

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian



Vol. X 5-4-88 No.17

"I REMEMBER.... LA FAYETTE...."

During the summer of 1900 Mrs. H.T. Eastman of Anna, Illinois visited with Mr. Samuel Bowen of Medina, NY. Mrs. Eastman had been raised in Orleans County during her beginning years before her family moved west. She was evidently here on a trip in 1900 reminiscing about her youthful years in the area. Upon returning home to Illinois she posted a letter dated September 6, 1900, to Mr. Bowen in which she refers to a conversation they had while she was visiting.

"Since I returned home, and after having read up some historical facts and some incidents that have occurred to me since, I find that you are certainly mistaken as to the date of the first business down on the canal. History says, and I remember

the incident that you referred to, that LaFayette went by boat from Lockport to Albany. As the boat passed Shelby Basin and Middleport, they fired a great many guns. My aunt, the late Mrs. William Hicks, was then teaching school at the schoolhouse south of the culvert, and took her scholars down to the culvert to see them pass. There was then a blacksmith shop at the culvert, run by a Mr. St. John, and he got his anvil up on the towpath and fired it. (There is a horizontal hole through the lower part of an anvil and old timers would fill this hole with gun powder, plug both ends and touch with a fuse which resulted in a cannon-like report.)

"I remember that they had the boat decorated with a great many flags, and that they had the French and U.S. flags entwined. A crowd of people followed the boat to Knowlesville, where the ladies spread their shawls and garments for the General to walk on. I remember hearing the guns at Eagle Harbor and at Albion also. That was in 1824, and the boat was run from Lockport to Albany, that is certain, but you are correct in saying that the canal was formally opened late in 1825. However, they did business early in the summer of 1825; this is certain, for my father moved to Michigan in the summer of 1825, and went by boat to Lockport. I am not certain though that the boat went through the deep cut, but think that she did. I distinctly remember how my mother and her sister cried as we went on the boat and bid each other good-bye. That was early in the summer of 1825."