

Life of an American Hero **Lester W. Conover**

By Bill Poray

Editor's Note:

I had the good fortune to visit with Lester "Les" Conover on September 20th at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Canandaigua. Nineteen days earlier he celebrated his 103rd birthday. On September 26th, six days after we met, Les passed away. Although we met for less than one hour, he made an impression on me that I will never forget.

Over a century ago, a local farm family welcomed their newborn baby boy to the family homestead on Mason Road. Lester William Conover was born on September 1, 1918. Exactly 103 years later, he celebrated his birthday at the Canandaigua Veterans Administration Hospital, where he was a resident for several years. I had the privilege of meeting him on Monday, September 20th. He died six days later. In this story, I'll do my best to tell you more about him.

A Farm Boy from Egypt

Les Conover spent his early years on the land his family farmed for three generations, just a short walk from the heart of Egypt. While active in sports at Fairport High School, his real passion was the raising of Guernsey calves. At just fifteen years of age, the young cattleman won first prize at the 1933 Rochester Exposition for one of his prize calves. The following year young Conover was presented with a pure-bred Guernsey bull calf, courtesy of the Monroe County 4-H club community, in recognition of his skills and expertise. In the mid-1930s, in the depths of the Great Depression, the teenager added to the family income by selling his pure-bred calves from the Mason Road farm.

World War II veteran Les Conover, at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Canandaigua. Les served with the 5th Infantry Division of the Third Army at the Battle of the Bulge at Ardennes, Belgium. Evidence of his heroism and sacrifice is found in the medals awarded to him, including the Purple Heart and Bronze Star.





~ **Bob Hunt** ~

Comments from your President

September 28, 2021:

This will be my last column under the heading, "Comments from your President." At this month's board meeting we started our new fiscal 2021-22 year, when we elect officers for the new year. I decided not to present my name for the

president's position in the proposed slate of officers. I am pleased to announce that your board elected Vicki Profitto to be your new president.

It was back in September 2011 when I wrote my first column as your newly elected president. In review, it has been an honor and privilege to have served as your president for the past 11 years, but it is time for someone new. I will still be a member of the board until August 31, 2022, and thus will be available to help with a smooth transition. No fumbles, hopefully.

I've always said that a leader is only as successful as the support staff he or she is surrounded by, and I have been blessed with great board members, officers and volunteers during my term. A sincere thanks to all of you.

The comments presented in that September 2011 *Historigram* said that I would strive to keep you, as members, informed as to what was occurring at the museum, decisions made at our board meetings and thoughts about future plans for the museum. Overall I feel that I have tried to do that.

Thanks to the *Historigram* editor Bill Poray, I was allowed to wander a bit, and write about items I found a bit interesting and different. As I prepared to write this, I spent some time rereading the 100 plus columns I have written over the last 11 years. The most common topics were weather-related, stories about some of our (Cindy and Bob's) crazy adventures, a few recipes tossed in from time to time, and articles discussed from the Old Farmer's Almanac. As a farmer boy, I was always interested in the weather, and thus would comment about it quite often in my columns.

The article I found most unusual and interesting was the story of the great molasses flood in Boston, January 15th, 1919. This disaster killed 21 and injured 150, and the tsunami-like wave reached a speed of 35 miles per hour. Not exactly going along with the saying "as slow as molasses in January."

I think I received the most comments about the article written in December 2018, regarding my Roadmaster bicycle. I also discussed riding my uncle's high wheel bicycle in Dundee parades. Many sent me emails saying they also had a

Roadmaster as a kid. I even received a photo from the Pittinaro family showing Frank Pittinaro with a high wheel.

I hope to write a few articles in the future, if I can meet the high standards of our editor. I probably won't be able to write about my crazy topics of the past, but instead will focus on topics related to local history in some way. I have a few ideas.

Thanks for the memories and please continue to support the Perinton Historical Society.

Bob Hunt, President (Until 7:00 p.m. on 9/28/2021)
585-415-7053, rhunt356.rh@gmail.com



Perinton Historical Society

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

<i>President</i>	Vicki Profitto
<i>Secretary</i>	Suzanne Lee
<i>Treasurer</i>	Linda Wiener
<i>Communications</i>	Jane DeMeis

TRUSTEES

Keith Boas	Bill Poray
Bob Hunt	Jim Unckless
John Laurence	Matt Wells
Lucy McCormick	

MUSEUM

<i>Director</i>	Vicki Profitto
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House Tour Premier Event a Success!

By Kay Joslyn

The premiere showing of the PHS Virtual House and Garden Tour was a grand event. On the first of October, homeowners, committee members and officers of PHS were treated to the initial showing of the video. The tour, an annual event begun back in 1978 as a candlelight tour, had been suspended for a year due to COVID.

This year, five Perinton homes and one village home were photographed using a drone and video camera. PHS members received a link to access the video online for the month of October. Kudos to the committee for their months of dedication to this project: Kay Joslyn, Chair, Nadine Fiero, Joyce Hawkinson, Elaine Lanni, Deb Mabry, Lucy McCormick, Wendy Murray, Vicki Profitto, Nancy Shadd and Sheila Tulloch.



Special Thanks—

to our outgoing president, Bob Hunt, who has served our organization with skill, compassion, and more than a little humor. Bob's commitment to his adopted community, including his involvement in Fairport Rotary, serves as an example to others. Thank you, Bob, for your exceptional leadership.

Bill Poray to Present —Old Money— Fairport's Potter Family

Tuesday, November 16th at 7:00 p.m.

The Potter Mansion, Potter Park, Potter Memorial and a street named Potter Place are tangible reminders of one of Fairport wealthiest and most intriguing families. In his will, Fred Potter (1870–1943) left the family home of over 70 years, as well as the extensive grounds to the village of Fairport, to be used as a community center.

Following the two-part Potter series published in the September and October issues of the *Historigram*, this presentation will shed even more light on three generations of the Potter family, as well as the source and ultimately the distribution of the Potter fortune.

REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED.

To register, call or visit the Fairport Historical Museum and leave your name, contact information and number of people who will be attending. Masks will be required for all program attendees regardless of vaccination status.



On December 6th of 2014, the facade the Potter Mansion was lined with American flags to flank the re-dedication ceremony of the adjacent Potter Memorial. The memorial, constructed in 1945 and renovated in 2014, remains relevant today, and is the focal point of annual services to remember the contributions of Fairport and Perinton soldiers.

Photo by Keith Boas

From Factory Worker to Soldier

Les worked as a laborer in a local greenhouse after graduating with the class of 1938 from Fairport High School. When area factories began production of products to support the war effort, Les took a job with Bausch and Lomb, helping to build binoculars for the U.S. Navy. The important nature of the work resulted in several deferments from military service. By June of 1944 Les was drafted, and dispatched to Fort Dix, New Jersey for basic training.

Off to Fight the War

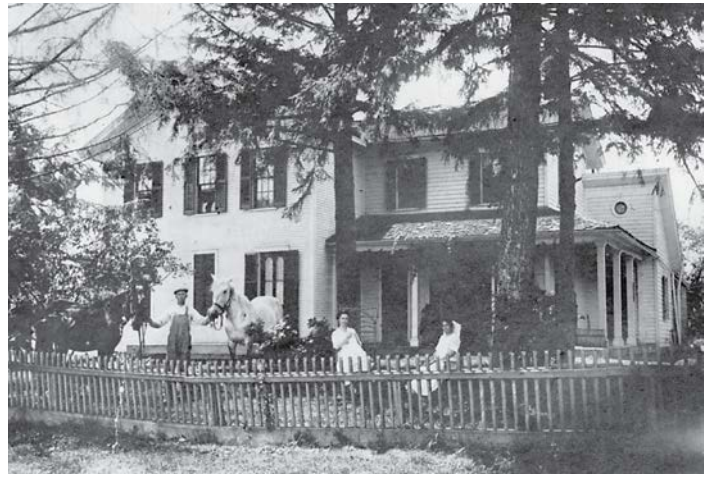
With thousands of other soldiers, newly minted Private Conover boarded a ship on November 21, 1944, headed for the war in Europe. Less than one month later, they would take part in what British Prime Minister Winston Churchill would later refer to as "the greatest American battle of the war." It was during this six-week brutal struggle, the last major German offensive on the Western Front, that Les Conover was seriously injured. Less than seven months after his induction into service in June of 1944, Conover was hit by mortar shrapnel, and suffered stomach and leg injuries, as well as wounds dangerously close to his spine. The news reached Fairport in mid-February, when the parents of Private Conover confirmed the receipt of a discouraging telegram from the War Department.

Leander and Beulah Conover later learned of an incredible act of compassion, which may well have saved their son's life. The events unfolded on January 19, 1945, during the chaos of combat between Allied and German forces on a frozen Belgian battlefield. While the shrapnel from incoming mortar fire resulted in Les Conover's life-threatening injuries, his unit simultaneously succeeded in the capture of two German soldiers. The brutally cold January temperatures coupled with a loss of blood created a perilous condition for the young American private. Realizing his captor's grave condition, one of the German prisoners removed his own wool gloves, and placed them on Conover's hands. Both prisoners then lifted the wounded American and carried him across a large field to a nearby stand of trees, where medics treated his injuries.

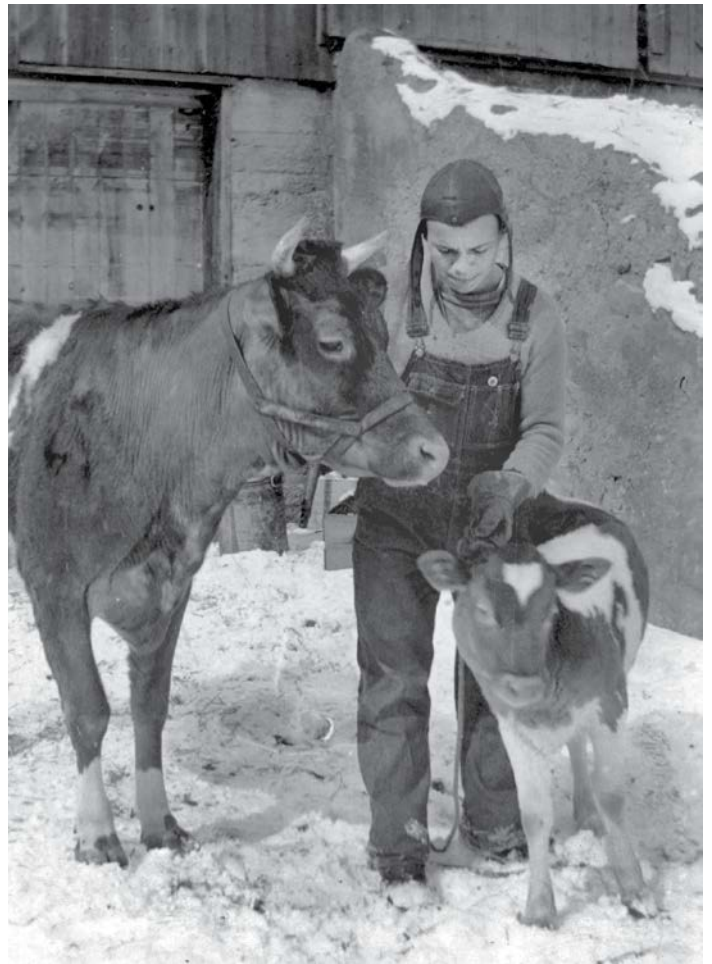
A Long and Fruitful Life

Healed from his wounds, Les Conover went on to live a very long and fruitful life. He and Bernice Lake were married for 51 years, until her death in 1999. He spent most of his life after the war in Wayne County, where he was a carpenter, a builder of stock cars, and piloted his own airplane. He was a hunter and fisherman, and loved to travel in his motorhome. And for many years, he served in a leadership capacity at the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Post 2883 in Newark.

It has been over three quarters of a century since Les Conover fought for his country. And for all those years, the



Early image of the Conover farmhouse on Mason Road



Lester Conover tending to his bovine at the family farm on Mason Road

former Perinton farm boy kept two treasured possessions close at hand. One was a pocket-sized Bible given to him by his parents before he shipped out, with the following handwritten note: "To our son, from Mother and Dad, Keep this close to your heart and read a verse every day." The other was the pair of German military-issue wool gloves, provided to him by a fellow soldier, an enemy, who, with another prisoner, quite possibly saved the life of Lester W. Conover.





By Lucy McCormick, YT Committee Representative

The 2021 PHS fundraiser, Yuletide Traditions, is back! Once again you're invited to participate in a festive silent auction and other events. The Grinch is not hosting this event, but Yuletide Traditions will look a bit different this year, because of the pandemic and because of trends the committee has noticed since the inception of this event in 2014:

- Individuals and businesses donating items for silent auctions will be asked for baskets and gift cards. We have certainly appreciated and have been awed by the creativity and artistic talent of many who have made festive items. However, because we have many members downsizing, we are suggesting that trees and wreaths not be donated. Baskets of all sorts and sizes are appreciated—for entertaining, wine lovers, young readers, crafty kids, canine and feline friends, gardeners and many other themes. Gift cards have also been popular, some receiving bids two and three times their value. Monetary donations are welcome as well.

- Several programs and events will be offered. Because of the pandemic, seating will be more spaced out than in the past. We're fortunate to have Bill Poray speak at the kickoff to YT on November 16th, with a presentation about the history of the Potter Family and Potter Memorial. While events are being planned as we write, one festive addition to the mix will be an ugly sweater contest. Participants will be encouraged to stop by the museum for a quick photo or invited to submit their own photo. Voting will take place for the best ugly holiday sweater in several categories.

- Refreshments will be wrapped items and bottled water, but we will certainly miss sharing cheese and cracker trays and unique homemade treats.

We look forward to you joining us for Yuletide Traditions. The Grinch will not be invited!



How you can support the Perinton Historical Society

- Become a PHS member or give a gift membership.
- Volunteer your time as a museum volunteer or on a committee.
- Donate artifacts to the museum that pertain to Fairport/Perinton.
- Purchase unique gifts from the museum gift shop.
- Donate gift cards and gift baskets for Yuletide Traditions silent auctions.
- Donate to the PHS through estate bequests, planned giving, IRA charitable giving, memorial and honor gifts, employer matching contributions, AmazonSmile, ROC the Day.



2021–2022 Special Recognition Level Memberships

As of October 12, 2021

Business (\$100)

Frank N. Pittinaro, C.P.A.

William Webb & Associates, LLC

404 East Atlantic Boulevard, Pompano Beach, Florida 33060
Phone 954-943-1650, E-mail: Frank@webbcpa.com

Canandaigua National Bank & Trust

72 South Main Street, Canandaigua, NY 14424
Phone: 585-394-4260. Website: cnbank.com

Lucien A. Morin II, Partner

**McConville Considine Cooman and Morin
Attorneys and Counselors at Law**

Suite 110, 100 Packetts Landing, Fairport, NY 14450
Phone: 585-223-2170, lmmorin@mccmllaw.com

Fairport Village Inn, Wayne and Patty Beckwith

103 North Main Street, Fairport, NY 14550
Phone: 585-388-0112, Website: thefvi.com

Robert Ruhland (aka Mr. Perinton), Keller Williams Realty

2000 Winton Road S. Bldg. 1, Rochester, NY 14618
Phone: 585-303-6607, Website: bobjruhland.yourkwagent.com

Salle d' Escrime of Prescott, AZ, A Fencing Club

Patricia Dodge Waples, Owner

DeLand (\$100-\$249)

Charles and Joyce Cowden
Suzanne Lee & Wes Harris
Drew Saum

Potter (\$250-\$499)

Fairport Rotary
Douglas and Jean Whitney
Anonymous (1)

Perrin (\$500 and above)

None this month

Memorial Donations

In memory of Barbara Robinson:

From Cynthia Pohl, Marlene Robinson,
Shirley Van Dekken, Annette Jo Hargis

In memory of Christina Bluhm Steve:

From Edward Steve



Upcoming Programs & Events

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. Free admission.

We are delighted to return to in-person programming. All program attendees are required to wear masks regardless of vaccination status.

Saturday, November 13th, 9:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

At the museum

Yuletide Traditions silent auctions donation drop off

Tuesday, November 16th, 6:00–7:00 p.m.

At the museum

Opening bids on Yuletide Traditions silent auction items accepted

7:00 p.m. program:

Old Money—Fairport's Potter Family

Speaker: Bill Poray

REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Saturday, November 20th, 10:00–11:00 a.m.

At the museum

Author G. Rollie Adams discusses and signs copies of his newest book, *Found in Pieces*

Saturday, December 4th, 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

At the museum

Ugly Sweater Party

Tuesday, December 7th, 6:00–7:00 p.m.

At the museum

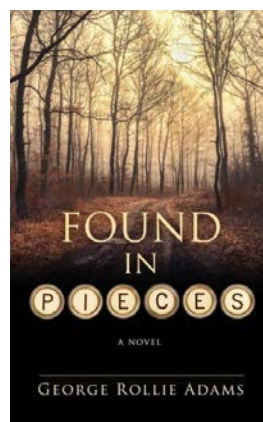
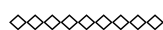
Final bidding on Yuletide Traditions silent auction items. Silent auction winners will be announced following the evening's program.

7:00 p.m. event:

PHS Annual Holiday Party

Sunday, December 12th, 2:00–4:00 p.m.

The museum's last day open before closing for the season



Author G. Rollie Adams will be at our museum on Saturday, November 20th to discuss his new book, *Found in Pieces*.

Rollie Adams *Author Appearance*

We are pleased to welcome author G. Rollie Adams back to the Fairport Museum. Rollie will be here on Saturday, November 20th from 10:00–11:00 a.m. to discuss and sign copies of his newest fictional book, *Found in Pieces*.

In 1958, when almost no women own and edit newspapers, Pearl Goodbar, a white mother of two teen-age girls, risks her family's financial future to buy a small, defunct Southern weekly. Before she can get the paper up and running, her husband loses his job, a smoldering desegregation crisis flames up in the state capital, and Elton Washington—a young black man whose mother, Sadie Rose, is also a businesswoman—disappears.

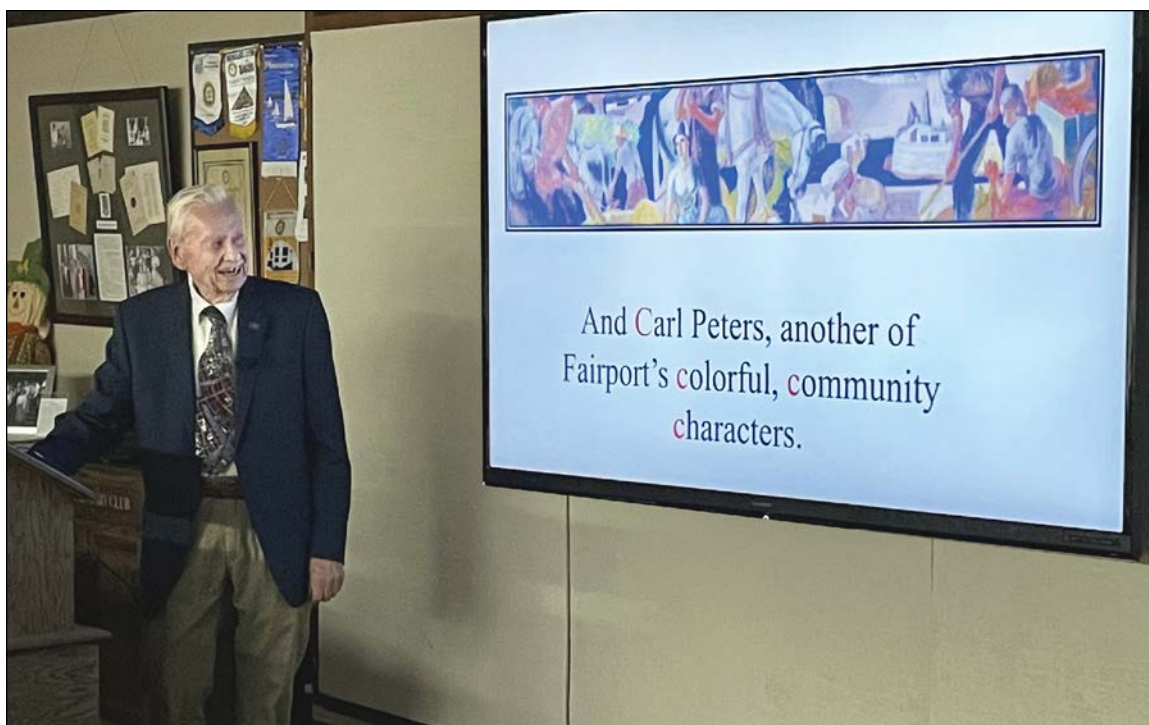
The mystery of Elton's whereabouts brings Pearl and Sadie Rose together in a gut-wrenching search for truth and justice and leaves Pearl facing editorial and business decisions that could lead to more money woes and even physical harm to herself and those around her.

The book was named the National Indie Excellence Award for Historical Fiction Winner, National Indie Excellence Award for Regional Fiction Gold Medal, Global Book Award for Modern Historical Fiction Silver Medal, Independent Publishers IPPY Award for Regional Fiction Silver Medal, Readers' Favorite Award for Social Issues Fiction.

George Rollie Adams is a writer, educator, historian, and storyteller. He served as executive director of the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society in New York and as director of the Louisiana State Museum in New Orleans. In conjunction with the latter position, he was also an assistant secretary for the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism. Subsequently, Adams served for many years as president and CEO of the Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester. Additional information can be found at georgerollieadamsbooks.com.

The book sells for \$15 softcover and \$20 hardcover; cash and checks accepted.





Don Shilling Presentation Captivates Crowd

The Perinton Historical Society was thrilled to have live historical programs return to the Fairport Historical Museum on September 21. Retired educator and prolific author Donovan A. Shilling led a lively presentation titled, **"The Seven Cs of Fairport."**

Consensus among the crowd was that Shilling's history show was creative and clever. Some might even say it was captivating.

'Tis the Season to be Tacky!

*You are invited to participate in PHS's very first
Yuletide Traditions Ugly Sweater Contest*

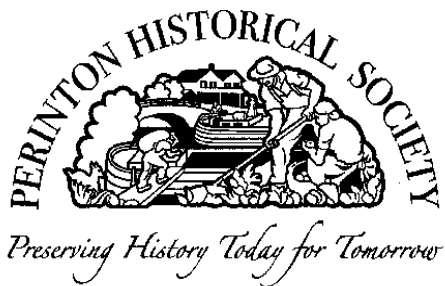
Scout around for that hideous sweater! Either bring a photo of you wearing it to the museum by November 16th or stop by to take your photo in our photo corner and bring your printed photo to the museum. Please write your name and phone number on the back of the image. Pet photos in ugly sweaters are welcome as well!

Photos will be on display at the museum starting November 20th. Voting for this coveted distinction will take place at the museum from November 23rd to November 30th.

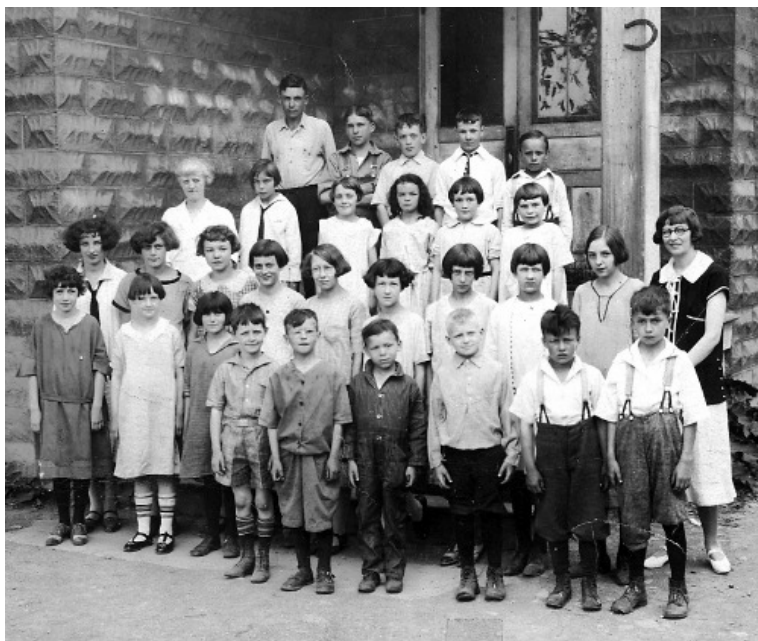
Be sure to vote, too!

Winners will be announced at the Ugly Sweater Party, on Saturday, December 4th. Join in the fun, wearing your ugly sweater, of course!





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Students of the
District 4 school in
Egypt, 1927. Lester
Conover is in the
front row, center,
in dark overalls.

See the story on
the life of this
Perinton war hero
on pages 1 and 4.

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

Through December 12th, museum 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. After December 12th, the museum will be closed to the public for the season. It will reopen in early March of 2022. During this period, you may call Vicki Masters Proffitt at 585-233-1204 or email at director@perintonhistoricalsociety.org to book a group tour or do research.

www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org