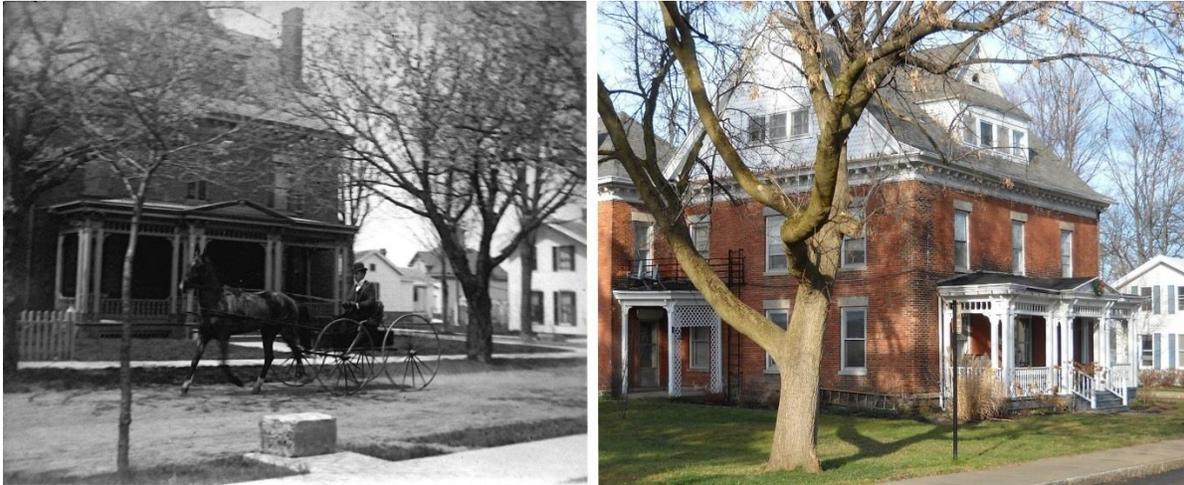


## Twenty-One Babies at the Big Brick House

*By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian*

For one hundred sixty years or more, a large brick house has stood at the corner of Parker and Pleasant Streets in Fairport. A lot of people have passed through that enormous house, including can-makers, tailors, and fortune tellers. The first owner was William S. Storms, a tailor by trade, who for many years operated “the oldest established Fairport clothing house,” according newspaper advertisements. Born in 1812, Storms arrived in Fairport from Georgia in the 1830s. He and his wife Mary raised their family in the big brick house, and it remained in the family until March of 1900, when it was sold at public auction.



*The big brick house at the corner of Parker and Pleasant Street. The photo at left is from about 1900.*

The house was soon owned by Edgar S. Thayer, listed as a “tin can maker” in census reports. He and his wife Carrie struggled with the enormity of the 4,500 square foot residence, and frequently advertised suites of furnished rooms to rent. They offered breakfast and dinner to their tenants.

The Thayers traded the big brick house to Mrs. Helen Dodge in 1919 for a farm in Penfield. Mrs. Dodge was born Alice Helene Harris in Canada in about 1880, and came to the United States as a child. Her occupation is listed as “practical nurse” in the 1920 census, and shared the house with two daughters and a cousin from Elmira.

Advertisements soon announced the opening of the Helen Dodge Maternity Home, with “Everything first class and private. Doctor attendant.” At other times it was called the “Helen Dodge Home for Children”, where boarding and adoption were available. A “lady doctor” was said to be on the staff, but there is no indication who that might have been.

Once news of the Helen Dodge Home for Children spread, it was not uncommon for the doorbell to ring, followed by the discovery of a baby left wrapped in a blanket on the porch. In the spring of 1920, 21 babies and young children resided with Helen Dodge, either as boarders, or waiting for a home of their own.

Helen Dodge sometimes provided rooms in her home to fortune tellers, who scheduled appointments with residents interested in communicating with the spirits. These included Madam Harris, billed as “The most wonderful medium.” Perhaps she was also a relation of Helen Dodge, whose maiden name was Harris.

In June of 1920, Helen Dodge married C.J. Frech, who had recently returned from military service in Europe. After the marriage the couple and Helen’s children relocated to the town of Camden, north of Oneida Lake, where she opened the Helen Frech Maternity Hospital.

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