

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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ROSWELL S. BURROWS 1798-1879



Roswell S. Burrows was born in Groton, Conn. Feb. 22, 1798. He attended an academy in Conn. and entered Yale College in 1819 studying for just a year, when poor health forced him to leave. However, in 1867 he was conferred an honorary degree of A.M. by Yale. In the early 1820's, with some capital from his grandfather, he purchased a cotton factory in Rhode Island where he carried on business for himself. The factory not being profitable, he sold out receiving a small down payment and the rest in mortgage which proved a total loss.

In July 1824, he came to Orleans County and settled in Albion. At the time, the Erie Canal was finished as far west as Lockport. Having borrowed two thousand dollars from his father and a like sum from his father-in-law, he commenced in business as a merchant on the east side of Main Street near the canal. In Nov. 1824 his younger brother Lorenzo Burrows, also came to Albion to assist him as a clerk. In 1826 they formed a firm of R.S. & L. Burrows which dealt in dry goods and produce. After ten or so years, they sold out the dry goods business.

In 1825 Roswell Burrows received the appointment of Collector of Canal Revenues. An office for this was established in Albion. He remained in this position until 1832. In 1827 the Burrows brothers had built a large warehouse making good business use of the canal traffic.

In 1839 Roswell and Lorenzo Burrows established the Bank of Albion. This was located in the newly built Burrows block which still stands on Main Street at the canal in downtown Albion. In 1863 Roswell Burrows organized a new bank

known as the First National Bank of Albion. This was the first National Bank that went into operation west of Syracuse in N.Y. State. Roswell Burrows was the president and owned a majority of the capital stock.

In 1851 Roswell Burrows and his wife Louise built a beautiful mansion at the corner of Main and West State Streets in Albion. In 1899 this residence was transformed into the Swan Library. Likewise, Lorenzo Burrows built an equally impressive home on Main Street which is now the Albion Federal Savings and Loan Association.

Roswell Burrows had many diversified interests in various business including: large stock holdings in railroads, telegraph companies, and a mining company. He was also very active in the Niagara Falls Suspension Bridge Company. Over his career he indeed, amassed a fortune through his shrewd and clear-headed business manner.

Because of his wealth he became known as a liberal donor to the causes he endorsed. In 1850 he became a founding trustee of the University of Rochester. He later gave the Rochester Theological Seminary a library of rare and valuable books which had been collected through many years by one of the best scholars in Europe at that time. Along with this interest in the theological school, Mr. Burrows was a staunch supporter of the First Baptist Church in Albion.

"Blest the man who possesses a keen intelligent mind."

Aristophanes