

JOHN G. SAWYER

1825-1898 *4/9/09*

BY C.W. LATTIN
Orleans County historian

John Gilbert Sawyer was born June 5, 1825 in Brandon, Vt. He was the oldest of seven children of John F. and Mary J. Sawyer.

In 1831, the family moved to Knowlesville where the father worked as a carpenter.

John G. Sawyer was educated in the district schools and Millville Academy. Following this, he taught for three years in Kentucky and later Arkansas, returning home in 1846.

In 1847, he settled in Albion and began a course of law study in the office of Curtis & Stone, finishing with Judge Isaac Bessac. He was admitted into practice in 1852.

Prior to this, he had been elected superintendent of public schools in this county in 1848.

In 1851, he was elected justice of the peace and held the office for five years.

In 1855, he formed a partnership with Sanford E. Church which continued until 1880, when Church died. He then formed partnership with George Bullard and still later, until the time of his death, was in law practice with his son-in-law, Gordon Fitch.

In the fall of 1862, Mr. Sawyer was elected district attorney and in 1863 was elected county judge, a position he held for 16 years.

In 1884, he was elected to Congress and served three consecutive terms, ending March 4, 1891.

Landmarks of Orleans County note: "Judge Sawyer is well-known as a stalwart and staunch Republican. He was originally a Whig, and was one of the organizers of the Republican Party in Orleans County."

His obituary read,

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Bethinking of Olde Orleans

"For many years, he stood high in the Councils of the Republican Party and wielded an extensive political influence as a citizen and neighbor. He was highly esteemed."

Sawyer was married June 27, 1855, to Eliza A. Shaw of Plainfield, Mass.

He was an active member of the First Baptist Church of Albion, serving as trustee and superintendent of the Sunday School for 16 years.

He was also prominent in organizing Good Templar Lodges in Orleans County and was a member of Renovation Lodge F&AM No. 97 and the Orleans Chapter R.A.M.

He was a member of the New York state and Orleans County Agricultural Societies and the Pioneer Association.

On account of his efforts while in Congress, he was called "soldier's friend" and his obit states, "he was generous to a fault."

John G. Sawyer died Sept. 5, 1898 and was survived by his wife and two daughters, Mrs. Gordon Fitch and Mrs. Herbert J. Bailey.

Landmarks of Orleans County say: "As a lawyer and a judge, he has won merited distinction, while his character as a man has made him a large circle of friends."

The Sawyer residence, which was large imposing house, was located on South Main Street at the corner of Chamberlain Street. It was torn down in the 1960s to make way for a parking lot at the new A&P store, now the American Legion.