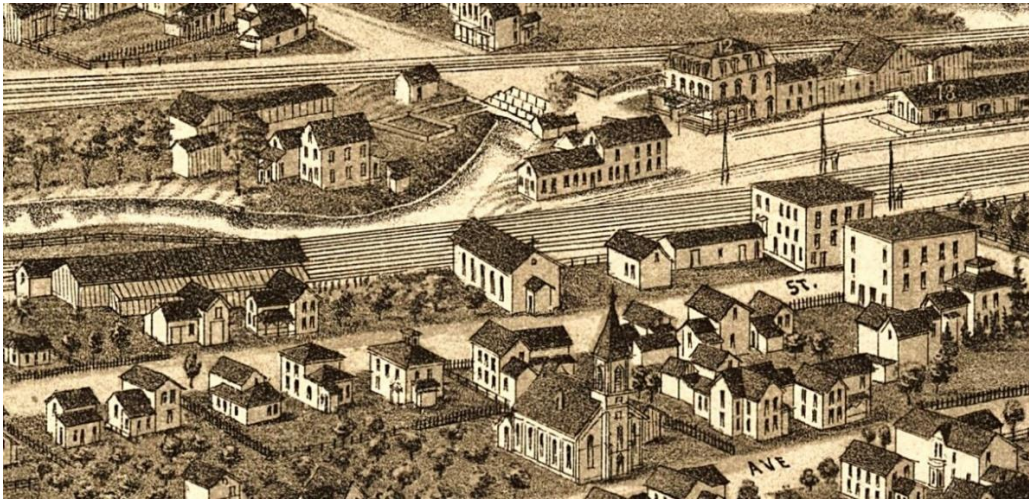


The Low-Down on High Street

By Bill Poray

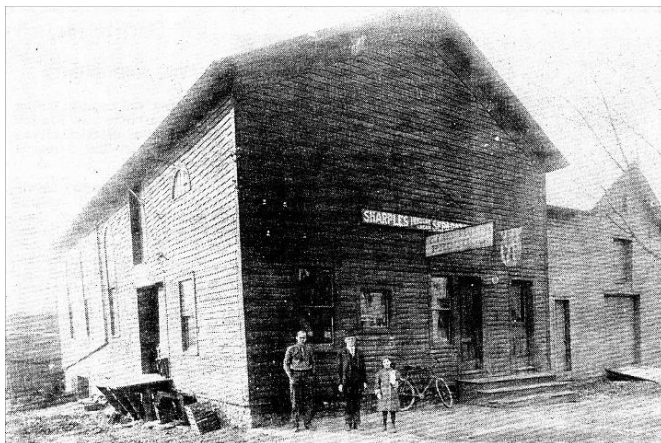
The colorful history of High Street began in 1853, when the New York Central Railroad first laid tracks through the village of Fairport. The initial tracks were approximately 400 feet further to the north than those in use today. The railroad gained a right-of-way through that portion of the village by purchasing land from the 101-acre farm formerly owned by Solomon Ralph (1778-1843), which extended from Thomas Creek, north to Whitney Road. Solomon's daughter, Ruth, married Smith Wilbur, and he, in partnership with his brother, Hiram Wilbur, developed the immediate area, first by selling land to the railroad.



The west end of High Street, reproduced from Burleigh's 1885 Birds-Eye View

Businesses and warehouses sprung up quickly on land adjacent to the railroad. Town documents indicate that the Wilbur brothers began laying out High Street early in 1855, east from North Main Street to Turk Hill Road, through the old Solomon Ralph farm. An 1858 map indicates fourteen structures, including businesses, homes, and the first Roman Catholic Church, which still stands at 22 High Street.

By 1872, about thirty houses had been built on High Street. Most residents were Irish immigrants, and many were working in local factories, as masons or laborers, or on the railroad. Names on the street included Beilby, Dunn, Downing, Mahoney, Flannagan, Benedict, and Tooley. Father Patrick McGrath lived within steps of the Catholic Church.



This was Fairport's first Catholic Church, located in the building that still stands at 22 High Street. In this early 1900s photo, the building was used by C. Lacy Fuller, who sold seeds, fertilizer, and produce.

The east end of High Street was sparsely populated in the 1870s, when land was carved out for a baseball field. As described in the Fairport Herald in July of 1877: “The grounds at the head of High Street have been graded, and in several days they will be fitted up in the most satisfactory manner. Ample seats are being erected and no pains will be spared to give those who favor this national game a chance to witness the highest science to be displayed on the diamond and in the field.” The price for admission was ten cents for men, and no charge for women.



Felix's Market at 84 High Street opened in May of 1946, operated by George and Helen Felix. Many have fond memories of what I have been told was the best pizza in Fairport.

A great wave of Italian immigrants arrived in Fairport in the early 1900s, typically settling on the village's north side. Construction for the widening of the Barge Canal provided ample employment, as did the railroad and factories in both Fairport and East Rochester. The 1930 census indicates that High Street's residents were primarily of Italian descent. Names on the street included Santini, Sozio, Pittinaro, Pomponio, Masciangelo, Rizzo, Parini, and many others. Almost 300 people were listed as living on High Street in 1930. There were even more in 1940, as the Great Depression lingered on, and economic concerns caused many property owners to take in tenants or members of their extended families.

High Street, first laid out 164 years ago, now includes apartments located on the former site of Felix's Market, and a large apartment building at the east end of the street has brought many new residents to the community.

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