

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

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## O. TURNER, PIONEER HISTORIAN

Orsamus Turner wrote of himself as follows: "Reared amid the most rugged scenes of Pioneer life upon the Holland Purchase, with little of early opportunities for education, beyond those afforded in the primitive log school house, he can prefer no claim to any considerable attainments in scholarship."

Although modest in appraising himself, Orsamus Turner left the people of Western New York an invaluable resource of material as author of Pioneer History of Holland Purchase of Western New York published in Buffalo in 1849. It contains 666 pages and a title page which reads like a book itself. "Embracing some account of the ancient remains; a brief history of our immediate predecessors, the confederated Iroquois, their system of government, war, etc. --- a synopsis of colonial history, some notices of the border wars of the Revolution, and a History of Pioneer Settlement under the auspices of the Holland Company; including Reminiscence of the War of 1812, the origin, progress and completion of the Erie Canal, etc. etc. etc."

This volume is no doubt, on reference at your local library and may be procured through dealers who handle rare books, such as Beech and Crow Books at Childs, N.Y. It is a comprehensive history of the region in which we live and was prepared long in advance of other similar works.

Mr. Turner was born in Ontario County, N.Y. on July 23, 1801. In 1804 his father Roswell Turner, moved their family to what is now the Town of Sheldon in Wyoming County. Here he built a log cabin which also served as a tavern for pioneers moving westward. Roswell died in 1809 and left his wife Catherine, three sons and three daughters in the wilderness. Orsamus was sent to live with an uncle back in Ontario County. In 1818 he became an apprentice to Timothy C. Strong, publisher of the Palmyra Register. His own and first written material appeared in this pioneer newspaper in 1820. In 1822 Orsamus went to Lockport where he published the Lockport Observer. His editorial policy was always neutral in politics with columns in his paper open to fair and candid discussion of all aspects of a question. At that time Lockport was little more than a site of log heaps, huge piles of rock and not over fifteen frame buildings, one of stone and the rest of logs.

He chronicled the notable events of his age as he was involved in ceremonies honoring Lafayette's tour, witnessed the Masonic delegates lay the capstone of the completed locks of the Erie Canal



and recorded the opening of the canal in October 1826. Mr. Turner continued as editor and writer for various Lockport publications through the 1830's. In February 1834 he married Suliza Bush of Batavia. They resided in Lockport and had two children. In 1848 he retired from his newspaper work to devote his time in preparing his history of the Holland Purchase which was released in 1849. It enjoyed a wide favorable acclaim which encouraged him to move to Rochester to write a similar volume, History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps in Gorham's Purchase and Morris Reserve. In 1852 he became editor of a new Democratic paper in Rochester but returned to Lockport in 1854 to control the Niagara Democrat. It was here he died at the age of fifty-four in March 1855. He was buried in an unmarked grave for close to fifty years in Cold Spring Cemetery. He died a poor man because of devoting so much of his life to so many civic movements.

Mr. Turner served as postmaster of Lockport under James K. Polk's administration. He was also a member of the fire department, and an officer of the Masonic Lodge. He once served thirty days in jail for refusing to testify in the Morgan abduction scheme, but was acquitted for lack of evidence.

Orsamus Turner was a man of integrity and often recognized that what older people remembered from their youth of pioneer times, was sometimes distorted. However, his history of the Holland Purchase remains forever one of the best sources available.