

EGYPT HISTORIC DISTRICT - The Middle Years

Second in a series

In the years between 1800 and 1825, Egypt was a center of politics and commerce for the town of Perinton. The coming of the Erie Canal in 1825 changed that. No longer was the center of activity along a stage route, for commerce and travel now centered around the canal, several miles to the north of the hamlet of Egypt in the village of Fairport. The hamlet did not lose its identity as a community, but its growth was slowed, and it ceased being the center of business and politics.

However, the subsequent years of the 19th century saw Egypt continue to thrive as an agricultural community anchored by the Ramsdell farms on Mason and Pittsford-Palmyra Roads, small businesses and stores, the church and school, and a growing number of residences along Loud, Mason, and Pittsford-Palmyra Roads. Gideon Ramsdell's home on Mason Road was purportedly a station on the Underground Railroad and also a place where Tonawanda and Buffalo Indians encamped during the summer months. Philemon Austin built his house at 7420 Pittsford-Palmyra Road and apparently manufactured pumps. The house at 353 Mason Road, which was built in 1820, had an iron foundry where the Lapham family manufactured "Egypt Plows." The next family to live there, the Conovers, added to the house in 1860 and ran a farm and a creamery there. Several other houses, including 30 Loud Road, built in 1840 by a member of the Loud family, and 7596, 7383, 7489, 7725 and 7752 Pittsford-Palmyra Road, built between the 1830's and the 1870's, add to the area's mid 19th century architectural legacy. The building that formerly stood on the corner of Loud and Pittsford-Palmyra Roads known as Nelson's Store was constructed during this period and served both as a store and a post office. It continued as a store and a gas station through much of the 20th century and was recently razed as part of the Route 31 expansion project.

Other structures in the hamlet date from the early decades of the 20th century. District #4 School (also known as the Fairport Grange), at 7700 Pittsford-Palmyra Road, was built in 1908 of molded concrete, a popular, inexpensive, and durable product that was popular at the time. Now serving as an office, it is a wonderful example of how an older building can be adapted for today's use. 7245 Pittsford-Palmyra Road, an American four-square, was built in 1920 of the same molded concrete as the school. At the west end of the hamlet at 7200 Pittsford-Palmyra Road is Robinson's Garage. Built in 1924, it is a reminder of those days when family-operated gas stations and repair shops were common and an important part of the community. In addition, several homes on the north side of Pittsford-Palmyra Road reflect the Colonial Revival style popular in the 1930's and 40's.

Egypt was linked to the rest of Perinton by the Rochester, Syracuse, and Eastern Interurban trolley, which began operating in 1906. Coming into Perinton from East Rochester, the trolley line was carried across Baird Road on a bridge, went through what is today BOCES I into the village of Fairport where it ran along the north side of the canal. Crossing at Turk Hill Road, it ran south behind today's Town Hall and Community Center and then east to Egypt, where it crossed Pittsford-Palmyra Road and continued on to Syracuse. The Egypt Fire Hall is located on the site of the former Egypt trolley stop. The ten trolley stops within Perinton served to connect outlying areas like Egypt with the center of activity in the village.

Around the turn of the century, Egypt became one of several food processing centers in Perinton. At the corner of Loud and Pittsford-Palmyra Roads, Frank Monihan and John Martindale opened a small evaporating plant or dry house, which dried and sold local produce.

By 1904, they had developed a working system of canning those products, and the Egypt Canning Company was born. In the early years, much of the preparation was done by local farm women who picked up the whole vegetables and fruits during the day and returned them in the morning ready for the canning process. By 1908, the company had added automatic machinery and had enlarged the facility. The business was incorporated in 1916 and became known as Comstock Canning Company. Growing through the 20's, 30's, and 40's, by 1957 the company joined several other canners to form Comstock Foods. The company provided regular employment for many Egypt area residents as well as for seasonal migrant workers and by the 1950's was pumping \$300,000 into the local economy, canning, among other things, applesauce, sliced apples and beans.

During the first half of the 20th century, while not the center of activity like the village of Fairport, the hamlet of Egypt was a viable community with a definite identity within the town of Perinton.

To be continued



Rochester, Syracuse, and Eastern trolley crossing Pittsford-Palmyra Road at Mason Road