

Rethinking of Old Orleans

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C. 1910 Photo Post Card

MEDINA'S BEGINNINGS

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"We may build more stately habitations, fill our rooms with paintings, and with sculptures, but we cannot buy with gold the old associations."

Medina Tribune, May 17, 1877

1982 is important in local history for it is the sesquicentennial year of the incorporation of the Village of Medina passed March 3, 1832 by the New York State Legislature. The old descriptive motto, "Medina the mecca of business and homes" is one which the people of Medina can be proud of in

congratulated. As this year evolves, Medina's past will become paramount as the Medina Chamber of Commerce and the Medina Historical Society make plans for celebrations. In the weeks ahead this column will frequently be devoted to Medina's past and people who have helped make it a mecca.

The beginning of any settlement was usually marked by the erection of a mill to meet the needs of building. One of Medina's earliest settlers was Samuel F. Gear, who built a small sawmill on the falls of Oak Orchard Creek about 1805. Salt works north of the village were also started around the same time which proved unprofitable until 1818 when Israel Bennett took possession. He also did an extensive business in potash. Other than these almost futile business attempts little can be said of Medina until the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825. The first dwellings in the area were those built for laborers on the canal. The first store was opened in 1824 by Sylvanus Coan and shortly thereafter other businesses were established.

The present village was surveyed and laid out in 1824 by Ebenezer Mix and the original streets surveyed in 1826. Medina enterprises and building largely grew from the banks of the canal and docks where the packet boats landed.

Ebenezer Mix has been credited with having given the village its name but it remains a mystery as to why he may have chosen it. The first mason in Medina was Artemas Allen who came in 1822 and superintended the building of an aqueduct for the canal on Oak Orchard Creek. John Ryan, another stone mason arrived in 1825 and between these two tradesmen much of the early stone work was done in the area. In 1827 Joseph Nixon built a brewery which was subsequently made into a distillery that operated for many years. The first hotel was started as early as 1824 by Uri D. Moore. The first blacksmith, Simeon Downs, came in 1825 and the first tannery was erected in 1826 by Justus Ingersoll near the creek and canal. It was built of brick and later converted into a flour mill. Upon the establishment of the Post Office at Medina in 1829 Mr. Ingersoll became the first postmaster. The first tavern was opened in 1826 by Otis Turner and the first schoolhouse was a log one erected the same year. The first church incorporated, was St. John's Episcopal under the name St. Luke's in 1827. It was not until 1830 that Dr. Thomas opened the first drugstore. Most of these businesses and a few houses were located on what we call Main Street then known as Shelby Street. In 1832 there were only seven dwellings and the Baptist Church on Center Street west of Main. In 1833 a suspension bridge was constructed across the canal. In 1836 the Medina and Darren Railroad was completed as far as Akron in Erie County. Vehicles drawn by horses were used upon it, but this proved an unprofitable venture and lasted only about three years. Then in 1837 the Medina Sandstone industry was born when John Ryan started the first commercial quarry which later developed into a major industry. It was this industry that attracted many pioneer families into the area whose descendants remain today.

In the latter years of the 19th century the metal trades and the furniture industry sprang up providing employment to many hundreds of people. By 1900 the food processing industry also furnished many seasonal jobs. As Medina developed it became a diversified industrial community "with roots in the past and eyes on the future."