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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

ASTER DAY

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**Bethinking
of Olde
Orleans**

At 2 p.m. Sunday, I and fellow historian Neil Johnson will conduct a guided tour of Mount Albion Cemetery. This comes about the time when Aster Day used to be celebrated at Mount Albion.

In fact, the photo with this article was taken on Aster Day in 1912. Here we see the main entrance to the cemetery and a vintage touring car decked out with an array of asters for the festivities.

We note here that the auto is parked outside the fence, but that the horse-drawn vehicles are inside the fence. It seems that back then, automobiles were not allowed in the cemetery grounds. It must have been felt that such a new fangled, noisy invention did not show proper respect for the dead. The touring car shown here must have simply been used to lead an entourage of people from Albion out to the cemetery.

Back at this time in our history, people frequently strolled out to Mount Albion on Sunday afternoons to pay their respects to the deceased. The cemetery was designed to be a beautiful place of repose, ornamented with landscape features, flowers, sculpture, architecture and even poetry in the form of epitaphs. A sidewalk once led from the village to the cemetery, and people were known to take a picnic lunch along. Hence, there were many cast iron benches.

It was Cassius Marcellus Clay Reynolds who in 1906 came up with the idea of

Aster Day. It seems that C.M.C. Reynolds was part owner of Reynolds and Flintham, a leading furniture and undertaking business in Albion at that time. Incidentally, that business was later purchased by J.B. Merrill & Son and is known today as Merrill Grinnell Funeral Directors.

Reynolds was a civic-minded man and a commissioner of Mount Albion Cemetery. He founded the Aster Day movement, which became popular in other places throughout the U.S. and Canada. It was always held on a Sunday the closest to the 15th of September. On this day, people were encouraged to decorate the graves of their loved ones with asters.

It is said that the meaning of aster symbolized "after thought" to Reynolds. At any rate, women raised these pink, white, blue, purple and reddish garden flowers for the sole purpose of Aster Day. When Aster Day arrived, there were usually speeches by dignitaries at the cemetery amidst a beautiful flower display.

Aster Day practically became a national holiday, but unfortunately fell out of fashion following the death of its founder at age 81 in 1925.