



Rethinking of Old Orleans

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Canal's 'backside' not so pretty in 1910

This picture, taken in the spring of 1910, shows construction work taking place on the canal in Albion. In the distance, to the far right, is the old swing bridge at Main Street. The rest of our view takes in the south side of the canal, showing the buildings that once stood there.

It's a rather unflattering view of the canal docks. We have a tendency in contemporary times to romanticize the old days when the canal was a major route of transportation. But the back side was not always very pretty. The buildings shown here were of utilitarian nature, specifically located here because of the transportation factor.

To the left, we see a large brick structure which on the 1875 map appears to be a warehouse owned by M.J. English. At the time of this picture, it was part of the A.L. Swett Electric Light and Power Co. The Albion Gas Works, just to the east of this, depended on shipments of coal for manufactured gas. Here we also see a large smoke stack and, just to the left of it, a partial view of the firemen's hose tower.

Next, there is a pile of something which I cannot identify. Behind that are the

coal sheds of Shourds Brothers Coal Yard, located at the end of Platt Street. To the right of these sheds is a large wooden building also built for a warehouse. The 1875 map indicates it was owned by Hubbard and Vanderkar, who were involved with produce and other provisions.

All in all, this picture represents a time when this area of business was in decline, as the railroads had taken over the canal vitality. With the construction work shown here we certainly get the idea that the widening and deepening of the old canal was an attempt to keep pace with the times.

Hence the Barge Canal came about and the older name Erie was dropped. But with the changing of times and interest in developing the canal for tourism, the name Erie was resurrected for its embodying quality of romance.

A view of this area today is quite different. The old buildings are gone. The area is cleaned up for attractive canalside dockage. A mural and gazebos are focal points. With the completion of the Chamber of Commerce building in the old Citizens Bank, a cornerstone for positive development in downtown Albion will be more forthcoming.