

Fancher helped develop a booming sandstone industry

OVERLOOKED ORLEANS: Syndicate once employed 1,200 men before Great Depression ended era

By **MATT BALLARD**

msurtef@batavianews.com

ALBION — More than a century ago, Orleans County was dominated by the Medina Sandstone industry, which was directed by Edward Fancher of Albion for a number of years.

Born Jan. 6, 1854 to John and Effie Bogardus Fancher, Edward engaged early on in the quarry business, gathering much of his knowledge from Charles Gwynne. After the untimely death of

his wife Lucy in 1892, Edward remarried to Ida Baldwin the following year and raised his young family in the Hulberton area.

On Feb. 20, 1902 a new quarry syndicate was established in the area, uniting nearly 50 quarries sprawled throughout Orleans County.

The Orleans County Quarry Company was incorporated with \$2 million in capital and employed more than 1,200 men.

Initial startup funds were directed toward operating the quarries, paying salaries, and most importantly, developing the infrastructure to support the refinement of stone, sale, and transportation across both railroad and the Erie Canal.

The newly established business situated its headquarters at Albion and immediately began the search for a general manager. Meanwhile, Fancher was sent to New York City to begin peddling the burgeoning company's products.

Within months of incorporation, the syndicate signed on to several major six-figure con-

tracts for paving stones in New York City, which would aid in securing a promotion for Fancher to a position of superintendent of the company.

In the heat of this growing business, Fancher took an interest in studying theology and was ordained a minister on Sept. 27, 1912. Serving at numerous congregational churches in the region, he was responsible for restarting services at the "old pioneer" Christian church at Manning. It was a short time after that the quarry business hit a wall with the start of World War I, halting production and interest in the building material.

At the conclusion of the war, quarries were offered to individuals on a royalty basis with John Lubomski of Albion serving as the executive secretary.

Once employees for the business, groups of men bought into the new system and took over management of individual quarries in the Albion and Murray area. Those such as Pasquale DiLaura; James and Edward Ryan; the Monacelli brothers; Camille and Henry D'Orazio; and Mario and William D'Andrea all

entered into agreements with the company to manage the very quarries they once toiled in.

The advent of the Great Depression marked an end to the golden age of the sandstone business in Orleans County as most quarries sold the stock they had and ceased the removal and cutting of stone from the quarries. At the conclusion of World War II, new industries created a void in skilled labor for quarry work and new construction materials replaced the once valuable stone.

The lasting impact of Fancher's contribution to the region is still recognized today, when passing through the hamlet of Fancher, driving down Fancher Road, or hitting the "Fancher Curve." These remain a testament to the ingenuity and hard work of the Rev. Edward F. Fancher who headed the growth of the Medina Sandstone industry at the turn of the 20th century. His passing on March 19, 1942 was marked by great sadness across the county, and recalling his dedication and contributions to the community.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Former Albion resident Edward Fancher was an influential figure in Orleans County's sandstone development.