

Robert C. Stevens PHS Member for 67 Years, and His Landmark Home

By Bill Poray

The Perinton Historical Society was founded in 1935, and for most of the time since, Robert C. Stevens has been a member. Only fourteen years after Marjorie Snow-Merriman, Helen Martin, Charlotte Clapp and a handful of others held their first meeting, Robert Stevens and his wife, Jane Knauss Stevens, signed on as PHS members. The young couple had made one of Perinton's most historic properties their home in the summer of 1949, and became members of the Perinton Historical Society in December of that year. That adds up to over 67 years that Mr. Stevens has been on the roster of members, the longest on record.



Robert C. Stevens outside the home he and his wife Jane purchased in 1949. Located at the corner of Ayrault and Green Ridge Roads, the property boasts a wonderful English barn and extensive gardens. The house is believed to have been built around 1820, although the ornamental trim seen here was added later in the 19th century.

The Town of Perinton's Historic Architecture Commission designated the house a Perinton Landmark in 1991.

Photo by Bill Poray

Robert C. Stevens was born in Boston, Massachusetts, and raised in Ithaca, NY. He graduated from Harvard University in 1947, and married in 1948. An executive with Stromberg-Carlson, Stevens eventually formed his own consulting business, helping entrepreneurs interested in starting their own business ventures. An avid genealogist and historian, Stevens served for many years as a board member and officer of the New England Historic Genealogical Society. He has documented his family extensively, and authored a book on the life of his great grandfather, Robert. W. S. Stevens, who has been referred to as "one of nineteenth-century America's truly extraordinary men."

The Stevens family has been involved and supportive of many organizations over the years. Jane became active in Perinton's Republican Committee in the early 1950s, and was appointed to the town's Planning Board in 1956, at a time when the involvement of women in such things was practically unheard of. By the early 1960s, she held a prominent position with Monroe County's Republican Committee. Jane passed away in 2008, after a life filled with accomplishments. With her husband, they raised a family and impeccably maintained their landmark home, now almost two hundred years old. Extensive vegetable and flower gardens were created, and rare varieties of trees were added to the landscape.

Continued on page 3



~ Bob Hunt ~

Comments from your President

January 15th, 2017:

Greetings and Happy New Year. Can you believe it? The busy holidays are past and by the time you receive your *Historigram* and read this, the month of January will be history as well. I mentioned in my last column that I hurried off to

Country Max to purchase a Niger seed feeder to attract the goldfinch and, while there, I also purchased a couple of suet cake feeders. The suet cake feeders were an instant hit with a couple of downy woodpeckers, which are about the size of sparrows. The male has a small red patch on the nape while the females do not and they are the smallest, tamest and most abundant of our eastern woodpeckers. The suet cake also enticed a new bird to pay a visit, the red bellied woodpecker, a new one for my list. This woodpecker is robin-sized and is black-and-white barred on the back. The male has a bright red crown and nape, with the female displaying the red nape only. The red patch on the abdomen, from which it derives the name, is seldom visible in the field. The male was the visitor to our back patio. This woodpecker is common over much of the south with New York on the very northern edge of its range. In fact, Fairport is located outside of its normal range, so he is a bonus visitor to our feeders.

You know we enjoy skiing as one of our favorite winter time activities, but even though the record shows almost 50 inches of snow to date, the ground is bare as I look from my carriage-barn office window. As a result, skiing has been very limited so far this season, although New Hampshire received a big storm of one to two feet right after New Year's. We made a quick decision to visit Bretton Woods, one of our favorite ski areas. Once again, we stayed at the Mulburn Inn in Bethlehem, which I told you about in my column from March of last year.

One of my favorite Santa-delivered gifts each year is the *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, and Santa came through again this year. I must have been a good boy. This annual periodical is one of my favorite resource/reference sources of information on weather, moon phases, when to plant my tomatoes, and lots of other useful and sometimes not so useful data. One of the articles I found very interesting was entitled "2017's Greatest Spectacle" by Bob Berman, about the first total solar eclipse over the U.S. mainland in 38 years. This will occur on August 21st, so put it on your calendars. From here we will be able to witness a partial eclipse, but if you want to witness the total eclipse, you need to be within the 140-mile-wide path it takes from Oregon traveling southeast to South Carolina. According to Bob Berman's article, along the 140-mile

path, one will witness darkness so that constellations are visible in the middle of the day. You will not see the summer constellations, but instead the winter constellations. Also from Bob Berman: "An uncommon mindset takes over people when the Sun, Moon, and your spot on Earth form a perfectly straight line in space. Many observers shout and babble. Some weep. Afterward, everyone proclaims it to be the greatest spectacle they have ever beheld. Beyond that, many are speechless. Animals also exhibit odd behavior."

The Hunts are planning a short road trip with the goal of being within the 140 mile swath of the "Greatest Spectacle" on August 21st, so we will report more when I write the September dated column. Watch the weather forecast as a cloud covered day would not be good for observing the eclipse. For more information, search the internet for Bob Berman and Solar Eclipse. A total solar eclipse will be visible in Rochester in 2024. But currently at 76 years old, I'm not pressing my luck and will try to attend the eclipse this year, probably somewhere in Kentucky or Tennessee.

Another date to put on your calendar is May 16th, the date for our annual meeting and picnic to be held at Perinton Park starting at 6:00 p.m.

Thanks for your continued support and we will chat again next month.

Bob Hunt, President

585-415-7053, rhunt1@rochester.rr.com



Boy Scouts Awarded Eagle Ranks

On December 18th, Boy Scouts Will Kaiser and Roy West were awarded the rank of Eagle Scout in a special ceremony, which took place at the First Congregational United Church of Christ.

Will and Roy, both of Troop 207, completed their Eagle projects at the museum. In February of last year, Will and his team painted the walls of the museum's north wing. Roy's project followed in June, when he and his crew painted the south wing walls.

Jack Kaiser, Will's twin brother, was also awarded his Eagle rank during the ceremony. His Eagle project involved leading an effort to create bat houses for Lollypop Farm. Both Will and Jack spent time last year as museum volunteers.

Scout Dan Whitney of Troop 208, was awarded the Eagle rank in November. Perhaps you have noticed the freshly painted walls in the museum gift shop and the sparkling woodwork, courtesy of the team led by Dan for his Eagle Scout project.

See photo and continuation of article on page 5.



Aerial view from early in 1950 showing the Stevens home (behind trees at right), barn, and outbuildings. A bit of Ayrault Road is at the bottom-right.

Photo provided by
Robert C. Stevens

Mr. Stevens and family members continue stewardship of one of the most recognizable and unique homes in Perinton. Unique because the house is built of "earthen" construction. In my visit with him, he shared several years of correspondence with architectural experts, descendants of former owners, and a 1948 letter from Marjorie Snow-Merriman. These documents shed light on the history of the property, and the construction of the house.

After reading a 1987 article titled "Earthen Architecture of New York State," Bob Stevens wrote to the author, Richard Pieper, of the Preservation League of New York State. Although Pieper highlighted two earthen homes in Penfield in his article, it was clear he was unaware of the Stevens home. In Bob's letter, he wrote, "The house in which my wife and I reside in the Town of Perinton, Monroe County, is also an earthen house, which fact seems to have been kept from those interested in such things, for quite a long time".

Merriman Research on Perinton's Earthen House

Marjorie Snow-Merriman spent untold hours in the 1940s researching many dozens of early and important homes for the Perinton Historical Society, including the home featured in this story. She reported her findings to the owner at the time, John Zimmerman, in March of 1948. There had been competing theories as to the age of the house, which Snow-Merriman documented in the excerpt below:

It seems that in Dec. of 1819, one Gideon Culver, of Mendon, in the southern part of this country, sold the farm to a Samuel Whittlesey. Since Mr. Culver was definitely not of Perinton, we may suppose that he was a land buyer or speculator. From 1790 to 1820, there had been many changes of ownership among this class and as late as 1811 one buyer had purchased the whole lot no. 60. I might say here that most of the lots in

Perinton contain 320 acres each. The speculators seldom built on the land that they bought, though they sometimes cleared it, so that it would bring more in a subsequent sale, I suppose.

With the advent of the Whittleseys, however, the picture changes. Samuel Whittlesey sold it to Ezra Whittlesey two years later, in 1821. Samuel is given in the 1830 census for Perinton (probably the male in the 60 to 70 year age group. Another male in the 30 to 40 year age group is probably Ezra, perhaps his son.) Ezra appears as a deacon in the Congregational Church from 1825 to 1833. This is all the contemporary evidence of this family in Perinton which I have found to date. But it is enough to confirm belief that the Whittleseys were living on this farm, since I do not find them in any other Perinton lot. It all seems to point to the age of the house as being about 1820. Undoubtedly the house has been altered and added to many times since and perhaps the decoration at the lower roof line was a subsequent improvement.

My earlier impression that the Alvords who bought it in 1849 and owned it until 1871 were the original occupants, is, I believe now, quite wrong. Alvord (orig. Alvoord) is a Dutch name and that tied in with the tale that the architecture was Dutch. But it isn't! My good friend Henry Martin tells me that it is a Victorian offshoot of East Lake Gothic. Henry should know. The snap shot I made of the house for our Historical Society records was aimed exclusively at the decorative roof line and shows little of the house. I will see if the Rochester Public Library has clipped Arch Merrill's picture of it, from the Democrat. Shall have to ask you please to return the film as it belongs to the Society.

Sincerely yours,
Marjorie S. Merriman



1940s photograph by Marjorie Snow-Merriman. The house is of earthen construction, sometimes referred to as rammed-earth construction.

An elderly visitor came to the Stevens home in the spring of 1950, less than a year after they had bought the house. He was a grandson of Royal Alvord, who had purchased the home a century earlier. It seems information regarding the construction of the earthen portion of the house had been passed down to Royal Alvord from previous owners, the Whittlesey family. He had been told of the method of construction by his grandfather, and he shared what he knew with Bob Stevens during his visit in 1950. Many years later, Stevens shared the visitor's information in a 1987 letter to the earthen home author, Richard Pieper.

Here is an excerpt:

The story was that after the 24" rock basement was laid, 18 inch wide forms were put on top into which was poured 12" of mud, rock, straw and "Portland." (I am not sure that the latter was actually used.) Boards were put in where the windows and doors were to be. A donkey was then driven up onto the form and walked around the house packing the mud down. The donkey packed it down to about 6" per day. When the proper height of the first floor was reached (8 ½ to 9 ft.), the form width was reduced to 7" and the pouring continued, but it was packed by hand (or human feet, as the case might have been).

The shelf formed by the change in the wall thickness from 18" to 7" was used to support the rafters for the second floor, which has 7 ft. ceilings. Mr. Alvord's understanding was that the mud part of the house and the wooden part in the rear (called the "summer kitchen") were built at the same time. This makes a great deal of sense to me, as the interior layout of the mud part would not have allowed a kitchen or fireplace to have been present.

When we decided to remodel the "summer kitchen" part in 1952, we discovered terrible termite damage. This resulted in our inability to remodel so we had to demolish that part. In so doing, we exposed the outside of the original mud wall—and it had never been painted—confirming, I am sure, our belief...that both structures were actually built at the same time.

We have photographs of the wall as it was uncovered at that time, which confirm Mr. Alvord's comments regarding the layering of the construction. The wooden form marks could be seen, as could the layering.



1952 photograph taken during demolition of the termite-infested summer kitchen

The photo shows the original unpainted mud wall (dark area at upper left in photo), and lines visible from the wood forms, as the layers of construction caused the house to grow in height, day by day.

Photo provided by Robert C. Stevens

The Stevens rebuilt the area that had been the summer kitchen in 1952, using the same dimensions, and reusing the original structural beams, visible on the new interior.

The home has been maintained impeccably, and in 1991 was designated a historic landmark by the town of Perinton. Certainly appropriate, as it is one of the most historic properties in the community, lovingly owned since 1949 by the longest tenured member of the Perinton Historical Society.



Perinton Historical Society Mission

To provide interest in preserving and sharing local history through education and accessibility.



Joyce Lyle and some of the beautiful Swedish Cookie Trees

Yuletide Gratitude

Once again, the Perinton Historical Society is overwhelmed by the generous support of the community, including the many members who donated and/or bid on the beautiful array of trees, wreaths, baskets, certificates, and other unique items in our annual *Yuletide Traditions* event. The Society successfully hosted a variety of programs and festive events for several hundred people—and raised over \$2,100.

Unique to this year's mix of items were 16 Swedish Cookie trees created by Joyce Lyle and her son, Jamie, and by Jolene and Fred Smith. The trees and ginger cookies are part of the Swedish celebration of the Christmas holiday, which runs throughout December until St. Knut's Day, January 13, when the trees are taken down and the cookies eaten.

"Eagle Scouts" continued from page 2



Boy Scout Troop
207 Eagle Scouts
Roy West, Will
Kaiser and Jack
Kaiser

The PHS is greatly appreciative to these young men for their efforts to beautify the museum, and we look forward to working with two additional Scouts, Evan Alaimo and Colin McKechney, as they complete their Eagle projects at the museum in the upcoming months.

Special Recognition Level Memberships

As of January 15, 2017

Business (\$100)

The Inn on Church

11 West Church Street, Fairport, NY 14450

Phone: 585-678-1106

Website: <https://www.facebook.com/theinnonchurch>

Ed Bradford, Liftbridge Financial Advisors

6 North Main Street, Suite 400w, Fairport, NY 14450

Website: <http://liftbridgefinancial.com>

Suzanne Lee Personal Histories

33 Chesham Way, Fairport, NY 14450

Phone: 585-267-6189

Website: <http://SleePersonalHistories.com>

Fairport Village Inn, Wayne and Patty Beckwith

103 North Main Street, Fairport, NY 14450

Phone: 585-388-0112

Website: <http://www.thefvi.com>

Robert Ruhland, Keller Williams Realty

2000 Winton Road S. Bldg. 1, Rochester, NY 14618

Phone: 585-303-6607

Website: <http://bobruhland.yourkwagent.com>

Forever Financial Advisors, LLC

Annie McQuilkin, MS, CFP®

140 West Church Street, Fairport, NY 14450

Phone: 585-598-1377

Website: <http://www.foreverfinancial.com>

Pixos Print

75 Goodway Drive, Rochester, NY 14623-3000

Phone: 585-500-4600

Website: ReadytoRun@pixosprint.com

Joel Cuminala, Turning Point Signs & Design

3 Railroad Street, Fairport, NY 14450

Website: <http://www.tpsigns.com>



Upcoming Events

Tuesday, February 21st, 7:00 p.m. at the museum

Program: *Rochester Mobilizes for the Great War*

Presenter: Dan Cody

Saturday, March 4th, 10:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m.

The museum opens for the season.

Tuesday, March 21st, 7:00 p.m. at the museum

Program: *The New York Woman Suffrage Centennial*

Presenter: Christine Ridarsky

Tuesday, April 18th, 7:00 p.m. at the museum

Program: Celebrating Fairport Village's Sesquicentennial

Presenter: Village of Fairport 150th Anniversary Committee

Tuesday, May 16th, 6:00 p.m. — Perinton Park Pavilion

Event: Perinton Historical Society Annual Meeting and Picnic

Tuesday, June 13th, 7:00 p.m. (Place to be announced)

Program: Annual Illuminated History Cemetery Tour



ENLIST AT

8 NORTH WATER STREET, ROCHESTER

Rochester Mobilizes for the Great War

The PHS is pleased to welcome historian Dan Cody to the Fairport Museum on Tuesday, February 21th, at 7:00 p.m. as he discusses Rochester's participation in World War I.

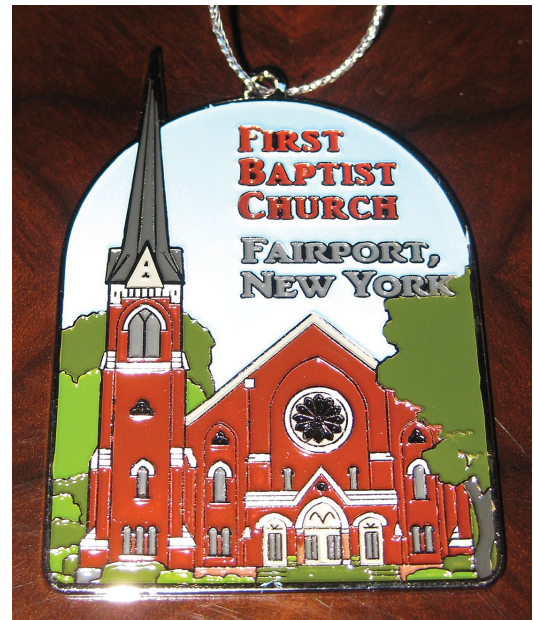
In 1914 the world was thrown into the Great War. Although the United States did not officially enter the war until 1917, Rochester participated in the war economy and prepared for eventual entry into the war. Once the United States declared war, Rochester was an All-American patriotic city.

Historian Daniel D. Cody, M.A., is employed as Collections Manager and Registrar for the Rochester Historical Society. He is also an Adjunct Lecturer of American History at Finger Lakes Community College.

Museum News

Beginning in March, the Fairport Historical Museum will extend its hours on Saturdays:

10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.



Although our 2016 Perinton Historical Society Christmas Ornament arrived late in the holiday season, it has proven to be popular design. The custom-made ornament features a beautiful view of the Fairport First Baptist Church.

All custom-made ornaments from the PHS collection are available year-round in the museum gift shop. They include the 2014 Fairport Lift Bridge centennial ornament (quantities are limited) and the 2015 Carl W. Peters mural ornament, as well as the new First Baptist Church ornament.

Treasurer's Report

By Linda Wiener

The following is a summary of the financial status of the Perinton Historical Society for the fiscal year, which ended August 31, 2017:

Income

Membership Dues	\$11,685
Grants	5,228
Gift Shop	4,011
Donations	4,618
Special Events	2,235
Miscellaneous Income	283
Interest Income	59

Total Income \$28,119

Expense

Museum Operations	\$4,056
Museum Collections	1,921
Building	4,537
Depreciation	2,491
Gift Shop	1,373
Historigram	1,736
Office Expense	3,122
Special Events	1,174
Membership	620
Programs	659

Total Expense \$21,689

Net Operating Income/(Loss) \$6,430

Net Assets:

Cash & Equivalents	\$34,585
Gift Shop Inventory	7,548
Community Foundation Funds	80,085

Net Assets \$122,218

Notes:

Cash & equivalents include \$2,000 for the Educational Outreach and funds in bank accounts and CDs that are available in one year or less. Of this \$28,155 was held in checking and money market accounts. The remainder is in a CD. The Community Foundation Funds are available upon approval of the PHS Board of Directors. The interest and dividends earned on these funds are returned to PHS annually in the form of a grant totaling \$2,827 in 2016. Depreciation expense is a non-cash item recorded according to generally accepted accounting principles as an offset to fixed assets purchased during the year. Fixed assets additions totaling \$2,490 were purchased with one-time grant funds awarded by the Community Foundation.

PHS files and pays sales tax annually related to gift shop sales, files 1099s annually and files an Informational Return – 990-N with the IRS. PHS is registered with the New York States Charities Bureau but is exempt from filing an annual return. All tax filings are current.



*The boats are coming! The boats are coming!
To Fairport on Wednesday, July 19, at 4:30 pm.
They'll be docking in the village until
the next morning!*

The Susan B. Anthony House and Museum is planning a celebration of 100 years of Women's Suffrage in New York State and is inviting local organizations to partner with them for this event.

A *VoteTilla* of boats will depart from Seneca Falls on Monday, July 17th, stopping at Lock 26 on Monday night, both Lyons and Newark on Tuesday, Palmyra and Fairport on Wednesday, Pittsford on Thursday and arriving at Corn Hill Landing in Rochester on Friday. The plan is to have celebrations at each of the stops, fireworks in Rochester on Friday night, and a parade to the Susan B. Anthony House on Saturday, July 22nd.

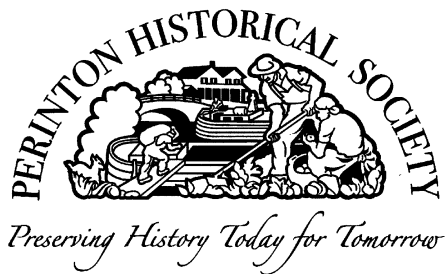
To commemorate this milestone, the Perinton Historical Society is partnering with the Fairport History Club to plan and perform local events, which will be in and near the village gazebo.

All kinds of help is needed: a few women to re-enact a FHC suffrage debate, which was held in 1914; researching suffrage arguments; writing scripts for re-enactors; creating signs; welcoming the boats as they arrive, and more. If you are interested in helping out, please contact Lucy McCormick at lmccormick@rochester.rr.com or 585 223 6934.

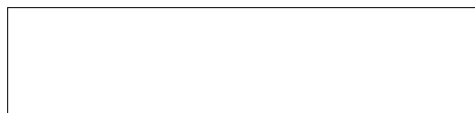


"I pray every single moment of my life; not on my knees but with my work. My prayer is to lift women to equality with men. Work and worship are one with me."

Susan B. Anthony
1820—1906



Non-Profit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
Permit No. 149
Fairport, NY 14450



A view looking south on North Main Street from August of 1908 during the Old Home Week celebration. The Monroe County Chemical building at left is occupied today by Main Street Mercantile. At right is the Osburn Hotel, decorated for the festivities of Old Home Week. The hotel was demolished many decades ago.

The Fairport Historical Museum—18 Perrin Street, Fairport—will be closed through March 3rd. It will reopen on Saturday, March 4th. During this period, you may call Vicki Masters Profitt at 585-233-1204 or email her at director@perintonhistoricalsociety.org to book a group tour or do research.

www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org