



Bethinking of Old Orleans

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SWAN LIBRARY CHANGING SCENE

For eighty-five years the Swan Library has been a viable part of central Orleans County. Its original benefactor was William G. Swan (1835-1896) who left a bequest to be used for creating a community library. Following his death the Swan Library Association was formulated and granted a charter on December 21, 1899. The Swan Library opened for business on St. Patrick's Day 1900 in its present quarters and is the oldest public library in Orleans County. The first library board of trustees selected the former Roswell Burrows residence at State and Main Streets in Albion as the home for Swan Library.

I thought it would be of interest to look at the changing scene of this building over a period of ninety some years. Photo number one shows the Swan Library when it was the Burrows residence in the mid-1890's. The Burrows family built the house in the 1840's using the popular Greek Revival mode of architecture. When the library association purchased the property it was transformed into the appearance of a public building for its day. The porches, window blinds and fence were removed. A small canopy supported by two columns was then erected to form a focal point for the entrance. Likewise, a grand staircase of Medina Sandstone was built to create the image of a public building, along with a balustrade or gallery around the roof. In essence, the structure was transformed from Greek Revival to Colonial Revival which at the time



was enjoying new popularity. Photo number two taken around 1902 shows all these changes.

Photo number three which is a recent view shows the building much the way it appeared in 1900 except for the pressed metal gallery which was removed from the roof in the early 1950's. The scene at Swan Library is ever changing with improvements to the physical structure and library services. In the late 1970's through a federal grant an elevator was added, thus allowing all three floors to be fully utilized. More recently, a state grant has provided new carpeting throughout the building. Swan Library now in its 85th year continues to serve the public as a major resource and cultural center for the people of Orleans County.