

Bethinking of Old Orleans

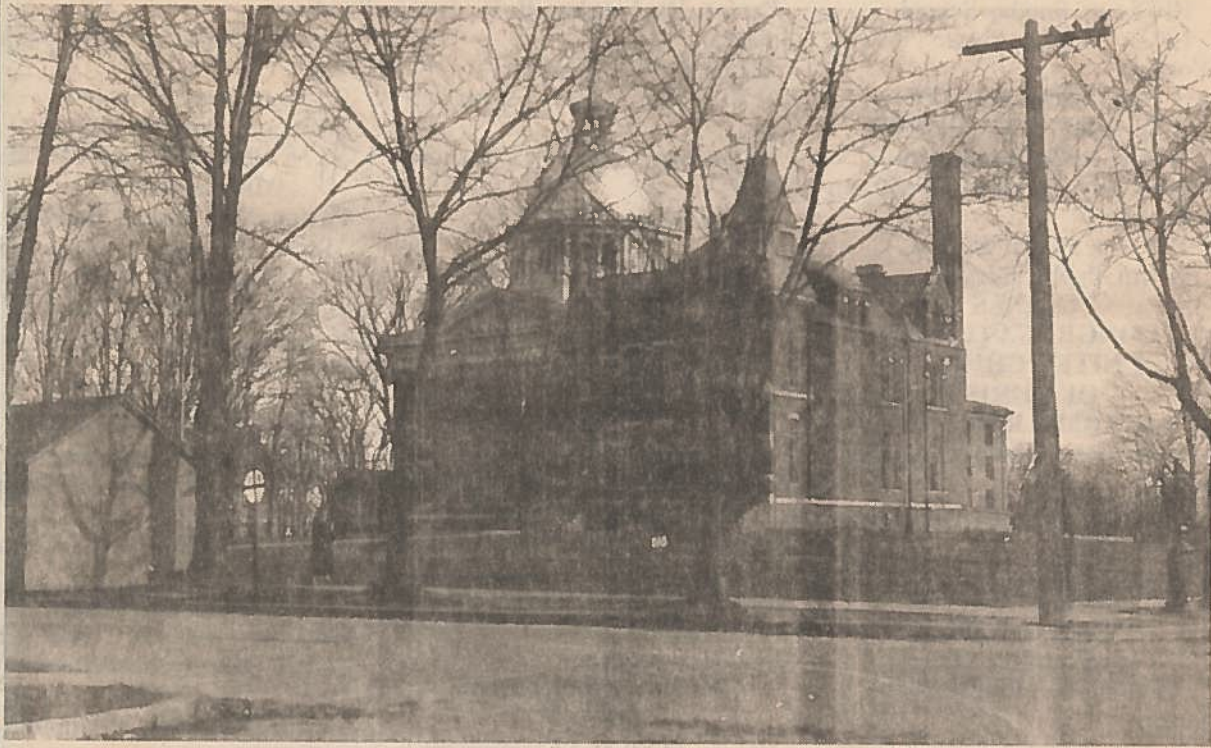
Vol XXI

C.W. Lattin County Historian

No.45

ELECTION BUILDINGS

11-12-99



Having exercised your right to vote last week I thought you'd be interested in where it used to be done. Years ago you always voted within the geographic confines of your election district. Now for example in the Town of Gaines all four election districts vote at the Town Hall.

Years ago it was quite different. This was especially so in villages and cities. Frequently a few days before the General Election, small election buildings were moved into each election district. These polling places were hauled on flat beds, sometimes pulled by horses. They were unloaded and jacked up into place for their temporary usage. Following the election, these buildings were jacked back up and removed by flat bed to a storage lot until the next Primary day or general election.

Our photo from the 1920's shows us a partial view of an election building. This picture was shot by Fred Holt from the intersection of West Park and South Main streets in Albion. In the distance we see the Orleans County Court House and the County Clerk's office. Notice to the far left, the building which is cut off by the picture's edge. I believe this was the polling place for Albion election district No. 2. It was located in the berm between the side walk and the street supported on cribbing. This was therefore located directly across the street from Christ Episcopal church. These election buildings were usually painted battleship gray and had board shutters on the windows to protect them when not being used. The interiors were not finished off as you could see the studs and rafters. There were built with two doors, one for an entrance and one for an exit. An American flag was displayed by the entrance door.

Frequently they were heated with small kerosene stoves and in earlier times, illuminated with kerosene lights. Even some of the early voting machines had kerosene lights which could be attached within the curtain area so the voter could see. Notice in our picture the railroad warning sign near the election building. This was of course for the BL & R Trolley which ran on State Street through the intersection just north of the building. The BL & R ceased to operate in 1931 which helps us to date this photo.

Within the last month the Cobblestone Museum has acquired an old election building measuring 12 x 18 ft. It was originally built in 1909 to be used in the City of Rochester. Around twenty-five years ago it was moved to near Walker in the Town of Hamlin where it was going to be used for museum purposes. This project never came to fruition. Recently, through Hamlin Historian Mary Smith, the Cobblestone Society was given and able to have the old election building moved to their grounds. It is now situated behind the 1836 brick house next to the Cobblestone Church.

Present plans include restoring its exterior and making use of the inside for the museum's continuous book sale. Perhaps at some time in the distant future it can be shown as a polling place or voting booth.

Over the years these election buildings were done away with when central polling places were established. Hence, these structures have become not only obsolete but a rarity. The only local one I can think of which still remains, is located on the west side of West Academy Street in Albion down near the canal.