

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian



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The following speech was given by Delia Robinson, historian for the Town of Gaines, at a ceremony for Historic Proctor Brook at the Cobblestone Museum Complex Sept. 11.

Even if your consuming interest is not in history, everyone has a curiosity as to why place names developed. In this area names like Lime Klin Road, Johnny Cake Lane and Pumpkin Hill catch the imagination. The name Proctor Brook is not a twentieth century invention, as it was used in reference to this stream as early as the 1820s. But why was it called Proctor Brook?

When historians speak about pioneers, people often envision an impoverished young family carving out an existence in an untamed wilderness. To be sure this was largely the story, but there was another type of pioneer who came for different reasons. Young sons of prominent New England families came to develop their own fortunes. They came with the backing of old money and were pioneer entrepreneurs and land speculators.

The Proctors were wealthy land owners in Dunstable, Mass. John was the eldest son of a family of 10 children; the son of Revolutionary War veteran Gershom Proctor.

At the age of 23, in 1810, John traveled to the new lands of the Holland Land Purchase. In Batavia he took articles to over 400 acres at the corner of what is today Transit Road and the Ridge. The 400 acres would have cost John, upon purchase of \$2.50 an acre, \$1000. This is considered no small sum today, but what must it have been nearly 180 years ago!

But, the next year John changed his mind, relinquished his articles to John Huff and moved a few miles west to the corner we know as the intersection of Rt. 98 and the Ridge. He again set about purchasing 400 acres which encompassed all four corners of the intersection which was then the second meridian survey line and the gravel ridge. Why did he make the move? Perhaps something which was happening farther north in what is today Carlton was an influence. Joseph Ellicott the land agent for the Holland Land Company saw the only viable route for trade as Lake Ontario. He had taken upon himself to lay out a village on the lake shore which he envisioned becoming a busy lake port, and he named his village Manilla. If you were to look at the 1852 County map and compare the

streets of Manilla with those which exist today as part of Point Breeze, you would see the remnants of Mr. Ellicott's plan. I believe that John Proctor had heard about Manilla and decided that his property should be on the direct line from the offices at Batavia to the lake port of Manilla. Thus he moved farther west to position himself in direct line of trade.

By 1816 the Town of Gaines was formed from Ridgeway and Mr. Proctor became the constable, overseer of the poor and the tax collector. It was then that he began actively to develop his village, today's Childs. By 1818 he began to sell building lots of ¼ acre for approximately \$30, west of the corner. Perhaps his astute business mind can best be seen when in 1819 he sold the corner lot, on which Bill Nestle's house stands today, for \$450 with a frame house then on the premises. John certainly knew how to make a profit!

John not only acquired hundred of acres in Gaines but also during his life owned two large farms in Carlton, land in Medina and speculated on 100 acre farms in the new west of Wisconsin and Iowa. John was also one of the original stock holders in the Niagara Suspension Bridge and locally was on the committee to study and accomplish the building of the new road improvement called plank roads. Oddly enough this road began at the brick school house in Barre and proceeded north to the village of Fair Haven, the village founded by John Proctor.

Within the town of Gaines, John held mortgages for innumerable families and was named guardian of children after the father had died. At that time an appointed guardian handled the welfare and financial dealings of any children under the age of 21. He was also influential in the welfare of several churches, he held the property which had belonged to the Congregational Church for a period of eight years and opened it to any denomination needing a meeting place. He promoted and helped to make a reality the cobblestone church here at Childs. Interestingly enough he never was a member of either church. One enticing piece of trivia I have found which shows Mr. Proctor's wealth and influence is that he actually held the mortgage of the Bank property in the village of Gaines!

With this background of influence and social consciousness, and because John Proctor owned approximately 1/3 of the land through which this stream flows, it is easy to see why the early settlers in central Orleans County named it Proctor Brook!