

C-G Publishes First in Series of Hoffman Contest

Verlyn Klahn, Contest Winner, Writes On Cobblestone Homes Built in Wayne

(First in a series of articles submitted by Wayne County high school students in the historical contest sponsored by the Hoffman Foundation Scholarship Committee is published in the Newark Courier-Gazette. Verlyn Edward Klahn, son of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Klahn of E. Miller St., who was graduated from Newark High School last June, won first prize in the contest and because of this, his entry has the honor of leading the historical series. His essay is being presented in two installments).

BY VERLYN E. KLAHN

With the advent of the building of the Erie Canal, great numbers of immigrants flocked to this territory. One of the greatest and commonest needs of these people was a home. At first they built small log or frame houses. Later, as this region grew in prosperity and the natural desire for better homes resulted, cobblestone houses were built.

This region, as can be noted by our many drumlins, is a glacial area. These glaciers left many troublesome stones on many fertile farms. The pioneer farmers worked hard removing these stones. Sometimes they made fences of them, but more often, just put them in heaps or piles. As the farmer started to erect buildings, he could use these stones for foundations of his barns and house.

What could be more sensible than to build a place that had absolute sound-proof and fire-proof walls, a house that had resistance to the elements, that needed no paint, and that had by its being built, provided a means for the removal of the many nuisance stones that had to be taken from the fields. Yet, here would be a house of awe-inspiring beauty.

This type house gave its would-be owners something to look forward to, to be proud of, and a useful hobby. The idea of stone houses wasn't new, but the laying of cobblestones in rows was.

As research seems to indicate, houses of cobblestone nature may be placed in three eras or periods. These started with the Early or First Period, which ranged from those built from the late 1820's till about 1835. The Second or Middle Period is inclusive of the work between 1835 and 1845. The Third or Last Period dates between 1845 and 1868. These dates are approximate and are used for the sake of simplicity in the understanding of the art.

By contrast, the periods are not indicative of radical changes



VERLYN E. KLAHN

as a '55 car might differ from the same make of '54, but the masons gradually changed and improved upon their work. Since some didn't improve as fast or were not as skillful as others, as is the human trait, one can find cobblestone houses built in the 1840's that look as if they had been built in the 1830's, or vice versa.

The mason of the Early Period used stones of the fieldstone variety of no particular size or shape. This type is exemplified in the Jackson Schoolhouse, where the stones range from 7 by 4 to 4 by 2. The horizontal and vertical joints were almost flush and what outline there is, is a wavy "V." The joint is from 1 in. to 1½ in. wide. It was formed with a trowel.

As the work advanced, the masons selected stones that were nearly of the same rounded size and variety, laid the rows with more care, and made the "V" more distinct. As still more time passed, especially during the Middle Period when the greatest

strides were made, smaller stones averaging from 2 in. to 4 in. long and 1 in. to 2 in. wide were used. Also during this period, the use of the beautiful red sandstones started and came into predominance.

Both the horizontal and the vertical joints were decreased in width, and greater sharpness and straightness were noted. The use of a "V" in the vertical joint began during this period but this "V" was not allowed to cross, touch, or take away from the predominating horizontal "V." Later, a pyramidal shaped vertical joint became dominant.

It was during this Middle Period that the bead, a half-circle projection produced by a tool especially designed for the purpose, was introduced. Though the bead is undoubtedly more interesting and attractive for the horizontal, only a small percentage of cobblestone houses have it. It was employed principally in the Late Period.

The stones used in the Late Period were smaller yet, and in this period, practically all cobblestone houses built were of the "lake-washed" variety. Lakewashed means those stones washed smooth by Lake Ontario. Here in Wayne County those "lake-washed" stones were taken from the shores at Pultneyville. The masons, according to my inspection, generally used long, oval-shaped stones instead of round ones. It is my belief that they were not sure of how their mortar would stand up under many years of weathering, so they selected long stones because they realized these would take a longer time falling out than shorter ones would.

Probably one of the most interesting tales that might be told would be about the masons themselves—those who built these structures. It has been said, and is the common local belief, that traveling groups of Scotch masons came through New York State from west to east about 1825, building here and there, wherever water-polished cobbles could be found. However, this report contradicts itself, because of the many buildings which are of fieldstone. Moreover, by the sampling of names of known masons, the percentage of Scotch names is only about average.

One fact is true, however: There would have to have been a great number of masons because of the time involved and the large number of cobblestone houses which were built in Wayne County alone. I have found 152 standing examples besides evidence of many other structures that have long since been torn down and hundreds

of cobblestone foundations under brick or frame buildings. Unfortunately, it isn't possible to trace back a mason who built such a house, as you can its owner. The only way the few known masons have been made known is by diaries and accounts of the builder-owners which have been passed on to succeeding generations, and the nameplates usually attached to the front of the house, usually over the front door.

We in Wayne County can proudly claim the name of the first known builder and of the last known builder. Before this research, the first known man who built these houses was Alonzo Bradley, who built a house in Rochester in 1839. I have found a house near Zurich that was built in 1831 by Arthur Henry Van Der Bilt. The last known work is the addition to the Riker House in Ontario Township by a Mr. Trimble in 1863.

Mr. George Chapman, since this winter deceased, to the last a possessor of an extremely recollective and nimble mind, stated that his grandfather never talked of how he built cobblestone houses or of their secret even though he had built the Mormon House in Palmyra Township. Such are cases where silence certainly is not golden.

Some say that the masons received anywhere from \$.50 to \$1.25 a day. It is known that Richard Stokes, who built Mr. Chapman's house in Ontario Township, received \$1 a day. It is, actually, indefinite as to how much a mason got, since there were several panics (depressions) between 1820 and 1860. The pay also depended on how good the mason himself was. One thing is known, however: The mason did put in long, hard, tedious hours for his money, since the eight-hour union day was still far away.

One cannot help notice the many lime-kilns scattered through the country; no doubt some of these furnished the masons of the cobblestone era with burned lime needed in their mortar. Each mason had his own formula and way of making mortar. That is why one sees a vast difference in color, texture and hardness of mortar on different places. In the mortar of many of these fine homes one can see small lumps of white lime that wasn't thoroughly pulverized or dissolved when burned or mixed. Of course this detracts from the fineness but it is an interesting feature nevertheless.

Such examples are the Southwell House and the Caldwell

Place. One also will find that the mortar of many houses has been colored, in most cases by the gradually fading in of the surrounding lake stone. However, there are some cases where the mortar has been colored by the mason, such as in the Winter Place. The mortar on each cobblestone house seems to have its own individual characteristics.

Many are very sandy; in others, hardly a grain of sand can be noticed; few have large pebbles; while some are very fine. And as I have mentioned before, the coloring and the fineness of the mortar used vary greatly. Also, some mortar has had a tendency to crumble and weather away while other types of mortar have stood like the Rock of Gibraltar. As one might guess, the mortar had to have consistency.

From either the bead of the "V" one can tell that after the mason had laid a row, he went back along with a tool to shape the horizontal and vertical joints. Thus the mortar had to be such as to hold its shape, yet manageable to mold easily. I have been told that road dust was collected to be used in the mortar. This might explain how some mortars got their very fine and hard qualities.

An intriguing part of this art is the many patterns or designs used. One type exclusively used in the Late Period is the "herringbone." The stones used in this were long slim red sandstone about 6 in. long and 3½ in. high. These were laid diagonally at an approximate 50 degree angle. Every other row was laid the same way, but the alternate row was laid slanting toward the other side. On a good sunny day this creates a rich, impressive mingling of shadows on that stone that varies all day long.

Usually these different patterns are arranged in fours, such as in the Alton Church: Two red, one white, one black. These

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color bands form definite patterns only on individual houses, not on these houses as a whole. Also, on several homes can be seen more red stones toward the

bottom with more white toward the top, or vice versa. Many masons also seemed to favor stones of either brown, black or yellow hue, or a mixture of these.

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one will note that the stones slant toward one direction. These are the regular type stone used, but the mason for some reason desired to slant them. A mason had to have a vivid imagination in addition to his artistic ability.

These cobblestone houses erected in the period from 1820 to the late 1860's are found between Buffalo and Utica, from Lake Ontario to a distance 50 miles south. The ingenious technique of building cobblestone houses has become a lost art since the Civil War. Yet it was only 130 years ago that the pioneers of the Lake Ontario Plains began using small, round, elliptical stones washed smooth by the waves as well as stones picked up from their fields for building homes, schools, churches, and various public buildings.

Stones were often hauled a distance of 30 miles. 3,500 to 7,800 stones were often required for the front facing of a single house, and it would often require three years' work to complete a home. The cobbles were drawn in wagons to the site selected for the house, and then came the work of sizing them for the various courses. After the stones had been gathered, there might be a "grading bee" at which the whole community would gather to sort out the cobblestones of just the right size and shape by the simple expediency of passing each individual cobblestone through an iron ring of the approved size, or, in other cases, through holes in a board.

As may be observed by an inspection of some of the dwellings, every stone was set in a casing of mortar with as great care as if the wall were a work of art, as indeed it was when finished. Cobblestone houses were well-planned and were built to last. Time was of little consequence to produce a finished job. Materials were cheap, except for the labor of gathering and sorting them. It was said that boys of that day earned spending money by picking up cobblestones.

I have found the 152 examples of cobblestone architecture scat-



One of the best known cobblestone homes in Newark vicinity is the Parker House on the Parker Road.

tered throughout Wayne County. There are 11 in Arcadia, two in Butler, six in Galen, two in Huron, 12 in Ontario, 15 in Palmyra, four in Rose, one in Savannah, 34 in Sodus, five in Walworth, 20 in Williamson, and two in Wolcott. It is, of course, impossible to insure that this is all of them, but there are probably not more than a dozen others which I did not find.

There is a wealth of history connected with these houses and the people who built them and lived in them. One of these people was Bela Morgan from Connecticut, who, upon his arrival in Palmyra in 1818, purchased a tract of woodland, where he built a log cabin with a bark roof. Morgan was busy for a number of years clearing his land while his young wife assisted by lighting the fires and keeping them going to burn the timber. In the summers, he worked for his neighbor, Stephen Durfee, for 50 cents a day, or for a bushel of wheat.

Later, unable to make payments on the land or pay taxes, he returned to Connecticut. While there, he borrowed \$500 from his mother and, on returning, built the cobblestone house with eight rooms. His trip to Connecticut, on foot, took six

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Missing text at end: it might be thoroughly seasoned. On the last sleighing that spring there was a "bee" and a large pile of sand was taken from back of the woods where Mr. Farnsworth's farm now stands, it being the first ever taken from there. It kept one or two men shoveling snow on the bare spots by thawing so fast. We got two or three loads of cobblestones from the lake for the facing of the wall. The "cut stones" (caps and sills) came from Phelps (then Vienna). The front door capstone and sill each made nearly a load."

Newark High Graduate Pens Winning Essay on Cobblestone Homes

Diary Reveals Home Builder Traveled To Lake Ontario for Many Loads of Stone

(Verlyn E. Klahn, first prize winner in the Hoffman historical essay contest, concludes his essay, "Cobblestone Structures of Wayne County," in this issue of the Courier-Gazette. This is the first in the historical series by county high school students being published. He was graduated from Newark High School last June. Funds for the contest are provided through J. Donald Frey and the Lincoln Rochester Trust Co. as trustees of the Hoffman Foundation.)

BY VERLYN E. KLAHN

"The job was let to a Mr. Skinner, not including the inside work, have forgotten the price, but I think it was less than \$200. They came and laid the cellar wall; then went away and did other jobs to let this harden; then returned and laid the first story; then went away again for several weeks and so on until it was finished. Meanwhile, the carpenters prepared the windows and door frames, the sleepers and joists.

As the walls were ready for them they did the plaining (sic) and matching the flooring (every board in the house being plained by hand) and nearly all but the floors were sandpapered. While they were absent father would have to draw more stones from Phelps besides doing a little farming and all the other work and business accompanying such building. He also went with two teams to Italy Hollow, south of Geneva, and got about 2,000 feet of pine lumber for about \$10 per thousand, being about all of the pine used in the house.

The first stone he drew from the lake, he took a man with the team and went to the bar off the bluff across the bay on ice. I went with him and we reached home about one o'clock in the morning. Father went about 20 times but sometimes being rainy he got only part of a load and often reached home 10 or 12 o'clock at night. Parkings the carpenter only did the work until it was inclosed, which was late in the fall.

One of my jobs was to flatten the nail heads as there were no finishing nails then; also had to putty the nailheads after being driven. In laying the walls after getting out of reach from the ground there were poles set about 6 or 8 feet from the wall and about as high as the walls were to be, then long poles were lashed to them with hickory withes an inch or an inch and a quarter in diameter and six to eight inches long and then scantling laid across them to the wall and planks laid on them making a scaffolding all around the house.

Then a crane and tackles and rope were fastened to the north-east post (it being larger than the rest). Buckets a little larger than a molasses cask cut in two would be filled with either mortar or stones and hoisted up, using a horse, to the scaffold and their contents distributed with a wheelbarrow.

When they were above reach from a scaffold the staging would be raised again. The inside work was done by Ruel Taylor and his men. They did their work evenings and were here all winter.

The doors were made by hand. Father went out southwest of Newark and bought a butternut tree for stair railings and all connected with them—the house was not ready for occupancy until May the next year. The frame part was not moved until fall, the crane and tackles were used in digging the well in the fall, which was in 1845."

According to Mr. Lee, his and his father's hands got so sore picking up stones that they had to bandage them. Sometimes the

stones were so heavy that they had to dump some from their load. Also since their horses wearied easily under the heavy load, they frequently had to stop and unharness the animals to rest them before completing the trip.

The story of the Stuart House on the corner of Stuerwald and West Maple Avenues in Newark was told in a letter by Franklin J. Keller, grandson of Jacob Keller, the builder, to C. W. Stuart, quoted here from Mrs. Herbert Jackson's article in the Newark Courier-Gazette of May 14, 1953:

"Jacob Keller came to Newark from Columbia County when a young man and bought the farm that lies around and west of the stone house. He first lived in a log cabin but built the stone house about 1845 and 1846.

"It took two years to build the house. The lumber and stones all came from the farm except the cobblestones that are in rows around the outside wall, and the sand. The sand was taken from a sandpit on West Avenue. The logs for the lumber were cut on the farm and were sawed in the rough at a sawmill that stood south of the Budd house, and about where the Beader barn now stands. There was a dam and a pond of about thirty acres there.

"The sawmill was run by a man named Carl, who owned the time. The lumber, to be dressed, was taken to a mill on the Outlet at Phelps. That mill was later owned and run by, and known as, the Bigal's Mill. The moldings were burned by a man named Horn, about two miles west of Fairville. The small round stones on the outside of the wall were drawn from the lakeshore north of Fairville by Dellavan Keller, son of Jacob and father of the writer. It used to take three days for a trip for a load of stones from the lake shore, if he had good luck, but sometime longer as there was no road three miles north of Fairville, only a rough crooked trail."

The Eggleston House is just out of Palmyra on the right-hand side of the Palmyra-Marion Road. Newton Eggleston, a native of Vermont, bought land for \$6 an acre and built a log cabin. In 1840-41, he had a stone-mason Stephen Trumbull, his father, and two other masons build the lakestone house across the road. They drew nine loads of lakestones from the Lake Ontario shore, 14 miles away. The cornerstones were drawn from the Naples that Mr. Eggleston saw his first train and because of the fog and the strange country, he was frightened as it came toward him.

Mr. Eggleston's son-in-law Frank Deyoe, while still living, recalled the construction of these cobblestone houses. A group of masons would work on one house until a foot of wall had been laid; then they were forced to allow the mortar to dry for a week. In order to keep busy, they usually planned to build more than one house at a time, which accounted for the long time required to complete a house. Of course, some were



State School farm house on the Vienna St. Rd. was built with medium field stones of all colors and a cobblestone foundation.

forced because of finances to delay the building.

A note that is of interest: The Congdon House on the Marion-East Williamson Road, now owned by Ida Schultz, tradition

says, was a station of the Underground Railroad. It has a dutch oven and a large fireplace in the center of the house. There is a concealed cupboard near the fireplace big enough to hold a person, where it is said slaves were hidden until they could be conveyed to the next station.

Of the many, many homes I covered, there was only one of the Victorian style—the MacLeod's on Ganz Road. The work is done in beautiful black walnut. There are lovely sliding

doors, and a semi-circular stairway which is said to have cost \$1,500. The attic itself is larger than many modern homes.

John Mogray's house on Ridge Road was built in 1839 and was first a Methodist Church. It was built with a double entry, one entrance for the men and one for the women. In past years it was common in some churches for the men to be seated on one side of the church and the women on the other side.

The Parker Place on Parker Road was built for the Reverend Parker in the 1820's. He held his meetings in the unfinished upstairs and this was the beginning of the Methodist Church of East Palmyra. It took only \$50

of actual money plus helping neighbors and barter to build this fine house. This house has never been owned out of the Parker family.

The John Bestard House in Wallington was built in 1834 for an inn. The inn was the half-way point for the stage between Oswego and Rochester. It was famous for its food, wines, rooms, and dance hall, and was probably one of the largest inns in this territory.

The Martin Harris Farm is now used by the Church of the Latter Day Saints for their headquarters in this area. This house was built by Robert Johnson for William Chapman in 1849. Martin Harris had mortgaged the farm land in 1829 for \$3,000 to E. B. Grandin, owner of the Wayne Sentinel, who in turn agreed to print the first edition of the Book of Mormon. For this first edition, 5,000 copies were printed.

Each house had its own individuality. The photographs and accounts of others of the 152 houses in the accompanying five notebooks will reveal many other interesting features not mentioned in this essay. No two of these houses were alike. In many of these places one will still find the original hand-blown windows, mainly around the entrance. Since hand-blown glass is wavy and contains small bubbles of air pockets, which tend to distort objects, it doesn't make good viewing glass and therefore has been replaced in some homes. Also, because hand-blown glass does not have the

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strength of manufactured glass, it is easily broken, hence its rarity.

At the Thomas Place on the Jeffrey Road, the lower front windows are of the Southern Terrace type. They are made to open on the porch like French doors. These were incorporated

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Cobblestone Construction Stops in 1868, Writer Notes

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into the house when it was built. All windows at the Frantz Place are said to be of the same size, which is unusual for an older type dwelling, for the upstairs windows were often made smaller.

The woodwork of many of these old homes is of chestnut, such as is in the Jordan Place on Alderman Road. This is interesting to note because of the blight which has swept the chestnut trees in recent years.

On one of my trips I was told that the masons used a few large stones placed at intervals along one course which passed straight through the wall, not only to tie in the veneer of small stones but also to be used as a scaffold holder. It seems reasonable that they could be used for scaffold riggings because of their parallel position and the force they could withstand. A good example of these tie-in stones may be seen in the front of the Hanagan Place.

Apparently, the old time owners were happily contented with and liked their cobblestone buildings. This is evident because of the many cobblestone additions found on the original cobblestone houses. I can recall only a few places having a foundation with a cobblestone exterior. For the most part, the foundations are of cut limestone. Why this should be so I can find no reason and is the more odd when one considers the countless cobblestone foundations found under frame houses. Indeed, these foundations have more meticulous masonry than most cobblestone houses have.

Sodus must have been the location of the earliest masons because two houses there are definitely different and more primitive. They have no shaped joints and are of very large and irregular stones. The cornerstones in these two houses—the Ellis and the Barkley Houses—are irregularly cut native stone. Since they are the only houses of their kind in the county, one may conjecture that they were built by a local man with no previous experience. However, I cannot honestly tell whether they were built before all the other cobblestone houses or whether they were constructed by some novice during the middle of the building period.

Cobblestone buildings have served many uses—as inns, warehouses, blacksmith shops, milk and smoke houses, barns,

carriage sheds, churches, school-houses, and homes. Cobblestone building was contemporary with the peppermint industry, and one wonders how many of these structures were made possible by the raising of peppermint, which brought good money and made many wealthy.

These stone buildings were not first examples of stone masonry in this county. Years before, cut stone buildings had attained much popularity and today many of these houses in almost perfect condition may be found near their cobblestone brothers. The Harrison House in Marion Township (where there are a great many cut stone houses) is a cut stone house with a cobblestone wing.

The preservation of our stone buildings and their adaptation to modern needs are well worth while, for they are one of the native architectural features of the lake counties. There will never be any more of them built, for even if modern masons rediscovered the lost art, it would not be economically feasible to build one. With today's union hours and labor costs, it would take a good-sized fortune to build such a house.

Being characteristic of Western New York, these old structures should be saved to serve as a reminder of bygone days when our pioneer fathers put in an honest day's work for small wages. These are solid, substantial buildings which do not have to be painted, are warm in winter and cool in summer. The stone surface gives forth a beautiful pattern of light and shadows in the sunlight.

Unfortunately, however, one finds that some of them are showing signs of wear. Deterioration as exemplified by white patches on the horizontal and vertical joints shows where mortar has begun to disintegrate. The late Mr. George Chapman found that this crumbling can be stopped by making a thin paste of cement and water, applying this with a brush over such places where disintegration is noted, taking care not to touch the cobblestones with the paste. The cement will harden and after a while it will turn to nearly the same color as the rest of the wall, and only a close inspection will show where the mortar had begun to crumble.

Why was it that such an art as this should die out? A big factor, of course, was the jealousy

with which the masons guarded the features of this individual techniques. Most masons would stop work when anyone was near enough to observe the details of the work. But as with most facets of history, economic considerations have been the primary cause for there being no cobblestone construction after 1868.

After the Civil War, the economic pulse of the nation quickened; work became more plentiful and rewarding so masons could find in the field of industry and business, work. Wealthy landholders, instead of tying up their money in stone monuments, invested it in the growing and robust manufacturing concerns, railroads, and other financial enterprises. But despite this pat economic explanation, one is still not quite satisfied.

What is strange is that the end of the cobblestone building era came at the time when the craft had reached as near perfection as man may come and did not experience any decline in workmanship. May it be due to our American spirit of enterprise that, when something can no longer be improved upon, interest in it is lost? Or is it perhaps what made cobblestone houses so desirable in the early part of the era—their uniqueness, variety of colors, attractive wall texture—were, as the art of cobblestone masonry gave way to the craft, replaced by uniformity in form, in color of stones, and the machine-like precision in which the stones were laid?

These relics leave the same impression on society today that they did on people of the last century. The character of the past has been immortalized in stone to symbolize that which made America what she is today—patient, ingenious, progressive, and most of all, yet almost paradoxically, stable.

We are proud of what our forebears could accomplish with limited means. I know that I speak for the many owners of cobblestone houses when I say that we are going to preserve them as a standing monument to our past and a prophecy to our future.

During the past year, I have traversed hundreds of miles, dug into numerous yellowing newspapers, letters, deeds and old records, and I have talked with hundreds of people. Everywhere I was received with the spirit of hospitality and cooperation which made a normally pleasant task just a little more so. It would be difficult to acknowledge the names of all those good people, but I am deeply grateful to everyone who helped in any way, no matter how trivial that as-

stance may have seemed to them.

I am particularly grateful to those who let me browse through their scrapbooks and take up their valuable time—Mr. Carl F. Schmidt, Mrs. Margaret Merhoff, Miss Dora Westfall, Mrs. Lois Welcher, Mrs. Howard Jeffrey, Miss Mary Ziegler, Mrs. George Ennis, Miss Gerda Peterick, and N. G. Klahamer.

In compiling a work of this scope it is unavoidable that a few errors will creep in here and there, although every effort has been made to be accurate. Sometimes it took nearly a day's time to get a picture and the history of the house, due to location, weather, daylight, and the tracing down of people connected with the structure. But these hundreds of hours of labor were made worthwhile by the broadening experience which they occasioned and the sense that they would result in historically valuable information and pictorial documentation, much of which was, during the course of this research, assembled in one place for the first time.

I found a poem which I think expresses our reaction to cobblestone architecture. It was written by Dorothy W. Pease and follows:

As I go wandering up and
down
New York State's Ridge and
the old byways,
I stop and chat with farmers
there
And hear the lore of bygone
days;

Of houses built of cobblestones
Brought from the lake by
oxen strong
Or harvested with patient toil
From the glacial fields where
they belong.

These stones were sorted then
for size

By dropping through a beetle
ring,
And reddish ones were laid
aside,
To use where they'd attention
bring.

The mason patiently did lay
In row on row of mortar
hard,
Round stones or patterned
herringbone
Which we with wonder now
regard.

O houses blessed with memory
sweet,
Of busy housewives, farmers
strong,
Who round the family fireside
sat
To worship God with
evensong.