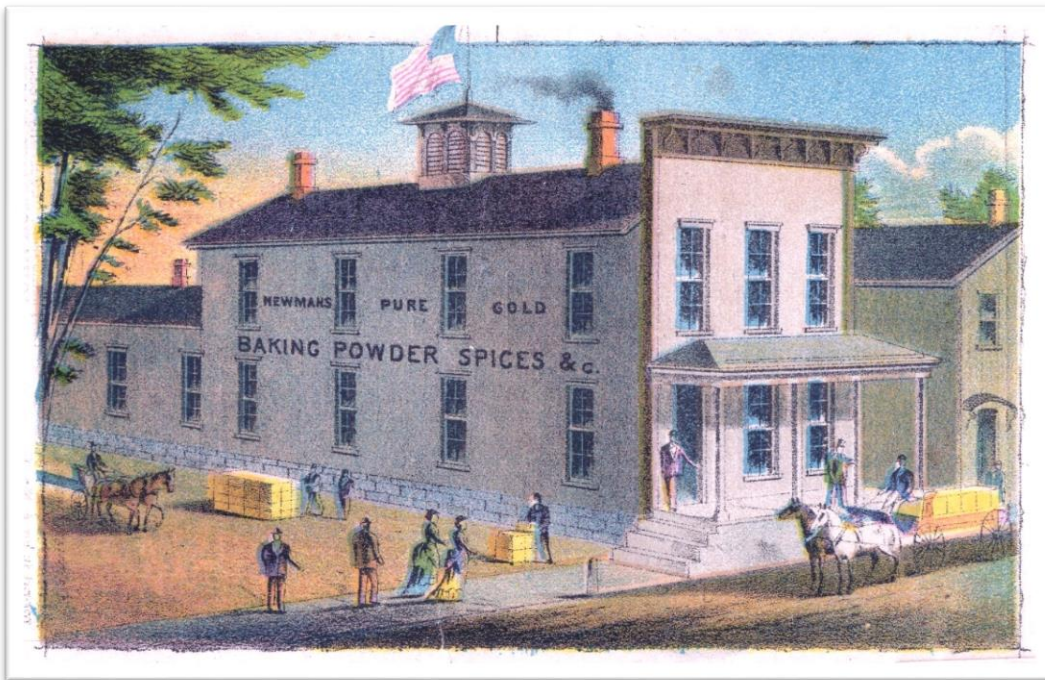


R.T. French and the Fairport Connection

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

An historic marker near the North Main Street railroad crossing in Fairport reads, “*Spice Mill – Near this site in 1883, the R.T. French Company began milling spices. A fire in 1885 destroyed the plant causing move to Rochester.*” Robert Timothy French operated a spice trading business in Elmira in the early 1880s. His son George visited Fairport and encouraged his father to relocate the business to the village. R.T. French followed his son’s advice, and soon his company partnered with Newman’s Pure Gold Manufacturing Company, makers of baking powder and spices.

When he brought his business to Fairport, R.T. French purchased an Italianate home built of brick on South Main Street, two doors north of the First Baptist Church. He was active in prohibition efforts, sponsored musical performances of visiting collegiate glee clubs, and was a member of the Congregational Church choir.



The Pure Gold building, built in 1876 on North Main Street, was briefly occupied by French, Palmer and French until a fire destroyed the building in 1885.

When the fire occurred on February 19, 1885, R.T. French’s company was the largest occupant of William and Susan Newman’s “Pure Gold” building. Only one year earlier, French, Palmer & French had purchased Newman’s interest in the Pure Gold Manufacturing Company. The Newmans retained ownership of the building, just north of the railroad tracks near where

Main Street Mercantile resides today at 62 North Main Street. The Monroe County Mail reported that the blaze was “the most disastrous fire which has visited Fairport”, and “in two hours nothing was left of the main buildings but a mass of smoldering ruins.” The DeLand Fire Company put forth a valiant effort, but all was lost. Eight years later, a system of hydrants connected to a municipal water works system was installed, and may have saved the building and its contents.



A designated Fairport Landmark, this home at 84 South Main Street was for many years the residence and office of Doctor John Kraai. R.T. French resided here before his company moved to Rochester in 1885.

Within a week of the fire Rochester newspapers reported the possibility of French, Palmer & French relocating to the city, and a month later, the move was confirmed. The company opened its new operations near Rochester’s Upper Falls, and R.T. French put his Fairport house on the market in the spring of 1886. The company didn’t manufacture a single jar of its famed French’s Mustard while in Fairport. Their signature product wasn’t introduced until 1904, eleven years after the death of R.T. French.

Countless residents have been inside the former Fairport home of R.T. French at 84 South Main Street, when it served as the residence and office of Doctor Kraai, who bought the property in 1936. Today the address is the home of Crystal Pix Incorporated, and is a designated Fairport landmark.