

From Garage to Grill in 103 Years on Water Street

Since 2004 Donnelly's Public House has been a thriving pub and grill in the village of Fairport. Located on the corner of Lift Bridge Lane and Water Street, loyal customers and a friendly staff maintain a lively atmosphere at the popular eatery, which features craft beers and a long menu of favorites. But this building had a far different beginning.

In the days when you were more likely to see a horse and buggy than a Buick, Daniel B. Fuller was an automotive enthusiast. Fuller was responsible for the 1911 construction of the brick front shop at 1 Water Street, for the repair of Perinton's Fords, Seldens, and Chevrolets. The garage had electric lights and a stove for heat, and room for the simultaneous repair of six cars. A second floor was used for storage. The south wall of the building, now the brick front of Donnelley's, was built on a diagonal slant. A railroad siding crossed the south portion of the lot at 1 Water Street, preventing the construction of a rectangular building.



Russ Stothers, a machinist at the Parce Avenue can factory, initially ran the garage, but by 1913 the proprietor was Erwin M. Edwards. He advertised his services, including repairs on automobiles, motorcycles, and bicycles, which he also built to order. If your baby carriage needed new tires, he could do that too. A gas pump provided fuel, if you were willing to pay thirteen cents a gallon. Joining Edwards in 1913 was Harlow Kelsey, who briefly sold and rented cars from the location. The name of the business was the John Street Garage.

Why would a business on the corner of Lift Bridge Lane and Water Street be named the John Street Garage? You probably know that the name Lift Bridge Lane is a recent development. Known as John Street in Fairport's youth, the name was changed to State Street around 1930. An explanation appeared in the town newspaper: *"The name of John Street was changed to State Street by the Village Board on petition of the owners of property in that street following the laying of the pavement. The arguments of the petitioners centered on the idea that John Street had borne in some respects an unsavory reputation, and the residents thought the building of the pavement was the occasion for a more stately name."*

D.B. Fuller sold the building in the spring of 1915 to Camillo Pomponio and his wife Maria. They continued to rent out the first floor for automotive repairs, and also made living quarters for two families, one on the second floor and one behind the garage. The Pomponios raised four children in one apartment, while the second was home to the family of Frank and Mary Guarino. I spoke recently with Karen Guarino Juneau, who recalls the story of her father, Joseph Guarino, being born in the second floor apartment in 1915.

In my next column:

Change would soon come to 1 Water Street, when the automotive business is replaced by what would become a Fairport institution: The Green Tavern, also known as the GT.

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