

Bethinking of Old Orleans

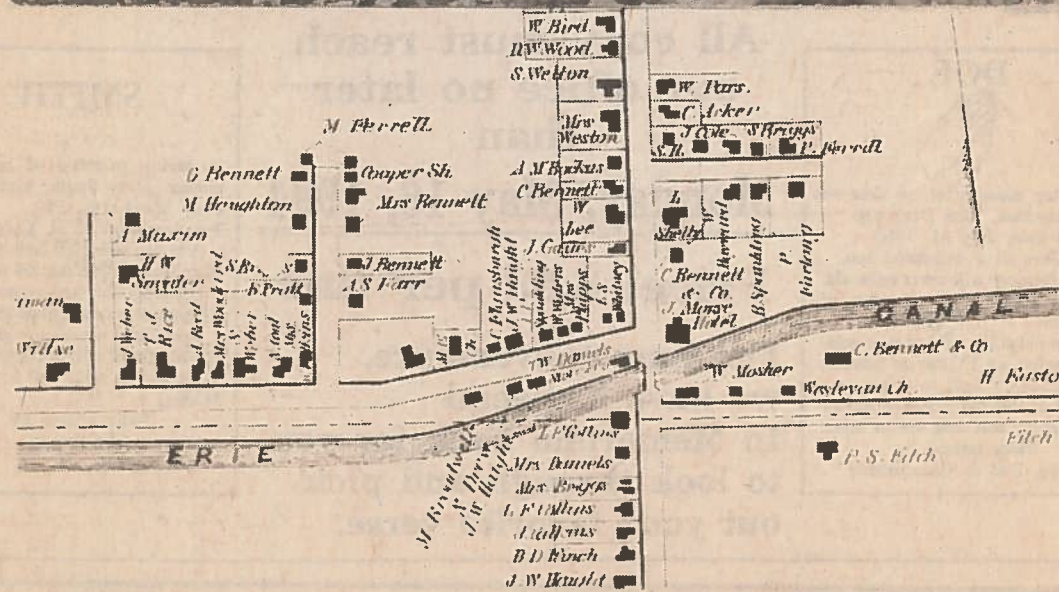
C.W.Lattin County Historian

Vol. XVI

5-10-94

No. 18

EAGLE HARBOR BRIDGE UNDER CONSTRUCTION



The title of this article will become a fact when the Eagle Harbor bridge will be closed to traffic for over a year. However, as we look at the accompanying photo, we can see the Eagle Harbor bridge under construction, as it was back in 1912. When this photo was taken, W.C. Eaton stood on the south bank of the canal at Eagle Harbor and pointed his camera in a north-easterly direction.

To the far left we notice Bennett's Store and to the far right we can see a frame hotel. In between, is the approach to an old steel arch bridge which had been removed when this photo was taken. The wooden forms in the lower center are being put up to create the north pit for mechanical apparatus and counter balance for the new lift bridge. We can also observe here, over a dozen construction workers and yes, your usual "sidewalk supervisors."

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has deemed our canal bridges worthy of restoration rather than replacement. Once the Eagle Harbor Bridge, now eighty-two years old, is rebuilt it will be as good as new and will handle heavy-duty traffic. With the Erie Canal being recognized for its park-like and recreational qualities as a tourism attraction, it's important to preserve as much of it as possible.

Our inserted map shows Eagle Harbor from the 1875 Atlas of Niagara and Orleans Counties. The dotted line indicates the town line between Gaines and Albion. The J. Morse Hotel which shows in the photo is clearly visible on the map near the bridge. In 1894, according to Isaac Signor, Eagle Harbor had three general stores, a hotel and livery, barrel factory, two blacksmiths, a wagon shop, a churn

and washing machine factory, a meat market, grist mill, warehouse, a schoolhouse and two churches. No doubt it was in part, the canal trade and shipping that allowed for so much industry in a hamlet this size. From Historic Gaines 1809-1984, Delia Robinson gives this account: "According to Arad Thomas, the first clearing at what is now Eagle Harbor was made by Stephen Abbott in the winter of 1811-1812, long before the canal arrived. Harvey Smith and Macy Pratt came in 1819 and Asahel Fitch in 1821. The route for the canal in this area was first surveyed by James Geddes in 1815, but not contracted for until 1821. By 1824 the canal was constructed from Holley through the Town of Gaines. When the route was being surveyed in 1815, a large bird's nest, supposedly that of an eagle, was found in a tree near this site; thus, the name of Eagle Harbor."