

Tarnishing the Family Name The Leslie Hulburt Story (Conclusion)

In last month's edition, we discussed the story of a young attorney, Leslie Hulburt, son of a prominent Fairport attorney and farmer, Thomas L. Hulburt. Despite life's privileges, Leslie chose a wicked path, including the abandonment of his young bride, and the fraudulent manipulation of the legal system in pursuit of bogus divorces, through the testimony of fake, paid-off witnesses. How bad was he? He stiffed a Rochester jeweler for the price of his wife's wedding ring.

After a grand jury handed down sealed indictments, Leslie Hulburt packed his bags and his assets and skipped town. The Monroe County Sheriff traced him to Kansas City, but came back without a prisoner. The indicted scoundrel with roots in Fairport disappeared. He soon surfaced again in Texas, and later, Mexico. With his new location came a new name—Charles T. Richardson, also known as C.T. Richardson. For the sake of clarity, we'll continue to call him Leslie Hulburt. On the lam, and with nothing to lose, the fugitive from Fairport unveiled a new, and even more treacherous scheme, this time to defraud a life insurance company. The sinister plan unfolded in Texas and Chihuahua, Mexico. Some reports say Leslie's formerly abandoned wife, Helen Mitchell Hulburt, was a participant. Others say another woman, a former housekeeper of Hulburt's in Rochester, played the role of his wife. The runaway gang included William Mitchell, the younger brother of Leslie's wife, who had worked for Hulburt in the illicit divorce mill in New York. Harry Mitchell, another brother, also played a role, although his was, literally, short-lived. He was murdered.



Born in May of 1866, Leslie Hulburt was raised in this house at 106 Hulburt Avenue.
Photo from the collection of the Perinton Historical Society

Leslie Hulburt conned his way into employment in El Paso, as an agent for the New York Life Insurance Company. In this role, he sought out gullible customers, to whom he sold life insurance policies. The smooth-talking Hulburt managed to arrange for his own name to be listed as sole beneficiary on the policies. Of course, he would only receive the benefit upon their death, which in each case, came quite rapidly. His accomplices in the plan were William Mitchell, his brother-in-law and former law office clerk, and Doctor Charles Harle, a down-on-his luck physician from Texas.



~ **Bob Hunt** ~

Comments from your President

I'm writing this month's article on March 15th, from my office in the carriage barn, on a sunny but cold day. As you probably know, the back page of the Democrat and Chronicle sports section dealing with weather information is my favorite part of the newspaper, and what I read first. It's hard to believe that

we have received 111 inches of snowfall so far this season, which is above the average of 99 inches for our area. However, this would be just a minor snowfall if you lived in the Tug Hill community of Redfield, NY. In February of 2007, that area received 141 inches in a ten-day period.

The other item I find interesting in this section of the newspaper is the "heating degree days," which is an index of energy consumption indicating how many degrees the average temperature was below 65 degrees. As of today, March 15th, the index is 4870, a bit warmer than normal for the year and a bit cooler than last year. Also we have a "blue moon" this month on the 31st.

Don't forget to bring in a few cuttings from your forsythia bush if you want to have some early spring color in your home. Cindy brought in a few cuttings this week and they're already showing green buds. Soon they will be covered with bright yellow blossoms.

I am happy to announce that your Fairport Historical Museum has been listed on the National Register of Historical Places. Many thanks to Catherine Angevine for helping make this happen. Please see the related article on page six.

We were very happy to have Cindy's brother Don (Buck) Wood visit us last month from Montana. This gave us an excuse to visit "The Howe House," one of two historical buildings maintained by the Phelps Community Historical Society. The Howe House was built in 1869 in the Second Empire Style, featuring a slate mansard roof, dormers with elaborate surrounds and a symmetrical façade.

The most interesting feature of the house is the unusual two-story outhouse or "privy" with its flared slate hipped roof and finial. This is one of very few examples of a two story privy that still exist in the U.S. The house is constructed of local brick with limestone lintels and foundation.

In 1899, Dr. Howe added an office addition to the west side of the house, faithfully maintaining the three-decades-old style in design and materials.

We received a very warm welcome on the day we visited and enjoyed a great guided tour of the home. I recommend that you put the Howe House on your list of historical visits, as we found it very interesting and informative. Also, you need to see how a two story outhouse works.

The Howe House is located at 66 Main Street in Phelps and is open to the public from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. Much of the information I have shared with you related to The Howe House came from the website of the Phelps Historical Society.

Thanks for your continued support of the Perinton Historical Society. We will chat again next month.

Bob Hunt, President
585-415-7053
rhunt356.rh@gmail.com



Upcoming Events

Tuesday, April 17th, 7:00 p.m. at the museum

Program: Conversations in Mary's Home: A Staged Reading of a New Play in Progress

Presenter: Erica Kortepeter-Ragan and the Webster Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd Players

Tuesday, May 15th, 6:00 p.m. at Perinton Park Pavilion

Event: Perinton Historical Society Picnic and Annual Meeting

HISTORIGRAM

*Published nine months per year by the
Perinton Historical Society*

Editor: Bill Poray Art Director: Keith Boas
Production & Distribution: Jim Unckless
Proofreading: Irene Poray



Conversations in Mary's Home

A Staged Reading of a New Play in Progress

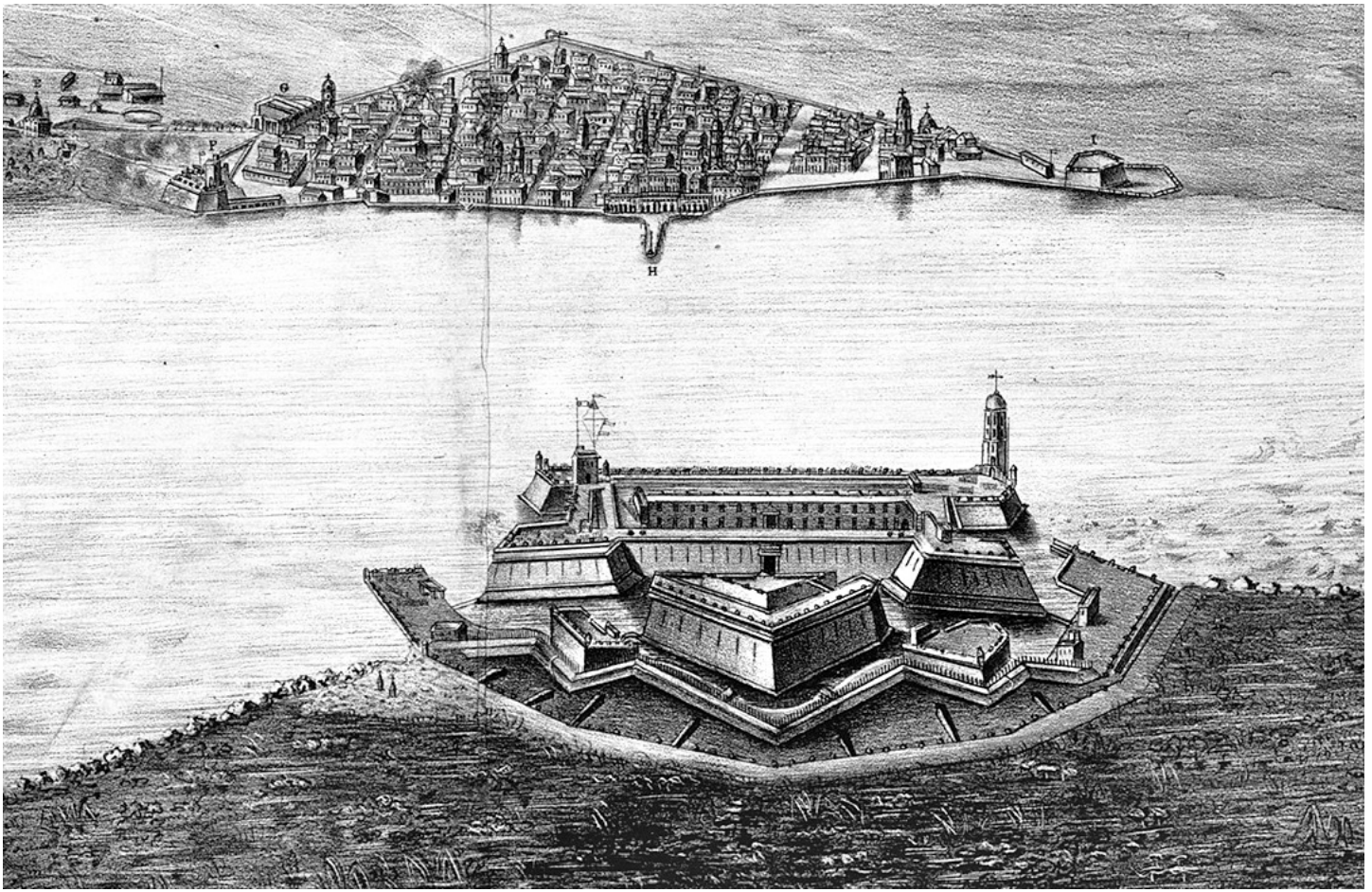
Tuesday, April 17th, 7:00 p.m. at the Museum

Conversations in Mary's Home is a play in the developing stages, originally written for an evening performance celebrating Susan B. Anthony's birthday in 2006. The theme of the play centers around the idea that "we are all a product of a cast of characters" and focuses on the life of Susan B. Anthony and key people that helped create the striking historical figure that she became through her many causes of temperance, abolition and suffrage for women. The play was written honoring the author's paternal grandmother, Olive Derbyshire Kortepeter, a strong Quaker, who passed away at the age of 102 before the first performance. It is her words and "voice" that are woven into the fabric and dialogue of the play.

Born in Toronto, Canada, Erica Kortepeter-Ragan has always loved stories and writing. The product of a creative family of six children, Ms. Ragan was raised near Princeton, New Jersey, and spent her summers in the Adirondack Mountains of New York State. After teaching in the Toronto public schools for ten years, Ms. Ragan moved to Rochester where she and her family settled in beautiful Fairport.

A former French and Spanish teacher at Allendale Columbia School, she now uses her language skills to teach English as a Second Language with Monroe #1 BOCES to students entering the United States from other countries around the world. Ms. Ragan loves to write in her spare time and enjoys gathering new stories every day.





A view of the castle of San Juan De Ulúa, with the city of Veracruz in the distance. The castle first served as a fortress in the 16th century. By the mid-1800s it was known as one of Mexico's most notorious prisons, and was known as "the prison beneath the sea."

Public Domain image

How many people were murdered in the insurance fraud scheme is unclear, but two victims are known; a man named Devers and Harry Mitchell, brother of William and Helen, Leslie Hulburt's wife. The murders were accomplished through the use of poisons mixed with liquor, and administered by Doctor Harle.

According to a Fairport Herald report from May of 1903, the insurance company became suspicious when "too many men with \$10,000 and \$20,000 life insurance policies on their lives were dying along the Rio Grande." An undercover detective hired by the company was able to win the confidence of Hulburt and infiltrate the gang, and soon, the entire scheme collapsed.

Hulburt, flush with cash from his divorce mill proceeds and the insurance scam, had houses in both El Paso and Chihuahua, and it was said he lived like a prince in each. The murders occurred at his home in Mexico, although Hulburt, William Mitchell and Doctor Harle were arrested in Texas. The Mexican government quickly moved to extradite the prisoners to face justice in Mexico. The men were jailed for the duration of the trial, which dragged out over a year, before finding each guilty of murder, with a sentence of death by firing squad.

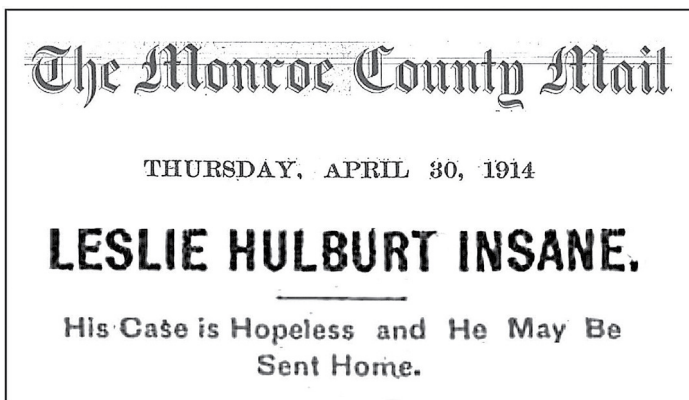
"He was the worst man it was ever my misfortune to meet. He had no more moral instinct than a rattlesnake. No more conception of right or wrong than a jungle tiger."

Rochester Attorney John B. Corcoran

Many newspapers across the United States covered the Hulburt insurance fraud story in detail. In one issue of the Buffalo Courier from November of 1905, a government official who knew Hulburt from his days in Rochester was quoted: "He was a good talking chap—a sandy complexioned, good-looking young fellow, not more than 28 or 29 years of age. His wife Helen was known as Nellie Mitchell. She was a pretty girl and was employed as his stenographer. Nellie married Hulburt secretly and the shock was so pronounced to the mother of the girl that she hung herself in the woodshed

of the Mitchell home.” In the same edition, John B. Corcoran, a well-known Rochester attorney, offered his opinion: “So Judge Rios has sentenced Leslie Hulburt to be shot has he? That fellow should have been shot years ago. He was the worst man it was ever my misfortune to meet. He had no more moral instinct than a rattlesnake. No more conception of right or wrong than a jungle tiger.”

After a lengthy series of appeals and the involvement of some high ranking U.S. diplomats and politicians, in 1907 the death sentences of the three Americans were waived, replaced by a sentence of twenty years imprisonment. It wasn't until April of 1914, when the United States, in a diplomatic spat with the Mexican government, invaded the port city of Veracruz, that the world again heard the name Leslie Hulburt. For it was in that city he was found, in the prison of San Juan de Ulúa, “the prison under the sea,” where the former Rochester attorney had been incarcerated for close to a decade. The cells of the ancient prison were below sea level, and the filth and vermin found there were horrific, as was the physical and mental condition of the prisoners. It was said that Leslie Hulburt begged for a firing squad to end his life rather than be sent to the notorious prison. According to a report in the Amsterdam Evening Recorder of April 29th, 1914, when the prisoner from Rochester was found by American soldiers who took possession of the prison, “Hulburt was examined by navy surgeons and found to be hopelessly insane. He is, indeed, almost an imbecile.”



William Mitchell, Doctor Charles Harle and Leslie Hulburt were reportedly freed from San Juan de Ulúa in the year 1914.

The doctor died in El Paso six years later. There is no trace of what became of William Mitchell. As for the scoundrel from Fairport who profited from countless sham divorce proceedings and ultimately was convicted of murdering his own brother-in-law and others, there is no indication that his life continued, either in Mexico or the U.S. His years in the horrific conditions of the Mexican prison may have caused insanity, as reported. Or, as some people have speculated, it was all a ruse, and Leslie Hulburt assumed yet another name and disappeared, to continue his despicable ways.



Special Recognition Level Memberships

As of March 16th, 2018

Business (\$100)

Barranco's Clothing and Shoes

32 North Main Street, Fairport, NY 14450

Phone: 585-388-1270

Fairport Village Inn, Wayne and Patty Beckwith

103 North Main Street, Fairport, NY 14450

Phone: 585-388-0112 Web: www.thefvi.com

Robert Ruhland, Keller Williams Realty

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

Phone: 585-303-6607 Web: bobruhland.yourkwagent.com

Joel Cuminale, Turning Point Signs & Design

3 Railroad Street, Fairport, NY 14450

Phone: (585) 377-9310 Web: www.tpsigns.com

The Inn on Church

11 West Church Street, Fairport, NY 14450

Phone: 585-678-1106 Web: www.facebook.com/theinnonchurch

Pixos Print

75 Goodway Drive, Rochester, NY 14623-3000

Phone: 585-500-4600 Web: www.ReadytoRun@pixosprint.com

DeLand (\$100-\$249)

None this month

Potter (\$250-\$499)

None this month

Perrin (\$500 and above)

Dan and Doreen Spoor

Perinton Historical Society Mission

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



Early view of the south wing of the library, known as the children's room. *From the collection of the Perinton Historical Society.*

Fairport Historical Museum Listed on National Register of Historic Places

By Catherine Angevine

In December of 2017, the former Fairport Public Library, located at 18 Perrin Street and now known as the Fairport Historical Museum, was placed on the National and State Register of Historic Places. The library was designated a village landmark by the Fairport Preservation Commission back in 2008.

The historic designation was awarded based on events that made a significant contribution to Fairport history and has a distinct architectural style. The library satisfied these criteria for designation: education, architecture and art.

The library was built in 1938, in the depths of the Great Depression, with community support, Works Progress Administration (WPA) funding and a village that desperately wanted a public library.

Beginning in 1839, the school district set aside a few tax dollars to provide library books for the school. It continued

until 1895 when the State of New York passed a law that permitted the transfer of school libraries to local library boards, which would then make the books available to the general public—a public library.

As the collection grew, the community struggled for many years, moving the books from school to school, then to buildings within the village and finally an unsuccessful attempt to obtain a Carnegie grant for a stand-alone building in 1914.* But the desire for a public library never abated.

Finally, with the help of the federal government through the Works Progress Administration, the generosity of the Douglas (Certo) family, and a World War I Veterans benefit fund, the building went up in March of 1938. At the same time, the WPA's Federal Art Project was encouraging under-employed and out of work artists to apply for assistance in exchange for work to be done in municipal buildings and public spaces. It was under this program that Carl Peters, an artist and Perinton resident, began his mural painting in the Rochester area. With their long desired library finally coming into view, the community decided to add an exceptional detail and commissioned Peters to paint the mural that graces the wall of the interior arch.

Constantly growing, the library and its books moved from the original site on Perrin Street to its present location at the

Fairport Herald=Mail

FAIRPORT, N. Y., MARCH 10, 1938

**Perrin Street Building Open
To Public Saturday Admired
By Throngs Throughout the Day**

Village Landing in 1979. The village of Fairport took over the building and then leased the premises to the Perinton Historical Society. The Society continues the tradition of public education with local history exhibits, community programs and learning adventures for local school children.

Fairport was decades ahead of the Library Movement in the United States (1870-1930), beginning with the purchase of those books for the school in 1839. During this time books were not public nor were they free. Subscription libraries abounded but the user paid a fee to a private entity who was in the business of lending books to the public. Fairport was one of the earliest municipal entities to begin purchasing books with public monies. Most notably, while this put books in the hands of schoolchildren, in 1848 the books were made available to the public on alternate Saturday afternoons.

In 1895 when New York State permitted the transfer of school libraries to local library boards, Fairport was ready. Within months, Fairport had its provisional charter.

The architectural design of the building is Georgian Revival, a style with roots in the neoclassical period. This is a popular design for public buildings, particularly libraries, in the early 20th century. In addition to the Peters mural, there are two other Federal Art Project (FAP) works nearby; the sculpture at the Fairport Post Office (Henry Van Wolf) and the mural at the East Rochester Post Office by Bernard Gussow.

While the library touches on several historical events: the WPA, the public library movement, public education, Andrew Carnegie, art and architecture, what is so compelling was the will of this small community to have a public library, and eventually, a dedicated structure to house it. It all began in 1839 with the purchase of those early books. They finally got a new library building one hundred years later.

*See February 2015 *Historigram* -Vol XLVII No. 5: 'Fairport's Magnificent Carnegie Library' by Bill Poray



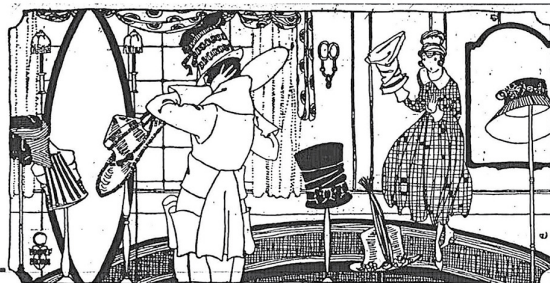
100 Years Ago This Month

Agnes "Aggie" Sproul (1856-1929) operated a fashionable women's shop at 11 South Main Street for many years. The advertisement below appeared in the Fairport Herald in 1918. Miss Sproul appears to be wearing some of her fashionable accessories in the undated photo below.

*From the collection of
the Perinton Historical Society*

THE HERALD, FAIRPORT, N. Y.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10, 1918



Spring Millinery Display

We Take Pleasure in Showing the
Public the Latest Modes

Poke Hats Watteau Hats Flarebacks
New Ribbons, Flowers, Wreaths, Fruits, Fancies, Ostrich Novelties
at Very Moderate Prices

WE GIVE S. & H. TRADING STAMPS

MISS A. D. SPROUL

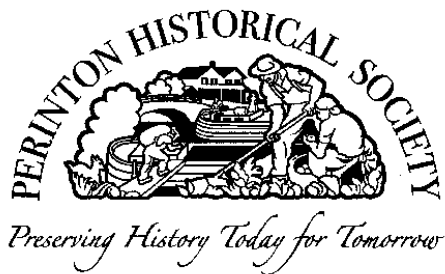
11 South Main St.

Store Open Evenings

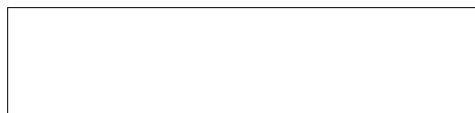
GOSSARD CORSETS



Agnes "Aggie" Sproul



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



The Fairport Historical Museum has been located at 18 Perrin Street since 1979. As seen in this photograph, the PHS collection had previously been located in the Crosmann Center, a former school on Fairport's East Avenue.

*From the collection of
the Perinton Historical Society*

Fairport Historical Museum

18 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY 14450

The museum is open to the public on Saturdays, Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays at the hours below:

Saturday 10:00–1:00 p.m. Tuesday 2:00–4:00 p.m.

Sunday 2:00–4:00 p.m. Thursday 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Group tours, presentations and special projects are by appointment. Please call and leave a message at **585-223-3989**.

www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org