



Perinton Historical Society Historiogram

18 Perrin Street
Fairport, NY 14450

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Engraving of the Great Snowstorm of 1879 Donated to the Fairport Historical Museum

By William Keeler, Curator of the Fairport Historical Museum



Scene at the sand cut near Fairport, after the wrecking of the engines of the Atlantic Express and the relief train on January 3, 1879. The engraving was made from sketches by Thomas Aiken for Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper.

Every generation has its weather stories. Whether it is the ice storm of 1991, heavy snows in 1966 (photo on page 3), or the unusually cold spring of 2012, which decimated the fruit crop, unusual weather leaves a lasting memory and sometimes tests our strength and resilience. In the late 19th century, the storm that was talked about most in this area was the snow storm of 1879. What started out as a typical lake-effect snow turned into one of the worst storms of the century. High winds and unrelenting snow for five days, from January 2nd to the 6th, made it a memorable storm for many of the Atlantic states. The storm covered much of New York and stalled transportation in the northeast for nearly a week.

One spectacular catastrophe occurred near Fairport, etching the storm into the memories of people for years afterward.

The catastrophe was the derailment of the Atlantic Express at Westerman's Crossing, just west of the village. The story was immortalized nationally in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper in its January 25, 1879 supplement. On pages 386 and 387 of that issue there is an engraving created from sketches drawn by Thomas P. Aiken who was at the scene. This engraving has recently been donated to our museum.

The engraving shows eight derailed train engines and passengers walking about in the snow among the wreckage. On the back side of the supplement are six more engravings of stranded passengers making the best of the situation. There are people going door to door looking for handouts, collecting wood to fuel the potbellied stoves in the baggage cars, and cooking food. There is even a scene of several men dancing to music and amusing themselves in a freight car. Of course the scene at this stranded train was nothing to dance about. There was one death of a railroad employee and many injured passengers that resulted from the derailment of several engines.

The second day of January, 1879 started out normal enough. A cold front was moving in from the west and it looked like another lake-effect snowstorm coming in from Lake Erie. The temperature was 17 degrees at noon, but the wind increased to 45 miles per hour, and the temperature plummeted to below zero by 3:00 a.m. the next day. Snow fell steadily and, with the wind, it was accumulating in ever higher drifts. Transportation at that time depended on railroads and trolleys to get people around. Tracks had to be cleared to keep the trains running. Train tracks were passable from New York City to Syracuse but tracks around the Mohawk River and Erie Canal were almost impossible to clear. With tracks clogged under several feet of snow, it was tough getting plows to clear the snow and to keep train engines from running off the tracks.

On the evening of the second, the employees of the Atlantic Express formed a train of nine passenger cars to leave from

Continued on page 3



Comments from your President

Greetings. I hope everyone has had an enjoyable holiday season with family and friends. Happy New Year!

We opened the museum on Tuesday evening the 14th of January for the Fairport-Perinton Merchants Association's holiday party. PHS is a member of FPMA. Vicki had the

downstairs set up beautifully with decorated tables for four to eight people and a total capacity of 60. Separate tables were set up as well for beverages and food. Beverages were donated by the Fairport Brewing Company and Casa Larga. We needed to obtain a special beverage permit from the village. The food was catered by Chakara Bistro and Bar, and was delicious. The attendees, totaling about 55, were challenged during the evening with a scavenger hunt based on items in the museum. Two winners were selected from those completing the hunt. The first-place winner received a bag of goodies from the gift shop, including a family membership. The second-place winner received a family membership. FPMA covered the cost of the prizes. The evening allowed us to show off the museum to many in the community who have never been in the building. In fact, we heard wonderful comments, such as, "I've lived here for twenty years and have never been in here before," and "This is a hidden gem in our community."

~ Bob Hunt ~



Pat and Wayne Beckwith, owners of the Fairport Village Inn, enjoy the scavenger hunt in the museum during the Fairport-Perinton Merchants Association's holiday party.

We are happy that the FPMA event has helped us to get the word out about our museum. Plus we picked up a few new memberships and some new volunteers to be docents. We also had several inquiries about the availability of the space for meetings by outside groups. Overall, it was a great evening and an opportunity to show off your museum. As an added note,

the FPMA supports us each year financially when they give back to the community from funds raised during Canal Days.

If you are in the area of the museum, please notice the new window well covers being installed by the Fairport Department of Public Works. Special thanks to Paul Feeley and his crew for this work. The window wells have been a problem for a long time, for the basement area of the building during heavy rain storms. The water would get in through these window wells and cause damage and dampness. These new covers should alleviate this problem.

We are also looking into options for easier access to the basement area, as some of our members have trouble with the stairs when attending activities such as programs in the meeting room. More on that in the future.

Finally, I just finished a great book called *Summer in a Glass* by Evan Dawson. I recommend it to anyone interested in the wine industry of the Finger Lakes. It is very well written. I couldn't put it down, and hated to see it end.

Thanks for your continued support of PHS, and we will chat again next month.

Bob Hunt, President

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HISTORIGRAM

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Perinton Historical Society

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"Great Snowstorm..." continued from page 1

Rochester on Friday, the third. The train was pulled by eight engines and was preceded by a snowplow. The train moved slowly out of the city. Everything went well until about ten miles outside the city line. Here the snowplow jumped the tracks and the train following could not stop in time and ran into the plow, derailing all eight engines. The engineer of the first engine was buried in the snow from the accident and killed instantly. Four other railroad employees were injured along with five passengers. The passengers and crew settled in and tried to keep warm until they could be rescued. There were several Fairport residents on the train including Levi DeLand and three lawyers. Because the train was so close to their homes, they decided to walk. They made it back to the village by 7:00 that evening.

When word of the accident reached Rochester, a train was immediately formed to rescue the stranded passengers. A train called a wrecking train, left the city pulled by six engines. Unfortunately, all six jumped the tracks before reaching the wreck and the snow was so deep they couldn't go any further. Snow continued to fall and was close to burying both train wrecks. By Saturday, the Fairport residents who had walked back to their homes the day before, began to worry about their stranded fellow passengers. A rescue party was formed with six teams of volunteers to provide food and offer shelter for those who wanted to come back to Fairport. It took two hours for the volunteers to arrive at the crash site. Those who wanted to leave were taken to the Osburn House on North Main Street. When that facility was filled, proprietor Robert Conant found lodgings for some of the passengers at private homes.

If this engraving (on page 1) and story wasn't interesting enough, in the margin at the top of the paper in the middle is

written "James Watson Gillis married Jeanette Paterson Miller Jan. 2, 1879." And if you didn't get the significance, just to the right written in pencil is "Our Wedding Trip."

James Gillis and Jeanette Miller, also known as Nettie, were married in a small ceremony at the bride's home at 48 Scio Street in Rochester the day the snow storm began. James Gillis owned a framing and moulding company on Allen Street. He boarded in his future father-in-law's house for several years before getting married. The wedding was attended by a few close friends and the couple was anxious to leave on their honeymoon to finally be alone together. Little did they know that they would be spending the first few nights in the company of complete strangers in a railroad car. The couple boarded the Atlantic Express on Friday the third, hoping to make it out of the city before the storm became worse, but to no avail. They were stuck, like so many others, on the tracks in a snow-filled field miles from the city.

On Sunday, January 5th, a special train came from Syracuse to finally rescue the trapped passengers. The cars consisted of eight engines, a wrecking car, a derrick car and several cars containing a large force of shovelers and mechanics. The train ran off the tracks just outside Syracuse in Jordan but it was soon put right and continued to its destination. The train finally reached Fairport by 5:00 pm that night. On Monday the tracks had been cleared and the passengers, including the Gillis couple, continued their journeys. By Tuesday night all the trains were back on schedule.

For those interested in seeing or purchasing a copy of this engraving, you can find a print on display in the museum in the north wing. A limited number of framed copies of this piece are now for sale in our gift shop.



The Blizzard of 1966

Another memorable snow event crippled our area in early 1966. Fairport's South Main Street (shown here looking north) was buried by snow, which started coming down on Sunday morning, January 30th. Fifty-mph wind gusts created huge drifts in most streets, forcing nearly all businesses in the area to be shut down for days. Many of the stores on Main Street were still closed on Wednesday, February 2nd.

Photo from the Town of Perinton archives

The Reminiscences of William Henry Dobbin

William Henry Dobbin was born in 1840 in Garafraxa, a Canadian pioneer town. His father and grandfather settled in the remote forest between Lake Ontario and Lake Huron in the spring of 1826. They acquired two hundred acres of land from the British government, with the assumption that such land ownership would lead to great, immediate prosperity. It did not.

Young Mr. Dobbin eventually landed in Fairport, where he became a partner in the Dobbin and Moore planing mill and lumberyard. He and his wife Margaret built their home (pictured below) at 141 West Avenue in 1875. The detailed wood trim of both the house and barn provide evidence to Mr. Dobbin's life's work in the field of lumber, and each are designated Fairport landmarks.

Mr. Dobbin dictated his reminiscences, with remarkable detail, to daughters Elizabeth and Helen in 1912 and 1913. In this chapter, he recalls the circumstances of 1859 which caused him to meet his future wife, Miss Margaret Calder, their courtship, and early married life together.

In other chapters of his reminiscences, William Henry Dobbin recalls his father's stories of survival in the wilderness of Canada in the 1830s, as well as his own adventures as a youth. It is an entertaining story, and I hope to share more with you in subsequent issues of the Historigram.

Bill Poray, Editor

By William Henry Dobbin

One of the ways we young people used to spend our winter evenings was in going to singing school or gathering at some of the neighbors' homes and spending the evening singing. My uncle William was a good singer and teacher of vocal music. He taught singing to classes of young people which he gathered into the different schoolhouses within a radius of about six miles, in the winter evenings. He had classes enough to occupy all his evenings, holding a class in each school one night per week. We youngsters made these classes quite a social event and frequently got up sleigh-loads and visited other schools, and they would do the same.

Aside from the real lesson-evenings we would often gather at some friend's house and have a good sing and social time and sleigh ride. It was at one of these that the most momentous event of my life occurred. It happened that one evening the Stuart boys and their sister came for Sam and me to go to a Mr. Johnson's for the evening and they said they had the Calder girls with them in the sleigh. I'd never seen or met the Calder girls before and don't think I said anything to either of them the whole evening. But some way one of them, Margaret, made a very strong impression on me that evening and I wished I might have a chance to sit by her going home, but I was too bashful to make it known to her or anyone else so we had our sing and went home without a word passing between us. I was then about nineteen years old and Margaret was between fifteen and sixteen. This was in the month of February and though I didn't have a chance to see her again for four months the impression stayed with me and grew stronger.

Along in June there was to be a party at my Uncle John Alpaugh's, the girls were to have a quilting in the afternoon and in the evening we boys were invited in. I found out Margaret Calder was to be there and I made up my mind I must do something that night to let her know I liked her before someone else got ahead of me. For several days before the party I went about with fear and trembling thinking some of the other smart



141 West Avenue, Fairport

Home built by William Henry Dobbin and his wife Margaret in 1875.

Photograph by Bill Poray

boys would get ahead of me. But the time came and before the party was fairly under way I made a chance to ask her if I could have the pleasure of seeing her home that night and she gave the coveted permission. This had a solacing effect on me for the rest of the evening and we had a pleasant time with games and dancing but I was in a hurry for the home-going and was on hand to see that no one got my girl.

It was a mile and a half to two miles and we walked pretty slowly on this nice June evening, or morning more nearly. My cousin Marriott Smith took Margaret's sister Jane home that night, I remember. Marriot Smith and his brother Jake were building a carriage house for my Uncle Alpaugh at this time. That was the reason for getting up this party that night as they had nearly finished it and were to go home soon.

On the Sunday afternoon following the party, Mariott came up to my house and said to me, "Let's go over and see the girls."

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FAIRPORT, N. Y.

William Dobbin was a partner in the Dobbin and Moore planing mill and lumberyard. This ad (left) appeared in the local newspaper in 1891.

I probably wouldn't have had the courage to go alone but was I glad to go with him.

It was about a mile and a half from our house to theirs and about the last half mile of that, from the main road in to their house, was through as beautiful a piece of woods as I ever saw, beech and maple and elm trees. As we got down pretty near to where we would turn into the private road through the woods we caught a glimpse of the girls, and when they saw us they hurried off toward home as fast as they could. We thought it rather queer but they didn't go very far, and we soon came upon them sitting on a log which lay close beside the roadway. This log was afterward the scene of many resting spells. We all sat there for a while and then went on to the house.

Long after I learned the reason of their hurried flight from our sight that day. Margaret and her sister Jane had been wondering how they would look in hoop skirts which were then coming into style, and thought they'd try running little pliable elm roots in the hems of their skirts. They had just got them in and were viewing the effect when they saw us coming and they ran on out of sight and hurried to get the hoops out before we should see what they had been doing.

After that I used to see her occasionally at church and Bible class to which we both belonged, but she was away from home a good deal and I sometimes didn't see her for four months at a time. But we kept up a correspondence and saw as much of each other as possible and it was only about two years before we became engaged.

After that time I was away at school some and she was away too, so we were separated a good deal till the summer before we were married, which was about three years from the time we became engaged. It seemed to us we had waited a long time and we were anxious to make plans to be married and we did this in the fall of 1864. During that summer I had arranged to rent a small farm and had all arrangements made to go on to it as soon as we should be married. Owing to the sickness of Margaret's brother at the time we wished to be married, we decided it was best not to have a wedding at her home, so we just went to the Presbyterian parsonage and were married quietly by the Reverend McDonald, our pastor at that time.



WE WANT YOU!

We are looking for additional docents to staff the museum on Saturday mornings from 9:00-11:00 a.m. 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 for additional information.

"We study the past to understand the present; we understand the present to guide the future." *William Lund*



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Perinton Historical Society



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Historic Wall of Canal Demolished



In January of this year, workers removed the old stone-block wall on the north side of the canal in the area of the Parker Street Bridge. The wall had been deteriorating badly in some places for several years.

It's history dates back to before 1862 when the Erie Canal was first widened. A new, concrete-and-steel wall, already started on the west side of the bridge, will be finished in time for the May re-opening of the canal.

Photos by Keith Boas



Special Recognition Level Memberships

Membership and contribution of any amount are greatly appreciated and important to the future of the PHS. Business memberships will be listed as supporters in each issue of the HISTORIGRAM, on the PHS website and at the museum. The Deland, Potter and Perrin memberships will be recognized once in the HISTORIGRAM and listed at the website and museum, unless they prefer to be anonymous.

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An Evening with Antoinette Brown Blackwell, First Ordained Woman Minister in the United States



As portrayed by
Betty Miller

Tuesday, February 18 7:30 pm at the Fairport Historical Museum

Antoinette Brown was born in 1825 in Henrietta, New York, and she spent her life there, graduating from the Monroe Academy and attending Oberlin College in Ohio. All she ever wanted was to be a minister in her Congregational Church, which later became the United Church of Christ.

She was not allowed to graduate with her fellow theology students at Oberlin because she was a woman, but she still preached in many churches in the surrounding areas. She was ordained in 1853 and became the first ordained woman minister in the United States.

She married Samuel Blackwell, of the famous Blackwell family, in 1856 at her parent's homestead in Henrietta.

She spoke at many conventions and still preached through the years, although she and Sam had six daughters.

Antoinette wrote nine books in her lifetime and was the only original suffragist alive to witness the ratification of the 19th Amendment, guaranteeing women the right to vote.

Betty Miller resides in Henrietta and has portrayed Antoinette Brown Blackwell since 1984. Betty has more than 50 years in theatre in the Rochester area and has acted, directed and choreographed many productions, including Eastman Kodactors, Webster Theatre Guild, Pittsford Musicals and Henrietta Community Theatre. She is also a biblical and historical dramatist.

Betty and her husband Bob have five sons, fourteen grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

NOTE: With the exception of the program on February 18th, the museum is closed until March 1st.

Upcoming Events

At the Fairport Historical Museum

Tuesday, February 18

7:30 pm

An Evening with Antoinette Brown Blackwell, First Ordained Woman Minister in the United States

As portrayed by Betty Miller

Saturday, March 1

9:00 a.m.

The Fairport Historical Museum opens for the 2014 season.

Exhibit: Grand opening of *The Wedding Exhibit* featuring gowns from the collection of the Perinton Historical Society

Tuesday, March 18

7:30 pm

Program: *The History of the Gamewell Telegraph Fire Alarm System in Fairport*. Presented by Matt Wells

Tuesday, April 15

7:30 pm

Program: *Orphan Asylums in New York State*

Presented by Michael Keene

At Perinton Park Pavilion

Tuesday, May 20

6:00 pm

Event: Annual Meeting and Picnic for members of the Perinton Historical Society

At Greenvale Rural Cemetery

Tuesday, June 17

7:00 pm

Event: *Illuminated History* tour featuring actors portraying cemetery residents

Museum Volunteer Training

Join us on Sunday, February 23rd from 2:00–4:00 pm for a new training session created especially for museum volunteers! During this mini-workshop, we'll discuss the ins and outs of the museum, with a focus on assisting visitors with their genealogical questions and house research. Veteran and new volunteers are invited to attend, and will receive email invitations in the coming weeks.

We are always looking for additional volunteers, and would love to add you to our roster. Each museum shift consists of two volunteers who work a two-hour shift once a month. We especially need volunteers to cover Saturday mornings from 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m. If you are interested in volunteering at the museum, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator Gail Black, at gblack@rochester.rr.com for more information.



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Fairport Historical Museum

18 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY 14450

Beginning March 1st, the museum will be open to the public on Saturdays, Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays at the hours listed below:

Hours

Saturday	9:00–11:00 a.m.
Sunday	2:00–4:00 p.m.
Tuesday	2:00–4:00 p.m.
Thursday	7:00–9:00 p.m.

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

www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org



Perinton Historical Society's Bob Hunt and Liffbridge Financial Advisors president Ed Bradford greet guests to the museum at the annual Fairport-Perinton Merchants Association party on January 14th.