

Bethinking of 9-27-85 Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin

County Historian

MEDINA SANDSTONE— ITS FOUNDER

John Ryan 1801 - 1896

VOL. VII NO. 39

John Ryan has always been cited as being the first to discover and develop the Medina Sandstone Quarry Industry which once played such a major role in our county. Although Medina Sandstone was quarried in Orleans County for building purposes as early as the 1820's it was Ryan who opened the first commercial business of quarrying in 1837. Supposedly, sandstone was first discovered in this area near Medina in Oak Orchard Creek. Prior to this it was known as Red Sandstone or just sandstone. It was Ryan who gave it a boost by calling it Medina Sandstone when he opened his quarry business at Medina.

John Ryan was born in Philadelphia in February 1801, his father being a veteran of the Revolutionary War. In 1824 Ryan walked from Philadelphia to Medina where he made his home thereafter. He worked first on the building of the Erie Canal and had charge of one of the cannons which fired the news of the completion of the work from Buffalo to Albany. Later when the canal was enlarged, Ryan had the contract for the

work on the Little Falls division. For several terms, he was superintendent of canals on the western division.

Ryan was a mason and a contractor who was responsible for building many early stone structures around Medina. His operations in connection with the quarries were extensive. It was indeed, through his efforts and interest that Medina Sandstone got its first substantial boost toward popularity.

By 1904 there were 48 operative Medina Sandstone quarries in Orleans County alone. The picture displayed here shows the Fancher-Cornwell Quarry in Hulberton on August 5, 1985.

At that period in time over 2,000 men were employed annually with an annual payroll of \$750,000. Paving blocks, curbing and ashlers were being widely shipped on the canal and the N.Y. Central Railroad between which most of the quarries were situated. This stone was especially good for paving in that it did not wear smooth and become slippery when wet, causing horses to fall. Many streets in Cleveland, Ohio were at one time quarried in Orleans County. Likewise, many public buildings and churches in cities from Buffalo to Boston were erected of locally quarried stone. When Ryan died in 1896 the quarry industry was reaching its all-time high, but during the succeeding years of the 20th century it declined to where there are only one or two active quarries in Orleans County today.

Ryan, in his days, was considered by his peers as the discoverer of the stone. He became a very wealthy and prominent citizen of Medina during his lifetime. He was a charter member of the Medina Masonic Lodge and the Medina Methodist Episcopal Church. In fact, he helped build its first church ediface and presented the first pipe organ to the church. He was a member of the first school board and served as postmaster in Medina under Lincoln. He was a staunch Republican all his life and was a friend of Thurlow Weed and Roscoe Conklin.

Ryan married Hannah Overdorf at Knowlesville in 1826. Eleven children were born to them. The Ryans made their home on West Avenue in Medina. It is I think, fair to say that probably many fruits of Ryan's efforts in stone masonry are in our midst even today in Medina.

MEDINA SANDSTONE--Sandstone was first discovered in this area near Medina in Oak Orchard Creek. It was named

Medina Sandstone by John Ryan in 1837.

