

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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Medina Sandstone historic marker

Just recently a new historic marker relating to Medina Sandstone was unveiled and dedicated. The marker was purchased by the Orleans County Historians Association. Pictured next to it are officers of the Medina Historical Society, from left: Pat Anderson, secretary; Shirley Nellist, treasurer; Carol Wasnock, president; Donna Murczek, vice president.

This side of the marker states:

Medina Sandstone

Used for paving blocks, walks curbs and Canal in the 1800s and early 1900s.

Following the marker's presentation, it was erected near the location of the first Medina Sandstone Quarry at the intersection of Route 63 and Ryan Street in Medina. This place is just north of the canal and Lions Park at the lift bridge. Shown here on the site is Frank Berger who was the inspiration and motivator for the notation of local history through the Medina Canal Task Force. This group which has met regularly since 1989 have been responsible for many improvements to the canal as it flows through Medina.

The other side of the marker, shown here, states:

The first to establish a stone quarry business here in 1837 naming his product Medina Sandstone.

John Ryan has always been cited as being the first to discover and develop the Medina Sandstone Quarry Industry which once played such a major role in our county.

Although Medina Sandstone was quarried in Orleans County for building purposes as early as the 1820s it was Ryan who opened the first commercial business of quarrying in 1837.

Supposedly, sandstone was first discovered in this area near Medina in Orchard Creek. Prior to this it was known as Red Sandstone or just sandstone. It was Ryan who gave it a boost by calling it Medina Sandstone when he opened his quarry business in Medina.

John Ryan was born in Philadelphia in February 1801, his father being a veteran of the Revolutionary War. In 1824 Ryan walked from Philadelphia to Medina where he made his home thereafter. He worked first on the building of the Erie Canal and had charge of one of the canyons which fired the news of the completion of the work from Buffalo to Albany.

Later when the canal was enlarged, Ryan had the contract for the work on the Little Falls division. For several terms, he was superintendent of the canals on the Western division.

Ryan was a mason and a contractor who was responsible for building many early stone structures around Medina. His operations in connection with the quarries were extensive. It was indeed, through his efforts and interest that Median Sandstone got its first substantial boost toward popularity.

By 1904 there were 48 operative Medina Sandstone quarries in Orleans County alone. At that period in time over 2,000 men were employed annually with the annual payroll of \$750,000. Moving blocks, curbing and ashlers were being widely shipped on the canal and the New York Central Railroad between which most of the quarries were situated. This stone was especially good for paving in that it did not wear smooth and become slippery when wet, causing horses to fall. Many streets in Cleveland, Ohio were at one time quarried in Orleans County. Likewise, many public buildings and churches in cities from Buffalo to Boston were erected of locally quarried stone.

