

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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THE LIBERTY POLE

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From a column of reminiscences which appeared in the Orleans Republican in 1922 we know that a tall Liberty Pole with a big wooden eagle resting on a perch half way up once stood in Albion. This was located on the west side of Main Street by a hotel known as the Mansion House which would have been located somewhere between what is now the Albion-Holley Pennysaver office and the Barge Canal. Other than this brief reference to it, nothing is known about the Liberty Pole or when it may have been erected or by whom. We can I believe, safely assume that it must have stood there well over one hundred years ago.

The first Liberty Poles, sometimes known as Liberty trees, were erected by American Colonists as symbols of their assertion of rights and independence from British tyranny. The initial Liberty tree was an Elm in Boston under which the Sons of Liberty rallied to denounce British oppression, sing songs, drink toasts and hang in effigy, officials who were in disfavor. A very famous Liberty Pole was erected on the Commons in New York City to celebrate the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766. However, it soon became a focal point for street brawls between the Sons of Liberty and British soldiers. Before 1770 it was demolished by the British as animosity grew, but a new one was erected in its place by the Colonists. At least five successive Liberty Poles occupied this same site which is now the present City Hall Park in New York City.

One of the earliest American political symbols, Liberty Poles were erected throughout the colony of New York. They ranged from rude logs to high, white-painted poles sometimes festooned with pennants or other patriotic decorations. Following the American Revolution, political parties began to erect Liberty Poles as focal points around which to rally. It is said that a tall Liberty Pole once stood in the hamlet of Gaines which may have been erected by Democrats in the 1870's. It is also said that Francis Harling, a blacksmith near Riches Corners, once made some straps of iron for fastening two poles together end to end so as to erect a taller Liberty Pole than one already placed by another political party.

With this sketchy information as our heritage, it seemed appropriate for the Cobblestone Museum to recreate a Liberty Pole based on the description of the one which was once located in Albion. It was thought that such a creation would embellish the historic quality of the museum grounds and since this Liberty Pole just so happened to portray an eagle, it tied right in with the "Bicentennial Year of the American Bald Eagle."

On July 4, 1776 a committee of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson was appointed by the Continental Congress to develop a national seal or emblem. Six years later on June 20, 1782, the Bald Eagle was adopted as the central figure of the Great Seal of the United States by the second Continental Congress. Benjamin Franklin later said he opposed the choice of the eagle as it had a "bad moral character." He preferred the turkey gobbler as the national bird despite the fact that turkeys were sometimes "vain and silly". In spite of his opinion, the eagle has come down to us as a symbol of strength and courage.

Ornithologists believe the Bald Eagle once soared over all the United States when the first Europeans arrived on this continent. Unfortunately, their numbers have greatly declined, especially due to modern pesticides, until the Bald Eagle is now listed as an endangered species throughout most of the country. Within the last year the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has made headway in propagating the Bald Eagle for its restoration to the American sky.

Now back to the Liberty Pole. When the idea for all this was presented to the Cobblestone Board of Directors in June of 1981, it was unanimously accepted and the museum curator was given the go-ahead to pursue this project for completion in July 1982. Larry Baun, a sculptor who lives near Lyndonville was first selected to carve and paint the big wooden eagle for the perch half way up. He began by first creating a model of the Liberty Pole. The finished eagle is a single piece of cedar and was paid for by a friend. Richard Cook, a Cobblestone Board member then procured a forty-foot pole for this adornment. Milford Heye then graciously turned out on a lathe, the large sphere to cap the Liberty Pole. Not having a picture to go by, of the original Albion Liberty Pole, the height, eagle's size and various colors and striping are largely a matter of conjecture. To label, mark and designate the purpose of our Liberty Pole, Leo LaCroix of Brigden Memorials in Waterport donated his time to engrave a large stone marker given by Cary H. Lattin for the site. Obviously the proper location for this at the museum is on Route 98 near Farmers Hall the former Kendall Town Hall which was moved there in 1978. And naturally, it was decided that since it was erected within the Township of Gaines, to present and dedicate it to the People of Gaines. The ceremony for this will take place on Sun. July 4th at 11:00 A.M. in Cobblestone Church at Childs, N.Y.