

BETHINKING OF OLD ORLEANS

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

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This picture was taken around one hundred years ago at John Howard's Coal Yard, which was located at the north end of Clinton Street on the canal in Albion. The scene shows coal being unloaded off a canal boat into the building.

This procedure meant the large wooden bucket was filled by men shoveling coal into it. Then it was lifted through the pulley system and dumped into a chute on the raised platform. There would have been men inside the coal barn to then hand shovel it around in different bins.

John Howard was one of five coal dealers listed in the 1903 Orleans County Directory for Albion. Also listed were Morgan & Linson on Clinton Street and Ezra Skinner also on Clinton Street, both at the railroad. Charles Porter on East Bank and the Shourds Brothers at the foot of Platt Street were located on the canal.

Both the canal and railroad were being used to ship this fuel into our region.

Other businesses in Albion that relied upon coal were often located along the canal. Two examples are the Albion Gas Works, which manufactured gas using coal, and Hiram Curtis Agricultural Works, which was a foundry.

By the mid 1850s, central heat was beginning to come into use. Our County Court House

completed in 1858 was originally heated with two hot air furnaces that burned coal.

Naturally, central heating was something that at first only the more well-to-do had installed in finer residences.

Coal stoves for room heating were commonly used way into the 20th century. Coal stoves or ranges for cooking purposes were used in almost every kitchen when our photo was taken.

Grates were often used in fireplaces for the sole purpose of coal fires.

Children of poor families often walked the railroad tracks hunting for lumps of coal that may have fallen off of coal cars. This was indeed a commodity much sought after and a very necessary part of daily life one hundred years ago.