

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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BALDACHINOS



As we approach Memorial Day many of us will make a trip to the cemetery. In so doing we will encounter a variety of monuments and symbols which adorn the graves of those who have passed away. One of the most splendid adornments of this nature in our county is shown above. In laymen's

terms, it is a canopy. In architectural terms, it is known as a baldachino. Briefly, it is an ornamental structure resembling a cloth canopy. Baldachinos are used in great cathedrals and large churches over the main altar. In essence, it symbolizes the most holy or sacred part of the church. For instance, St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and St. Patrick's Church in New York City both have baldachinos.

In a cemetery the same symbolism is somewhat derived by placing such a structure over or near a grave suggesting a very sacred spot. The baldachino shown here is located in Mt. Albion Cemetery on the Church Family lot. In place of an altar underneath the structure, we find a square monument immortalizing the names of Sanford E. Church who died in 1880 and his wife Ann Church who died in 1883.

Hon. Sanford E. Church was at one time Lt. Governor and later, Chief Justice of the Court of Appeals from 1867 until 1880. These dates certainly give us a time frame for the erection of the baldachino.

It is constructed of white marble with shafts of pink polished granite for the four columns. Stylistically, it is Gothic Revival with a very strong Victorian character to it. Note the incised designs in the frieze and on the capitols. Even the ceiling is ornamented with incised detail. The base is made of locally quarried Medina Sandstone which forms the treads. Originally, there was a life-size bronze dog resting on the top step symbolically guarding his master's grave. However, this was stolen in the late 1950's. There are a few miniature baldachinos in various county cemeteries. This however, is the only life size one in the county. Because of its uniqueness, it is truly one of our outstanding landmarks, small though it may be.