport.
1921 photo from the
Town of Perinton Archives

Herman Steffen, who also was the Fairport Village Mayor (1929—1930), took full advantage of the frequent need that canal tugs had for coal. An article (see below) appearing in the *Herald-Mail* on October 9, 1930, gives us an understanding of Mr. Steffen's success, along with the success of other Fairport merchants benefiting from the tug trade.

Canalers Are Buying Things Other Than Coal When They Stop Here

Supplying of tugs and boats on the barge canal with coal has been no small part of the business of H. L. Steffen during the canal season, and by the close of the season in December, Mr. Steffen will have furnished in the neighborhood of 3,000 tons of coal to the companies plying boats on the state's waterway.

His contract with the towing companies calls for loading the coal at any time, day or night, that they reach Fairport, and Mr. Steffen's men are subject to call at almost any hour. The tugs pull up at the south side of the canal along the Dudley-Hanby Lumber Co.'s premises, and the average amount required for a tug is 20 tons. This is hauled in dump trucks from the Steffen elevator in Parce avenue, and requires no handling by hand shoveling either in loading or unloading the trucks.

Tugs take on coal at Buffalo, Fairport, Clyde, Rome and other points east.

It is a frequent remark of boatmen that they like it when the can take on coal here at Fairport, for this is the most convenient place along the line for them to purchase foodstuffs. As a consequence, Fairport merchants are seeing a nicely increased trade through this channel.

Mr. Steffen wasn't the only person who saw the profit in selling coal—to local residents as well as the tugs. Some of the other coal-supply businesses in Fairport during the first half of the 20th century included Sabin Schummers, Dewey Jackson, Fairport Lumber and Coal, Dobbin & Moore and George S. Holman.

"Bless Papa and Mama and make me a good little Girl, and take the gosh-darn out of my brother."

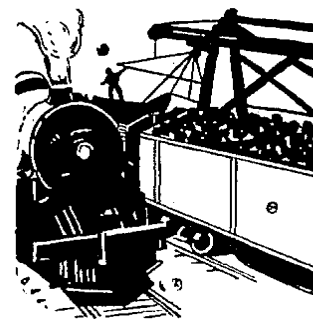
Holman's COAL has taken the sting out of winter as nothing else could do. You try it the next time you are in need of COAL.

GEO. S. HOLMAN

BOTH FONES

Office, Yards and Elevator, High Street

Newspaper ad from 1916



IT'S COMING
BY THE CARLOAD

We might almost say by the trainload, to our yards. Nobody need suffer for any lack of good coal, for we have it, and at fair prices too. We want to impress this vital fact on you. Our Coal comes direct from the leading mines.

PHONE 27

HERMAN L. STEFFEN

Parce Avenue

Fairport, N. Y.

Newspaper ad from 1927

Dealing with the tug trade, however, sometimes had its difficulties. In July, 1933, the *Fairport Herald* printed a story on problems with tugs coming from the west, waiting to tie up for coal at the Steffen dock, which was just east of the lift bridge. Because of the height of the tugs and their smokestacks, the bridge had to be in its *up* position frequently, and sometimes for periods longer than a few impatient, waiting motorists considered necessary. The Fairport Village Board reviewed the problem and strongly encouraged Mr. Steffen to move his coal-loading dock further east (closer to the Parker Street bridge) to minimize the congestion under the lift bridge. Mr. Steffen agreed to do so and also promised that he would discuss the occasional problem with canal authorities.

The article went on to state that the Board had received a complaint about smoke coming from the tugs. Apparently, a local resident disliked the coal-fired engine soot being deposited on her wet laundry when hung outdoors to dry. The Board offered sympathy but took no action. It no doubt considered the fact that tug crews were bringing significant business to the local merchants. Clearly, Fairport did not want the tugs to switch their dockings to another canal community.

And then there two situations in June of 1936 when tugboats sunk, right in the middle of Fairport! The following articles appeared in the *Fairport Herald-Mail* on June 25 and July 2, 1936:

Tug Sinks. Stays Four Days

A tug, hauling a string of westbound canal boats (barges) made an extended stay in Fairport over the weekend, in fact, from Saturday night until late Wednesday, all because the crew got in a hurry in loading the tug with coal at the dock maintained by H. L. Steffen near the Parker street bridge. The tug and tow of five boats reached Fairport shortly before 9 o'clock. H. L. Steffen, who has a contract to supply coal to some of the lines plying on the canal, was at the dock with the coal. The tug carries a crew of seven. They had tied the tug and it was partly filled with coal when, to make the filling more convenient, the crew swung the tug about to head the other way. They did not count on the weight of the coal already in the tug nor just where it lay in the bottom, and the consequence was that as the tug swung around, it listed, began to dip, and was going at such speed that it could not be halted, resulting in the sinking of the tug.

The above article went on to explain how men from the Canal Salvage Corporation worked, eventually with the help of a pump, to float the tug. They tried for nearly four days, drawing large crowds of spectators on both the Parker and Main Street bridges as well as along both canal banks. Finally, on Wednesday afternoon, the tug was floating again and the crew "recovered their wearing apparel after a four-day soak."

By late that day, the dripping-wet tug was on its way—towing its five boatloads of cargo and carrying a full load of coal for its steam engine. We assume that, this time, the coal was stowed correctly.

In the next (July 2) issue of the *Fairport Herald-Mail*, another tug made local news:

Last week it was the sinking of a tug that upset things in the canal and this week it is (another) sinking... A big tug hauling a huge Dolomite steel boat was too high to pass under the old trolley bridge, and to (lower it), the tug (was given) sufficient water to sink it far enough to clear the bridge. The (Dolomite) boat itself had to be given a load of water from the canal by its own pump to get it under the bridge. This sank the boat to the bottom of the canal and it required additional tugs to haul it off. It was a boat of tremendous size, and one of the largest ever to be seen passing over this section.



Plant Sale a Big Success

Our friends at the Greenbrier Garden Club held a fundraising plant sale at the Fairport Historical Museum on May 11th. Despite rainy weather only a gardener could love, the sale was successful, and also brought many visitors to our beautiful museum grounds.

For many years, the Greenbrier Club has maintained and beautified the gardens at 18 Perrin Street. We are eternally grateful for their kind and generous support.



How the Irondequoit and Fairport Rivers laid the Foundation for the Erie Canal more than 126,000 Years Ago

By William Keeler, Fairport Museum Curator

The information for this essay came from the book *The Rochester Canyon and the Genesee River Base-Levels*, by Herman Fairchild, 1919

There is a lot of talk today about global warming and its effect on the planet, and much speculation as to what will happen with the melting of the ice caps and rising sea levels. Many thousands of years ago our planet was much warmer than it is today. At some point in the Pleistocene Era, the Earth became very cold and then warmed up again. As the planet's temperatures continue to rise today, so that it is closer to the Age of the Dinosaur than the Ice Age, I thought it would be good to reflect on the effect of the Ice Age on our landscape and how the melting glaciers were a factor in the location of the Erie Canal through Fairport.

More than 126,000 years ago, plus or minus 5,000 years, the landscape of what would become western New York was very different. There was a river to the north, since called the Ontario River, which flowed to the sea and carved a large valley now at the bottom of Lake Ontario. Another, named the Irondequoit River by historians, was a major tributary which carried water north to the Ontario and carved out an impressive valley up to five miles wide in some places. Around the late Pleistocene Era the earth began to cool and the Labradorian Ice Sheet began to creep down from the north. The Ontarian Lobe, a glacier on the edge of the ice pack, extended down from the ice sheet, and covered an area roughly the size of today's Lake Ontario at its southernmost extent. After thousands of years, during the Dawson Stage, the ice began to melt. Two lakes were formed on either side of the Ontarian Lobe, Dawson Lake on the west side and Iroquois Lake on the east side. Iroquois Lake drained into the Hudson River via the Mohawk River. For many years, Dawson Lake didn't have an outlet. The Irondequoit River Valley filled up with water so that the shores of the lake extended a little farther south of what is now Bushnell's Basin and as far east as what is now Main Street in Fairport.

As the land uplifted with movements in the tectonic plates and the water rose in the lake, the outlet of a river was formed in what is now Fairport, just east of Main Street. From the shores of Dawson Lake the headwaters of the Fairport River, sometimes referred to as the Fairport-Lyons River, extended from Frank Street to the corner of Parker Street and East Church Street. The river was from one half to one mile across in some places. There was a large egg-shaped island at the mouth, which divided the river into two channels. The island was 12,000 feet long and 4,500 feet wide. This land feature can still be seen today as a large hill. The former island is 565 feet above sea level at its highest point and is roughly framed by Turk Hill Road, East Whitney Road, Hamilton Road and Macedon Center Road. The river flowed through here for



During the late Pleistocene Era, a large island (circled area above) sat in the middle of the ancient Fairport River. You can still see the island today as a large hill.

several thousand years until the ice sheet began to recede again. As the ice sheet melted, the waters of Dawson Lake and Iroquois Lake met and formed a single lake with its shore, lapping up against what we now know as Ridge Road. At that time the Fairport River dried up and the large valley that was left was drained by a much smaller Thomas Creek, taking water west, and Mud Creek draining water to the east.

In 1816 James Geddes was hired by the State of New York to survey upstate New York for an inland route for a canal from the Hudson River to Lake Erie. The challenge for Geddes was to find a level piece of ground to build the canal. When he came to this part of the state he found the old Fairport River bed and plotted the canal along its entire length from Lyons to the Irondequoit Creek Valley. When he reached the Irondequoit Valley, he took a sharp 90-degree turn south along the edge of the valley until he found enough soil and debris left by Dawson Lake and the Irondequoit River at Bushnell's Basin to almost bridge the entire valley for the canal. The remaining several hundred feet was eventually built up by the Great Embankment. Because of these ancient rivers and their valleys, there are no locks on the Erie Canal in Perinton.

When you stroll down the village streets or along the canal, you are walking along the shores of a primordial lake or in the former bed of a great river that flowed through our area thousands of years ago.





Come – Explore!

Would you like to know more about the people who lived in Perinton, or perhaps even in your own home? The Fairport Historical Museum has many resources available to help in your historical research. Our collections include village and town directories from many years, school yearbooks, and photographs of people, buildings, houses, and street scenes. We also have an extensive postcard collection. Our genealogical resources may just offer the missing branch to your family tree! Our collection includes detailed information on many of Perinton's pioneer families.

*And remember, the great thing about doing research on historic topics:
The most rewarding discoveries are often made while looking for something else!*

Current Exhibits At the Museum

There are two wonderful exhibits at the Fairport Historical Museum that run until September 15th. Please stop in to see the *Fashions Inspired by Downton Abbey* costume exhibit in our south wing of the museum, and the *Fairport Postal Exhibit* in the atrium.

You can view the exhibits during regular museum hours: Sundays and Tuesdays from 2:00-4:00 pm, Thursdays from 7:00-9:00 pm and Saturdays from 9:00-11:00 am.

Bring a friend to visit these remarkable pieces of history which come directly from the museum's collections.

Fairport Savings Bank Community Champion

Thank you to everyone who nominated and voted for the Perinton Historical Society in the Fairport Savings Bank Community Champions program. The FSB received nearly 600 nominations for more than 100 not-for-profit organizations.

Three of the award recipients were announced on June 6th. The Perinton Historical Society was proud to be named as one of 10 worthwhile organizations vying for the fourth award, which was chosen by popular vote on Facebook, and we tied for second place. Congratulations to the four Fairport Savings Bank Community Champions—Friends of the Penfield Library, Safe Journey, Webster Comfort Care and the National MS Society Upstate New York Chapter!



Preserving History Today for Tomorrow

18 PERRIN STREET, FAIRPORT, NEW YORK 14450

FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED

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Fairport, NY 14450



Fairport Historical Museum

18 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY 14450

The museum is open to the public on
Saturdays, Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays
at the hours listed below.

Hours

Saturday 9:00-11:00 am
Sunday 2:00-4:00 pm
Tuesday 2:00-4:00 pm
Thursday 7:00-9:00 pm

Group tours, presentations and special
projects are by appointment. Please call
and leave a message at 223-3989.



The Elmwood Cemetery Tour on June 18th drew more than 75
of our PHS members and their families. See page 3 for the story
and more photos of the event.

www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org