The Fairport Champions, Perinton's First Football Team

By Bill Poray

The history of football in the United States can be traced in part to a meeting held by representatives of Yale, Princeton, Rutgers, and Columbia Universities in 1873. Rules were established, and soon after games were played, which had some vague resemblance to modern football today.

The first game in the Rochester area appears to have happened at a picnic in August of 1876. Two teams associated with the St. James and St. Patrick's Societies played a match in a park, just one of the activities held at the picnic.

A more organized form of the game took hold in Wayne County in the fall of 1885. A series of games were contested, culminating in the Wayne County championship, won by the Unions of Palmyra, over the Academy of Newark, with a score of 5 to 1. Clearly, a different scheme for score keeping was in place at that time.
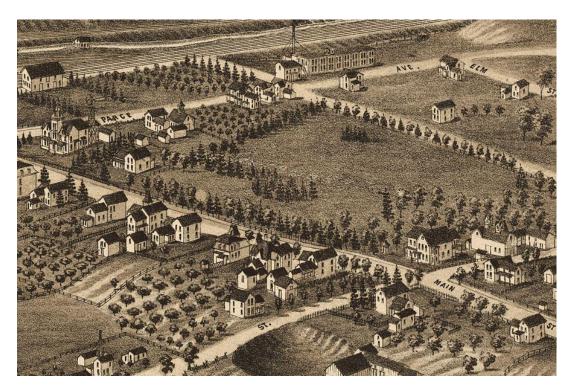

The earliest known photographs of a football team in Fairport are of the school team of 1906. They posed here in front of the original high school, once located at 38 West Church Street.

The first local team in the Fairport-Perinton community was organized in June of 1886, and placed a notice in the local newspaper, seeking competition. It stated: "The Fairport Foot Ball

Club hereby challenge any team in the town of Perinton to play a game, with the object being simply for fun and practice." They quickly received a reply, not from within our town border, but rather from Palmyra, another canal town thirteen miles to the east.

Prior to ever playing a game, our hometown team called themselves "The Fairport Champions." The team, in their brand new uniforms, traveled by train to Palmyra, to play the seasoned Wayne County squad, the same team crowned county champs the year prior. Although Fairport lost the game, they made a good showing, for their first time in competition. According to reports, the performance of the Fairport Champions may have been enhanced by the presence of reinforcements brought in from Canada, who quickly headed north after the game. Fairport needed the help, as the victory by Palmyra was their twenty-second in a row.

DeLand Park, site of the first football game played in Fairport, is visible in the 1885 Birds-Eye View of Fairport. The open area lined by trees near the center of the image is probably where the game took place.

Almost instantaneously, another Fairport team formed, this one sponsored by the Deland Chemical Works, who challenged the Fairport Champions "to a friendly game any time at their convenience during the next week." Soon after, what is believed to be the first football game played in Fairport occurred, on July 30, 1886. The match was contested at a field laid out in DeLand Park, where the streets DeLand Park A and B are found today. They were part of the extensive property of Minerva Parce DeLand, whose home still stands at the corner of North Main and Whitney Road. She was the widow of Daniel Parce DeLand. An enthusiastic crowd gathered to witness the big event, which resulted in a 1-0 victory for the Fairport Champions.