

The Highs and Lows of George E. Burgess— Evangelical Preacher

By Bill Poray

On a Saturday night in June of 1926, a demoralized man dined alone in his cell at the Monroe County Jail, awaiting trial for grand larceny and fraud. Twelve years earlier, in November of 1914, his anticipated appearance in Fairport caused the construction of an 8,000 square foot building, necessary to house the immense crowds anxious to witness his arrival. His name was George E. Burgess; his profession—evangelical preacher.



A rare view inside Fairport's tabernacle, constructed for the month-long evangelical "Good News" services of George E. Burgess and Benjamin F. Butts, seen in this photo in the second row, fourth and fifth from the left.

From the collection of the Perinton Historical Society

Constructing the Tabernacle

With donated material and volunteers wielding hammers and saws, a building measuring 130 feet long and 62 feet wide was erected in just nine days. Richard Roberts, a local carpenter, led the crew. Women brought fried cakes and coffee to the workers, and kept track of the construction from the upper windows of nearby houses.

The outside of the building was wrapped in tar paper to block the cold winds. Wood shavings covered the dirt floor, and the interior was made festive with American flags and colorful bunting. At full capacity the building was designed to accommodate 1,500 believers.

Fairport residents called it their tabernacle, which stood, briefly, close to where Fairport's post office was built 24 years later, at 121 South Main Street.



~ Bob Hunt ~

Comments from your President

June 15, 2018: Once again, I am writing this month's article from my office in the carriage barn, on a beautiful summer-like day. Many of you marked your calendars and attended the annual PHS meeting and picnic on Tuesday May 15th, and without failure we enjoyed some fine "country cookin" with the dishes to pass brought by our

membership. There were burgers and hots on plates, sided with salads of all types, relish trays, baked and barbequed beans and a wide selections of desserts. Included in the desserts was my favorite, lemon bars. I'm also fond of beans prepared just about any way a cook can think of. Below is a memory about raising beans on our farm in Milo.

I grew up on a forty-acre farm on Route 14A about two miles south of Dundee, but we also farmed about one hundred acres in the Town of Milo. This property was handed down and was originally settled by Adam Hunt in the late 1700s, when he traveled to the area with the Society of Friends from Rhode Island. The land was excellent for growing crops and my dad grew beans of various types over the years. There were red kidney, soup, dark blue navy, and cannellini beans.

After the soil was prepared for planting, my job was to ride on the back of the planting drill to ensure the planting tubes did not get blocked with sod or stones, which would cause the beans not to be planted into the ground. On one pass across the field, as I was day-dreaming, I didn't notice a blocked planting tube. Consequently, the next half hour was spent walking back along the row with a can of beans, planting them three inches apart for the length of the row. My father was not pleased with me and needless to say, there was no more day-dreaming. Pulled by a Farmall H tractor, the drill we used had two compartments and would plant six rows at a crossing. One compartment would contain the seed beans while the second compartment would contain the fertilizer which would be drilled into the soil alongside the beans.

Killdeer birds inhabited this land and built their nests on the ground. We tried our best to not disturb the nesting sites. The nests were built with small stones and the eggs looked like stones as well, so the nests were difficult to find. We were usually successful coexisting with them.

As the rows of beans started to grow, cultivators were installed on the tractor to basically hoe the row to remove weeds. This would be done a couple of times during the growing season. In late September beans would be dried and ready for harvest using a threshing machine. Bean pullers were installed on the tractor. The pullers consisted of two

blades set at an angle, which could be lowered along two rows of beans. Controlled by hydraulics, they would slice through the roots of the bean plants. Two rows of beans were pulled or sliced at a time and were left as a single row. Six rows, or three pulled rows, were made into piles along the center row using pitchforks.

Next the beans had to be piled and my dad hired several of my high school buddies for this task. Teams of three were used to pile the beans. The middle person gathered the pulled beans with a pitchfork and started a pile along the row. The other two team members gathered the adjacent rows and placed the beans on the started pile. Once the field was piled, the piles were hand-loaded onto a tractor-pulled wagon and taken to the threshing machine. The wagon was unloaded into the threshing machine, again by hand. Leonard Holley, who lived on the Dundee Himrod Road, owned the threshing machine and went farm to farm threshing crops.

The threshed beans were collected in burlap bags and transported to local mills such as the Dundee GLF. You can see providing beans for soup and baked dishes was labor intensive, but that was the normal process in the 1950s.

Thanks for your continued support, it is appreciated. Will chat again next issue

Bob Hunt, President
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HISTORIGRAM

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Perinton Historical Society*

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Museum News

Greenbrier Garden Club Plant Sale

The Greenbrier Garden Club Plant Sale was held on May 12th on the sidewalk of the Fairport Historical Museum. Despite the rainy day, business was brisk as customers flocked to the sale in search of beautiful blooms for Mother's Day. Thanks to the Greenbrier Garden Club for maintaining the gardens at the museum.



Descendant David Kaiser at the museum's new DeLand exhibit

DeLand Descendant Visits the Museum

David Dickinson Kaiser, great-great-grandson of Daniel B. and Minerva Parce DeLand, visited the Fairport Historical Museum on May 26th to view the new DeLand exhibit. Museum Director Vicki Masters Profitt was pleased to show David the changes to the museum since his last visit in June of 2016, during which he attended the Mount Pleasant Cemetery Tour. At that time, Doug Whitney and Lucy McCormick portrayed Henry A. DeLand and Helen Parce DeLand in the cemetery presentation.



Michael E. DoVideo, DDS



George Dean, MD in 1948



Warren W. Shaddock, DDS

Doctor and Dentist Artifacts Donated to the Perinton Historical Society

The Perinton Historical Society is fortunate to have received donations of photos and artifacts related to area dentists and doctors for our new exhibit. Dan Dovidio (Dan does not capitalize the v but his father did) supplied the PHS with four digital photos of his father, Michael E. DoVideo, D.D.S. (1913-1980). Marlene Shaddock, widow of Warren M. Shaddock, D.D.S. (1923-2017), graciously donated six digital photos of Dr. Shaddock. Both men were well-known in the area and highly respected.

In addition to these acquisitions, Dr. George A. Dean's granddaughter, Whitney Stewart, donated five boxes of memorabilia pertaining to Dr. Dean and his wife, Louise Griswold Dean. The boxes include photographs of Fairport in the 20th century, as well as snapshots of the Dean house and office at 11 West Church Street, now The Inn on Church.

Yourself and friends are cordially invited to attend the Burgess-Butts "**Good News**" services being held at the Big Tabernacle in Fairport, under the leadership of Evangelist George E. Burgess and Singer Benjamin F. Butts



"For the wages of sin is death; but the Gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord."—Rom. 6:23.

An invitation to the Burgess and Butts services in Fairport.

From the collection of the Perinton Historical Society

Burgess and Butts Bring Their "Good News" Services to Fairport

Many of the local churches cooperated in bringing the well-known Burgess and Butts evangelical campaign to Fairport for a month long engagement, from Wednesday, November 18th to Sunday, December 20th. Prior to their arrival, the troop had stints in Penn Yan, Wayland, and East Rochester. In each community, they were greeted by enormous and enthusiastic crowds, ready to hear the gospel, delivered by the great evangelist, George E. Burgess, and his partner and musical director, Benjamin F. Butts. Joining them was Mrs. Butts, who focused mainly on the salvation of Fairport's women and girls, and pianist Carl Leggett.

Burgess and Butts dedicated each night to different groups and organizations. There were separate men's and women's nights, and student nights. On another evening a delegation of 123 traveled from Wayland to Fairport to relive the Burgess and Butts experience. Still another night, the tabernacle was filled to capacity, including hundreds of East Rochester residents who caught the short trolley ride to relive the "Good News" spectacle one more time.

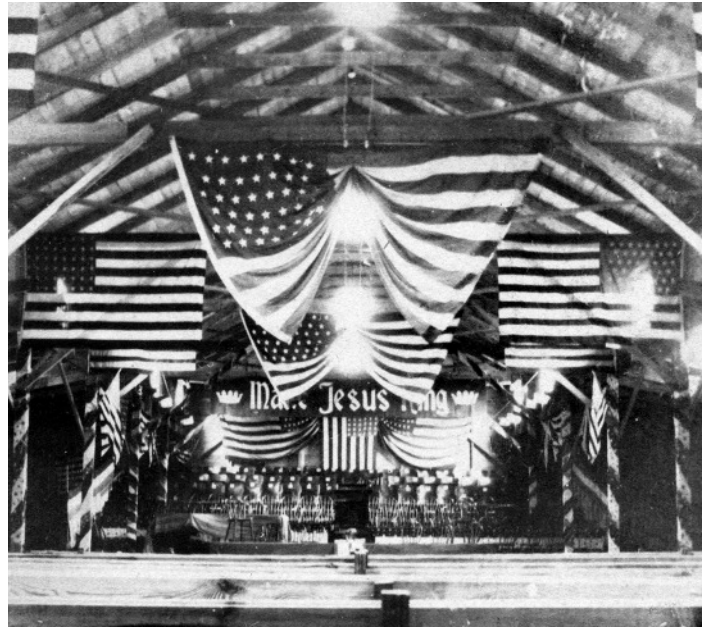
When the month-long campaign came to a close after a sunrise prayer meeting on December 20th, the Monroe County Mail called the event "the greatest religious awakening Fairport ever had." Burgess and Butts were credited with leading 560 "converts" to a life of devout Christianity.

Of the 36 year-old evangelist George E. Burgess, The Monroe County Mail stated: "He is not and does not claim to be a trained sermonizer. He would call himself a business man on fire for righteousness....this is his business and he expects to get your order. Men understand him and in large numbers line up with him. He hates sham and mercilessly flays hypocrisy, in the church and out of it." The newspaper's biography of Burgess professed "the transparent sincerity and downright honesty of the man," and stated, "The impression which he made on Fairport will never be effaced."

Monroe County Mail, December 24, 1914

"What has happened to Fairport? Unprecedented numbers have gathered night after night in the big Tabernacle and have come away happy. Drunkards have been redeemed. Family quarrels have been obliterated. The silly and the frivolous have become serious. Nominal Christians have become real Christians. The stores are selling more meat and flour and the whiskey bunch are selling less booze. The whole town is more good natured than ever before.

'What has happened?' The community has been basking in the light of enthusiastic and stimulating personalities. The Burgess and Butts 'Good News' company are a worthwhile combination. Fairport has happy memories of their all too brief visit and extends to them at this Christmas season, its best wishes for their continued success in their evangelistic work."



A view of the stage in the Fairport tabernacle.

From the collection of the Perinton Historical Society

After the month-long revival had come to a close, many Fairport residents sought to keep the tabernacle as a permanent fixture in the community. A large Christmas tree was placed in the building, and Fairport enjoyed a community-wide holiday celebration in the great hall. A local choir had been assembled for the Burgess and Butts revival, and they came together again and performed at the tabernacle at the Christmas celebrations open to all in the community. Despite the protests of many, the building was removed a few weeks later. It was never envisioned to be a permanent structure, and wasn't built to last.

The Burgess and Butts traveling evangelical road show

held many month-long events in 1915, including stays in Medina, Bath, Belmont, Dansville and Seneca Falls, where 3,000 heard him rail against “demon rum.” In each case, tabernacles were constructed, most even larger than Fairport’s. In September, the news reached Fairport that Burgess had purchased a large farm just west of Medina. He hired Reverend Charles A. McAlpine of Fairport to run the operation, who he had previously employed as his executive manager.

Fleeing the Flock— Burgess Finds Investors among Followers

By 1920, George Burgess no longer traveled the countryside preaching the gospel, instead choosing to stay on the farm and offer occasional sermons in nearby churches. At the same time, he accepted a position as a salesman for the Chemical Oil and Gas Company of Pittsburgh. Burgess had the respect of influential and wealthy men in communities across several counties, and reached out to these men when he sought investors for the businesses with which he became engaged. In 1922, he took charge of the former Kleen Sweep chewing gum factory in East Rochester, and soon established it as the manufacturing site of the Everyday Piston Ring Company. Burgess promoted his new company as providing a product superior to manufacturer’s original equipment designs, and claimed his product would stop automotive oil leaks and increase fuel economy. As president of the company, he led a drive to sell large sums of stock in the company. Many of his investors were in the circle of acquaintances of his former life as an evangelical preacher. Some mortgaged their homes and took out loans to purchase stocks sold by Burgess, who was known to assure investors they would receive an annual return of twelve percent or more. He soon left his Medina farm and purchased a fine home on the Pittsford-Fairport Road, known as Golf Avenue today, for the significant sum of \$44,000. By 1923 the Everyday Piston Ring Company was bankrupt, the East Rochester manufacturing plant was sold, as was the high priced home of Burgess. Directories indicated he and his wife were living in a modest two family home at 316 Ridgeway Avenue in Rochester, but soon after multiple sources confirmed Burgess and his family left the area for Cleveland, Ohio. Legal suits began to surface, as investors of his companies sought to recover their money from Burgess.

In early May of 1924, newspapers from Buffalo to Rochester reported that the former evangelist had been charged in a stock swindle. It seems sales of worthless shares of the Everyday Piston Ring Company had raised significant funds for the former preacher, but none for his investors, despite the promise of substantial financial returns. An even larger stock scheme involved the Chemical Oil and Gas Company of Pittsburgh, in which religious converts became buyers of worthless stock. The newspaper reported that despite the pending investigation of potentially hundreds of defrauded investors, Burgess continued to sell stock in Ohio, although his specific whereabouts were unknown.

Burgess Found Guilty of Fraud and Grand Larceny

The autumn of 1925 found former evangelist George E. Burgess in a court room, along with two others, charged with fraud and grand larceny related to the sale of stock in the Chemical Oil and Gas Company. When brought to New York for the trial, his family resided in an affluent neighborhood in Lakewood, Ohio. According to court records, Burgess confirmed that his education was limited to a high school diploma and a course offered by the Y.M.C.A., an organization for which he worked for several years prior to assuming the role of evangelical preacher.


Previously indicted by a Grand Jury in July of 1924, Burgess was found guilty in a jury trial in the court room of Judge Willis K. Gillette in Monroe County Court. The judge imposed a prison sentence of five to ten years on Burgess, now 48 years of age. After a failed appeal, the former evangelical preacher began his sentence on March 16th, 1927, at Auburn, New York State’s second oldest prison.

Governor Pardons Burgess

New York State Governor Al Smith was overwhelmed by Republican Herbert Hoover in the Presidential election of 1928. Shortly after, he announced a number of holiday pardons, and among these commutations, was the name George E. Burgess. Said the Governor, “I feel that because of the type of man Burgess is, he has served sufficient time.”

After his release from prison, Burgess and his wife and children relocated to San Diego, California. He died in April of 1931 at the age of 53, little more than two years after Governor Smith signed the commutation papers. His death went all but unnoticed in Fairport, one of the many localities that had embraced him with such devotion not so many years earlier, when the local newspaper wrote of “the transparent sincerity and downright honesty of the man.”

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State of New York
Executive Chamber
Albany, December 19, 1928

The Secretary of State is requested to make out a COMMUTATION for George E. Burgess who was convicted of Grand Larceny in the first degree in the month of June 1926 and was sentenced to 10 years — 10 months, minimum 10 years — 10 months, maximum imprisonment in the Auburn Prison

His sentence is now commuted to imprisonment in Auburn Prison for 3 years

months — 10 days, minimum 10 days — 10 months, maximum without commutation from March 16, 1927

This commutation is granted upon the express condition that if the said George E. Burgess shall be recaptured convicted of any felony committed during the period between the date of his discharge by reason hereof and the date of the expiration of the full term hereby commuted, he shall be deemed an escaped convict with respect to the said commuted term, and in addition to the penalty which may be imposed for the felony committed during the interval aforesaid, he shall be compelled to serve in the prison or penitentiary in which he may be confined for said felony, or if not confined therein in any prison or penitentiary, then to the Auburn Prison the portion of the term hereby commuted now remaining unserved without deduction or commutation for good behavior.

Alfred Smith

Commutation document, authorizing the release of George E. Burgess from Auburn Prison, signed by the Governor.

From the New York State Archives





Robert Croll Stevens
1924—2018
Photo in 2016 by Bill Poray

Remembering Robert Croll Stevens

By Bill Poray

Robert Croll Stevens and his wife, Jane Knauss Stevens, became members of the Perinton Historical Society in December of 1949. After his wife's passing several years ago, Mr. Stevens continued his membership, and generosity, to this organization. Our longest tenured member passed away on April 3rd, 2018 at the age of 94. He and his family were remarkable stewards of the Stevens' long-time home at 1 Green Ridge Road, at the corner of Ayrault Road. The family has donated a wonderful vintage painting of the home, which is a designated Perinton Landmark, to the Perinton Historical Society. The painting, by Fairport artist Fred Van Almelo, now hangs in the north wing of the Fairport Historical Museum.



A Quiz About This Year's Historic House Tour:

Lovin' the Dewey Avenue Life

True or False:

A "boomerang" effect brings folks back to live on Dewey Avenue, sometimes after 30 years.

Four-square style houses come in different "flavors."

The best "room" in our house is the large inviting porch.

In 1908, lots for sale on Dewey Avenue were called "Fairport's best residence section" by attorney James D. Harris.

If you said **True** to all of these, you are correct.

Don't miss this year's tour on Sunday, October 7th, from 1:00 to 5:00 pm. Stay tuned to upcoming issues of the *Historigram* and the PHS web site.

To help with the event, contact Elaine Lanni at eellaannii@gmail.com.



27 Dewey Avenue, one of the homes on this year's tour planned for October 7th

Photo in 2012 by Keith Boas



*Recent photo, taken on
Perinton's Bent Oak Trail,
by Keith Boas*

—Deer Spotted in Village— Stop the Presses!

By Bill Poray

I saw a deer yesterday in my neighbor's yard, here in the village of Fairport. Of course, that's nothing to get excited about. Deer can be seen on an almost daily basis in Fairport. I've seen as many as ten in our back yard at one time. So a deer sighting is hardly a news-worthy event. But amazingly, in 1935 it was just that.

Lottie Filkins looked out her window on Hulburt Road on a July morning in 1935, and was amazed to see a deer in the wheat field adjacent to the house she and husband Clarence shared. The Filkins home was located where Minerva DeLand School is found today. In fact, the house was picked up and moved in 1954, just up the street to 110 Hulburt Road, to make way for the construction of the school.

Lottie immediately called the office of the Fairport Herald-Mail. A reporter with camera in tow made tracks for the Filkins farm. A group of young men from the neighborhood also heard the news, and came with cameras, hoping to capture an image. The deer, however, didn't cooperate, and disappeared into the great forest behind the farm. The Herald-Mail reported that this was "undoubtedly the first time in modern history at least that wild deer have ventured within the village limits."

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!

Special Recognition Level Memberships

As of June 18th, 2018

Business (\$100)

Bonnie Wetzel, Howard Hanna Real Estate Services

65 South Main Street, Fairport, NY 14450

Phone: 585 -03-1678 Web: TopRochesterAgent.com

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

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

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7 East Avenue, 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)

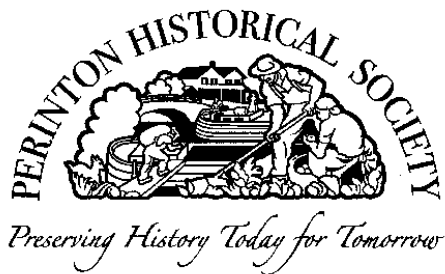
None this month

New since April 16th

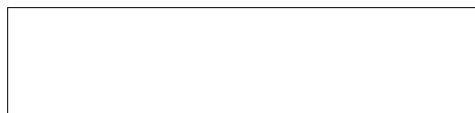
Perrin (\$500 and above)

Anonymous (3)

For information on becoming
a member of the Perinton Historical
Society, visit our website at—
www.PerintonHistoricalSociety.org.



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PHS Executive Board members Linda Wiener and Doug Whitney share a laugh at the annual PHS meeting and picnic at Perinton Park.

Photo by George Wolf

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