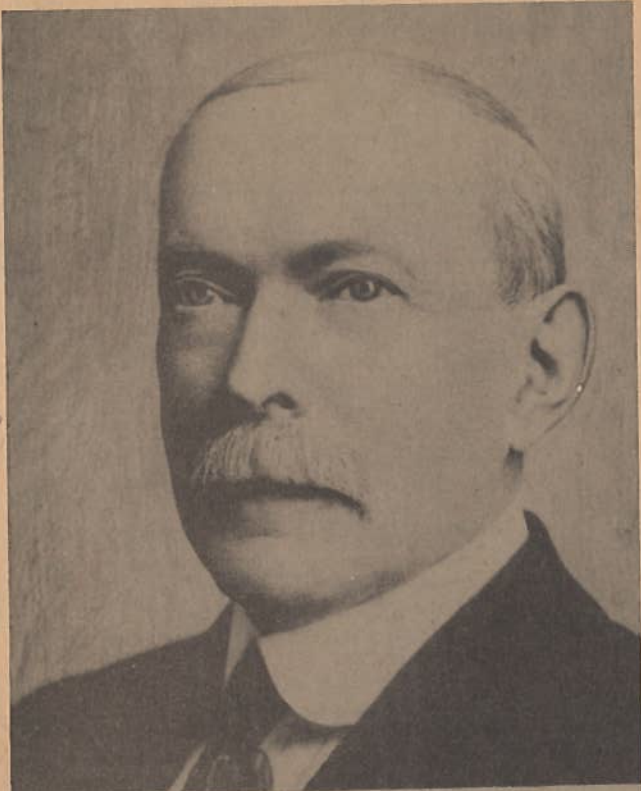


# Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin • County Historian



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**COUNTY CLERK**  
George A. Newell 1846 - 1933  
"But one thing is needful;"  
St. Luke 10:42

On Wednesday, Dec. 14, 1983 at 4:00 P.M. a formal public ceremony will be held in the County Clerk's office to commemorate the Centennial of the County Clerk's Office Building. It was during 1882 and 1883 that the present County Clerk's Building was erected on a site formerly occupied by the Phipps Union Seminary. Architect for the building was none other than Isaac G. Perry of Binghamton who later designed the noted "Million Dollar Staircase" in our capitol at Albany. The building committee was made up of Charles Bidleman of Gaines, Robert McCargo of Murray and William Hallock of Albion. The County Clerk was George A. Newell. On Dec. 14, 1883 when the Board of Supervisors met, they authorized the County Clerk to occupy the first floor of the new building on and after December 17, 1883.

The clerk's office had previously been housed in a smaller building, later razed, which was not fireproof and stood just west of the Court House. As we pause to celebrate this building's birthday and its architectural uniqueness in the Eastlake Style, we also recognize the importance of this structure, not only for its National Register status, but its vital function for us as a repository. Until March 1982 the Surrogate's Office occupied the second floor. That space is now the chambers of the Orleans County Legislature. For many years the Motor Vehicle Dept. was housed in the basement, it has since moved to the County Office Building leaving space for the Tax Office.

In reflecting upon the commemoration of this building, I thought it would be of interest to know more about the County Clerk of 100 years ago who first used the present structure. George A. Newell was a man of great prominence and one who was held in very high esteem by his contemporaries, an esteem and a respect attained by few.

George A. Newell of Medina, was born in the year 1846. In 1868 he graduated from Yale and was admitted to the Bar the following year. He became a member of the Orleans County Bar Association in 1877 but never set himself up in the practice of law. His livelihood however, was in banking. He was first cashier of the Union Bank of Medina and for many years until 1931 was President of the Bank.

He was first elected County Clerk on the Republican ticket in 1877 and was twice re-elected to that position through 1885. This means he not only served as County Clerk in the present building but also its predecessor. It is interesting to note that Mr. Newell was also elected our County Treasurer in 1894 and served in that position for twelve years or through 1905.

As a civic spirited person, he served as clerk of the Village Board of Trustees in Medina for five years as well as Treasurer for a number of years. He also was Treasurer for the Medina Board of Education, a Commissioner and Secretary for Boxwood Cemetery where he is buried. He was a member and officer of the Median Masonic Lodge No. 336. Impressive as all this may seem, his accomplishments in the Masonic Fraternity are unequalled for Mr. Newell was a thirty-third degree Mason, the highest honor attainable in that Order, an honor which is only bestowed on a select few. The offices he held in the Masonic Lodge were numerous and included being Grand Master of the Masonic Lodge of New York State and General Grand Master of the General Grand Council of United States, elected in 1918. For many years he was Grand Treasurer of the Grand Council for this State as well as Treasurer and Grand Commander of the Knights Templar of the State. He was Acting Grand Secretary to the Grand Master at the cornerstone laying for the Pullman Memorial Church in Albion during 1894.

George A. Newell died in 1933 leaving his wife the former Anna McGrath and several children. His youngest and only survivor who was born when her father was middle aged is Mrs. George Callaghan of Medina. It is just remarkable how close our connections with the past sometimes are. Mrs. Callaghan, you can be very proud of your father's many accomplishments and that his name will be embellished on a brass plaque in commemoration of the County Clerk's Building which was erected a century ago.