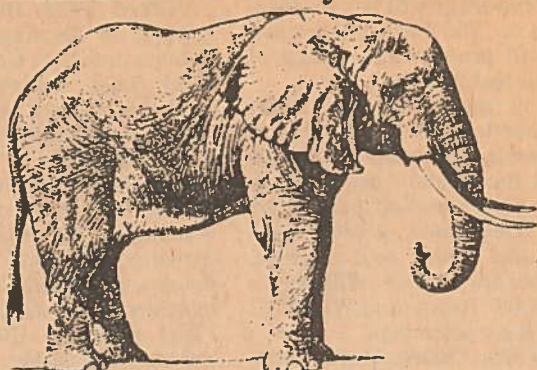


Bethinking of Old Orleans

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Pranksters

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If one thinks that the youth of today are ill-behaved and mischievous, one only has to read behavioral accounts of 19th Century youths to know that our children are actually quite normal. Here then are two different anecdotes about youths in the Town of Gaines well over one hundred fifty years ago.

The first story is from a letter written in 1874 by W.C. Ruggles to Alamanzor Hutchinson: "...Mrs. Dewey, the youngsters called her Mother Dewey...what I am about to relate of her must have happened about 1837. She was a positive character, and ruled the realm of her home. Her husband stayed with her and she had a daughter and they lived on the Gaines Basin Road in the first house south of the Ridge Road. It was a log house and in those days the woods grew near it...she was a conscientious member of the church, perpetual attendant, where she slept away much of her life. I remember her well as she used to come down the road to church. Though poor in this world's goods, she was fat in person, and rich in robust health. She waddled along with head and shoulders erect with a big brown workbag slung to one arm and a pinch of snuff and red bandana handkerchief swinging in the other hand...(In the church her seat)was in the back, directly under the front of the gallery. There she sat and slept, with nodding head and mouth wide open, all the same whether the sermon was dull or inspiring. It was one summer Sunday that the old lady had taken her usual seat, had gone into her usual sleep and the preacher had gotten well into the depths of his sermon, when two roguish boys in the gallery above her discovered her head directly under them throw back unusually far, and a dark hole in her face where her mouth ought to be. They itched to do something, it was too strong a temptation for mischief-loving boys. Instantly a fly leaf from a hymn book was chewed to pulp. It was held over her in consultation and passed from hand to hand in trial. Finally it dropped. It was a plumb drop, a bullseye shot. She choked, rolled over, coughed and spat it out. Her friends rushed to her, opened the window, fanned her, propped her up and talked of apoplexy. She said there wasn't any apoplexy nothing of the sort but didn't say what the matter was. Her dignity was fearfully insulted, and her indignation against somebody upstairs knew no bounds. In the melee two boys made lively tracks downstairs and out doors.

Our second story is one which was printed in the 1906 Gaines Centennial booklet. It now follows in its entirety from that publication. "Mr. James Calkins, eighty-six years of age now residing on the farm his father took up and where he was born, tells of the sharp practice of some West Gaines youths. In about 1832, Harve Noble, being one of them. As circuses had to get between stands in the night, one was due to pass with an elephant, in the wee small hours. Like all boys they wanted to see this special one by daylight. They had heard the monsters are fond of sweet apples and, as boys always know where apples grow, had supplied themselves with a goodly number and had scattered them in the road together with all the brush they could collect before the circus came. Mr. Elephant scented the apples among the brush and no amount of prodding with the keeper's staff, profanity nor coaxing could budge that elephant from those sweet apples. It is needless to say the boys won out and saw the elephant by daylight."