



An 1849 perspective

3-11-10

In 1849, Orsamus Turner published a book titled "Pioneer History Of The Holland Purchase Of Western N.Y." Turner was born in Ontario County and first became an apprentice in the printing office of the Ontario Repository at Canandaigua. In 1822, he became proprietor of a paper in Lockport, thereby being an editor for more than 25 years.

He was immensely interested in the early history of this region and having the skills of writing and publishing, and was also the author of "History Of Phelps And Gorham Purchase."

Here is what he wrote about Albion in 1849:

"Albion — The fine lands in the immediate neighborhood of Albion had attracted settlers at a pretty early period in the settlement of the country, and previous to the location of the canal, a considerable advance had been made in improvements. The village, however, was one of the creations of that great founder of villages and cities: commencing gradually, as the work progressed, and was brought into use.

"In 1823 it had sufficiently advanced to indicate the necessity of a press and newspaper, and Oliver Cowdery, (who had been the pioneer printer in at least a half-dozen localities) took a part of the old battered "small pica" that had been used in printing the Lockport Observatory, and adding to it indifferent materials from other sources, commenced the publication of the "Newport Patriot."

"Wm. Bradner, Harvey Goodrich, R.S. & L. Burrows were early merchants. The early physicians were Orson Nichoson, A.B. Mills, William White and Stephen M. Potter. Philetus Bumpus was an early tavern keeper, if not the pioneer in the line.

"The first Methodist society was organized in 1830; the first Baptist society, the same year; the first Presbyterian society, in 1822; and the first Episcopal organization was in 1844. Albion Academy was incorporated in 1837; Phipp's Union Seminary, in 1840.

"The first Board of

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Bethinking of Olde Orleans

Trustees of the village were as follows: Alexis Ward (president), Orson Nichoson, William Bradner, Freeman Clark and Franklin Fenton.

"The progress of Albion has been gradual and uniform, keeping pace with agricultural improvements in its fertile neighborhood. In the midst of universal prosperity, such as every where exists upon the Holland Purchase, it is difficult to discriminate; but no where are the evidences of increasing, substantial wealth exhibited in a greater degree, than in Orleans and its smiling and flourishing villages — Albion, Gaines, Medina, Shelby, Knowlesville, Eagle Harbor and Gaines Basin."

Isn't it interesting that Turner speaks of flourishing villages in his last sentence? In modern perspective, Gaines Basin is a ghost town — totally non-existent today.

Eagle Harbor once had a store, hotel, two churches, a blacksmith shop and school. The only public use structure left is the Methodist Church.

Knowlesville, once a self-sufficient village with even a high school, is now simply a cluster of houses and one church down from three.

Shelby Center, a flourishing community in 1849 with a mill, hotel, stores and blacksmith shop, is again a cluster of houses.

Gaines still has a church, but nothing else to attract public use. This cluster of houses was even incorporated in 1832 as its own municipality, but that charter was later surrendered.

That leaves us with Medina and Albion as our business centers today.

This illustration from Turner's history shows an 1849 farmstead in our region. At the time, it showed the great advances we had made from huts in the wilderness in the beginning of the 19th century.