



# Perinton Historical Society HISTORIGRAM

18 Perrin Street  
Fairport, NY 14450

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585-223-3989

## The Cox Shoe Factory Strike of 1890: The Company Part 2 of 3

Industry in the 19th century, like their counterparts today, rely on orders from stores and customers to keep their workers busy. When times are slow, workers are layed-off for a time until sales pick up and the workers recalled. In the 1800's there was no unemployment insurance so the effects of prolonged unemployment had a devastating effect on the American worker.

In May of 1890, orders for shoes at the Cox factory dropped. As a result, the managers decided to lay-off the ten to twelve leather cutters until sales picked up. The next week the managers at the plant decided to build up their surplus stock by 3 to 4 thousand pairs of shoes to avoid more lay-offs in the shop. For this limited run only four of the cutters were recalled.

The four cutters, whose names are now lost to history, refused to come to work unless all twelve cutters came back with the work spread amongst the twelve workers. The supervisors, who felt they should manage the factory and the work schedule, refused to recall all of the cutters and fired the four cutters who refused to come back to work. After a short union meeting, it was decided to call a strike at the Fairport plant for the day after Memorial Day 1890.

The strike soon spread to the Cox factory in Rochester where sympathetic workers walked off the job.

After the general strike was called, issues from both sides began to take shape. On the laborer's side were at least six separate unions representing the workers. The demands were for fair wages and a uniform wage scale for all Cox workers. They also demanded wage concessions for those skilled laborers who were displaced by new machinery, in particular the McKay lasting machines.

On management's side was the Boot and Shoe Manufacturer's Association representing 21 footwear manufacturers in the city of Rochester. At the time, Rochester was the third largest shoe manufacturing center in the country. The Association gave moral and financial support to Patrick Cox to resist the strike and press for progressive business practices, and continued automation of his factory.

A State Board of Mediation and Arbitration was set up to help resolve the strike. Neither side budged from their position for many months.

Just days after the strike, non union workers from the city were hired for the Fairport plant. They came into the village by train which was only a block from the factory. In July there were threats against these workers at the station by union workers and the Monroe County sheriff's department was called in to protect the strike breakers. In a little less than three months, Patrick Cox was able to hire enough non union workers to keep the factory going at full capacity. There were stories of union workers posing as non-union laborers, being hired and then ruining the machinery, and of sympathetic workers adding brick dust to the ink used to color the shoes so it

### ≡≡≡ *Our Mission* ≡≡≡

*"The Mission of the Perinton Historical Society is to promote Community interest in the preservation of local records, structures and artifacts for posterity, and for the enlightenment of the people of our town of Perinton."*

# P. Cox Shoe MANUFACTURING CO.

ROCHESTER, N. Y., FAIRPORT, N. Y., AND NEW YORK CITY.



Above represent a few of the leading lines we carry a full stock of, in all sizes and widths, at our

NEW YORK SALESROOMS, 78 Reade and 177 Church St.

“P.Cox Shoe Company advertisement 1886.”

### Cox Strike (continued from previous page)

would not stick to the leather.

Then in late November of 1890 the Boot and Shoe Manufacturer’s Association made a fatal mistake. The 21 shoe manufacturers of the association staged an industry wide lock out of all workers in Rochester to force a settlement at the Cox plants. This caused the AFL (American Federation of Labor), which supported the striking workers, to call for a nationwide strike of it’s 50,000 to 60,000 members.

With a national strike looming, Samuel Gompers, AFL labor leader, came to Rochester on December 15th to try and resolve the strike. The workers made 3 demands: 1) The strike in Fairport must be settled. 2) Wages in the Cox factories should be adjusted. 3) The present non-union employees would be discharged at the Cox factories.

Things moved quickly after that, and almost six months to the day, the strike was settled in late December of 1890. The company ended up making several concessions to the workers and the Cox Shoe Manufacturing Company was open again to union workers.

Next month: *The Aftermath.*

## March Meeting to Feature an Architectural Trip Down New York State

Join us on March 13 at 7:30 p.m. in the Fairport Museum for a colorful armchair journey to some of New York State’s most loved architecture. Andy Olenick and Dick Reisem will take you on a power point adventure traveling through the state from Long Island to Buffalo showing you some of the architectural treasures the state has to offer. Both author and photographer for the newly released book *Historic New York: Architectural Journeys in the Empire State*, will share their experiences and favorite stories about their adventures writing and photographing this coffee table book.

Historic New York begins in Long Island, home to some of the finest estates, and meanders westward ending in the Niagara Frontier with its famous falls and fort. In between, the 244 page book visits every region of the state, documenting its architectural treasures in more than 300 full color photographs.

More than five years in the making, this book is the third Olenick-Reisem collaboration published by the Landmark Society. The celebrated team is renowned for their outstanding photography books on local and regional architecture, including the award-winning *Erie Canal Legacy* and the best selling *200 Years of Rochester Architecture and Gardens*.

Most locations in the book were photographed on several different occasions to capture the precise lighting and time of the year that will showcase that structure the best. “Lighting, in my mind, is the secret,” explains Andy Olenick, a seasoned magazine and commercial photographer. “When you have dramatic lighting on a building it accentuates the fine details and evokes emotions.”

Embellishing the photographs are Dick Reisem’s mini-histories of each site. A retired Kodak executive and life-long student of architecture, Reisem weaves together pity architectural reviews with dramatic tales of altruism, daring, and carnage. He tells of an attempted assassination, a surprise pre-dawn attack, and the competition to construct the tallest building in the

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world—stories that bring each location to life.

The book explores landmarks that are all open to the public, such as house museums, public buildings, churches, office buildings or other sites that can be visited. A helpful list of telephone numbers and web addresses for any site with regular visiting hours is included.

The Landmark Society of Western New York is one of the country's oldest and most respected preservation organizations. Support for this project was also provided by the New York State Council on the Arts and the Preservation League of New York.

If you already own the book, you can bring it with you and have it signed by the authors. If after you see the presentation you would like to buy the book, they will be available for sale after the meeting.

## Mark Your Calendars

- ~ **March 13** - A trip down historic New York State by photographer Andy Olenick photographer of the new Landmark Society book *Historic New York*. 7:30 p.m. in the Fairport Museum.
- ~ **March 18** - Open House and Grand Reopening of the Fairport Museum. Refreshments and continual tours of new displays. 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
- ~ **April 29** - Spring House Tour. Fairport's West Street neighborhood. 1:00 to 5:00 p.m..
- ~ **May 15** - Annual Perinton Historical Society Picnic at Perinton Park.

## Fairport Museum Open House & Grand Reopening

It's been a long winter especially for our curator Bill Keeler. The museum has been closed to the public in January and February but Bill has been hard at work building displays, redesigning exhibits and pulling long forgotten artifacts out of the attic. The result is a totally reorganized museum. This is the first major exhibit change since the Perinton Historical Society moved into the building 28 years ago.

On Sunday, March 18 there will be a grand reopening and open house for members and visitors. From 1:00 to 4:00 Bill Keeler will be talking non-stop to anyone who will listen explaining the stories behind the exhibits and throwing in some local history as well. Visitors can drop in, listen for awhile, drop off to take a closer look at an interesting display, or take a break downstairs where there will be refreshments of punch and cookies.

The former Victorian parlor has been changed to displays about domestic and social life in this community in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Collections that have been exhibited for short periods of time and then put away, now have permanent display space. Long forgotten collections like Ms. Bolton's hat pin and decora-

tive shoe collection, the George Lawrence collection of rare pharmaceutical herbs and plants, and the two foot high silver Spalding Trophy awarded to the 1907 Perinton Town Baseball Team are all on display. Everything has been described with interpretive signing and pictures.

The north wing is now dedicated to the History of Fairport and Perinton. There are the old favorites like the coopers tools from a shop in the village and the collection of bottles and cans of products made in Fairport. New to the museum are inventions made in Fairport, a section dedicated to the DeLand family, urban renewal, celebrations such as Old Home Week and the Perinton Sesquicentennial and a special display board composed by Leonard Sayles former resident and son of Robert Sayles who owned a men's wear store on South Main Street. The plaque describes life in Fairport in the 20's and 30's from the eyes of a child with a picture of Leonard as a baby with his father in front of Sayles Men's Wear Store.

Take some time on March 18...stop in and have a look at our new displays.

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## Fairport House Tour 2007

All members are invited to the annual Perinton Historical Society House Tour on April 29 from 1 to 5 p.m. Traditionally, our house tour was held in the Fall. This year, co-chairs, John Jongen and Bill Barry are trying something new...a spring house tour.

There will be 8 to 10 period homes all located on historic West Street off West Church Street just a short two blocks from the village four corners. West Street is simply a beautiful review of 19th century charm. "This is not just a tour. This is a 19th century neighborhood tour" say Bill Barry this year's tour chair. Visitors will see all stages of restoration and architectural styles along with interesting fences, porches, gardens and carriage barns.

Repeating last year's format you are encouraged to begin your tour at 12:30 p.m. at the Deland Community Center on South Main Street next to the First Baptist Church. There you will hear Peter McDonough, president of the Perinton Historical Society, weave a tale about what Fairport and West Street were like in the mid 1800's. New this year will be a concluding site; the Green Lantern Inn. Here house visitors may gather in the restored dining rooms of the famous Henry DeLand family mansion and compare personal notes on their tour. Refreshments of wine and cheese will be available for purchase.

Fairport is called "The Jewel on the Erie Canal." The house tour and our Society are rich parts of this Fairport tapestry. "Increasing our membership and interest in preservation is very important to us and the annual tour helps us with those goals." says John Jongen co-chair. This is an exciting event for Fairport and brings in new members for us that keeps our organization vital and relevant to the community.

Brochures, which are coming in the mail to members in place of the April Historigram, are your ticket to the event. Please bring them with you to the tour. The tour is free to members but is \$10.00 for non-members who receive free membership for the year. If you know a non-member who would like to go on the tour, encourage them to pick up a ticket at the museum during normal hours or call the Fairport Museum at 223-3989 for additional locations where tickets may be purchased. This should be another fantastic house tour. Don't miss it.

## Society Receives Largest Donation Ever

Last December, the Perinton Historical Society received a substantial monetary gift from Leonard Sayles of Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. A well-known expert on American Industrial Management and Behavior, Leonard Sayles, who was raised in Fairport in the late 20's and early 30's, made this gift to give something back to the community where he had so many pleasant childhood memories.

Leonard Sayles is the son of Robert and Rose Sayles who lived on Dewey Ave. Robert Sayles had a men's wear store on South Main Street which later became Rudin's Men's and Boys' Wear. Leonard lived in Fairport during the Great Depression and has vivid memories of walks along the Erie Canal, climbing the tower on the Main Street lift bridge and watching chocolate being made at the Fairport Candy Kitchen. After the death of his father, Leonard and his mother moved to Rochester around 1937. Accounts of Leonard's life in Fairport have been written down and are now part of our business display in the Fairport Museum.

A graduate of Monroe High School, Leonard won a four year scholarship to the University of Rochester and graduated with highest distinction. He received a doctorate from M.I.T., became an Assistant Professor at Cornell University and full Professor at the University of Michigan and Columbia University. Leonard was also an adviser to NASA in the late 1960's. Leonard Sayles has written or co-authored over a dozen books and articles relating to industrial behavior and management issues. He lives with his wife Kathy in Dobbs Ferry, NY and winters in Naples, Florida.

The Society's Board has not decided what to do with the donation, but has discussed about using it for educational purposes. Some ideas were to revive the local 4th grade local history program making it more relevant to the new Social Studies Standards, or perhaps developing a presentation about local history which could be shown in our schools.

The Society is sincerely grateful to Leonard for his generous gift to the Perinton Historical Society and our community.

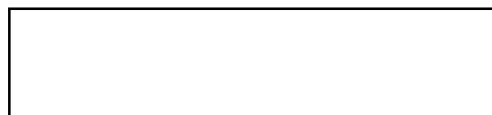




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## **FAIRPORT HISTORICAL MUSEUM**

**18 PERRIN STREET, FAIRPORT, NY 14450**

### **REGULAR HOURS**

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

The first two Mondays of every month the Archives open for  
Community Researchers only from 8 a.m. to noon.

Visit our website:

[www.angelfire.com/ny5/fairporthistmuseum](http://www.angelfire.com/ny5/fairporthistmuseum)

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