

The Old Empire Block was a commercial hub

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OVERLOOKED ORLEANS: Stores for clothing, dentist, pharmacy

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ALBION — Per an 1857 map of the Village of Albion, the block at the intersection of Batavia and Canal streets, now North Main and East Bank, was owned by Willis P. Collins, a grain dealer from Connecticut.

As a self-sustaining community, businesses filled the first, second, and third stories of these buildings, providing residents with convenient options for obtaining essential goods and services.

On the first floor of the “Old Empire Block” was the store of W. Cole and Robert Sheldon, who operated a clothing business along with Martin Rawson and Fitch Collins.

The appearance of signage hanging above the second floor windows shows the dentist office of Dr. J.S. Northrup. On the third floor, as indicated by the high-hanging signs, was the headquarters for the Orleans American, which was operated by David S. Bruner.

Moving further north along Main Street was the drug store of Drs. Orson Nichoson and Lemuel C. Paine, two local pioneer physicians — Snell Realty currently occupies the build-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

One of the oldest images of downtown Albion shows the former Old Empire Block. The location housed numerous businesses and offices.

ing.

Also visible are stores belonging to William Close, a local shoemaker, and Jacob Hallenbake, a hardware merchant. Slightly visible is the iconic “Gothic Hall,” owned by grocer and baker Andrew Wall, as well as the large block owned by Roswell Smith Burrows.

The Empire Block burned on Dec. 18, 1868, due to a fire caused by an ember from a stove within the Cole & Sheldon store.

The conflagration left a total loss including:

■ Mr. Densmore, on build-

ing, \$11,000 with \$6,000 insurance.

■ Cole & Sheldon, on goods, \$12,000 with \$6,000 insurance.

■ Martin Rawson, on goods. \$5,000 with no insurance.

■ Orleans American, \$6,000 with \$2,500 insurance.

■ John Bradshaw, hatter, on goods, \$3,000 with no insurance.

■ J.S. Northrup, \$1,000 with no insurance.

■ Fred Butler, tailor, on goods, \$1,000 with no insurance.

■ Collins Hill, owner of a nearby building, \$3,000 with no insurance.