

A Shocking Loss of Life: Death by Trolley

By Bill Poray

The Rochester, Syracuse and Eastern Railroad operated its electric trolley along an 87-mile route from 1906 to 1931 between the two cities. Ten trolley stops were established in Perinton, including the village station at 23 North Main Street. The trolley provided fast and convenient transportation to communities on the line, including the nearby towns of East Rochester, Macedon, Palmyra, Newark, and Lyons. However, the introduction of the high speed electric railway brought with it life-threatening safety problems.

An east-bound Rochester, Syracuse and Eastern trolley car at North Main Street in Fairport. The building behind the trolley, Boyland's Mill, was relocated in May of 1911 to allow for construction of the trolley station, which still stands at 23 North Main Street.



An analysis of newspaper reports in Fairport between 1906 and 1927 have identified the deaths of at least 25 pedestrians and motorists struck and killed by R.S. & E. trolley cars within three miles east or west of Perinton.

Trolley cars classified as "Limited" picked up passengers only at the bigger stations, but not the small rural stops. Others were designated as "local" cars, traveled more slowly, and picked up passengers at all the stops. Many of those killed didn't realize that the approaching

car was a Limited, virtually indistinguishable from the slower trolley cars, and believed it was braking to pick them up. Would-be passengers were often struck while crossing the east-bound and west-bound tracks to board the approaching trolley car.

The first death occurred soon after the trolley cars began operations in 1906. Herbert Skinkle was driving a horse and buggy on the R.S. & E. tracks when he was struck during a heavy rainstorm. Both he and his horse were killed instantly. From 1909 to 1910 five people were killed in separate



Greetings from your President

March 14, 2021:

Happy Saint Patrick's Day from Cocoa, Florida. After we sprung forward an hour yesterday, I was wondering about the history behind this twice-annual event of springing and falling, so good old Google came to the rescue. The main reason

~ **Bob Hunt** ~

for daylight saving time, or DST, as it is known, is to make better use of daylight. So we are basically moving an hour of daylight from the morning to the evening. An interesting note is that at the equator, daylight and darkness are nearly the same at twelve hours each. The idea of daylight saving was conceived by Benjamin Franklin during the time he was an American delegate in Paris in 1784.

The idea was first advocated seriously by London builder William Willett in 1907, in the pamphlet, "Waste of Daylight." Germany popularized DST when, along with its ally Austria, it moved the clocks ahead one hour in April of 1916. The two countries did so in order to minimize the use of artificial light, to save fuel for the war effort. The United States first observed DST in 1918. The current schedule of spring forward and fall back was established in 2007 and follows the Energy Policy Act of 2005. Most of Arizona and Hawaii don't use DST, and Indiana introduced it in 2006. The federal government controls DST, but only 26 states have considered making it permanent. However, unless Congress changes federal law, states cannot implement permanent DST. States can only opt out of DST, not standard time. Opposition to permanent DST comes during the winter time when school children and working people start their day in darkness.

I talked to my editor this week and he told me to send some photos. Included here are some taken on a bicycle ride through Orlando's Wetland Park. One is a 15 foot long alligator sunning itself along the path. Another features an anhinga drying its wings. Other photos were snapped of spoonbills, long-legged wading birds.

The anhinga is a diving bird and eventually its wings become water-soaked and thus the bird will sit on a perch with its wings spread out for drying. The spoonbill is a beautiful pink bird with a spoon shaped bill it uses for grubbing for food in the wetlands. The spoonbill almost became extinct as they were hunted aggressively for their beautiful pink wings, used in ladies' fans.

We took a trip to DeLand, Florida a few Sundays back, and while there, enjoyed a nice lunch on an outside patio, I asked the waitress how the community of DeLand got its name. She did not have a clue, so I had to tell her the story as



she stood there, in awe. She must have enjoyed the story, as she had another staff member stop by for a repeat telling.

Please continue to stay safe and healthy. We will chat with you again in our next issue.

Bob Hunt, President

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HISTORIGRAM

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Upcoming Programs & Events

Thursday, April 1 at 11:00 a.m.

VIRTUAL PRESENTATION

Program: The Psychic Highway: How the Erie Canal Changed America

Presenter: Michael T. Keene

Note: This is a pre-recorded presentation.

Registration required—michaeltkeene.com/registration

Tuesday, April 20 at 7:00 p.m.

VIRTUAL PRESENTATION

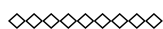
Program: The Story Behind the Most Famous Songs of the Erie Canal

Presenter: Bill Hullfish

Registration required through the Fairport Public Library—fairportlibrary.org

The Fairport Historical Museum is once again open to visitors! Stop by to see our new exhibits. The museum is open Sundays and Tuesdays from 2:00–4:00 p.m. and Saturdays from 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

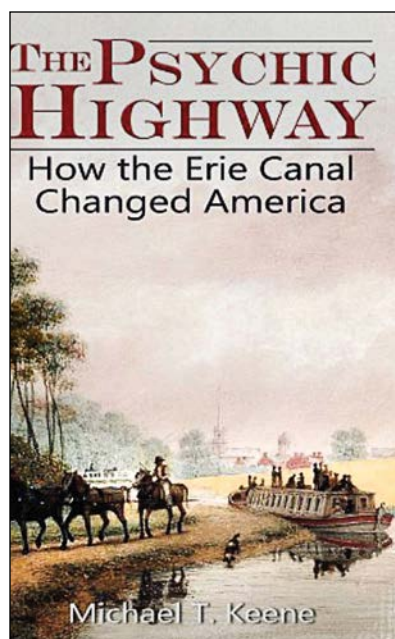
Please note that there will be no in-person Tuesday presentations at the museum for the 2020–2021 program season due to the pandemic. We are partnering with the Fairport Public Library to offer virtual presentations instead. Please see each event listing for information about registration, which is required for all virtual events.



With Appreciation to the Fairport Public Library

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were unsure how we would reach our PHS members. The last presentation held at the museum was February 18, 2020 when Rose O’Keefe presented Frederick and Anna Douglass in Rochester. Then the Fairport Historical Museum closed for the shutdown on March 14, just days before our March program was to take place. The remainder of the 2019–2020 program season was canceled. How would we proceed as the pandemic went on?

PHS was fortunate to have the support of the Fairport Public Library, which stepped up and co-sponsored our entire PHS 2020–2021 program season on Zoom. A special thank you goes to Adult Services Programming librarian Abby DeVuyst, who has been wonderful with set up, technology challenges and hosting responsibilities. We would also like to thank library director Carl Gouveia, who wrote an eloquent response for our historical COVID-19 project and to librarian Karrie Bordeau for sharing six-foot safety signage she created during the pandemic.



The Psychic Highway: **How the Erie Canal Changed America**

VIRTUAL PRESENTATION

Registration required.
To register, visit michaeltkeene.com/registration

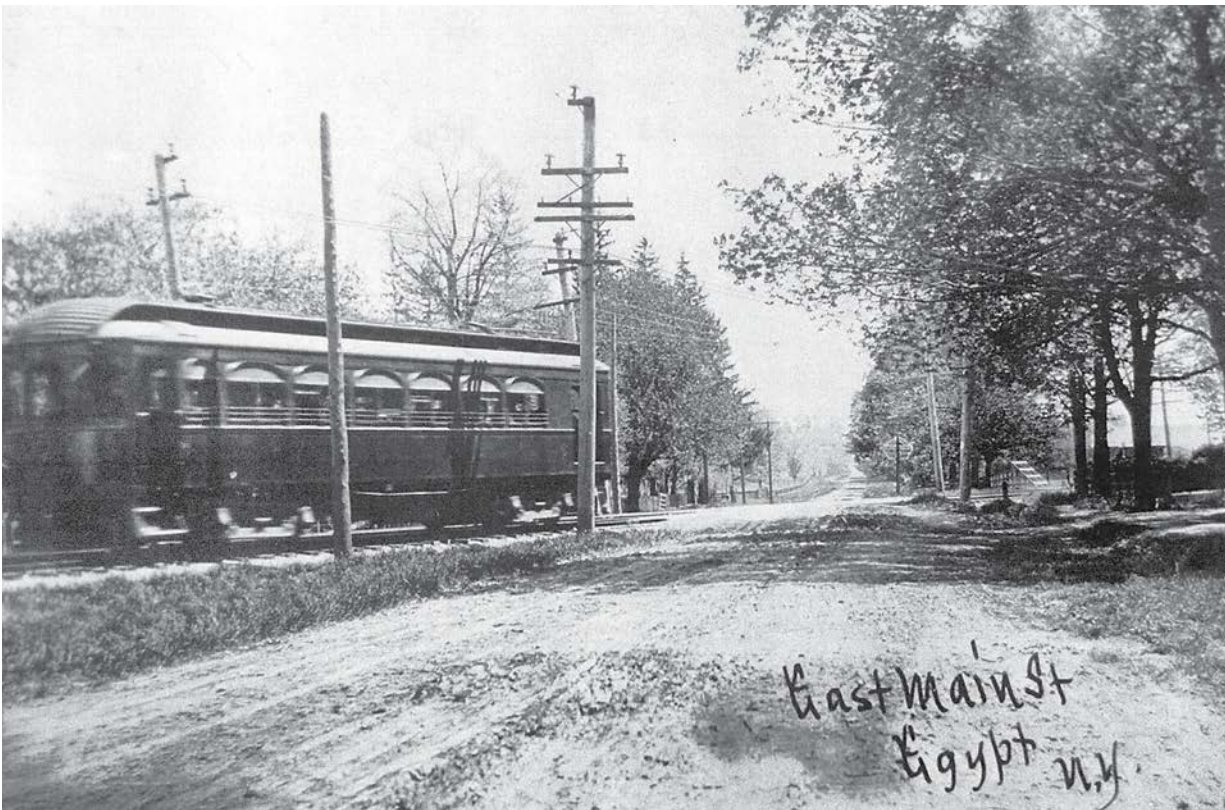
PHS is pleased to offer this pre-recorded 30-minute presentation from author Michael T. Keene.
Thursday, April 1 at 11:00 a.m.

The Erie Canal opened up vital passageways that led to the advent of the major social, political, and religious movements that swept through upstate New York during the 19th century. This powerful waterway carried a flotilla of radicals, visionaries, social reformers, and prophets bent on the idea of creating a new society. It was as if a bolt of electricity struck Western New York, lighting it up as fertile ground for ideas and lifestyles that had never been expressed or attempted before. It delivered people to important places for important reasons, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott to Seneca Falls for history’s first women’s convention; to Rochester to meet and support abolitionists Frederick Douglass and Harriett Tubman or to witness the Fox sisters summon spirits and their eerie knockings. Or maybe people on the temperance bandwagon hurrying to the Burned Over District so Charles Finney could save their souls.

Michael Keene, local author and frequent speaker at the Perinton Historical Society, has created a unique online program based on his book, *Psychic Highway: How the Erie Canal Changed America*. Michael’s program is told through the use of archival photographs, original music, and narration.

To register, visit michaeltkeene.com/registration. Once registered, attendees will receive a link to the presentation. Registrants may watch the recording during its premiere on Thursday, April 1 at 11:00 a.m. and re-watch any time after that. The museum gift shop carries a variety of books by the presenter.





The Rochester, Syracuse and Eastern trolley at the intersection of Mason and Pittsford Palmyra Roads in Egypt.

accidents in little more than a year. In many cases, the victims were waiting for the arrival of the electric trolley when they were struck and killed by a Limited trolley car.

Several factors combined to make for a perilous situation for pedestrians. The Limited cars were very fast, capable of achieving a speed of 64 miles per hour, and they were also relatively quiet. In addition, because the trolley cars travelled independently, they were more difficult to see than a traditional train with multiple cars. Finally, the R.S. & E. route included fairly sharp curves, so an approaching trolley car might not be seen or heard soon enough to avoid a tragedy.

As the death toll continued to rise, an essay was published in the local newspaper, painting the problem as entirely due to the negligence of the general public. It began with the following statement:

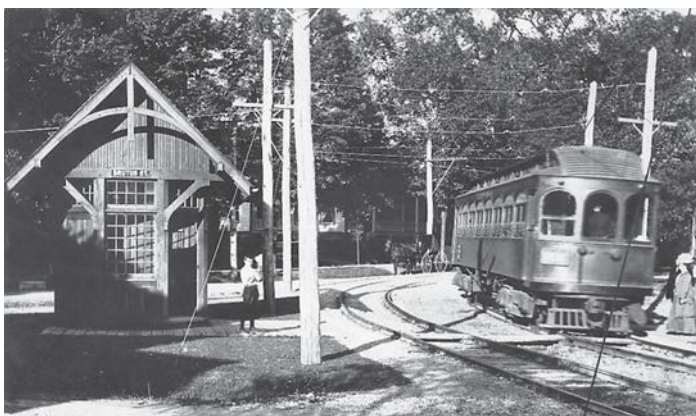
"Disturbed by the increasing recklessness shown by people attempting to cross its tracks ahead of its fast Limited trains which has recently resulted in several losses of life, the management of the Rochester, Syracuse & Eastern Railroad has begun an educational campaign intended to impress the public with the great danger that accompanies such an act. Within a comparatively short time no less than three women have met instant death while endeavoring to cross the company's double tracked railroad ahead of the approaching Limited trains. In each case these accidents occurred at rural stops where the Limited cars make no stops and in each case the testimony of disinterested witnesses has demonstrated beyond all question that the accident was solely due to the gross negligence of the person killed."

As more residents of Perinton acquired automobiles, the risk of accidents with trains and the trolley cars grew. Blame was placed squarely on the shoulders of motorists and pedestrians, as illustrated in this excerpt from the Fairport Herald newspaper of November 10th, 1910:

"If the public would exercise the same care and caution to preserve its own life and limb that the railroad company does to save it from harm, the number of accidents of all kinds would be materially reduced each year. Almost every motorman on the road has a daily record of narrow escapes due to the foolhardy attempts of persons to drive or walk across our tracks ahead of oncoming Limited trains."

The most horrific crash between an automobile and trolley in Perinton occurred at stop number 16 at Ayrault Road, east of Turk Hill Road. On a Thursday afternoon in October of 1915, Frank S. Kenyon, pastor of the Fairport First Baptist Church, invited three ladies of the congregation to join him for a ride in the country in his new car. As they returned from Egypt heading westbound on Ayrault Road, the respected pastor slowed the car as it approached the double tracks of the R.S. & E. trolley. The crossing at this location was considered by many to be one of the most dangerous on the line. A sharp curve in the tracks and an apple orchard obstructed the view, making it difficult to see an approaching westbound trolley car. No safety devices such as gates or flashing lights were used at these country crossings.

The Kenyon car waited as a westbound trolley crossed Ayrault Road. The lone surviving passenger in the car would later testify that Kenyon then looked to confirm that the



Rochester, Syracuse and Eastern trolley at a rural stop. It was necessary for passengers to cross the dual tracks in order to board the car on the far set of tracks. The Limited cars did not stop at these rural stations, causing confusion, accidents, and deaths.

tracks were clear in the other direction. Seeing nothing, he accelerated his car to cross the tracks.

Frank Kenyon never dreamed that a second westbound trolley was fast approaching. The motorman of the trolley car, Levi Vanderbilt, estimated his speed at 55 to 60 miles per hour. The automobile was struck and pushed into the trolley shelter, and the passengers were thrown from the car.

Two of the women, May Gray, 38, and Elizabeth Bort, 51, were killed instantly. Anna Moore, 61, and Frank Kenyon, 41, were transported on the next westbound trolley to a hospital in Rochester, where Kenyon died.

Twelve years later, what may have been the last trolley-related death in our area was blanketed in cruel irony. George Higbie created Midvale Drive, Perinton's first suburban neighborhood. Located off Baird Road just south of underpasses for both the R.S. & E. and the New York Central, Higbie promoted Midvale's convenient proximity to stop number 11 on the R.S. & E. line.

Accompanied by his wife, Sarah, the couple traveled by trolley from Rochester on January 9, 1927, to visit their daughter and grandsons at their Midvale home. After their visit, the Higbies bid farewell to their family, and made the short walk to trolley stop 11. According to newspaper reports, the couple believed the approaching trolley car was preparing to stop. Mrs. Higbie, several steps ahead of her husband, began to cross the tracks, when she tripped and fell, and was killed by the approaching trolley.

As in so many previous cases, the trolley was a high-speed Limited car, and never intended to pick up passengers at the Midvale stop.



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Perinton Historical Society

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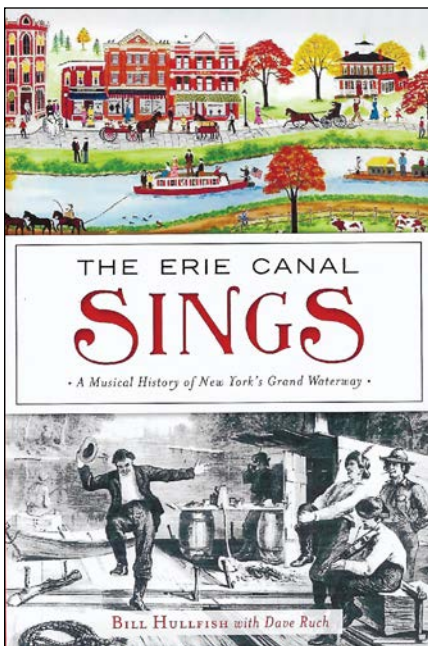
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The Story Behind the Most Famous Songs of the Erie Canal

*Presented by
Bill Hullfish, PhD*

*Join us on Tuesday, April 20 at 7:00 p.m.
for this entertaining virtual presentation
about the canal.*

Erie Canal histories in the past 200 years have focused usually on the planning, construction, engineering, innovation and economic benefits of the canal. What we have not heard much about are the songs that tell the people's history of the canal.

Join us as Bill Hullfish reveals the research behind the discovery of famous canal songs and demonstrates the place of canal songs in discovering the everyday lives of the people who worked on the canal.

Bill Hullfish is professor emeritus SUNY College at Brockport. He is a member of the Canal Society of New York State and the American Canal Society. Bill has boated, bicycled and walked a large number of American as well as European canals.

Bill's publications include: *The Canaller's Songbook*, *The Brockport Murder Dog Trial*, and *The Erie Canal Sings*, plus numerous articles on canalling in journals.

This event is free and is open to the public. It is co-sponsored by the Perinton Historical Society and Fairport Public Library.

Registration is required through the Fairport Public Library and is limited.

To register, visit <https://fairportlibrary.libcal.com/event/7621184> or call the library at 585-223-9091.



Three New Exhibits at the Fairport Historical Museum

The museum opened the season on March 6th with three new exhibits: *Agriculture*, *A Centennial of Town Historians* and *Perinton in the Pandemic*. The *Agriculture* exhibit was the only exhibit left untouched during our massive exhibit remodel in 2018. Assistant Curator Nancy Slaybaugh and Museum Director Vicki Profitt finally pulled everything out of the four bays and retooled the exhibit (pun intended) with tools pertaining to the agriculture, blacksmithing, cooper and tinsmith trades. Emphasis has been placed on the 11 "Century Farms" in Perinton which are farms that, up to 1953, had existed for more than 100 years. Photos highlight the barns and some of the homes of these early farmers. Another bay shines a light on the blacksmithing trade, while several tinsmiths and coopers are shown in the final section.

The year 2021 celebrates 100 years of Town Historians in Perinton, from the first (Charlotte Clapp) to our current historian Bill Poray (the sixth and first male historian).

Fourth historian Jean Keplinger has generously donated the costume she wore to portray Minerva DeLand while visiting with our elementary school visitors. That can be seen

Continued on page 7

on Maggie the Mannequin.

A new addition is fifth historian Sue Roberts' costume created and worn for the 175th Perinton anniversary.

The other new exhibit is *Perinton in the Pandemic*. Our Capturing Tomorrow's History Today committee has been busy with Zoom meetings since November, gathering photographs and information from individuals, government agencies, organizations and businesses. A very small amount of the information collected is on display in the atrium.

Additional information continues to flow in and can be found in the binder created by Lucy McCormick, which sits on the ledge behind the exhibit.

Thank you to all who have taken the time to document and share photos and information on this historic pandemic. If you have something to contribute, please email it to History@PerintonHistoricalSociety.org.



Unique, double face shield now on display at the museum's new *Perinton in the Pandemic* exhibit.



The 60-foot hose tower is at the far right of this circa-1900 image.

The Hose Tower on John Street

By Bill Poray

Henry Lovejoy built several important homes in Fairport, among them, the lovely 1893 residence of William M. Newman at 11 West Church Street. The owner's son, Arthur B. Newman, designed his father's home. The builder and architect worked together the following year on another structure of far different proportions (see above).

The Fairport Fire Department needed a place to hang its wet fire hoses after they were used. Made primarily of cotton, the hoses were susceptible to rot if not hung to dry soon after use. The contract for the tower was awarded to Henry Lovejoy at a cost of just over three-hundred dollars.

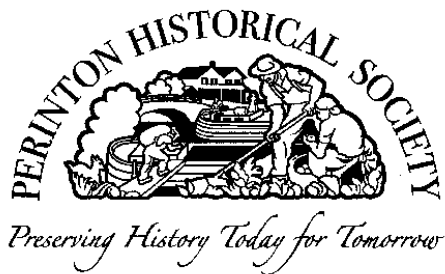
Construction commenced on the sixty-foot wooden tower in the summer of 1894, next to Fairport's electric and water pumping operations on John Street. Fairport Electric continues to occupy the same location today, 127 years later, on the street now known as Lift Bridge Lane.

The life of the hose tower was brief. By 1915 it was no longer part of the Fairport skyline. (See the photo and caption on the back page of this issue for more information.)

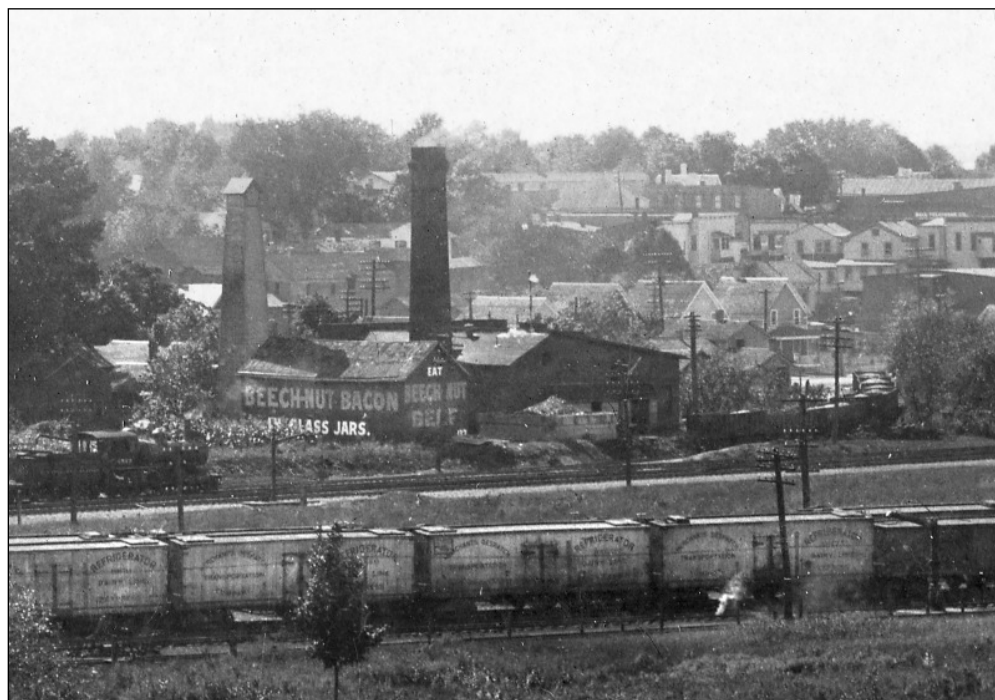
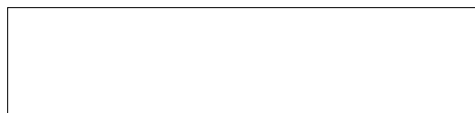


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Perinton Historical Society,
visit our website at—

www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org



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A view of Fairport looking south, circa early 1900s. The Fairport Fire Department's short-lived hose tower is on the left. The passing refrigerated railroad cars in the foreground are stenciled with the name, "Merchants Despatch Transportation," discussed in last month's issue of the *Historigram*.

Fairport Historical Museum, 18 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY 14450

The museum re-opened to the public on March 6th. Hours are Saturdays from 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m. and Sundays and Tuesdays from 2:00–4:00 p.m. Free admission. Group tours, presentations and special projects are by appointment. Please call and leave a message at **585-223-3989**. **www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org**