

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

Vol. XVIII

9-3-96

No. 35

REMINISCENCES

During the early 1920's the Orleans Republican published a weekly column entitled "Reminiscences" with a sub title "Doings of the Old Days Long Gone By-Do You Remember?" The column was compiled by Lafayette H. Beach, the editor for whom the park is named on West State Street in Albion.

The little column is literally chuck full of interesting tidbits of a varied nature. Usually one-liners comparable to sound bits today. But in these brief reminiscences, there is indeed, a great deal of colorful local history. Let us remember that these reminiscences were written down over seventy years ago by someone who was then going back some fifty or more years in time. Hence, we now have a window on life as it was perhaps back in the 1870's

Here is a random selection of what Mr. Beach wrote:

Do You Remember?

When venison and bear meat were sold in the local markets every winter?

When the Village Hall site was a vacant lot on which traveling humbugs and fakers sold gew-gaws and worthless cure-alls by the light of smoking torches?

When the first moving picture was shown in Albion, depicting the rescue of two horses from a burning barn, and how we all wondered at the curling smoke and moving figures?

When choirs in Albion churches were all located in the rear of the room - the preacher at one end and the singers at the other?

When the Democrats erected the tall McClelland flag pole on the Court House corner in 1864, two hickory poles being brought from E.B. Lattin's woods in Gaines by four yokes of oxen and the two poles spliced together to make the one towering flagstaff?

When the gas company employed lamp-lighters to light and extinguish the gas lamps about town and they made their daily trips with a ladder and a pocket full of matches?

When one April fool-day some of the Albion Academy boys took a stolen wagon apart and reassembled it way up in the belfry, where it remained until Prof. Morehouse had thrown half a dozen particular fits?

When the milkman rang his bell at your front gate and you went out with a pail or pitcher to receive your dipped milk, before we learned to fear germs?

When all coal was shipped in by canal and a dozen husky men found work unloading the boats?

When wood-burning locomotives were used on the Central Railroad and great piles of 4-foot wood were stored near the depot, supplied by local contractors?

When Albion's three sawmills sawed and shaved their own shingles and employed boys and girls for fifty cents a day to pack and bunch the shingles?

When old Mrs. Riggs held forth as a fortune-teller near the fairgrounds and inveighed the half dollars from people who wanted to pierce the future?



L. H. BEACH

When spray rigs were unknown and worms and bugs had their orchard picnics and chewing matches without fear of poison sprays?

When plank roads were built and maintained on the main north and south highways out of Albion and travelers were held up at the toll gates on north and south main streets for a 5¢ toll?

When it was the common practice in political campaigns to string the streets with Japanese lanterns and spend loads of money for fireworks and brass music whenever a spellbinder came to town to instruct (?) the people?

When town pumps were located in convenient places for the benefit of residents without wells?

When the Bidelman tannery at Gaines made a market for the farmers' hides and drew great bales of leather to Albion for shipment by railroad?

When a dozen oyster houses did business here and you sat on a high stool at the counter and soused peppersauce on the bivalves as the half-shells were passed to you?

When a jail-bird named Carpenter descended into a dry well in the jail and tunneled his way to freedom outside the jail wall?

When the old folks always put a foot stove in the bob sleigh in winter and sometimes used the heater in the church pew on Sunday?