

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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"The Town of Gaines was formed by state legislation and named for Gen. E.P. Gaines February 14, 1816"
So notes part of the wording on a granite tablet mounted in the new Gaines Town Hall which was dedicated on the 175th anniversary of this enactment. You may ask: Who was Gen. Gaines? Town Historian Delia Robinson, in a recent article published in a souvenir paper for the town hall dedication, answers this question.

GEN. EDMUND PENDLETON GAINES

By Delia Robinson

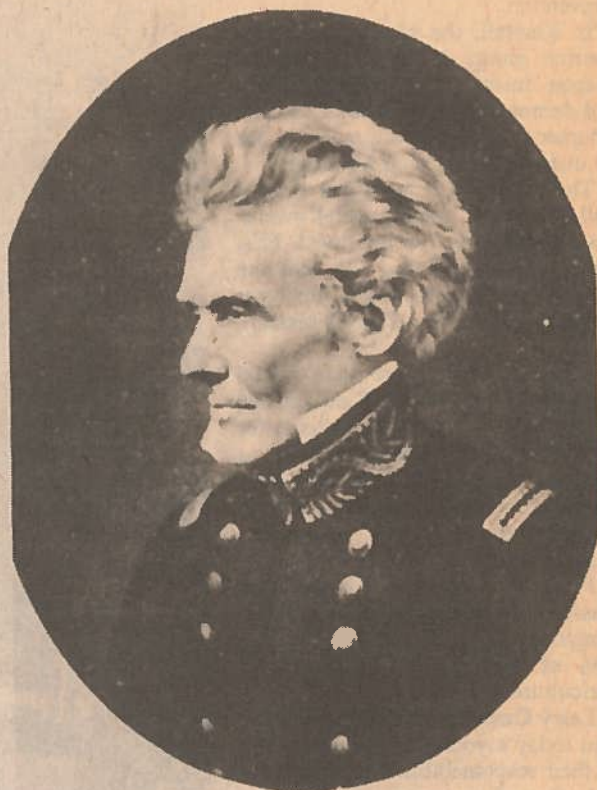
The War of 1812 was a reality to the settlers on the Holland Land Purchase. The people living along the Ridge witnessed those fleeing a burning Buffalo in 1813 and heard the reports of British ships on Lake Ontario. The Battle of Lundy's Lane in July of 1814 had stopped the Americans. Major General Brown, the commander of the American Forces on the Niagara Frontier, sent a messenger to Sackets Harbor ordering Brigadier General Edmund Pendleton Gaines to assume command at Fort Erie.

On August 5, 1814 General Gaines arrived at the fort. Two days later the British General Drummond decided to advance. Because the Fort had been strengthened with new bastions the Americans were able to answer the attack and the exchanges lasted for eight days. Even though the regular troops on the Niagara frontier totaled 1,000 they were being besieged at Ft. Erie by an army of 4,000 British troops and Canadian militia. The frontier troops could not be expected to hold the fort or to evacuate and retreat against such odds. Therefore on September 1, 1814, the militia in all the counties west of the Genesee were called out. The militia was composed of all able-bodied white male citizens between the ages of eighteen and forty-five. These settlers were ordered to march to Buffalo from where they would be sent as reinforcements to Fort Erie. Upon arrival the volunteers encamped on the lake shore, were placed under the command of General Peter B. Porter and engaged the enemy in several sorties.

On the morning of September 17, an announcement was made of the victory of our sailors and militia at Plattsburg 6 days before which acted to inspire the volunteers. At noon the volunteers were formed into two columns headed by regular riflemen and dragoons under the command of General Porter. The two columns marched to the lake and merged in the forest. They made several sorties against the enemy who were in these woods outside the fort opposite Black Rock. Rain poured down relentlessly and the ground was covered in heavy underbrush. Due to the thickness of the underbrush the men were instructed to replace their hats with handkerchiefs or bands of red glazed cloth which had been supplied in large rolls. The ground was covered with mud, strewn with logs and interspersed with ditches and ridges. The constant rain rendered many of the muskets inoperable because the priming had become wet, so much of the combat was hand to hand. Under these conditions, rules of discipline were waived by the regular soldiers.

At the end of the engagement the Americans had lost 20 to 30 men, a number were wounded and a few taken prisoner. The British could count killed, wounded and prisoners at 1,000. Due to their losses they halted their siege and retreated down the Niagara River. The volunteers were then discharged and returned to their homes on the frontier.

Many of these volunteers are familiar names on the history of our town. John Proctor remembered well the battle in September as several bullets passed through his clothing and one grazed his hand. Ptolemy Sheldon, brother of Abner and Zelotes Sheldon, was severely wounded in the shoulder from which he never fully recovered. Moses Bacon, settler at Five Corners, was shot through the neck and taken prisoner to Halifax. He was released in 1815, but never regained his health. Reuben Root and his father assisted in tak-



ing some 500 prisoners on that September 17 and were discharged receiving the rate of \$8.00 a month for their service.

It was only a short 17 months after this battle that Town of Gaines was formed and the War of 1812 was fresh in everyone's mind. According to local accounts William J. Babbitt was one of those who suggested and supported the name for the new town to be Gaines in honor of the General with whom they had held Fort Erie. His name was also familiar to these settlers as the lieutenant who, in 1807, had arrested Aaron Burr near Fort Stoddard in Alabama and was a witness at the trial.

Edmund Pendleton Gaines was born in Culpeper County, Virginia March 20, 1777. He was the son of James and Elizabeth Strother Gaines. His father was a captain in the Revolutionary War and member of the North Carolina Convention which ratified the Federal Constitution. Edmund's brother George Strother Gaines was an Alabama pioneer and Indian Agent. Edmund was named for his uncle Edmund Pendleton a well known lawyer.

At the age of 18 he was lieutenant in a company of riflemen organized for Indian warfare and in 1797 entered the U.S. army as an ensign but was at once promoted to lieutenant. In 1804 he was made commandant at Fort Stoddert and by 1807, after the arrest of Burr, he attained the rank of captain. He obtained a long leave from the service and studied law in the Mississippi Territory until the War of 1812 brought him back to the service with a rank of major. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel, colonel and adjutant general in 1813.

General Gaines was seriously injured at Fort Erie and took no further part in the war. For his successful defense, though, he was promoted to brigadier-general with a major general's brevet, thanked by Congress, given a gold medal and received votes of thanks from five states and swords from Virginia, New York and Tennessee.

His career was not over though. He engaged with Jackson in the campaign against the Creek Indians and Seminoles. He was in the Black Hawk War in 1832 and 1835 and in command of the western department during the Mexican War. He died of cholera in New Orleans June 6, 1849.