

Reminiscences of Main Street in Albion

BY C.W. LATTIN

The following reminiscences were written by Joseph B. Achilles (1877-1957) and published in a little booklet for the 90th anniversary of Marine Midland Trust Company in June 1949. Achilles served as the Orleans County historian from 1944 to 1957. Here are some excerpts from his reminiscences:

"It seems quite different from the Albion I knew so long ago. I wonder what the folks, who were here then, would say if they could see it now and if they would miss, as I sometimes do, the Main Street of yesteryear.

I wonder who recalls with me, the big white wooden horse that stood out of the window of Mustills harness shop, poised on his hind legs as if he were trying to gallop across Main Street. I can hear again the little whistle that came from the peanut roaster under the wooden awning that stood out over the sidewalk, where John sold us kids penny candy, gum and fireworks.

That push button operated chunk of metal highway that spans the canal now covers up a lot of memories — how we youngsters used to ride the old swing bridge as it turned around to let the boats through and the mule driver's comments when the tow line got tangled. We learned a lot of words that way but we didn't use them around home.

That big white front market has replaced the nerve center of Republican politics. At the turn of the century, decisions made in Waterman's rear office around the big stove by George, Titus, Parmalee and Bruner had a vital effect on the political future of many an ambitious citizen.

The destiny of the Democratic minority in Orleans was in constant dispute between the Albion and Medina party leaders. Most of the decisions were made in the clothing store of Dye & Fox. The results were varied but always interesting and were the subject of many a dispute among the local statesmen as they sat around on the salt barrels in front of Bailey's grocery store, summer evenings, and prophesied what things would happen to the country if Cleveland were elected.

No recap of the politics of the late 1800's would be complete without mention of the torch-light parades of those days, the huge American flags decorated with pictures of the candidates that hung across Main Street on both sides of the Four Corners.

And speaking of parades makes me think of the Fire Companies and gaudy uniforms and the rivalry between them. As that big modern red pumper comes out and picks up the boys along the street, the years roll away and I hear again the clanging bell, the running feet and the cry of "Fire, Fire" in the quiet night. In its place I see the



Joseph B. Achilles
1877-1957

old steamer, with its upright boiler scattering live coals on the street as it rattled over the bumps behind the big bay team from Shrouds' coal yard. The horses really seemed to sense the importance of getting somewhere fast and modern kids will never experience the thrill and excitement of horse-drawn fire equipment answering an alarm.

Back up the street again — you get gas and oil where Bordwell sold you Three-Star Hennessey and stabled your horses at what was then the Exchange Hotel. Bob Wilkin's big wooden Indian has gone to the Happy Hunting Grounds.

Across the street, the old Baptist Church with the big clock tower has been replaced by a movie theatre and they make out your income tax return on the site of the little red brick office, close to the sidewalk, where Gideon Hard studied the Revised Statutes.

The colonial type post office on the hill is a far cry from the one in the rear of Cap. Hardie's newsroom on Bank Street where we watched for new issues of Beadles Half Dime novels and a new "Deadwood Dick" was snapped up like sugar in the recent ration days.

No watermelon has ever tasted as good as the ones that the deck hands on the canal steamer "Frankie Reynolds" used to drop on the cobblestone East Bank for us children while they were tossing them to the one-horse wagons for Jim O'Brien, Sile Stockton and Tom Graves to deliver to the stores up town. The big chain store trucks have cheated today's kids out of a big thrill.

Back on Main Street, there is a neat, steel flag pole on the corner where the big gilded mortar and pestle stood high above the sidewalk in front of Barrell's Drug Store. The Trust Company's flower boxes cover the windows where the big bottles of colored water stood for many years. You might climb the stairs to the old Pratt Opera House and see the ghosts of "Old Homestead", "East Lynne" and "Uncle Tom's

Cabin" stalk across the darkened stage that opened with such a blaze of glory in the Gay 90's.

Shopping for the ladies in those days was a comparatively simple manner. You went to Upper Landauer's, now a grill, where Moritz Landauer sold you Sattinets, Cassimeres, Velveteen's, etc., or to Lower Landauer's, where Simeon Landauer, his brother, showed you the same patterns in the recently streamlined store now operated by his grandson. That dignified and friendly competition has no counter part in the savage merchandising methods of today.

The reverence of George M.

Pullman for his mother's memory and the aftermath of a bitter political battle for the County Judgeship resulted in the two fine church buildings on the corners of Main and Park Streets. The beautiful sandstone spire of the Presbyterians at the top of the hill has replaced the little frame house of Pierpont Dyer who was murdered in his canal bank saloon at the foot of Main Street on a Christmas Eve so long ago.

Yes, streamlined, chromium fitted and super powered as it is today, Albion of other years was a friendly, comfortable place to live. The temp was fitted to that long past era."