

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

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## GRACE BEDELL AND HER ADVICE TO LINCOLN

To the best of anyone's knowledge Abraham Lincoln was never in Orleans County. Our firsthand attachment to him by any local history is therefore at best very remote except through Grace Bedell Billings (1848-1936). Grace's parents, Norman and Amanda Bedell came to Albion, N.Y. the year they were married in 1827. In 1831 they purchased a new home at 350 West State Street in Albion, which is now the residence of Jim and Barb Passarell.

The family lived there for over forty years except from 1859-1861. Norman Bedell in 1827, built a foundry on East Bank Street in Albion where he cast stoves and ranges. His business later expanded and was known as Bedell and Berry Co. and by the mid 1850's they employed from 75 to 100 men. They were able to cast as many as 30 ranges a day which were shipped as far west as Detroit, leaving Orleans County on the old Erie Canal.

In 1859 Norman Bedell decided to move to Westfield, N.Y. to extend his stove-making knowledge. The Bedells evidently did not expect to spend many years in Westfield as they rented out their Albion house. We can assume that they were fairly well-to-do as Norman helped found and endow the Genesee Wesleyan College which was located at Lima, N.Y. We know that George Pullman made use of a college scholarship given by Norman Bedell. The Bedells belonged to the Albion Methodist Episcopal Church which like many churches had become a hot bed over the issues of slavery versus abolition. The harsh treatment of slaves as described in Harriet Beacher Stowe's book "Uncle Tom's Cabin" touched the Bedell's, especially their daughter Grace.

Naturally Norman Bedell was a supporter of Lincoln and in the Fall of 1860 he brought home from a fair in Chautauqua County where they were living at the time, a political poster. Upon seeing the poster, Grace Bedell unbeknown to anyone wrote the following letter to Lincoln.

Westfield Chautauqua Co. NY  
Oct. 1860

"Hon. A B Lincoln

Dear Sir

My father has just come from the fair and brought home your picture and Mr. Hamlin's. I am a little girl only eleven years old, but want very much you should be President of the United States so I hope you wont think me very bold to write to, such a great man as you are. Have you any little girls about as large as I am, if so give them my love and tell her to write to me if you cannot answer this letter. I have got 4 brothers and part of them will vote for you anyway, and if you will let your whiskers grow I will try to get the rest of them to vote for you you would look a great deal better for your face is so thin. All the ladies like whiskers and they would tease their husbands to vote for you and then you would be President. My father is going to vote for you and if I was a man I would vote for you to but I will try to get everyone to vote for you that I can. I think that rail fence around your picture makes it look very pretty I have got a little baby sister she is nine weeks old and is just as cunning as

*Private*  
Springfield, Ill. Oct 19, 1860  
Miss Grace Bedell  
My dear little Miss,  
Your very agreeable letter  
of the 15<sup>th</sup> is received -  
I regret the necessity of saying I  
have no daughters - I have three  
sons - one seventeen, one nine, and  
one seven, years of age - They, with  
their mother, constitute my whole fam-  
ily -  
As to the whiskers, having never seen  
any, do you not think people would  
call it a piece of pie, affection  
if I were to begin to grow?  
Your very anxious well-wisher  
A. Lincoln.

can be. When you (send) your letter direct to Grace Bedell Westfield Chautauqua County New York I must not write any more answer this right off. Goodby Grace Bedell."

Lincoln was so touched by the innocence of this child's letter that he responded to her in a letter dated Oct. 19, 1860, a copy of which appears here. We all know what the outcome was as he decided to take her advice. In Feb. 1861 Pres. elect Lincoln passed through Westfield, N.Y. on a train enroute to Washington, D.C. It was in Westfield that he gave a brief speech following which he asked if Grace Bedell was present. Upon this invitation to meet her personally, Grace was led through the crowd to the train where Lincoln greeted her with a kiss and simply said, "You see, I let these grow for you, Grace".

In 1861 the Bedells returned to Albion to live and in Dec. 1867 Grace married George Billings of East Gaines. There George helped run their family store but was greatly influenced by Horace Greeley and his advice to young men to go west. It was in 1870 that George and Grace took that advice and moved to Kansas where they spent the rest of their lives. The letter which Grace had received from the Great Emancipator always hung framed in their home library.

To commemorate this piece of American History of which we are a small part, an historic marker will be erected at 350 West State Street by Oct. 19, the 137th anniversary of Lincoln's response. The historical marker has been paid for by the Orleans County Historical Association and the Orleans County Department of History.

The marker states:

CHILDHOOD HOME  
of Grace Bedell 1848-1936  
In 1860 she wrote A. Lincoln  
suggesting he would look  
better with a beard. He  
responded & took her advice.

NOTICE Annual Fall Tour of Mt. Albion Cemet-  
ery - Sat., Oct. 18 - 2 p.m.