

A TRIO OF FAIRPORT 19TH CENTURY ENTREPRENEURS

Nineteenth century Fairport village was home to a number of enterprising businessmen. Among them were F.B. Clench, George Seeley, and William Newman. Mr. Clench was a photographer whose work includes many local portraits and scenes; Mr. Seeley owned a hardware business among other ventures; and Mr. Newman was a builder as well as engaging in the lumber and baking powder businesses.

F.B. Clench came to Fairport after having run a gallery for over 35 years in Lockport. After visiting friends in Fairport in 1889, he decided that the village would be a good place to do business and secured space in the Deal block on North Main Street. He built up a flourishing business in the community and had his work published in an issue of Wilson's Photographic Magazine of New York, which said of him: "Mr. Clench is one of the most painstaking and progressive artists....It is seldom we have seen more of feeling and sentiment put into so many different attitudes of the same subject. Grace and ease characterize every pose, the lines well arranged, the accessories well chosen, and the lighting such as to give a beautiful and perfect modeling of the face and figure.....All the minor points, which play so important a part in the make-up of the whole, show that a trained mind has directed the execution of the work." He not only did photos, but he also did crayon drawings and enlargements and was known for taking photos of children. Many of the extant photos of late 19th century school classes, sports teams, street scenes, homes and individuals that are in the local archives were done by Mr. Clench.

George Seeley came to Fairport in 1847 and worked in the tin and hardware business in the Dickinson block. Within 10 years he had built a brick structure of his own on the corner of West Avenue and South Main Street where he did business until his retirement. He built his residence, a brick Italianate style house, on the corner of West Avenue and West Street. In addition, he was active in public affairs, representing the First Assembly District of Monroe County in the State Assembly, and also serving as Town of Perinton supervisor for six years and clerk for five years. In the village of Fairport, he served terms as village president, assessor, and treasurer. Seeley saw many changes in Fairport during his 50 plus years in the village. By the time of his death in 1911, the population had doubled and the village had become a bustling industrial town with canal, railroad, and trolley traffic.

William Newman was a businessman and a builder who came to Fairport from Pawling, New York, in 1856. He started out as bookkeeper for the DeLand Chemical Company, moved on to the lumber business with Lewis Jones and then in 1874 he purchased W.I. Ayers' spice and baking powder business, which first became Newman and Son and then the Monroe County Chemical Company. He was said to be "one of Fairport's most substantial and active businessmen, and is a man of sound judgment and strong character." Active in the First Baptist Church, he also served as Town Clerk and as President of the Board of Education. He built a number of residences including a house on the corner of Main and Church Streets, a house on West Avenue, the large house subsequently owned by Walter Parce on North Main Street, and the house on West Church Street which was occupied for many years by Dr. Dean. He also built a planing mill later owned by the firm of Green & McAuliffe, and the building used by the Monroe County Chemical Company on North Main Street.

George Seeley and William Newman clearly served as village leaders and significantly added to the physical growth of Fairport, and Mr. Clench, with his photographs, added to the historical record.