

# Bethinking of Olde Orleans

## John G. Sawyer, 1825-1898

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Orleans County Historian

John Gilbert Sawyer was born at Brandon, Vermont on June 5, 1825. He was the eldest of seven children of John F. and Mary J. Sawyer.

In 1831 the family moved to Knowlesville where the father was engaged as a carpenter. John G. Sawyer was educated in the district schools and Millville Academy. Following this he taught school 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 to 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 a partnership with George Bullard and still later, until the time of his death, was in a law practice with his son-in-law, Gurdon 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 in that body three consecutive terms, ending March 4, 1891. He was the last person from Orleans County to be elected to Congress.

Landmarks of Orleans County notes: "... 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



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Orleans County." In his obituary it is stated, "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."

Mr. Sawyer was married to Eliza A. Shaw of Plainfield, Mass. on June 27, 1855. 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 NY 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 on Sept. 5, 1898 and was survived by his wife and two daughters, Mrs. Gurdon Fitch and Mrs. Herbert J. Bailey. Landmarks of Orleans County states: "As a lawyer and a judge, he was won merited distinction, while his character as a man made him a large circle of friends."