

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

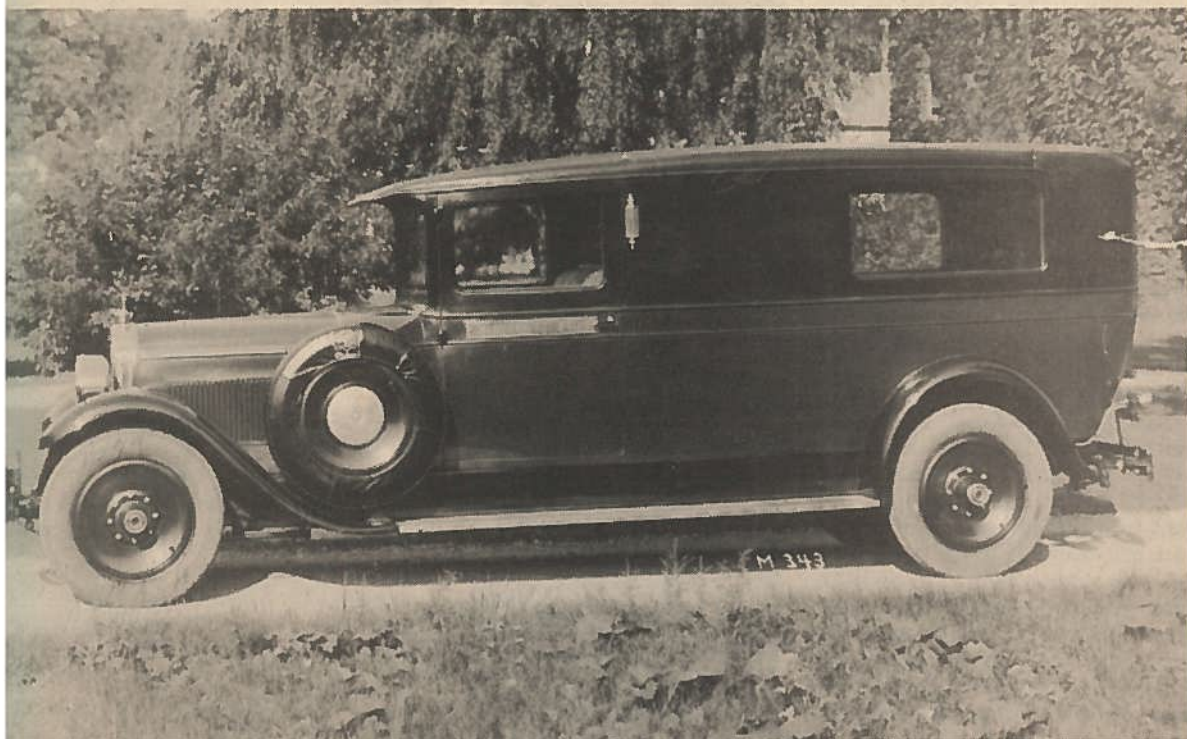
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75 YEARS FOR MERRILL—GRINNELL, INC.



Merrill-Grinnell, Inc. Funeral Directors of Albion and Holley will note the completion of 75 years as a funeral establishment. On Saturday, September 9 from 1-4 an open house will be held at their funeral home on 39 Geddes Street in Holley and the following day, Sunday, September 10 a similar open house will be held from 1-4 at their funeral home on 12 Ingersoll Street in Albion.

The Merrill family has been in the funeral business in Orleans County since 1914. The present firm of Merrill-Grinnell, Inc. of Albion and Holley was formerly J.B. Merrill and Son of Holley. In 1904 J.B. Merrill the founder, decided to leave his farm operation in the Town of Clarendon and move to Holley in order to give his three children a better opportunity for education. He obtained employment in a furniture and undertaking business and ten years later purchased that business under his name. His son Roy T. Merrill, assisted him during his school years. Roy graduated from Holley High School in 1915 and once stated "In my early days, horsedrawn vehicles were used, with the hearses on sleighs during the winter. In 1917 we purchased our first motor driven hearse. This was a high, ornately carved affair made by the Cunningham Co. of Rochester, reputed to be the finest hearse and coach builders in the United States. My job was to wash and service the vehicle as well as drive it. Naturally I was held responsible to have it ready for use at all times." The hearse pictured here, a Nash, was one the firm purchased in 1927.

It was in 1920 however, that J.B. Merrill with his forward-looking ideas, opened the very first funeral home in Orleans County at Holley. This was also one of the very first funeral homes in a rural community in New York state at the time. His contemporaries in nearby villages scoffed at the idea of such a service in so small a community. Little did they realize that this was the way of the future. Prior to this time, funerals were conducted in the family home where often the embalming took place and the undertaker carted folding chairs for the funeral guests. Other innovations of J.B. Merrill included the first use of a grave tent and grave trim in the area. Naturally, these features were soon copied by others and are commonplace today.

In 1922 after Roy T. Merrill returned from service in World War I, he became a partner with his father in the firm which then became known as J.B. Merrill and Son. And in 1928 J.B.'s daughter Erva Merrill Steele, a licensed funeral director, also became involved and later managed the Holley funeral home until her death in 1974.

In 1925 the firm purchased the furniture and funeral service business of Reynolds and Flintham in Albion which had been established in 1860 by Mayor George W. Ough. This acquisition then gave them three furniture stores; one located in Kendall, one in Holley and one in Albion. All three of these stores were discontinued by 1940 and the entire efforts of the firm were then devoted to their expanding funeral service. It was in 1930 that they opened a funeral home at 134 East State Street in Albion. This is a large majestic residence built in 1879 which they used for 25 years. During this period they also offered ambulance service. In 1955 the present Albion and Holley funeral homes were opened to the public. In Albion Merrill's purchased the former Church residence and transferred it into its present use as a funeral home.

In 1957 John B. Merrill, son of Roy T. Merrill, became a licensed funeral director and joined the family business. In the same year the funeral service of Leon C. Grinnell in Albion and J.B. Merrill & Son were merged and the name changed to Merrill-Grinnell, Inc. Roy Merrill who retired from the business several years ago died in 1986. Currently associated with the firm are four licensed funeral directors including John B. Merrill, Lee Minier, James Neilans and Scott Schmidt with receptionists Sally Borelo and Katherine O. Monacelli in Albion and Nancy Lavender in Holley.