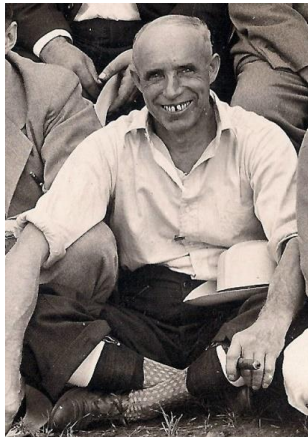


Perinton's First Car Owner, First Car Dealer

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

With the bicycle craze sweeping America, Andrew Palmer and Harlow Kelsey opened a Fairport shop for the sale and repair of two-wheelers in February of 1898. They located their new venture in the Chase block, a three story brick building built in 1886 at the corner of North Main Street and Parce Avenue. For Palmer, a man who changed occupations with the frequency that others change their clothes, the venture was short-lived. Kelsey bought out Palmer's share and continued the business on his own.



Harlow Kelsey (1876-1950), enjoying a cigar at the Fairport Businessman's annual picnic. He was the son of Joseph S. Kelsey, a veteran of the Civil War, and the brother of George Kelsey, first local soldier to lose his life in the Spanish-American War.

For several years, canal excursions were available on the Whipple, the Kelsey family's large steamboat. Most likely, Harlow, who had a way with all things mechanical, kept her running smoothly. However, boating on the canal was not the primary interest of Kelsey, but rather the excitement surrounding one of the biggest innovations of the time, the horseless carriage.

Automobile Shop Removed

My automobile repair shop and Ford salesrooms located for some years near the New York Central station, are now located in my large new garage at

150 North Main Street

where I am better able than before to make repairs of all kinds. I also have in stock new and second-hand Ford cars.

H. E. KELSEY.

A 1918 advertisement for Harlow Kelsey's Ford agency, which had been recently relocated from a shop near the New York Central station to 150 North Main Street.

Some have said Kelsey was the owner of the first automobile in Perinton. Like the family's steamboat, the Whipple, his first auto was a steam-powered vehicle manufactured in

Rochester. He sold the steam-powered car to Glenn Curtiss of Hammondsport, well known for his innovations in aviation. It was in 1902, the year before Harley-Davidson sold their first motorcycle, that Curtiss began manufacturing his own motorcycle, two of which he traded to Kelsey for his steam-powered automobile. Along with owning the first two motorcycles in Perinton, Kelsey reportedly also owned the town's first gas-powered automobile, built by the Northern Company of Detroit.

A converted canal-side building next to the Parker Street Bridge became Harlow Kelsey's first automotive repair garage in 1910, and soon after, he acquired a franchise of the Ford Motor Company. Within two years, the expansion of the Barge Canal forced him to relocate the business, and the Kelsey Ford dealership moved to a building adjacent to the passenger station of the New York Central Railroad. Sales documents from his first seven years totaled 129 new Fords sold by Kelsey.



Constructed in 1918, Harlow Kelsey operated his Ford dealership from this building at 150 North Main Street for many years.

Fairport's first Ford dealer moved to yet another location in the spring of 1918. On a vacant lot at 150 North Main Street, Harlow Kelsey constructed a 40 x 60 foot masonry structure of two stories, with access by automobiles to the basement and ground floor. He christened a new slogan, "The Garage for Satisfactory Service." Just two years later, Kelsey lost his Ford franchise to rival Albert Hupp, and promptly switched to the Overland brand. Kelsey eventually retired, and passed away in 1950. The building at 150 North Main Street remains a useful part of the community, now 101 years old.

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