

WILLIAM J. BABBITT, 1786-1863

8-19-09

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Bethinking of Olde Orleans

The following biographical sketch is taken from "Pioneer History of Orleans County" by Arad Thomas 1871.

"William J. Babbitt was born in Providence, Rhode Island, September 1786. He learned the blacksmiths trade of his father and worked at that business mainly until he came to reside in Gaines, where he had a small shop and occasionally worked at his trade for several years. In the year 1812, he took up the farm on which he ever afterwards resided.

For many years after Mr. Babbitt settled in Gaines no professional lawyer had come into what is now Orleans County. The people however would indulge occasionally in a lawsuit, and Mr. Babbitt, being a good talker and a man of more than common shrewdness, they frequently employed him to try their cases in their justices' courts. He improved under his practice until he became the most noted "pettifogger" north of the Tonawanda Swamp and whichever of the litigants secured the services of Esq. Babbitt, was quite sure to win his case.

He was active in getting the town of Gaines set off from Ridgeway in the winter of 1816 and July 1st of the same year, on his application, a post office was established in Gaines and he was appointed postmaster, which he was the first postmaster in Gaines.

In 1831-1832 he represented Orleans County in the Assembly of the State. He was appointed a Justice of the Peace by the council of appointment in 1815, and re-appointed from time to time until the elections to that office were given to the people under the constitution, when he was elected by the people holding the office of Justice of the Peace in Gaines, in all 23 years.

He was several times Supervisor of his town, and held various other town offices from time to time. He

positions, and was largely gratified in this particular by his fellow citizens.

He was remarkable for promptness in keeping engagements. Late in life he was heard to say he was never behind set time in being present in any legal proceeding to be had before him. He acquired a character for uncompromising fidelity in business matters, and by a life of industry and economy laid up a large property.

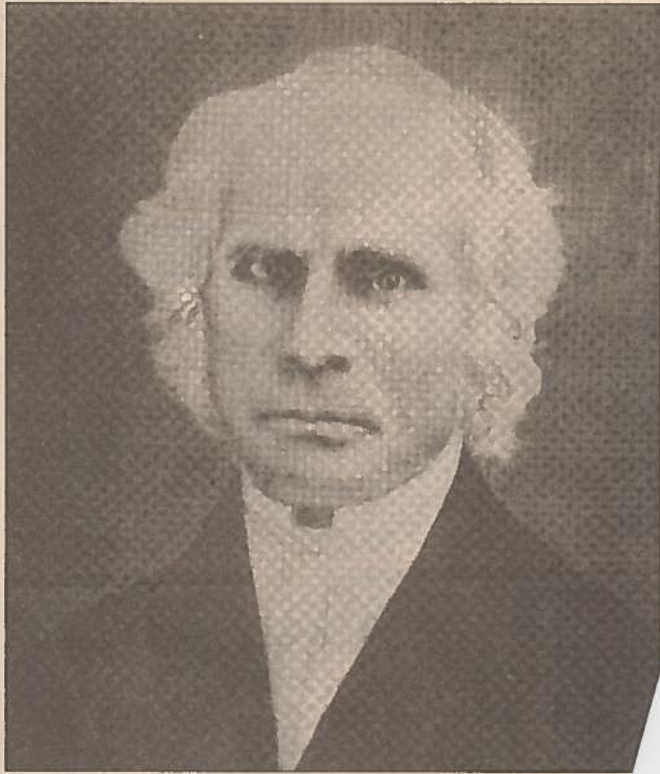
He died July 20th, 1863.

He married Eunice Losey, June 27th, 1810. She died April 4th, 1867."

The historic Gaines District No. 5 Cobblestone School at Childs now a part of the Cobblestone Museum, is a testimony to Babbitt's pride. The marble tablet in the front gable states: "School District No. 5 of Gaines AD 1849. Wm J. Babbitt Esq. gratuitously superintended the erection of this building and made the District a present of the bell." The bell also carries an inscription "W.J. Babbitt pays \$25.00 for this bell and gives it to school district No. 5 in Gaines AD 1849."

On Saturday, Sept. 12 the Town of Gaines will celebrate its bicentennial of the first settler who came in 1809. As William J. Babbitt came to Gaines in 1812, he surely may be counted among the first settlers of Gaines. Likewise, his name endures not only on the tablet at the cobblestone school in Childs but also his headstone in the first burial ground in Orleans County at Gaines (behind the Congregational Church). At 7 p.m. Thursday, a tour of this first burial ground will take place.

Notice: Tour of the Gaines Cemetery on the north side of Route 104 just east of Route 270 will be at



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