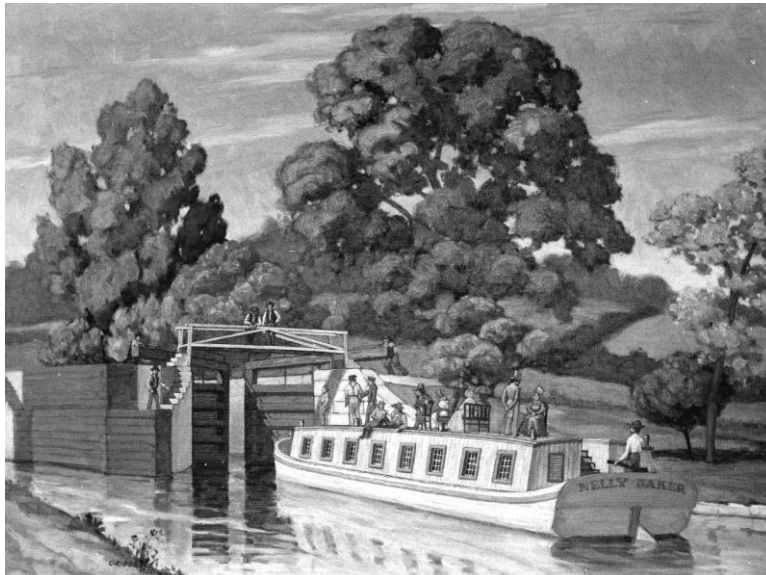


The Ingenuity and Incarceration of a Perinton Pioneer

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian

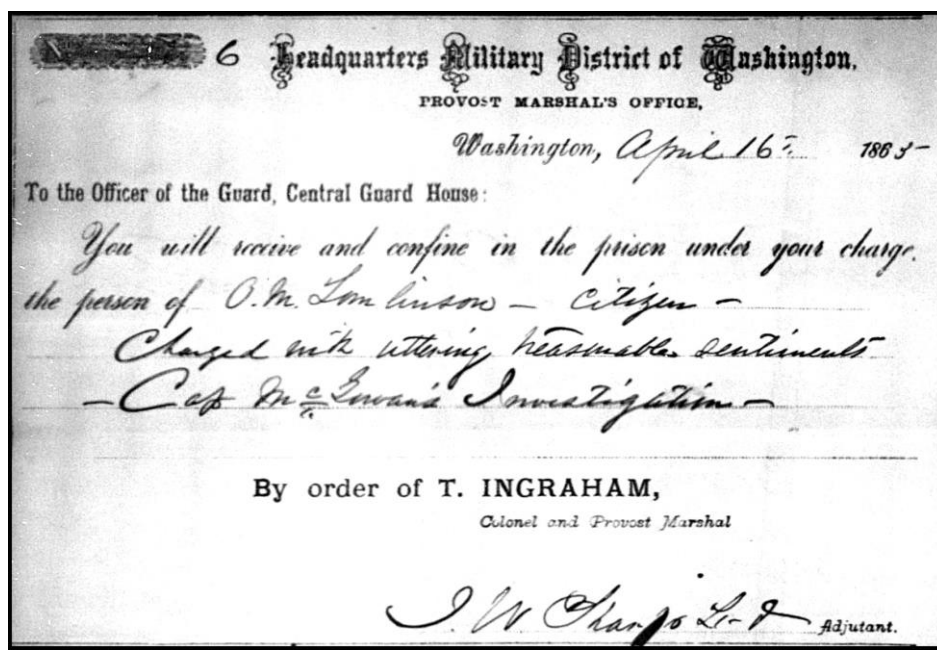
Perinton pioneer Oliver Tomlinson was one of a kind. A pioneer, businessman, a miner of gold in California, inventor, and political activist, some considered him an eccentric character, to put it mildly. Born in Connecticut in 1796, Tomlinson arrived in Perinton in about 1819. He purchased 45 acres of land east of Main Street and north of Church Street, including a log cabin, which he promptly sold for \$25 and a gold watch.

Tomlinson married Ann Staples, daughter of the proprietors of Staples Tavern in Egypt, in the spring of 1825. He operated a canal-side mercantile near the Main Street Bridge, and by all measures was a civic-minded citizen. He provided the land for both the Greenvale Cemetery and the Universalist Church, both on East Church Street.



After relocating from Perinton to Albany, Oliver Tomlinson operated a line of packet boats in the 1830s and 1840s, until the lure of the California Gold Rush caused him to head west.

Seizing upon the canal's commercial opportunities, Oliver Tomlinson relocated his family to Albany, where he took ownership of the Western Navigation Company. His packet boats plied the canal waters, while a fleet of steamboats carried passengers and freight to Great Lakes ports. Tomlinson's interests turned to politics, and the philosophies of the Whigs, who believed that Congress should have more power than the President, and were strong defenders of the Constitution.



Documentation of the 1865 incarceration of Oliver Tomlinson for threatening the President of the United States.

Oliver Tomlinson was opposed to any expansion of slavery. He supported the Constitutional Union Party in the 1860 presidential election, and was disappointed by Lincoln's victory. By the fall of 1864, Tomlinson had taken to making speeches for his preferred presidential candidate, John C. Fremont. Tomlinson stood with the "Radical Republicans", hard-line abolitionists who railed against Lincoln's positions on slavery and reconciliation with the southern states.

Of course, Lincoln was reelected, only to meet his fate at the hand of John Wilkes Booth on April 14th, 1865. Booth was still at large on April 16th, when an unrelated arrest occurred in New York City – former Perinton resident Oliver Tomlinson, now living in Buffalo. The New York Times reported that "One of the long-haired wandering preachers, named Tomlinson, and hailing from Buffalo, while speaking at a soldier's camp, this afternoon, indulged in the remark that if the new President (Andrew Johnson) pursued Mr. Lincoln's policy he would meet Mr. Lincoln's fate in two weeks. He was immediately set upon by the soldiers, and only escaped severe bodily harm because he was at once arrested."

Upon his eventual release, Tomlinson returned to Buffalo. He promptly focused his efforts on the creation of a new political party, The People's National Union, the proposed officers of which were primarily Buffalo shopkeepers and store clerks. The party never materialized, and Oliver M. Tomlinson, died near Buffalo in 1867.