

BETHINKING OF OLDE ORLEANS

Vol. XXVIII, No. 16

4-20-06

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Our picture, taken about 100 years ago, shows the Albion Free Methodist Church at the corner of East State and Platt Streets in Albion. This historic church and the buildings neighboring it were included on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. The church, built in 1860, is a unique example of the Normal Revival style.

To the left of the church in our picture was perhaps one of the oldest standing residences in the Village of Albion before it was leveled at the end of March. Probably built in the 1820s, it first served as a residence for Orson Nicholson (1795-1870), Albion's first physician and Orleans County's first county clerk. The main portion of the house, built of brick, was the oldest part. Subsequently, wooden wings were added in the 19th century, greatly enlarging the residence. The house therefore came across as a late example of Greek Revival style architecture from the 1850s.

Free Methodists have long wanted this property for parking lot/expansion. Over the last several years, the house had fallen into disrepair and had been a topic of discussion when threatened with demolition about a year ago.

In 1998, another historic property of similar nature in Childs was threatened for demolition. That however was purchased and saved by the Cobblestone Society Museum. Additions were removed and it stands today as the attractive brick house between the Cobblestone Church and J.P.'s Market. After all, it has been a part of the streetscape since 1836 and continues to be a viable part of our heritage and a wise asset to the museum as



a resource center, office and storage space, while acting as a buffer to neighboring commercialization.

When the Albion Historic Preservation committee suggested a similar plan for the house next to the Free Methodist Church it obviously, didn't receive much consideration as an asset with any sympathy towards its history or creative possibilities for a new use. State Historic Preservation people even tried to be persuasive in convincing village officials the home should stay in place. A spot on the National Register of Historic Places doesn't mean it cannot be removed. All the Registry does is protect it from public funds being used to destroy it.

True, we have lost some of our best architectural treasures in Albion over the years. Perhaps the house on East State

Street just lacked eye-appeal for rejuvenation. But if we are going to truly use one of our greatest assets of local history for the sake of tourism, we need to look at our architectural heritage seriously. It is easy to pick and choose with little understanding. As a society we often disguise our past and call it preservation. We manufacture and use plastic parts fooling ourselves into believing it is restoration. Pretty soon there isn't going to be anything left because one by one and little by little, things of integrity are conveniently removed. Some people just don't get it. The demolition of the house on East State Street right out of the Historic Court District will hopefully send a wake-up call to planners, municipal boards and the interested public. Our built environment is indeed very fragile.