

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

Orleans Parish County Historian

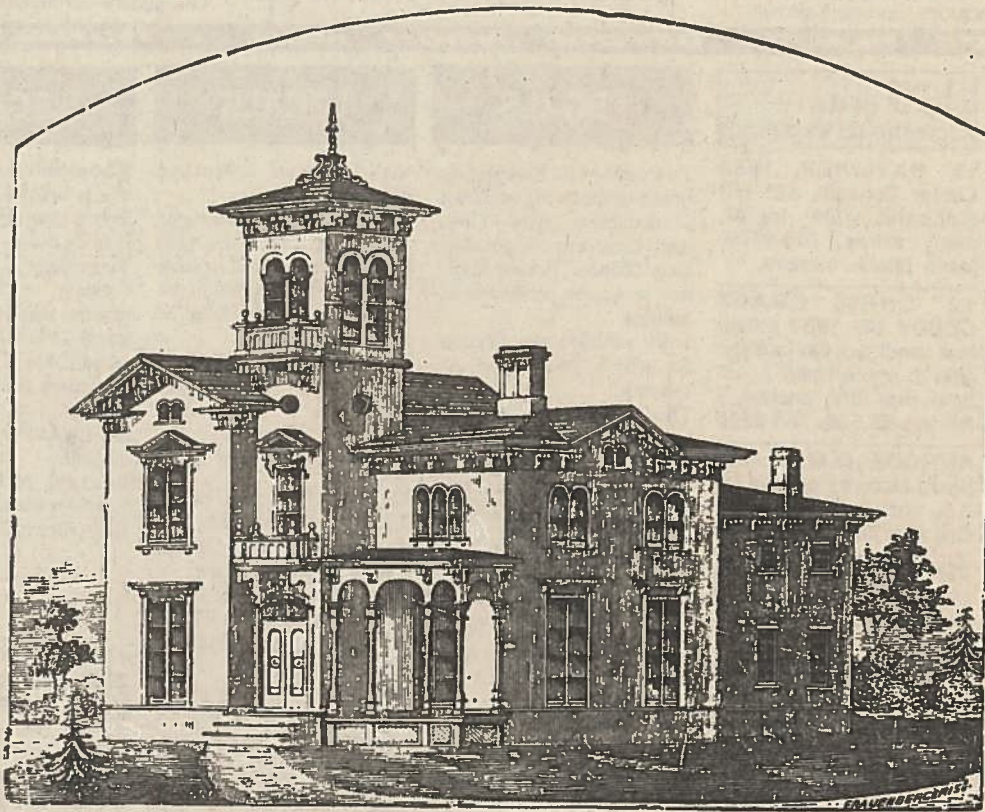
Vol. XX

8-3-98

No. 26

## RIGHT OUT OF THE BOOK

No. 19. An Italian Villa.



During the 1850's and the two and a half decades which followed there appeared on our Orleans County landscape Italian Villas. Buildings and houses of this style were non-Greek Revival and non-Gothic in character yet maintained a romantic quality. Villas of the nature like the one pictured, were found in the Italian countryside along the Mediterranean. By the mid-19th century Federal and Greek Revival buildings were looked upon as "old fashioned". Often such earlier styles were changed to take on the Italianate character. This style emitted a feeling of cheerfulness at a time when people were tiring of the pure classical forms.

Italian villas often take on a monumental form which is achieved through massive proportions. They have a strong vertical quality through the use of towers or cupolas. Low pitched roofs with large decorative supporting brackets are an outstanding characteristic along with double windows often with arched tops. Little balconies and slender porch posts add to the decorative ambience.

Our illustration here is taken from *How To Build, Furnish and Decorate* published by the Co-operative Building Plan Association, New York, N.Y. Copyright 1883. Many such plan books were readily available to local builders, carpenters and contractors. Someone who wanted a house built over one hundred years ago could pick out a design they liked and have the local carpenter reproduce it. This often occurred with slight changes and alterations to the plan in the book.

The plan herein should look vaguely familiar. There are several Italian Villas not unlike this in Medina including several on West Center Street and West Avenue. Perhaps the one most like this engraving, is the one at 304 West Avenue long known as the Luther Home. It was built in 1861 by Augustus M. Ives of Medina Sandstone. The tower, double windows, overhang and general configuration is strikingly similar to the one right out of the book.

No doubt, it was through such books on building plans that various styles were propagated throughout our country. Here is what the book has to say about the house pictured: "The accompanying elevation and plans will be found well worthy the attention of those who wish to build a good yet economical house, of moderate size. The rooms are conveniently arranged, and of sufficient size for an ordinary family.

"On the first floor is the entrance hall, 8x16½ feet, with doors opening into the parlor library and dining-room; with open staircase and china closet under, connecting with dining room; 14x22 feet, with doors opening into parlor, nursery and kitchen; a library 12x14 feet, can be entered from nursery, or may be entered from dining-room. A bathroom is connected with nursery 6x8 feet, and closet, 3x6 feet.

"The kitchen 14x16 feet has a back stairs to chambers above and also a flight under same to cellar, which is under the entire building. Connected with the kitchen is a large pantry and store-room, each 5x6 feet. The outside entrances to dining room and kitchen are under the piazza. On the second floor are seven bedrooms of good size, four in the main part and three in the addition, with closet to each. All the bedrooms can be entered from the hall, which extends the entire length of the building. Stairs from the hall give access to attic, with a closet under same, opening from the front hall. The estimated cost of this building, exclusive of mantles and furnace is \$6,700."

Imagine building a house like this for \$6,700. But not many did because this was considered a costly mansion at that time. We have to remember that the estimate was made back when men were getting at a good job, a dollar a day.

Aside from the noteworthy villas in Medina, we can also see them in other parts of Orleans County including several in Albion, two of particular interest on North Main Street built of stone and stucco.