

# Bethinking of 10-31-84 Old Orleans

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## GAINES BASIN

With the new prison being erected on Gaines Basin Road and the fact it is not far from what once used to be known as Gaines Basin, I thought it would be of interest to know more about this place.

The canal was not officially opened until October 1825, but it was open from Holley east in 1823. Up until this time the Ridge Road (Route 104) was the main thoroughfare east and west through Orleans County. It was a slow, tedious, expensive route over which to ship the quantities of grain, fruit and lumber. The canal proved to be a much cheaper means of transportation. In fact, the price of wheat rose from 50¢ to \$1.50 per bushel after the canal opened to traffic. Thus, farmers in this area were anxious to have a local shipping point. At this time Gaines was a thriving center of business activity and the canal was important to that business. The distance from Gaines to the canal is much shorter via the Gaines Basin Road, than via routes 279 and 98 to Albion. In fact, Gaines Basin marks the farthest point north on the Erie Canal. The canal at that time was only forty feet wide, so it was necessary to dig a turn basin so that boats coming from the east could be turned around to carry produce back to the east coast. A warehouse and shipping docks made this turn basin area a center of shipping activity. Soon there were eight or nine houses, a blackstone shop where canal horses and mules could be shod, a cobblerstone schoolhouse and two general stores. The blacksmith was a Mr. Southwick and some of his hand wrought work is still in existence. The stores provided boatmen with all kinds of supplies. In fact, old records show that whiskey sold for 3¢ a drink. The little hamlet that grew up at the canal turn basin was the Gaines shipping point and it naturally followed that it was called Gaines Basin. As late as the 1880's A.J. Plamer's 180 proof cider brandy was being shipped from Gaines Basin on the canal. Palmer's distillery was located at the intersection of the Gaines Basin Road and Route 104.

By late 19th Century this community seems to have phased out. Commerce had of course, started shifting to the large communities and the railroad.

The only building which remains today of any of the original structures at Gaines Basin is the cobblerstone schoolhouse which is located just north of the Gaines Basin Road canal bridge. The picture shown here of that school was taken in 1902.



(L. Monacelli photo copy)

