

## MALLETT'S TAVERN or the FAIRPORT HOTEL

“It was Fairport’s first tavern. “It was built in three days.” “The name ‘Fairport’ was coined here.” These are only several of the many stories and legends that are associated with the building known first as Mallett’s Tavern and then for many years as the Fairport Hotel. It was, in fact, the first Fairport tavern built on the newly completed Erie Canal, probably completed in 1827, although some sources say 1825.

The tavern was indeed built in three days. The owner of the property on the north bank of the canal, Cyrenus Mallett, offered his friends sufficient food and drink to complete the task. Of course no one had to worry about heating, plumbing, or wiring, so, in fact, it was like a barn raising. Apparently, despite the fact that a liquor license was not issued to the tavern until 1828, Mallett had enough alcohol to keep his volunteers happy, and, as one story has it, to stand upon the framework, swing a bottle of whiskey above his head, break it, and name the building the “Fair Lady of Fairport.”

Cyrenus Mallett, the son of Solomon Mallett, one of Fairport’s early settlers who lived in the first house built in the village and who laid out Greenvale Cemetery, built his tavern in response to the great need on the newly opened canal for places to stay and to get food and drink. The response was overwhelming because it was later said that there was, at one time, a tavern or grog shop every quarter mile the entire length of the canal. Mallett’s tavern, however, was the only hotel in town for a number of years, until the Osburn House was built in the 1860's. The front doors of the establishment opened on the canal path to welcome the canal travelers who either would spend the night or perhaps take the stagecoach into Rochester.

The first floor of the hotel featured a dining room, a parlor, one bedroom, and a bar. One story claims that it was in the bar that travelers talked about the “fair port” where they had arrived. The kitchen was located in the rather gloomy basement. The second floor provided two bedrooms and a ballroom. The bedrooms, with their rope beds and cornhusk mattresses, offered a bit more privacy than the usual dormitories which separated men and women with a mere curtain. The ballroom was mentioned in an 1832 article which notes that there was a dance held there starting at 4 p.m. Heating was by fireplaces, and the assumption was made that the cracks between the floorboards on the second floor were for the purpose of allowing the heat to rise. Candles provided lighting, and sufficient privy facilities were available. Walter Edmonds, in his novel Chad Hanna, had the hero and his bride stay at the hotel on their honeymoon, where they got “a room for fifty cents, [and] a fine feather bed.” They ate breakfast in the “small dining room” where the “windows opened on the towpath.” They were served “sausage and fried eggs, and fried potatoes, and bacon cut thin and cooked crisp, and cuts from a peach pie.”

In 1862, Theron “Rudd” Pritchard purchased the tavern. He came from Egypt where he had run the “Egypt Halfway House,” so named because it was halfway between Palmyra and Rochester on the stage route. He came to Fairport because of the growing railroad traffic. By this time, the tavern had a second entrance on North Main Street for the railroad clientele.

Pritchard and his tavern were very popular. Not only was the tavern a busy canal and



railroad stop, but several sources describe the tavern as a place for wedding receptions. One source describes guests walking to the tavern from the bride's home where the wedding took place and being greeted by Theron Pritchard. There were tubs of lilacs for decoration and a "sumptuous repast" provided for the guests. Another recalls that "Old Father Butts" had officiated, and that the abundant food had been prepared by the bride's family.

Tradition says that the phrase "watch your P's and Q's" originated in this tavern. A black-painted board was used to keep track of the "pints" and "quarts" that were ordered by the patrons, and it behooved one to the "P's" and "Q's" to make sure he was correctly charged.

During Pritchard's ownership there was extensive remodeling. Steam heat was added, as was a lobby. Pictures from the time show the rooms furnished with lace curtains, heavy Victorian furniture, carpets, and wallpaper. He also prominently displayed a photo of his favorite politician, Democrat Stephen Douglass, over the bar. According to a 1937 newspaper account, the adjacent livery stable was run by "Bucky" with help from "old Fred Pester," who was a "dreamy old boy who usually sat by the inside of a stanchion that supported the long front porch and fell asleep." An active member of the community, "Rudd" Pritchard served as a village trustee and overseer of the poor.

In the early 1900's, under the ownership of E.J. Cary, the tavern was again remodeled. A third story, balconies, and a flat roof with bracketing in the Italianate style replaced the gabled roof, giving the building an entirely new look for the new century.

Evidently, the building remained as a hotel at least through 1913, because the Fairport Directory of that year contains an ad that reads "When in Fairport, stop at Hotel Fairport, W.J. Cary, proprietor, Both Phones." By 1923, however, the property, then owned by Mark Millstone, had become apartments and retail shops. That year, the building suffered a fire which drove ten families out of their apartments and damaged several retail businesses.

The Millstone Block still stands at 9 North Main Street. Much of its architectural significance has been obscured; only a small segment of the east side balcony and the Italianate roofline and bracketing are still visible. The south facade is hidden by a new concrete block building between the hotel and the canal, but walking along the towpath it is still possible to imagine the welcoming sight of a canal side tavern.



*The tavern in 1908*