

Bethinking of Old Orleans

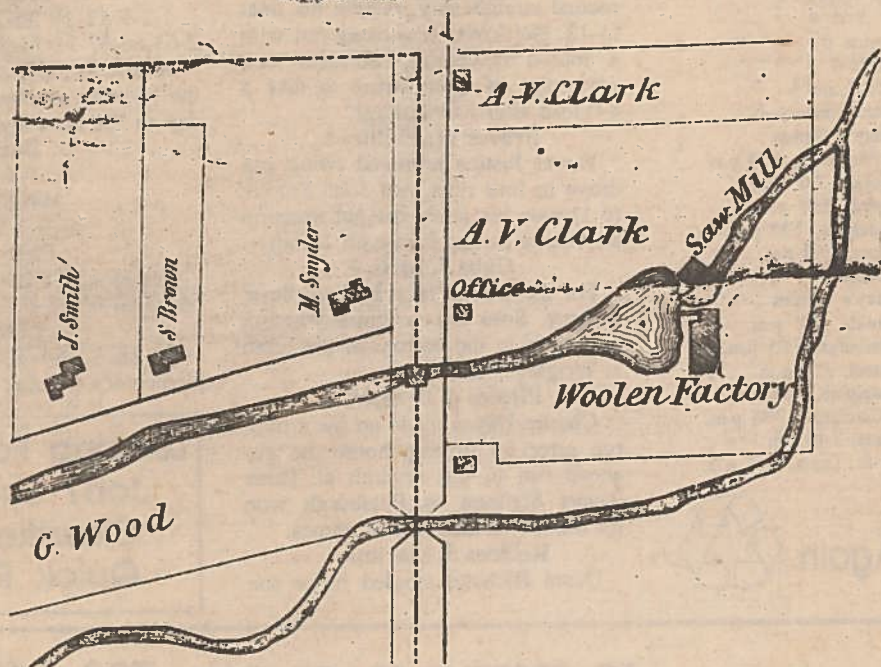
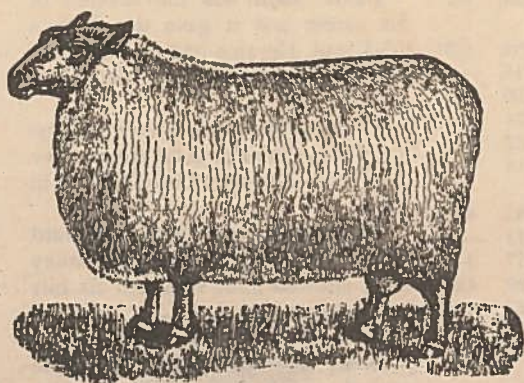
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ALBION'S WOOLEN FACTORY



Our diagram with this article is taken from the 1857 Village of Albion map. It basically shows Brown Street running north with Caroline Street running east perpendicular to it. At the head of Caroline Street, just outside of the village limits back then (dotted line), we see a mill pond and race way created by the West Branch of Sandy Creek. Next to the mill pond we plainly see a woolen factory on the south side and a sawmill on the north side. Note too, an office at the end of Caroline Street and that this property was owned by an A. V. Clark.

In an article written by L. H. Beach which appeared in the Orleans Republican in April 1922, we find the following bit of information on this establishment under the title: Dealing With Albion's Woolen Mill and Early Grist Mills.

"In the earlier days of Albion's history a woolen mill did business at the east end of Caroline Street where the abandoned grist mill now is. It was built about 1836 by Nathaniel Braley, father of Byron H. Braley, and was regarded as an essential industry at that time. The farmers brought in their wool and the mill produced the popular sheep's-gray-cloth -- an honest-to-goodness virgin wool fabric such as would cost big money to duplicate in those days. In 1852 Mr. Braley traded the mill property with one R. A. Rice for a farm in Michigan and two of his sons went west to work it. Subsequently the ownership changed a number of times, and some time in the early sixties the mill was burned, Orville Bennett then having title. The old mill stood to the west of the present grist mill, and on the south was a saw mill. Later this became a cider mill and was next converted into a grist mill by Jerome Lee. Robert VanStone operated it for a time with profit and the property is now held by a Mr. Miaski. The raceway on Caroline Street was constructed to give power to these mills. A few years ago the village bought this raceway, which had become a menace to the health of the locality, and it has been practically all filled in."

As L. H. Beach indicates, the property changed a number of times. A. V. Clark was one of the subsequent owners.

In the mid-19th Century, mills abounded in our country wherever water power could be stored in a mill pond or reservoir for generating purposes. Indeed, many of our present-day communities were positioned near a water power source.

Here are a few: Shelby Center, Medina, Jeddo, Waterport, Lyndonville, Millville, Clarendon, Holley, Albion, Kendall Mills, Kenyonville, Oak Orchard-on-the-Ridge and Murray, formerly known as Sandy Creek. Flour mills, grist mills and saw mills were essential to getting the area settled in pioneer times. As food and shelter are all important. It stands to reason that an industrious settler such as Nathaniel Braley would be involved in such a milling enterprise as a Woolen Factory.

From Landmarks of Orleans County, we find this information: "Nathaniel Braley was born in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, in 1796....married Sarah Wickham, who was born in Columbia County, N.Y. in 1799, and came to Gaines in 1816 with her brother, Dyer Wickham, and her uncles, Daniel and Jonathan Brown. They had ten children, seven of whom were born in their original log house....Nathaniel Braley brought with him a quantity of apple seeds which he had washed from some pomace at a cider mill, and these furnished many of the pioneers with their first orchards. To his first purchase of eighty acres he added an adjoining lot of fifty acres, and on this built a frame barn and a substantial brick house. In 1836 he and Alfred H. Rice purchased the clothiery and saw mill of Smith & Lee. This afterward became the woolen factory of Braley & Northrup, succeeded by Braley & Sons, and later the grist mill of Robert VanStone."

In 1837, by an exchange with Palmer Cady, Mr. Braley became the owner of what had been the Crandall farm, on which he resided until his death in 1880.