

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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REMEMBERING THE LIBERTY POLE



The photo shown here was taken just ten years ago on Sunday, July 4, 1982 at the dedication of the liberty pole on the grounds of the Cobblestone Museum in Childs. Left to right: Richard Cook, Liberty Pole Committee; Arthur (Dick) Eddy representing Orleans County Legislature; Assemblyman Steven Hawley, Gaines Councilmen James Lubbell and Roger Rush, Gaines Supervisor Donald Radzinski (cutting the ribbon) and Gaines Councilman David Vagg. The festivities that day included a ceremony for the flag of the United States by Orleans Chapter DAR and a procession to the liberty pole led by the Color Guard and Women's Auxiliary of Sheret Post #35 of the American Legion.

The other picture shows the museum grounds as it looked with the liberty pole in the foreground the day it was dedicated. Shrubbery and trees have now filled in but the liberty pole is still clearly visible from Route 98.

Such patriotic devices were our first American symbols. To this day, our New York State seal and flag show an ethereal female representing Liberty holding a liberty pole. From a column of reminiscences which appeared in the Orleans Republican in 1922 we know that a tall Liberty pole with a big wooden eagle resting on a perch half way up once stood on the west side of Main Street in Albion by a hotel known as the Mansion House which would have been located between what is now the Lake Country Pennysaver and the Erie Canal. Other than this brief reference to it, nothing is known about the Liberty Pole or when it may have been erected or by whom.

The first Liberty Poles, sometimes known as liberty trees, were erected by American Colonists as symbols of their assertion of rights and independence from British tyranny. The initial Liberty tree was an Elm in Boston under which the Sons of Liberty rallied to denounce British oppression, singing songs, drink toasts and hang in effigy, officials who were in disfavor. A very famous Liberty Pole was erected on the Commons in New York City to celebrate the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766. However, it soon became a focal point for street rowls between the Sons of Liberty and British soldiers. Before 1770 it was demolished but the British animosity grew, and a new one was erected in its place by the Colonists. At least five successive Liberty Poles occupied this same site which is now the present City Hall Park in New York City.

Liberty Poles were erected throughout the colony of New York. They ranged from rude logs to high, white-painted poles sometimes festooned with pennants or other patriotic decorations. Fol-

lowing the American Revolution, political parties began to erect Liberty Poles as focal points around which to rally. Several Liberty Poles once stood in the hamlet of Gaines and one 180 foot high was supposedly erected on the Court House lawn in the mid-19th century. It is also said that Francis Harling (1827-1897) a blacksmith near Riches Corners, once made some straps of iron for fastening two poles together end to end so as to erect a taller Liberty Pole than one already placed by another political party.

With this sketchy information as our heritage, it seemed appropriate for the Cobblestone Museum to recreate a Liberty Pole based on the description of the one which was once located in Albion. It was thought that such a creation would embellish the museum grounds and since this Liberty Pole just so happened to portray an eagle, it tied right in with the "Bicentennial Year of the American Bald Eagle."

On July 4, 1776 a committee of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson was appointed by the Continental Congress to develop a national seal or emblem. Six years later on June 20, 1782, the Bald Eagle was adopted as the central figure of the Great Seal of the United States by the second Continental Congress.

When the idea for all this was presented to the Cobblestone Board of Directors in June of 1981, it was unanimously accepted and the museum director was given the go-ahead to pursue this project for completion in July 1982. Larry Baun, a sculptor from Lyndonville was first selected to carve and paint the big wooden eagle for the perch half way up. The finished eagle is a single piece of cedar and was paid for by a friend. Richard Cook, a Cobblestone Board member then procured a forty-foot pole for this adornment. Milford Heye then graciously turned out on a lathe, the large sphere to cap the Liberty Pole. Not having a picture to go by, of the original Albion Liberty Pole, the height, eagle's size and various colors and striping were largely a matter of conjecture. To label, mark and designate the purpose of our Liberty Pole, Leo LaCroix of Bridgen Memorials donated his time to engrave a large stone marker given by Cary Lattin for the site. The marker states:

TO THE PEOPLE OF GAINES
THIS
LIBERTY POLE
Replica
was erected in the
"Year of the Eagle"
1982
by The Cobblestone Society