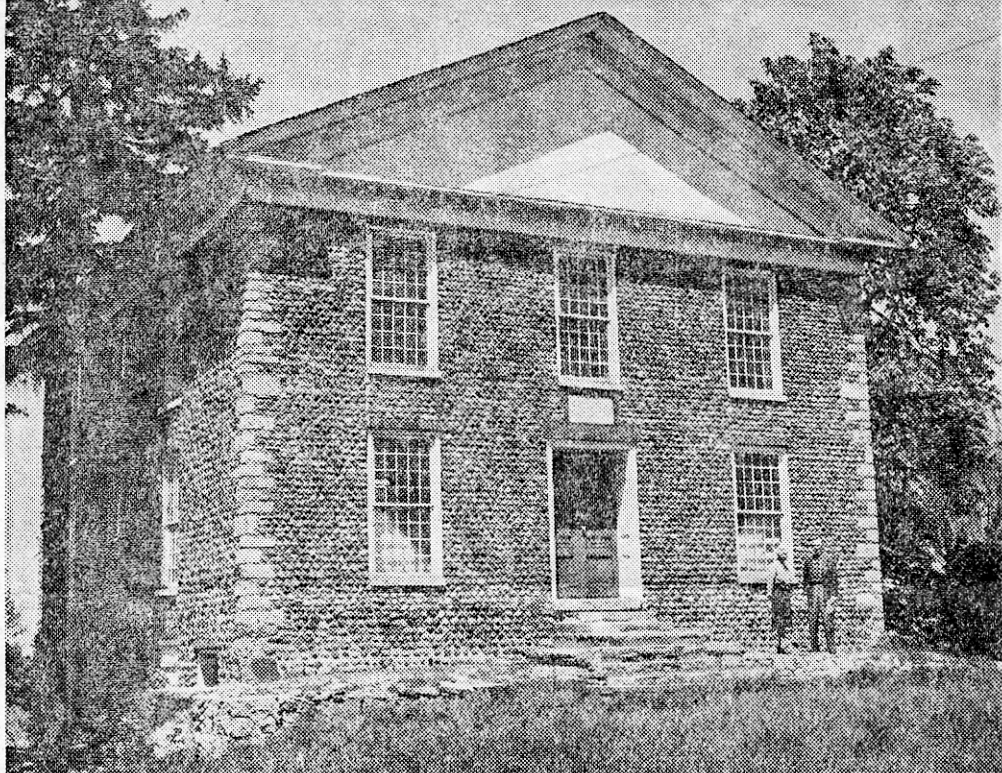




A gracious cobblestone church in Childs . . . object of today's C-E tour
 . . . it was built in 1834 by John Proctor

Cobblestone Homes Quaint

A drive can be fun if you know where you're going. To make your Sunday travels more interesting *The Courier-Express* is publishing a series of tour articles. This is the second. Another will appear next Sunday.

By BILL LAMALE

COBBLESTONE—Some houses are made of brick. Others, wood. A few—a very precious few—are made of the water-worn stones gathered on the shores of Lake Ontario.

These are known as cobblestone houses, and there will never be any more of them. Nearly all are situated within a 60-mile radius of Rochester, but the greatest single concentration of them is in the hamlet of Childs, in Orleans county, the focal point of today's *Courier-Express* tour.

Childs is located on U.S. 104, the Ridge Rd., once an Iroquois trail between the Niagara and Genesee regions which blossomed into a highway with the advent of the Erie Canal. Tourists going east on the highway or visiting the side roads along the way will find a sprinkling of the quaint structures, schools, churches and homes, their walls made of rounded stone laid in varying patterns.

ORIGIN—The dwellings attracted almost no attention until several decades ago when motorists paused, snapped pictures and began asking questions. Residents long accustomed to the special comforts and sense of solidarity in their knobby-walled homes began delving into their origin.

But it was not until a scant three years ago that they

formed a society. Then 50 of them rallied when a cobblestone schoolhouse was up for sale. It could have been converted into a garage or roadside restaurant. They raised \$125 to purchase the building.

Since then membership has grown to include 300 Western New Yorkers dedicated to the preservation of these architectural landmarks.

SCHOOLHOUSE—The Cobblestone Society owns a schoolhouse in Childs, and is completing arrangements for the purchase of the old First Universalist church there, too. In the same crossroads community are six other cobblestone structures, including homes, another school and a shop.

To reach the gently rolling cobblestone country, Buffalonians can take Rt. 263, Millersport Highway, and Rt. 78, Transit Rd., to Wrights Corners, four miles north of Lockport, joining U.S. 104. Traveling time to Childs is nearly an hour and a half and the distance from the city limits here is 46 miles. Niagara Falls is 54 miles from Childs.

Roadside markets trace the history of the Ridge Rd., where the cobblestone houses are now the oldest dwellings. One quarter of a mile west of the hamlet is a rest stop with picnic tables. Childs, about three miles north of Albion on Rt. 98, is six miles from Lake Ontario. Once it was an important stage coach stop.

CANAL—Hundreds of the elegant cobblestone structures were constructed in New York's Great Lakes region between 1825 and 1860, mostly by masons who turned to building homes after completing work on the Erie Canal. High wages paid to

such craftsmen during the Civil War caused the end of cobblestone construction.

Using the fieldstone gathered at the side of the highway (Ridge Rd. was the prehistoric shore of Lake Erie), the masons laid and mortared their walls a course at a time, using boards to hold the stones in line and troweling in a distinctive "V" joint. Walls were often 18 inches thick, and today many of these homes are so cool in the morning that furnaces must be switched on.

While some masons built walls ranging in color from gray to dark red, others constructed a veneer of egg-shaped stones laid with machine-like precision. Many masons laid flat stones in a herringbone pattern.

HISTORY—Aided by experts in American architecture, members of the Cobblestone Society are delving into the history of individual structures, including the church in Childs, largest of the masonry buildings there. It was constructed in 1834 by John Proctor, known locally as the "Paul Revere of the Ridge" because he rode to warn farmers there of the British invasion during the War of 1812.

But Cary H. Lattin, Orleans county historian who has lived in a cobblestone house most of his life, notes that members of the group find information about the masons and their work only fragmentary.

"We know that a cobblestone building cost as much as \$300," he says, "and that many of them were paid for with butter, cornmeal and wheat. But the generation that watched the cobblestone masons on the job is gone. Much of their work is a lost art. We don't even have any of their tools."

