

PIONEER HISTORY

OF ORLEANS COUNTY, NEW YORK

By

ARAD THOMAS

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Pioneers of Orleans County, NY

Pioneer History of Orleans County, New York (vol1)

*Pioneer Handbook: Mastering Pioneer Life
in Orleans County, New York* (vol2)

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SAMPLE

DEDICATION.

TO THE ORLEANS COUNTY PIONEER ASSOCIATION,
BY REQUEST OF MANY WHOSE MEMBERS THIS WORK
WAS UNDERTAKEN, BY WHOM THE AUTHOR HAS BEEN
GREATLY AIDED IN PREPARING IT, AND TO WHOM HE
FEELS UNDER OBLIGATIONS FOR MANY PERSONAL FAVORS,
THIS BOOK IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY THE
AUTHOR.

THIS ADAPTED EDITION IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO
THE MEMORY OF MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER, GRACE EMILY
HAMILTON-PIERCE, A 4TH GENERATION DESCENDANT OF
ARETAS PIERCE, AN ORIGINAL ORLEANS COUNTY PIONEER.

A.BURRIS

FORWARD.

by A.Burris

Having grown up in a modern American single-parent household and separated from my grandparents by thousands of miles, I had only a vague understanding of my family's history. In 1989 I was a young adult, hungry to learn more. My mother gave me a stack of documents with details of our family's past. Among them was an old book with hundreds of stories written in a language from a bygone era. This book was an original copy of *Pioneer History of Orleans County, New York*, by Arad Thomas, which had been passed down through generations of my family.

Within its pages are over thirty chapters detailing the history of Western New York, the Holland Purchase, the county's settlement, biographies, and first-hand stories told in the pioneer's own words.

Despite my repeated attempts, I found it difficult to read more than a few pages at a time. Yet, I felt a strong connection to its content and the stories of my pioneer ancestors. For years, I have felt called to share these tales with a wider audience but lacked the resources to do so. Until now. Recently retired and with new advancements in technology, I finally had the time and means to turn this dream into reality.

My goal was to update the language of the original piece for a contemporary audience. While refreshing

the language, I worked hard to maintain its elegance and preserve every detail. Highly detailed information, difficult to understand in this format, such as the description of civil divisions in chapters 2 through 4, has been relocated to an online repository along with a glossary, high-resolution maps, and other information that bring the material to life.

Arad Thomas’s poignant 1851 speech to the Pioneer Association and the first-hand accounts of the Pioneers remain unchanged.

And so I’m delighted to present to you, dear listener, this audiobook version of Arad Thomas’s original work, completed just in time for the Orleans County Bicentennial Celebration in 2025.

If you, like me, feel disconnected from your family roots, I hope this book instills in you a sense of strength and pride in our shared heritage. For history enthusiasts, this book offers a detailed glimpse into the lives of early Americans during the birth of our nation—stories that have been lost in time but that deserve remembrance.

SAMPLE
[Ague, Currier, Gill, Halcyon, The Creature]

19th Century American English Can Be a Bear!

visit pioneerresources.folk.studio
to view the glossary for this content—
you’ll be glad you did.

A sample of unfamiliar terms are *italized* in the text.

PREFACE.

by Arad Thomas

The origin of this book is briefly this: the Orleans County Pioneer Association had collected a volume, in manuscript, of the local history of many of its members, written by themselves, which they desired to publish.

Some difficulty existed in getting the work by the Association out, and many of his friends requested that the author write a book on his own account, which should contain the substance of the histories and such other material and matter connected with the Pioneer History of Orleans County as might be of general interest to readers.

The author used records from the association and histories of the Pioneers and extracted and condensed the parts that he believed would be of more general interest.

Many of the facts were collected from his own knowledge and the testimony of early settlers and others familiar with the matter.

The character of this book is local, many names of persons and events of private history have been introduced, of little interest perhaps out of the families and neighborhood of the parties; but with these, the author has endeavored to collect and preserve the

memory of such events of a more public character, as marked by the progress of settlement in this portion of the Holland Purchase, and as many be worthy of remembrance.

For this purpose, *O'Reilly's Sketches of Rochester*, *Turner's History of Phelps and Gorham Purchase*, and of the Holland Purchase and French's *Gazetteer of New York* have been consulted, and such extracts and compilations made as could be found there.

It has been an object, kept in view, to collect as much personal reminiscence as possible, for the gratification of the older inhabitants of Orleans County for whom the book was more particularly designed.

Errors and dates, events, names and narratives, no doubt may be found in the work. Such errors are unavoidable in giving details of statements of aged people, often conflicting in their character, and the intelligent reader may sometimes regret that he finds no notice here of facts and incidents in the Pioneer History of this region of country, which he may deem of more importance than what the book contains.

Some such facts and incidents may not have come to the notice of the author, and he has been compelled to omit much matter of interest, lest his work should be too large, beyond the plan proposed.

Much as an apology may seem to be needed, the author has little to make, more than to say he is not a professional book maker, and has no hope of founding a literary reputation on this work. He has little fear therefore of critics, and will be happy, if by this labor

he has pleased the old settlers of Orleans County and done his part to save from oblivion, good matter for history, fast passing away; for in the beautiful language of Whittier—

*“Still from the hurrying train of life, fly
backward far and fast, The milestones of
the fathers—the landmarks of the past.”*

—John Greenleaf Whittier

SAMPLE

INTRODUCTION.

After Columbus discovered America, the first European settlements on the Atlantic Coast were made by the English and Dutch on the South and by the French on the *extreme north*. Ascending the great river St. Lawrence, the French founded the cities of Quebec and Montreal; following the river and the lakes westward, they established the settlements at Pittsburgh and Detroit, many years before the English settled Western New York.

When the French arrived, the *Algonquins* and *Hurons* lived in Eastern Canada. They formed a strategic partnership with the French, as the Canadian Indians and the Iroquois in Western New York were at war. The French sided with their Indian allies in this conflict, which led to deep-rooted hostility from the Iroquois.

Many intense battles occurred between the French and these Native Americans with varying levels of success. Eventually, the Algonquins and Hurons were displaced or obliterated, and the Iroquois nearly wiped out the French settlements in Canada. They effectively prevented the French from establishing themselves in New York, even though the French claimed the entire territory. Only a few French missionaries were permitted to stay in Iroquois territory, except at the mouth of the Niagara River, where the French founded a trading post in 1678. The English, led by Sir William

Johnson, captured the post in 1759 and held it until it was surrendered to the United States in 1796.

Meanwhile, in 1722, the *colonial government* of New York built a trading house at Oswego, and in 1727, a Fort was added to strengthen it.

The French objected to this *encroachment* on the territory they claimed and sent military expeditions multiple times to drive out the English.

These English establishments at Oswego were captured by the French in 1756 and destroyed. The English reconstructed them in 1758 and held them until 1796 when they were handed over to the United States under Jay's treaty.

The French maintained communication through Lake Ontario to connect their western settlements with Quebec but did not establish any other locations within the bounds of New York due to the power of the Iroquois.

In 1760, General Amherst led a formidable army consisting of British, Indians, and Provincial Americans to Canada. In the end, the French surrendered Canada and all of their western possessions, including their claim to Western New York.

The Iroquois, also known as the Six Nations, established friendly relations with the English early on. They remained loyal to their alliances even after the French were defeated in America, continuing this loyalty through to the time of the Revolution.

At the beginning of the Revolutionary War, American

General Philip Schuyler met with the leaders of the Six Nations at *German Flats* in June 1776 and secured their agreement to remain neutral in the war.

But Sir John Johnson, Joseph Brant, Colonel John Butler, and other Tories persuaded the Indians to break their promise and encouraged them to fight alongside the British against the Americans. Throughout the war, all the Indians, except for the Tuscaroras and Oneidas, remained loyal to the British.

Many of the Tories came from a British settlement that had been established in the Mohawk Valley by Sir John Johnson and his father, Sir William Johnson, where they had been trading with the Mohawk. In fact, many of the white residents in the Mohawk Valley were Tories, and so they allied themselves with the hostile Indian groups led by Butler, Brant, and others. Together, they launched attacks against the Americans, causing death and destruction in the frontier settlements of the Colonies.

After their raids, they would retreat to the British strongholds at Niagara and Oswego, where they were safe from retaliation. This predatory warfare continued intermittently from 1775 to 1779, particularly along the Mohawk and Susquehanna rivers.

In 1779, American General Sullivan led an army of five thousand men sent by General Washington to punish the Indians and Tories of New York for their conduct in the Revolutionary War. He encountered them in force at a fortified camp near Elmira, where they were defeated with great loss. General Sullivan's army pursued the enemy to Canandaigua and then

through their villages in Livingston County, destroying everything belonging to the Indians along their route.

Following the Battle of Elmira, only a few Indians were killed. However, the survivors were left feeling scared, weakened, and defeated. Instead of returning to their settlements east of the *Genesee River*, they resettled near Geneseo, Gardeau, Mount Morris, and other areas in the western part of the state after fleeing from Sullivan's forces. The Oneidas, who did not participate in the war, were able to remain in their homes undisturbed.

General Sullivan's expedition severely defeated and humbled the Indians, but they remained peaceful towards the whites thereafter.

SAMPLE

CHAPTER 1.

THE INDIANS OF WESTERN NEW YORK

The history of the Indians who inhabited Western New York at the coming of the white men is comparatively unknown. Their own traditional accounts go back little more than a century, but the numerous relics and ruins and the marks of ancient *fortifications* scattered over this region of the country, upon which no doubt human labor and skill have been employed, seem to prove conclusively that here men have lived for many centuries past.

All these traces of former habitations of men are found within the bounds of Orleans County. When they were made and by whom seems to be as inexplicable to the Indian of the present day as to his white brother. The commonly entertained opinion of those who have investigated the subject most is that this country has been inhabited by a people who have become long since extinct. A people of higher civilization and more skilled in the arts than those found here now, known as the Six Nations.

The most considerable of these ancient fortifications to be found in Orleans County is thus described in *Turner's History*:

“About one and one-half miles west of Shelby Center, in Orleans County, is an ancient work. A broad ditch encloses in a form nearly circular, about three

acres of land. The ditch is, on this day, well-defined and several feet deep. Adjoining the spot on the south is a swamp, about a mile in width, by two in length. This swamp was once doubtless, if not a lake, an impassable morass. From the interior of the enclosure made by the ditch, there is what appears to have been a passageway on the side next to the swamp. No other breach occurs in the entire circuit of the embankment.

There are accumulated, within and near this fort, large piles of small stones of a size convenient to be thrown by hand or with a sling. Arrowheads of flint are found in or near the enclosure in great abundance, stones, axes, etc.

Trees that have grown for four hundred years stand upon the embankment. Underneath them are earthenware plates and dishes wrought with skill, presenting in relief ornaments of various patterns.

Some skeletons have almost entirely been exhumed. Many are giants, not less than seven or eight feet in length. The skulls are large and well-developed in the *anterior lobe*, broad between the ears, and flattened in the *coronal region*.

Half a mile west of the fort is a sand hill. Here, a large number of human skeletons have been exhumed in a perfect state. Great numbers appear to have been buried in the same grave. Many of the skulls appear to have been broken in with clubs or stones.”

The Indians found occupying this part of the country when white men began to settle here were the Senecas, a tribe of the Six Nations. They had no village