

Bethinking of Old Orleans

7-31-2000

Vol. XX

C. W. Lattin, County Historian

No. 30

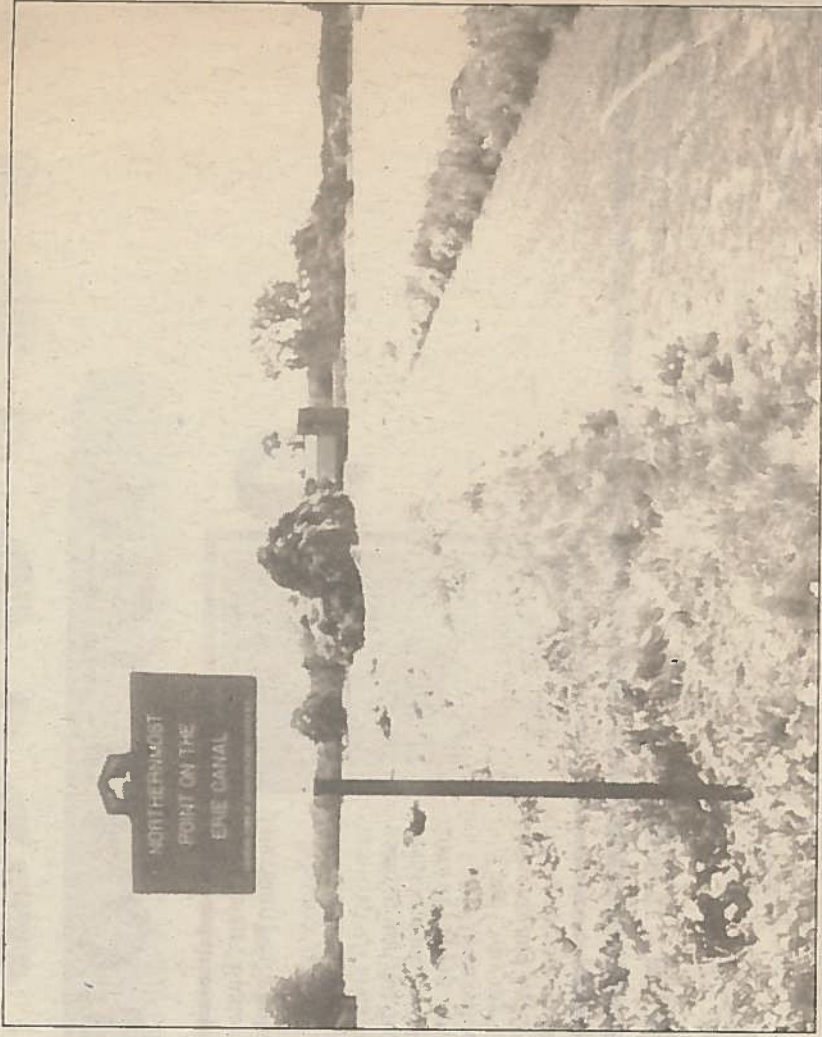
Northernmost Point

The Orleans County Department of History is pleased to announce the placement of a new traditional state-type marker along the towpath of the Erie Canal. Seen here, the marker states: "Northernmost Point On The Erie Canal." The smaller line states: "Location - Town of Gaines, Orleans County, N.Y." On July 10 this marker was put up just 900 feet west of the Gaines Basin Road bridge. It is especially intended for boaters, hikers and bicyclists who use the canal or towpath. The northernmost point is truly a unique geographical feature on the entire Erie Canal system. Looking west from the canal bridge it is quite obvious the canal has a fairly sharp bend in it at this point. Incidentally, early surveys for the canal location would have put it farther south entering Orleans County through Clarendon. The northernmost point is at a place once known as Gaines Basin. Our photo looking east shows the Gaines Basin Road bridge to the right, Emilio DiLodovico's barn and silo next to it and the old cobblestone schoolhouse to the far left. The schoolhouse is the only building left which was part of this once thriving little community in the early days of the old Erie Canal system. When the canal opened in

1825 Gaines was a thriving center of business activity and the canal was important to that business. The distance from Gaines to the canal is much shorter via the Gaines Basin Road, than using Routes 279 and 98 to Albion. The canal at that time was only 40 feet wide, so it was necessary to dig a turn basin so that boats coming from the east could be turned around to carry produce back to the east coast. A warehouse and shipping docks made this turn basin area a center of shipping activity. Wheat rose from \$.50 to \$1.50 per bushel after the canal opened. Thus farmers in this area were anxious to have this local shipping point.

Soon there were eight or nine houses, a blacksmith shop where canal horses and mules could be shod, a cobblestone schoolhouse and two general stores. The stores provided boatmen with all kinds of supplies. The little hamlet that grew up at the canal turn basin was the Gaines shipping point and it naturally followed that it was called Gaines Basin. As late as the 1880's goods were being shipped from Gaines Basin on the canal.

By the late 19th Century this community seems to have phased out. Commerce had



of course, started shifting to the large communities and the railroads.

With the Erie Canal now in its 175th

year of existence, this new marker is one way of pointing out a local feature no other place in New York State can claim.