

## The Story of Fairport's Clyde Kelsey

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town historian

There are few in town that recall Clyde Kelsey, a merchant on Fairport's North Main Street in the 1930s. Charlie Barranco is one of them. When Charlie was a young boy, Kelsey operated a storefront in the Millstone Block. It was just a stone's throw from the Barranco store, where you can still find Charlie today. At the mention of Clyde's name, Charlie reflected on the days of his youth, and quietly said, "Clyde Kelsey...he was a nice man."



*Fairport's first high school, once located at 38 West Church Street. The bell tower was the site of the fateful flag rush, which cost Clyde Kelsey his vision.*

*Demolition of the old school was completed in January of 1956. The Fairport School District administration building is located at the site today. It opened in 1971.*

From his little store, Kelsey sold magazines, cigars, candy, and distributed Rochester's newspapers to a stable of paperboys. He took good care of his young employees, and was known to treat them to occasional evenings at Fairport's Temple Theatre on South Main Street. It was an especially kind gesture, considering Clyde Kelsey was unable to see the film himself, for he was blind.

Born in 1901, Clyde was one of seven children of Charles and Alice Kelsey of 19 Summit Street. The loss of his sight can be traced to a controversial activity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, known as a flag rush. More typically found on college campuses, it was briefly a tradition at Fairport High School. One evening in the spring of 1920, Clyde and his classmates found themselves in a flag rush against another class. Kelsey's team took a position in the bell tower of the school. Kelsey and his boys were gathered atop a trap door, high in the tower,

defending their flag. The invading team climbed a ladder and attempted to break through the trap door with a long iron rod. Clyde Kelsey received a gruesome injury, which resulted in the loss of vision in one eye, and eventually, the other as well.



*A group of newspaper delivery boys at Clyde Kelsey's store in the Millstone Block, probably in the late 1930s. Top row: Alphonse Bentivegna, Dan Crowell, Carmen Marchioli, Frank Farnoli, Rebel Capana. Bottom Row: Mike Sperino, Harvey McMillan, Burton Moulton.*

In 1926, Helen Keller, by then a well-known author and lecturer, appeared at an event in Batavia on behalf of the American Foundation for the Blind. Within two weeks, with the help of the Foundation, Clyde opened a small store selling cigars, candy, and other items within the confines of the American Can factory on Parce Avenue. A year later, with experience and new confidence, Kelsey opened his newsstand in the Millstone Block, where he remained a popular fixture for sixteen years. Kelsey relocated to Washington D.C. in 1943, where he ran a series of concession shops in government buildings for another thirty years, until his retirement in 1973. He benefited from the use of a guide dog, provided by the Lions Club, for the last few years of his life, until his death in 1977.