



With February being Black History Month, it seems timely to reflect upon Richard Gordineer, a well-known and respected citizen and ex-slave. Pasted to the obverse side of this portrait, circa 1890, is some biographical information which is presented verbatim as follows:

"Richard Gordineer, of Medina, Orleans Co., N.Y. was the son of Jacob Gordineer, a Mohawk Dutchman, and a colored woman, Gordineer's slave. Jacob Gordineer was a horse dealer and made and lost a great deal of money, and finally died in Buffalo a poor man. Richard's mother and himself were sold to Joseph Grant when Richard was only two months old. Joseph Grant was the father of L.A.G.B. Grant, of Medina fame. Richard being three years old when L.A.G.B. Grant was born, it will be readily seen that on his last birthday December 13, 1889, he was ninety-five years of age.

"Richard's mother and himself were set free when the slaves were set free in New York State, 1825. He came to where Medina now stands in the year 1823, and cooked for Walton Grant's people on the farm south of Medina, and lived with the Grants until 1824, after which time he worked on the Erie Canal for fifteen years, or until 1839 when he settled permanently in Medina. Richard was a good cook and a wedding party was never complete without him to do the baking for and waiting on the guests. He was the only successful cartman here for many years and there seemed no end to his call for whitewashing. He was very successful in his business up to 1862, and had accumulated a nice property, but about that time he was betrayed by a man he called his friend and lost everything he had worked hard to accumulate, since which time he has been engaged in whitewashing, smoking hams, baggage express, etc. On December 11th Richard will be 96 years of age."

Just imagine selling the woman who bore your child and selling your own off-spring. To me this is the most gripping part of Richard's story. This kind of first-hand account, written so long ago, certainly gives us insight into a "master's" attitude. How deplorable! Yet in some cases to this day, white-supremacy dies hard. The whole account is indeed, revealing for more ways than one. I trust you noted that Richard's mother is not

spoken of by her name, simply that she was "...a colored woman, Gordineer's slave". Neither is there any mention made of Richard's wife. However, the 1865 census lists him as living in the 2nd Election District of Ridgeway and that there is a wife, Jeanette, age 32, born in Wayne Co. Likewise, in some cases to this day, male chauvinism dies hard. As a side note, this account also mentions L.A.G.B. Grant. Lathrop Grant was our very first Assemblyman elected from Orleans County in 1825. He also served as Shelby Supervisor in 1826, 1845-46 and 1847-50. He was a prominent miller and businessman.

Richard Gordineer was known county-wide as an expert whitewasher. In a column of reminiscences from an Albion newspaper published in the 1920's, it is mentioned that he could whitewash a ceiling without ever dripping a single drop on the furnishings or floor. I do not find Richard's name in the 1869 Orleans Co. Directory. However, in Kirwin's Orleans County Directory for the years 1887-88, he is listed as a whitewasher living at 5 North Academy St. in Medina. If this listing is accurate, it suggests that at age 93 or 94, he was still plying his trade. Let us remember that this is before social security benefits and with someone having fleeced him, he still had to work.

Richard Gordineer was indeed, one of Orleans County's early settlers and Pioneers. In fact, he was a member of the Orleans County Pioneer Association which was organized June 25, 1859. At the thirty-third annual meeting on June 20, 1891, Richard is mentioned in a Roll of Honor of people "who have reached the age of 80 years and upward." It states: "Richard Gordineer (colored), 97, came to this county with L.A.G.B. Grant in 1823; was a cook on the first boat passing over the Erie Canal; been a member of the Pioneer Association for many years". At the thirty-sixth annual meeting of the association on June 16, 1894, the list of those who have died since the last meeting includes "Richard Gordineer, aged 99 years." Both the 1891 and 1894 records of the Pioneer Association have him listed as living in the Town of Albion.

Our research indicates that some time after the listing in the 1887-88 directory, he became a resident of the Orleans County Alms House as it was known.

Records indicate that he died on Jan. 15, 1894 and is buried in the County Farm Cemetery.

"Even a friend of mine on whom I relied, who ate my bread lifted up the heel against me. But Thou, O Lord, be gracious to me; raise me up and let me repay them. By this I know that Thou delightest in me, because my enemy does not exult over me. As for me, in my integrity Thou hast upheld me, and dost sit before thy face forever."

Psalms 41:9-12