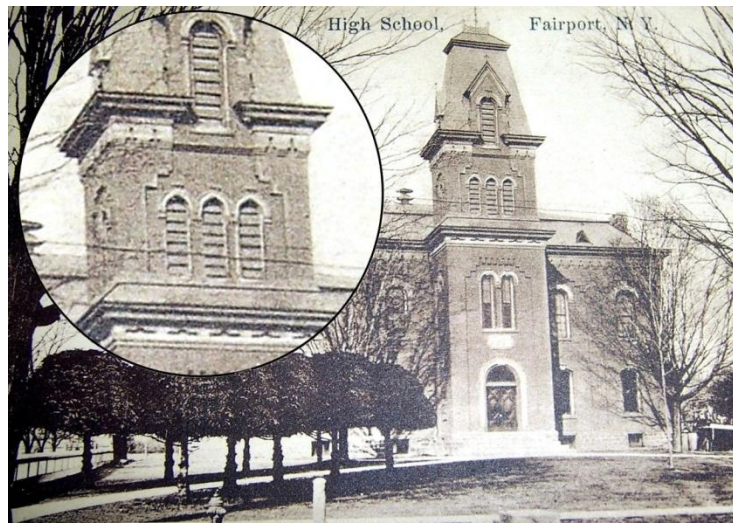


## Where is the Bell?

I have had the opportunity to meet with over 400 students from all the fourth grade classes in the Fairport schools in the past several weeks. We talked about many topics related to our town's history, including the Erie Canal and railroads, agriculture, and business. We also explored the history of education in our town, from the earliest one room schoolhouses to the buildings where students currently attend classes.

The students, typically nine or ten years old, loved seeing the old photographs of the early Perinton schools that they would have attended, had they been born in an earlier time. In talking about our community's first high school, a mystery becomes apparent, one that I have been unable to get to the bottom of. In fact, I've recruited the fourth grade students to help solve the mystery.

With the rapid growth of our town and village population in the late 1860's, came the realization that larger and improved educational facilities were required. The Fairport Union Free School District was formed in 1870, and land was purchased on West Church Street. Initially named the Fairport Classical and Union School, the large brick building was opened in 1872. The school featured a grand central tower containing a school bell, loud enough to be heard from great distances. The tower supported a cupola, and on top of it, a golden feather weather vane. The cupola was removed in 1939 after years of water damage, but the bell tower remained.



Over the years the school was enlarged and modified, reflecting the area's growing population, and became known as Fairport High School. In September of 1924 a new building for the upper grades was opened on West Avenue. The building on West Church Street was modified for use as an elementary school, and carried on in that fashion for about thirty years, until district centralization and the opening of Johanna Perrin School.

In the fall of 1955, the School Board made the decision to raze the old high school, and hired John Fly and Sons to do the job. The Fairport Herald-Mail reported on the demolition with the headline "School Bell Tower Silenced Forever". The story provided the following clue: *"The bell from the tower has been delivered to the High School where it will be kept for the time being. The Board of Education will decide what to do with it in the future."*

A search of the Board of Education meeting minutes from the summer of 1955 through 1961 found no references to the bell. In December of 1959 the financial records of the school district listed the "sale of junk", at the same time the former high school on West Avenue was undergoing some interior modifications in preparation for its new role as the Martha Brown Junior High School. If the bell was stored at the school, perhaps it was disposed of at this time. However, I have talked to several people who attended or worked at the school in the late 1950's and early 1960's, and none can recall seeing the bell. So the trail has gone cold. The whereabouts of the bell, first heard in 1872, remains a mystery.

I have instructed the fourth graders to be on the lookout for the 141 year old bell. It could be hanging from the rafters of a local barn, or gathering cobwebs in the corner of a garage. Of course, it may have been relocated to a distant place decades ago, or worse, melted down for scrap metal. Let's hope not. I would like to hear the old bell ring.

*Written by Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian   Published in the Fairport-ER Post, 07/04/2013*