

The Rippey-Banfield cobblestone house, 1854, is a rare one. It is in the Italian villa style with Florentine windows and hand-carved brackets. The house is located on Route 245, just outside of Geneva.

COBBLESTONE CURIOSITIES

Story and Photos by
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Glacier-polished and lake-washed stones, roughly round or oval-shaped, some as small as hens' eggs, hand-set in parallel rows, the mortar itself manipulated to give a repeated textural design—such is the picturesque and rugged cobblestone masonry that forms the walls of scores of houses and small buildings in New York State.

We who live near the Finger Lakes region are very familiar with these charming, well-built and unique 19th Century houses—houses that reflect the ingenuity and skill of American carpenters and masons who built from 1828 to the 1850's. For their construction is, indeed, a purely American invention.

Oxcart loads of cobblestones from Lake Ontario, other less perfect stones collected from the fields, all sorted for size and quality and set in mortar, were the building materials. Thus cobblestone houses became the fashion in Western New York, for 30 years or so—particularly in Monroe, Orleans and Wayne Counties.

But certain basic 19th Century architectural designs were also the fashion in our American countryside and it was found that these styles could be followed with the unusual material quite successfully.

We, therefore, can still admire distinguished cobblestone mansions in the Greek Revival style, like the Gracey house, just west of Geneva on Route 5-20, with the typical Greek pediment and portico of massive Ionic columns, its smaller ones of the same design along the flanking wings.

Also of Greek Revival origin are simpler farm homes, one having its long entablature pierced with decorative iron grilles; another with "eyebrow" windows piercing the frieze band—and this house stands high on a hill facing a magnificent view.

The Italian Villa with its extended roof, decorative brackets, cupola and lovely arched Florentine windows with twin arched lights, was built with stones that were most carefully chosen for

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HOUSES

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their decorative as well as utilitarian use. The Rippey-Banfield house on Route 245, just outside of Geneva, is a good example.

The octagon fad is represented with a handsome house in Madison, ostentatiously geometric. There are houses, too, that have the popular mid-century pointed Gothic gables and windows—all of cobblestone masonry. Finally, there still stands a fascinating array of cobblestone churches, schools, stores—even a cobblestone pump house, a smoke house, a hop house and a cemetery vault.

Less obvious, but interesting, details found among the buildings are German silver door fittings and wooden mouldings of various Greek designs. There was consistency of color, size and shape of the cobblestones, unusual trowel-mark designs—details indicating admirable and imaginative craftsmanship. The buildings are cornered with cut-stone quoins and most of them have lintels, sills and waterables of stone.

The pictures accompanying the article were taken in June, 1965, on the fifth annual Cobblestone Tour of the Cobblestone Society, Childs, Albion P.O., New York, in cooperation with the Ontario County Historical Society—organizations dedicated to the preservation of these unique buildings.

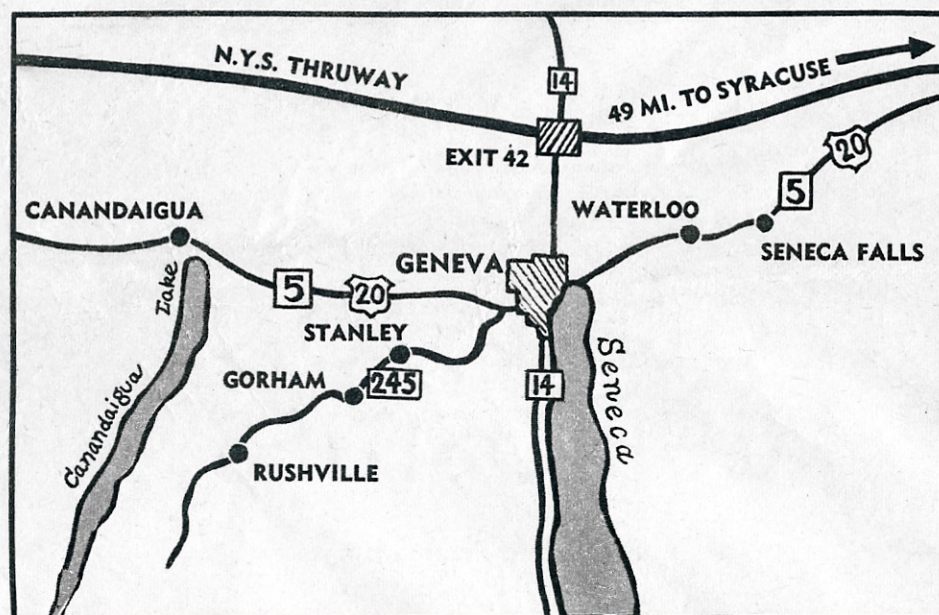
The group recently sponsored its sixth annual tour, this time covering houses in Western New York.



The McEwen house follows the Greek Temple plan. It is located off Route 245, between Stanley and Gorham.

THE AUTHOR

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Map shows area around Geneva where most of houses pictured are located.



The John Klein house. Notice the blind window on the wall at left. House is located off Route 245, between Gorham and Rushville.



Bellwood Farm, also known as the Tucker-Lewis-Poole house. The original cobblestone house was built about 1835, with additions in 1905. It is located on Pre-emption road, which runs off Route 245 just outside of Geneva.



This a view of the north end of Bellwood Farm.



The Barron-Gracey house, called "The Cobblestones," was built in 1848. It is one of the finest examples of cobblestones used in a Greek Revival house. House is located on Route 5-20 just west of Geneva.



Two mid-19th Century innovations for domestic architecture are combined in this unique Madison house: the octagon design with the use of cabblesstones for building materials.