

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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MEET

J. HOWARD PRATT

Historian, Town of Gaines

J. Howard Pratt, Historian for the Town of Gaines was born on August 15, 1889 to John Henry Pratt and Mary Britt Pratt. He and his sister Mrs. Florence Pratt Jamess of Albion were the only two children. Their father, John Henry Pratt was a farmer and Howard continues to live on land bought by his grandfather Winslow Pratt, in 1842 on Ridge Road. In 1908 Howard and his sister both joined the Pullman Memorial Universalist Church of Albion and in 1911 he graduated from Albion High School. At that time if you passed a N.Y.S. examination for teachers, you could become certified to teach in the public schools. So in the Fall of 1911, upon passing such an examination, Mr. Pratt embarked upon a teaching career. His first job was at the one-room Riches Corners school for \$11.00 per week. He then

taught the upper grades at the Barre Center two-room school for \$12.00 per week, a raise which he considered substantial at the time. Other districts in which he taught included: the Bullard district on the Ridge Road, Oak Orchard-on-the-Ridge and finally Eagle Harbor. In all, he spent sixteen un consecutive years in teaching with the last being in 1936.

In 1914 he married Leola Budd, also a teacher who died in 1972. Their children are: Marjorie Rustay, John Pratt, Elizabeth Nesbitt and Roger Pratt.

From teaching Mr. Pratt went full swing into farming and prided himself on raising fine Gurnsey cattle. He has to this day around 1500 prize-winning ribbons from county and state fairs. In 1956 he retired from his active role in farm work. For three years, beginning in 1938, Howard Pratt was the 4-H County Agent and did 34 radio programs on WHAM during that time.

Over the years Mr. Pratt has had a keen insight and an intuitive sense of local history with a special interest in Lincoln. He was first appointed historian for the Town of Gaines twenty-five years ago and has been very active in that role since. In 1959 he was Co-chairman with the County Historian for the Gaines Sesquicentennial. In 1960 he was elected to the first Board of Directors of the Cobblestone Society at its organizational meeting. He later became Vice-president of that society for five years and was very instrumental in acquiring the Ward House at the Cobblestone Museum Complex in 1975. Through his efforts as a former teacher the education program at the Cobblestone Museum was begun in 1963. For over ten years he conducted classes at the Cobblestone School in Childs to which hundreds of elementary students attended from the surrounding area each Spring and Fall to learn of local history. He also has dressed up like Abe Lincoln and talked to several thousand children about this great man including several TV programs. In 1968 Mr. Pratt received a Certificate of Commendation from the American Association for State and Local History.

Around twenty years ago he took up painting and in 1981 had a show of his work and his mother's paintings which were displayed at the Swan Gallery in Albion. During the past three years he has become noted as a local author with his *Memories of Life on the Ridge* which was published by the Orleans County Historical Association in 1979. In fact, he helped organize OCHA following the Bi-centennial in 1976. At present, author Pratt is working on another book which will deal with the very early history of Gaines from 1809 to 1835. Much of this material was published in his column "Saga of the Ridge Road" which appeared in the Albion paper for five years.

In seeking data and doing historical research Mr. Pratt has traveled seven times to the British Isles over the past ten years, touring England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. In his spare time he enjoys collecting, selling and caning old chairs. In spite of a bad fall from his roof three years ago, Mr. Pratt continues to be extremely active in all sorts of historical affairs and events.