

JOHN BOWLES

11-29-13

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Observing people, who have ever walked upon Albion's sidewalks, will recognize the name John Bowles. As a child I can remember seeing his name on little bronze name plates imbedded in concrete sidewalks. Naturally, many old sidewalks have been replaced so the little nameplates aren't as plentiful. However, there are a couple of them in the sidewalks leading to the Albion United Methodist Church.

John Bowles was a local mason and businessman. Our photo from the 1905 Souvenir Book of Albion shows where his cement products were made. He was in partnership with Henry Crowther dealing also in grain, produce and coal. Their place of business was located at the northeast corner of McKinstry and Fruit Streets and the railroad. This piece of property is now vacant and devoid of any buildings shown in the picture. Fruit Street, incidentally, has since been renamed Crimson Drive. In 1905 they were advertising cement building blocks, cement sidewalk, cement horse blocks, cement hitching posts, cement fence



Vol. XXXV, No. 50

Bethinking of Olde Orleans

posts, cement chimneys and cement steps.

Around the turn of the century John Bowles built himself a residence expressive of his masonry trade. It is the brick house on King Street in Albion. It displays a cast or molded concrete lintels, sills, quoins, porch pier caps and water table that are all very decorative, somewhat emulating fancy carved stone. John Bowles' partner Henry Crowther, likewise built an impressive double concrete block house on East Avenue in Albion, which again, showed off

their products. Another outstanding example of their concrete block work is the pump house at Mt. Albion Cemetery. Our photo shows a number of their concrete products on display along with employees. I believe Mr. Bowles is the man standing toward the middle of the photo with the vest and light colored hat on.

We must remember that by the turn of the century, stone products were becoming more expensive to produce because of the labor involved in quarrying. Concrete blocks could be made to look like stone, be uniform in size and were much cheaper in price. Consequently, we find Bowles and Crowther concrete blocks in innumerable basement walls and commercial build-

ings where the material was most often used.

John Miller Bowles was born in England in 1849 and became a resident of the area in 1870. He and his wife Elizabeth had two daughters, Nellie M. Bowles and Esther B. Martindell. Mr. Bowles was a man who took great pride in his community. He was very active in the Albion Methodist Church, the Odd Fellows Lodge and was a member of the Board of Education for a number of years. It was during his tenure on the Board of Trustees at the Methodist Church when the physical structure of the church was greatly altered in 1914. We note the extensive use of molded concrete decorative work around the front entrance along with other decorative embellishments on the tower.