

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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CHARLES A. DANOLDS
1818 - 1899

"Give me the storm and tempest of thought and action, rather than the dead calm of ignorance and faith!"

-- Robert Ingersoll

One of the most prominent, influential and industrious men of our locale during the 19th century was Charles A. Danolds. Today however, he is practically forgotten and unknown for his many enterprises, worthy concerns and accomplishments.

He was of New England stock, his grandfather having been a native of Connecticut. The name Danolds was originally spelled MacDanolds. The father of Charles Danolds was David who was born in Connecticut in 1788. He married Mattie Hosmer who was also born there in 1790. They produced nine children of which Charles Aldrich Danolds was the fourth.

David and Mattie Danolds moved to Western New York in the early part of the 19th century, first settling in Avon, N.Y. where he ran a brickyard. From there they moved to Stafford, N.Y. where he was engaged in the hotel business and also in the milling and potash businesses. It was there in Stafford on August 17, 1818 that Charles Danolds was born. From Stafford the Danolds family moved first to Batavia and then to Elba following similar pursuits as in Stafford. In the year 1833 David purchased several hundred acres of land at Oak Orchard-on-the-Ridge in Orleans County where he went into farming on a large scale.

Charles A. completed his education in the common schools and first kept a hotel at Oak Orchard-on-the-Ridge for about ten years. He was a popular hotel keeper in the days when the Ridge Road was the stagecoach thoroughfare. While in Oak Orchard he married Mary Jane Patterson of Elba in 1848.

In 1852 Charles Danolds bought a two hundred acre farm at Eagle Harbor where he and Mary Jane resided for the rest of their lives. Their union produced three children who were Charles, Warren, and Carrie P. who married Sands Cole, Jr. It was after he settled in Eagle Harbor that he ventured on a most active business career. Here he was first involved in the mercantile and potash businesses. He also owned and conducted four canal boats used for shipping.

In the year 1853 he procured his first large contract work, that of enlarging a section of the Erie Canal. He was an early friend of George M. Pullman and it was at this time that he was also able to secure for Mr. Pullman, then only twenty-two years of age, his first contract for doing some canal work. This bit of help from Mr. Danolds proved to be the beginning of the great fortune subsequently amassed by the sleeping car industrialist. During the mid-19th century Charles A. Danolds became one of the leading contractors in New York State. He was extensively engaged in the enlarging of waterways, not only the Erie Canal but also the Champlain Canal, Chenango extension, including locks, and work at Tonawanda and Black Rock. One of his most important contracts was the widening and building of six locks on the Welland Canal which was an engineering feat. In 1873 he acquired the contract for the construction of the Elmira Reformatory which was completed in 1879. He was also general superintendent of the Western Division of the Erie and Genesee Valley Canals for three years. He also built a great dam at Cohoes and a large reservoir at Cuba, N.Y. In some of these large projects he worked with Henry S. Danolds, his brother, as a partner and also George Lord.

During the Civil War and after, he entered into large contracts with the Federal government for the supply of horses. These great undertakings often brought him into very intimate relationships with the eminent politicians and prominent men of the state. At the time of his death, no Orleans County resident had wielded greater political influence than Mr. Danolds. Although he was influential in the Democrat Party he was a personal friend and admirer of Sanford E. Church, Haratio Seymour and Samuel J. Tilden.

When at home, Mr. Danolds enjoyed entertaining friends and relatives. He was a member of the Masonic and Odd Fellow fraternities. In religion he was a pronounced Universalist and was for many years an active and generous supporter of the Universalist Church (Cobblestone) at Childs. It was Mr. Danolds who first conceived the idea for a Universalist Church in Albion. While on a visit to the summer home of Mr. Pullman in the Thousand Islands during the summer of 1890, Mr. Danolds broached the subject which was met with great interest by Mr. Pullman. Subsequently, George Pullman built the Universalist Church in Albion at his own expense and presented it to the local congregation on January 31, 1895. It was erected as a memorial to his parents James L. Pullman and Emily Caroline Pullman. Mr. Danolds served as the first chairman of the board of trustees. On September 4, 1899 Charles A. Danolds died of cholera morbus after an illness of only a few hours. Although he died in the last century, the legacy of his various activities remains with us today.

Shown here with a portrait of Mr. Danolds is his great granddaughter, Mrs. William Crandall, of Waterport.