

## National Championships at Keck Hill

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

An easily missed street sign with the words “Keck Road” is the only indication that from 1917 through the 1970s, hundreds came to race, and tens of thousands came to watch some of the best hill climb motorcyclists anywhere. On Labor Day of 1913, riding mostly on dirt roads, Frank Kluch rode his motorcycle from Rochester to south Perinton. An electrician by trade, Kluch (a name that works for a motorcyclist), rode out to the country to visit the Kaeck family. From Victor Road south of Bluhm Road, a dirt path led to the farm of John Kaeck, with rolling pastures and impressively steep hills. Frank Kluch probably couldn’t resist the temptation to attempt Perinton’s first motorcycle hill climb that day. It would not be the last.



*Hill climb at Keck Hill in 1927*

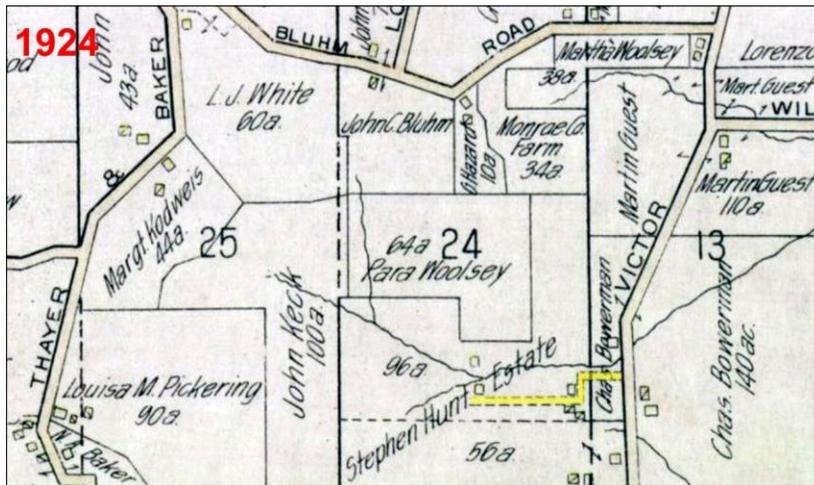
For the better part of sixty years, motorcycle hill climbs, often featuring some of the best competitors in the country, took place at the otherwise sleepy farm of John Kaeck. Eventually the family adopted the simpler “Keck” spelling for their name, probably because that was how pretty much everyone spelled it. John Keck and his family were a social bunch, and welcomed friends, family and others to their idyllic pastures for picnics and sausage roasts. The visits often included hikes to the upper elevations of their property, a place alternately referred to as “High

Peak” and “Keck’s Hill”. Soon anyone with access to a Rochester newspaper could read stories about the motorcycle hill climb races held their each year.

*The sports section of Rochester newspapers featured detailed accounts of the hill climb competitions at Keck Hill.*



Known in the earliest years as the West High Hill Climb, the first event in 1917 proved to be a hit from the beginning, with 3,000 spectators in attendance. By 1919, the Buffalo newspapers reported two hundred riders competed at Keck Hill from that city alone. John Keck provided parking for hundreds of cars and motorcycles in an orchard at the bottom of the hill. Others arrived via the Rochester, Syracuse and Eastern Trolley, with Stop 19 about a half-mile walk from the farm.



*John Keck’s 100-acre farm was located between Thayer and Victor Roads, as seen on this 1924 map.*

The 1920s to 1930s were the heydays for Keck Hill, and featured national championships attended by 10,000 or more spectators, organized by the Kodak City Motorcycle Club. Don Perry (1911-1980) of Shortsville stood in awe as a young boy, positioned at the bottom of Keck Hill with his father and thousands of other spectators. His dad was cooler than most on that muggy day, as in the excitement, “he tore the seat of the trousers of a new suit when hurdling a fence to get to the scene”, according to his son.

There was a lot of excitement out on Keck Hill one hundred years ago, a sleepy place most folks would have trouble finding today.