

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

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## JOTHAM MORSE'S STORY

In our day and age, so far removed from pioneer times of 175 years ago, it is hard to imagine the hardships they endured. We live in an age of plenty and plenty of waste. Now in our 175th year as a county, we might take note of what it was like when the first settlers took up land here. Jotham Morse gave this account of his early life as a pioneer dating as far back as 1814. It is printed in the Pioneer History of Orleans County by Arad Thomas in 1871. Here are some selected portions in his own words:

"We came by the Ridge Road to West Gaines, where we found an empty shanty and moved into it. I went to Batavia through Shelby and procured an article of a piece of land west of Eagle Harbor, and returned in one day as far as Millville. It snowed hard all that day, and I think I did a good day's work, traveling so far through the woods on foot. I acknowledge my steps were some hurried by seeing tracks of two wolves in the snow, and seeing some evidences of a bloody encounter they had had.

"I bought a three year old heifer and paid for her chopping three acres of timber, and fitting it for logging, going three miles to the place where I did my work.

"In time of haying and harvest I walked to Palmyra and worked there three weeks to buy pork and wheat for my family. The next fall I moved into a log house I had built, and felt at home. The next year I had a little trial such as was common to pioneer settlers in

those days. It was before harvest. My cow had lost her bell, and had been gone in the woods eight days. We were destitute of provisions, except a small piece of bread, some sugar and some vinegar. I went to the nearest place where flour was sold and could get none. On my return we gave the last morsel of bread to our children. I picked some potato tops which my wife boiled and we ate, dressing them with vinegar. Our empty stomachs would not retain this diet. We speedily vomited them up and retired supperless to bed. Early next morning I arose and went to my neighbors a mile away, and they divided their small store of flour with me. I carried it home and my wife speedily salted some water and made some pudding, which we ate with maple sugar, and this seemed to me to be truly the best meal of victuals I ever ate. I felt, even in this straight, the words of Solomon to be true: 'Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and contention therewith.'

"Another incident, Myself and immediate neighbors were destitute of flour. I had money which I had taken in exchange of land, so a neighbor took me with his team and wagon to Hanford's Landing, at the mouth of the Genesee River, to purchase flour. I bought six barrels of flour and one barrel of salt and took out my money to pay for it.

"This supply carried the settlement through until harvest, and by the blessing of Heaven



and our own industry and economy, we have been saved from such destitution until the present time.

"I have seen the wilderness disappear, and beauty and civilization spring up in its place around me. I have, in common with mankind, drank of the cup of affliction, perhaps more deeply than many others. I have been called to mourn over the graves of two loved companions and four children, from a family of fourteen.

"I now reside with my third wife in West Shelby and preach every Sunday at the Christian Church in Barre, N.Y., where I have labored in the ministry, more or less, for

fifty years."

This account was written in May 1868. Times were tough and life was not easy to say the least for our early settlers. Let me mention that there was a denomination simply known as Christian. Jotham Morse organized the Christian Church of which he speaks, which built a meeting house on the West County House Road a little west of the Long Bridge Road in what is now the Town of Albion. This denomination later merged with others. The Christian Meeting House on West County House Road was torn down after its congregation dissolved in the late 19th Century.