

A Street by Any Other Name

I was recently asked how Fairport's streets were named. This is a simple question, but of course, there is not a simple answer. Several streets have had their names changed over the years, sometimes to the dismay of longtime citizens who liked the old name just fine. Take Herb Howard, born in 1861, for example, who stated in a letter to the Fairport Herald in 1938, "It is never too late to correct a mistake". He was referencing the renaming of Fairport streets which occurred over fifty years earlier, and was miffed with the abandonment of names he knew from his childhood. Examples include Cherry Street, which became West Avenue, and Sanford Street, renamed East Avenue, on the village's north side. Herb recalled his family's cows grazing in the pasture that soon after became Sanford Street.

In the early years of our community, many streets were named after prominent citizens of the area. Sanford Street was no exception. George Sanford and Mary Elizabeth Barnum were married in Walworth in 1854, and had a large farm and substantial house on the Rochester Road, called Fairport Road today. George was involved in many endeavors, including business, politics, and farming. He was elected village president for a time in the 1870s, and when the new Union School was built on West Church Street in 1873, George Sanford served as a trustee on the Board of Education. He also operated a lumber yard on the south bank of the canal in various partnerships, producing moldings, windows, doors, and other building products necessary for the growing village of Fairport.



1960 photograph of a home that once stood at the northeast corner of Main Street and East Avenue, formerly Sanford Street. The old Assumption Church can be seen to the right.

In an edition of the local newspaper from 1901, the following was written: "It may not be generally known that when first opened, East Avenue, now one of the prettiest streets in Fairport, was called Sanford Street. Some 30 years ago, George R. Sanford, a hustling business man, purchased of Smith Wilbur, 80 acres of land in the north part of the village for \$20,000, which is said to be the greatest price ever paid for that amount of land, in one purchase, in the town of Perinton. On this land several streets were opened and Mr. Sanford built about 60 houses, which were sold or rented. A good building lot at that time sold readily at \$400."

The Sanfords built an impressive brick house on the northeast corner of North Main Street and the recently opened street to which he lent his name. Before the house was completed, Sanford sold the home to Nathan and Mary Higbie, and they and their family owned the showplace home for many years.

By 1880, George and Mary Sanford left Fairport and established a farm in Girard Township, Michigan. Once departed, it didn't take long for village leaders to rename the street. The name East Avenue was chosen, much to the lifelong dismay of Herb Howard.

Written by Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

Fairport-ER Post, 12/04/2014