

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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THE WAY SIDE INN



Hundreds, if not thousands of people, pass through this 4-way intersection daily, which is shown in our photo. I dare say however, very few will recognize this location from the picture. The house pictured here, an early landmark in the Town of Barre, has been remodeled and disquised almost beyond recognition. The place has a name too - Benton's Corners. And I dare say that probably doesn't mean much to most people either. In fact, the house is no longer in the Town of Barre but rather the Town of Albion. Having kept you in suspense long enough - this is the intersection of Oak Orchard Road (Rt. 98) and East Lee Street Road (Rt. 31A) where there is a caution light. Our photo, taken around the turn of the century shows the house on the north east corner.

In 1875 the northern part of the Town of Barre was sub-divided to form the Town of Albion. But in earlier times this structure played a role in the history of Barre. It seems that Oliver Benton took an article of land from the Holland Land Co. in 1812. In 1818 he built a large tavern at the corner of oak orchard and Lee Roads. In the early history of Barre many important events took place here as this is where the town meetings were held and voters gathered to cast their ballots in general elections. Oliver Benton was appointed Barre Post-

master in 1823 so this also became a post office. In November 1826 he was also elected the second sherriff of Orleans County. The intersection was called Benton's corners for many years in his honor.

As a tavern it was the site of noted balls and gatherings for several generations. The sign hanging off the tree to the left, in part states "Way Side Inn. Beer - Ale." In the History of the Town of Barre 1818-1968 Helen Mathes notes it was also called "The Half Way House." I can understand that name because it was half way between Barre Center and Albion. The 1913 New Century Atlas notes this place as "Maple Croft". It was then the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Harry D. Waldo and took its name from the maple trees surrounding the grounds. The Atlas also notes that the first town meeting was held in 1818 and that Mr. Waldo purchased the property in 1911. He was for many years Orleans County Highway Superintendent. Later the house was the residence of Mr. and Mrs. George Wolcott and family.

In my opinion as we see the house here, it was probably dressed up in the Italian Style during the 1870's with a porch, bracketted over hang and cupola. It's doubtful if Oliver Benton's original tavern had any of these elements.