

Old Reconnoiter

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From an Albion newspaper clipping dating back to the early 1920s, we find an anecdote under the title "Reconnoitered the Fence." This is one of the most amusing legendary tales I've ever run across in local history. I first presented it here in this column back in 1981. Here it is again:

"Our older residents will remember a man known as "Old Reconnoiter" who lived years ago in the house now owned by John Williams on East State Street. How he came by that name will interest our younger people. He was a farmer and was accustomed to indulge in large words without regard to their meaning. One day he told his hired man to go out into a field and "reconnoiter the fence rail." The man went but was puzzled to know what to do. A traveler was hailed and told the orders and his advice sought as to what was best to do.

"Don't you know what reconnoiter means?" asked the traveler. "Well, your boss wants you to take down that fence, pile up the rails in a heap and burn them."

Thus, the hired man proceeded to do. When the farmer discovered how his orders had been followed he raved and used some bigger words still, but the incident got out and he was ever after



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Bethinking of Olde Orleans

known as "Old Reconnoiter."

The farmer's actual name has long been forgotten, yet there is a moral to this story: When giving directions, don't try to show off your superiority by speaking in terms above the level of your listener.

Incidentally, Webster's Dictionary defines reconnoiter as "to make a survey, to gain information, or to make a reconnaissance of."

Notice: Neil Johnson, Village of Albion historian, will lead a tour of Mount Albion Cemetery at 2 p.m. Sunday. The theme of the tour will be Civil War soldiers.