



Perinton Historical Society HISTORIGRAM

18 Perrin Street
Fairport, NY 14450

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Fairport Museum Acquires Copies of Rare 1817 Geddes Survey Maps

The building of the Erie Canal took a shorter amount of time to dig than it took to convince people, legislatures and politicians that the project was worthwhile. As early as 1803, visionaries and dreamers have thought about a canal that would link the Hudson River to the Great Lakes. The trick was to convince enough people that it would be worth the price in terms of profits for merchants, and increased commerce for the State of New York.

Jesse Hawley, a flour merchant, is credited with first discussing the idea of a canal with the New York State Gouverneur Morris in 1803. Hawley also plotted out a possible route with associate surveyor for the State of New York James Geddes when he was a boarder in Geddes home in 1805 shortly before Jesse Hawley fled New York for Pennsylvania.

Hawley was a flour supplier who bought flour from the interior of the state and transported it to New York City by wagon. The infrastructure in the state was very poor in the late 1700s and early 1800s. The roads were narrow or non-existent, many rivers had no bridges and much of the lower rural areas were swampy and nearly impassible. The price to ship flour by wagon from some of the inland regions such as Rochester was so expensive that Jesse Hawley accrued

a debt and moved to Pennsylvania to avoid the debt collectors. In 1807 he turned himself in to authorities who threw him in debtor's prison in Canandaugua, NY. While in prison, Hawley wrote several well publicized articles in support of canals not only in New York State but the rest of the United States as well.

In 1808, the State of New York authorized the expenditure of \$1,000 to conduct a survey with maps to investigate the possibility of creating a canal to link the Hudson River to Lake Erie. The report was to be submitted to the United States Government in an appeal for funds to build the canal. State Surveyor General Simeon DeWitt (DeWitt Clinton's cousin.) appointed his associate James Geddes to make the survey and added an additional \$600 as an honorarium for his service. The favored plan was a two canal system. One canal from the Mohawk River to Lake Ontario and another from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie. Geddes was instructed to concentrate on this two canal system but to further investigate the possibility of an entirely inland route across the state through western New York.

James Geddes was born in Carlisle, PA on July 22, 1783. As a young man, he settled in Onondaga County, NY and set up a salt works in what is now known as Solvay, NY. Later James Geddes became a lawyer. Many of the cases he handled involved property disputes and he gained a great deal of knowledge about surveying. He later became an member of the Surveyor Generals office in Albany. Even though Gedes was not an engineer or trained surveyor, it was felt he could learn the skills on the job and was famil-

≡ *Our Mission* ≡

"The Mission of the Perinton Historical Society is to promote interest in preserving and sharing local history."

iar enough with surveys through his experience as a lawyer to do the job assigned.

The survey was completed and sent on to Washington D.C. in 1808. The bill to build a canal in New York State to link the Hudson River to the Great Lakes was passed by the Congress of the United States but vetoed by President Madison. DeWitt Clinton of New York, an early supporter of the canal, was furious but undeterred. Two years later DeWitt Clinton joined Simeon DeWitt, James Geddes, William North and Thomas Eddy on a trip thorough the back waters of New York by canoe and wagon to look at the feasibility of building and financing a canal by the State of New York.

Shortly after this trip, the State Canal Commission was formed and began looking for an engineer to plot a proposed inland route. Their first choice was Englishman, William Weston who had mapped out a canal for the Western Inland Lock Navigation Co. in 1790. Because of Weston's age and ill health, he declined the offer. The survey job was then offered to two New York lawyers Benjamin Wright and James Geddes. Wright worked on the survey from Buffalo east and Geddes worked from near the Mohawk west. They met somewhere just west of Rochester.

Maps 13 and 14, copies of which were acquired for the museum, are part of a set of maps made in 1817 by James Geddes that tracked the western part of the proposed Erie Canal. This is the first time these maps have been seen outside of the state capital. These are copies of the original maps used in the printing of the 175 page report for the New York State Assembly as part of a bill introduced to the legislature February 1817 in support of building an interior canal from the Hudson River to Lake Erie. The survey detailed a proposal for 363 miles of canal, 83 locks and 18 aqueducts. The cost was \$4.9 million dollars which came to \$13,400 a mile.

Map number 13 shows the proposed canal, marked in blue, running parallel to a robust Thomas Creek to the north. This was Thomas Creek before it was tamed into what we see today. The creek to the east of the village business district is now a small wetland before flowing west where it is channeled behind some buildings on North Main Street and funneled into a narrow culvert under the street flowing toward Irondequoit Creek. In 1817 Thomas Creek flowed through a narrow valley. It's eastern route took it



James Geddes, Engineer

Engraving of James Geddes from *Onondaga: or Reminiscences of Earlier and Later Times* published in 1849.

through a low swampy area but it's banks became more defined as the creek got closer to Irondequoit Creek.

On the bottom part of the map is an elevation profile that matches the map above it. James Geddes skirted the south side of Thomas Creek Valley and placed the proposed canal right through the middle of a small settlement on high land where the village of Fairport now stands. The settlement had five buildings and a single road or path that led from where the village hall is today to the top of Brooks Hill on South Main.

Map 14 shows the proposed canal heading south from Thomas Creek then west to a mill pond on Irondequoit Creek near where Bushnell's Basin is today. When James Geddes reached the mill, he knew that the slopes surrounding Irondequoit Creek Valley were too steep at this point and the valley too narrow for a series of locks to bridge the gap in the proposed canal. So he envisioned an earthen embankment to cross the valley.

When the final engineering plans were being discussed in the 1820s, there was a proposal to erect a wooden aqueduct instead to carry the canal over the valley. It was finally decided that a wooden aqueduct with tons of water and loaded barges high above the

valley floor would be too top heavy and could potentially fall over in a high wind. This idea was scrapped and Geddes' original idea of an earthen embankment was adopted which can still be seen today.

The New York State Assembly approved the proposed plan 51 to 40, two months later the Senate passed the bill, and it was finally approved by the Council of Revision in late 1817.

The maps, which were originally bound in a leather cover, eventually made their way to the New York State Archives. The cover deteriorated to a point where only a small square piece of leather with the gold embossed year 1817 survived. The original survey maps have remained intact with minor repairs. Digital images were made of two maps that show the proposed canal across the town of Perinton and copies were acquired by Bill Keeler, Fairport Museum curator, for use by researchers.

The maps, which are over 4 feet long, are currently framed and are on display on the first floor of the museum and will be shown for the first time at the museum's grand reopening on March 1 from noon to 4 P.M. Bill Keeler will be in the museum to answer questions and the public will also be able to see the recently installed lighting fixtures in the museum.

PHS Society Meetings & Events & Museum Schedule

- ~ **February 9** - one of the exhibit cases in the Fairport Public Library will have a display of pictures and captions from the soon to be released book *Then and Now: Fairport and Perinton*.
- ~ **February 17** - the Fairport Museum, 7:30 P.M. Jean Keplinger will give a power point presentation *Fairport's South Main Street Then and Now*.
- ~ **March 1** - Grand reopening of the Fairport Museum and unveiling of copies of 1817 Geddes Maps. Noon to 4:00.
- ~ **March** - meeting speaker to be decided.
- ~ **April 6** - Release of the new book *Then and Now: Fairport and Perinton* by William Keeler and Keith Boas.
- ~ **April** - Annual House Tour in the town of Perinton.
- ~ **May** - Annual Society meeting and picnic.

February Society Meeting...

Perinton Town Historian Jean Keplinger to be Featured

On the third Tuesday of February, the 17th at 7:30 P.M. in the Fairport Museum, the Perinton Historical Society will host Town Historian Jean Keplinger who will be delivering a power point presentation entitled *Then and Now: Fairport's South Main Street*. This is the second of two presentations given by Jean that will highlight buildings that have changed through time in the village of Fairport.

The South Main Street business district has arguably been the the most fashionable part of town from Fairport's founding in 1866 until urban renewal in the late 1970s. Henry DeLand chose this section of town for his grand mansion over the traditional DeLand corners located at the North Main and Whitney Road. Substantial brick, concrete and stone buildings replaced previous wooden buildings along South Main Street from the 1850s to 1910.

If you enjoyed Jean's presentation on North Main Street last year don't miss this presentation covering buildings on the south side of the Erie Canal. The meeting is free and open to the public.

Recent Contributions to the Perinton Historical Society

- A contribution in honor of Matson and Ruth Ewell from Maryo Gard Ewell.

Museum Acquires a Brick from First Baptist Church

You may have seen some work being done on the exterior of the First Baptist Church on the corner of S. Main and Church Streets last Fall. Contractors were hired to replace deteriorated bricks on the outside of the church. The damage to the bricks occurred when the church was painted in the 1990s. The paint trapped moisture causing the bricks to retain water causing damage to many of the bricks.

As a fund raiser, forty of the bricks were salvaged by members of the church and were offered to the public for a donation. The bricks are affixed with a small plaque which says "1st Baptist Church of Fairport Built 1876 Restoration 2008. National Historic Site." The bricks are orange with remnants of the red paint on one side. These are the original bricks that were used to build the church in 1876.

Bill Keeler, curator for the Fairport museum, bought one of these vintage bricks. It will be on display in the north wing of the museum. The brick is an important addition to our collection of pieces of historic buildings and places. The other objects in our collection similar to the brick include two mill stones from the Boyland Mill located on North Main Street and later State Street, now Liftbridge Lane, several square cut nails from the old Fairport Union School built in 1870 on West Church St. and cast iron ornaments from store facades torn down on South Main Street during urban renewal. In the 1980s Matson Ewell retrieved a paving stone when the state repaved South Main Street and we even have some volcanic ash from the Mount St. Helen's eruption out west that was sent to us by a former resident.

Independence Day Float

On July 4, 2009 the Perinton Historical Society is planning a float for the Fairport parade. Anyone interested in helping with the planning, the costumes, and/or decorating the float should call Ann Castle at 385-1268 or e-mail haranncas@aol.com.

This should be a good opportunity to showcase the society and museum.

Special Sneak Preview for Members

It's still winter and the museum has been through some changes while shut down for the last several months. Volunteers, staff and electricians have been working hard to prepare the museum for a special reopening to the public on March 1 from noon to 4 P.M. New light fixtures for the north and south wing have been installed along with fans, the ceilings have been painted and the floors waxed. Thanks go to Harold Castle and Bill Keeler for painting the ceilings, and Bill Keeler and Art Wilson for moving displays, covering artifacts and moving furniture during the installation of new lights.

Although the museum will still be closed, members and guests attending the February meeting are invited to come early and take a sneak preview at the changes in the museum. Also on display will be a copy of two rare 1817 maps of Perinton which will be in the center display case.

Then and Now Display on Exhibit in the Fairport Library in February

On April 6, the book *Then and Now: Fairport and Perinton* which is being sponsored by the Perinton Historical will be released. A display case has been reserved in the Fairport Public Library for the month of February which will have on display a sneak peek at some of the pictures and captions from the book.

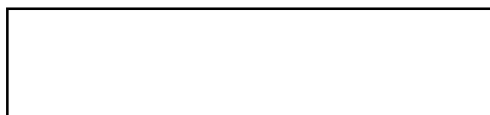
Some of the pictures are old favorites like the Henry Deland House and Pure Oil Station and others are more obscure like the Powderhorn ski jump and Quonset Inn. All the pictures will have captions describing the views and a brief history of the site both then and now. The book will be on sale beginning April 6 and will be available at the Fairport Museum and perhaps the Perinton Town Hall during normal hours. Several book signing are also planned after the book's release.



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FAIRPORT HISTORICAL MUSEUM

18 PERRIN STREET, FAIRPORT, NY 14450

The first two Mondays of every month the Archives open for Researchers only.
The Fairport Museum will be closed through February

Visit our website:

www.angelfire.com/ny5/fairporthistmuseum

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Call 223-3989 and leave a message.*