

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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SHELBY CENTRE



Surely one of the outstanding architectural landmarks in the Town of Shelby is the old Shelby Center Hotel. Pictured here around fifty-five years ago, it presents an image remembered by older residents. Now mute and boarded up, this vestige of a once bustling community lies waiting for a creative, imaginative and energetic force to rejuvenate it. Unmistakenly clad in Greek Revival detail, this building is historically noteworthy, dating back to the 1840's. The third floor served as a large dance hall which is said to have a spring floor to accommodate the weight of people dancing. Such floors were considered superior to one which were completely stationary.

Mrs. Bonnie Hartway of Medina points out that in tourist and travel brochures, it is the quaint and significant historic buildings in communities that are pictured to attract visitors, not modern stores which can be found anywhere.

A word to the wise: Community leaders should continue to recognize our architectural assets and do whatever is necessary to encourage private investors. Let them play upon our rich heritage and the visual charm. Tourism and ultimately financial returns can be gleaned by preserving historic buildings. Such structures are a part of our community fabric interwoven with the generations before us. How often we have seen neighborhoods devalued when the aesthetic appeal of historic architecture is not recognized for its intrinsic value to the betterment of community pride. The old Shelby Center Hotel is no exception.

The 1860 Niagara Orleans County map notes this place as Shelby Centre (archaic spelling). The building pictured is labeled as a hotel, store, and post office at that time. Known in the past as Ellicott's Mills and Barnagat, it was a thriving settlement before the Village of Medina was settled.

The first notice of Shelby Centre in the Holland

land office in Batavia was the parceling off of one lot and part of another to Col. Andrew Ellicott. This was on Nov. 9, 1810. Colonel Ellicott's brother Joseph, when he surveyed this plot for the Holland Land Company, noticed the attractive features of these lands and took the best of the lands he surveyed for himself in payment for his services as a surveyor.

To facilitate the growth of the new village, the Ellicotts with the aid of the Holland Land Company, opened the first highway from Shelby Centre east to Oak Orchard Road in the town of Barre. Later a road was built to Salt Works leading to a point north of where Medina now stands.

Colonel Ellicott was the patron of the village and one of his first deeds was to make friends with the Tonawanda Indians. So kindly did they receive him that shortly afterwards he was adopted into the tribe under the name Kiawana, meaning "A Good Man". He never passed up an opportunity to befriend them with food in periods of scarcity.

The first settler in the town of Shelby was Alexander Coon.

According to records, Mr. Coon came in by the Lewiston Road. The first birth in Shelby was that of Asa Coon, son of Alexander, Feb. 14, 1811. The first death occurred more than a year later, William Bennett, Oct. 4, 1812.

There was no tavern until 1816 when Daniel Timmerman opened one. The first store was opened two years later by Christian Groff. Cornelius Ashton taught the first school during the winter of 1815-16. The first regular physician was Dr. Christopher Whaley, who began the practice in 1819. Colonel Ellicott was the first postmaster at Ellicott's Mills.

John Van Brocklin built what is believed to be the first iron foundry in Orleans County here in 1821. Naturally, Shelby Centre, being situated on Oak Orchard River, had its share of early mills so necessary to the development of our area.