

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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THE OLD VIOLIN



Here is a recent photo of Mr. Charles A. Straba of St. Petersburg, Florida taken in the parlor of the Ward House at the Cobblestone Museum in Childs, N.Y. A musician himself, here is the story he writes about the old violin.

"A pioneer with an oxen drawn narrow gauge covered wagon, registered with the Land Office in Batavia, N.Y. in 1809. He left his family, also a hired hand, and proceeded alone on foot to where Buffalo is, down the Niagara River to where Lewiston is, then easterly to a point in West Ridgeway. (There is an historical marker here). He found two men clearing timber, rested and ate with them. They told him that they had marked a tree a mile or so east but had decided to settle at this site. He went on and marked his claim at their first choice, and then went back to Batavia, got his wagon under way and as they had to hack a trail to allow the wagon, their progress was hampered at each stream to hand grade the banks of the ravines. The deepest cut was at Oak Orchard at which point a wider wagon overtook them. Joining in the effort to make the ascent, the second wagon master made his claim there, as the first wagon continued to where Ridgeway is, the site being where the Ridgeway Hotel stands. A large log cabin was erected which became a refuge for weary settlers. The original timber is in the hotel upright. The hired hand played a violin that was on board and in time, the widely scattered pioneers began to socialize

here. Having only one horse in the area, the mode of transportation was by oxen drawn slip boats. Gatherings lasted several days.

"The violin was the only musical sound in the entire area to enlighten the party. As the fiddler aged, an understudy was cultured to relieve his tedious hours of playing. He expired about Civil War days. The understudy named Ben Loades carried on and died about World War I.

I was born in the hotel in 1917 and Widow Adeline Loades was my Godmother. In 1928, she presented me with the violin wrapped in a small wool blanket, set up in playing condition."

Mr. Straba says that back in the 1950's he turned the violin over to the Orleans County Department of History. He states: "I believed that it belonged to the county and I was moving away." At that time there were not as many local museums to accommodate historical artifacts. However, after the Cobblestone Museum at Childs was founded and opened to the public for its first season in 1966, the old violin was placed there for many more people to see. Mr. Straba is right when he indicates that the violin was the joy and recreation of our hearty ancestors.

Yes indeed, before jukeboxes, player pianos or pump organs in public places, it was the local fiddler who produced the desired musical sounds that tingled the heart and brought gaiety and laughter to the people of our area when it was nothing but a rude frontier.