

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

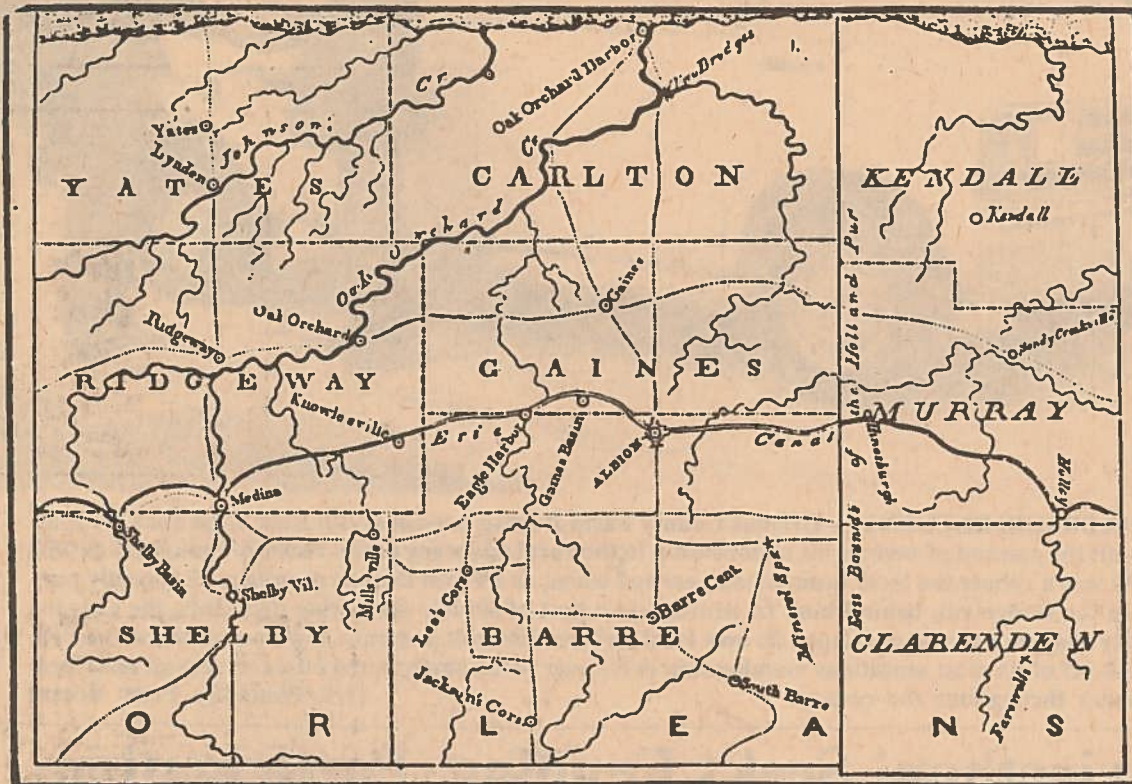
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## HOLLAND PURCHASE



"The local historian of almost our entire continent, finds at the threshold of the task he enters upon, difficulties and embarrassments. If for a starting point the first advent of civilization is chosen, a summary disposition is made of all that preceded it, unsatisfactory to author and reader. Our own race was the successor of others. Here is our own region, when the waters of the Niagara were first disturbed by a craft of European architecture -- when the adventurous Frenchman would first pitch a tent upon its banks, there were "lords of the Forests and the Lakes" to be consulted. Where stood that humble primitive "pallisade," its site grudgingly and suspiciously granted, in process of time arose strong walls -- ramparts, from behind which the armies of successive nations have been arranged to repel assailants. The dense forests that for more than a century enshrouded them, unbroken by the woodman's axe, have now disappeared, or but skirt a peaceful and beautiful cultivated landscape. Civilization, improvement and industry, have made an Empire of the region that for a long period was tributary to this nucleus of early events.....

We are prone to speak of ourselves as the inhabitants of a new world; and yet we are confronted with such evidences of antiquity! We clear away the forests and speak familiarly of subduing a "virgin soil", -- and yet the plough up-turns the skulls of those whose history is lost! We say that Columbus discovered a new world. Why not that he helped to make two old ones acquainted with each other?"

The above selection is taken from the first chapter of Pioneer History of the Holland Purchase of Western New York by Orsamus Turner 1849.

To me, Mr. Turner shows a great deal of insightfulness in his observations considering the time frame in which this was written. In particular, the last paragraph which mentions Columbus shows, I think, a reverence on Turner's part for Native Americans. We must remember that in 1849 Columbus was generally portrayed as the "Discoverer

of America".

Although Columbus made four voyages to the New World he never did succeed in reaching the mainland of North America. It wasn't until June 24, 1497 that John Cabot landed on the coast of Newfoundland. In more recent times we have changed our appraisal of Columbus and with the recent 500th anniversary of his landing, Native Americans made it perfectly clear they saw him as no hero.

None the less, because of his exploration, the new continent was developed. Following the control of the Six Nations all the land west of the Transit Line in what is Orleans County was owned by a wealthy group of Dutch land speculators identified jointly as the Holland Land Companies. This area containing Niagara, Erie, Chautauqua, Cattaraugus, the western part of Allegany, Wyoming, Genesee and Orleans counties amounted to 3,600,000 acres. Surveying began in 1798 and Batavia was of course, the headquarters for the Holland Land Company. The present Holland Land Office Museum in Batavia built in 1815, was used for about thirty years or into the 1840's for its original purpose.

The map displayed here of our Orleans County also from Turner's work shows the east boundry of the Holland Purchase (transit line) that separates Kendall, Murray and Clarendon from the western part of the county. These three eastern towns were originally part of the Connecticut tract or more commonly identified as the 100,000 acre tract.

I'm pleased to announce that Jeff Bliemeister, Curator of the Holland Land Office Museum in Batavia will be the featured speaker for the annual mid-winter dinner sponsored by the Cobblestone Society to be held on Saturday evening, February 20 at the Erie Inn in Knowlesville. Mr. Bliemeister's topic will be "Evolution of the Holland Land Purchase." For more information about this dinner program, call 589-9510. The annual mid-winter dinner is intended as a community awareness program for the entire public.