

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

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Lakeside Park,
N. Y.



Vol. IX 10-23-87 No. 41
PORT OF REFUGE

Oak Orchard, New York

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The one photo included here shows at the far right, the Oak Orchard Inn at Oak Orchard-on-the-Lake in 1897. Also, seen here, are "line" cottages and bath houses in the foreground. In back, to the far left, is the roller skating rink and dance hall. The other photo, perhaps taken about the same time, shows the steamboat North King entering the Oak Orchard Harbor. The lighthouse is clearly seen at the end of the west pier, while people are seen standing on the east pier.

PART II Shipbuilding

One of Oak Orchard's most important contributions to lake commerce was ship building. The earliest activity here was carried on by Johnathan Murray. Born in Hartford, Connecticut in 1790, he learned the shipbuilder's trade from his father. As a boy, he went to sea and by the time he was 24, he had commanded several vessels. In 1824, he abandoned the high seas and went to northern New York State, in Jefferson county, where he pursued farming until 1840.

He then went to Rochester, where he engaged in shipbuilding at the Upper Landing of the Genesee River, four miles from Lake Ontario. He remained there until 1847, when he moved to Oak Orchard. He died there in 1874. He and his sons, Dexter and Horatio C., built numerous vessels here and were also involved in the hotel business.

The shipbuilding began in 1848 with construction of the flatbottomed schooner "New World", of 130 tons. This vessel launched the following year, and under Capt. Dexter J. Murray, plied the lake on the coasting trade with Oswego.

A SOCIAL PORT

While commercial enterprise figured in the early development of the Point Breeze (east) side of Oak Orchard Harbor, social activities were responsible for the growth of Oak Orchard-on-the-Lake.

In 1892, people came from miles around to join the throngs at the new Oak Orchard Inn. Modern improvements, waiters in full dress, course dinners, choice lake foods and an orchestra packed the 150-guest accommodation resort during the summer season.

The Tally-ho, coach and four, brought passengers twice daily from Albion, while the steamboat, "North King" also brought in pleasure-seekers well into the 1900s. Parties also ferried across the harbor from Point Breeze at 5 cents a head. One of the ferries was operated by the Taylor Brothers, who for many years had a boat livery. If a couple preferred cycling, a cinder path stretched from Albion to the lake beside the highway. A highway stop was made at Wheelman's Rest, a picnic mecca of the 1890s.

Construction of the three-story hotel was part of the scheme of Oak Orchard-on-the-Lake Corporation to develop the summer resort into the largest in western New York. It was at that time that the corporation purchased a large share of the original 400-acre tract "taken up" by Aaron Burr in 1789 and repurchased by A.V. Clark. The tract was subdivided into building lots.

Oak Orchard Inn was torn down after two decades of glory. It had been preceded by two other hotels, built farther inland and both destroyed by fire.

A race track with a regular program of events furnished entertainment for Lakeview guests following the Civil War.

Summer homes built at the same time were used by generations of summer residents. A few years after the Civil War, E. Kirk's steam yacht was considered the epitome of elegance.