

## THE BOWN FAMILY

Several houses on South Main Street, a dominant red brick building in Fairport's business section on South Main Street (before urban renewal), a designated Perinton landmark in Egypt, and a subdivision off the Victor-Egypt Road are all associated with the Bown family.

In the early decades of the 1800's the Bowns resided in Ancaster, Ontario, Canada. Edwin Bown was a blacksmith who taught his son George the trade. In 1848 at the age of 13, George came to Penfield, New York, to live with his uncle, the Rev. Charles Bown. Before long, he had established a blacksmithing business in Walworth, where he married Mary Jane Foreman and started a family. Eventually the couple would have nine children.

In 1856 the family moved to Fairport and George opened a blacksmith shop. By 1861, he had purchased land on South Main near the four corners and built his first house (#131). In time, the Bown family would build and own #126, #127, #131, and #135 South Main Street. Within ten years, he had moved several smaller buildings to the back of the property at 131 South Main and had opened a carriage factory. The George Bown Wagon and Carriage Manufactory included a construction building, a paint shop, a sales room, and an office. The enterprise prospered until 1887 when a disastrous fire destroyed most of the outbuildings. The newly formed DeLand Hose Company was able to use its hoses to save portions of the surrounding property, however.

After the fire, George Bown purchased property from C. J. DeLand nearer the Erie Canal on the west side of South Main Street in the vicinity of today's Village Landing. He soon rebuilt his factory in the new location, and also rebuilt his houses on South Main Street. George and his three sons, Frank, Gardner, and William, employed about 20 workers who built, stenciled, and sold wagons and carriages. Besides the carriage shop, George G. Bown and Sons included a blacksmith shop, a salesroom for bicycles, and a woodlot. Bown continued to expand his presence on South Main Street's business district by constructing a large brick structure in 1890, known as the Bown Block. It housed a number of concerns including his son-in-law Robert Estes' drug store, insurance, and real estate businesses, as well as the local post office. George Bown in fact served as postmaster between 1897 and 1902. He also served the community as village trustee, school commissioner, and overseer of the poor. After George's death in 1904, his three sons continued the family business and by 1919 were slowly converting it to an auto dealership and a garage. Frank and Laurence Bown are listed in Fairport's 1932 directory as auto dealers.

Seven of George and Mary Jane Bown's nine children lived to adulthood. Of those that remained in the Perinton-Fairport area, Frank married Ella Ellsworth and lived in the house at 126 South Main Street; Gardner married Bertha Bruner with whom he had three children, one of whom, Bruner, married Margaret Case, whose grandfather Nathan Case had first farmed the land on the east side of Victor-Egypt road starting in 1851. Bruner and Margaret ran a dairy farm there and lived in the old farmhouse at 7725 Pittsford-Palmyra Road, known as a "marriage house" because it has two sections built at two different times (1820's and 1890's). In addition, Bruner served his community as Town Justice from 1920-1963. Since then the farm land has been developed as Egypt Park Estates and boasts a Bown's Hill Lane in honor of the family's contributions to the community. The house is a designated Perinton landmark.