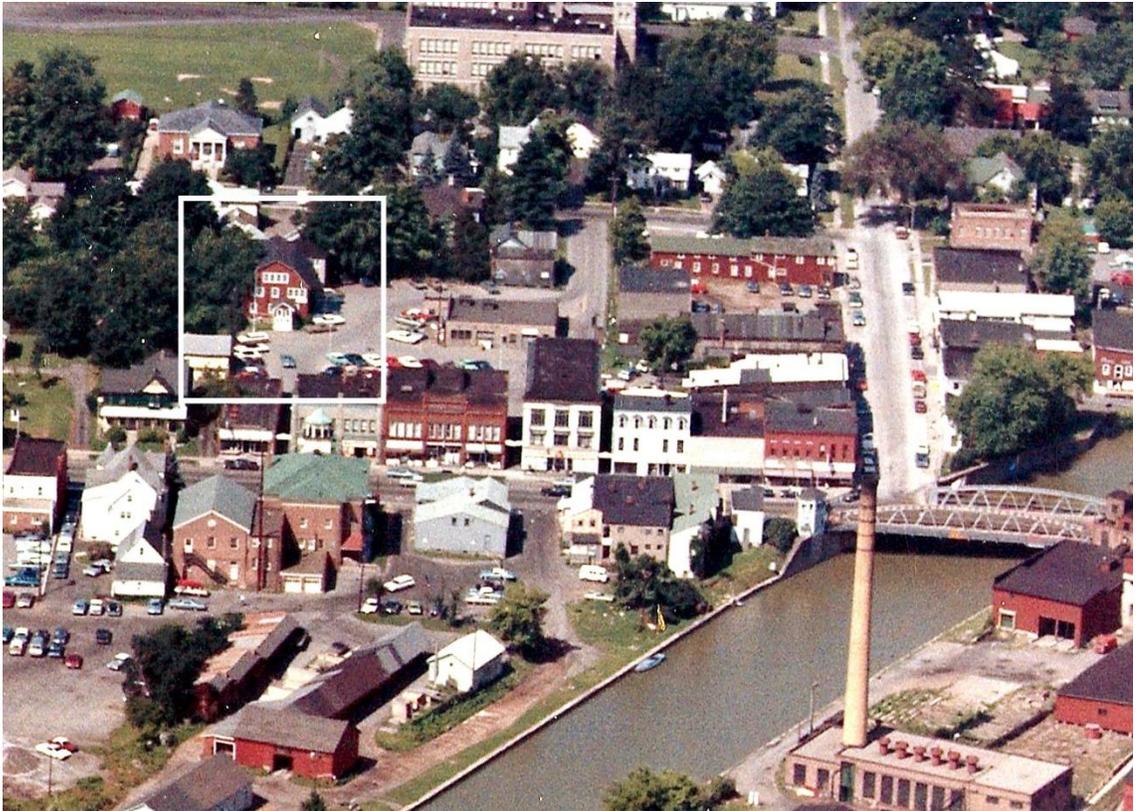


## He Knew the Underwear Business from the Bottom Up

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

My last column revealed the surprising but short existence of an underwear factory in the backyard of 70 West Church Street. Built in 1904, the 20 x 40 foot two story wooden structure burned to the ground in March of 1907. The employees of the Reed Company, all women, were rescued from the second floor by local workers who hoisted ladders to the windows of the burning building.



*After fire destroyed the Reed's West Church Street underwear factory, manufacturing relocated to an old barn formerly used for building carriages, located behind commercial buildings on South Main Street.*

Only days after the fire destroyed the factory, arrangements were made to rent a large barn previously used by the Bown Company related to their carriage making operations. The barn was located approximately where the parking lot exists today at the Fairport Village Landing. The company was insured, and allowed for the quick purchase of machines and

equipment necessary to restart the business of producing “The Reed Corset Covers and Ree-Dettas”, advertised as being “Dainty, Distinctive, Comfortable, Cool, Stylish, and Popular”.

By 1912, with the underwear factory bursting at the seams, the Reed Company built an addition to be used as a stockroom. As the deafening sound of rows of sewing machines filled the old Bown barn, evidence of the popularity of Reed’s products was close at hand. The “fancy undergarments” were awarded to Fairport’s female dance contest winner at the 1915 Labor Day celebration. Her partner went home with a pair of pants, courtesy of Fairport tailor Sam Jacobson.

Even in the underwear business, eventually the bottom falls out. The Reed Company couldn’t keep up with bigger competitors, and the machines fell silent not long after a factory sale held at the old Bown barn in August of 1916. For a while, the factory was resurrected as an operation of the Horseheads Glove Company. The local newspaper urged residents to financially support the new enterprise: “Why not invest at home in a stable, profitable line manufactured in a Fairport factory, now idle, that will re-employ those thrown out of employment, directed by Fairport businessmen who are successful in business...” The newspaper’s advice probably cost residents their investment, as the glove business fizzled.

By 1919, the old Bown barn again produced underwear, this time under the management of D.E. Sicher and Company of New York. The factory was put under the charge of Fairport resident Howard Hopkins. It was said that the operation was in good hands, for according to reports, “he knew the business from the bottom up”.

Readers might remember the old Bown barn factory as the eventual home of Gundlach, maker of photographic equipment, and later, Dynamic Optics.

*Written by Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian*

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