

Bethinking of Old Orleans

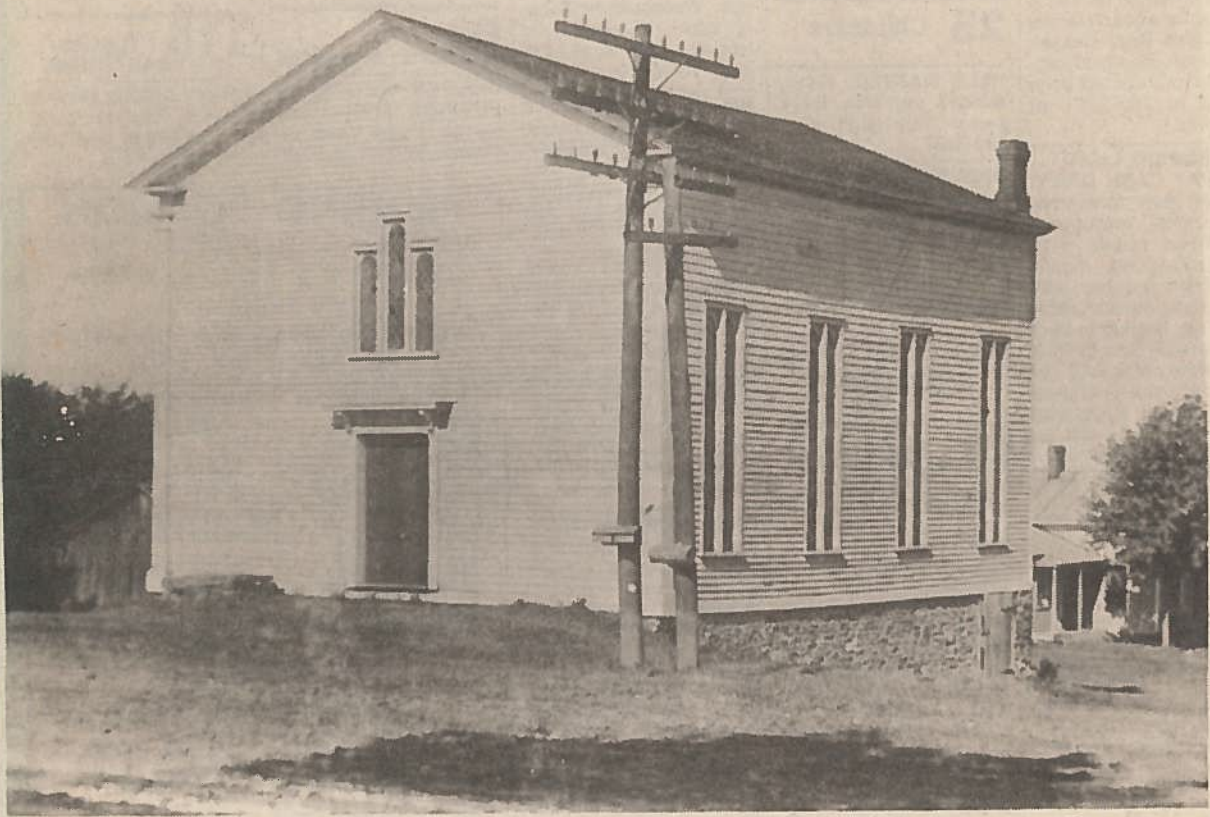
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FIRST CHURCH



Pictured here around 1920 is the first church built between the Genesee and Niagara Rivers. It was constructed in 1824 at Gaines, N.Y. by both Baptists and Congregationalists.

In 1874 at the Semi Centennial of its construction, Alamanzor Hutchinson remembered: "Originally a single front door opened directly into the audience room, a gallery extended across the south end, two tiers of windows on all sides, two rows of square pews on either side and two rows of slips through the center...The pulpit was a very high one." In 1834 the Congregational Society built their church further east and transferred their rights to the Methodists, by 1840 John Proctor held the building for the Universalists and by 1847 the First Free Congregational Society had formed and bought the building. This group made extensive repairs to the building. Mr. Hutchinson and C. Ruggles remembered in 1874: "The ornamental honeycomb work, a conspicuous architectural feature in construction, became so delapidated that it was wholly removed to give place to another plan...The repairs consisted of a new pulpit, new seats...a partition from the front of the gallery to the floor, reseating of the gallery, plastering and painting the whole." In 1869 it was deeded to the Free Methodists. They "carried the partition up so as to close the gallery, putting in stained glass windows, putting in an altar, painting and papering the inside, painting the outside and building a stone platform in front."

Obviously our photo shown here, is the altered version with stained windows that were added by Free Methodists. In the Mid-1920's this building was acquired by the Town of Gaines for a highway garage and town offices. At that time an addition

extending approximately 50 feet to the west was built to accommodate two bays and an office. The original structure pictured here, was gutted and turned also into two bays for trucks, and other highway equipment. At that point all the interior architectural features including any remaining original parts and subsequent additions by Free Methodists were removed and destroyed, including all the stained glass windows. What remained was a shell, devoid of any architectural integrity except some parts of the overhang. Naturally, most of the original interior structural support beams remained in place except where two overhead doors were cut through on the front.

This last June the Town of Gaines dedicated a newly renovated and up-to-date highway garage in the former Roth building at Childs. Consequently, it was thought in the best interest of the Gaines Community to remove the former highway garage. As a member of the Gaines Town Board, I am in concurrence with this decision after giving fair consideration to other alternatives. While I consider myself an architectural preservationist, I also recognize what is worth preserving and what is not. Age alone or being a ghost of the first church does not necessarily or automatically mean historical and architectural significance.

Aside from lacking architectural integrity, this property has some other problems which include: not being able to get a clear title, not being zoned commercial and not having an adequate size lot for a prescribed septic system. The north west corner of the structure also happens to stand on the neighbor's property. In essence, the structure is in deplorable condition which is why the town opted for a new highway building and ultimately decided to tear down the old one.