



# PERINTON HISTORIGRAM

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EDITOR

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## Calendar of Coming Events

Tuesday, April 16 -- "Brief History of the Erie Canal" by John R. Groves, 7:30 p.m.  
at the Museum. (Details below.)

Tuesday, May 14 -- Annual Picnic. (Details next month.)

## "Brief History of the Erie Canal" by John R. Groves.

One of the treasures of New York State is the Erie Canal. We as a community in Fairport are always eager to learn more about it. Our April program will give us that opportunity.

Our speaker, John R. Groves, is a graduate of the Rochester Institute of Technology who has worked in graphics most of his life. His informal talk will cover the history of the canal from about 10,000 years ago to the present. It will include the geology, history, infrastructure and "what's new" about the canal. He has even offered at some later date an opportunity for those interested to participate in a field trip called "The Three Locks." It takes about four hours spent visiting Erie Canal locks of the three major periods.

Come to the Merriman-Clark Room at 7:30 p.m. on April 16 to enjoy another great evening of learning more about our historical heritage.

## Recent Donations to the Museum

If you attended last month's society meeting you may have noticed and read some of the old newspapers from a recent gift to the museum. The headlines gave a sampling of world events in the early 20th century. D-Day from the Times-Union of 6-6-1944, the San Francisco Earthquake in 1906 and the electrocution of Leon Czolgosz, assassin of President McKinley in 1901 are just a few of the newspapers on display.

Two 19th century papers were of special interest. The display included the complete bound 1855 edition of Moore's Rural New Yorker which was published in Rochester. This popular newspaper was read by the largely farming population of the United States. The articles include the latest in labor saving machinery, new strains of fruits and vegetables, and practical farming advice. The second paper from the 19th century was the 4th edition of the Savannah Daily Loyal Georgian published in December of 1864, shortly after the city's fall to General Sherman's troops. On the front page are Sherman's General Orders to the populace of the city concerning curfews and addressing grievances.

Last month the museum received several photographs which give us a glimpse of early Fairport life. Mrs. Richard Roberts of Victor donated a photograph of a group of

horsemen who marched in the Old Home Week parade in 1908 and may have later competed in the races held 8-4-1908. Another donation by Richard Forster included a picture of the outside of the old Forster Pulley Works that operated around 1901. The pulley works occupied the building located on Parce Avenue before the Sanitary Can Company bought it in 1904.

All these items will be processed soon and added to our collections.

### Report of March Meeting

Alan and Mary Isselhard delighted a large audience at the March meeting of the society with their tales of sleighing in New York State. They had brought with them many artifacts and photographs relating to sleighing. We were pleased that some members of the audience had also brought items of interest such as sleigh bells, pictures, and stories.

The Isselhards' hobby of collecting sleigh-related materials started when they went to purchase a cider press at an antique sale and found there an old sleigh, which they bought. Since that time they have added greatly to their collection. They have also done a lot of research into the history of sleighs, although it is difficult to find anything as sleighs were always a "stepchild" of the carriage industry.

Many pioneers came this way from New England, traveling in the dead of winter to settle in western New York. There were many reasons why they traveled in the winter in sleighs rather than in wagons at another time of year: one horse can pull eight times as much weight on a sleigh than on a wagon; a sleigh is easier to fix than a wagon; sleighs can go where there are no roads; they could avoid the spring mud; it was easier to cross a frozen stream in areas where there were no bridges; they could not afford a wagon but could afford a sleigh; it was easier to see through the trees for dangers such as Indians and wild animals when there were no leaves to hide them.

"Sleigh" is a generic term to cover any vehicle to be pulled through the snow. The most common type of sleigh is a cutter. Alan showed us examples of various types of cutters, the most popular being the Portland cutter and the Albany cutter. There was even one called the "booby hut" which was enclosed and was used in the Boston area by the well-to-do. Some of the terms used for sleigh parts are much like those used for automobiles -- "dash" was in front of the sleigh and protected the driver from ice kicked up by a "dashing" horse; "fender" on each side of the dash protected from side swiping by branches.

Mary Isselhard then gave us a demonstration of various types of sleigh bells. Most bells came from Connecticut; East Hampton was the bell capital of the world. Some bells were meant to be strapped on the horse. There was a law that a sleigh traveling at night had to have bells, for obvious reasons. The bells she showed us (and some which were brought in by the audience) had wonderful melodic rings, all of different tones. Other items used on sleighs were plumes of dyed horse hair for decoration and sleigh blankets, also made of horse hair or of buffalo hide, which were very heavy.

Alan read some newspaper accounts of sleighing accidents, some of which were hilarious and others tragic. He showed us a Sears, Roebuck catalog of 1920 which listed cutters for sale, some for less than \$20. Studebaker made carriages and sleighs before they made cars. Locally, Cunningham & Son, a carriage manufacturer, made sleighs by order only. They later began to manufacture custom cars until the time of the depression.

Report of March Meeting (continued)

Old sleighs can be found displayed at the Shelbourne Museum in Vermont, at the Granger Homestead in Canandaigua, at Genesee Country Museum, at the Farmers Museum in Cooperstown, and at a museum in Stony Brook, Long Island.

Some good books about sleighs which the Isselhards recommend are: Sleighs -- The Gentle Transportation, by Carlo Italiano, published by Tundra Books in Montreal; Horse Drawn Sleighs, by Susan Green; Flexible Flyer and Other Great Sleds by Joan Palicia. Alan Isselhard also noted that the worst thing you can do with an old sleigh is to keep it outdoors as a decoration. It should be under cover or it will soon deteriorate.

Even though we had no snow on the ground that night, it was fun to contemplate what it must have been like to zoom along in one of the old sleighs, with the bells tinkling merrily. We were thrilled to have the Isselhards with us, to share their stories, and to learn much of this form of transportation of long ago.

We enjoyed delicious refreshments provided by Helen Matthews and her helpers.

Society to Add Staff in June

The Perinton Historical Society membership has grown in recent years to its highest level since its founding in 1935. Our museum is busier and research questions have increased significantly this past year. Unfortunately, the number of volunteers stepping up to provide these essential services has not been forthcoming.

Retirements by key volunteers have opened up needs for volunteer coordinator, house tour coordinator, director, education associate, secretary and editor for our newsletter. To help insure that the society will be able to provide these services to the membership, the Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee voted to hire Bill Keeler for the upcoming season to coordinate the society's many activities and fill in when volunteers cannot be found. Bill will be keeping office hours in the museum from 9 to 1 every first and second Monday of the month to work on society projects and help walk-in researchers.

This contract will last for one year and will be reviewed by society officers at the end of the year. At that time a decision will be made whether to keep or eliminate certain programs that no longer have volunteer support.

A Report from Society President Bill Matthews

Recently I read that the National Museum of American History has some 3.2 million objects in its collection. Of course, we don't have anywhere near that number -- it just seemed that way as we moved artifacts and furniture upstairs, downstairs, and from side to side in preparation for cleaning and waxing the main floor at 18 Perrin Street. As I write, the job is about half done, but when you read this we expect everything to be back in place. Pieter Smeenk has been doing the floor cleaning and polishing. Assisting in moving our treasures we want to thank Curator Bill Keeler, Museum Director Matson Ewell, Anne and Geoff Johnston, Jim Unckless, John Jongen and Helen Matthews.

Taking advantage of the upheaval, I did some dusting and polishing of the panelling and woodwork, and that gave me time to reflect on those craftsmen of 1937-38 who did such a competent job that years later, about 64 to be exact, all that is needed to restore the patina is a little lemon oil and elbow grease. Growing up in the latter part of the Depression years, I recall we used to say that "W.P.A." stood for "We putter around." That certainly isn't the case at #18 Perrin Street.



### What I Left Out--Bill Keeler

Old Home Week (Chapter 12) was a good news, bad news event for the village of Fairport. On the one hand, thousands of people poured into the village to enjoy parades, entertainment, food and contests; but on the other hand, a group of arsonists were nearly successful in burning down the entire business district. The week after the event *The Monroe County Mail* ran two articles describing Old Home Week. The first article was entitled "Old Home Week Closes as Band Plays Home, Sweet Home. By Far the Most Successful Event Fairport Ever Held-40,000 People in Attendance." The second article two pages after declares "Fiends Unsuccessful in Attempt to Burn Fairport. The Fire Laddies Do Heroic Work in Saving the Village From Destruction-Four Fires Started."

The first article describes the event as "...one which will be remembered with pleasure for years, not only by Fairport residents, but by hundreds of people from far and near, who have gathered with us and indulged in the festivities and pleasures of the occasion. Everything passed off harmoniously and the results have far surpassed the most sanguine expectations of all."

The article goes on to describe Fireman's Day which was reported by a Rochester newspaper as "Fairport's greatest day. Fireman's Day ---was an ideal day so far as the weather was concerned, the rain of the previous night having laid the dust, and in some places left a little more mud than was usually desirable for a parade...The crowd began pouring into the village at an early hour, coming by railroad [p.122], by the trolley [p.123], by boats on the Erie, by all sorts of conveyances from the farms and near-by villages until there were 20,000 people on the grounds." During the parade "The streets were thronged all along the line of march and the balconies of the hotels [p.123], windows of business blocks [p.123] and even sides of the canal bridge [p.127] was filled with people waiting to cheer the particular company in which they were interested."

"The parade [p.127] was forty-five minutes in passing the Town Hall [p.122] and hardly had the last company passed the reviewing stand before the foremost of the marchers had covered the three mile march through our streets and were reentering DeLand Park [p.126]."

"Many of the residents along the line of march were thoughtful enough to provide drinking water for the boys as they passed by, and this was greatly appreciated."

After the parade the firemen sat down for a meal served by the DeLand Bible Class of the First Baptist church. Concerts were held by 13 different bands and at 2:30 the hose race and hook and ladder race were held on East Avenue. Finally, "The largest crowd of the day congregated at DeLand Park in the evening, to witness the fireworks display, and enjoy the various attractions of the 'midway' [p.126]. The fireworks display consisted of several set pieces, including a 'Welcome', 'Fire Alarm Box 43', hydrant, fire engine, etc., interspersed with aerial bombs and rockets."

The article closes with "Thus ends the Old Home week festivities....and we believe the occasion has been one of pleasure and enjoyment to all the old home comers and it has been a genuine

pleasure to our citizens to meet so many old time residents, and extend to them the Glad Hand [p.119]."

In stark contrast, the article on p.7 of the same issue begins "Fire fiends tried to burn the village, Saturday night, as a finale of Old Home week celebrations, but were fortunately foiled in their attempt. They set fire in four different places within an hour's time and but for the prompt and efficient work of our fire laddies and citizens, a large portion of the business section of Fairport would now be in ruins."

The first fire began at 10:00 P.M. at the Free Baptist parsonage on Church Street. "The persons who discovered the fire gave alarm, and immediately Frank Bown, who heard the alarm, and William Wagner, living in the next house west of the parsonage, were in the house, and fighting the flames. They had the fire subdued before the firemen arrived."

The second fire occurred at the Monroe County Mail building on West Ave. "In a very short time the men had a stream of water upon the building, and the chemical engine was brought into play, the flames soon being subdued...The probability is that if the Mail building had burned, the entire Schummers property to Main street would have been doomed."

"The firemen again returned to their rooms [above the Town Hall], which they scarcely reached, when the third alarm was sounded. This time it was found to be a small barn north of the canal...adjoining the vinegar factory [p.78]. In this instance the building was enveloped in flames before the firemen could reach the place, and the building was soon burned to the ground."

"Upon returning to their rooms for the third time, the firemen began to get a little uneasy and some of them took a run down through the lumber yard-and none too soon. They were just in time to discover and check the fourth attempt to fire the village. In a desk in the lumber shed, they found a fire had been started with shavings and tarred rope...A few pails of water quickly extinguished this, which might have proved the most disastrous fire of all, as not only the lumber sheds, but the entire east side of Main street was threatened...if the fire bugs had been discovered at this time, they would have been roughly handled to say the least. Twenty-five extra watchmen were placed on duty for the balance of the night, and many of our citizens remained up until daylight."

The arsonists moved on to the Despatch Transportation Shops where 2 to 3 fires were set in their lumber yard (p.37) at 2:30 A.M. Later the gang burned down the Gleason Cold Storage building in Brighton and several fires in the city of Rochester were blamed on these same arsonists. There is no report in this article as to whether the people responsible for the fires were apprehended.

(If you have not yet obtained your copy of Perinton, Fairport and the Erie Canal, you should get one now in order to refer to the pages Bill mentions in his articles. They are on sale at the Museum Gift Shop and the Perinton Town Hall.)

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Editor's Note: In his article about the waxing and polishing of the museum floors, Bill Matthews gives credit to all who helped in this endeavor. However, it should be noted that the chief engineer, organizer and foreman of this event was Bill himself. He was there at all hours, making sure the work progressed smoothly. We owe him many thanks for the beautiful new look we will all enjoy when we contemplate the shiny clean floors at the museum.

Perinton Historical Society  
18 Perrin Street  
Fairport, New York 14450

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