

1816, the cold year

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The year was the "Year Of No Summer," perhaps the coldest ever known.

It started out great. January had some mild days when some of the pioneers even let their fires go out. The air was balmy and spring like. Even February was mild and some farmers were able to do some plowing.

Then March came in like a lion and the proverbial lamb took off for the woods until September. Ice and snow plagued the settlers throughout April. There was hope that surely May would bring spring at last, but the month opened with winter temperatures; buds froze on the trees. There was ice an inch thick on lakes and ponds. There were frosts night after night. Corn planting was abandoned.

June turned out to be the coldest ever. It was said that "frosts and ice were as common as buttercups and daisies." Vermont had 10 inches of snow and New York had three. Overcoats, heavy socks and mittens were worn all summer. Fruits and vegetables were ruined.

Farmers "worked out their taxes" by repairing the roads, their faces raw and red, eyes watery and noses dripping in the bitter winds.

July killed off any crops stubborn even to have survived June. Even August failed to bring the promise of summer. Only in the fall was there a return to normal weather which was, of course, autumn weather, not summer.

The summer-less year of 1816 was unfortunate for Orleans County pioneers. The War of 1812 had interrupted their hard work of



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Bethinking of Olde Orleans

clearing the forest and building their homes. Militiamen had returned from skirmishes on the Niagara Frontier and their wives and children had returned from the east where many had fled to safety. New settlers had just resumed their migrations.

Hope was high. But the extreme scarcity of farm produce brought extremely inflated prices. Flour

reached \$15 a barrel and wheat \$3 a bushel. Gideon Freeman of Gaines chopped more than 50 acres of woodlot so that his cattle could browse on twigs and dry leaves. Even then he lost six of them to starvation. The usual argue and fever were aggravated by inadequate food.

The days of the "Year Of No Summer" were indeed cold and dark. But every cloud had its silver lining and Orleans people persisted and looked forward to the prosperity the new canal was about to bring.

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