

## ***Colonial Belle— Where Have You Been?***

*By Keith Boas*

*In 1961, the Blount Marine Company, a boat builder in Warren, Rhode Island, laid the keel for the Dolly Madison, an excursion vessel. The boat was launched on June 22nd of that year. Now at age 54, the boat—still in active service—is a Fairport icon, operating under the name Colonial Belle.*



Warren, Rhode Island:

The *Dolly Madison*, now the *Colonial Belle*, on the day she was launched by the Blount Marine Company

June 22, 1961

**T**he first owner of the *Dolly Madison* was the Wilson Line in Washington, D.C. Wilson ran sightseeing excursions to historic Mount Vernon and other tourist locations along the Potomac River.

Yet, for some unknown reason, the boat's stay on the Potomac was very short. In 1963, just two years after her construction, *Dolly* showed up in Florida. There, under the wing of the Gray Line Sightseeing Boats Company, she carried tourists through the Everglades and the Ocean Canal, located near Boca Raton. After brief service in Florida, she relocated up the Atlantic coast to Connecticut where she was used for sightseeing excursions and to ferry people to the 1964 World's Fair in New York.

Long-time Rhode Island resident Leeds Mitchell III, who worked on *Dolly* from 1964—1967, tells us that he was the

boat's first mate. "My duties included running the concession stand, handling the lines and providing relief driving for the captain, who was my father. *Dolly* was owned at that time by Riverboat, Inc. of Hartford, Connecticut, a company started by my father and his partner, Gifford Warner. She was berthed under the Charter Oak Bridge in Hartford, doing day trips and charters along the Connecticut River. And once a week, we did a trip to Long Island Sound, which, at a break-neck speed of ten knots, took most of the day. Charters were mainly corporate events and receptions, with the insurance industry and schools being a large part of the business."

Back then, *Dolly* also made trips to Newport, Rhode Island for the America's Cup races, taking people out to the course from Galilee in Narragansett.

*Continued on page 4*



## Comments from your President

~ **Bob Hunt** ~

It is another beautiful fall day in Fairport, and this morning I attended the PHS Property Committee meeting, where many items needing attention were discussed. The exterior painting promised in a recent *Historigram* will not be completed this year but will be rebid by the village this winter for painting in the spring. The tractor did not have the required credentials for dealing with lead paint. Other items on the agenda were to move the tool room into space in the furnace room, which will free up badly needed storage space for items the museum has in its possession. We are also planning to strip and re-wax the tile floors.

Congratulations go out to both the Scarecrow Committee and the House Tour Committee for outstanding volunteer time given to PHS. The scarecrow was, in my opinion, the best of show. The house tour attendance was the largest in recent years and brought in new members as a result. Well done by both committees.

In previous comments I have been telling about my ancestor, John Fillmore II as described in *The Narrative of Captain John Fillmore*, a brochure printed in 1837 by A.M. Clapp of Aurora, NY. You probably remember that John was a captive of the notorious pirate Captain John Phillips.

One day when they had failed in an attempt to overtake a fine merchant vessel, Phillips, in a rage, cut with his sword, eleven holes through John's hat and the skin of his head. On another occasion Phillips accused John of plotting against him and drew a concealed pistol from his coat, pointed it at John's breast and pulled the trigger. Happily for John (and for me for as I would not be here), the weapon misfired. Phillips re-cocked the pistol and again attempted to shoot, but struck the pistol aside and was unharmed.

John became more fearful and also more watchful of any attempt upon his life. He determined that if such an attempt were made, he would sell his life as dearly as possible. "About the end of the seventh month from my entering on board, we took a merchantman belonging to Boston commander, Captain Harridon, a young man about twenty-two years of age. The father of this young man was a merchant in Boston and had given his son the education requisite for a mariner and sent him to the West Indies as captain of the vessel called the 'Squirrel' of Cape Anne. This was a fine fast ship and Captain Phillips captured it as it was returning to Boston. Captain Phillips took this ship for his own operations and handed over his former ship to other members of his crew."

## HISTORIGRAM

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Proofreading: Irene Poray

John is credited with having formed a plan to overcome the pirate crew and take charge of the ship. When an opportunity arrived, the plan was put into action. There was a brief, bloody battle in which Captain John Phillips was dispatched. The pirates were overcome, and those still living were bound. The new crew brought the ship into Boston Harbor and handed it over to the authorities. All crewmembers were arrested and charged with "piracy, felony and robberies."

The trial was held at the Court of Admiralty, Boston, May 12, 1724, with the Honorable William Drummer, Esq. John Fillmore and Edward Cheeseman were the first prisoners to be brought before the court. Nine charges of "piracy, felony and robbery" were read. They pleaded "Not Guilty." Evidence was taken from other crewmembers and from the two "prisoners at the bar." After the trial the prisoners were taken away and "the Court was cleared and in private."

The Court, having duly weighed and maturely considered the evidence, unanimously agreed and voted that the said John Fillmore and Edward Cheeseman were "Not Guilty." The Court awarded John Fillmore a gun, a silver-hilted sword, a curious tobacco box, silver shoe and knee buckles and two gold rings the Captain Phillips used to wear. Of the eleven other persons tried, four were found "guilty" and sentenced to be executed. Seven others were found "not guilty."

John Fillmore was known as Captain John and "Cpt John Fillmore" is inscribed on his gravestone at the Plain Hill Cemetery, Franklin, Conn. John died February 22, 1777. About three years ago, I visited his grave at the cemetery and found his gravestone. It is also inscribed with—

Behold and see as you pass by  
As you are now so once was I  
As I am now so you must be  
Prepare for death & follow me.

In his will Captain John Fillmore mentions his wife Mary and all of his surviving children, fourteen in number. That's enough about my ancestry and my relationship to President Millard Fillmore. I had a great time researching this topic with my granddaughter.

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

Bob Hunt, President  
585-415-7053, [rhunt1@rochester.rr.com](mailto:rhunt1@rochester.rr.com)







Adrienne Lanni shows the lovely dining room in the Heisman home on Potter Place.

- Pat May for promoting the event and to Vicki Profitt and Bob Hunt for their support.
- The Perinton Town officials for being docents, organized by Barb Clay.
- The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts for their assistance at the Potter Memorial.
- The House Tour Committee, consisting of Jeanne Cole, Robin Ezell, Deb Mabry and Lucy McCormick— for their extensive and creative work in finding willing homeowners, conducting meetings, researching Potter history, enlisting docents, making gifts for homeowners and creating exhibits.



Helping explain the features of the Potter Memorial were Cameron Cannioto and Collin Granville from Boy Scout Troop 208.

## Thanks to House Tour Volunteers

*By Elaine Lanni*

A big thank you to everyone who helped make the House Tour featuring Potter Place a huge success. Thanks to—

- All the residents of Potter Place for maintaining their lovely houses and lawns.
- The seven homeowners who spruced up their houses and shared their beauty and architecture.
- The 56-plus docents who gave their time to attend meetings, learn the history of the homes, and greet more than 300 tour participants.
- The dedicated PHS members for their support in many ways; especially Jim Unckless for selling memberships in numerous venues and keeping tabs on new members and potential docents; and to Catherine Angevine and Doris Davis-Fritsch for the extensive architectural research provided and website coverage.



Digging history for 80 years plus and honoring the ten PHS founders were the themes of this year's PHS entry on Fairport's Scarecrow Festival. The design and construction team consisted of veteran builders Lucy McCormick, Dave and Sue Scheirer, Sue Templeton, Sue Broda, May Thomson, Anne Johnston, Sharon Catanese, and Ann and Harold Castle. We all had a howling good time recycling the ghosts of festivals past.

*Photo by Lucy McCormick*

*“Colonial Belle...” continued from page 1*

Leeds explains that making money with *Dolly* was not about to happen, at least not in 1960s’ Connecticut. “In spite of a lot of effort and advertising, the *Dolly Madison* never turned a profit, as the ‘gate’ never really materialized like we had hoped. The Connecticut River is largely unspoiled and quite scenic, but at the time, there was little interest in seeing it. And we were the ‘only show in town.’ Today, there are several tour boats on the river, so perhaps Riverboat, Inc. was just ahead of its time.”

From Hartford, *Dolly* later moved to New York City, where she was operated by Circle Line Sightseeing Cruises, running tours around the island of Manhattan.

Then came Boston. *Dolly*’s next owner was Boston Harbor Cruises. One of her duties there involved taking tourists out into the Atlantic Ocean on whale-watching excursions.

And later (the dates get rather sketchy here), she again was back in New York City—but not for long. She was soon sold to a California company, which hoisted her onto the deck of a freighter and shipped her, via the Panama Canal, all the way to San Francisco Bay. There she was renamed the *Franciscan* and was used for private charters and excursions primarily to the island of Alcatraz.

#### **We now “turn the page” to 1995.**

Responding to an ad in a boating publication announcing that *Dolly (Franciscan)* was again for sale, local canal tour boat owners Lee and Mona Poinan seriously considered purchasing the old boat to replace a smaller one they were using in their business. But before they bought *Dolly*, they had to figure out how they would get her to the Erie Canal. According to Lee, “We first had the idea to have her put on the deck of a freighter, the same way she had been previously shipped to California. We looked into the cost. Well, it didn’t take us long to forget that idea! At \$179,000 for shipping, the figure was just too much for us to swallow. And the freighter would have taken her only as far as New Orleans!”

Helping to solve the problem, a couple of Lee and Mona’s friends threw out another thought: “Why not just buy the thing and drive her home?” Now that seemed to make a lot more sense. Money soon changed hands to secure ownership. A crew was hired, extra fuel tanks were added (they filled the entire dinning room) and six thousand gallons of diesel oil were taken aboard. To further outfit *Dolly* for the open sea, extra fresh water and food were stock piled, along with a \$10,000 radio, which their insurance company forced them to purchase.

Finally, under *Dolly*’s own power, Lee’s brother and two professional sea captains, with required ocean-going licenses, piloted her down the Pacific coast to and through the huge Panama Canal. Lee stayed home to run his busy tour-boat business on the canal. While on the open sea, one of the captains was careless and collided with another ship. A portion of

*Dolly*’s side was pushed in nearly a foot and several windows were broken. But, fortunately, she was still seaworthy and the voyage continued.

While in Panama, that same captain apparently consumed too much of the local brew and pulled a knife on Lee’s brother. No harm done, but that man quickly lost his job. He was replaced by a friend of Lee’s who served as deck hand for the rest of the trip. On they went—next to Jamaica, then Miami and eventually up the coastline of the Atlantic, churning along, sometimes as far as 40 miles offshore to pick up the fast-moving Gulf currents. The crew was in a hurry, as hurricane season was fast approaching—thus the reason they chose the open water of the Atlantic, as opposed to the slower Intracoastal Waterway route.

Eventually, they reached New York City, went up the Hudson River to Waterford, the Erie Canal’s eastern entrance. They continued their journey to Cold Springs Harbor in Baldwinsville (near Syracuse) for some badly needed maintenance and refitting. The entire trip took about seven weeks.

From the Hudson to Syracuse on the canal, bridge clearance is 20 feet. But that’s not the case west of Syracuse, as the clearance drops to 16.5 feet. This meant that when the boat reached Syracuse, some refitting was needed. Originally, the boat had an enclosed bridge or pilot house. (See 1961 photo of *Dolly* on page 1.) Lee intelligently realized that the pilot house was not going to get along well with the canal’s low bridges west of Syracuse. Briefly stated, the bridge was too high for the bridges. So off it came, leaving only the dash and wheel. And now, for the past 20 years, Lee has been enjoying plenty of fresh air, along with occasional rain in his face, as he enthusiastically pilots his boat—in the open air.



#### **“Low bridge, everybody down...”**

When piloting the *Belle*, does Captain Lee duck his head while passing under bridges? To find out, take a ride, sit on the deck and see how many inches (if any) the captain has to spare at bridge-confrontation times.

**Tip:** Watch out for your own head, too.

Another modification made in Baldwinsville was the removal of the boat’s smokestack. An easy task, right? Simply reroute the exhaust to go out a side of the boat. Not so fast, said the U.S. Coast Guard. Plowing through a mountain of





The *Belle*, passing through Canal Lock E-32, west of Pittsford  
Recent photos of the *Colonial Belle* and Captain Lee Poinan  
by Keith Boas

Coast Guard regulations and paperwork added weeks to this refitting project.

The boat's final stop prior to arriving in Fairport was Inland Harbor, a marina just east of Geneva on the Seneca-Cayuga Canal. Workers there made repairs to the boat's crushed side and replaced the broken windows.

#### Why change the name of the boat again?

Before they purchased *Dolly Madison* (*Franciscan*), Lee and Mona Poinan operated another tour boat, which they had named—through a naming contest—the *Colonial Belle*. It was a good name and everyone liked it. Why go with something different? So move over *Dolly Madison* (*Franciscan* or whatever). Welcome *Colonial Belle*!

The boat has now been known as the *Colonial Belle* for 20 years. And whether she's charging through the Erie Canal's "high seas" during the day or relaxing through the night at the wharf at Packett's Landing, she definitely makes a picturesque sight. World traveler, now local resident, she's our *Colonial Belle*—the remarkable *Belle* of Fairport.

The *Colonial Belle*'s builder, Blount Marine Co. (now Blount Boats), was started in 1949 by Luther Blount. Luther ran the shipyard until he died at age 90 in 2006. When *Dolly* was built, she was the 72<sup>nd</sup> boat to come out of Luther's operation. A sister boat, the *Martha Washington*, was built by Bount at about the same time. It is also still in use.

Keel laid	April 27, 1961
Launched	June 22, 1961
Length	64 ft, 6 in.
Width	27 feet (32 feet on the beam)
Draft	6 feet (7 1/2 feet, according to the builder)
Engine	Single Screw, GM 871 diesel
Heads	2
Max speed	10 knots
Passengers	Capacity of 149
Crew	Average of 4
Schedule	Daily from mid-May through mid-November
Food & Bar	Snacks on short cruises. Occasional dinner cruises with catered cuisine. Full bar.
Winter storage	New York State Dry Dock in Lyons, NY



## New in the Museum Gift Shop— *Carl W. Peters Items*

The PHS has once again commissioned a Christmas ornament pertaining to local history. This year's ornament (\$10) features the Carl W. Peters mural which graces the interior of the Fairport Historical Museum. Other new Carl Peters items in the gift shop include bookmarks, magnets, greeting cards and artwork featuring our mural.

Check out our gift shop for other exciting gift ideas. We have everything from autographed books to Erie Canal playing cards, hurdy gurdies to historic postcard prints.



On November 22<sup>nd</sup> at the museum, local author Louis Malucci will be on hand to sign copies of his book *B-47 STRATOJET*.

For more information, see page 7.



## Vintage Tug Visits Fairport

The NYS Canal Corporation's 82-year-old tug *Syracuse* visited Fairport recently to perform the yearly inspection of the lift bridge. The history of the tug dates to 1933 when she was launched—see news clipping below—from the Barge Canal Terminal Shops in Syracuse. At the time, the 74-foot craft was the largest of its type built in the region.

Once in the water, she was outfitted with sixty tons of machinery, plus cabins and a pilot house. Originally powered by steam, the tug was later converted to diesel power, with an engine producing 575 HP. Currently, tug *Syracuse* has a crew of four, including her captain, Wendy Marble.



The tug *Syracuse* and her crew—docked in Fairport on October 6, 2015

Photos by  
Keith Boas

## Special Recognition Level Memberships

*As of October 18, 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>

**Fairport Village Inn, Wayne and Patty Beckwith**

103 North Main Street, Fairport

Phone: 585-388-011

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)

**Keith and Carol Anne Boas**

**Mr. and Mrs. R. Clinton Emery**

### Potter (\$250–\$499)

**Doug and Jean Whitney**

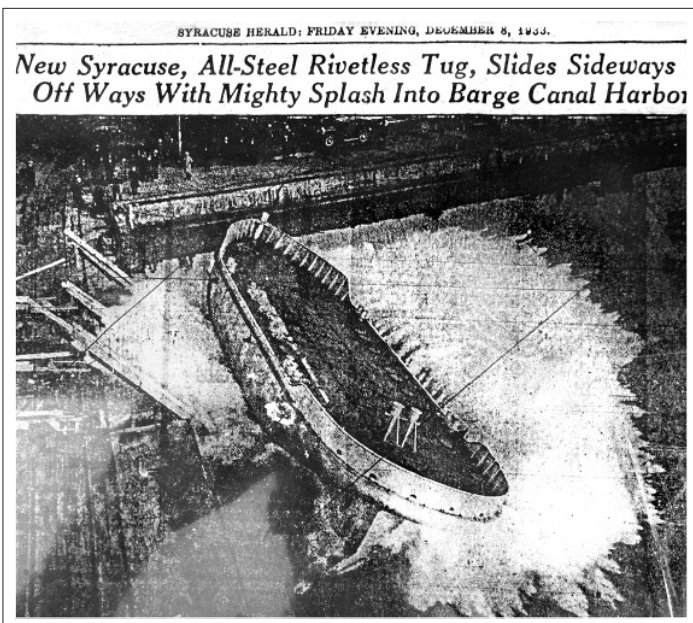
**Dave and Linda Wiener**

## RIT Museum Studies Students Visit Our Museum

Students from RIT visited the Fairport Historical Museum on October 9<sup>th</sup>. The visit was arranged by Dr. Tina Lent, Director of the RIT Museum Studies program.

Each year, the Museum Studies students tour 10–15 local museums and historical society facilities to learn about the differences among small, medium and large museums and the challenges each face. Dr. Lent, who had previously visited the Fairport Historical Museum and was impressed with what she saw, felt a visit from the students would be in order. Museum Director Vicki Masters Profitt headed a walking tour of the village, during which the students heard some of Fairport's history and watched the lift bridge being raised.

After the walk, the group headed back to the museum, where they were given a behind-the-scenes tour of the exhibits, program room and upstairs space. The students were very interested in learning about the museum's collections and various processes for donation intake and the creation of exhibits. We hope this will be the first of much collaboration between the RIT program and our museum!



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## Upcoming Events

**Tuesday, November 17<sup>th</sup> at the museum**

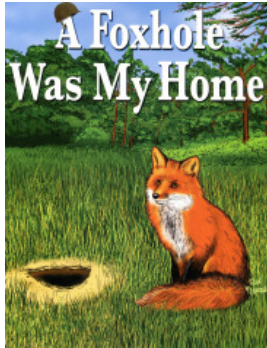
**6:00–7:00 p.m., *Yuletide Traditions***

Opening bids accepted for silent auction holiday items

**7:00 p.m., *Historic Highlights & Heartwarming Discoveries***. Presenter: Bill Poray

**Saturday, November 21<sup>st</sup>, 10:30–11:30 a.m. at the museum**

***Children's Craft*** with Suzanne Lee and a visit from Santa. Bring the kids to create a fun holiday-themed craft. Santa will be making an appearance during the craft time.



**10:30–11:30 a.m.**

***Book Signing***  
by Darrell C. Kilburn

This World War II veteran will sign copies of his book, *A Foxhole Was My Home*. The hardcover book sells for \$43.20. Cash and checks accepted.

**Sunday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2:30–3:30 p.m. at the museum**

***Book Signing*** by local author Louis Malucci

The author will sign copies of his book, *B-47 Stratojet*, which sells for \$26.00. Cash and checks accepted.

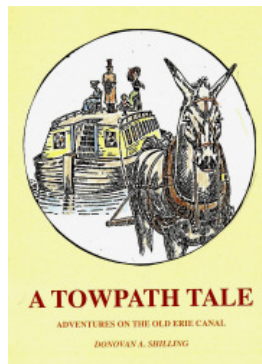
**Sunday, November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2:30–3:30 p.m. at the museum**

***Book Signing*** by author Michael Lasser. His books include *America's Songs: The Stories Behind the Songs of Broadway, Hollywood, and Tin Pan Alley* (\$33.00) and *America's Songs II: Songs from the 1890s to the Post-War Years* (\$30.00). Cash and checks accepted.

**Saturday, December 5<sup>th</sup>,**

**10:30–11:30 a.m. at the museum**

***Book Signing*** by author Donovan Shilling who will sign copies of *A Towpath Tale*, *Rochester's Movie Mania* and *Made in Rochester*, plus several other titles. Cash and checks accepted.



**Sunday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2:00–3:30 p.m. at the museum**

***Art Sale*** by Fairport artist Susan Prener who generously donated her original watercolor, *100 Years of Lift Bridge Inspiration*, to the Perinton Historical Society in 2014. At 2:00 p.m. the accessioned painting will be unveiled as part of the museum's collection. Susan will have her artwork available for sale until 3:30 p.m. Multiple pieces and prices. Credit cards accepted.

**Tuesday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, 6:00–7:00 p.m. at the museum**  
***PHS Yuletide Traditions***. Final bids accepted for the silent auction. Winners will be announced at the end of the evening's program.

**7:00 p.m., *Annual Holiday Party & Program: History of Band Organs & Christmas Sing-Along***

Presenter: Tim Wagner

Please bring a dessert to pass.



## Yuletide Traditions *Celebrating in Style*

**Y**uletide Traditions is back for its second year! Once again, the YT Committee approached area businesses, individuals and organizations who generously donated artificial Christmas trees, wreaths and gift baskets to the PHS. Those items will be silent-auctioned off, with bids being taken November 17<sup>th</sup> beginning at 6:00 p.m. and running through December 8<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. during open museum hours. Winners of the silent auctions will be announced following the December 8<sup>th</sup> annual holiday party and program. Please stop by to view and bid on the beautifully decorated donations and to support the local authors and artists who will be at the museum showcasing their works during this three-week event. Check the calendar listing for details. All proceeds from the silent auctions benefit the Perinton Historical Society. We appreciate your support!

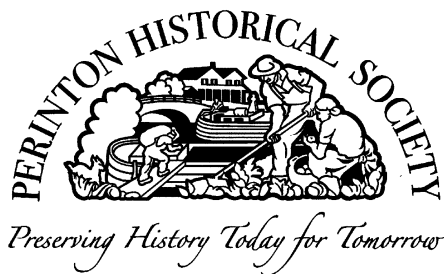
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## Historic Highlights and Heartwarming Discoveries–

***November 17<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 p.m., Fairport Museum***

**P**resenter Bill Poray will unveil new glimpses of our history from Perinton's backyards, attics and a treasure chest of photos tucked safely under a chair for decades. Researching these stories has resulted in unseen images, and new information about people and places in our community. This program will provide those in attendance with the opportunity to share in many discoveries, including paintings found during the demolition of the home of Carl Peters, 16 mm movies of Fairport and Perinton from the 1930s, early glass plate negatives unseen for decades, and a mysterious gravestone discovered in the backyard of an early village home.

Bill Poray is the Town of Perinton Historian, a trustee of the Perinton Historical Society, and editor of this publication.



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U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
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Fairport, NY 14450



## Art Sale

December 6<sup>th</sup>  
2:30–3:30 p.m. at the Museum

See page 7 for details.

*Watercolor painting of Fairport's  
historic lift bridge by Fairport artist  
Susan Prener*

## Fairport Historical Museum

18 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY 14450

The museum is open to the public on the days and hours listed below:

Saturday 10:00 a.m.–Noon	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](http://www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org)**