

The Evolution of a Canal-Front Property

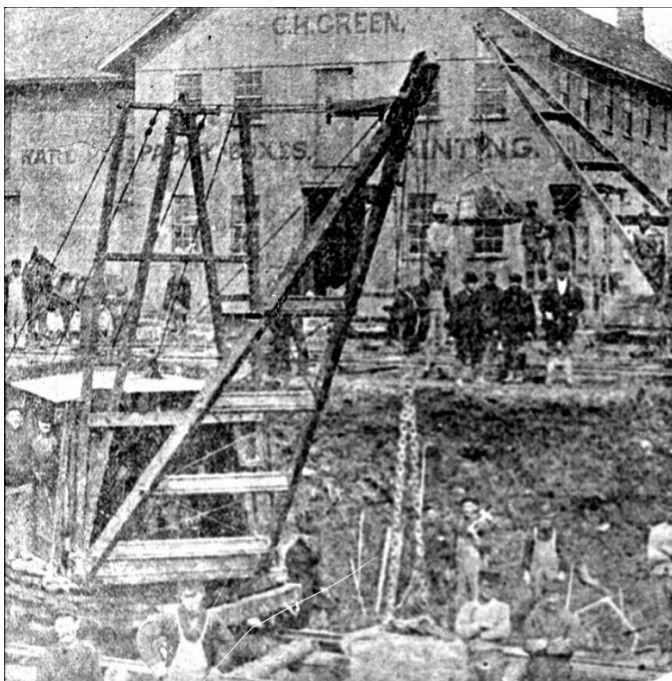
By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

A few hundred feet of the north bank of the canal west of Main Street contains some interesting history. There have been many lives to this property, and the businesses, buildings and people who have come and gone.



Charlie's Marina on the Erie Canal's north bank. The American Can factory on Parce Avenue is visible at the top of the image. This photo dates from the late 1970s.

A road known as Canal Street bordered the waterway at this location in the mid-1850s, with a few houses along the towpath. In the 1860s and 1870s, Al Parker (1817-1882) operated a grocery store and had a license to sell liquor, to the chagrin of those active in the temperance movement. John Hook (1814-1878) and his wife Martha (1806-1884) lived in one of the canal-side houses. They made a modest living selling vegetables raised in their garden. Next-door lived barber John Parker (1827-1900), an African-American man who fled slavery in Maryland prior to the Civil War.



The box factory of Doctor Cassius H. Greene. It was built in 1885 along the north bank of the canal, a short distance west of North Main Street. This building replaced his earlier factory, once located behind a house on South Main Street, approximately where the farmer's market is today. In 1889 he sold the business. Shortly after Greene moved to Marion, Indiana, where he opened another box factory.

In the 1880s, physician Cassius H. Greene (1844-1898) operated a thriving box-making business in a large wooden building with 15,000 square feet of manufacturing space spanning four floors. Known as the Fairport Paper Company, the factory benefited from its close proximity to the West Shore Railroad and the Erie Canal.

Dr. Greene sold his business in 1889, and soon after, his factory and several hundred feet of canal-side land became the property of Platt B. Viele (1828-1923). An 1892 map of the property indicates the presence of a warehouse, sheds, and a fruit evaporating building at least partially built of stone. Two houses were also present, probably the same homes earlier occupied by the Parker and Hook families. Viele operated a flour and feed mill on the site in the early 1900s. Another mill was located nearby on North Main Street. During this period Canal Street was renamed Mill Street. The tracks of the Rochester, Syracuse and Eastern trolley were installed in 1906 between Viele's buildings and the canal.

Much of Viele's property sat vacant for many years after his death in 1923. Town inspectors eventually determined all the buildings to be in poor condition, and the former mill building was razed in 1944. Two years later a fire destroyed one of the homes. Apparently, the other disappeared soon after.



Early 1940s view. The north side of the canal is to the left. The two houses at the lower-left were part of the Viele property. The Main Street lift bridge is in the upper-right corner.

Charlie Kopp of Parce Avenue opened a busy marina on the property in about 1960, which operated until 1983. He constructed the first floor of the current wood frame building in 1970, and added a second floor in 1972. Most recently, the building has been used as a restaurant.

The area formerly occupied by the marina will soon benefit from a project currently under way. It will provide fully accessible boat docks and a ramp, among other amenities for both residents and visitors. Most would be amazed at the variety of bustling activity and history that has taken place in this spot since the Erie Canal first opened in this area in 1822.