

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

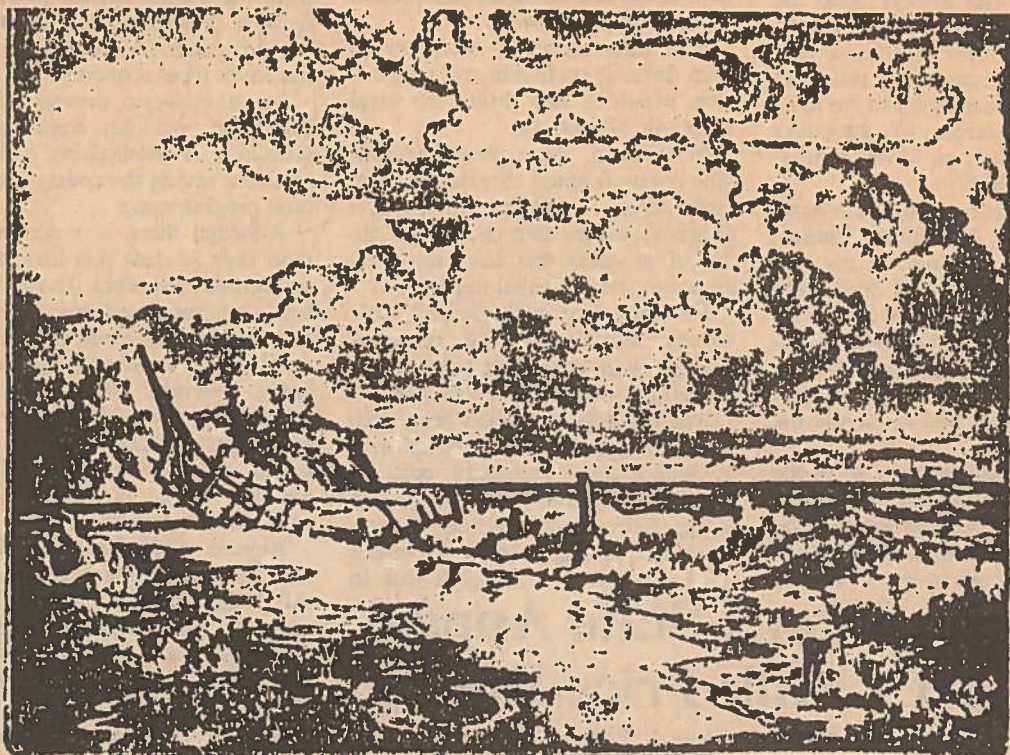
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## 19th CENTURY SHIPWRECKS OFF OAK ORCHARD



BEACH SCENE AFTER ONE OF THE LAKE ONTARIO STORMS

*Now all good wood scow sailor mans,  
Take warning by dat storm  
An' go marry one nice farm girl,  
And live on one big farm*

*Den de win' can blow like heck,  
An' s'pose she blow some more;  
You can't get drown on Lake Ontair'  
So long you stay on shore."*

*(Lake sailors chantey, 1880)*

As historian of the county municipality containing both major natural waterways I receive requests every year for information regarding boating, shipbuilding, and shipwrecks. Each year the answer is the same: "very little information has ever been documented on this subject along our county's bordering of the lake." What little there is was written in: "The Historical Album of Orleans County, New York - 1879." These were the recollections of Captain Horatio C. Murray, a prominent shipbuilder and lake navigator. He was born in 1821 and was about 58 years of age when his records were set to print.

In the twelve years of my tenure I have investigated anything dealing with local shipping. As rather insignificant data has ever been found it seems appropriate to reprint Capt. Murray's memories. If any further information might be available concerning our present century it possibly could be gained by contacting the U.S. Coast Guard, 9th District; Rm. 459, 601 Rockwell; Cleveland, Ohio.

In 1847 the schooner "Missouri", Captain Gardner commander, ran ashore and was so damaged that it was necessary to haul her out and rebuild her. After the outlay of considerable money, and amid many perplexities, she was put afloat again in 1848. In the same gale that wrecked the "Missouri", the schooner "Paul Jones" was driven ground three miles east of Oak Orchard Harbor. She was hauled ashore and newly bottomed and launched the following year. Another disaster occurred at the same time, the Canadian Schooner "C. Pollet Thompson" having been run ashore four miles east of Oak Orchard Harbor. She was abandoned for the winter and rescued the following spring.

In the early part of 1849 the steamer "Lady of the Lake," Captain Eccleston master, Charley Caldwell mate, broke her shaft one evening on her passage down, when off Oak Orchard. The next morning she was seen riding safely at anchor about four miles east of the harbor, through the wind was blowing a gale from the northwest. Those on board communicated with persons on shore by means of a message washed ashore in a sail and measures were taken for her rescue.

The Canadian brig "Matilda Taylor", Captain Taylor, bound from Kingston to Cleveland, with a cargo of railroad iron for the Cleveland and Cincinnati railroad, was caught in a gale and snow storm, in the winter of 1850, driven ashore and wrecked

two miles east of Oak Orchard. In the spring of 1851 the schooner "Wilson S. Malcolm", with a cargo of flour, sprang a leak outside the harbor and was run ashore three-fourths of a mile east of Oak Orchard. She was pumped out, her leaks partially stopped, and she was sent forward.

About December 1, 1855, the schooner "Perseverance", of Niagara, laden with coal and salt, was caught in a snow and wind storm from the north, and having her main boom broken went ashore five miles west of Oak Orchard, near the mouth of Johnson's Creek. Captains Selheimer and Murray were employed to get her off, and did so two weeks later, only after a severe struggle with the storm, the winds and the ice along the shore, when they brought her into the harbor.

The "Clipper" a small Canadian schooner, was caught in a severe norther, was driven ashore east of the harbor, and abandoned. In the fall of 1867 the flat-bottomed Canadian schooner, "Lord Nelson", with a cargo of wood, lost part of her canvas in a heavy gale. She was driven into the harbor, striking the western pier, and sustained serious damage. The "LaFayette Cook", a brig, was caught in a heavy nor-wester in the winter of 1871, her crew tried to run into the harbor, but she went on shore just east of the eastern pier. Part of her cargo was thrown overboard, and she righted after the gale subsided.

During the fall of 1873 the propeller "Young America", of the New York line, had her engine disabled while trying to weather a heavy storm from the north, was driven twelve miles beyond the harbor, passing over the lower part of the bar, where she remained a total wreck.

Other disasters which have occurred in the lake off Oak Orchard Harbor include: in 1840 the Canadian timber brig "St. Lawrence", laden with heavy oak, sprung a leak and sank in the offing opposite the harbor. The crew were saved in the yawl. Eight years later the propeller "Genesee Chief", bound west, ran down and sank the steamer "Cuba", of Oswego, laden with wheat. A suit for damages was in the courts for years, which finally resulted in a verdict of \$18,000.00 for the proprietors of the sunken vessel.

In 1849 the schooner "Forest", bound up the lake with a cargo of salt, sprang a leak in the offing and sank, the crew pulling into Oak Orchard Harbor just in time to obtain a passage home in a vessel about to weigh anchor. During the year 1869 the Canadian schooner "Jane Lesley", laden with coal, sprang a leak in the offing and run ashore five miles west of Oak Orchard. Captain Douglas came over from Toronto and negotiated with Captains Selheimer and Murray to take her off and bring her into the harbor. They were successful, soon had her afloat and inside the harbor.

There is only one vessel owned at the harbor now (1879). It is a large craft of 250-tons burden, owned by Messrs. Selheimer and Beckwith and employed by them in the grain and lumber trade, chiefly with Canadian ports.

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