

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT



Our photo this week is certainly one of great intrigue. When completely studied, it tells a lot about a bygone era of time. It shows us the interior of the Patrick J. Donahue Barbershop which was located at 3 East Bank Street in Albion, N.Y. The calendar on the wall to the far right is turned to April 1892.

As we glance into this moment of time, one-hundred five years ago, it is the shaving mugs which catch our eyes. Two cabinets predominate this shop with rows of little niches each filled with a mug in which there is lather and a shaving brush.

From a little news clipping dated 1938, Fred Callard, then an old time barber, who also had a shop on East Bank Street, is quoted as saying: "Individual shaving mugs are a thing of the past." He goes on to say: "People have got out of the habit of wanting them and you can't even buy one now".

Mugs like these pictured were personalized most often with the man's name or initials in gold script. Some men would frequent a barbershop like this almost daily for a shave. Mr. Callard noted: "There was a time when many a man insisted on his own shaving mug, cream dish, razors, combs and shears. And some even had individual clippers." The article goes on to state: "Those were the days when bay rum was a popular odor and a person felt that he had been poorly treated indeed, unless he sallied forth from the barbershop bearing a tell-tale scent of lotions." Fred Callard said the most famous person he had ever given a shave was ex-president Taft when he visited Albion in 1920.

The Donahue Barbershop which is pictured, was located in the Empire Block next to the jewelry store on the four-corners (Now Albion Chamber of Commerce). When I was a youngster in the early 1950's it was still a barbershop but with Mike Donatelli and Leo Shortsleeve as barbers.

At the time this picture was taken, the shop employed three barbers none of whom are identified here. Three patrons also appear in wooden barber chairs. The two at the left are being shaved. Note the man to the far left has his face all lathered

up. A couple of other men may be seen in the reflection of the mirror to the right along with the traditional barber pole symbol. The pole is outside and the men could also be outside in front of the shop.

Note how the interior of the barbershop is decorated with flamboyant wall paper and several pictures including one of a hunting dog. Notice also, there is an early electric light fixture hanging over each barber chair. The counter under the shaving mug cases shows several bottles, no doubt some filled with bay rum or other lotions. A high chair for little boys appears in the lower right corner.

To the very far left we note a girl seated in a chair. Perhaps she was simply there waiting for her father. The 1894 County Directory lists six barbers in Albion. The 1903 Directory lists twenty-four barbers in the county (all men) and one hair dresser in Albion (also male) who would have done women's hair. The 1911 Orleans County Directory lists twenty-four barbers (all men) and two hair dressers both of whom were women. The 1926 Directory again lists twenty-four different barbers (all men). But under hairdressers we notice a considerable change. There are now five different listings (all women) including the "French Beauty Shoppe" on E. Bank Street in Albion. It had to be one of the first so-called beauty shops in the county. This change certainly begins to reflect changing hair styles for women in the 1920's.

A local woman now in her ninetys tells that when she was in college in 1925 she went to a barber and had her below the waist in length hair bobbed. When she came home for Thanksgiving vacation her mother wouldn't speak to her because of that, until she got ready to leave again for college.

Indeed, over the years there has been a great transition in hair styling, shaving, and who's doing it. What was predominantly a man's profession, has almost completely flip-flopped to where there are now many more women in the profession.

As a note of interest - March is Women's History Month.