



Vacant and in sad repair is Harford's cobblestone house, more than 130 years old.

Photo by Barbara Bell



By BARBARA BELL  
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It's a house of mystery and its future is in doubt. It is one of the few cobblestone houses of the area and was probably erected earlier than average.

"From 1825, when the Erie Canal was completed, to 1860 our heritage of cobblestone buildings was constructed", according to "Our Cobblestone Heritage," a publication of the state's Cobblestone Society.

The cobblestone house on the Daisy Hollow Rd. in Town of Harford, a few miles south of Dryden, is on lands recently bought by Cornell University for development of its farms.

The house has been unoccupied for several years, was in a state of disrepair before the sale and, as might be expected, has been vandalized since it was vacated. With windows broken and doors left open, snow, wind and rain have been able to speed deterioration.

One of the five cobblestone structures in Cortland County, the house was built by Nathan Heaton between the time he moved to Daisy Hollow in 1824 and the year he died, 1841.

This is the conclusion drawn by Mary Louise Dexter of Cortland who, at the request of Cortland County's historical society, meticulously searched old census and land records for many hours. She located an 1855 map showing the place, the only cobblestone structure in Harford township, then the property of Edward Mulks.

Mulks bought it from James Hart Heaton, son of Nathan, in 1853. He paid \$4,000 for 103 acres with building and appurtenances.

These statistics look so final and simple, but the reader might be interested in why the research was started and what efforts were expended in the process.

It was early last autumn that a Cornell University employee and

Dryden resident, Larry Doe, became curious about the old house. He took photographs and made a limited inquiry without learning much background before he contacted this writer for ideas. It took only brief checking to determine no written history of the house existed.

Starting with former owners, the Cotterill family of Dryden, and with certain Cornell officials, we compiled names of former owners and old-timers.

We sought help from Ray Rockefeller of Dryden, an experienced sleuth of local historical matters and member of an old family of the area. We contacted a former Town of Harford clerk, the Cobblestone Society, and Cortland County Historical Society.

We checked libraries and made telephone calls to 30 or more persons (one, though listed in the phone book, had died more than a year ago and his family knew nothing about the house).

We wrote to many people and visited some, and with Rockefeller, we visited the house itself.

We were able to trace direct ownership back for 80 years or so and collected a number of comments from the memories of former residents of Daisy Hollow. But it wasn't until Miss Dexter delved back into the records that concrete information about the years before the 1890's was forthcoming.

Miss Dexter first checked the 1855 census for Harford and found one, and only one, cobblestone structure listed — a house (No. 144) valued at \$600 and owned by 35-year-old Edward Mulks, a farmer. Tracing ownership back from Mulks meant a search of old deeds. Nowhere was the actual construction date recorded.

Nathan Heaton settled in Harford Mills in 1807 while it was still part of Town of Virgil. He built the farm grist mill there

in 1914. He sold the business and moved to Daisy Hollow in 1824.

In 1933, Heaton was among those appointed representatives of three religious denominations who joined forces to buy land and erect a church which was dedicated in 1833. It is fairly safe to assume he had built his house by that time.

The cobblestones appear to have been taken from his own farm or nearby. Some of the older houses still standing in the neighborhood have foundations of similar stone. Only a few miles away in any direction, one finds the older stone foundations are of flat fieldstones or quarried materials.

Heaton served in the State Assembly and it was while he was home temporarily from legislative duties in 1841 that he died. He and his wife, Susan Luana Hart Heaton, are buried beside each other in a Harford Cemetery. They had four children.

Heaton's home, though unusual in this area for choice of materials, is no architect's beautiful dream. There are some rows of stones laid in herringbone pattern and there are at least two rows of elongated cobbles in one side wall between the first and second stories. The cobblestones, obviously, were not sorted and used by size as there are large, medium and small ones mixed throughout.

Its corners were formed by laying up large, smooth-surfaced and square-cornered stones called "quoins". Each is the same thickness as the cobblestone facing, in such construction. This particular house also boasted a Dutch oven in its cellar, built into the cobbled foundation.

Cobblestone construction is an old art. Its technique was given uniqueness on this side of the Atlantic Ocean by emphasis given to the mortar joints, according to the society's book

on cobblestone history.

Many of the masons who built the New York State edifices learned their trade while building the Erie Canal. Information concerning the total masonic process is not complete because those who knew how were somewhat secretive of their mortar mixture recipes and how to do the cobblestone facing. The real secret of a cobblestone wall is the high quality of mortar that was used, historians of the craft say.

A cobblestone wall is usually at least 18 inches thick. Our cobblestones are relics of the glacier ages, times when this and was bared by retreating glaciers which had crept down from the north, covering most of what is now New York State, the Great Lakes and New England.

As it inched along, the cobblestone history says, glacier picked up loose rocks which it gradually ground down and roughly smoothed. These were strewn over the land as the glacier left.

Before the cobblestone house belonged to the Cotterill family, it belonged to or was occupied by a Harry Robinson and before that, in order (I believe) to Austin Gilbert, Albert Richardson, a man named Howe whose daughter is Mrs. Henry Patch of the Harford area, a Clarence Conrad, Luther Holden and his father, Ben Holden.

A Mrs. Herbert Tyler of West Brookfield, Mass. writes that she lived in the house from 1929 to 1932 and papered and painted

every room. She was one of the Richardson family.

About 80 years ago, Mrs. Leland Burch, (now of Dryden), often visited the Holdens in the Cobblestone house. Her father had been born and raised near there and was a friend of the tenants of that day.

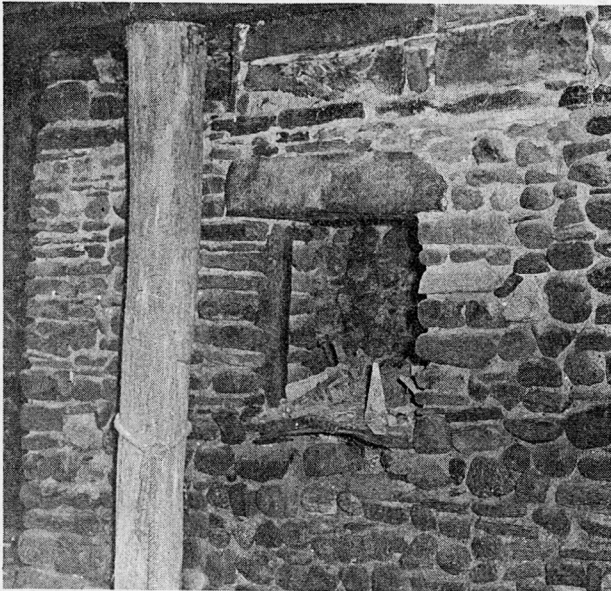
Mrs. Holden always had big red geraniums flowering on the broad windowsills, Mrs. Burch recalls. Luther Holden was tall, well-built and pleasant, "probably 40 or 50 years old."

This writer, Cortland Historical Society, Ray Rockefeller of Dryden, and the state's Cobblestone Society are all seeking more data on the house. I would be happy to share, with the others, any information sent to me.

It is not likely that the place will be restored. The natural wear of the ages, hurried by vandalism and weather, make it a costly idea.

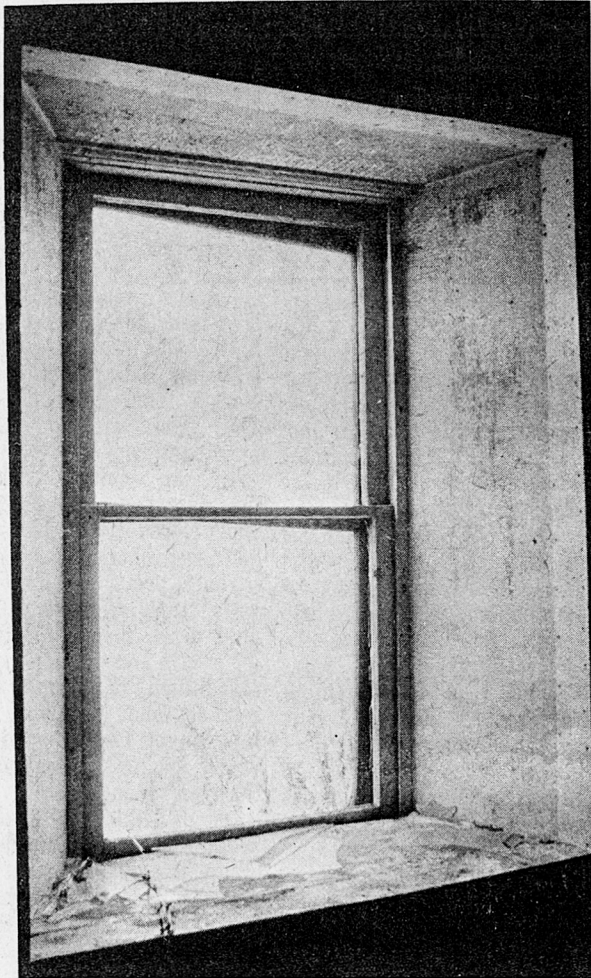
Moreover, to what practical use might it be put, if restored, especially as it is now standing on acreage included in Cornell's extensive farm holdings, all of which will probably be needed by the agricultural college sooner or later? There have been, however, a few inquiries by private individuals, with results unknown to us.

The next best thing to full restoration and appropriate use is a written and pictorial history, as complete as possible. Many are working on that.



—Photo by Larry Doe

Chimney hole in cellar was for a Dutch oven.



Window frame, where geraniums once stood, shows thickness of walls.



—Photo by Larry Doe

Side wall in various stages of deterioration: Wood siding has replaced some of the lost stones. Note the different sizes of cobblestone under the first-floor window, and herringbone pattern under the second-floor window.