

Bethinking of Old Orleans

11-9-83

C.W.Lattin • County Historian



Vol. V No. 45

"A DEEP SUBJECT"

Last week Tuesday an old well was discovered quite by accident directly behind the Orleans County Court House. The County maintenance department in excavating the area for the installation of an access ramp to the rear entrance of the Court House, found this long abandoned water source. Restoration of the front steps to the Court House has been recently completed. To meet Federal standards, a ramp for handicapped with an incline of one inch to one foot is now being erected to the rear door. The well was located about eight feet from the building and was a little less than three feet in diameter and twenty-eight feet deep. A large well stone covering it had been covered with black top which completely disguised it. From remaining pipes it was soon discerned that this well was once used by the old jail and perhaps as a water source for all the County Square buildings. The upper photo shows the well opening and the typical way stones were used to lay up the interior. The stones used here were Medina Sandstone and beautifully laid in together. The lower photo shows the maintenance crew of Roy Keiffer, Charlie Neilans, Burnell Bingaman and Marlin Shawver filling in their unwanted find. It's a good guess that the well was probably dug when the present Court House was built in 1858 and 1859.

J. Howard Pratt in his recent book "Saga of the Ridge" tells most descriptively how wells of this sort were made. Selection of the well site was frequently made by a diviner using a peach twig. Usually a hole seven feet in diameter with slightly tapered sides was then dug. The first six or eight feet was easy. Then two planks, forming a staging, were placed across the well opening and the rest of the dirt was hauled up by a bucket. The deeper it was dug, the more danger of a cave-in. When fairly moist sand was reached, a hollow tree trunk known as a button-wood gum was lowered into the bottom of the well to form a base or cistern. At this point, stones were then encircled around the buttonwood gum and the well was then laid up. Larger ends of the stones were arranged on the exterior of the well, small ends inside, which made it impossible for these stones to collapse. Although Mr. Pratt goes into more detail, this essentially describes the well-digging process. "Saga of the Ridge" is full of many other interesting stories relating to the habits and life style of our early settlers. The book is now available at area libraries at \$9.00 a copy.