

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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A GRAIN WAREHOUSE



This picture of a warehouse located on the south side of the Erie Canal at Hindsburg was taken on Jan. 11, 1911. The 1875 Niagara Orleans Atlas shows the warehouse as belonging to L.G. Burns. Likewise, the 1887-88 Orleans County Directory lists Lewis G. Burns at Hindsburg as postmaster, grocer, and grain dealer. The 1869 Directory simply lists him as owning a grocery and meat market.

Mr. Burns was born Oct. 27, 1826 in the Town of Murray. He was engaged in farming until 1857 when he then became involved in mercantile trade at Hindsburg. It's possible Mr. Burns built this warehouse in the late 1850's.

We normally think of a warehouse as a strictly utilitarian structure and for the most part, this is. However, we see on the building some Greek revival architectural embellishments around the roof line. Although this warehouse was a functional structure, the builder went to the trouble and expense to enhance it with style. There is related to us here, a sense of aesthetics and pride of workmanship through a totally functional building.

As a grain dealer, L.G. Burns needed a large warehouse primarily for the storage of wheat which he would have been purchasing from local farmers. The warehouse situated directly on the canal bank served as a point of shipment.

Note the five chutes sticking out the side of the

warehouse for loading bulk wheat on the canal boats from bins inside. Incidentally, the sign posted there notes: "Caution Motor Boats must not exceed 4 miles - Hour". Notice to the far right up the hill a straw stack in a barnyard. Surely another indication of grain production.

The photo was taken before the Erie Canal was last widened and deepened. With the water out of the canal we can see just how shallow it used to be.

The L.G. Burns warehouse was appropriated by the State of New York and was demolished by 1913. Few commercial buildings of this nature which once lined the banks of the old Erie Canal in towns and hamlets, remain. But in the early canal days when farmers and other business people relied on it as the main source of transportation, there were such warehouses. As industrialization hewed its course and railroads put canalers out of business, the old warehouses became obsolete. Freight houses along the railroad lines soon began to take the place of buildings like the warehouse you see here. Our photo however, gives evidence of the fact that this area was once the leading grain producer in the country. That's all back in the second quarter of the 19th century when Rochester was "The Flour City" and upstate New York was "The Bread Basket of the World".