

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

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## BARNs

This week's illustration is a photograph taken in the 1880's of a barn raising which took place at the farm of Arnold Gregory located on West County House Road in the Town of Albion. Studying this rare photo you will note that there are at least thirty men in the picture. The raising of a farm barn a century ago was indeed, a neighborhood activity requiring many hands.

The late Clarence H. Steele of Barre 1888-1979, related through an interview undertaken by the Orleans County Historical Association Oral History Project, his remembrance of a barn raising. I would however, first mention that the Oral History Project was directed by Mrs. Helen McAllister of Medina and the interview with Mr. Steele which follows was conducted in January 1978 by John B. Munger.

"In 1900. What was Barre like then?

We moved with the stock and all. There was no improved drive ways, improved roads at all. It was a log road way across the swamp. That's through what's now 98, from Quaker Hill north coming into Barre.

A log road then. It was kind of bumpy wasn't it? It was to. Yep. Well it was worn down. Of course they kept a good gravel on it but it was worn down so you hit the bumps quite often.

Did you move right up to where you live now? No. We moved over to the farm in well it was between the Delano-Steele Road. It was a --- a lady in Batavia that owned the farm, I can't recall her name right now. And the first thing they had to do was build a new barn. They had a cow barn there that was made of logs and marsh hay on top of it. That's where they kept the cows when we came there. Well in 1900 we build a new barn -- ninety-three feet long.

Well, was that a regular barn raising like I've heard tell about? Oh yeah.

The men with the pike poles and -- That's right, yeah.

Ninety-three feet long, that'd call for an awful lot of men to lift up one side of that wouldn't it?

That was quite a project. Henry Belson was the boss carpenter. And I can remember when they had the plates on it. They had a young fellow that was working with him, took a run router round the plate, from one corner to the round right on the plate. He was a little daredevil.

Geed, that would only be about 8 inches wide wouldn't it? That's right. That's more than I'd do.

I know it. I can't think of that fellow's name right now. Will Hare was working with him at the same time.

Will Hare? Yep. But this, Joey something -- I can't think of his last name. But he was a pretty nimble chap and went around that place, went clear around it.

Well how long would it take to put the barn up? I assume it was all framed and laying on the ground.

That's right. And then how long would it actually take to put the barn up?

Well, they had the raising of the barn. They would get a gang together and they put up the frame work. They raised each end and then they put up the sides. Frame work. At that time they would get, when they put up a barn, they would have a gang of volunteer farmers that would come in and help. They have pike poles, different ones would hold up the framework until they get a carpenter up there and then they --- this was a gamble roof barn -- and they put a man up on top. But before they put it up they have to get that gamble part all prepared on the ground. Well, I think that takes care of raising of the barn. Had to put up a silo after that, which was another project."

If you are interested in barns, their history and how they were made, you won't want to miss the Cobblestone Society's mid-winter community dinner and program slated for this Saturday night at the Elks Lodge in Albion. Dr. Dan Fink, a professor at Geneseo and a noted authority on barns, will be speaking on his favorite topic. A brief film will also be presented showing the hewing process involved in making beams. Dr. Fink will illustrate his information with color slides of numerous examples of barns from New York State. Reservations for this event can still be made by calling immediately 589-9510.

