

HISTORIC PROGRAM



Perinton Historical Society
18 Perrin Street
Fairport, New York 14450

*Home of the Fairport
Historical Museum*

Newsletter for the Perinton Historical Society

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Editor: William Keeler

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What's with the Mulberry Tree?

Article by John Jongen,

Perinton Historical Society Trustee

That is the question I have been asked since the unfolding of the recent public disagreement between two Fairport Neighbors over saving a purported historic White Mulberry (*Morus Alba Muticaulis*) tree. The question raises a number of issues about the stewardship of the natural environment.

The incident involved the disputed removal of a mature Mulberry tree on the property line of two houses on West Church Street. The incident leaves our community to deal with the larger issue of when a tree, especially one with

THE MISSION OF THE PERINTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY IS TO PROMOTE COMMUNITY INTEREST IN THE PRESERVATION OF LOCAL RECORDS AND ARTIFACTS FOR POSTERITY, AND FOR THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE PERINTON COMMUNITY.

historic pedigree, can be removed? After all there are no statues that address 'treejacking' as such.

Few would argue that this Mulberry tree, growing near the busy intersection of routes 250 and 31F, provided an aesthetic respite from the increasing commercialization of the area. To nearby tenants and residents it provided shade and dust protection, reduced summer heat and noise and, let's not forget, produced fresh oxygen!

But then there is also the question of the tree's historical importance. Fairport's Mayor Clark King put the issue in perspective when he said that 'if the tree was really a descendant of the original trees from 'Mulberry Grove' it's too bad that it is gone and the loss is Fairport's.

White Mulberry trees grow in many places throughout our town and are purported to be the descendent of a Mulberry grove of an attempted silkworm business in Fairport in 1828. Here is an account by Fairport historian Dr. A. Porter S. Sweet:

"Abishai Goodell, a Fairport merchant, was one of the first to learn about the 'Morus alba muticaulis' tree. This new mulberry tree imported from the Philipines, grew with amazing rapidity in our climate and had an abundance of

enormous leaves upon which silkworms flourished. Even staid, conservative Congress directed attention to the profits to be made by producing silk threads from silkworms". It would cost from \$1.50 to \$2.00 a pound to produce raw silk, which would sell from \$4 to \$5 a pound. Goodell, along with thousands of others were led to believe 'every house would have cocooneries attached, its silkworms...yielding two, three, or four crops of cocoons per year...wives and daughters...were to reel the silk, and perhaps spin and twist it, till silk became as cheap as cotton.'

Abishai plunged into this fascinating new business. His large mulberry orchard began at the southeast corner of South Main and East Church Streets. His factory was built where the old Post Office now stands.

Unfortunately, the silk boom collapsed completely. A disease that was impossible to control appeared and killed many of the trees and the cold New York winters killed many more. There are however a number of monuments to Abishai Goodell's venture: self-sown descendants of his trees still grow in Fairport.

In China, White Mulberry was, and still is, used to rear silkworms, its leaves are used as their food source.

All attempts to raise silkworms in the U.S. have failed.

The Shakers, a religious sect in North America, attempted several times to establish silk production at their colonies in Kentucky and other states. After failing several times with native tree species, they imported White Mulberry trees, planting around the village and harvesting the leaves to feed the worms. The silk industry again failed, but the White Mulberries had already been naturalized.

Today, White Mulberry trees are abundant near the old Shaker villages. White Mulberry was apparently present in North America early enough that anthropologists recorded the use of the tree for medicine and food by the Cherokees Native Americans.

The White Mulberry flowers in March or April. It is polygamodioecious, i.e. male and female flowers occur on the same tree and therefore does not require another tree to bear fruit. The fruits are multiple drupes and ripen in June and July. It is a prolific fruiting species and birds flock to them. Seeds are quickly and widely dispersed by birds and foraging mammals. They may germinate the same year or in later years. Growth is rapid, and the trees rarely live more than 80 years.

White Mulberry trees can reach 60-75 feet.

The White Mulberry in my garden has survived two major ice storms and severe winter conditions in its exposed location. After the storms it sustained significant breaks and stress cracks that required extensive pruning. But it happily developed new branches at the cuts and regained much of its former shape.

Around the Fourth of July the many bird species, squirrels and raccoons that feast on the fruit scatter the seeds which results in a few dozen seedlings in the fall. Eventually I use the 3-year old plants to fill holes in our hedgerows. In this area the tree has no obvious pests. Foliage remains shiny and green through the three seasons then turns yellow before it drops.

White Mulberry trees observed in the Fairport area all appear to be of the same species, *morus alba muticaulis*. Because the species was deemed to be a messy, nuisance tree, tree nurseries have not made them available to the general public. Therefore we can reasonably conclude that the White Mulberry trees in our area are the direct descendants of Abishai Goodell's failed silk worm venture, 175 years ago.

So the unfortunate removal of the White Mulberry tree is indeed Fairport's loss. While the preservation of trees on private property cannot be legislated we, the residents, have a responsibility to preserve our tree heritage. If we would accord our trees the same sensitive treatment that we provide our antiques, and our historic homes, we can also nurture a population of healthy trees as our legacy for future generations to enjoy.

...and More on Mulberries.

Besides Abishai Goodell's factory on the corner of Main and Church Streets, there reportedly was a factory at the corner of Baird and Whitney as well. In a supervisor's report from 1841 to 1845, there are entries for five Perinton farmers who raised silk worms and mulberry trees. They were Abishai Goodell, Zera Burr, Justice Beardsley, Charles Dickenson and Elisha Marlett.

The following poem is from the *Genesee Farmer* published in Rochester, New York on page 42 of the February 7, 1835 issue, extolling the virtues of raising mulberry trees and using the leaves to raise silkworms.

To Farmers

If ye aspire to wealth and ease,
 Stock well your farm with
 mulberry trees,
 The silk-worm will their worth
 unfold
 And coin their foliage into gold
 Suppose that you have never
 known
 And are not curious to be shown
 The simple culture of the worm;
 Your neighbors may the thing
 perform
 And then the leaves, which you
 produce,
 In skillful hands become of use,
 The farmer who would make
 pretense
 To task, should have a hedge-row
 fence;
 No tree that's known, so quickly
 grows,
 Or looks so uniform in rows.
 It springs from cuttings or from
 seeds,
 It overcomes poor soils and weeds;
 And in four years will make a
 fence,
 With, of all things, the least
 expense.
 And when, instead of walls and
 rails,
 The mulberry hedge around
 prevails,
 The lands produce a mine of
 wealth,
 Employment, happiness and
 health.

The mulberry grows on every soil,
 Requires but little acid or toil
 And the best silk is always found,
 Produced from the leaves off
 sandy ground;
 While a rich soil will leaves
 produce;
 Abounding in watery juice,
 And upon which, if worms be fed,
 They make a coarse and brittle
 thread.

William Matthews, Society President, Passes Away.

With deep regret and sadness, the members and officers of the Perinton Historical Society say farewell to our beloved president William Matthews, who passed away 10-21-2003 at 10:30 AM.

Bill was our charismatic leader since 1996 when he was elected the president of the Perinton Historical Society. A member of many organizations, Bill had a special place in his heart for the Society and the Museum.

As head of the Executive Committee, he would start every Society meeting with his "historic five minutes" where he would entertain us with stories about such diverse historical topics as the Pan American Airlines, the Butler Opera House and the

Matthews Building Movers many projects.

The museum has been updated through Bill's efforts. Three restrooms have been remodeled or modified by Bill; the kitchen has been remodeled, and he was instrumental in negotiating with the village in maintaining the outside of the building from the bricks to the most recent project of blacktopping the driveway and sealing it.

In the village you can visit the station master's office, which was a former trolley waiting station Bill arranged to have moved to the village. At Potter Memorial you can visit the outhouse, which was moved from East Church Street and see the brick work Bill did to repair the structure.

What we will miss most is Bill's sense of humor and his "take charge" attitude. He was a man of his word and he made things happen. The Society will miss Bill's imagination and drive.

ADDITIONAL DONATIONS TO THE SOCIETY

- In honor of Lorain Francis of Rainy Day Mercantile and Jean Keplinger, Historian for their wonderful programs presented to Morning Circle, 1st Congregational Church of Fairport.

Upcoming Perinton Society Meeting Speakers

- ❑ Tuesday November 11th, a presentation by Howard Ford on *Stories Behind Historical Markers of Central New York*. 7:30 PM at the Fairport Historical Museum, 18 Perrin Street.
- ❑ Tuesday December 9th, Christmas Program. 7:30 PM at the Fairport Museum
- ❑ Tuesday January 13th *In Search of the Lost Powers Orchestrion* an intriguing presentation by Craig Smith. Joint meeting with the Fairport Library at 7:15 PM.

What I Left Out: Walter Parce and His Gas Well.

This is one of a series of articles written by Bill Keeler about pictures found in the book *Perinton, Fairport and the Erie Canal*. Page numbers in the articles refer to page numbers in the book.

The influence of Walter Parce in Perinton can be seen throughout the book *Perinton, Fairport and the Erie Canal*. Page 83 shows his company Walter A. Parce and Co. listed as proprietors of Fairport Mineral Spring Water. As promoter, Walter may very well have coined the phrase "Crystal Rock Mineral Spring Water...the King of Table Waters and Nature's Sovereign Remedy." His stock certificate in the company

is on page 85 and on page 48 he is seen with his wife and son Donald when he was a part owner in the Snow & Parce Clothing Store. Walter Parce's crowning achievement was the founding of Despatch now called East Rochester in 1897 Chapter 4. His picture on page 36 shows Parce as president of the Vanderbuilt Improvement Company.

It seems that any scheme, that promoted the community or made money in the late 1890's and early 1900's, was championed by Walter Parce.

A little known venture of his was the drilling for gas and oil in the eastern section of Perinton in 1905. In the late 19th and early part of the 20th century, gas and oil had been discovered and pumped in western Pennsylvania and was being used for lighting, heating fuel, lubrication and fuel for the newly developed automobile. Not much was known about the location of oil and gas deposits, so every community in the country was a potential oil field.

There were two competing companies in Perinton vying for mineral and drilling rights and Walter A. Parce was the prime mover in securing options in the eastern part of town. 7,000 acres were secured by his company protecting the

company's interests in case gas or oil was discovered.

Drilling began in the winter of 1905 on the Ayrault farm where the Fairport High School now stands. A large derrick was erected and a test well was sunk to look for gas.

According to Yale Parce, Walter's son, the test well was drilled to a depth of 2,752 feet at a cost of \$6,000. Gas was struck at a depth of 900 feet but there is no record of any attempt to pump the gas for commercial use.

The Fairport Museum has the set of well borings from this venture on the second floor of the museum. There are 16 small jars of soil samples with the depth in which they were found labeled on the bottom of each.

Walter Parce died in June of 1930 in Reno, Nevada. At the time, he was identified with the Hecla Mining Extension of Wallace, Idaho and treasurer of the Como Mining Company.

Fairport Facts

Tornadoes are not common in New York State but in late April of 1934 a "twister" struck the Baird Road area near the Midvale School. It started near the school and traveled north for a few hundred feet spreading parts of George Steffen's cold frames and greenhouses as far as 50 feet away.

Presentation at the November Meeting to be on the *The Stories Behind the Historical Markers in Central New York.*

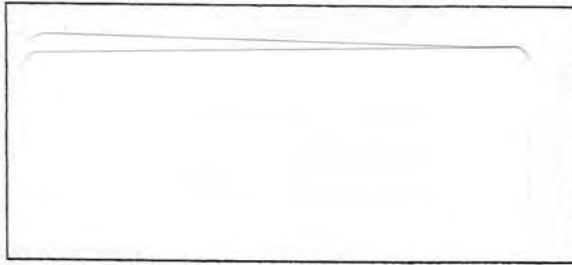
By Bernadette McDonough

Tuesday November 11th at the Fairport Museum at 7:30 PM there will be a presentation by Howard Ford of Syracuse, NY on the *Stories Behind Historical Markers of Central New York.*

In his presentation, Mr. Ford will discuss the legends, myths and histories that lay behind historical markers.

Howard became fascinated by the blue and gold and yellow historical markers that he encountered along the highways of Central New York. However, he soon found that the signs did not give enough information to satisfy his curiosity. He then began to study the events or people involved in the markers.

In his presentation, Mr. Ford will share some captivating stories behind relevant and memorable markers sharing stories of past events from the Iroquois League to the end of the 19th century. He will also be selling his book *Sure Signs* after the meeting.



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Perinton Historical Society
18 Perrin Street
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FAIRPORT HISTORICAL MUSEUM IS OPEN

18 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY 14450

- Tuesday 2 P.M. to 4 P.M.
- Thursday 7 P.M. to 9 P.M.
- Sunday 2 P.M. to 4 P.M.
- The first two Mondays of every month the Archives
are open for Researchers Only
8 A.M. to Noon
- Visit our website at:
<http://www.angelfire.com/ny5/fairporthistmuseum/>

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Call 223-3989 and leave a message.*