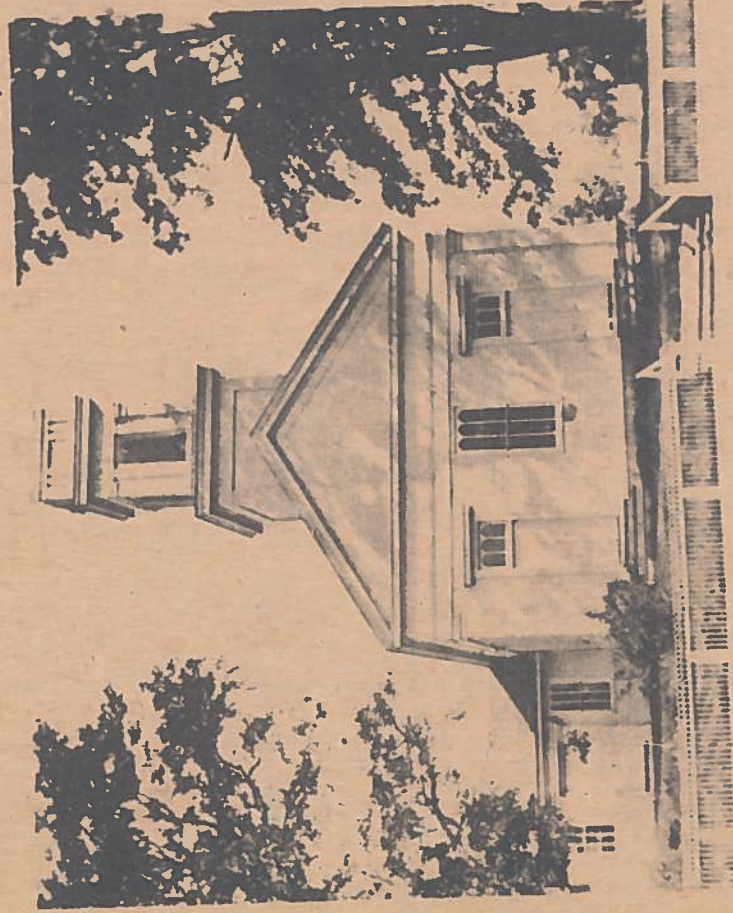


# Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin • County Historian

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## THE GREAT CLARENDON FIRE OF 1892

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From time to time I would like to invite our local historians to be guest writers for this column. This week it's my pleasure to present "The Great Clarendon Fire of 1892," which has been researched, compiled and written by Alan J. Isselhard, the Clarendon Town Historian. The picture shown here is the Clarendon M.E. Church 1851 - 1892.

"On Friday morning, November 11, 1892, a Clarendon merchant, Nicholas Darrow, who owned and operated the local hardware store on the Byron-Holley Road, was engaged in writing a letter in the front part of his store. The hardware was located directly next to the First Methodist

Episcopal Church which was at the corner of Byron-Holley Road and Brockport Road. (now Church Street) It was about 7 A.M. and while Mr. Darrow was writing his letter there was an explosion of an oil lamp in the rear of the store. Within seconds the structure was engulfed in flames. Mr. Darrow fled the store unharmed and sounded the alarm that there was a fire out of control. Word spread quickly and within a few minutes many townspeople converged at the scene and a bucket brigade was formed, which included women and children. Virtually nothing from the hardware store was saved before the building was a mass of flames. It soon became obvious that the fire would spread to the building on either side. In the process of attempting to save the church wet carpets were placed about to no avail. An account of the fire in the Holley Standard newspaper said 'The fire communicated first with the session room of the Methodist church south-east of the Darrow store, and the whole building was soon in flames.' Citizens managed to save the organ and some of the furniture before flames burned the 1851 structure to the ground.

'North of Darrow's store was the general merchandise store operated by Copeland and Murphy. Quick work by volunteers had emptied the store of most of its contents shortly before the fire made the store a charred ruins. The attached house was destroyed as well as a barn to the rear. Flames erupting from the Copeland and Murphy general store soon spread to a meat market operated by the Preston Brothers. Within minutes this building was also ablaze and doomed to destruction. Next to the meat market was the home of Horace Coy, at the corner of Byron-Holley Road and Town Hall Street (now NY Rt. 31A). Anticipating destruction, Coy along with several others, removed his household goods in great haste. For some reason however the dwelling, although sustaining damage, did not burn down and still exists today.

'Word was sent to Holley requesting assistance. The Downs Hose Company and an engine responded. However, by the time they arrived the fire had run its course. The whole calamity was over in less than two hours.

'The Holley Standard predicted that all the buildings would be rebuilt and they were mostly correct. The Methodist society held their meetings in the town hall for the next year. In the meantime a new edifice was constructed for about \$4,000 on the same site and dedicated debt free in November, 1893. This building still exists today although it has been converted into a private residence. The lot occupied by Darrow's hardware store is still a vacant lot now containing mature trees. Wohler's grocery store now stands where the Preston Brothers had their meat market. The Preston Brothers operated their meat market after the fire from the basement of the Clarendon Hotel across the street. Copeland and Murphy moved what remained of their stock into the hotel ballroom and did business from there for awhile.

'The Orleans American newspaper stated 'The village has no fire apparatus for protection hence the flames had comparatively free course'. Unfortunately it was not until over sixty years later that a few determined citizens decided that the town needed fire protection and made the effort which resulted in the formation of today's Clarendon Fire Department.'