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TINSMITHING

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Orleans County historian

This unusual picture was taken in the late 1880s or 1890s at Watermans Hardware store in Albion. From left to right we see: Joseph Watt listed as a tinsmith in the 1887-88 Orleans County directory, "Billie" Carter kneeling and soldering and George M. Waterman owner of the hardware business.

Carter appears to be holding a soldering iron in his right hand. A little soldering stove stands in front where other irons are being heated.

These men are certainly showing off a huge metal tank which is being put together outside the shop.

Evidently the shop door wasn't wide enough to get a tank like this through it so they are working in an alley.

Years ago hardware stores employed competent tinsmiths who are able to construct metal objects upon demand.

George M. Waterman owned the leading hardware store in Albion at the time this picture was taken. In 1890 he built a large business block on Main Street known as the Waterman Building which was a companion to the Briggs Block.

The Waterman block burned in the early 1980s, was eventually torn down and serves today as Waterman Park.

Also in 1890, Waterman built a large Queen Anne



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style residence on South Main Street, which was torn down in 1956. Tim Hortons now occupies the site.

It was said years ago that one of Waterman's tinsmiths constructed the beautiful elaborate zinc finial for the

turret on the Waterman residence.

George and Clara Waterman were laid to rest in the Waterman mausoleum at Mt. Albion.

It's my guess the tank in our photo was for water

storage. Tanks like this were sometimes used in finer homes for gravity-fed water to sinks, bathtubs and toilets. These were usually located in the attic and would have been filled by pumping up the water by hand.

Occasionally tanks like this were located high up in nearby farm barns and filled by windmills. Consequently they were found in hay mows where hay was used to bank the tanks to keep it from freezing.

In other words, tanks like this were being used in the late 19th century where municipal water pressure was not available. Albion's water works was however completed in 1888 with pressure created by steam engines.