

The Forgotten Gilded Age Townscape of Warren, Ohio.

Alexander T. Bobersky

The townscape organized by Henry Bishop Perkins reflects his self-interest in shaping both town and countryside. This story is not typical of the Gilded Age. Henry B. Perkins was interested in agriculture to the exclusion of industry. His wealth allowed Henry Perkins to create a private realm for himself and his family—a quite picturesque townscape. While Youngstown industrialized, Warren was restrained by Henry's very different creed. Urban growth, industrialization and foreigners all had to wait until after Henry Perkins was gone.

The Gilded Age dawned in Warren in 1871 when Henry moved into his new twenty room Italianate Mansion. This estate represented an ostentatious demonstration of Henry's position at the pinnacle of Warren society. Henry's mansion fronted on Mahoning Avenue for almost a thousand feet and was located one block from the town square. No other place in the Reserve had an estate of this size so close to the center of town. The grounds today only hint at the horticultural detail that once graced this estate. This once grand landscape goes unnoticed in the work-a-day world of Warren.

In 1874 Henry was 50 years old and owned 1,018 acres of prime agricultural real estate less than a mile east of town. This farm land was equal in size to more than 1.5 square miles and did not include the 53 acre place in town. Henry also administered his deceased brother Jacob's 754 acre farm north of town. Henry's acreage was divided into two farms of near equal size. One farm was devoted to a dairy operation that engaged in cheese production. The other farm was devoted to raising steers and horses.

Henry B. Perkins was a gentleman farmer who lived in town. A review of the large property owners in the vicinity of Warren reveals that some of his neighbors successfully followed Henry's lifestyle. About a half dozen other members of this landed aristocracy lived in town and possessed lands in the countryside. An examination of township maps shows the town surrounded by this land owning pattern.

Like his father, Henry B. Perkins tried to influence his children to stay in Warren. "Since sticking to one's roots had worked so successfully in his life, he tried to force that philosophy on the next genera-

tion”¹, according to his grandnephew. Henry’s four children rebelled against their designed future in a little town. The Gilded Age townscape Henry B. Perkins cherished was lost to history soon after his death when the flood gates of change were swung wide open.

Notes

¹ Perkins, Ralph. *Perkinsiana*. 2 vols. 2 ed. (Cleveland: The Gates Legal Publishing Company, 1963), 2:195.