

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

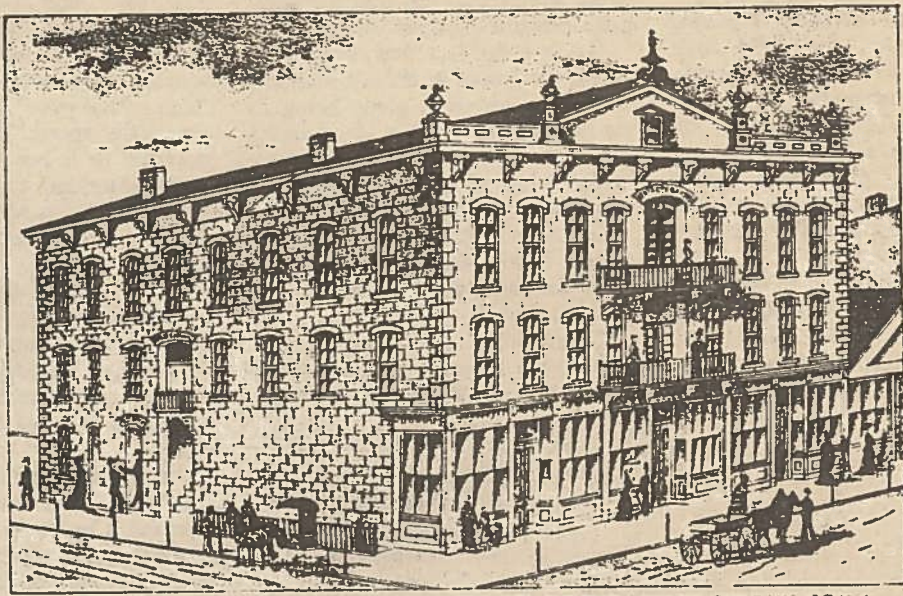
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## BOYHOOD DAYS



BENT'S OPEPA HOUSE MED. LA. TOWN OF RIDGEWAY, ORLEANS CO. LA.

The following article consists of excerpts from a letter published in the Medina Tribune back in 1931. The letter was written by Burley Barnes Ayers to James N. Boyd who was then President of the Medina Tribune Publishing Co. Although the letter was written sixty years ago, it reflects upon the 1860's which gives us a first hand view of early times in Medina.

"Dear Mr. Boyd: Your illustration of the old toll gate a mile south of Medina, appearing recently, brought back old memories. I spent a summer vacation there in 1871, helping take tolls. It was great fun and I became a great favorite with travelers. Was 12 years old. I invented a system of carrying pennies in my pocket to make change so they did not have to stop. Became well acquainted with the regular patrons. A line of grain wagons painted blue and called the "Blue Line" was run between Shelby (known then as Barnegat) and Medina, of which Mr. Harmon was proprietor. He drove a handsome buggy and made daily trips. His opposite was Mr. Bradwell, another grain buyer, who drove a dilapidated buggy. Another famous traveler was Mr. Schemerhorn, who owned a big straw-paper mill at Barnegat. Another famous patron was Volney Acer, who drove a fine double rig with the handsomest family of children I ever saw. He was my ideal of an elegant country gentleman and was very kind to me, so that when I visit Boxwood I doff my hat to his grave. Mr. Sumner lived at the top of the hill and was another fine gentleman farmer. His hired man was a swell guy who used to take Saturday Night off to drive to Medina and stopped at the Gate to buy a 5-cent cigar. He was my ideal of a real sport. Just under the hill the Oak Orchard creek swelled out into a pond that supplied the mill race that ran through Medina. The pond was loaded with bullfrogs whose nightly chorus was magnificent. My uncle, Ira Barnes, kept the toll gate that year. He was taken ill the following spring and died in the arms of Mr. Goodman and Mr. Dawson, of the Masonic lodge. Bob Searle and Will Prudden were other next door kids and pals. Bob's father was the one ice house owner.

"The Baker boys and I attended school at Miss Swift's in the Bent Block, and later changed to the Academy. I had another pal in Elmer Trask, who lived next door and was a pal of Frank Kearney. Frank Kearney took piano and appeared in recital in Kearney Hall. I plainly see him now before a square piano on the stage. He played so well I got excited and resolved to study piano also, which I

did. I saw the Presbyterian Church burn. It caught from across the alley. When the new church was built I saw my first pipe organ which was erected by House of Buffalo in 1872. Mrs. Gilbert, wife of the miller on Center Street, was organist. I pumped the organ. The grand harmonies of that organ thrill me yet.

"Some time ago you had stories about Dick Gordiner. He used to whitewash the ceilings of our house, corner of what is now South and Main Streets, as far back as 1866. He occupied a shack in what was then a wilderness just north of the Academy. He was a great talker while he whitewashed.

"I saw Brent's Hall built — wonder structure. Not so long after Mr. Blake, who had the drug store on the corner, lost his eyesight charging a soda fountain in the basement. Must have been risky things in those days — about as bad as our kerosene lamps that would explode and fire the house.

"Medina was largely Irish, a magnificent race of huge brawn. One community of them occupied "Paddy Hill" (properly named Laurel Hill). They all came directly from the old sod to operate the stone quarries that were flourishing mightily in those days, creating a commerce that supported three hotels of size and with the grain and apple and the immense canal traffic it seems to me created a bigger business than exists today. Captain Flynn, a doughty Irishman, was a celebrated navigator, commanding a line boat on the canal. His son was one of my pals. The mill race was a big asset to the village, operating a big planing mill, Becker's and Gilbert's flour mills and Mount's foundry. Our house was on the race. Great willow trees surrounded it in the branches of which I spent many summer days singing to the wind. I had a boat race in summer and skated on it in winter.

"Mrs. Bateman, wife of the miller in Gilbert's mill lived across the street. She had a son, Walter born helpless, could not talk. An awful sight. His mother lifted him in and out of bed from infancy to full grown manhood, a beautiful exhibit of maternal devotion. I had many school friends north of the New York tacks but except when going to school was kept closely at home for fear of being run over. Nowadays even every side street has many times the risk in autos — wonder what the mothers think now?

"Pardon this long letter. I simply love that life in Medina up to my thirteenth year."

Sincerely yours  
BURLEY BARNES AYERS