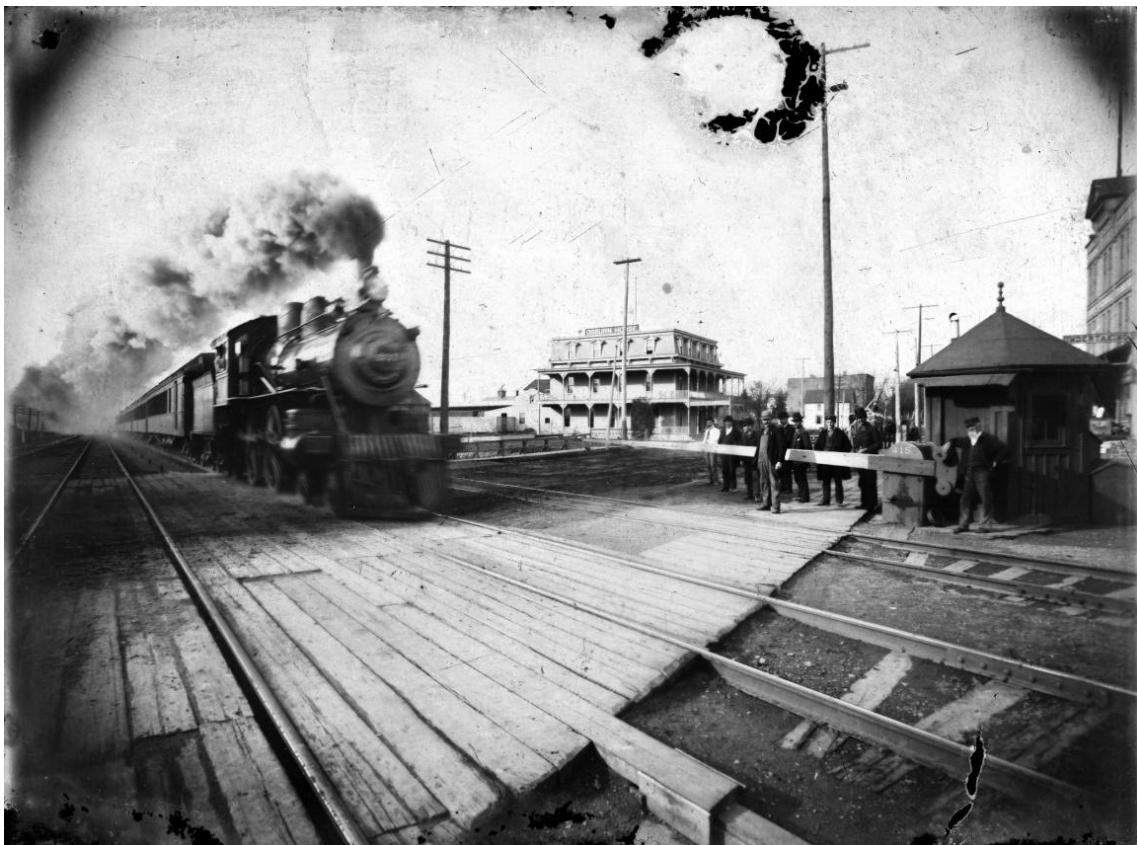


Fairport's First Fresh Air Kids

Imagine the scene at Fairport's bustling train station on a hot summer morning in 1885, as over 150 young children from New York City climbed off a specially chartered train, our town being one of many destinations along the route. The youngsters arrived in Perinton to escape the noisy, stifling, and crowded metropolis, and to delight in the quiet countryside. It all started in 1877, when the Fresh Air Fund was established to allow disadvantaged youths the opportunity to spend two weeks with host families in countryside communities.



A turn of the century steam engine crosses Main Street in Fairport. A similar train brought the Fresh Air Kids to Fairport for the first time in 1885.

In 1881 the New York Tribune provided its financial and journalistic support to the growing Fresh Air Fund. Fairport's Congregational Church responded by raising over fifty dollars to allow "a number of poor children of the great city to get into the country, up in Connecticut... to enjoy the fresh air and pleasant scenes of the country."

Perinton's support for the Fresh Air Fund became personal in 1885, when local families hosted an enormous throng of children, most from six to twelve years old. The young visitors arrived at Fairport's train station, each wearing a ticket with the name of their host family. Although cheerful on their arrival, most were exhausted and hungry. A local newspaper account of their arrival observed that the children "seem to be quite well-mannered, considering the class from which they are selected."

Residents were fascinated with their guests from the big city. Newspapers reported that the visiting young people displayed "exclamations of surprise at seeing many of the most ordinary country luxuries", and were "eager to adapt themselves to the great change in surroundings." One little girl was confused when she saw cattails growing along the side of a road, stating, "I never knew how sausages grew before."

One of the young visitors was sent a letter from her older sister in New York City, however the girl could not be located. The word spread in Sunday schools and other meetings to be on the lookout for young Sophia Blank, but she apparently was never located. It was assumed she got off the train at the wrong stop. Whether she was ever found is unknown.

The visiting children and their host families said their farewells as the eastbound Fresh Air Fund train arrived in Fairport on its way to New York. But for one Fairport woman, no farewells were necessary. Mrs. C.H. Green was so infatuated was the two little sisters who stayed with her, she convinced the mother of the girls to move from New York and make her home in Fairport.

Written by Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

Fairport-ER Post, May 19, 2016