

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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JUDGE ISAAC S. SIGNOR 1842-1935

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“JUSTICE IS LIKE THE KINGDOM OF GOD: IT IS NOT WITHOUT US AS A FACT; IT IS WITHIN US AS A GREAT YEARNING.”

GEORGE ELLIOT

Isaac S. Signor was born on a farm at Skaneateles in Onondaga County and began his preparation for college by teaching in country schools. He graduated from the Law School of Hamilton College in 1871 and was admitted to the bar the same year. He first came to Albion in 1871 upon the insistence of a college classmate John V.B. Lewis with whom he formed a partnership. In 1873 they both went to New York and entered the office of

Davies and Work. He remained for five years in New York, the last three in a partnership known as Griggs and Signor. It was during this time he met his wife Mary (Dolly) Grierson of Brooklyn. They were married by the eminent Congregational clergyman of the Plymouth Church, Henry Ward Beecher. In fact he was an intimate friend of Beecher's and was the Superintendent of the Plymouth Sunday School. The Signors had three children: a son Hon. Charles A. Signor, and two daughters, Beatrice who married Lynn Burrows and Dorothy who married Francis H. Blake Sr. In 1878 Isaac Signor returned to Albion being induced by Edwin L. Wage with whom he formed the partnership Signor and Wage. Upon Mr. Wage's retirement from the practice, it became known as Signor and Signor when his son Charles entered the firm. Still at a later time when Herbert Reed entered the business it became known as Signor, Reed & Signor.

His public career began in 1880 with election to the District Attorney's office on the Republican ticket. He served through 1883 when he was elected County Judge. Upon completion of his first six year term he was re-elected. In 1895 he was defeated in the Primary by W.P.L. Stafford who in turn was defeated in the general election by W. Crawford Ramsdale, a Democrat. Judge Ramsdale's successor Edwin B. Simmonds died with a year of his term left. It was then with the support of Justice Henry A. Childs of Medina that Judge Signor was appointed by Governor Higgins to complete the term. He then was elected to a third term as County Judge and Surrogate which gave him nineteen years in the position. From 1943-50 his son Hon. Charles Signor was also County Judge and Surrogate.

Vitally interested in education, Judge Signor with help from Prof. Greene of the Albion Academy conducted night classes for quarrymen during the 1880's. Many of these stone cutters were immigrants and Isaac Signor taught them how to read and write. For many years he conducted the Signor Class which bore his name at the First Presbyterian Church.

In 1886 he established the Signor Prize Speaking Contest for Juniors in Albion High School who excel in rhetoric, recitation and declamation. Also for a number of years he was a member of the Albion Board of Education. Judge Signor was elected the first President of the Swan Library Association and served in that capacity for over thirty-six years. Perhaps one of his greatest accomplishments was when he compiled and edited "Landmarks of Orleans County" which was published in 1894. It remains today as one of the best sources on local history. Aside from educational activities he was President of the Board of Managers of the Western House of Refuge for Women. He was one of the original incorporators of the Arnold Gregory Hospital and of the Virgil Bogue Home for Dependent Children. Judge Signor was also Vice-President of the Niagara Falls International Bridge Company.

Although Judge Signor resided in Albion he did not belong to Albion alone for he belonged to all of Orleans County. In fact, to all of Western New York. His service as District Attorney, County Judge, legal advisor to every town and village in the County and his endeavors for education bestow on him a kind of immortality.