

Thinking of Old Orleans

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L. Monacelli photo

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ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Part I

The Presbyterian Manse - Albion

During the past year and a half this column has frequently featured stories about buildings destroyed in Orleans County. Most recently the Cobblestone Society has published a book entitled "Architecture Destroyed in Orleans County, New York". The intent of this book is to acquaint the reader with various architectural styles and to point out that much of our great architectural heritage has vanished. It is my hope this book will act as a catalysis for the preservation of existing architectural masterpieces. To that end, it is now time to take a close look at some buildings very worthy of being preserved.

Many distinct cultural traditions have been mirrored upon the Orleans County scene through architectural styles. Dwellings, stores, schools, and churches reflect not only basic needs of the builders, but also their aspirations. Yet there are many people who cannot accurately use architectural terms or identify styles and significant buildings.

One existing noteworthy structure is the old Presbyterian Manse on East State Street in Albion. It was built in 1893-94 at a cost of around \$20,000 which was largely subscribed to by E. Kirke Hart and his cousin John W. Hart. Stylistically, this house is important because it is Victorian Romanesque. I dare say it is one of the only residential examples of this style in Orleans County. The best examples of this style for public buildings in the county have all been destroyed.

Victorian Romanesque architecture can find its roots embedded in European history dating as far back as the eleventh century or the Norman Period. American architects seized upon this Romanesque

Style during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the early part of this century. The leading characteristic of the style is the rounded arch opening and asymmetrical balance. Buildings of this style are almost always made with masonry materials. They are very massive in form and lack superficial decorations. High peaked roofs and chimneys dominate. Windows can be found in series like those in the attic story of the manse. Rounded windows or doors are used as focal points. It is not at all uncommon to find a wide variety of assorted shapes and sizes for window openings in Victorian Romanesque buildings. Where several building materials are combined in a structure such as the manse, color was carefully considered so that these various elements blended. Although we see contrast here, the mortar was colored red so as to coincide with the red brick. The sandstone trimmings are of reddish hues as are the slate shingles in the attic portion. The original window trim and other exposed wooden parts were painted a reddish color to coordinate the whole design. The interior of this house boasts a fireplace in the front hall with an elegant stairway leading to the second floor. The dining room is perhaps the grandest of all the rooms with an inglenook. All the woodwork in the house is of quarter sawed oak in the Colonial Revival Style.

Presbyterian ministers who served the Albion church lived here until a few years ago. Since then, the manse has been rented out by the church for offices. This superb building is now for sale under listings of Peter Snell Realty. Monumental in character, it may seem forbidding, yet it shows great imagination and a very well thought-out design.