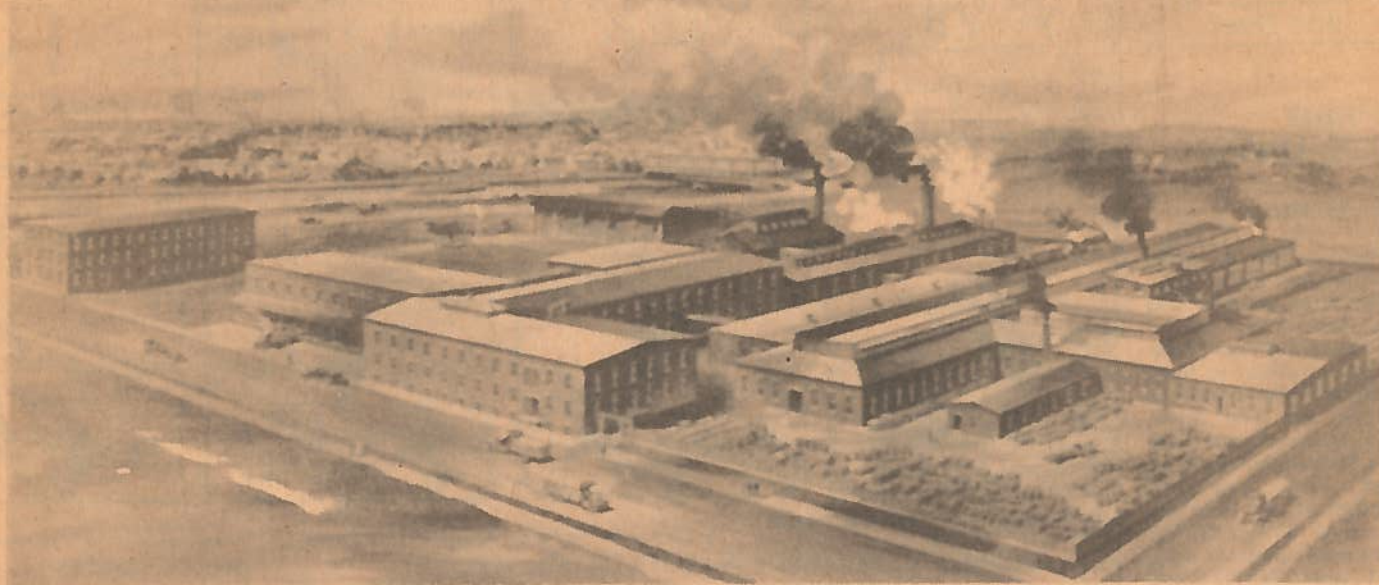


Bethinking of Old Orleans

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Plant of the A.L. Swett Iron Works, Medina, N.Y.

Medina's Foundry Business

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For over 100 years the foundry business was the leading and most thriving manufacturing business in Medina. It employed hundreds of area men along with the quarry industry of the same era. Both of these businesses helped Medina grow and develop into the largest community in our county. The readily available access to transportation, either on the Erie Canal or New York Central Railroad, made it possible for the foundry industry to have a significant impact on Orleans County.

Legend suggests that the first foundry in Medina was commenced by Simeon Bathgate in 1840. Later it was sold to Shaw and Oliver in 1855. This partnership was succeeded by William Bennett in 1859 and by John Mount in 1861. Following Mount's death, it was sold to Oscar K. Johnson, who operated it until 1866 when the plant burned.

The Bignall Manufacturing Company was begun in 1850 by two brothers, Benjamin and George Anthony who opened a foundry near Orient and Starr Streets. In 1861 this foundry was purchased by the Bignall Brothers. In 1865 Lewis J. Ives became a partner and the firm became known as the Bignall Company. It was later run by the Robbins family and still later by a Buffalo firm until it closed in 1960.

Another early foundry industry was the firm of Ives and Son which manufactured iron goods as well as paper-made products.

A.L. Swett, who was first employed as a shipping clerk with the Bignall Company started his own foundry in 1873. Power for his operation came from a waterwheel in a raceway diverted off Oak Orchard Creek. In 1876 A.L. Swett, with W.H. Sampson, formed a partnership and built the first foundry on

the east side of Glenwood Avenue. The power for the venture was obtained from a turbine water wheel below a dam on Oak Orchard Creek. This was the start of what later developed into the A.L. Swett Electric Light and Power Company. It was in 1890 that Sampson withdrew his interest and thereafter the company was operated under the name of the A.L. Swett Iron Works until 1898 when Swett sold out to the Central Foundry Company of New York City.

He then constructed a new foundry and machine shop across the street which was opened in 1899 under the name of A.L. Swett Iron Works. In 1911 a serious fire destroyed part of the works but it was rebuilt immediately. After A.L. Swett died in 1924, his son Raymond F. Swett operated the business. This foundry continued under the name Swett until it was purchased in 1963 by the Ontario Corporation which ceased operation in 1965.

Another foundry in Medina was organized by Michael J. Slack and Orrin F. Butts in 1900 in a building near the New York Central tracks at the west end of Park Avenue. It ceased operation after World War II. Still another foundry, known as the Medina Iron and Brass Company, was organized by Carl Breed and Frank Ernst. It was located off East Avenue and later owned by J.C. Posson and other local interests until it closed in the 1950's.

Together, these old-time foundries cast such iron products as agricultural equipment, hardware, pumps, soil pipe, etc. The canal and railroad brought in the raw materials and were used to ship out the finished products. From the 1840's to the 1960's many a Medina household was supported on this ince major industry.

The illustration pictured here is the A.L. Swett Iron Works which shows Glenwood Avenue in the foreground and the rest of Medina in the far distance.