



LEST WE FORGET

Before Robert M. Fairbairn became active in local affairs, there had been no appreciable change in the character and habits of this community for a century. The population of about 800 lived by tilling the soil and trading in the products thereof. A few commuters, New York business men, were elected occasionally to the Township Committee, but they were handicapped by the prejudice of farm folk against any improvements that added a penny to taxes. The overseer who dared spend more than \$100 to "repair" the roads, after the annual spring thaw, was considered a spendthrift.

Mr. Fairbairn was a member of the New York Stock Exchange. He lived on the New Providence Road and drove to and from the station daily. A forward-looking citizen, he realized that the old town would continue to enjoy its isolation for another hundred years unless something were done to improve the road system. Like the other main thoroughfares within the township, Mountain Avenue and Broad Street were then old dirt roads, with bumps and water-breaks every few paces. Farmers were allowed to work out their taxes by "mending" the roads. They plowed up the gutters to provide better drainage, threw the surplus dirt into the middle of the road, filled in the "bad holes" with small stones, and leveled off the surface with a harrow. The "top dressing" was washed away by the first heavy rains, leaving the roads in

worse condition than before. There was little driving in the country for pleasure except when Providence intervened to provide good sleighing. The Parson, many of whose parishoners lived at distant points, usually started praying for snow at Thanksgiving time, and if there was a six-inch fall by Christmas he took credit for an assist.

Mr. Fairbairn's election as chairman of the Township Committee, in 1879, set the stage for an era of progress. He not only advocated better roads, he helped finance them. It was said that "he lent more money for public improvements than probably any others or all others combined." He urged that the road districts be consolidated. His plan was to place several roadmasters, of which there was one for every rural locality, under a general overseer, and combine them all into one district. He proposed that the roadbeds of all the main highways be made of crushed stone. These, he said, were measures of economy, for the roads would improve with usage and the cost of administration and maintenance be reduced.

In a long and somewhat acid controversy, Mr. Fairbairn's proposals were defeated, and not until his death, in 1891, at the age of 52, was the full worth of his services acknowledged. Then the building of "Telford" roads (see note) and the adoption of the County Road system, made necessary the local road reforms which he had