

# Remembering Orleans County in 1869

BY C.W. LATTIN  
Orleans County historian

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**Bethinking  
of Olde  
Orleans**

The following story was written in 1869 by George E. Mix and is found published in Pioneer History of Orleans County by Arad Thomas in 1871.

"I can remember the dark and heavy forest that once covered this land, with only now and then a little 'clearing' that made a little hole to let in the sunshine; the large creeks that seemed to flow and flood the whole country during a freshet; the large swamps and marshes, in almost every valley; the wild deer that roamed the woods almost undisturbed by men; the bear that plodded his way through the swamps and the wolf that made night hideous with his howling.

"I remember when the roads ran crooking around on the high grounds, and when roads on the low lands were mostly causeways of logs. When almost all the houses were made of logs, and almost all the chimneys were made of sticks and mud, and the fireplaces were of Dutch pattern.

"But the sound of the ax man was heard at his toil through the forest, hurling the old trees headlong. The woods and the heavens were lit up with the lurid glare of fire by night, and the heavy forest soon melted away. Those little holes in the old woods soon became enlarged to broad fields of waving grain that glistened in the sunlight.

"The foaming creeks soon became rivulets or dried up. The swamps disappeared and nothing remains to show where many of the great marshes of the old time were. The deer, bear and wolf have departed. The crooked roads have been straightened and the log causeways have been buried out of sight. The log house, stick chimneys and Dutch fireplaces are reckoned among the things that were

and are not now.

"I can remember when my mother spun flax on a little wheel and carded wool and tow by hand and spun them on a great wheel; when she colored her yarn with the bark and leaves of trees and had a loom, and wove cloth and made it up into clothing for her family.

"I can remember when my father plowed with a wooden plow with an iron share and reaped his grain with a sickle and threshed it with a flail; when he mowed his grass with a scythe and raked it with a hand rake. I remember when no fruit grew here but wild fruit, but we soon had peaches in profusion, bushes of them rotting under the trees.

"At the first settlement of this county, fruits, such as grapes, strawberries, cranberries, blackberries, gooseberries, raspberries

and mandrakes, were to be found growing wild. We had nuts from the trees, such as butternuts, chestnuts, beech-nuts and walnuts.

"Pumpkins, squashes and melons were largely raised and of great value to the people. Pumpkins were cut into strips and dried on poles in the log cabins and kept for use the years round. Maple trees furnish us nearly all our sugar. At our fall parties and our husking and logging bees we had pumpkin pies; at our winter parties we had nuts and popped corn and in the summer, berries and cream.

"I can remember when the common vehicles for traveling about was an ox sled with wooden shoes and the only wheel carriages were lumber wagons and they were few, when the Ridge Road was the main thoroughfare by which to reach the old settlements and stage coaches were the fastest means of conveyance.

"It was considered an impossibility to make the Erie Canal. People said possibly water might be made to run uphill, but canal boats — never.

"Some said they would be willing to die, having lived long enough when boats in a canal should float through their farms; but afterward, when they saw the boats passing by, they wanted to live more than ever to see what would be done next.

"Next, after the canal came the railroad. I heard the cars were running at Batavia and I went out there to see the great wonder of the age, and saw them.

"We were next told of the telegraph. Knowing ones said that was a humbug, sure. I remember even some members of Congress ridiculed Professor Morse and his telegraph as a delusion. But despite ridicule and doubt and incredulity, the telegraph became a success, and by it the ends of the earth have been brought together. These things I have seen and remembered while living here in Orleans County."

— George E. Mix