

Hell's Half Acre
By Douglas H. Shepard

We have had inquiries from hordes of people — well, three actually — about the section of Fredonia once known as Hell's Half Acre. Although the term was in use earlier, it seems to have first shown up in print in 1906. That was in *The Grape Belt* of 13 April 1906, which reported on two Pomfret men missing from their homes. "One is John **Miller**, whose abode is in that section of Fredonia known as 'Hell's Half Acre.'" (The "abode" was at 30 Porter Avenue.)

In its own next issue, the *Fredonia Censor* objected to the *Grape Belt's* terminology. "One John **Miller** of Fredonia has gone away and left his wife and two children, but we know of no reason why his neighborhood should be stigmatized as "hell's half acre" in the *Grape Belt*. Those people between the railroad and Canadaway Creek near Eagle street may be poor, but are as orderly as the rest of the town."

Of course, that wasn't quite fair since, as the *Grape Belt* had said, the section was already "known as," not that they were naming it. As a matter of fact, later on there was a kind of official sanction given to the name, and it was done by the Town of Pomfret. At a meeting on 31 August 1911, the Town Board took up the matter of a judgment by the Overseer of the Poor against the aforesaid John **Miller** and agreed to release from a lien "certain premises located on Devils Half Acre." So they did clean up the name a bit, even as they recorded it for posterity.

A number of explanations have been given as to where the name came from. One is that there was a kind of hobo jungle in the vicinity; another, that the bad hairpin turn going under the railroad trestle caused terrible accidents. If anyone has another explanation to offer, we would welcome hearing from you, and if you're uncomfortable using the older name, just copy Radar O'Reilly from the old MASH television show and call it H-E-Double-Two-Sticks Half Acre. We'll understand.