

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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REFLECTIONS



"Bethinking of Old Orleans" first appeared as a weekly column in January 1979. There have been just a few skips along the way. With the publication of this article the total number now reaches 1000. It has been a privilege to provide this service in behalf of Orleans County. I'd especially like to give recognition to my mother Avis Lattin for her many hours as a volunteer typist in this endeavor week after week.

When my father was appointed County Historian in 1958 he recognized like myself, that we always live in a period of transition. With camera in hand he set out to take pictures of vanishing sites. One of his photos which is shown here was taken just forty years ago in the Town of Carlton. It depicts the old fashioned type R R crossing signs which at the time were vanishing landmarks. These stated: "RAIL ROAD CROSSING LOOK OUT FOR THE CARS". He wanted me to stand by the sign to show its size in relationship to a person. I would have been 13 1/2 years old at the time. As I recall, this was taken at the Park Avenue crossing of the "Ho-jack" Line which has since been out of service for over 25 years.

For this one thousandth article it seems appropriate for me to reflect on some transitions from my own neighborhood through childhood memories. Indeed, there have been many changes over the past fifty years but occurring gradually, we seldom take notice.

The neighborhood of Gaines Basin Road north of the Erie Canal and West Bacon Road in the Town of Gaines is today not unlike many rural areas with homes and farm land. Fifty years ago there were seven or eight working farms here, all with various sorts of livestock. Today there isn't a cow, work horse, pig, sheep or chicken in the neighborhood. Back then there were eighteen barns. Today only six of them survive. Most of the land is now rented out to two or three farm operations who raise soy beans,

corn, wheat or perhaps cabbage. But I can remember fields of tomatoes and peas when such fruits and vegetables were processed locally. I also recall going to the pea vinery and getting ensilage to feed the cows in the winter. Indeed, farm families were much more self-

sufficient years ago. We had our own eggs, beef, pork, chicken and garden vegetables which my mother either canned or froze. Not having a home freezer, we rented a locker, like many people did, at the Growers Cold Storage and also at Walter Rowley's Storage and store. I can remember my mother washing and packing eggs and taking them to Greggs Red & White Store in trade for merchandise. I recall my Dad taking his own wheat, oats or corn to the GLF grist mill in Knowlesville to have it ground for cow feed and chicken food or scratch. Each spring we got baby chicks through Lester Canham. They were put in the brooder coop which was heated with a little coal stove under a big hood to keep the chicks warm. What a job it was just to carry pails of water to the chicken houses.

The big event of every season was when Howard Bigger came with his threshing machine pulled by a big green Huber tractor with a roof on it. The threshing machine was backed into the barn so bundles of wheat which had been stored there could be pitched down by a neighbor or two into the machine for threshing. The result was a huge straw stack in the middle of the barnyard. Ours had a pen under it so the straw formed a natural thatched roof. The straw was otherwise used for bedding in the barn stables.

We harvested hay loose. As a kid of 7 or 8 years old I can remember steering the farm truck with a hay loader hitched behind it while my dad and hired hand pitched it around to make a load. This was after our hired man John Green, had cut it with a horse-drawn mowing machine. John was an old gentleman who didn't like tractors and preferred horses. Although my dad had a small Farm-All tractor he still kept the team of horses until about 1956. It was indeed, a period of transition. I've seen first hand, a one-horse plow in operation and vividly remember how the horses pulled with more gusto when headed toward the barn, then when going in the opposite direction.

Where there used to be fields, there are now houses. In fact, there are almost twice as many houses as there were fifty years ago and with the installation of water lines there may be even more to come. In some ways we've become much more sophisticated. West Bacon Road used to be dirt and closed in the winter. It's now hard to find a public access road that is not black topped.

Another change in our neighborhood is the lack of a town dump. In fact, every town had one years ago. As a kid I'd rede my bicycle over to the dump on the Bacon Road to pick over the trash. On several occasions I found some pretty good stuff which had been thrown out. Today such items would warrant hefty prices at a flea market.

Over the past fifty years there have been many changes. Some of the people are the same but there are many new faces. I knew at least five World War I Vets in the neighborhood, but they are all gone now.

Local school districts brought the neighbors together but with Centralization complete here in 1953 there wasn't the opportunity to know the person next door. I recall going to the Gaines School Dist. No. 2 meetings at the old cobblestone school house. These were held annually even though the students were by contract sent to Albion.

But what rural neighbor hasn't experienced many of these same changes? Little did I know, standing at the crossroads when this picture was taken, just how often I too would be reflecting on the