Cornerstone’s Contents
Recalls Duel Days Here

Escanaba, Mich., in 1873 was as far removed from New Orleans, rhetorically speaking, as the present-day court-method of settling disputes from the gun duel in affaires d’honneur of a former era, yet a newspaper editor in that small town dipped pen in ink on July 13, 1873, to “berate” New Orleans for “allowing dueling.”

The outraged editor’s comments not only called upon the world to “blush for New Orleans,” but the edition of the paper—the Tribune—was preserved for posterity in the cornerstone of St. Joseph’s Catholic Church of Escanaba.

The Tribune recently was brought from a metal box in which rested, also, other newspapers of the day, old coins and church documents, when the church was demolished to make way for a new structure.

Brought to New Orleans
A May 12 issue of the Escanaba Daily Press, commenting on the cornerstone’s contents, reproduced the Tribune’s article on dueling. The paper was received here by Father Gregory Troklus, O. F. M., assistant pastor of St. Mary of the Angels Church, but formerly of Escanaba.

The Daily Press quoted the Tribune article as berating “the city of New Orleans for allowing dueling, referring to a recent duel between R. B. Rhett, Jr., of The New Orleans Picayune and ex-Judge William H. Cooley in which Cooley was killed on the second shot.”

According to the Tribune, “The difficulty sprang out of an article in The Picayune headed ‘Hawkins vs The Picayune;’ a reply to it by Judge Cooley provoked the challenge by Colonel Rhett. The weapons used were double-barreled shotguns, loaded with ball—distance 40 feet. Rhett’s first shot ranged high, Cooley’s to the right. At the second, both firing together, Cooley fell, the ball passing into his side and through his heart.

“Let the world blush for New Orleans that two such eminent citizens should be so lost to reason and so blinded by passion as to seek satisfaction in the barbarous practices of dueling.”

Comment Stirs Trouble
The article erred slightly, according to an account of the duel in The New Orleans Times of July 2, 1873. The distance was 40 yards, The Times news story said.

The duel, according to The Times, was precipitated by a Picayune article entitled “Hawkins vs The Picayune,” in which Editor Rhett, commenting on a libel suit for $100,000 filed by Judge Jacob Hawkins, referred to “malicious and willfully false” representations made by Judge Cooley in the case.

Cooley replied to the article, wherefore, Editor Rhett answered with a challenge, according to The Times.

The duel was fought at Montgomery Station, two hours’ ride on the New Orleans, Mobile and Texas railroad at that time, and “only the seconds and a few warm personal friends of each of the principals were aware of the object of the mission,” The Times related.

“The train reached Montgomery Station at 10 o’clock. At 25 minutes past 10 the last shot was fired. Four minutes and a half later, Judge Cooley was a corpse,” The Times said.