

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

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## RESIDENCE OF CONGRESSMAN JOHN G. SAWYER



Earlier this year in Vol. XVIII No. 5 a biographical sketch appeared about John G. Sawyer, the last Congressman to be elected from Orleans County. Mr. Sawyer served three terms from 1885 to 1891. Our photo with this week's story shows the Sawyer residence as it appeared almost one hundred twenty years ago. I wish to thank Linda Krantz Smith for the loan of this wonderful picture which her father, Henry Krantz, had saved.

Indeed, this beautiful home was one of the venerable old dwellings which once graced South Main Street in Albion. It was located on the east side of the street at the corner of Chamberlain Street. Architecturally speaking, this was an Italian Villa which I believe was built in the late 1870's. Note the wide bracketed overhang, low pitched roof surmounted with a cupola just barely seen through the foliage. Other Italianate characteristics include the arched windows, arches between the veranda posts and the double window in the second story. The interior boasted a central hall with a flight of stairs which curved toward the top with a niche in the wall for statuary. The little side porch seen here, was an entrance to the dining room. We notice along side it, a driveway leading back to the carriage barn. A horse block or stepping stone is located by the dining room porch steps.

It's interesting that the color scheme of the house appears to be monochromatic. Although being a black and white photo, who can really say? We might assume the house to be light grey, off white, ivory or cream with only an accent color on the window sash and doors. What is odd, are the window blinds (shutters) which appear to be the same color as the siding and trim, rather than being painted the typical green in contrast to the body color of the house.

The Sawyers had two daughters, Julia (1859-1935) who married Gurdon Fitch (Vol. XVIII No. 7) and Mary (1861-1924) who married Herbert Bailey, an Albion grocer and produce dealer. It is strictly an assumption on my part, but I think it is Mary, the younger daughter who is standing by the hitching post in the foreground. There are also two

women standing on the porch in the shadows. They might well be Eliza Sawyer, the congressman's wife and the older daughter, Julia. Incidentally, Mary Sawyer Bailey was the mother of Lewis Bailey who will be remembered locally as a salesman of packing products for fruit farmers.

When Gurdon Fitch and Julia Sawyer were married in 1885, they made this house their residence along with the Sawyers. Julia died four days short of their fiftieth wedding anniversary in 1935, while Gurdon Fitch lived until 1948. At that time the house was sold to Newell and Maude Maxon. He had been Town Clerk of Shelby and later when they moved to Albion became the Albion Town Clerk. Maude was his Deputy and also the Welfare Officer. He died in 1959 and this house and one north of it, owned by Miss Lucy Arnold, were sold to A & P in 1961. Both were razed for the A & P store which opened in December 1962. Hence, the exact site where the Sawyer house stood is now a parking lot. Following the closing of A & P, Guido's store was here for a short time. Beginning in December 1980, the American Legion Sheret Post No. 35 used the former store, after extensive renovations, for a Post home.

It has been truly unfortunate that many of the very finest homes architecturally, which were located in a three-block area of South Main Street, were demolished for commercial development during the 1940's, 1950's and 1960's. Fifteen such residences as this one met with the wrecker's ball in an era when appreciation of such landmarks was overridden by what was thought to be progress.

The Rev. Kenneth L. Patton has written: "We have set ourselves over many things. We have gathered terrible powers into our hands. We have made ourselves masters of the planet, users of its stores, governors of its teeming life, exploiters of its energies of fire and fission. We have built and we have torn down; we have created and we have despoiled. We have chosen ourselves to be the leaders; but where are we leading the earth and its creatures?"

He certainly asks a poignant question. In retrospect, what we have wrecked and despoiled has surely been wasteful folly.