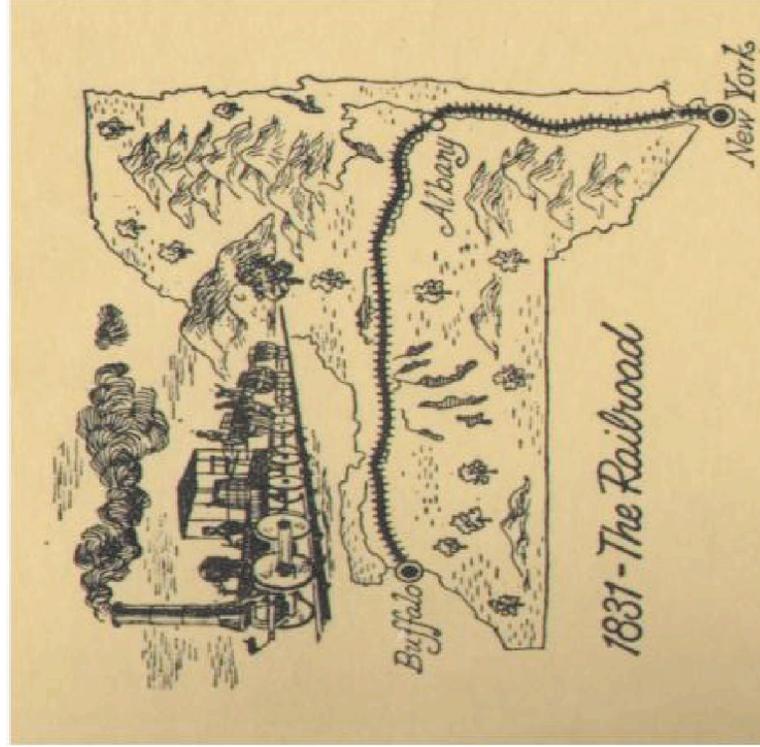


HISTORY OF TRANSPORTATION IN PERINTON

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Dr. A. Porter S. Sweet, Editor.

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I Trails

When we step into our car for either a short or an extended trip, how often do we stop to consider how our means of transportation developed? Let us trace it carefully in the Town of Perinton from its early beginnings.

This whole territory was inhabited by the Seneca Indians and there were settlements at Boughton Hill (near Victor) and in the territory behind St. Mary's Cemetery on Turk Hill Road. The Indians built longhouses, cleared some land, planted orchards, and raised corn, squash, beans and gourds.

For their daily living they were dependent on certain commodities, so they cut trails through the woods to obtain them. One such trail followed Thomas Creek, where the Senecas trapped, and then on to Irondequoit Bay for fishing; one led to Basket Street (now Jefferson Road) to obtain reeds for basket making; and one went to Salt Road where the salt licks were found for the preservation of meat and fish — other trails led to deposits of clay, flint, and soapstone.

All trails were combined in a vast network whereby the Indians could travel to all parts of the continent peacefully or in war parties. By 1838 few Indians were left in the area as they were pushed westward by the early settlers, but their narrow paths remained to form a matrix for roads to come.

In 1789 William Walker and his brother Caleb, the first residents of Perinton, spent the summer surveying the township and building a log cabin on Ayrault Road (then Wapping Bridge Road) near the Thomas Howard residence, which is across the road and slightly east of the present Martha Brown School.

The next year their cousin Glover Perrin and his wife Johanna, for whom our grade school is named, built their home near the site of the log cabin and extended their holdings to 160 acres. In 1791 Glover's brother, Jesse Perrin settled near him on Mosley Road where the Abigail residence now stands. The Fairport school buses pass these two first homestead sites in Perinton each day en route to the Martha Brown School.

II Roads

Originally there was no more than a footpath between these two cabins, but as settlers moved in, cleared the land, and harvested their crops, additional primitive roads were built for communication and transportation of grain to the mills located on nearby streams.

Since much of the land was hilly or swampy, the narrow dirt roads, some only fifteen inches wide, were cut through the underbrush by crude farm implements and often went around the hills, not always by the shortest route. To bridge the swampy areas, logs were laid crosswise to form corduroy roads and toll was charged for their use.

In 1803 the Palmyra Road (then Mud Road) was surveyed for three and two-thirds miles; in 1805 the name was changed to the New York State Road, and the next year it was laid in corduroy fashion.

You may recognize the names of some of the early roads in Perinton, although seldom do they follow their original course: Bluhm, Aldrich, Thayer, Marsh, Whitney, Dailey, and Steele, usually named for the families who settled on them.

The majority of main roads were built east and west as people migrated to western areas. Travel was seasonal, usually being done in the winter on skis and snow shoes or later on bob sleds and in cutters when the streams were frozen and the fields were covered with deep snow. Spring and summer travelers complained of the 'abundance of mosquitoes and the dreaded swamp fever.'

As the population grew, wagon traffic evolved. First came the hand pushcart, then the ox drawn cart with two solid wooden wheels, and finally the American lumber wagon with four spoked wheels. The two front wheels were smaller than the rear wheels, and the axle swiveled to the front bolster to facilitate turning. The wooden axle, strengthened by strips of iron, was lighter and could withstand the jar and jolt of the rough roads better than one made entirely of metal. Oak and ash were most frequently used in wagon making. Hickory was seldom used because it was difficult to obtain.

Oxen and mules were mostly used as beasts of burden until the sturdy draft horses were introduced for farm work; the better breeds of horses were kept for riding and carriage use.

Although Fairport did not become incorporated until 1867, the actual birth date of the village is 1822. The earliest maps show Fairport as a square bounded by Church Street (the oldest one), Main Street, West Avenue (first called Chadwick Street and later Cherry Street), and West Street (then Wood Street). There was also a smaller square formed by Pleasant, Parker, Church, and Main Streets. John Street, now State Street, was later built to parallel the canal.

As the village grew, the carriage became a popular conveyance for private use. The common carriage was a wheeled vehicle hung on straps between elliptical steel springs to absorb jolts, and designed to carry people on ordinary streets and roads.

There were many different styles in use: the gig, the hansom broughtham, the surrey, and the buggy. These were commonly lined up at the hitching posts on Main Street, and the watering trough was a popular place to refresh the horses. Farmers coming into town to trade made good use of the church sheds and livery stables, and the shoeing of horses was a profitable business for the blacksmith.

It is difficult for our present day traveler with access to trains, cars, and planes to imagine himself back in the days when stagecoaches were the chief means of public

transportation. The stage left daily at 9:00 AM from the Mail and pilot coach office opposite the Eagle Tavern on Carrol Street in Rochester. It went to Palmyra, on through the Cherry Valley to Albany where it arrived three days later.

The first change of horses took place at Staples Inn, twelve miles outside of Rochester. This inn was established by Olney and David Staples in 1809 and is now the residence of Mr. and Mrs. George Wilson on Palmyra Road. (This building has been demolished. Editor)

The coaches were box-shaped compartments set on a four-wheeled wagon frame. Entrance was by side doors, and inside two long seats facing each other could accommodate four to eight passengers, with outside seats for several more in clement weather. The luggage, usually carpet bags, mail pouches, deer-skin bags, and pig skin trunks, was carried on top. Descent from the coach was by ladder.

The stagecoach driver had to dress for the season -- in summer he wore a broad brimmed hat for protection from the bright sun; in winter, he dressed in a heavy fur coat, a bear-skin cap, and thick boots. The driver was always an imposing figure. He managed the four to six horses skillfully over the bumpy corduroy roads, applying the whip or breaks as necessary. He not only acted as the land agent for prospective settlers along his route, but also set the ladies' fashions of the day, selecting materials and patterns for them in the larger towns.

The taverns, with their cheery fireplaces and tap rooms, were a welcome sight to the weary traveler after a long day's journey on bumpy roads. There is a story of the famous Staple's ghost and it was a brave person indeed who would sleep in the northwest room of the Staples Inn for he was bound to be tormented on a windy night by the moaning of the ghost. Years later, a window in the room was moved and a bottle was found between the walls under the sill. The wind, blowing across the open bottle neck, was the cause of the weird howling.

III Canal (See Part 3 The Erie Canal by Helen King)

IV Railroads and Trolleys

With the coming of the iron horse, the stagecoach became obsolete. The New York Central tracks were laid in 1853, and the first train, carrying state officials from Albany to Buffalo, passed through Fairport in that year. The West Shore tracks were laid in 1882, and like the first set of tracks, paralleled the Canal.

The early wood-burning engines threw out sparks which were a threat to the passengers' clothing and the wooden buildings along the tracks. Railroad stations for freight and passengers were built in the larger towns and cities. By 1867 the Pullman car, in which the comfortable seats by day could be converted to sleeping quarters at night, became popular, and later in 1874 the coal-burning engine was introduced to replace the woodburners.

The train of the early 1900s passing through Fairport would consist of an engine, mail cars, day coaches, Pullman, and dining cars. With the increase of power and speed, the coaches were constructed of steel instead of wood. At that time two of the New York Central's fastest non-stop trains through Fairport were the Empire State Express and the Twentieth Century Limited.

Due to the popularity of air and bus travel today much of the passenger service on the railroads has been discontinued and many of the old railroad stations have been torn down. The Fairport station was dismantled in 1962. Since the railroad companies must pay taxes to each town and village through which they pass, and since they have lost much passenger and freight business, many railroads find themselves today operating at a loss.

Long freight trains with heavy equipment on flatcars, trucks carried piggy-back style, and with perishable goods in refrigerated cars still pass through Fairport frequently. The caboose, always the last car on the train, serves as the crew's living room, dining room, and kitchen. (In 1990 the caboose was eliminated by railroad companies as a cost-cutting measure. Editor).

From 1906 to 27 June 1931, the public trolley car, which received power from an overhead electric cable, was a familiar sight through Perinton. The 'Rochester, Syracuse and Eastern (R.S.&E.) ran parallel to the canal and furnished public transportation from Syracuse to Rochester. The trolleys, first painted dark green (later changed to orange), were of two types: the limiteds (top speed 70 miles per hour), which stopped only at the larger towns and cities; and the locals, which serviced the rural areas by stopping at many designated shelters. Ninety-nine such stops were made between Syracuse and Rochester.

A special commuter car ran every fifteen minutes between Fairport and Rochester. The round trip fare was 25 cents.

The trolley car had three main sections: the motorman's compartment; the passenger section containing two long lines of black leather seats facing the front and separated by an aisle for use of the conductor in collecting fares and the passengers in getting to and from their seats; and the covered rear platform where steps were located for passengers entering and leaving the car. A small front section, shut off by a sliding glass top door, was reserved as a smoker. A long narrow seat was provided for workmen in dirty clothes at the rear of the car across from the toilet facilities (frequently used by car-sick children).

The trolley, seating 62, was also equipped with overhead straps for extra passengers standing in the aisle. A second car attached to the first for rush hour traffic was called the 'tripper service' or 'double header'. There were special freight trolleys carrying milk and fruit from Rochester, and the three o'clock car out of the city usually had the evening papers for the nearby towns.

Some of the following regulations were in effect on the trolley cars:

1. No person under fifteen years of age was allowed in the smoker unless accompanied by an adult.
2. Children under five years of age, not exceeding three in number and accompanied by an adult, could ride for free.
3. Children five to twelve years old could travel for half fare.
4. All dogs in the car must be muzzled and on a leash.

(The restored Trolley Stop 22 waiting shelter on the south side of the Erie Canal in Fairport and the restored five-mile Trolley Track Trail that starts behind the former Crossman Arms factory, east of Fairport, are some of the visible reminders of the trolley transportation era in Perinton. Editor).

V Bicycles and Motor Cycles

The bicycle has been a popular means of inexpensive transportation for many years. Prior to 1876, a bicycle consisted of a large front wheel and a small rear one with the rider perched on a high seat; after that the bicycle was much lower with both wheels the same size. Many accessories have been added such as the padded saddle seat on springs, pneumatic tires, brakes, lights for night use, and baskets for carrying small items. The English bike of lighter construction with high and low gear shift has found great popularity with the younger set. Bicycle clubs were formed in the early 1900s for group outings on Sunday afternoons over the country roads and cinder paths. We should mention the fact that even today bicycle riding is one of the best forms of exercise for the sedentary American.

In the past fifteen years the high-speed motorcycle has taken the place of the bicycle in popularity with our younger people and we often see groups of riders with their white helmets, goggles, and black leather jackets on our streets and highways. Early each summer the Sunday motorcycle hill climb at Keck's farm in Egypt attracts many people.

VI Automobiles and Buses

The automobile, a road vehicle carrying its own power, gradually eliminated the horse and carriage for private use early in the 20th Century. Few people thought these queer looking contraptions, which frightened horses and caused many runaways, were here to stay. The early topless gasoline autos (some early models were powered by steam) were one-seaters, started by a hand crank connected to the engine. The battery box was usually on the running board. Later additions included a back seat and a collapsible top, fastened by straps on either side of the hood from the windshield.

For those who were brave enough to venture out at night, two acetylene gas headlights, a kerosene running light on each side of the windshield, and a red kerosene taillight were provided. All had to be lighted by hand. The tires were small and easily punctured or blown-out on the bumpy dirt roads.

The conventional attire for car travel was a linen duster (cover all long coat), veiled hats tied under the chin for ladies, and leather caps, gauntlet gloves, dusters, and goggles for men.

The first automobile to run on the streets of Fairport was a six-cylinder Ford (1905) owned by Fred Potter, whose home is now Potter Memorial. Since the roads were never plowed in the winter, cars were put up on blocks and the batteries were removed until the spring thaws opened up the roads. Side curtains were added to the early autos to keep out spring rains and wind.

Our modern cars with their puncture proof tires, tinted glass, automatic shifts, power steering, directional signals, and air conditioning are great improvements over the early models. Travel is now year round on concrete roads, ploughed and salted in the winter. Some of the popular styles today are the sedan, station wagon, convertible, compact, and smaller foreign cars.

With the introduction of the bus lines for public transportation, the trolley made its last run on 27 June 1931. The Buses traveling the main roads through the center of towns, making frequent street stops, were more convenient than the trolley entering Fairport through State Street at the station north of the canal bridge where the gas station now stands. The Greyhound Bus Line, which started the commuter service through Fairport and Perinton, is now active in long bus runs to all parts of the country. It must make a daily trip from Rochester to Syracuse on the Thruway in order to maintain its Thruway rights.

Since 1960 Trailways have given our town excellent hourly service in large, comfortable, air-conditioned buses, but as inflation continues, the one-way fare has increased from 25 to 50 cents.

Mention should be made of the large freight trucks and moving vans, which are so common today. Such vehicles can move a whole or partial load from a home or factory to any destination that can be reached by road. This service has taken much business from the railroad, which requires each article to be crated before shipping. Today in our town all food supplies for the stores are brought in on trucks, and industries, such as the American Can Company, use this means of transportation in connection with storage in warehouses located in various cities.

The village of Fairport and the Town of Perinton operate fleets of trucks for garbage collection, road repair, and general maintenance.

VII New York State Thruway

The New York State Thruway originates just north of New York City and continues northward to Albany where it turns westward and goes across the state to Buffalo. It was begun in 1946 at Victor and was dedicated by

Governor Thomas Dewey in 1954, one year before completion. The Thruway is a four-lane super-highway 427 miles long with double lanes separated by a grass median strip. The road is fairly straight and is designed so it can be used for military vehicles in case of a national emergency. The sixty-five miles per hour speed limit is well enforced by state troopers aided by radar. Tolls are collected by attendants at all fifty exits. No stopping is allowed except for emergencies, and well-kept service areas with restaurants and rest rooms are located at frequent intervals. The highway is well cared for in the winter by salt trucks and plowing crews, and during the summer frequent mowing of the lateral and median grass gives a neat appearance to the road area. Small planes have recently been introduced with direct communication to the State trooper cars to report stranded vehicles as well as to enforce the speed limit.

VIII Airplanes

Since the Town of Perinton is so near the Monroe County Airport (built in 1936 and taken over by the County in 1948) we must take notice of the increased plane travel of the Mohawk, American, and United airlines in and out of Rochester in the last ten years. Most of the east-west planes follow the canal and railroad, and with the jets starting their descent long before Fairport, they commonly fly quite low over our area.

The Brizee Airfield on Marsh Road (now a housing development next to White Haven Cemetery) was operated for many years by Roy Harmon as a flying school, landing field, and hangar area for small private planes.

IX Acknowledgments

The author wishes to acknowledge the help of Mr. Vincent Kennelly Sr. regarding trolley transportation in Perinton and of Mr. Charles Cleveland concerning bus transportation. (Vincent Kennelly Jr. in the 1980s was mayor of the Village of Fairport. Vincent Kennelly Park in Fairport is named after him. Editor).

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