

Bethinking of Old Orleans

Vol XXI

C.W. Lattin County Historian

8-13-99

No.32

ONE OF ALBION'S FINEST



This was one of Albion's finest old mansions located on South Main Street. Sadly, not only the house is gone, but to date, this is the best picture we have of it.

Our photo, taken from a snapshot, only gives us a partial view because of a tree trunk which is in the way.

The house was built around 1890 by George and Clara Waterman. It was situated on the east side of South Main Street, the first house south of the railroad. I believe our picture was taken in the 1940s. George Waterman (1846-1932) was a local hardware merchant who also built a large business block in downtown Albion. Following the demolition of that structure, the site was developed into what is now Waterman Park. The Waterman house was later used by the Snyder Canning Co. as offices. About 1955 or 1956, the property was sold, the house demolished and a Gulf gasoline station was erected on the lot. Following the garage and gas business, Radio Shack was located here and presently this is a vacant lot.

The Waterman house was truly one of our best examples of Queen Anne-style, which was popular in the late 19th Century. From our photo, we can see a turret over the front entrance. Inside the turret, which was on the second floor, was the painting studio of Clara Waterman (1847-1911). This studio was actually a story-and-a-half in height, which included the attic story windows of small panes of translucent amber glass. Mrs. Waterman had used her painting skills to decorate fireplace tiles used around several fireplaces within the house. The most fascinating feature of the house to me as a kid was the hall and its

uniqueness. The front doors went into a vestibule at the very northwest corner of the house. From here, a central hall ran diagonally through the house to the southeast corner. At the end was a magnificent staircase with a landing halfway up, where the stairs reversed their direction. The landing was triangular in shape. At this level, there were two stained-glass windows at right angles to each other. One faced east, the other south. In the center of each window was an etched glass life-sized portrait, one of George Waterman and one of Clara Waterman. Because of the diagonal hall, the rooms ended up with corner doors, fireplaces across corners or triangular closets. Different rooms had different kinds of wood for trim, including cherry, golden oak and maple.

It was truly a neat house which has unfortunately been lost. I would be interested in obtaining a copy of a good picture of this elaborate mansion which once graced South Main Street.

Fact of Myth?

In this column (Vol. XXI No. 29), I indicated that the name Lake Alice at Waterport came about because of A.L. Swett's granddaughter, Alice. Since that column was published, I've heard from A.L. Swett's grandson, who thinks that possibly the lake may rather have been named for A.L. Swett's daughter, Alice A. (1873-1884), who died of scarlet fever at age eleven. However, he states "I can't say for sure that it was or that it is not."

My own information comes from legend. Legends are not always totally factual. So at this point, it remains somewhat of a mystery — daughter or granddaughter? The more we know, sometimes the more convoluted history becomes.