

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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ASTER DAY



Recently I've had several people ask me to do a story about Aster Day. Consequently, this old photo, taken on Aster Day 1912, shows the Mt. Albion Cemetery entrance and a vintage touring car decked out in an array of asters for the festivities. We note here that the auto is parked outside the fence, but that the horse drawn vehicles are inside the fence. It seems that back then automobiles were not allowed in the cemetery grounds. It must have been felt that such new fangled, noisy invention did not show proper respect for the dead. The touring car shown here must have simply been used to lead an entourage of people from Albion out to the cemetery. Back at this time of our history, people frequently strolled out to Mt. Albion on Sunday afternoons to pay their respects to the deceased. The cemetery was designed to be a beautiful place of repose, ornamented with landscape features, flowers, sculpture, architecture and even poetry in the form of epitaphs. A sidewalk once lead from the village to the cemetery and people were known to take a picnic lunch along. Hence there were many cast iron benches.

It was Cassius Marcellus Clay Reynolds who in

1906 came up with the idea of Aster Day. It seems that C.M.C. Reynolds was part owner of Reynolds and Flintham, a leading furniture and undertaking business in Albion at that time. Incidentally, that business was later purchased by J.B. Merrill & Son and is known today as Merrill Grinnel Funeral Directors.

Mr. Reynolds was a civic-minded man and a commissioner of Mt. Albion Cemetery. He founded the Aster Day movement which became popular in other places throughout the U.S. and Canada. It was always held on the Sunday closest to the 15th of September. On this day people were encouraged to decorate the graves of their loved ones with asters. It is said that the meaning of aster symbolized "after thought" to Reynolds. At any rate, many women raised these pink, white, blue, purple redish garden flowers for the sole purpose of Aster Day. When Aster day arrived, there were usually speeches by dignitaries at the cemetery amidst a beautiful flower display. Aster day practically became a national holiday bt unfortunately fell out of fashion following the death of its founder at age 81 in 1925.