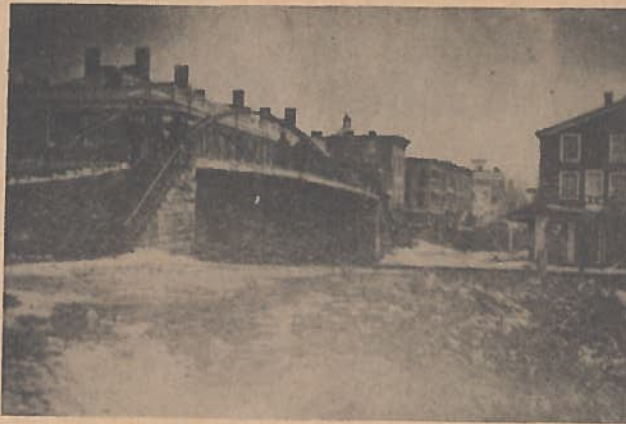


Bethinking of Old Orleans

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AN APPALLING CATASTROPHE

One of the most terrible accidents which ever occurred in Orleans County happened on Wednesday, September 28, 1859. It was on the occasion of the Orleans County Agricultural Fair which drew a large assemblage of people to Albion. It seems that a young man from Brockport had proposed to walk a tight rope across the Erie Canal. The rope was strung up from a window of the Mansion House that stood on the north side of the canal to the Dyer building on the south side of the canal. The Mansion House which was close to the towpath and the Dyer building were both located on the west side of Main Street. The gymnastic feat was set for 5:00 P.M. As a result a large crowd had assembled on the Albion Main Street bridge to get a close view of the action.

The bridge which is pictured here was a three-arch iron bridge, with a sidewalk on both east and west sides. A middle arch divided the bridge into north-bound and south-bound traffic. This view shows the bridge looking south with the Dyer building to the extreme right. The west half of the bridge was well filled with people and the arches were filled with men and boys. There were five horses, one double team with lumber wagon and one horse hitched to a buggy. Likewise, a crowd of people and more teams had gathered on the approaches making a general blockade to those on the bridge. At 5:15 P.M. the tight rope walker began his trek, but hardly had he advanced more than ten feet when a creaking and groaning of the bridge was heard. Immediately a man was seen leaping off the bridge far out into the water. The rope walker threw him his balancing pole and dropped down to a sitting position. A moment later the entire bridge collapsed into the water carrying with it around 250 people and the horses. Fifteen people were either killed or drowned in the melee. They were: from Albion, Jane Lawery and Lydia Harris; from Gaines, Annie Viele and Ramson Murdock; from Barre, Charles Roosevelt, Perry Cole, Joseph Cade and Edwin Stillson; from Carlton, Sarah Thomas, Harry Henry, Thomas Alchin and Caroline Martin; from Kendall, Adelbert Wilcox; from Yates, Thomas Handy and from Toledo, Ohio, Sophia Pratt. The horses hitched to the buggy also drowned. Over twenty other people were badly injured as a result of the catastrophe. Many of those who had remained on the canal bank helped rescue those who had fallen. As one man was helping people out, a lady came along, all wet from the canal saying, "Oh I've lost my baby, I've lost my baby". The poor woman was so frantic over the entire situation that she did not realize her baby was very tightly hugged up under her arm, his head one way and feet the other. He wasn't saying anything but was winking and blinking, lapping his tongue with water running down all over his face.