



Perinton Historical Society HISTORIGRAM

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Fairport, NY 14450

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Ice Skating: The Modern Era

Second of Two Parts by John Jongen

(Part 1 of this two-part series described the history of ice skating as it evolved from a primitive personal conveyance into a Dutch cultural phenomenon. See the February 2006 issue available on our website.)

The Dutch Eleven City Skating Tour

A video, shown in the PHS booth at the 2006 Fairport Winter Fest, is a half-hour Dutch news release about a winter festival that took place on January 4, 1997 in the Netherlands. It is called the 'Elfstedentocht', or Eleven Cities Tour. This 125-mile one-day speed skating race is like the Alaskan Iditarod of ice skating. It happens about every 10-15 years whenever ice conditions permit. On a particular day the word goes out across the country that the race is on and some 20,000 countrymen and women show up before dawn to start their day-long race through eleven cities connected by natural lakes and canals. Another quarter million spectators and press people line the canals to cheer on the competitors.

Our Mission

"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 people of our town of Perinton"

The race starts in the Friesland provincial capital of Leeuwarden (see map on page 2). From there the race proceeds south to the cities of Sneek, then IJlst, then it crosses a lake before arriving in Sloten. Then the course turns west to Staveren on the shore of the Zuiderzee from whence the course turns north to Hindelopen, another city on the Zuiderzee. The race now continues north thru the inland cities of Workum, Bolsward, to Harlingen, another community on the Zuiderzee. From there the course turns in a northeasterly direction and meanders through the cities of Franeker and Dokkum. In Dokkum the race turns south on its final leg back to Groningen and the finish line.

At the end of the race there is one winner who is decorated with a simple medal, and all the others who complete the race before midnight receive a metal lapel pin. The first woman to finish the race also receives special recognition. The rest of the Dutch population, along the route and at home, become spectators. Business grinds to a standstill and all Dutch broadcasts and print media are focused on this one rare event. The previous race was held in 1986.

In the March 1997 issue of the PHS Historigram John Jongen gave the following account of his relationship to Fairport's Erie Canal: "One of the primary reasons I chose to live at the western end of West Church Street near the Erie Canal was so that I could practice some of my favorite activities instilled in me by my experiences in my native The Netherlands: biking and ice skating. The canals and watery ways of the Dutch are legendary.



But we in Fairport, too, have been, and continue to be, influenced by our proximity to the Erie Canal. So far this season the ice on the canal near our house has not been good enough to try to skate on it. It seems that there is always just a little too much snow or thin-looking ice patches so that it is too risky to venture out on it. Instead, I have been biding my time skating on the outdoor rink at Potter Park. That will have to do for now, but it cannot compare to the feeling you get from skating on the wide-open canal from Fairport to Bushnell's Basin to Pittsford and beyond."

John then writes about the days in The Netherlands when he fantasized that some day he could compete in the Dutch "Elfstedentocht," the eleven-city ice skating race. He trained himself to skate the circular moat around a 13th century castle near his house. He relates: "There I met some Friesian skaters who showed me the way to skate, with a still upper body, with hands behind my back, and with long, even strides. Today when I practice this style on the Potter Park skating rink, I find young children surreptitiously imitating me, just as I must have imitated the Friesians decades ago, and I chuckle to myself."

Recreation, and Healthy Too

The social and health benefits of ice skating cannot be overstated. Optimum enjoyment of ice skating involves all of the senses. It is a physical experi-

ence but it is much more than that. To be truly enjoyed it must be an aesthetic experience as well. Traditionally ice skating venues were on open rivers, ponds, lakes, and canals. And everyone skated at their own risk. Ice skating is an excellent way to strengthen the legs and buttocks, enhance muscular endurance and increase cardio-vascular stamina. Ice skating sculpts the legs by strengthening the quadriceps, buttocks, hips and calves, and it also improve balance and coordination.

The Future of Recreational Skating

The twentieth Winter Olympics in February 2006 in Torino Italy will continue the trend of the gentrification of ice skating. Ice skating is now performed in billion dollar sports arenas by million dollar athletes for

the vicarious pleasure of the world's billions of people. The days when ordinary people used the sport for their own pleasure and health are disappearing. In only a few decades ice skating has been transformed to a spectator sport performed by competitive club teams and at Winter Olympics venues.

For example, take an Olympic speed skaters like Greta Smit of the Netherlands competing in her long track speed skating event in Salt Lake City at the 2002 Winter Olympics. Her ice skates, her training and her clothing are too costly for most skating enthusiasts. Speed skates are now only produced in a few countries and can cost several thousands dollars a pair.

Ice hockey also has become too expensive for many kids. The sport was once performed mostly by neighborhood boys and girls on any patch of ice they could scrape clean. But it has become an elite sport practiced mostly by those who have career prospects to become professional skaters. The hockey stick budget of one American League hockey club was reported to exceed \$320,000 for one season! And reports about the cost and time commitments to develop a champion figure skater are legendary.

The reasons for the waning popularity of recreational ice skating are many and complex. Because of the cost of technical advances, skating equipment and accessories are not as affordable as they once were. Technological improvements have increased the price

of a pair of skates a hundredfold from \$20 to \$2000 and more in just a few decades.

Refrigeration and ice resurfacing technology improvements further added to the cost of skating. Traditionally the long blades, of what came to be known as speed-skates, were ideal for skating on relatively rough and cracked natural ice. The longer the blade was the smoother the glide. But with the introduction of specialty skates, figure skates and hockey skates, their shorter blades did not perform well on rough natural ice.

Through successive advances in refrigeration and resurfacing technology the ice was made ever smoother and it ushered in the rise of competitive skating clubs and Winter Olympics skating events as we now know them.

Another reason for the decline in popularity of ice skating is that, as a society, we have become less inclined to participate in winter outdoor activities. There are so many indoors attractions, from video games, movies, and television, that few adults and their children venture outdoors in all but the most clement conditions. After all, we can watch skating, skiing and sledding on our television in the comfort of our own living room.

Our society's increased mobility permits us to avoid some or all of the winter months by traveling to warmer climates. Like migrating geese, the 'snow-birds' among us disappear during January and February, which are also the best months for winter activities. As a result winter festivals and winter venues become less well attended and organizers become less inclined to stage these costly winter events.

And then there is the unpredictability of winter weather. During some winters even the ice skating capital of Canada, Ottawa's five-mile Rideau Canal, experiences mid-winter thaws that have an adverse impact on its famous 'Winterlude' skating events.

With all of these uncertainties it is difficult for communities in the more southern US latitudes to justify the investment and staging of any winter event, be it on natural or man-made ice.

Access to ice skating is further hampered by the high cost of equipment and club membership. Many municipalities are in the final phase of closing the last remaining public skating facilities. They cite lack of funds and the high cost of liability insurance as the reasons for these decisions.

Private facilities have taken their place, but they are no longer readily affordable to the public. The business model of the private ice skating facilities is based on sports revenues. Figure skating, hockey skating, and even speed skating have become big business. They involve product branding rights, television broadcasting deals, and big salaries for athletes and coaching staffs. In this atmosphere it is all but impossible to find a 'free-skate' session any more.

It seems that recreational skating, as we knew it, has been largely replaced by newer easy-entry sports like skateboarding and similar sports. The difference is that these new sports are no longer practiced as a family activity. Because of the stamina and skill level required parents and younger siblings are pretty much excluded. It is in fact a highly individual activity, rarely engaged in as a group or team activity. But because its entry cost is just the cost of a skateboard, or a bicycle, and maybe some knee and elbow protection these activities are readily accessible to most young persons.

Ever more modern recreational skating venues are becoming associated with commercial ventures. The ice rinks at Lincoln Center in New York and in the Galleria Mall in Dallas, Texas are examples of the 'disneyfication' of the skating experience. Retail businesses are trying to make a connection between the

Perinton Historical Society *~ Trivia ~*

In 1951 the Fairport Schools abandoned District School #1 in Bushnell's Basin because of decentralization. The building was offered by the Town of Perinton to the Perinton Historical Society for their headquarters. The trustees turned down the town because they thought the maintenance costs would be too much for the membership and the location was in the remote southwest corner of the town away from the population center in the village of Fairport.

retail store, the shopper, and some form of spectacular entertainment like a skating rink. Like Las Vegas, modern ice rinks often include copious amounts of dramatic architectural backdrops, moving lights, art, sculpture, ice, organ music, and, of course, a few young skaters. These venues are typically surrounded by eating and drinking concessions where the shopper-spectator can relax and feel good in a Currier & Ives fantasy.

A Brief Skating Lesson....

Start the workout by skating lightly for five minutes to warm up the leg muscles. Then step off the rink and give the legs a good stretch. Stretch to the point of mild tension and hold the position for 10-20 seconds. During skating, bend both knees before pushing and always push from a bent knee to the other bent knee. Your skating knee (the leg on the ice) should always be active with a constant rise and fall movement. Keep the back straight and hips and shoulders in good alignment. The free leg (the leg not on the ice) should always be straight and either turned out with the toe pointed and slightly down, or turned inwards but still straight. When gliding, keep the feet horizontal to the ice and the blades parallel to each other. Pay attention to others to avoid colliding. The best way to avoid injury and learn to skate correctly is to take a few lessons under the guidance of an experienced skater.

Dress in layers of clothing that can be adjusted to changing weather conditions. Gloves or mittens should be made of wool or acrylic. They keep hands warm and serve as hand protectors in case of a fall. For beginners eye protection, head helmet, elbow and knee pads protection are well advised.

Wool socks keep moisture away from the skin. They should fit snugly around the foot and not bunch inside the skate. Skates must fit comfortably and well. The heel must be snug against the back of the skate and the toes must have some wiggle room to optimize skate control without impairing circulation. As with any physical sport, drink plenty of water.

So be a good skate and join the kids for some healthful ice skating!

March Meeting Feature...

Growing Up in Fairport in the 1950's

A talk by Dr. Matthew J. DiRisio

On Tuesday March 14 at 7:30 PM in the Fairport Museum, we will be having a special presentation by Dr. Matthew DiRisio entitled *My Story/A Village/Growing up in Fairport in the 1950's*. This presentation is one way Dr. DiRisio has chosen to honor and thank special Fairport individuals from the past who have had and continue to have a profound effect on his life and career. Also stressed are the various ways the then tiny village of Fairport helped form him.

Fairport's past, particularly the 1950's, both through photographs and oral presentation, is described using a power point presentation slide show. Many of Fairport's more colorful characters, such as "Hawk" DiRisio, are featured. It is, at its heart, a very personal story of one immigrant family, its struggles and triumphs, seen through the eyes of one of the boys who is very thankful for that family and its uncommon resiliency.

Dr. Matthew DiRisio is a 1959 graduate of Fairport High School and has over 40 years working in various public schools around the state. He is currently the president of the Fairport Board of Education. Dr. DiRisio received his undergraduate and graduate degree in Education from the State University of New York at Brockport and his doctorate in Education Administration from the University of Rochester. An inductee into the Fairport Alumni Wall of Fame in 2000, he has served on several committees in the village.

As an added bonus, Bill Keeler, the museum curator will put on display several boxes of material that was donated by the DiRiso family to the museum shortly after the death of the "Hawk".

This should be an exciting evening with plenty of local stories. The meeting is free and open to the public.

The Research Committees

(Part 2 of 4)

The first officers of the society spent several years in office and then left to head up research committees that dealt with different aspects of Perinton history. The committees were filled by members. For the first few years, memberships to the society were by invitation only. In 1936, a year after the society was founded, 13 women were asked to join and 11 accepted.

There were standing committees for the library, publicity, meetings, materials, maps, reminiscences, and genealogy. From these committees came such projects as the recording of cemetery records and tombstones, school histories, the plotting of the town map, textile exhibits, NYA indexing project, state marker and Erie Canal projects.

Cemetery Records: Most of the cemetery records were compiled by Mrs. G.H. Miller beginning in 1935. The records were compiled from tombstone inscriptions, records of various cemetery associations, church and family records, and local newspapers. All were checked against vital records from the town clerk's office. The records were then typed on 3x5 cards. As the records were completed they were published in the Fairport Herald Mail from 1935 to 1938. Mrs. Miller moved from Fairport just before the last entries were published in the newspaper.

Over the years some tombstones have fallen over or have been lost. These early cemetery records are sometimes the only source of information about people buried in a cemetery. Recently they have been published on the web and can be found at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~nymonroe/index.htm>.

School Histories: This committee took many black and white pictures of all 13 district schools in the Town of Perinton. Histories were written about each school and all minutes from the various school boards and local meetings were transcribed and typed. Since decentralization in 1952, this has been an invaluable resource for early Perinton schools.

Genealogy, Map and Land Record Committees: It is not clear who served on these committees over the years because few people signed their work. However, the genealogy committee did record who compiled their records. Every member of the society contributed their own family genealogy. Many letters were sent to relatives, friends and residents who once lived in Fairport and Perinton to

help fill in the record for hundreds of families who settled in Perinton. There are hundreds of genealogies from members, published sources and family bibles that make up a 5 volume set with indexes.

Using these genealogical studies, cemetery records, oral histories and other sources, 3 volumes of biographies were written on Early Settlers in Perinton from 1790 to 1830.

The town lot committee divided the town into 66 equal lots. They then created a file for each lot and copied all the land transactions from the Phelps and Gorham Purchase to 1850. They then added biographies of people who inhabited a particular lot and created map studies so that a researcher could follow the change of owners and houses from 1855 to 1902.

The final piece that ties together all these committees was the 1852 Early Perinton Map. This folk map was drawn by Adelaide Clark in 1959 and depicts the houses, roads, railroads and the Erie Canal in Perinton in the late 1800's. On the map were added historical notes gleaned from the research committees by Marjorie Snow Merriman. The map was then gridded into the 66 lots and indexed to the lot file.

In a little less than 25 years Perinton Historical Society members had collected and organized mountains of data concerning Fairport and Perinton into a comprehensive system that any researcher from outside the region could readily grasp. This is an outstanding and highly focused achievement for any organization over such a long period of time especially by a group of volunteers with no formal training.

The records show that Marjorie Snow Merriman had the most influence on these committees. In 1959 Ms. Merriman donated all of her notes and reference materials to the Perinton Historical Society. There were maps, charts, mounted newspaper articles, pages of type written text, indexes, and hand written oral histories. They came to the Society in 17 brightly colored covered bond paper boxes. In all the collection contains nearly 6,500 sheets and 4,000 index cards. The culmination of Marjorie's lifetime of work recording the history of Perinton came together in 1964 and 1965 when *The History of Perinton* was published in the Fairport Herald. Marjorie Snow Merriman died in 1966 at the age of 80.

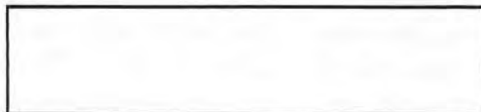
Next Month: *The Middle Years: Looking for a home.*



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The first two Mondays of every month the Archives open for Researchers only.

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