

EARLY PERINTON ELLSWORTHS

William Pratt Ellsworth shouldered his knapsack and began the trek west from Florida, New York, to Perinton where two of his former neighbors, James Hannan and Lovejoy Cady, had purchased 160 acres. An ambitious 21- year-old looking for new opportunities, he went to work on the Hannan and Cady farms and eventually married Cady's daughter Irena. They "began their life together in a part of the house of James Hannan." After six years, they decided that more opportunities existed west of the Genesee and bought a farm in the Holland Purchase at Ridgeway on Oak Orchard Creek. They moved themselves and all their belongings in an ox cart and settled down to begin a new life. Unfortunately, it was not a successful move. William developed a serious case of malaria, probably from the mosquitoes that bred "like bees" in the low scummy water of the creek. Irena and William returned to Perinton in 1832 and purchased land from Samuel Hanford in Perinton Center (in the vicinity of today's Ayrault and Turk Hill Roads). Here they finally began to establish what would become known as the "Ellsworth Homestead."

William Ellsworth was an excellent farmer. He began to clear the land of trees and the every-present stones. Corn grew well in the newly-opened areas, as did wild strawberries, making the air "sweet with the fragrance of crushed fruit." As more land was cleared, he planted wheat which was, of course, cradled, cured, flailed by hand, and then carried to Albany by ox cart to obtain the best price. There is also some evidence that he grew tobacco.

Ellsworth was also a good businessman. While early fences were built from the many stones removed from the fields, by the 1840's, fences were made entirely of rail and zigzagged across the landscape. Later those fences were replaced with plane board ones, all of which needed caps to hold the sections firmly together. William made and sold thousands of these caps. He also ran a tannery and a kind of bank. As there was no bank in the area, he purchased a safe, loaned people money at a reasonable rate, and placed important deeds, notes, and papers in his safe. It was known as Ellsworth's Bank. Over the years, the property was filled with a number of structures including, besides the farm house, a barn, sheds, cider mill, cheese factory, bee houses, and poultry sheds.

Irena was significant in her own right. She had received a good education and ran a school across the road from her house. Unusual for a woman, she was adept at drafting and was in demand locally for such services, especially for the construction of mills. She was also a surveyor and could use a cross-bow. William and she had six children, two of whom, James Byron and David Henry, lived to adulthood.

James Byron married Mary Theresa Yale. They lived and farmed in Perinton, raising a family of eight. Mary Theresa also taught music. After Mary's death in 1876, James married Sarah Mina Stone and the couple raised another nine children. Sarah outlived James, who died in 1921, and married George Bulman, a retired farmer.

For the first 18 years of his life, James' and Mary Theresa's son Lincoln Ellsworth lived and worked on his grandfather William's farm. Later on he worked at Maple Grove Farm, another of the Ellsworth family farms, located in the vicinity of today's Perinton Wegman's. He married Jessie MacMillan, daughter of James McMillan who owned property near the Maple Grove Farm. They raised five children. Lincoln was very interested in machines and built one of the first steam engines in town. Eventually he moved to Rochester and opened a bicycle shop. At first he sold the high-wheeled ones, but eventually he turned to the new lower bikes, developing the safety brake. He was a frequent lecturer and demonstrator of the new bicycles, winning prizes for his designs. He continued this work for about nine years before returning to Perinton and the family farm, where he remained until his death in 1941.

William, Irena, James, Mary Theresa, Lincoln, and Jessie are all buried with many other Ellsworths in Perinton Center cemetery.

