

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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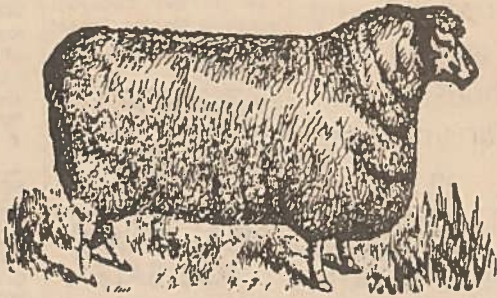
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No. 45

CALLING THE MARKET

RING UP

Brooks & Marshman,



14 East Bank St., Albion.

Bell and Citizens' Phones.
also at both residences.

Dealers in

MEATS,

Poultry, Fish,

OYSTERS and

VEGETABLES,

Let me direct your attention to the above advertisement which appeared in a booklet published by the local Womens Christian Temperance Union in 1902. I suppose you wonder what's special or important about it? At a quick glance I'll admit it's totally uneventful but when we stop and analyze all the parts, it suggests that life was different around the turn of the century.

The ad states, "Ring Up." Just imagine that! Imagine calling your friendly grocer and giving him the list of your needs over the phone and then having him deliver the groceries to your house free of charge. Well, I can remember a few people doing that even back in the 1950's. However, by the 1970's locally owned grocery stores gave up offering such a service as it was just too costly for them to do so. In fact, I tried to look up phone numbers in the white pages for several local super markets. Guess what? Some aren't even listed. Indeed, we are living in a different era than our grandparents a couple of generations ago.

Notice also that the ad indicates Bell and Citizens' Phones. Just imagine that problem. You see, there were two phone companies at the time which were not inner connected. Therefore, if you were to receive calls from all your customers, you had to have two phones, one a Bell and one a Citizens'. As the ad notes, Brooks & Marshman also had both phone systems in their residences as well. Naturally some people only had one phone system.

Now let's note their products. Look at what they've used for an illustration, a full grown sheep. Just imagine Mutton! However, years ago mutton was a standard meat staple. By contrast nowadays, one might find in the supermarket a leg of lamb and lamb chops. But because lambs are so cute and associated with children and innocence, I'm sure no butcher would want to illustrate his business with either a lamb or a sheep because of the stigma of mutton for some people.

And finally, note the oysters. This is probably

one thing which has become absent from menus more than anything else. Believe it or not, oysters were a part of every festive meal and for some people a part of almost every meal. Raw oysters on the half shell, oyster cocktail, oysters Rockefeller, oyster stew, escalloped oysters, smoked oysters, fried oysters, and even oyster dressing for that Thanksgiving turkey. Just imagine all that! People ate oysters and lots of them. My grandfather, Nahum Lattin, around the turn of the century would buy a barrel of unshucked oysters shipped up on the canal. These live oysters were put in the basement and fed cornmeal to keep them alive so that he always had fresh raw ones to eat out of the barrel. There was hardly a restaurant where you wouldn't see oysters of some sort on the menu. But in the last twenty-five years, with oyster beds becoming polluted, we've seen the popularity of this seafood drastically drop off. The very last restaurant in Orleans County to have oysters on the menu was the Maple Crest in Medina under the ownership of Margaret Raymond. With Margaret's passing we saw the end of a long era of the oyster in our restaurants.. I'm sure Diamond Jim Brady, the noted 19th century entrepreneur who was said to eat two dozen raw oysters just to start off the meal, would be pretty disappointed nowadays with our fat-free low cholesterol diets and lack of oysters. When you do find oysters in the store they are certainly very expensive and a delicacy. I imagine my grandfather got a whole barrel of them for what we have to pay for just a half pint.

Charles H. Brooks and Burnett Marshman were grocers and butchers around the turn of the century in Albion. As their ad indicates, they were located at 14 East Bank Street. In my youth I remember that store front as Mr. Pilato's fruit and vegetable market with crates of produce for sale out on the sidewalk. And what's more, he even delivered. Just imagine that!