

DeLand Fire Sparked Establishment of Village Water Works

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

The fire whistle sounded at 8:00 pm on a miserable winter night in February of 1893. A barn on Summit Street was burning. The Hook and Ladder and Protective companies answered the call, but there was little they could do. The firefighters made their way uphill to the blaze over icy streets through howling west winds and frigid temperatures. The barn was a total loss.

Just as the cold and tired men returned from the smoldering barn, the fire whistle again pierced the night. Just west of the Main Street Bridge on the south bank of the canal, the Chadwick warehouses were in flames. The temperature was near zero with gale-force winds, but the valiant firefighters fought with honor. Said the Fairport Herald, "The warehouses were like a tinderbox, and almost at once the cinders and fire was pouring over the adjoining blocks and along the canal east for nearly half a mile, driven by the west blizzard, which every minute was getting colder." Several commercial buildings near the canal were in jeopardy, and it appeared their loss was imminent, when the DeLand factory came to the rescue, with its own private fire control apparatus. DeLand hoses were connected to hydrants at the factory, with water pumped from the semi-frozen canal. By midnight the fire had been beaten back. Exhausted firefighters went wearily home, as the blizzard showed no signs of quitting.

Residents woke the next morning to the sound of yet another fire alarm, as workers at the DeLand factory discovered flames in the baking powder department. With temperatures still hovering near zero, the factory's fire hoses, used just hours earlier on the Chadwick warehouse fire, were frozen solid, as was the Fire Department's equipment. The Rochester Fire Department was telegraphed to request their urgent assistance, but their arrival came too late. By noon the DeLand factory was in ruins.

The growth and prosperity of Fairport had been in large measure tied to the success of its most significant employer. Without it, politicians and citizens alike were concerned for the future of the community. Village President E.J. Fisk held a public meeting at Shaw's Hall a few days after the fire, "for the purpose of expressing sympathy for DeLand & Co., and employees in their great loss." A resolution was approved, stating that "every effort be made to induce Messrs. DeLand & Co. to rebuild here, in order that the prosperity of the village may be maintained".



A view looking east across the canal at the DeLand factory in ruins. It was located where the Box Factory building and parking lot is today.

After three fires in little more than twelve hours, Fairport's residents knew it would take more than a hopeful resolution to convince DeLand to rebuild. The village needed fire protection that only a water works system could provide.

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