

Bethinking of Old Orleans

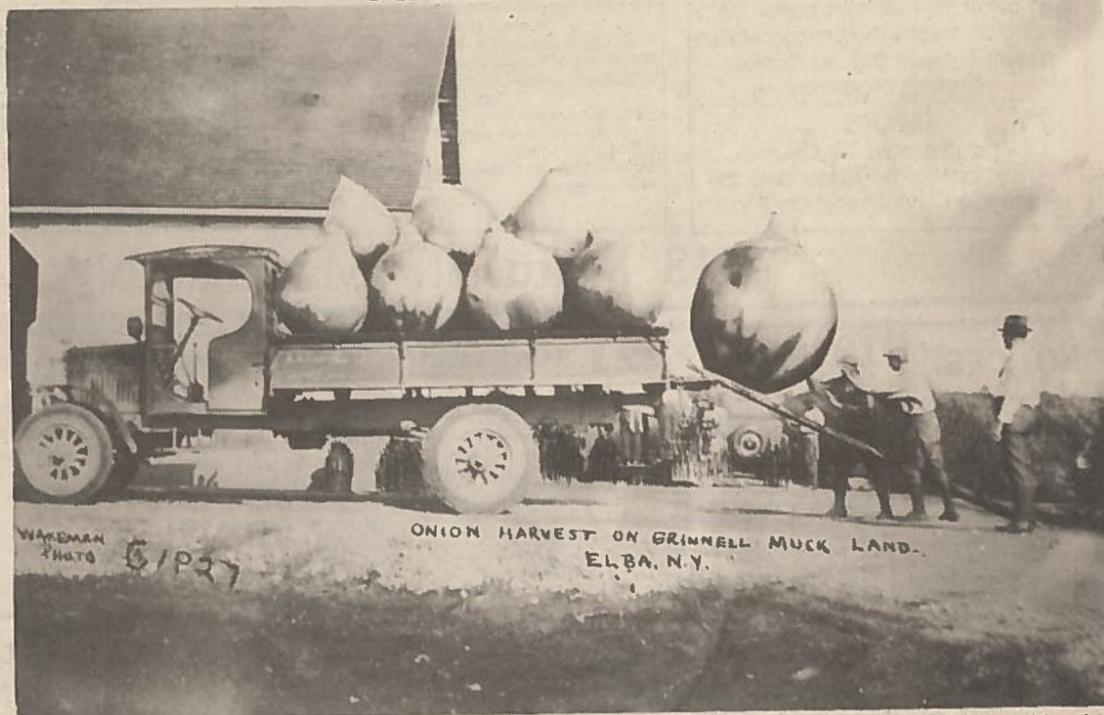
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TOWN OF ELBA CELEBRATES 175th ANNIVERSARY



Surely anniversaries help us focus on our heritage. Likewise, any lasting outcome of a celebration is the written word. The proximity of Elba to Orleans County and the agricultural implications over the years, especially through the muckland, makes Elba an important neighbor. Because of this, I want to take this opportunity to alert our readers of a recently published history of the Town of Elba. The actual celebration took place July 7-9 but what remains is a valuable piece of research and writing. The 286-page books at \$12.50 are available at the Elba Town Hall on Maple Avenue in Elba or at the annual Onion Festival the first weekend in August.

This is the result of much time and effort expended by Scott D. Benz, Village Historian of Elba. Others on the anniversary committee are Earl C. Roth, Chairman, Lois Petote, Gladys Kregger and Josephine Soules. The book is illustrated with old photos and maps including a wide range of topics, all relating to local history.

One chapter which stands out is the one on Draining the Big Swamp which now includes large portions of Orleans County muckland. "It is famous all over the country....is the largest continuous section of this type of soil perhaps in the entire world". Talk of draining this area began in the 19th century but it wasn't until 1902 that it really became serious. The actual work began around 1913 when "11,000 acres of swamp lands were

drained to provide black muck soil for cultivation. Up to this time the Oak Orchard Swamp had lain idle and unproductive until drainage and reclamation were vigorously pursued with gratifying results by the Western New York Farms Company. By 1915 almost twenty-one miles of the main canal for drainage had been constructed while the feeder or lateral lines amounted to twenty miles. This construction successfully accomplished, released several thousand acres of previously submerged muck land. Adirondack woodsmen were then obtained for their skillful use of axes in cleaning underbrush. Larger trees were felled and the resulting timber used for making barrel staves and heads. Cultivation was first done by a caterpillar type tractor engine. The season of 1915 produced the following crops: hay, wheat, corn, rye, oats, buckwheat, potatoes, kidney beans, white beans, string and wax beans, peas, lettuce, celery, onions, beets, carrots and spinach."

But it was onions that ultimately made Elba king. Our imaginary or trick photo which illustrates this story was done in 1927. It is entitled "Onion Harvest on Grinnell Muckland Elba, N.Y." Although onions never really get this big, the allegorical statement however, implies big business in onions which all came about because of the muckland.