

Fairport's Magnificent Carnegie Library

By Bill Poray

Communities across America benefitted from the generosity of Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919). The wealthy philanthropist was devoted to education and was a great lover of books. Among his many interests, support for public libraries was second to none.

Fairport's desperate need for a dedicated library building coincided with Carnegie's immense investment in the same, resulting in an opportunity for our community that was sure to result in a new library of which all residents could be proud. Requirements by Mr. Carnegie on municipalities seeking his charity were simple—a plot of land to place the library upon, and an annual fund for ongoing library operations. Surely Fairport, as over a thousand communities had before, could meet these modest commitments. But as history shows, Fairport's Carnegie library was never built.

Early in 1914, at one of the very first meetings of the Fairport Chamber of Commerce, Edwin Roy Bowerman, a young man thirty years of age, spoke of the necessity for an improved library in the community. At the time, Fairport's library was located in a dingy upstairs room of the Bown building on South Main Street, with books stacked from floor to ceiling. Bowerman's remarks included statistics regarding the present use of the library, and noted that 1,600 residents were borrowers of books. He made special note that more than one hundred of these borrowers were of Italian ethnicity. Mr. Bowerman's data showed that use of the library had grown significantly over the last eight years, and he concluded by advocating that the Chamber of Commerce spearhead an effort to secure a Carnegie library. A motion was made, and the members unanimously approved of the idea. A special committee was assigned to take the lead in the Carnegie library matter, the members being Bowerman, Fletcher Defendorf, a barrel-maker by trade, and Fairport High School principal Professor G.A. Burton.



The town of Perry, in Wyoming County, opened the doors to their own Carnegie library in 1914, thanks to a \$12,000 grant.

Photo by Peggy Parker, Director, Perry Public Library

The Chamber of Commerce committee contacted other communities that had successfully built Carnegie libraries, asked questions, and developed a plan. Confident that their efforts would result in the construction of a splendid new library for Fairport, the committee applied for a Carnegie grant.

On April 15th of 1914, word was received from the Carnegie Corporation that a grant would be tendered in the sum of \$11,000 for the construction of a new library. The commitment was based on the usual conditions; that a site be furnished, and a sum equal to at least ten percent of the grant be allocated annually to cover the cost of library operations. The Carnegie Corporation also requested to see sketches of the building, as in a few cases from the past, poorly designed libraries had been built.

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Richard Reisem Presents— ***Myron Holley: Canal Builder, Abolitionist, Unsung Hero***

Join us on Tuesday, February 17th at 7:00 p.m. at the museum for Richard Reisem's presentation about Myron Holley.

Myron Holley's story is told in the context of the momentous historical events and movements that shaped his life, including the War of 1812, the building of the Erie Canal, and the struggle to abolish slavery. This visionary man changed the course of history in New York State. Among Holley's many achievements, he served as the Superintendent of Construction of the Erie Canal and founded the first Horticultural Society in Western New York, the First Unitarian Church in Rochester, and the anti-slavery Liberty Party.

Richard Reisem has written 15 books since retiring from his 31-year career in Kodak's Communications and Public Affairs. His Mount Hope Cemetery books include: *Gravestones in Mount Hope Cemetery*, *Frederick Douglass and the Underground Railroad*, *Buried Treasures in Mount Hope Cemetery* and *Mount Hope: America's First Municipal Victorian Cemetery*. Other cemetery books are: *Forest Lawn Cemetery: Buffalo History Preserved*, *A Field Guide to Forest Lawn Cemetery* and *Blue Sky Mausoleum of Frank Lloyd Wright*.

Other books include: *Historic Photos of New York State*, *Historic New York—Architectural Journeys in the Empire State*, *Erie Canal Legacy—Architectural Treasures of the Empire State*, *Classic Buffalo—A Heritage of Distinguished Architecture* and *200 Years of Rochester Architecture and Gardens*.

He is an honorary trustee of The Landmark Society of Western New York, vice-president of the Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery and former trustee of the Rochester Historical Society. For 16 years, he served on the Rochester Preservation Board, and was chair for four years.

Museum Volunteer Orientation *Saturday, February 28th*

On Saturday, February 28th at 2:00 p.m., an orientation for current and prospective museum volunteers will be held at the museum. This is an opportunity for volunteers to get to know each other and to view new exhibits before the museum re-opens to the public. Light refreshments will be served.

Museum volunteers work one two-hour shift per month greeting and assisting visitors. New volunteers are paired with veterans for each shift, and training is provided. We are always looking for new volunteers to staff the museum. If you can give of your time just two hours a month, please contact PHS Volunteer Coordinator Sue Scheirer by phone at 585-377-3789 or at dscheir1@rochester.rr.com.



New Technology at the Museum

Thanks to a historic preservation grant in the amount of \$12,500 received from the Rochester Area Community Foundation (RACF), the Perinton Historical Society's museum has moved into the digital age. On December 22, Dayton and Jered, shown left to right above, from Best Buy's Geek Squad, installed new equipment in both the downstairs program room (pictured) and on the museum's main floor. The equipment will enable us to broadcast live presentations, occurring downstairs, up to the main floor, where overflow crowds and those who don't wish to negotiate the steep stairwell will be seated.

The Perinton Historical Society would like to thank the following for their assistance with this project: RACF, Best Buy's Geek Squad, Luke Wenschhof of the Village of Fairport for his guidance, PHS President Bob Hunt for locating and picking up chairs for the new viewing areas, PHS Treasurer Linda Wiener for assisting with the purchase process, and Mitch Wilke and Eric Heeg of Fairport Electric for rewiring the museum's electrical system to meet the needs of the new equipment.

A special debt of gratitude is owed to the PHS Technology Committee chaired by Catherine Angevine. Catherine and her committee members, Charles Profitt and Chris Pruszyński, spent many hours meeting and researching technology that would best fit our needs, plus ordering and installing products to get this project off the ground.

Several components of this process are yet to be completed, but it is expected that the new viewing areas will be available by the April 21st program.



One of Fairport's local newspapers attributed this issue to "the fact that library committees, especially in small towns, are frequently comprised of busy men, who have lacked the time or opportunity to obtain knowledge of library planning."

Upon securing the Carnegie grant, the Chamber considered its work done, with a formal recommendation: "That the matter be placed in the hands of the school's Board of Education for action; that the property owned by the school district on Perrin Street be offered as a site for the library building, and that \$1,200 be voted as an annual appropriation for the maintenance of the library." The resolution was adopted, and the matter turned over to the school district.

Residents had no issue with appropriating ten percent of the grant amount toward library operations. In fact, that was the same amount already funded by taxpayers for the current makeshift library in the Bown building. However, regarding the location of a lot for the construction of the library, it seemed everyone had an opinion, and some of them had a piece of property to be considered as well. Some favored the Perrin Street site, which would cost nothing, as it was already owned by the school district. Others believed that a new Carnegie library should be placed only on the most prominent of locations. A librarian from Brooklyn, a former Fairport resident, wrote on the subject, and was quoted in the Monroe County Mail, only two weeks after word of the Carnegie grant: "I am glad to see Carnegie is giving you \$11,000 for a building. The all-important point is the location. It must be central, and yet in a location befitting an institution of its kind. Give it a good big lot and have the grounds beautified. Make it a beautiful spot, an example of neatness and local pride, such as a village the size of Fairport should have."

With a school district-sponsored vote on the Perrin Street site on the calendar, the newspapers were soon filled with letters from prominent members of the community. Most denounced the Perrin Street location as being an unworthy location for the new library. Edward Dudley commented that if the library were on Perrin Street, "when people visit our village it would not be easy to find the Carnegie gift without a guide." William Dobbin concluded his views on the matter with the statement, "Let's not make the mistake of using a lot simply because we own it, or of selecting a site because it is cheap, but let us feel that we can well afford to buy whatever site seems best for the present and future usefulness of the library."

By June, a public meeting of citizens resulted in yet another committee, with George Slocum, Edward Dudley and Charles Clark representing the group. They published the following statement in the Fairport Herald: "It seems inappropriate to place the library on Perrin Street. It is only once in a lifetime we have an opportunity to get a \$11,000 building given to us, and the least we can do is to place it where it will

be seen by the public and be a credit to the village. For this reason we have obtained a 60 day option on the Doherty property on the southeast corner of South Main and Church Streets." The committee urged the community to vote "NO" to the Perrin Street site, so that the Doherty site could then be purchased by the school district for the Carnegie library.

Within days, a number of sites in addition to Perrin Street had surfaced for consideration, and another public meeting was called to discuss the merits of each. The list included properties on South Main Street, Church Street, and West Avenue, ranging from \$1,000 to \$7,000. A straw vote was taken among the attendees at the meeting, and the result was strongly in favor of the Doherty property, on the southeast corner of South Main and Church Streets. Despite the informal vote, the process used by the school district allowed only one site to be considered at a time, and they would first put the Perrin Street site up for a vote. If more voted against than for the Perrin Street site, another vote would be necessary to consider a different location.

The June 17th issue of the Fairport Herald trumpeted the results of the vote: "Big Majority is Against Perrin Street." The article stated that "three hundred thirty eight people, of whom more than 100 were women, voted on the Carnegie library propositions at the town hall at the special election Monday afternoon. Automobiles were busy during the voting hours bringing voters to the polls, the largest difference of opinion being on the proposition to build the new library on Perrin Street, which was defeated by a vote of almost three to one." As a result, it was necessary for the school to select another site to bring to the public for a vote.

It seemed that the school board had its hands full in determining a site for the new Carnegie library. The public committee represented by Slocum, Dudley and Clark did their part by securing options on several of the properties under consideration, and followed with a statement saying they believed the decision was rightfully in the hands of the school board, and therefore dissolved their committee. The school board resisted the responsibility, and attempted to shift the ownership to the Chamber of Commerce, who would have none of it.

To add a bit more complexity, the July 1st issue of the Fairport Herald included an announcement from Miss Ella Higbie. She offered a free site for the Carnegie library on the north side of East Avenue, just east of her home on North Main Street. Of all the lots under consideration, none had been on the north side of the village. Miss Higbie's offer was warmly embraced by north side residents, and despised by others. A week later, she reported to the Herald that she was "visited by a delegation of citizens yesterday morning, who suggested that she reconsider her tender of a free site on East Avenue for the Carnegie library." She replied that "the only condition on which she will reconsider is that the school district purchase the Clark property on Main Street, opposite the post office.

SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 9
TOWN OF PERINTON
PREFERENTIAL VOTE FOR SITE FOR CARNEGIE LIBRARY

Make an **X** mark in the square before the site favored or write your preference in blank space at bottom.

| | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Mrs. Alice Hooker | \$6,500 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Mrs. Ellsworth Wyman | 4,000 | 14 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Mrs. Ada Clark | 7,000 | 18 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Mrs. E. Casterline (Nivison) | 3,000 | 5 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Dennis M. Doherty | 4,000 | 106 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | F. & A. M. | 1,000 | 40 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Mrs. Lovinia N. Knapp | 3,500 | 3 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Miss Ella Higbie | Gift | 303 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Perrin | | 5 |

A non-binding vote in July of 1914 resulted in an overwhelming preference for the Higbie lot, the only site on the village's north side. The school district held an official vote one month later. Those opposed to a library located on the north side vigorously campaigned and as a result, the Higbie site failed to receive a majority vote.

From the archives of the Perinton Historical Society



Fairport's public library was located in this house at 18 Perrin Street from January of 1917 until the construction of the new library on the same site in 1937.

From the archives of the Perinton Historical Society

Otherwise her offer stands as originally made." Another preferential vote was taken, with the overwhelming winner the Higbie site. The school district held an official vote a few weeks later, but by then, opponents of a north side library had mobilized and the Higbie site failed to receive a majority vote.

In the coming weeks and months, votes were taken and retaken, with no conclusive decision. The practice of voting on one site per election doomed the process to failure. By December, hope for a Carnegie library had dwindled. The Monroe County Mail commented, "As Carnegie is now in his eightieth year, he may never realize the joy of a public library building in Fairport, unless things move smoother than they have the past year." In reporting on their first year's successes, the Chamber of Commerce noted as an accomplishment "the securing of a Carnegie Library. The fact that the taxpayers could not agree on a site does not belittle the prestige of the Chamber in the securing of the gift."

Two years later another vote was taken in an effort to secure the Perrin Street site for a Carnegie library, and again the public voted it down. The Fairport Herald had the final word, condemning the results of the vote with abundant sarcasm: "We thank you very much, Mr. Carnegie, for your kind and generous offer, but we cannot possibly find a suitable location for your proposed library building. We think it much better economy to spend \$1200 a year and house our library in a two by four, scarcely large enough to hold the books we possess, stacked in piles from floor to ceiling, than to spend the same amount in maintaining our library in commodious quarters specially adapted to library needs, and particularly when we can have these quarters handed to us on a platter. This is our idea of the economy of the situation, Mr. Carnegie. Again we thank you."

With great irony, just a few months later, the Fairport library was relocated to a tired old house on the Perrin Street lot that was considered by the voting public to be inadequate for the Carnegie library. The house was modestly modified, and for a period of twenty years served its purpose, until it was torn down and a new library built in its place, and opened in 1938.

The final irony is that the site of the new library –18 Perrin Street–was the same as that considered and rejected in 1914. Of course, we know the address today as the home of the Perinton Historical Society and Fairport Historical Museum.



Special Recognition Level Memberships

As of January 13, 2015

Business (\$100)

Ed Bradford, Liftbridge Financial Advisors
6 North Main Street, Suite 400w, Fairport
Website: <http://liftbridgefinancial.com>

Suzanne Lee Personal Histories

33 Chesham Way, Fairport
Phone: 585-267-6189
Website: <http://SLeePersonalHistories.com>

Joel Cuminale, Turning Point Signs & Design

3 Railroad Street, Fairport
Website: <http://www.tpsigns.com>

Wayne and Patty Beckwith, Fairport Village Inn

103 North Main Street, Fairport
Phone: 585-388-0112
Website: <http://www.thefvi.com>

Robert Ruhland, Keller Williams Realty

2000 Winton Road S. Bldg. 1, Rochester, NY 14618
Phone: 585-303-6607
Website: <http://bobruhland.yourkwagent.com>

DeLand (\$100-\$249)

Anonymous (1)

~ *The Early Days* ~

100 Years Ago This Month

From the Fairport Herald Newspaper

Prof. W. C. H. Sike

Will give a Grand Concert at

SHAW'S HALL,
Friday Evening, February 19.

He will be assisted by

Mr. ANDREWS, the eminent Violoncellist;
Mr. THOMAS, Pianist;
Mr. ROCKAFELLOW, Basso;
Miss A. CARPENTER, Soprano;
And a Vocal Quartette.

Tickets to the Concert can be had at Hardick's bookstore.

THE CORNER BOOKSTORE USED & COLLECTIBLE BOOKS

The Corner Bookstore— Another Fairport Treasure

If you have not yet visited The Corner Bookstore in the Upper level of the Fairport Village Landing, you are missing yet one more village treasure! The store's ever changing inventory includes popular fiction, children's books, and much more—at unbelievably low prices, as the gently used books are community donations and the store is run by *Friends of the Fairport Library* volunteers.

For the month of February, the store is highlighting books on history and politics. It has a sizeable collection on local history, including Fairport, Rochester, and New York State. During Presidents Week, February 17 through 21, you can get 20% off all history books. You can also take on several history challenges—or simply enjoy browsing in the cozy ambiance of a village bookstore.

The Corner Bookstore is located at 106 Fairport Village Landing, just upstairs from the library. It is open Tuesdays, 12–6, Thursdays 10–4, Fridays 10–2, and Saturdays 10–4.

Book donations are welcome. Proceeds support programs of the Fairport Public Library.



Raise Money For PHS!

Drop off your deposit cans and bottles to EZ Bottle and Can Return, and tell them you want to donate the deposit to the

Perinton Historical Society

EZ BOTTLE and CAN RETURN

1259 Fairport Road
Fairport, NY 14450
585-377-9140



Upcoming Events

All programs are at the Fairport Historical Museum

Tuesday, February 17, 7:00 p.m.

Program: *Myron Holley: Canal Builder, Abolitionist, Unsung Hero*

Presenter: Richard Reisem

Saturday, February 28, 2:00 p.m.

Event: Museum Volunteer Orientation

Hosts: PHS Volunteer Coordinator Sue Scheirer and
FHM Director Vicki Masters Profit

Tuesday, March 17, 7:00 p.m.

Program: The Slave Experience and the Underground Railroad
Presenter: Jerry Bennett

Tuesday, April 21, 7:00 p.m.

Program: An Evening with Andersonville Survivor
Oliver P. Clarke

Historic Preservation Commission Opening

Are you a Fairport resident and interested in historic preservation and architecture in our Village? If so, consider applying to serve on Fairport's Historic Preservation Commission. The Commission meets monthly to preserve and enhance the village's historic, architectural and cultural heritage by implementing its historic preservation policies and initiatives.

To be considered for this volunteer position, you must be willing to dedicate some time to researching and documenting a local property's historical and architectural significance. It is also advantageous for you to be proficient in computer usage, Microsoft Office applications and operating a digital camera.

To find out more about this position, you can contact chairperson Doris Davis-Fritsch by phone 585-755-6281 or email at dorisdfrisch@yahoo.com. You can also learn more information about the Historic Preservation Commission by going to the websites for the Village of Fairport at <http://www.village.fairport.ny.us/> and the Perinton Historical Society at www.perintonhistoricalsociety.org.

We look forward to working with you.



Annual Financial Report

By Linda Wiener

The following is a summary of the financial status of the Perinton Historical Society for the fiscal year ended August 31, 2014:

Income

| | |
|-----------------|-----------|
| Membership Dues | \$8,786 |
| Gift Shop | 4,297 |
| Scholarship | 3,170 |
| Grants | 3,142 |
| Donations | 2,461 |
| Special Events | 663 |
| Miscellaneous | 272 |
| Interest Income | <u>25</u> |

Total Income \$22,816

Expense

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Museum | \$6,133 |
| Building | 2,964 |
| Gift Shop | 2,236 |
| Historigram | 2,164 |
| Scholarship | 2,000 |
| Office Expense | 1,392 |
| Special Events | 886 |
| Membership | 730 |
| Programs | <u>440</u> |

Total Expense \$18,945

Net Income/(Loss) \$3,871

Net Assets:

| | |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| Cash & Equivalents | \$28,639 |
| Gift Shop Inventory | 6,112 |
| Community Foundation Funds | 82,860 |
| Deferred Revenue | <u>(5,981)</u> |

Net Assets \$111,630

Notes

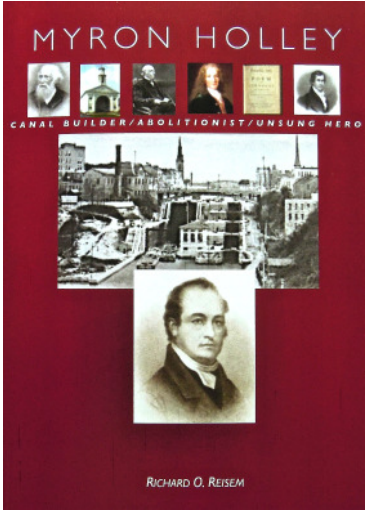
Cash & Equivalents includes \$1,545 for the PHS Scholarship Fund and funds in bank accounts and CDs that are available in one year or less. Of this \$18,383 was held in checking and money market accounts. The remainder is in CDs maturing at various times during the year. The Community Foundation Funds are available upon approval of the PHS Board of Directors. The interest and dividends earned are returned to PHS annually in the form of a grant totaling \$3,142 in 2014.

The primary sources of income are from membership dues, gift shop sales and grants & donations. Our primary expenses include museum operations, gift shop purchases for resale, scholarship and membership newsletter and programs.

PHS files and pays sales tax annually related to gift shop sales. It files 1099s annually and also files an Informational Return – 990-N with the IRS. PHS is registered with the New York State Charities Bureau, but is exempt from filing an annual return.



Non-Profit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Permit No. 149
Fairport, NY 14450



Richard Reisem talks about his book *Myron Holley: Canal Builder, Abolitionist, Unsung Hero* at the museum on Tuesday, February 17th. See page 3 for details.

Fairport Historical Museum

18 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY 14450

The museum is currently closed for the winter. Beginning on March 1st, it will open to the public on Saturdays, Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays at the hours below:

Saturday 9:00–11:00 a.m. Tuesday 2:00–4:00 p.m.
Sunday 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 **585-223-3989**.

www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org