

Rethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin • County Historian



HON. E. KIRKE HART 1841 - 1893

One of Orleans County's most prominent and wealthiest citizens of the 19th Century was Hon. E. Kirke Hart who left behind an illustrious record of accomplishments. He was born in Albion, the only son of Elizur and Loraine Field Hart and received his education at the Albion Academy. In 1863 he married Louise Sanderson and they had five children: Charles, Emma, Lorain, E. Kirke, and Louise.

His father Elizur Hart had come to Orleans County in 1806 with his parents, and in 1827 began a business with a capital of \$500.00. Upon his death in 1870 he left a large fortune, bequeathing \$50,000 toward the erection of the First Presbyterian Church in Albion.

In 1861 E. K. Hart entered into business at the Orleans County Bank which had been established in 1860 by his father and Joseph M. Cornell. Upon organization of the Orleans County National Bank in 1865, he became connected with that institution, first as cashier and eventually in 1890 assumed the position of President.

Mr. Hart always played a prominent role in local affairs. He served several terms on the Albion Village Board of Trustees, the Board of Education and was a commissioner of Mount Albion Cemetery. He was also a director of the enterprising Niagara Falls International Bridge Co., a part owner of the Rochester Post Express newspaper which he helped establish in 1882, a large stockholder in the Curtis Mfg. Co. and was one of the principle owners of the Albion Electric Light works. It was through his efforts that Albion streets were first illuminated with electric lights in 1890.

In 1871 Gov. Hill appointed Mr. Hart to the Board of Managers of the Western New York Refuge for Women, whereby he was elected president. It was wholly due to his efforts that this institution was located at Albion. We know it today as the Albion Correctional Facility.

In earlier life he was a Republican and was elected in 1871 as our Assemblyman. However, a year later he identified himself with the Democrats with which he remained thereafter. In 1876 he was elected to one term in Congress with a significant majority when our Congressional District was Monroe and Orleans Counties.

Mr. Hart at one time owned Hart Island in the St. Lawrence River. Today, still retaining a heart-like shape, it is known as 'Heart Island'. Through combined efforts with his cousin John W. Hart, both giving liberally, the present brick and stone Presbyterian Manse was built on East State Street in Albion. His own residence was Albion's largest and most impressive mansion. Removed in the 1930's, it was a three-story grey brick dwelling which stood on the present location of Dale's Super Dupor on South Main Street. The second floor hall of that house displayed the beautiful collection of stuffed birds which are exhibited at the Cobblestone Museum and known as the E. K. Hart collection.

Because of his prominent and leading role in local history, Mr. Hart's name has appeared in this column before and will appear here again in the future.