

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

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On Sunday, June 12 between the hours of 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. the Cobblestone Museum will come alive with tales of rural life. Anyone who has interesting stories to tell about, or memories to share, is invited to participate. If you enjoy such local folklore, then just come and listen to others. Admission is free. The program will begin in the Cobblestone Church audience room promptly at 2 p.m. with a brief ceremony dedicating this festival as a living memorial to Cary H. Lattin, storyteller. Following this, three groups will form at different locations within the museum complex for storytelling on an informal basis in round table fashion. One of the major purposes of this event is to tape record those interesting stories about rural life which are not written down any place but deserve retaining for future generations. From the humorous to the tragic or the sublime to the ridiculous, stores and legends of the common folk will be the order of the day. Come prepared to tell your favorite tale or have your memory joggled by hearing something that reminds you of a similar happening of long ago. The true success of this event will be spontaneous reminiscence of things one usually doesn't recall.

Stories are of course, entertaining and have been a delight to people of all ages for generations. And yes, truths are perhaps sometimes stretched to embellish a point for esthetic reasons (poetic license). While we are speaking of stories, I'm reminded of one my father used to tell about an old time neighbor, Amos Clift.

Amos Clift was a farmer who lived on the Gaines Basin Road north of the canal just west of Albion. One summer morning he went out to his pasture to get his cows and discovered that they were out. He walked around the pasture and found that some rails were missing from the fence. He gathered his cows back and fixed the fence. In about a week the same thing happened again. The cows were out and more rails were missing. This

back in the 1920s. He must have been a pretty smart dog too. One fall evening my grandfather Nahum and my dad had decided to stay over night with their relatives Will, Neil and Neal Wilson out on the East County House Road. The dog Rove was with them because they had planned to get up early the next morning to go pheasant hunting. As they sat around that evening talking, one of them said "I wonder how Soph is doing?" Soph was my grandmother who had stayed home on the Gaines Basin Road several miles away. In a couple of minutes the dog barked and wanted to go outside so they let Rove out. In about twenty minutes the phone at Wilson's rang. It was my grandmother Soph. She had called to ask why the dog came home. Well, it was pretty easy to figure out. Rove had gone home to see how Soph was doing.

There are little facts which are passed down through the ages in the form of stories. I recall my grandfather, Ross Wilson, telling me about the interior of what used to be the Cobblestone Quaker Meeting House in Millville. He grew up in Millville during the 1880s and '90s and although not a Quaker, did know what the inside of the meeting house looked like. It seems that the pews were made with adjustable backs so that you could have everyone face in one direction or have, by readjusting the backs of the seats, one half of the congregation face the other half of the congregation. In other words, the backs of the seats were hinged in a simple fashion so that they would flip flop. That little bit of information is just not written down any place. What neat pews those must have been. I always thought how interesting that he remembered that detail perhaps because it must have seemed unusual to him. That building hasn't been used as a church since the 1890s. Those pews are long gone but at least we have the story about them. And that's what's really important about the Story Teller's Festival — retention of information. So plan to come and have your stories preserved for posterity.

The 1890s photo here depicts a group of men sitting around the stove in a country store.

Years ago this was usually a hangout where, especially the men might gather to, you guessed it, tell stories.



time he spotted a small wisp of smoke coming out of the chimney on a shanty up by the canal. This was in the 1880s and at that time the canal was being enlarged. The shanty housed a few of the canal diggers.

Amos figured they had fished the rails for their cook stove and he decided to take care of the matter. After all, it was no easy job to split rails. Besides, he was really irked to think that they were burning up what was his. So that evening under cover of darkness, Amos went out to the pasture taking with him a gimlet which he used to bore holes in a number of rails in the fence near the canal. He then filled the holes with gunpowder and dobed them over with mud. He then waited. In about four days as the story goes, the griddles on the stove in the shanty went right up through the roof. Needless to say, Amos lost no more of his rails from the fence.

And then there are animal stories. Here is one my father used to tell about their dog Rove. Rove was an English Shepherd which my family had