

# The Establishment Of Orleans County

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When the first counties were established in this state it was still a British Colony. The first Colonial Assembly of the Colony of New York met in October 1683. During November of that year the Colony of New York was divided into 12 counties, western New York being a part of Albany County which had no northern or western boundaries. With the gradual increase of settlements upon Indian lands problems arose. By 1768 under the leadership of Sir William Johnson a council was convened at Fort Stanwix and a treaty was agreed upon establishing a line of demarcation between Indian territory and white settlements. This was recognized by the six-member Indian Confederacy and white settlers until after the Revolutionary War.

By 1772 the large area of Albany County had become too settled to administer efficiently so it was divided into three parts: Albany, Charlotte and Tryon which included western New York. This was named for William Tryon, Governor General of New York. The New York Provincial Legislature met for its last time on April 3, 1775 and of course, it was on April 18, 1775 that Paul Revere made his famous ride. The following day the battle of Lexington occurred. On July 9, 1776 a convention of the Representatives of the State of New York first convened. Our original New York State Constitution was approved on April 20, 1777 giving us our legal beginning as a State. Following the Revolution, Charlotte County was renamed Washington and Tryon was changed to Montgomery with western New York being the western most part of Montgomery County.

By October 1784, a new line of demarcation was established between the Indian chiefs and commissioners of the U.S., that new line being the Niagara River. By 1788 our State had 13 counties and 120 townships. The largest was Whitestown which comprised 80% of the western part of

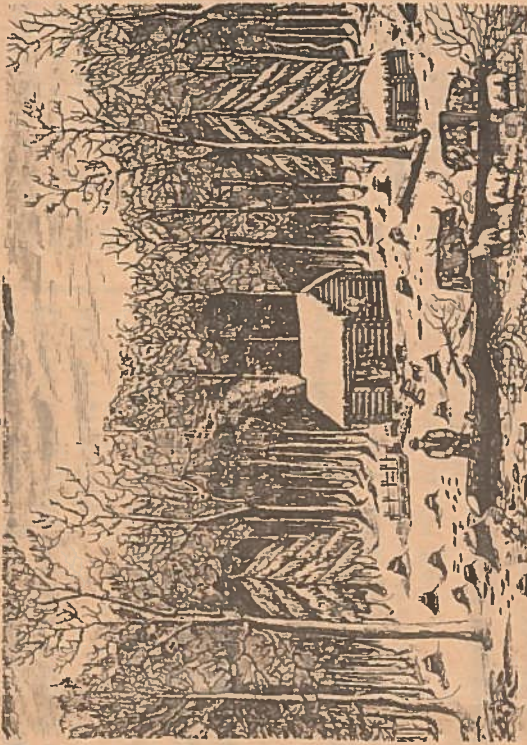
# Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

Montgomery County. By 1789 the Phelps-Gorham Land Company had established a sales office in Canandaigua and the County of Ontario was established, thereby making this area a part of that county. In July 1797 Joseph Ellicott was hired by the Holland Land Company to act as chief surveyor of all the land in this area. This was after the relinquishment of all Indian claims to the land. At that time we were in the Township known as Northampton. By 1800 land was offered for sale in what is now our county. However, the first settlers did not come until 1803. In March 1802 Genesee County was split off of Ontario County and divided into four townships. In 1806 Allegany County was taken from Genesee and in 1808 Niagara, Chautauqua and Cattaraugus were also created from Genesee County. It was the same year that the Town of Murray came into existence. In 1812 the Town of Ridgeway was taken from the Town of Batavia and established as the northwestern part of Genesee County. In 1816 Gaines was separated from Ridgeway and in 1818 Barre was formed from a part of Gaines, and Shelby was subdivided from Ridgeway. In 1821 Clarendon was separated from the Town of Sweden and in 1822 Oak Orchard, renamed Carlton in 1825, was subdivided from part of Ridgeway and Gaines. Northton was created from Ridgeway in 1822 and renamed Yates in 1823. With Batavia being the county seat it was extremely difficult for the early settlers to walk there through forest and swamp to transact business. Consequently, it was by an Act of the State Legislature in 1824 which provided for the establishment of Orleans County to become effective on the first of January of 1826.

Originally Orleans County was covered with a heavy growth of trees. These had to be removed to open the soil for

cultivation. Much of the Town of Ridgeway was burned off, the ashes being leached to make potash. The illustration here shows an early settler's log home in the wilderness.



Coinciding with the establishment of Orleans County the grand Erie Canal was completed through this area in 1824. By October 1825 the canal was entirely completed across the state. At that time it was a mere ditch of four feet in depth and only 12 feet in width. But that ditch provided an easy water route for settlers, many from New England, into this western frontier and provided the necessary transportation for raw materials and goods, and gave us a route for the shipment of our own products. It was this inland water route, more than anything else which led to the greater development of our county in the second quarter of the 19th Century.