

Bethinking of Old Orleans

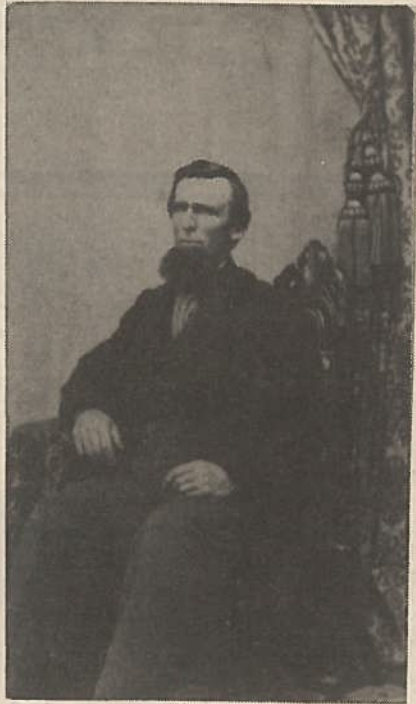
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MR. AND MRS. THOMAS COON



In looking over an old family album recently, I found these two pictures clearly marked: "Thomas Coon" and "Mrs. Thomas Coon". So often such pictures in old albums are unidentified, making them of little historical worth.

Judging from the way they are dressed and posed, it's my guess these pictures were taken not later than the mid-1860's. There is however, printed information on the back of each photo. His states: "Photographed by P.J. Mathewson, Over Knight's Clothing Store, Medina, N.Y." Her's states: "P. J. Mathewson, Photographer, Marble Front, Medina, N.Y. Duplicates may be had at any time without further sitting."

With this information I checked the earliest County Directory (1869), but could not find such a photographer listed in Medina. I did however, find: "Knight, P.D. merchant tailor, 76 Shelby." I then checked Landmarks of Orleans County (1894) and under the history of Albion found P.J. Mathewson. In a paragraph about the year 1870, we find "P.J. Mathewson, photos, successor to J.R. Porter, 71 1/2 Granite Block". Then checking again the 1869 directory under Albion, I discovered: "Mathewson, Perry J. (Albion) photographer, 71 1/2 Granite Block." All this leads me to assume that P.J. Mathewson moved from Medina to Albion, perhaps in the late 1860's, which confirms my feeling that the pictures date to the mid-1860's or before. Both Mr. and Mrs. Coon were posed in the same chair before the same drapery and bold tassels. Their photos would have been taken under natural light in a studio. Notice that the pictures are taken sideways of the chair so that the decorative back of the chair shows. This may be a happenstance so as to allow a photographer's prop or clamp to be attached to the back of their heads to keep them from moving during the time exposure

of the camera. Notice too, they are resting their right arms on a small table to also prevent movement. I must say they are beautiful, clear and sharp portraits for perhaps being now over 130 years old.

From Landmarks of Orleans County (1894) we find this information: "Coon, Thomas J., born in an old log house on the farm where he now resides, August 6, 1832, son of Alexander and Betsey (Weatherwax) Coon. Educated in the schools of the township, worked as a boy on his father's farm, where he has ever since resided. In religious association he is a member of the Baptist Church, he has been trustee for a number of years, has served the people as assessor and road commissioner for a number of years; has also served many years as school trustee. He was married, April 5, 1855, to Miss Elizabeth Eckerson, daughter of John and Hannah Eckerson, who was born in Schoharie County, and came thence when four weeks old, was born June 18, 1835. Children are: John A., born November 21, 1858; Albert C., born November 27, 1864; Merrill C., born February 2, 1868. Mr. Coon's father, Alexander Coon, was born in Rensseler County, N.Y., 1794 and was the son of Alexander Coon who was killed by the limb of a tree falling upon him in 1812. They came to what is now Shelby township in 1810, and were the first white settlers in the region. Alexander Coon took strong interest in the Baptist Church, and in 1861 contributed largely to the erection of the present structure (brick) of the First Baptist Church at Shelby Center."

It is of course, hard to sometimes tell a person's age from an old photograph, but to me, these two look like they might be in their early thirties. If that is the case, then indeed, these pictures date to the 1860's.