

# Bethinking of Olde Orleans Coal

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Coal is something most of us don't personally come in contact with as a heating fuel. Indeed it is something from another period of time for many. Nowadays we can sit back and enjoy automatic heating systems fueled by oil, electric, natural gas or propane.

Lots of younger people haven't the foggiest idea just how hard it used to be to keep warm during cold winter months. When I was a child our house had central heat from a coal-fired furnace in the basement. This is what might be referred to as an old octopus type, with large round heat ducts and even bigger cold air returns.

The coal which we got from Karl Wolfe was delivered in a large dump truck which backed over the lawn to a cellar window. A metal shoot was inserted through this opening into the coal bin,

made of heavy plank and located near the furnace. The driver would slowly hoist the truck bed, and by adjusting a small sliding door in the rear, would allow several tons of coal to rumble down the shoot into the bin. What a noise it made through the dusty mess it made too if it hadn't been sprinkled down with water. It seems to me we had about one delivery a year.

We also had a coal-fired hot water heater which was sort of a miniature furnace. Both this and the furnace had to be tended at least twice a day. That is, you shook the fire down in the morning and shoveled on more coal.



bluish cast and supposedly burned a blue flame which was hotter. I can also remember when there were a number of coal dealers around in Orleans County, and when Ralph Vick in Albion advertised his coal dealership with a huge piece of coal which was displayed outside his scale house on West Academy Street.

The picture which accompanies this article was taken in 1905 of the Charles G. Porter coal yard on East Bank Street in Albion. It backed up to the Erie Canal where shipments of coal were unloaded into sheds. Toward the right side of our picture we can see one of the sheds in the background. In later years this coal yard was operated by Karl Wolfe from whom my dad purchased coal to warm our house.

By C. W. Lattin  
Orleans County Historian

the garden or driveway while village residents put theirs out for pickup. At night you again shook the grates, added coal, and hoped it would last through the wee hours.

My dad used to swear when he got "klinkers." They were large coagulated pieces of ash which fused together. He'd take a poker and try to release them from the

grates which otherwise wouldn't operate properly. I remember that some people had stokers which were furnaces that had a very slow moving conveyer from the bin that continuously fed the furnace a fine grade of coal. These people used to say, "A skuttle a day."

I remember in particular, "blue coal" being advertised. It had a

To get it going faster and hotter, you could open a damper. Our damper was connected to a control upstairs by a ratchet with fine chains for adjustment.

Of course, once you shook the fire down, you had ashes which had fallen down into the ash pan. These were then emptied into ash cans and hauled out of the cellar.

We always spread ours on

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