

Perinton Historical Society HISTORIGRAM

18 Perrin Street
Fairport, NY 14450

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The Fairport Canal Riot of 1871: The Riot Part 3 of 4

The contractor, Lewis Selye, who fixed the first breach in the canal on April 25th, was called on again to fix this much larger break at the Ox-Bow. Lewis Selye was a successful Rochester business man and politician. He moved to Rochester in 1824 and engaged in manufacturing iron and later in building fire engines. As a Rochester city alderman, Selye was responsible for the building of the second suspension bridge over the Genesee River near Carthage which fell under heavy snows in the middle 1850's. Lewis Selye was elected to the 40th Congress of the United States and served during the Andrew Johnson administration from 1867 to 1869. In 1858 Lewis was awarded the Erie Canal contract, which put him in control of all maintenance and repairs of the canal from Syracuse to Buffalo.

The first order of business for Selye was to rehire the 50 men he employed to repair the breach. He also began looking for more workers. As the Democrat and Chronicle article of May 5th 1871 put it, "The news of the break was sent over the state and the idle, the indigent and the depraved made their way to the scene of the disaster, and applied for work, which was readily given."

A rough pine shack was erected as headquarters for Selye on the east side of the canal. Tents of all

sizes from one to five poles in length were put up on both sides of the canal linked by a rude bridge. A large 130' by 70' tent was set up as a mess tent. Three managers and many assistants were hired to feed the men. Inside the tent were 30 long tables all set with cups and plates to feed 500 men. At the far end was a tight board fence to cut off the sleeping quarters from the mess hall. The quarters were equipped with wooden bunks, and straw was laid on the ground to keep the area relatively clean and dry.

In order to eat in the tent, the men hired were given numbered tickets. At meal time the men would line up at the door of the tent, and their tickets would be punched before they entered. Waiters would then bring in the meals and serve the men. The workers brought their own shovels to meals and kept them tightly secured between their legs to keep them from being stolen. They even took them to bed with them as thefts were quite common in the camp.

The canal break was a shot in the arm for the local economy. Roughly half of the workers came from local farms in the area. The men were employed as shovelers, foremen, waiters, carpenters and watchmen. If a young man could take time off from his chores around the farm, he could pick up a quick \$2.50 a day and a free meal. James Culhane, a young boy who lived on a farm just a few hundred feet from the break, worked at the job site for 3 ½ days as a water-boy and earned \$5.25. The Hickey brothers from nearby Willowbrook Farm worked for 8 days as diggers and used their teams of horses to move soil to the site.

More than 30 homeowners in Fairport earned an average of \$20 for boarding men in their homes. Star

Our Mission

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

Northrup, who owned a house on Fairport Road, boarded several men in his house and made an additional \$67.50 as a foreman on the site for 15 days of work. Farmers who could spare their horses could make \$3.00 a day (minus feed) by using their teams and wagons to transfer soil or pick up materials. Other farmers, like E. Benedict, supplied straw for the tents and oats for the horses. Benedict was paid \$40.70 for a shipment of straw and oats to the site.

Merchants also did a brisk business. Simmons & McAuliffe, a lumber company in Fairport, sold timber and aspen wood for \$2,291.06 for buildings and the temporary dam; Morey & Hodskin supplied medicine for \$101.65; Burke & Co. supplied shovels, picks, horseshoes and nails for \$485.37. L.M. Shaw, who owned a mortuary in the village of Fairport, was paid \$72 for 12 days of transferring clients and dignitaries in his buggy from the train station in the village to the Oxbow.

All went well for a few days as the workmen were assembled and dirt began arriving by horse and wagon to fill the break. Some of the earth had to be brought in from as far away as half a mile. Then on the 4th of May it began to rain. The newly constructed roads were now muddy paths, and shoveling began to be more tedious and uncomfortable. Grumbling began among the men as some felt they should be paid \$3 a day instead of the going rate of \$2.50 a day because of the conditions. By 10:00 that morning the rain was so bad the men began to walk off the job. The men who remained were threatened by the men who were walking off, and wagons were pitched into ditches to keep the remaining men from working. Before long the job site was completely abandoned.

At the noon meal the men had corn beef and coffee. After the meal speakers arose and addressed the 600 men and aired their grievances. A series of chants were started "Three dollars a day for all of us" followed by a final refrain "Let it be recorded." Many of the men

stayed in the tent to await the next meal. The workers who ventured outside the tent entertained themselves with various activities. Two men were seen throwing shovels at each other playfully, ending in a fight; some engaged in contests, one of which was throwing a 25 pound rock to see who could throw it the farthest. Fires were set in various locations by groups of 10 men to keep the chill off. Although very few men appeared intoxicated, several were seen walking behind the tents and taking large swigs of benzine (a chemical that could be taken to get high) from a pop bottle.

By the afternoon, it was clear to the contractor, Lewis Seyle, that there could be a full blown riot on his hands over wages. Rochester Mayor Briggs was telegraphed with a request for military assistance. The 54th Regiment was called and prepared to come to Fairport immediately by train.

Next issue: The Troops Arrive.



Lewis Seyle is the second man seated from the left in front of his headquarters at Camp Seyle beside the Oxbow on the Erie Canal, Fairport, New York. Stereo-graph is from the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division

Repair Vouchers

Below is a sampling of the vouchers issued to people and firms for services rendered in the repair of the Oxbow in 1871. Original vouchers are in the New York State Archives. A0954-77

5-11-1871 Thomas Blood, bill for oats, \$113.75
5-15-1871 Allen Ayrault, delivered wood , \$204.00
5-15-1871 William Hibbard, watchman, worked 6 days, \$15 minus \$3.60 for board, \$11.40.
5-7-1871 Nelson Hulbert, worked 1day, \$2.50 minus board (60 cents), \$1.90 paid.
5-12-1871 S. Hammond, carpenter, 2 days of work, \$7.00.
5-12-1871 Star Northrup, boarded men, \$43.00.
5-8-1871 William Parkhurst showed up with no shovel but bought the one supplied to him. 5 days worked. \$12.50 minus \$1.00 for the shovel, \$11.50.
5-8-1871 James Perrin, carpenter, worked 9 days with helpers, \$315.00.
5-16-1871 Michael Hickey, with a team of horses worked 7 ½ days, \$45.00.
5-12-1871 S.P. Howard, bill for the use of tools and hickory wood, \$11.50.
5-12-1871 C.M. Steele of Pittsford, for food, \$25.30.
5-22-1871 Thomas Durand for gravel, \$115.20.
5-11-1871 Joseph B. Campbell, sheriff and deputy, bill for keeping the peace \$113.65 and \$739.00
5-11-1871 Alty Hulbert, waterboy, worked 9 days, \$13.50.
5-23-1871 H.W. Selye, straw, \$5.
5-11-1871 H.H. Newman, merchandise, \$167.25.
5-11-1871 Nelson Lewis, foreman for 10 days, \$25.00
5-11-1871 Company B, 54th Regiment, to quell the riot, \$1,245.00.

Happenings at the Society

For more information visit our website at www.perintonhistoricalsociety.org or call the museum at 223-3989.

- ~ **November 17** at 7:30 p.m.(Tuesday) Perinton Historical Society meeting at the Fairport Museum. The speaker will be Audrey Johnson the town of Pittsford Historian who will talk about the history of the town of Pittsford.
- ~ **December 15** at 7:30 p.m.(Tuesday) Perinton Historical Society Christmas Program at the Fairport Museum. Note: this date and time might change depending on the Fairport music students availability.
- ~ **January 19** at 7:30 p.m.(Tuesday) Perinton Historical Society meeting at the Fairport Public Library. Vicki Profitt will be the speaker and talk on the graves and lives of Civil War Soldiers buried in Pittsford and Perinton cemeteries. Note: Time and date may change depending on the availability of the Library meeting room.
- ~ **April 25** from 1 to 4 p.m.(Sunday) Perinton Historical Society House Tour in the Village of Fairport, projected to be in the West Ave. neighborhood.
- ~ Thanks go to **Anne Johnston** who volunteers to tally our sales tax at the gift shop and fill out our sales tax forms quarterly.
- ~ The Perinton Historical Society thanks **William and Beverly Pullis** for their donation to the Society in memory of Alta Hutchings.
- ~ Correction. Our new Board Treasurer is **Bob Hunt** not Bob Hart.

from the Historic Structures Committee...

The Village Landmark at 18 Perrin Street

by Jean Whitney

In 1976, the Landmark Society of Western New York did a survey of buildings in Fairport. The survey stated 18 Perrin Street was "perhaps Fairport's only distinguished public building." The building is owned by the village of Fairport and leased by the village at no charge to the Perinton Historical Society. It was the first building to be designated a landmark under the local law in 2008.

The library was designed by Fairport resident, Henry Martin, an architect in the firm of Wiard and Martin. His wife Helen Martin was the active head of the library during WWII and continued to work there until the early 60's. In the depression years of the early '30s funding was scarce for public buildings. Robert Douglas, philanthropist and founder of Fairport's Pectin Company, gave 500 shares of Pectin Co stock to build the Library. After the stock market crash in 1929, the stock wasn't worth enough to build the library.

The Perinton Patriotic League had \$10,000 dollars which had not been used to help support WWI veterans. They decided to donate this money to help build the library. This is the reason for the dedication plaque in the front foyer to the WWI veterans from the Fairport Perinton area.

The WPA, Works Progress Administration, donated the labor to build this building. It's the only WPA building in Fairport or Perinton.

The Perinton Historical Museum is built in a Georgian Revival style with 4 unfluted columns on the front porch. The doorway has a circular fanlight with 2 fluted Corinthian columns on each side. At the top of each column are acanthus leaves. The brick is from Virginia and the size of the brick is larger than normal which was done to make the overall impression of the building seem smaller. There is a fanlight transom



in brick over each window. The slate roof is of Bangor slate from Pennsylvania. The drainage gutters, called Yankee gutters, are built into the roof to prevent icicles from forming.

Local artist, Carl Peters, was chosen to do the mural in the library/historical museum. Part of Franklin Roosevelt's economic recovery in the 1930's was to hire artists to do artwork locally. There were 2 Federal WPA art projects in Fairport: The bronze plaque in the old Fairport Post Office was one and Peter's mural was another. Peter's mural was designed for Fairport. It shows the canal and local people living their daily lives.

Since 1979, The Perinton Historical Society has maintained and operated 18 Perrin Street as a museum. We are fortunate to have their dedicated commitment to preserving this building. The Perinton Historical Society received the Landmark Society of Western New York's Historic Preservation Stewardship award in 2001 for their efforts to preserve this building. The care they have given this building has made it much easier to designate it as a landmark.

DeLand Artifacts to be on Display at the Ontario County Historical Society

Beginning on October 24, 2009, the Ontario County Historical Society Museum and Research Center in Canandaigua will be presenting an exhibition entitled "Self Made Men and Women of Western New York." On display, from October 2009 to September 2010, will be artifacts, photographs and archival materials of 15 to 20 individuals who made a difference in their communities. Included among these elites are Daniel and Levi DeLand. The artifacts on the DeLands will be on loan from the Fairport Museum for this exhibit.

Daniel DeLand founded the Deland Chemical Works in 1852. It transformed this small community from a rural farming area to an industrial village on the outskirts of the city of Rochester. He was also in local politics and was a court judge in Rochester. His son Levi followed in his father's footsteps. Levi was also involved in politics and brought Fairport its first fire department, water works and community band.

The exhibit was developed to complement a traveling exhibit arriving at the Ontario County Museum in February of 2010. The exhibit, called "Self Made in America: Abraham Lincoln", has been produced by the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. It will make 40 stops across the United States and will be at the Ontario County Historical Society for the entire month of February.

If you want to see our artifacts displayed in another institution, are interested in the luminaries of 19th century western New York or have a particular interest in the life of Abraham Lincoln (for the month of February 2010 only), take a trip to Canandaigua and see the exhibits.

For more information about the exhibits go to www.ochs.org. The Ontario County Historical Society Museum and Research Center is located at 55 North Main Street in Canandaigua, New York. There is parking behind the museum.

"What does being "self made" mean?

To most it is the Horatio Alger story of going from rags to riches. However, in Lincoln's time, being self made also meant to improve one-self through good morals, character, lifelong learning so that he/she could be a better citizen. In doing so a person might bring wealth to him/herself and family, but also might contribute social, intellectual and material improvements to the community and society in general."

Wilma T. Townsend
Curator
Ontario County Historical Society Museum

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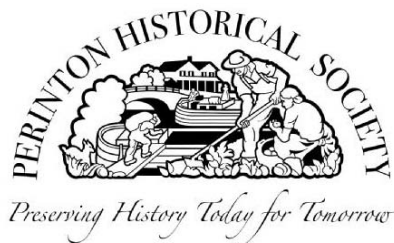
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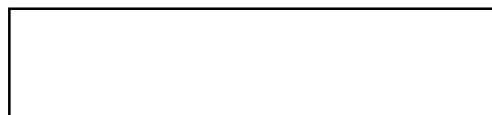
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FAIRPORT HISTORICAL MUSEUM

18 PERRIN STREET, FAIRPORT, NY 14450

REGULAR HOURS

Sunday	2 p.m. - 4 p.m.
Tuesday	2 p.m. - 4 p.m.
Thursday	7 p.m. - 9 p.m.

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

Visit our website:
www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org

*Group tours, presentations and special projects by appointment.
Call 223-3989 and leave a message.*