

The Apparent Murder of Mr. Mooney

By Bill Poray

More than one hundred and fifty years ago, James and Margaret Mooney bought a small farm carved into the side of a steep hill in south Perinton. Thayer Road, little more than a dirt trail at that time, passed far below their modest wood frame hillside home.

Two of their nearest neighbors lived in log cabins. James Mooney had come to the United States with waves of other Irish immigrants, and upon his arrival worked as a farm laborer in Victor. He and Margaret were married in 1860 or perhaps a bit earlier. They eventually scraped together enough money for a down payment on the 44 acre farm on Thayer Road. She was born in the state of Georgia, which must have made her something of a novelty in the sleepy Turk Hills of Perinton.

The first of four children was born in 1863, a smart and observant child named Mary Ann. Six years later James Phillip was born, then John, and last, Willie, in the summer of 1878. Mrs. Mooney seemed to grow increasingly bored with the isolated nature of life in the quiet hills of south Perinton. Egypt was two miles to the north, and the village of Fairport was three miles beyond Egypt. Mrs. Mooney must have enjoyed the liveliness of Fairport when she traveled there for supplies.

A young Irishman by the name of John Sexton began to appear at the Mooney farm in 1878, the year baby Willie was born. Sexton, a recent arrival from the old country, was about fifteen years younger than Mrs. Mooney, and by some accounts, was not particularly bright. In the summer of 1878,



An early photo of the former home of James and Margaret Mooney on Thayer Road.

Photo provided by Judy McNulty

the Fairport Herald reported that Mrs. Mooney had been seen in the saloons of the village in the company of John Sexton, and had left her home for a period of time, but returned some days later.

Soon after, on a Sunday afternoon in late September, John Sexton visited the Mooney farm, and stayed for dinner. Later that evening, James Mooney became violently ill. For over a week, he frequently vomited, and grew more weak with each passing day.

Continued on page 4



Comments from your President

April 14, 2018: I am writing this month's article again from my office in the carriage barn on a cool and windy day. I read recently that the police department of Depew, New York has issued an arrest warrant against Mother Nature for the continuing winter season. So

~ **Bob Hunt** ~

far it has not caused much of a change, as spring is avoiding us. It has not stopped the birds at our feeding stations on the back patio from starting their nesting sites for the season.

In last July's issue of the Historigram, I told you about a pair of chickadees tap-tap-tapping away at a knot hole on the outside of the barn, in order to enlarge it and prepare a nesting site. The spot is right next to where my desk is located. This year the hole has been enlarged a bit more by a pair of house sparrows. The male has a black throat, white cheeks, and gray crown, while the female is streaked dull brown above and dingy white below. A brood will start with five to six white eggs lightly speckled with brown. The nest is made with feathers, grass, strips of paper, or string placed in a cavity such as in the side of our barn. They may just use the insulation they found inside. A nesting pair may have two to three broods per season. The species can be found over the entire United States and all have descended from a few birds released in New York City's Central Park in 1850. These birds found an unoccupied niche in the many towns and farms of the settled parts of the country. I will keep you posted on our house sparrow family or families. Information about the house sparrow is from "The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds."

Another bird experience occurred last month in the large hemlock tree just outside my office window. The tree was suddenly covered with dozens of goldfinches, feasting on the seeds from the tiny hemlock cones the tree produces. It lasted only a couple of days, but what a beautiful sight. Mother Nature is wonderful, in spite of the arrest warrant by the Depew Police Department.

In mid-March we picked up Margie, Cindy's high school friend from Geneseo, and made our annual trek to Cartwright's Maple Tree Inn for their delicious buckwheat pancakes. The Maple Tree Inn began serving its first pancakes and maple syrup in the year 1963 when Ronald and Virginia Cartwright built a new sugar shack after the previous one had burned the previous year. However, this time they included a restaurant where they could serve pancakes just like the ones Ronald's grandmother used to make, and sell their syrup to the public instead of selling it in bulk in Vermont.

The business has seen much progress over the years with children and now grandchildren helping with its success. The restaurant has been remodeled and expanded many times. Today there is seating for about 235, compared to just fifteen when the restaurant first opened in 1963. They place more than 10,000 taps each year and collect the sap to holding tanks using tubing, so one does not see sap buckets hanging from maple trees. They use a state-of-the-art evaporator with a reverse-osmosis machine, which removes excess water from the sap, thus reducing the time needed to boil into syrup. Note that the restaurant is only open from about the 15th of February until the 15th of April each year.

We took our trip to Cartwright's on a Wednesday, with the idea that the mid-week crowds wouldn't be too large. This place is located out in the boondocks about twelve miles south of Nunda. Despite the large seating capacity, we have never been to Cartwright's when we didn't have to wait in line. This year the line was a bit longer than usual, but the wait is always worth it, with the best all-you-can-eat buckwheat pancakes to be found anywhere. They will be closed when you receive this issue of the Historigram, but I suggest you put it on your bucket list for next year.

Don't forget to mark the annual meeting/picnic on your calendar: Tuesday May 15th, 6:00 p.m. at Perinton Park. Talk about good eating! You will enjoy some fine country cooking with the dishes to pass brought by our membership. I'll be there flipping burgers, not pancakes.

Thanks for your continued support, it is always appreciated. We will chat again in the next issue of the Historigram.

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



Correction

In the April issue of the Historigram, an article detailing the Fairport Historical Museum's listing on the National Register of Historic Places identified 1979 as the year the library moved to the Village Landing. Thanks to one of our members for pointing out that the library actually moved one year earlier, in 1978.

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

Upcoming Events

Saturday, May 12th

from 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

at the Fairport Historical Museum

Greenbrier Garden Club

Annual Plant Sale

Tuesday, May 15th

6:00 p.m.

at the Perinton Park Pavilion

**Perinton Historical Society Annual Meeting
and Picnic**

See details and response form on page 7.



Greenbrier Garden Club Plant Sale

The Greenbrier Garden Club Plant Sale is scheduled for Saturday, May 12th, from 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. on the sidewalk of the Fairport Historical Museum. The club always has a wide variety of plants for sale at very reasonable prices. But don't delay! The garden club's selection of plants usually sells out quickly. The Greenbrier club beautifully maintains the gardens at the museum, and the Perinton Historical Society is pleased to host this annual plant sale.

Museum News

Fourth Grade Field Trips

The fourth grade school visits to the museum have begun! Bill Poray and Vicki Profitt host two classes per day. While one class is downstairs seeing a PowerPoint program filled with historic happenings with Mr. Bill, the other class is upstairs with Miss Vicki taking a museum tour and completing a scavenger hunt. Then the kids do, as Mr. Bill likes to call it, "the old switcheroo," and we do it all over again for the next class. Between April and May, 25 classes will visit the museum—21 from the Fairport fourth grades and four from Pittsford's Thornell Road Elementary School.

It's a wonderful way to introduce kids to local history, and the Perinton Historical Society is excited to partner with the school districts on this fun and informative field trip for the students.

Exhibit Remodel

After nearly six months of planning, researching, and creating category signs and labels, the exhibit remodel on the main level of the museum is now complete. The fresh, clean and open floor plan allows visitors to easily get around to see the new items, many of which haven't been on display before. Check out the temperance banner hanging at the entrance to the south wing, the expanded cases featuring local inventors, and the area dedicated to local doctors and dentists.

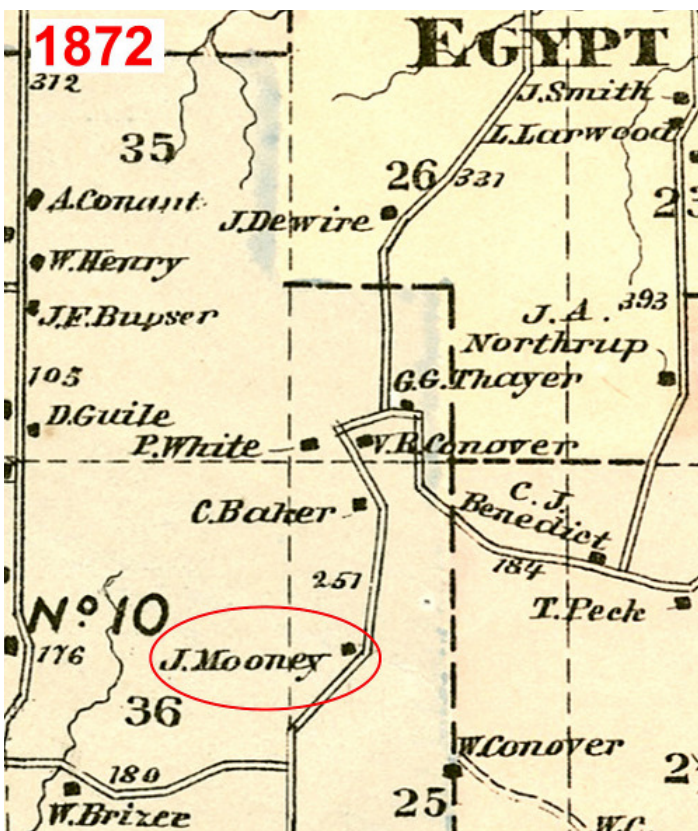
Other new exhibits include an homage to Albert "Hawk" DiRisio in the atrium, and a display case in the south wing honoring young P. David Marsh, who gained the support of the Fairport community after becoming disabled due to a childhood illness.

Support the Museum as a Volunteer

Museum volunteers work one two-to-three-hour shift per month greeting and assisting visitors. New volunteers are paired with veterans for each shift, and training is provided. We are always looking for new volunteers to staff the museum, and especially need volunteers on Saturdays from 10 a.m.–1 p.m. and Sundays from 2 p.m.–4 p.m.

If you can give of your time just a couple of hours a month, please contact PHS Volunteer Coordinator Renee Barry at reneejbarry@gmail.com. We look forward to adding you to our volunteer roster!





This section of the 1872 map of Perinton indicates the location of the Mooney farm on Thayer Road.

Despite his illness, Mr. Mooney had banking business to attend to. On October 2nd, a Tuesday morning, he and Mrs. Mooney made the five mile trip to Fairport in their horse-drawn wagon. James Mooney conducted his business at Becker's Bank in the Chadwick building at the corner of West Avenue and South Main Street, while Mrs. Mooney made a purchase in the Gem Drug Store, a few doors to the south. She then located Doctor Winfield S. Fuller, and told him her husband was quite sick. Fuller, who served as a surgeon in the Civil War, found James Mooney outside the bank. The doctor prescribed a treatment, and James and Margaret Mooney began their return trip to the farm.

By the next day, James Mooney was again violently ill, and soon after Margaret Mooney was spotted in a Fairport saloon with John Sexton. Daughter Mary Ann, now fifteen years old, was concerned for her father, and sought the help of neighbors Giles Thayer and Catherine White. One of the Mooney's boys located another neighbor, Philomena Muller. The women provided comfort to the younger children, while noting, according to the Fairport Herald, that the home "presented a strange destitution of even the necessities of life, and looked as if it had received little care from a good housewife and mother."

The neighbors were at his side when James Mooney died at about 1:00 pm on the third day of October, 1878. Mooney had laid in his bed, with his arms crossed over his stomach,

and asked his friends to hold him down tight. He requested they summon a doctor, but then changed his mind, thinking it would do no good. Before he passed, he said his heart was breaking.

Rochester coroner Doctor Porter Farley was telegraphed, and arrived in Fairport on the 11:00 pm train, and immediately began his investigation. He soon learned that Fairport's Catholic priest had been called upon shortly after Mooney's death by his widow and John Sexton, who requested a swift burial for her dead husband. It became known to Doctor Farley that the two were in the midst of an adulterous affair, and that Mrs. Mooney had, the day before her husband's death, purchased poison at the Gem Drug Store. This was enough for the coroner to pursue a warrant for their arrest from Fairport Justice Ashley F. Murdoff.

Doctor Farley summoned a jury and authorized an inquest to hear evidence and determine if there was cause to seek a grand jury on the case. The coroner's list of jurors included local residents Otis Clapp, John Adams, George Stevens, Charles Dickinson, George Trainer, Seymour Palmer, and Andrew Deal. The doctors and witnesses all traveled to the Mooney home south of Egypt. The jurymen surrounded the corpse, and took an oath to determine if at all possible the cause of death of James Mooney. Mrs. Mooney as well as John Sexton were located, and also were brought to the home, and were present during the inquest.

Witnesses called to testify included neighbors and fifteen year old Mary Ann Mooney, who was aware of the marital difficulties of her parents. She had heard her father speak of her mother's infidelity, and of a threat made by her father when his wife left to be with Sexton, that "if she went, she would come back a corpse." The Fairport Herald noted that the teenage girl's heart was "well-nigh broken with grief, and seemed to fully realize her position, with three younger brothers in the house, the youngest being three months old, her father dead, and she, called upon to give evidence which might incriminate her mother."

MURDER IN PERINTON

**STRYCHNINE THE POISON USED BY
THE ALLEGED MURDERERS.**

**Margaret Mooney and Her Paramour, John
Sexton, Charged with the Crime of Poi-
soning James Mooney.**

Headline published in the Rochester Evening Express
on October 4th, 1878

Additional testimony to the coroner's jury was that of Doctor Fuller, who treated James Mooney the day before his death. He stated that Mrs. Mooney attributed her husband's sickness to the drinking of too much hard cider. He provided details of his prescribed treatment for Mr. Mooney and of

his post-mortem examination, assisted by Fairport's Doctor Durand. The post-mortem examination was performed at the Mooney home on October 4th, the day after James Mooney's death, in the presence of the jurors. The doctors found no external cause of death. Their analysis found the brain and heart to be normal, intestines and liver also without cause for alarm. The deceased's stomach was removed and placed in a jar and provided to the coroner for further analysis, which might yield evidence of poisoning. Further investigation indicated that Mrs. Mooney purchased fifteen grams of strychnine poison the day before her husband's death. Robert Estes, the pharmacist at the Gem Drug Store, noted in his ledger that she said she needed the poison to kill rats and a dog she no longer wanted. According to another Fairport druggist, Egbert Hodskin, the previous week Mrs. Mooney bought four ounces of arsenic, also said to be for the extermination of rats and a dog. Mrs. Mooney and John Sexton provided no testimony at the inquest.

Upon the jury's decision to proceed with a trial before a grand jury, Mrs. Mooney and John Sexton were brought to Fairport, handcuffed to each other, and transferred to the Monroe County Jail. A few days later, with his father dead and his mother in jail, three month old Willie Mooney was transported to the Monroe County Poor House. Perinton's Overseer of the Poor arranged for the other children to be boarded at the homes of local residents, and twenty dollars was allocated for the burial of James Mooney.

In January of 1879, a reporter for the Democrat and Chronicle interviewed the widow Mooney and John Sexton, still held at the county jail. He reported Mrs. Mooney to be "by no means a repulsive woman," and found her friendly and pleasant. When asked how she had managed to tolerate three month's imprisonment, she stated, that it made the confinement much worse when it was all through no fault or misdeed of hers. The reporter found Mrs. Mooney's alleged accomplice "to be a fellow of less than ordinary intelligence, though seemingly quiet and perfectly harmless," and said Sexton was confident of his innocence.

While still in jail awaiting the decision of the grand jury, a suit was brought against Margaret Mooney by the proprietor of a Fairport meat market. Justice of the Peace Murdoff ruled in favor of James T. Jennings for the amount of \$62.16, compensation for unpaid bills by Mrs. Mooney. After almost four months held in the jail, the grand jury did not find sufficient evidence to charge Mrs. Mooney or John Sexton with any crimes, and they were released.

Justice may have been served when Margaret Mooney and John Sexton were released from prison. It is quite possible that neither killed James Mooney. When Mrs. Mooney brought Fairport doctor Winfield S. Fuller to her husband outside Becker's Bank in Fairport, the treatment prescribed by the physician was calomel, or mercurous chloride. The medicinal use of calomel was once a popular treatment, but had fallen out of favor long before 1878, for one important reason—it sometimes had the unintended consequence of killing the patient. So the question remains: Who poisoned James Mooney; his wife and her lover, or the physician who treated him?



Special Recognition Level Memberships

As of April 17th, 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.



Honorary Fairport Fire Department Captain David Marsh
Photo from the collection of the Perinton Historical Society

David Marsh A Man of Courage

By Vicki Profitt

David Marsh was a little boy who smiled often, and nothing garnered smiles from him more than his two loves—firefighting and baseball. His life took a different turn than most boys his age, but David was still able to realize some of his dreams through the compassion of the Fairport community.

Paul David Marsh, the eldest of Harold and Carolyn Crane Marsh's three children, was born August 7, 1940. He would later be joined by brother Harold Jr. "Hal" and little sister Molly. Although he was named after his paternal uncle, Paul Marsh, the little boy was always called David by family and friends.

At the age of six, David contracted rheumatic fever. It meant the beginning of many stays in the hospital throughout the rest of David's short life and caused him to be wheelchair bound. In an age where accessibility for physically challenged individuals was rare, David received support from the Fairport community, which found alternative ways to include him in childhood activities others might take for granted.

Knowing of David's interest in firefighting, the Fairport Fire Department presented him with an honorary membership in 1949 at the rank of lieutenant, and he was given a jacket, badge and hat, all of which he wore proudly. Three years later, David was promoted to captain in a special ceremony held at the hospital where he had been sent for rehabilitation.



Each spring at the opening game for Little League, David handed the baseball to the mayor, who would then throw the first pitch. He served as honorary president of Little League and was awarded a sportsmanship award. On June 8, 1953, the baseball field at Perinton Park was dedicated "David Marsh Field" and an historic marker was placed at the park in 1988 commemorating the site of the town's first Little League baseball field.

Despite the challenge of spending months at a time at Genesee Hospital, where he required the use of a tutor, and then a year at the New York State Rehabilitation Hospital in Haverstraw, New York, David was able to return to Fairport schools. Boys lined up to help carry his wheelchair up and down the stairs of the school on West Avenue each day.

David proudly graduated from Fairport High School in 1959. The following year, he enrolled in a correspondence course in accounting, which allowed him to acquire a job as bookkeeper at Plastic Pools of Rochester, located at 557 Whitney Road in Fairport.

Paul David Marsh died August 1, 1964, just six days shy of his twenty-fourth birthday. He was laid to rest at White Haven Memorial Park. But that wasn't the end of David's story.

In 2018, David's sister Molly donated to the Perinton Historical Society items which were close to David's heart. The collection includes his Fairport firefighter jacket, captain's and lieutenant's hats and badges, a framed certificate naming David an honorary member of the Fairport Fire Department, newspaper articles, photographs and David's Little League trophies. The items are now on exhibit in the Fairport Historical Museum's south wing where, despite his short life, the little boy with the big smile will be remembered and honored for his courage in the face of adversity.



Dewey? We do!

Welcome to Fairport's Dewey Avenue, site of our 2018 House Tour. Circle Sunday, October 7th on your calendar, and join us between 1:00-5:00 pm as we walk through a number of homes constructed between 1910 and 1929.

Our historian's best research indicates that Dewey Avenue was first laid out as part of the Soanes Tract in 1899, and appeared on a 1902 map of Fairport, although few houses were built until about 1910. Due to Admiral George Dewey's victory at Manilla Bay in the Spanish-American War and his subsequent hero's welcome upon his return to the United States in 1899, this street may have been Fairport's tribute to the only person to have reached the rank of Admiral in the United States Navy.

House Tour Volunteers Needed

Would you like to join a fun group of PHSers? The House Tour Committee welcomes anyone who would like to see the house tour from the inside, assist us with research, contribute as a docent, or help to publicize the event. Contact Elaine Lanni to find out how you can contribute.

Email eellaannii@gmail.com or call 585-766-5467



This home at 49 Dewey Avenue, pictured here in 1960, was one of the earliest built on the street.

Photo from the Town of Perinton historic archives

Annual Meeting and Picnic Scheduled for May 15

The annual Perinton Historical Society picnic and meeting will be held rain or shine in the shelter at Perinton Park on Fairport Road, near the canal at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 15th. Hot dogs, hamburgers and veggie burgers, decaf coffee and lemonade will be provided by the Society. Members coming to the picnic are requested to bring a dish to pass, and their own plates and silverware. Please make reservations with the form below, or by calling the museum at 223-3989 and leaving a message.

Please indicate:

1. How many people will be coming
2. Whether you would like a hot dog, hamburger, or veggie burger
3. What dish you would like to pass (salad, hot dish, cold dish, dessert)

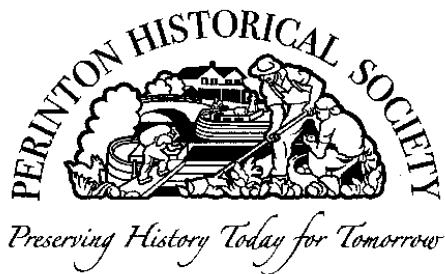
At the meeting there will be a few words from our President, and then the members will vote on the nominations for officers for the Society. This is always a good time to renew friendships, meet new people, and partake in some excellent food. Please join us for a pleasant evening in the park.

Name _____ Number of people attending _____

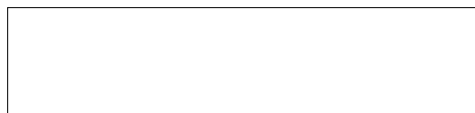
I would like (indicate number) _____ hot dogs _____ hamburgers _____ veggie burgers

I will be bringing (circle one) Salad Hot dish Cold dish Dessert

*This form can be delivered and dropped in the mail slot at the Fairport Museum no later than May 13,
or mailed to the Perinton Historical Society, 18 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY 14450.*



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



Extremely heavy traffic, possibly a "log" jam, on the canal in Fairport. This view shows the Parker Street Bridge in the distance. The photo is undated; however, when it is enlarged, we can see a 1930s-era automobile to the left of the bridge.

*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