

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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Former Gumaer Residence
(L. Monacelli Photo)

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“THE END OF A FAMILY”

“What happened to Albert Gumaer never came out and whether it was accidental, or suicide or murder, only later happenings gave anyone a good chance to form their opinion.” --Marc W. Cole

This story about “The End of a Family” was first written up by Marc W. Cole, Sr. from recollections of when his family were neighbors of the Gumaers. Although I have paraphrased the entire story, the characters were real and all the facts are true, according to Marc Cole.

The story starts with Albert and Adaline Bennett who were married in 1835. He had had several jobs working for different banks as a teller including a Buffalo Bank and the Bank of Orleans. Following his banking interests he and Adaline purchased a 134-acre farm near Eagle Harbor. “He was kind of a ‘broadcloth farmer’ ... talked a lot about his government bonds ... wore his good clothes everyday ...” The Bennetts had one daughter Frances, who was born in 1846. “She was the mousey, shy kind, not much to look at ... taking care of a lot of canaries and a few cats were about all her work.” She and her mother Adaline both had catarrh so they always talked all stuffed up. Everybody was quite surprised when Jerome Bonaparte Gumaer married her. He was an ex-soldier of the Civil War, served as Sergeant of the Geo. P. Church Co. and had been a prisoner of war for a year. He had been out west and “... must have seen a lot of likelier women...” Perhaps it was the money talk of Albert Bennett and the farm that caught him. Hed had a tough life in prison camp which gave him “...a queer slant on life...” At any rate, when Jerome moved in, the Bennetts thought they were getting a hired man but instead, he spent most of his time in the hammock during the summer and his time during the winter around the stove at the local store.

In September 1878 Frances gave birth to a son which they called Albert and in 1883 another son Edward, was born. But having two sons did not change Jerome or his ways. As time went on, the Bennetts and his wife Frances became more and more annoyed with him. It was never a happy home as they were always rowing with one another and eventually Adaline Bennett died. As the two boys became older, Jerome wanted to keep them at home working on the farm. In particular, he would bear down on them against women. When Albert and Edward were in their teens, Grandfather Albert Bennett died. Jerome got the surprise of his life when the estate was settled for all the talk about money was simply that -- talk! This meant that with half-hearted interest, Jerome and his boys really had to tackle farming. Albert, the oldest boy “...was a big sloppy kind...” and Edward, the other boy just let him do all the hard, heavy work. Edward, like his grandfather Bennett “...used to be bossy...wear good clothes and his grandpa’s gold watch and chain...” He spent a lot of time shooting with a 32 Remington. “...he’d pop at anything and he was just careless...” Jerome thought this was kind of cute so as a result, Albert got the short end of things but not without a lot of cussing. As time went on Albert “...showed bad signs first...” and became more and more shy. If Edward was asked to do something around the farm, he’d get sore at his father or brother and would not speak to them for days at a time.

One day late in the Fall, Jerome summoned the neighbors and told them that Albert, who was then around 25, had been gone for a day and a night. A few of the neighbors started with Jerome and Edward to hunt over the farm and woods. They also asked Edward many questions without any satisfactory answers. They hunted for a week but found no Albert. He had left with no money and hadn’t been seen by anybody. After a month or so, the excitement died down. Edward, it seemed had kind of enjoyed these hunts, leading the others off in various directions and always carrying his Remington. Finally, it was to be the last day of the search, when Charlie Cole climbed over a rail fence in the barnyard that “...he stepped down on something soft and slippery under the tangled weeds at the bottom... it was Albert. ...the cows and dogs had been at the body”. When Charlie yelled, Edward was upon the scene almost instantly, his gun cocked. The other neighbors noting this, quickly sent him for the coroner. The coroner took a quick look and gave the cause of death as exposure. “It was too late to look for any bullet holes, the job was too messy and nasty.”

When Spring came Albert of course, was not there to do the farm work and Edward wasn’t about to do it. All he seemed interested in doing, was shooting and dressing up. One day in July he took a pot shot at Jerome with the bullet just missing his head and piercing the hat band. With aid of the neighbors Cole, they found Edward sitting on the front porch with rifle in hands. It wasn’t easy getting the gun away from him. The sheriff came and a few days later Edward was taken to the asylum. But one day in the Fall of that year, Edward somehow got out of the asylum, came home while Jerome and Frances were having dinner and broke it up in a hurry when he grabbed their bread knife and took off after his father. Again, the Coles summoned the sheriff and Edward was removed back to the asylum where he died shortly thereafter. It wasn’t too long after that, Jerome died in his sleep and between malnutrition and catarrh, Frances also died, bringing about “the end of the family.”

“Weeds grew up in that family ’till they hid real things just like they did Albert’s body. That was right near home too.”
-- Marc W. Cole