

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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THE O'DONNELL BROS. LUMBER TRUCKS

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The photo included here is a rare scene taken in the 1920s on East Center Street in Medina. Provided through the courtesy of Louise O'Donnell Brownell, it depicts the O'Donnell Bros. Lumber Yard in the background. I want, in particular, to draw your attention to the two lumber trucks in the foreground. You will note that the cabs are of a most unusual architectonic design.

Here is the history behind their creation. William David O'Donnell came to the United States from Canada in the 1860's. He first settled in Shelby and then later moved to the Town of Barre where he ran a thresher during the summer and a sawmill in the winter time. In the year 1902 he purchased the lumber yard on East Center Street in Medina which had previously belonged to Charles H. Hedley for whom Hedley Street is named in Medina. He first called his business William O'Donnell Lumber and then later O'Donnell and Son when his son Francis joined the business. Their lumber yard office was a very small building to the east of the main lumber shed, which shows in the photo. This office was moved to the cobblestone Museum Complex in Childs during 1977.

William O'Donnell died in 1912 and around 1920 Bertram O'Donnell joined his brother Francis in the lumber business. From then on it was known as O'Donnell Bros. and their office was located in a house to the west of the main lumber shed. It was at that time that Francis O'Donnell got the idea of making his lumber trucks look like little houses. After all, they were selling lumber to build houses, why not promote building materials through which means they were delivered. It is believed that O'Donnells first purchased the chassis of their trucks with hard rubber tires, then Francis designed the cabs and had local carpenters construct them. Indeed, each cab looked like a little house with all the architectural elements including shingled hip roofs, house type windows, doors and siding. The cabs or little houses were painted yellow with white trim which coincided with the color scheme on all their lumber yard buildings. These were Francis O'Donnell's favorite colors for buildings. This advertising gimmick of course, was a real attention getter. Not to use a pun, but the O'Donnells got a lot of mileage out of this very clever method of advertising. What fun and what Yankee ingenuity won't produce to sell a product! At any rate, there were three trucks which were used up into the 1940's when they were abandoned and just left to stand idle at the lumber yard.

Bertram O'Donnell died in 1953 and Francis O'Donnell died in 1963. At that time the lumber yard was sold to Wilfred Newell who in turn sold the house-like trucks. In 1969 Erling Maine purchased the business which has since been known as Maine Home Centers. He wishes the trucks had never been sold. We can now only surmise that they are no longer in existence.