

Fairport's Comic Book Menace

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

In a 1940 article first published in the Chicago Daily News, and widely reprinted in cities across America, author Sterling North took a stand against much of the comic book industry, which he termed a “national disgrace.” North wrote, “The bulk of these lurid publications depend for their appeal upon mayhem, murder, torture, and abduction.” He decried the glorification of “superman heroics, voluptuous females in scanty attire, blazing machine guns, hooded justice and cheap political propaganda.” Sterling North warned the nation, “unless we want a coming generation even more ferocious than the present one, parents and teachers throughout America must band together to break the comic magazine.”

Fairport Herald-Mail

FAIRPORT, N. Y., NOVEMBER 18, 1948

Parent Teacher Group Considers Campaign To Ban Comic Books

Eight years after Sterling North's condemnation of the comic book industry, parents, teachers, and representatives from local churches met at Fairport High School on West Avenue to voice their shared concern over a growing menace in the community – comic books. Those in attendance “decried the evils of such literature in which sex, murder and mayhem are the principal ingredients,” according to the front-page report in the Fairport Herald-Mail of November 25, 1948.

Not all comic books were deemed offensive by those in attendance, although Reverend Joseph Natale of the Church of the Assumption referred to a study, which identified only thirty percent of comic books as being suitable for youngsters. He urged parents to supervise the reading selections of their children. Reverend Robert Marr of the Fairport First Congregational Church referred to comic books as “the marijuana of the nursery,” and suggested an appeal to local stores to eliminate the sale of objectionable material to children. Reverend J. Edward Dahlen of the Fairport First Baptist Church also supported the effort to eliminate the sale of objectionable comic books, and reinforced the role of parents in providing appropriate alternatives to their children.



Circa 1950s view of the school on West Avenue. The building was Fairport's second high school, serving in that capacity from 1924 to 1959. Photo by Reverend Albert D'Annunzio.

A committee convened to take on the comic book menace in Fairport, and included members of the clergy, school board, business leaders, and parents. Local business owners were called upon, and agreed to cooperate with the requested moratorium on the sale of comic books considered objectionable. Although some communities implemented ordinances that forbid the sale of comics to youths, there is no indication that Fairport or Perinton implemented any similar provisions.

Opinions of students polled by the Fairport Herald-Mail varied widely on the topic of a comic book ban. The newspaper reported, "Some students say that before the list of censored comic books was made public they did not know the majority of these books were published, and it aroused natural curiosity to read them."

Published in August, 2019