

Bethinking of Old Orleans

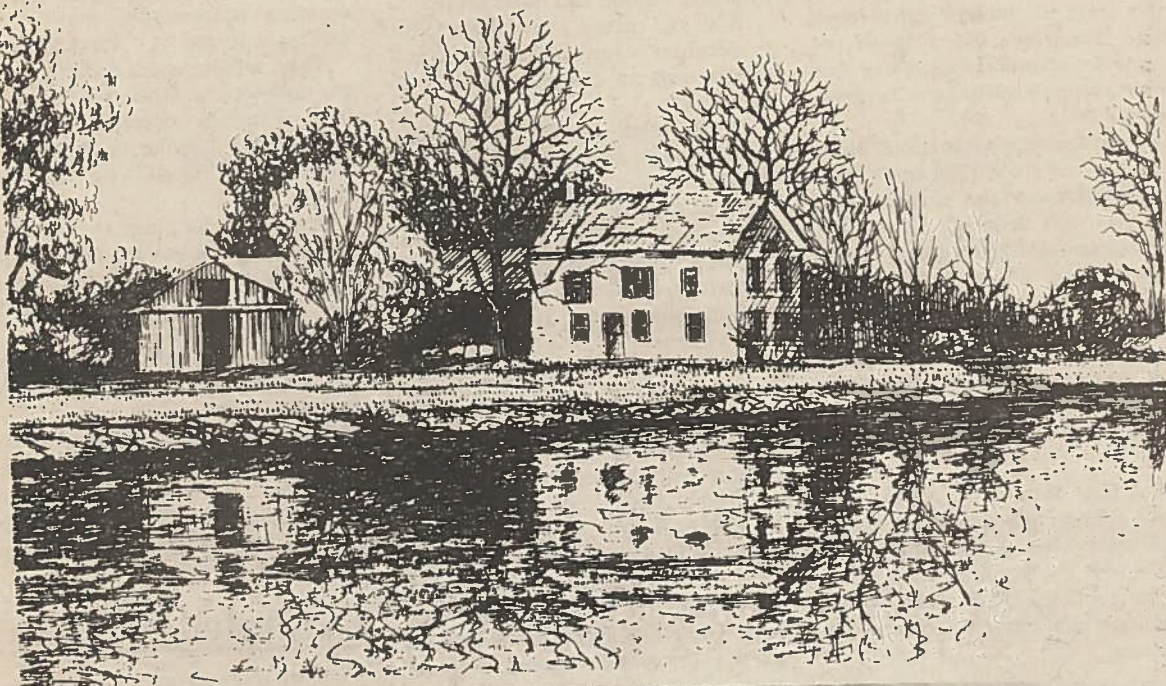
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LANDLOCKED



One of the most picturesque scenes along the historic Erie Canal may be found just west of Eagle Harbor in the Town of Albion. In fact, local artist Arthur Barnes picked up on this intriguing view back in 1990 when he made this pen and ink drawing with the old red brick house as a center of interest. Consequently, this scene by the same artist has been used on county tourism brochures. It is unique for it is the only single family dwelling on the canal which is located so close to the water's edge. Our rather dismal photo taken perhaps around 1910, shows the house before the canal was last widened and deepened which brought the south bank even closer to the front door.

The original owner of the property (a farm) was Avery M. Starkweather who acquired the land from the Holland Land Purchase in 1811. It remained in the Starkweather Family until 1943. After a succession of owners and a time of abandonment, it was in 1981 purchased by Charles Martillotta where he and his wife Gina now reside. It is the second house on the property, replacing the original log cabin no later than 1824. For this region, that makes the house a very early one and indeed, it is a fine example of the Federal Style.

To this point our story is uneventful and not much out of the ordinary. But as Paul Harvey would say, "Here is the rest of the story." It seems the Starkweather Family got to this site before there was a canal. In 1816 the surveyors of the canal plotted its route right through the family's log cabin. The brick house was built south of the site of

the log house at the same time the canal was being constructed through this part of the county. In other words, the canal was dug through Starkweather property dividing it into two parcels and separating the house from the road to the north. The canal commissioners offered Mr. Starkweather a significant amount of money or a bridge which they would keep maintained. Mr. Starkweather took the bridge because he wanted accessibility to the road. Over a period of years there were three different bridges located here as the canal was widened and deepened at various times. The last bridge across the canal here to simply service this house, was a steel arch type. However, when the canal was last enlarged through this region between 1910-1914, the canal authorities recognized a way to save the State money. So it was at that time, they offered the descendants of the original owner \$2,000.00 or a new bridge. They took the money and the State saved themselves the expense of a new bridge and its upkeep. Ever after, anyone who lived in this house had to travel a narrow treacherous path on the south bank of the canal to get to Eagle Harbor.

My own ancestors had a similar problem just west of Albion when the canal separated their farm from the road. They took the bridge each time the money was offered. In fact, there is still a bridge there near the guard gates which services that one farm. But the Starkweathers and everyone else at the old brick house since 1911, have found themselves landlocked.