

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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A DRY HOUSE OR EVAPORATOR



This photo of a dry house was taken from an unidentified glass plate negative. It, along with some other glass negatives, were discovered several years ago by Cliff and Doris Kelley in their barn at Gaines. Many of the scenes could be identified as being in either the Towns of Gaines or Carlton from around 1902-03-04. Therefore, we assume this dry house was a local one.

The problem is that one hundred years ago there were many such businesses like this in rural communities. The apple industry was a major importance to the agricultural community. In the Albion Souvenir Book of 1905 it is reported: "For the last ten years there has been shipped from the county an average of about 525,000 barrels of merchantable apples each year, the average price paid being \$1.50 per barrel.

"In addition to this, there is a large quantity of the inferior fruit that is evaporated and shipped in packages of about 50 pounds each, and the poorest fruit is manufactured into cider in large quantities.

"There are now several large vinegar factories in the county. The total receipts from the apple crop each year will average about one million dollars, although the crop varies largely from year to year."

One hundred years ago there were cold storages in the communities along the railroads where apples were preserved and kept for shipment. But keeping perishable fruit from spoiling years ago was a problem without electric refrigeration.

Therefore, the drying of apples was an important side line to the fruit industry. The 1903 Orleans County Business Directory list 7 evaporators in the Town of Carlton, I know that's hard to believe. They were: Frank Harris (Waterport), O.A. Huff (Kent), Albert Ives (Waterport), Thomas Maginn (Carlton Station), Quale & Rowley (Kenyonville), William Still (Waterport), and Edson

Wickham (Waterport). For the Town of Gaines there were four evaporators. The Daniels Bros., Freeman & Root (Eagle Harbor), W.W. LeFrois and M & J Sandle (Gaines). Our photo could easily be any one of the evaporators above. The total number of evaporators listed in the 1903 directory is a whopping 46 for the entire county.

Let's take a closer look at our picture. The first thing that strikes me is the number of people employed at the business. Granted, it was mostly seasonal labor. In the photo there are 27 people including 8 women, 2 boys (seated on roof) and a team of horses. I judge the owner is the well-dressed gentleman standing in front of the doorway. The women were no doubt, hired to slice and peel the apples to get them ready for drying. That would have been a gender-biased job. Likewise, the men were there for handling, shipping, shoveling, loading, stoking the fires in the furnaces and general management, also gender biased!

Next, note the number of chimneys on the building. There are three plus a number of ventilators. Apple slices were placed on drying racks above the heat from the furnaces which dried or evaporated the fruit. Small amounts of sulphur dioxide were also burned along with the fuel wood to keep the apples from getting moldy, and to make them whiter. The team hitched to the wagon shows 50 pound bags of dried apples ready for delivery, maybe even to the railway dock for shipment to some far off city.

Note too, the number of apple bins next to the dry house and the heap of apples to the far right. A man sitting in a second floor window seems to be holding a drying rack. In all, this is a wonderful piece of Americana, a telling bit of history in more ways than one!

NOTICE: Mt. Albion Cemetery tour - Sat. October 18, 2:00 p.m.