

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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ARCHITECTURE DESTROYED

Part XXI

The Little Red Brick Store 1826-1924

"It often happens that the real tragedies of life occur in such an inartistic manner that they hurt us by their crude violence, their absolute incoherence, their absurd want of meaning, their entire lack of style. They affect us just as vulgarity affects us."

—Oscar Wilde

For ninety-eight years this charming little building in the upper photo stood on Main Street in Albion before it was demolished. The lower photo shows the vacant building and store front which currently occupies the same site.

Hon. Gideon Hard (1797-1885) came to Albion in the year 1826, erected this little building for an office and set up his practice of law there. In 1827 he became our County Treasurer and served through 1834. In 1832 and 1834 he was elected our representative in the U.S. Congress. In 1841 Mr. Hard was elected Senator to the New York State Senate and in 1848 was appointed a canal appraiser for two years. In 1856 he was elected County Judge and Surrogate. Judge Hard was a Whig by political affiliation and certainly through his career held some very impressive offices interspersed with his practice of law. Following his use of the little brick building it became a millinery shop which was operated by Mrs. A. Leonard who is standing on the porch.

Little buildings of this sort were frequently erected in the 19th Century for offices or other small businesses. This particular office was built in the Federal style of architecture sometimes referred to as Classical Revival. In essence it pre-dates the popular Greek Revival style of the second quarter of the 19th Century.

Buildings in the Federal Style were essentially built from as early as 1780 up to about as late as 1840 in our area of the country. These structures are characterized by balance and symmetry in design, lightness and elegance in mood, delicacy and finesse in execution. Fan-shaped window and door openings are typical. Delicate columns forming porticos, low-pitched roofs and finely detailed cornice work at the eaves accentuate Federal or Classical Revival architecture.

In 1924 the Rialto Theater building was erected on this site and the adjoining space by Will Robson. It was at that time the Little Red Brick Store as it had become known, was razed. Surely we cannot describe the appearance of the present structure in any flowery terminology except to say that it does indeed "...affect us just as vulgarity affects us." For many years it was owned by Charles Martina who operated the Rialto Theater which closed around twenty years ago. We can only hope the present owner succeeds in revitalizing the property. How frequently we have seen beautiful architecture destroyed only to be replaced with something that is now vacant or no better than temporary. One is certainly given to wonder about the rational of man.

