

BETHINKING OF OLDE ORLEANS

Vol. XXVIII, No. 32

8-10-06



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

COOPERS

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The 1903 Orleans Directory lists more than 30 coopers or barrel makers. Every town in the county had at least two listed. No doubt there were others at the time who were not included in the listing.

The making of primarily apple barrels was a major sideline business to the apple industry in the 19th and early 20th century. Thousands of barrels of apples were shipped out of Orleans County each season, either on the Erie Canal or the New York Central

Railroad.

Our photo taken in the 1880s shows the Charles Bennett Cooper shop in Eagle Harbor. Here we see 20 individuals, mostly men, but also three or four boys who were involved in the production of barrels at this shop.

To the left we see a barrel partially set up. In the middle of the picture a young man is seated on a shaving horse using a draw shave to shape a piece of wood. Another young man to the right holds a cooper's tool. Hoops and staves that are unassembled also appear here.

It is said that a good cooper could set up 100 barrels a day.

Because the staves were curved and slightly bent, they were submerged in water before being assembled to make them form better.

A cooperage also had a coopers stove to place the completed barrel over for quick drying purposes so as to hold its shape without strain.

Early county maps show stave and heading mills where all the barrel components were made. In other words, the cooper did not necessarily make the parts but simply put them together.