

Bethinking of Old Orleans

10-13-83

C.W.Lattin • County Historian



Vol. V

No. 41

ONE OF A KIND

If the purpose of a museum is to exhibit the rare, unusual and curious, then the Cobblestone Museum at Childs lives up to that standard. The building pictured above which was moved to the museum complex this summer is all of those things and is indeed one of a kind. Measuring approximately eight feet square it is entirely made of steel (boiler plate) which is riveted and bolted together, sides, roof and door. You ask what for? Well then, here is the interesting story surrounding it.

In the late 1860's a grant of \$87,000 was appropriated by the Federal government for making drastic improvements to Oak Orchard Harbor. As part of the project, two long piers were built from the harbor out into Lake Ontario. One on the east and one on the west in the approximate location of the present jetties. The pier on the west or the Oak Orchard-on-the-Lake side had a lighthouse at the very end of it out in the lake. Records indicate this lighthouse and the lighthouse-keeper's home were finished in the summer of 1871. Located on shore at the end of the west pier was this steel building which also must have been completed in 1871. It was originally made with brick walls on the inside which included steel shelving on three sides used for storing lamp oil for the lighthouse beacon. It was a completely fireproof building and ventilated by a ventilator perched on top of its hip roof. Perhaps the brick walls tended to make it cooler as there was an air space between the brick and steel outer wall.

In 1905, due to the River and Harbor Act, maintenance was denied to the harbor facilities and the lighthouse and piers were abandoned. After several years of neglect, waves tore apart the piers and the lighthouse was blown over in the lake during a storm in 1916. However, the little steel oil storage building remained. It was a little over sixty years ago that Mr. Edward Archbald's father bought the property on which the oil storage building stood and the old lighthouse keeper's home. Mr. Archbald remembers that he and his brother undertook to move the steel building from its original site around 1921 to their barnyard where it was used as a tool house. It was at that time that the interior brick walls were removed so as to more readily transport the building on a slip boat to where they wanted it.

This past Spring, Mr. Archbald recognizing its historical uniqueness offered it as a gift to the Cobblestone Museum for a curiosity. During late July it was moved under the engineering skills of Tom Finnefrock, Richard Cook and Donald Ross to its present location which is in the back lawn of the Cobblestone Church at Childs. I think we are very fortunate to have this unusual nautical artifact preserved through the foresight and generosity of Mr. Edward Archbald.