

# Bethinking of 8-6-87 Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian



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Our photo this week shows Ronald W. Herlan (left), Associate Professor of History at Brockport, as he explains a point to Alan Isselhard (right), Town of Clarendon Historian, at the July meeting of the Orleans County Historical Association. The meeting was held in Westcott Hall at the Disciples United Methodist Church in Clarendon where Prof. Herlan delivered a speech entitled "Moles in Orleans County: A Plea For More Underground History."

In his remarks he challenged OCHA "to strengthen its role as a cultural leader. . . not only on your organization's behalf, but also on behalf of Orleans County. . .". He pointed out the importance of indepth research into the records of Orleans County's past, including such things as maps, diaries, censuses, deeds, poll lists, election results, legal papers, minutes, books, business accounts, wills and newspapers. "What you may commit yourselves to undertake is the searching out, collecting, inventorying, preserving, interpreting and publishing some of these materials. . . In short, our vigorous tracking of the past's imprints all around us will make our history more complex, but so much more challenging, so much more complete and so much more enriching and fulfilling."

Prof. Herlan noted that Henry Ford once said "history is bunk" and when asked by a news reporter why he said that, Mr. Ford replied, "As a young man I was very interested in how people lived in earlier times; how they got from place to place, lighted their homes, cooked their meals and so on. So I went to the history books. Well, I could find out about kings and presidents, but I could find nothing of people's everyday lives. So I decided that history is bunk."

The kind of social history that Prof. Herlan encourages OCHA to undertake is exactly what Henry Ford had hoped to find in the history books. Local history groups such as OCHA will do well to take Prof. Herlan's suggestions and direct their endeavors toward the preservation, documentation and publication of the "buried" records of common folks. The proliferation of museums will not fill the void in social historical research which must and needs to be preserved and documented.

Prof. Herlan also said: "Attention and consideration will need to be given to structure and to processes, besides those formerly devoted to events and artifacts. Ways must be discovered to learn how social history joins past to present in contrast to the familiar concentration on the dramatic, highly visible differences between past ways of doing things and their contemporary counterparts. Of course, it remains valid to show how different past life was when organized around the spinning wheel instead of the Fashion Barn or Fashion Bug, but it is equally important to examine those elements of stability and continuity such as family relationships and religious practices which flow more unhurriedly from past to present. Finally, we must reorder our conventional priorities in studying history so that changes in humbler spheres of activity can be distinctly positioned alongside the superficially more brilliant milestones.

"Far too often and quite unjustifiably, associations like OCHA are characterized by uninformed outsiders as 'tea and cookies' clubs. . . For those Orleans County inhabitants already 'hooked' on history, your summons to them to join your endeavors will release the energy and excitement of the converted. . . and finally, history is alive, but its tasks are uncompleted. Discovery of new knowledge and understanding of the human condition both past and present beckons each one of us to enter this spacious abode."

Prof. Herlan ended his remarks by passing out a list of five suggestions for OCHA which included: (1) the publication of a regular historical series, (2) matching funds for microfilming of significant records, (3) preparation of a local history for use in the Fourth grades, (4) sponsoring a course in local history and (5) sponsoring qualified graduate students to help inventory, preserve and interpret records.