



**Bethinking of
Old Orleans**

C.W.Lattin
County
Historian

THE HON. E. K. HART BIRD COLLECTION

One of the most extraordinary works of local art is the Hon. E. K. Hart Bird Collection located at the Cobblestone Museum in Childs. This collection of taxidermy which was created in 1883 has recently been relocated within the Cobblestone Church Museum. The Scarlet Tanagers shown here are one of 39 cases of birds representing over 40 species. The Annual Art Show which is being held this Mothers Day weekend from noon to 8:00 P.M. Saturday and Sunday at the Cobblestone Museum, serves also as an excellent time to view this fabulous collection of taxidermy.

The collection was commissioned by the Hon. E. K. Hart from taxidermist David Bruce of Brockport. E. Kirke Hart (1841-1893) was identified with local banking, the Niagara Falls International Bridge Co., and was at one time our Representative in the U.S. Congress. He was wholly responsible for the location of the Western House of Refuge in Albion (1890), now the Albion Correctional Facility. He was one of Albion's wealthiest citizens who lived in a large mansion on South Main Street where Dale's Super Duper is now located. Because of his wealth he was able to hire David Bruce to assemble the collection of birds to decorate the second floor hallway around the stairwell of the Hart residence. In 1942 when the Hart Mansion was razed, the birds were given to the Albion High School where they were hung in the Biology Room. In 1977 the Albion Board of Education turned over this historic collection of art work to the Cobblestone Museum where it would receive more exposure and appreciation.

The taxidermist David Bruce was born in Perth, Scotland, June 13, 1833. When he was a year old, the family moved to Norwich, Norfolk, England.

He was always interested in birds, butterflies and in painting. In 1861 he made his first trip to New Zealand. There he collected birds and did some painting and paperhanging. He was in the business of procuring plumes and feathers of birds for millinery purposes.

It was not until the late 1870's that he moved to the United States and settled in Brockport. He was known as a decorator, painter, naturalist and foremost, a taxidermist. Many of the older homes in the Brockport area were painted by him with his motif being foliage and brightly-hued birds. In 1882 he received a Government appointment to make a collection of butterflies and moths of the United States. For this he traveled extensively in the west, making Colorado Springs his headquarters. Through his effort, the first and most complete classification of butterflies was made. In 1892

he collected and arranged an exhibit of moths and butterflies of Colorado as part of that State's exhibition at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. He became known in the world of ornithology and entomology.

David Bruce was the first taxidermist to place birds and mammals in cases surrounded by their natural environment. With his skill as an artist he was able to reproduce a suitable background for each particular case of mounted specimens. Prior to this, stuffed specimens often looked stiff, out of place and dead. His sculpturing ability in clay became especially important to his work. At that time taxidermists usually treated skins with salt, alum and an arsenic soap. The bones were wired, wrapped and put in the legs. The body was hung upside down and stuffed with straw. David Bruce attempted to improve the art of taxidermy by his own artistic and ingenious approach. He died in September 1903 while on a hike along the shore of Lake Ontario near Hamlin, N.Y. where he had been collecting specimens. He had no aspirations to become a wealthy man although he must have been a very happy man; one who was able to roam at will over some of the most beautiful country in the world doing the thing that he loved best.

However, his story does not end here, because not far from Brockport lies the township of Clarendon. Here on May 19, 1864 was born Carl Ethan Akeley. As a boy he was torn between his desire to please his parents in becoming a good farmer, and his love for the forest and wild life. Through an advertisement in the Youth's Companion, he found his answer (a book on taxidermy for \$1.00) A neighbor's deceased pet canary was his first subject. Eventually, Carl Akeley learned of David Bruce who lived just a few miles away. He went to Brockport and got acquainted with him. During the following three years Carl Akeley worked with David Bruce, the latter teaching and showing him the secrets of mixing paints, sculpturing in clay and other aspects of taxidermy including anatomy and sketching.

Carl Akeley however, had a special flair to do spectacular things and so he went on to become the great African explorer and the creator of African Hall in the American Museum of Natural History. Akeley is credited with being the first taxidermist to place specimens in their natural surroundings in decorated cases. That however, is a case where the inventor of a way of doing something does not receive the credit due him by the public. For it was the teacher, David Bruce, whose artistic genius led Carl Akeley on to outstanding accomplishment and fame.