

## Ramsdell – Ranney Homestead

One of the oldest surviving pioneer farmsteads . . . one of four houses in Perinton with Federal architectural features . . . one possessing historic value as part of the social history of the community . . . a place identified with historic personages. These are some of the criteria that led to the designation of the Ranney-Ramsdell house and barns as an Historic District in the Town of Perinton. Since the Historic Preservation Ordinance was passed in February of 1987, the town has designated twenty-six individual properties and five districts as historic.



*The Ramsdell-Ranney homestead circa 1900*

Approximately two acres of the Ranney property at 7516 and 7532 Pittsford-Palmyra Road were designated as an Historic District in 1993. The house, built sometime between 1818 and 1820, on the main coach road between Palmyra and Rochester, was the first frame house in Perinton. It is an outstanding example of an intact 19th century pioneer farmstead. Paul Malo, a professor of architecture at Syracuse University, and a consultant to the Landmark Society in its survey of historic homes in Perinton, gave the house the top “red” rating, stating that it had “tremendous historical value . . .”

The two-story house is of post and beam construction with clapboard siding consisting of a rectangular main block and a long gabled rear wing. The house includes both Federal and Greek Revival elements. The six-over-six double hung windows, symmetrical facade, and center entrance are Federal features, while the cornice returns and the temple-style front porch with its paneled columns are Greek Revival. The north wing of the house contains original twelve-over-twelve windows. In addition, the northernmost section of that wing may well have been a woodshed which was later finished off for a hired hand.

The significance of the property was enhanced by the two historic agricultural outbuildings, to the east of the house. The smaller of these two barns, which unfortunately had to be razed in 2006, had a high stone foundation and was used for grain storage, probably corn. The larger barn, owned by Northern Nurseries, has a gambrel roof, which was the dominant barn form by the late 19th century. The surviving two buildings with their surrounding trees form an integrated whole, which are representative of Perinton’s agricultural past.

Thomas Ramsdell purchased Lot 22, a total of 320 acres, in what was then called the Town of Boyle, in 1802. He built his house on what would become the Palmyra-Rochester coach road, the regular stage and mail route to Rochester. Three taverns, (one of which, Packard’s, hosted Perinton’s first town meeting), a stage depot, a tannery, blacksmith shops, a foundry, and a wagon shop were among the commercial establishments that made this area the center of activity and government in early Perinton. There Ramsdell and his wife Hannah raised six children and successfully farmed his 320 acres. Indeed, it was due to Thomas Ramsdell and other successful farmers like him who were able to harvest corn in 1816, the “year without a summer,” that the name “Egypt,” after the Biblical Egypt that provided food for the famine-stricken Israelites, was given to the area. Thomas, like other members of his community, was

active in public service. He served as Overseer of Highways, Poormaster, and Commissioner of Highways. He was active in the Northfield Congregational Church and also donated land for the Mason Road Cemetery and the First Methodist Society's church.

Gideon Ramsdell, Thomas' son, was given 192 acres north of his father's house on what is now Mason Road. Gideon and his wife, Hannah, were Quakers, following beliefs which surely influenced their generosity toward runaway slaves and Indians. Their house, sometimes referred to as "Ramsdell's Castle" because of its size, sits on the west side of Mason Road. It is a rambling wood frame clapboard house, and is said to have been one of the stops on the Underground Railway. Not only did Hannah and Gideon freely offer food and shelter to runaway slaves, but they also allowed Tonawanda and Buffalo Indian groups to camp for the summer on part of their property. Gideon's son Jeremiah, also a Quaker, lived with his grandfather Thomas and was the last member of the Ramsdell family to live in the farmstead on Pittsford-Palmyra Road. In 1862 he sold the property to Hiram Ranney.

The Ranneys were also successful farmers, and were active in the social and political life of Perinton for more than eighty years. Hiram Ranney, his son Roswell, and his grandson Hiram served as Overseers of Highways, election inspectors, and school trustees. They were members of the Grange, the Masons, and the First Congregational Church. When Hiram, the grandson, died in 1945, his obituary referred to him as a "specialist in his chosen profession of farming...(held) in high esteem by his neighbors." Nellie, Hiram's widow, continued to live in the house for many years followed by David, her son, who owned the house until it was sold in 2000. The new owners of the property proposed to open a restaurant in the old house and build several other buildings that would house small retail shops. Unfortunately the project never came to fruition and the house sat empty for the ensuing six years. Several years ago, however, Northern Nurseries, which owns the adjacent property, purchased the house and surrounding property and have rehabbed the house to use as an office. The development is good for Northern Nurseries, and also keeps intact one of Perinton's oldest landmarks.