



Perinton Historical Society HISTORIGRAM

18 Perrin Street
Fairport, NY 14450

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Robert Douglas Nominated for Inventors Hall Of Fame

Research by Gail Black

Fairport and Perinton are the home of many inventors and inventions. From 1859 to 1940 there were over 118 patents issued to residents of this town. This year (2005) saw the election of Perinton resident Robert Gundlach to the National Inventors Hall of Fame for his work on the photocopier.

The National Inventors Hall of Fame was established in the early 1970's by the National Council of Intellectual Property Law Associates and the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Originally housed at the United States Patent and Trademark Office in Washington D.C., the Hall of Fame has been in Akron, Ohio since 1987.

The purpose of the National Inventors Hall of Fame is to "honor individuals who conceived the great technological advances of our time and to foster continued innovative progress." Nominations are accepted year round and inductees are selected

by a National Selection Committee of 37 national, scientific, and technical societies.

This year the Perinton Historical Society is nominating Robert Douglas the inventor of Certo to the National Inventors Hall of Fame. Douglas had a profound influence on Fairport. He created hundreds of jobs at the Douglas Packing Company on North Main Street from 1909 to 1947 and left 500 shares of General Foods stock to be used for a public library which stands today at 18 Perrin Street.

On page 2 is a brief account of Robert Douglas' life and the development of his invention. This essay was included with the application to the Inventors Hall of Fame.

Plan to Attend

Tuesday December 13 - Christmas at the Museum. A concert by Ken Brown and his Fairport High School students at 7:30 p.m. in the Fairport Museum. Please bring cookies.

Tuesday January 17 - Presentation by Jim Fisher entitled *The Ghost Ships of Lake Ontario*. This meeting is on the third Tuesday at 7:15 p.m. at the Fairport Public Library. Please call the library and make reservations at 223-9091.



Our Mission

"The Mission of the Perinton Historical Society is to promote Community interest in the preservation of local records and artifacts for posterity, and for the enlightenment of the people of our town of Perinton"

Robert Douglas: Inventor, Manufacturer, Philanthropist 1859-1929

Born in Scone, Scotland in 1859, Robert Douglas was the son of a marmalade manufacturer. Robert invented a long thermometer that told jam boilers when the jam was done. He sold them in England for several years.

At the age of 28, Robert Douglas moved to the United States and sold his thermometers to jam makers in America. On his business travels, he also worked as a consultant solving problems for various food and vinegar plants. A long business relationship developed with Earl J. Neville and John J. Clingen when the three worked together at the American Fruit Products Company. With financial help from others, the three began the New York State Fruit Company in 1906 which manufactured cider and vinegar. The factory was in the former DeLand Saleratus Works buildings in Fairport, New York. In 1909 the partners bought out the business and had it incorporated into the Douglas Packing Company in 1911. The company was set up as a manufacturing and holding company which formed the foundation for the eventual manufacture of fruit pectin.

Robert Douglas was 6'1" tall with blue-gray eyes and a large drooping mustache. He wore spectacles, shunned publicity and would not allow pictures to be taken of him. Douglas had a slight Scottish brogue and loved to tell stories about his native Scotland especially about his countrymen's legendary thrift. To his friends and employees he was generous and fond of saying "If a man makes a dollar for me I am willing to share it with him." (page 3 of the *Outline of Certo History*) Although his manufacturing plant was in Fairport, Robert Douglas lived on Merriman Street in the nearby city of Rochester. In 1905 at the age of 45, he married Frances G. Willsey.

Beginning in 1909 Robert Douglas, and later several chemists, started experimenting with the extraction of pectin from apple pomace. Experiments were conducted in a small second floor laboratory whenever there was a slow period in the manufacturing of vinegar in the plant.

Apples had been known to cause fruit to jelly but

only after being boiled for several hours. Robert Douglas began experimenting with apple pomace left over from vinegar production concentrating the pectin found from the apple waste. Douglas began extracting pectin from apple pomace by boiling the mixture down with the aid of an organic acid until it developed into a thick liquid. The mixture did not gel of itself but added to fruit and sugar, it developed into a jelly with little or no additional boiling. Robert Douglas was the first person to make jam or jelly without prolonged boiling.

By 1913 the process had been perfected enough to apply for a patent. That fall, the first shipment of pectin was shipped to jam makers in England in wooden barrels. For the next seven years the Douglas Packing Company supplied pectin to commercial jam and jelly makers in 5 gallon tins.

The depression year of 1920 saw the lowest profit ever made by the company. In a bold move, Robert Douglas ordered 7 railroad car loads of glass bottles and began to fill the bottles with concentrated pectin for home use. In 1921 62,500 cases were sold. The following year sales had increased to 291,000 cases. 1921 was also the year the name Certo was given to the product. The name survives today in supermarkets and is referred to in its dry form as Sure-Gel.

For the last ten years of his life, Robert Douglas had suffered from recurring attacks of phlebitis. This circulatory disease was incurable at the time and caused Douglas to seek a merger for his company to insure its continuation as a profitable company. In 1929 the company was absorbed by the Postum Company later to be called General Foods.

Robert Douglas died shortly after the merger in his home on May 28, 1929 at the age of 70. At the time of his death, he owned over 45,000 shares of stock in the company. In his will Douglas left 20,000 shares to establish the Douglas Foundation in his birthplace in Scone, Scotland. He also left 500 shares to the village of Fairport to build a library. The building was completed in 1937 and is now the Fairport Historical Museum. *(continued on next page)*

December Meeting Offers String Quartet

Our popular Christmas program will be presented Tuesday December 13 in the Fairport Museum at 7:30 P.M. Ken Brown, music instructor for the Fairport Schools, will be leading several talented Fairport High School students in some classical and seasonal string pieces. For the past several years Ken and his group has regaled us with familiar and not so familiar tunes to the delight of members and visitors to our annual musical presentation.

To give our refreshment committee a break, we are requesting that you bring a dozen cookies, either home made or store bought, to share. Coffee and tea will be supplied by the Society.

This should be a fine start to the Christmas season. The meeting is free and open to the public.

Ghost Ships of Lake Ontario: History Comes Alive

By Bernadette McDonough

The year is 1812. A fierce storm is ravaging Lake Ontario. The American and the British Navies are engaged in a savage battle. The Americans must stop the British reinforcements coming from Canada or the War of 1812 may well be lost. Two American war ships are lost during the storm.

Under the professional guidance of historian Jim Fischer, we will have a guided tour (in a slide show) to the bottom of Lake Ontario to visit the two ships, the *Hamilton* and the *Scourge*.

Don't miss this unusual presentation.

For those members who have a habit of coming to the museum every second Tuesday of the month for a meeting, *remember*, there will be no newsletter in January to remind you of this meeting. The date has changed to the **third Tuesday** of the month (January 17) instead of the second and the meeting is at the **Fairport Public Library** at 7:15 p.m. instead of 7:30 p.m. So make sure you write the date down in your planner. Because the meeting space is limited, the library would like you to call for reservations at 223-9091. This meeting is free and open to the public.

Robert Douglas (continued from p. 2)

Robert Douglas' invention of concentrated fruit pectin in liquid and later powdered form, allowed the food processing industry to create jams and jellies easier and quicker using less energy. The introduction of this product to the American housewife saved her time and money in producing jams and jellies for her family. Home canning has been a tradition for generations of women who have put up canned fruits, vegetables and preserves for winter use varying the diet of the household and improving the quality of life of the American family. The product is still found on grocers shelves, a testament to its continued usefulness today.

Bibliography:

Outline of Certo History, 1906-1929 by William A. Bender. Unpublished special report to Mr. R.S. Smith of General Foods, 1950.

Federal Census of 1910 and 1920.

Obituary of Robert Douglas from the *Democrat and Chronicle*, 1929.

Obituary of Mrs. Frances Grace Douglas, *Democrat and Chronicle*, 5/27/1967.

Perinton Historical Society ~ *Trivia* ~

Bill Matthews had the longest number of consecutive terms as president of the Perinton Historical Society. He was president for nearly 7 years from 1997 to 2003.

Celebrating 70 Years!

Perinton Historical Society Time Line

- 1935 - November 1st. The Perinton Historical Society is founded.
- 1938 - October 18th. The Society becomes a member of the New York State Historical Association.
- 1946 - The Society sponsors an exhibition of local artist Carl Peter's work at the Fairport Library.
- 1948 - There are 152 members. Society sponsors a tour of Perinton sites.
- 1948, 1949, 1950 - The Society sponsors a local history essay contest open to 7th graders in the Fairport Schools. First prize is \$5.
- 1950 - The bell and eagle from District School #1 in Bushnell's Basin is donated to the Society.
- 1950 - September 25th. Society receives its absolute charter from the University of the State of New York.
- 1951 - New By-laws are passed. Board of Trustees and Executive Committee replaces the Board of Managers.
- 1951 - January 14th. The Board of Trustees turns down the town's offer of the old Bushnell's Basin School #1 for a headquarters. The town offers this building again to the Society in 1977. The Board turned them down again.
- 1951 - February 27th. The seal for the Perinton Historical Society is adopted.
- 1962 - The Perinton Historical Society is given a room at the old Crosman Center on East Ave. in the village.
- 1966 - Charlotte Clapp, first curator for the Society and Marjorie Snow Merriman the first Society president both pass away.
- 1969 - The first issue of "Perinton Historigrams" is delivered to members October 10th.
- 1970 - The Society investigates the possibility of buying the Wagner House on South Main Street as a headquarters.
- 1971 - the Society sponsors a costume exhibit in the old Mayfair store on South Main Street.
- 1972 - The first tureen supper and auction is held by the Society.
- 1978 - There are 215 members. Warren Stevens becomes the new curator replacing Dr. James Welch.
- 1978 - November 30th. The First Candlelight House Tour is held. 75 members attended.
- 1978 - The society members go on a canal cruise on the Emita II captained by Peter Wiles.
- 1978 - The dedication stone from the Bushnell's Basin school is rescued by Helen Butler and donated to the Society. The building was razed after the roof fell in under heavy snows.
- 1979 - February. The Fairport village and school district agree to allow the Perinton Historical Society use of the old library building on Perrin Street.
- 1979 - June. The Fairport Historical Museum is officially dedicated at 18 Perrin St.
- 1980 - Membership stands at 190.
- 1991 - February 26th. One of the most popular presentations was given by Sue Roberts, Perinton Town Historian, on the Oxbow.
- 1993 - The Industrial Development Agency provides money to the Society to open up the museum extra hours during the summer months.
- 2000 - The book "Perinton, Fairport and Erie Canal" authored by members of the Perinton Historical Society is published by Arcadia Press. Four years later the Society publishes its second book "Perinton and Fairport in the 20th Century."
- 2005 - The Society celebrates its 70th anniversary!



Members make Scholarly Contributions to Museum Archives

The Perinton Historical Society was founded in 1935 as a scholarly organization dedicated to the collecting of data on early Perinton pioneers. There were committees set up to investigate and copy maps, public records and collect oral histories. Early minutes record the enthusiastic meetings at member's homes or the Potter Memorial building where the committees would get together and share their research with each other.

Evidence of this extensive research can be found in the museum library. There are cemetery records, typewritten copies of county records for all land transactions in Perinton to 1850, hand drawn maps of Perinton, genealogical and pioneer biographies of Perinton's first settlers.

In the 1960's, the Society had a room in the old Crosman Center and began to collect and display artifacts from the area. There was more emphasis on collecting primary documents and artifacts and less on copying information that pertained to Perinton and Fairport. Most of the information we get today for the museum is from the community in the form of letters, photographs, newspapers, etc.

Even though most of our materials today come from outside sources, we occasionally have member contributions and programs set up to increase our knowledge of the community.

A long standing project is the photocopying of articles of local interest from newspapers. For several years, Pat Wilcox has been taking clippings and copying them onto acid free paper. She then arranges them into topical notebooks for use by visitors to our museum.

In 1820 there were only 1668 residents in Perinton. Famous families include Perrin (Which the town is named after), Ramsdell (First settlers in Egypt), Ripley (Owned the first mill in town) and Richardson (Who ran an early tavern in Bushnell's Basin).

By 1830 there were 359 families and 2182 residents. As the census continued more information was asked of residents. In 1840 there were 2513 total residents which included 22 free colored persons, 2 blind people, 3 people who were insane and 740 school

children. Also listed are 5 residents still collecting pensions from the Revolutionary War.

A recent project, taken on by Helen Matthews, is the creation of a computer database for the NYA (National Youth Administration) newspaper subject index.

This was one of many projects set up by the Roosevelt administration in the 1930's to put unemployed Americans to work during the depression. The newspaper index project was set up for hundreds of communities throughout the United States. In Fairport, the Perinton Historical Society and the Perinton Town Board sponsored the indexing of the *Fairport Herald* and *Monroe County Mail* from 1872 to 1898 through the National Youth Administration. A subject index was created and typed onto 3"x5" file cards and checked by members of the Perinton Historical Society. These newspapers, from which the information was recorded, are now on microfilm and in the Fairport Public Library.

The 8 file drawers of cards that were created are now stored in a closet in the library. Helen Matthews is working with the library staff to transfer the information on these cards onto a computer database so that the subjects can be searched easily from workstations in the library. When the project is completed, a paper copy of this index will be created for our museum library.

The Society salutes these volunteers who are making an important contribution to our archives and are carrying on a long tradition of research at the Perinton Historical Society.

Fairport Facts

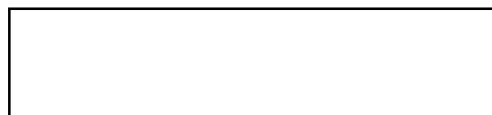
In the early 1800's DeWitt Clinton stayed in Perinton over night on his trip to inspect a site for the Erie Canal. In his diary, he complains of fleas.



Perinton Historical Society
18 Perrin Street
Fairport, NY 14450

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FAIRPORT HISTORICAL MUSEUM

18 PERRIN STREET, FAIRPORT, NY 14450

REGULAR HOURS

| | |
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| Tuesday | 2 p.m. - 4 p.m. |
| Thursday | 7 p.m. - 9 p.m. |
| Sunday | 2 p.m. - 4 p.m. |

The first two Mondays of every month the Archives open for Researchers only.
The Fairport Museum will be closed during January and February

Visit our website:

www.angelfire.com/ny5/fairporthistmuseum

*Group tours, presentations and special projects by appointment.
Call 223-3989 and leave a message.*