



Old Orchard Distillery.

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The Old Orchard Distillery

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Our photo from a post-card of the 1920's shows the old distillery at Oak Orchard on the Ridge. This L-shaped structure built of field-cobbles was located on the west side of Oak Orchard River on the north side of Route 104.

The Illustrated Album of Orleans County published in 1879 indicated the distillery was no longer in use. In fact, this picture shows the roof on the wing has caved in and the other parts of the building are overgrown with vegetation. The remains of this building were torn down and cleaned up more than 70 years ago.

The distillery was constructed in 1838 by John B. Lee of Albion, who operated it for a number of years. Being a large grain producing region back at that time, distilleries became a profitable business. Another distillery was also located in Gaines.

My great-great grandfather once sold a load of wheat to J.B. Lee and took in payment a barrel of whisky instead of cash. My great-great grandmother was pretty disgusted to think he would do that having seven sons all of drinking age. She wasn't about to have the likes of drunkards around and she made her point quite clear.

After that any dealings with Mr. Lee were strictly on a cash basis. History tells us that the highest consumption of alcoholic beverages in this county was during the 1930's. It's easy to understand that with local distilleries. It is also easy to see why the mid-19th century temperance groups began to make an impact on people's attitudes about drinking.

Another story handed down about this Old Orchard distillery is the neighboring pigs would sometimes get out of their yard only to be found behind the distillery deeding on the thrown out mash and acting like drunken sots.