



Bethinking of Old Orleans

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J. Bidelman's Store

Judging from the attire of these gentlemen in the picture it is fair to assume it was taken in the 1890s, although I can't exactly pinpoint when this store was in business. Plainly lettered on the windows it states: "J. Bidelman Flour and Feed." We know this store was located on the south side of East Bank Street in Albion. Notice the reflection of lettering in the transom over the door. This reflection is of the Orleans Republican sign from a third floor level across the street.

Mr. Bidelman's goods are prominently displayed in his windows. Here we see "Champion Flour" and also "Pillsbury's Best" in sacks. In fact, John Bidelman is the man dressed in a light colored suit standing in the doorway. Interestingly, he took his hat off for the picture while the others did not. A peddler's cart appears in front of the window next to him.

What I find fascinating about this picture are the huge panes of glass used in the store front windows. Each piece must measure at least 10 feet high. In fact, these windows are small compared to some other store fronts in downtown Albion at that time. Often in our modern day quest to restore buildings of this sort we have the urge to make quaint fronts with small panes of glass mistakenly believing this is authentic or

correct.

Bidelman's store was located in what later became the Elks Lodge block. Many people will remember when this store front served as the Endicott and Johnson shoe store.

Now look at the man to the far left. It appears he is standing in front of a large open doorway. This open space was actually a narrow alley off East Bank Street which went in behind the business blocks off Bank and Main Streets. The alley went under or through Bordwell's Block or what later became the Masonic Building.

In due course of time the alley itself became a store front. The 1917 insurance map shows it being used as a restaurant. Eventually the alley was consumed into the main floor of Newberry's. However, to this day there is recessed brick work up the front of the Masonic Building on the second and third floor levels which reflects the fact that something different was once happening below. It is the only part of the block which has the indentation in brick. Unless you knew of the alley of long ago the indentation otherwise doesn't make any sense.

Finally, we will note that when this picture was taken, board walks were in use rather than sandstone flagging.