

# Intricacies In Architecture Come Gradually

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SIGNED WORK—Carved above the doorway of the Herring-Mills House is the inscription "O. Spaulding 1844," as a record to the future.

By William Aeberli

In previous articles, we explained that cobblestone architecture generally falls into three distinct categories accorded to period workmanship: Early—rough or simple; Middle—rustic, conventional and varied; Late—intricate and artistic.

We explained also the development from the most simple forms of walls to the most intricate, which is based on the more careful selection of cobblestones.

If we take ten cobblestone buildings, at random or within a certain area, we find, most often, that all three cobblestone periods are usually represented. This holds true along the Ridge Road, where we may study the progression from the earliest of buildings to walls of the Civil War period or the cobblestone postlude.

Regardless, in any period, no two cobblestone walls are exactly alike, although some forms of duplication exist.

In other words, all cobblestone walls have their own "built-in individualism" because no set plans were ever invented for cobblestone architecture.

Except for the fact that there was a basic method of laying up a cobblestone wall, the courses of stones which make up the overall subjective pattern was rendered objectively.

Furthermore, the old time cobblestone mason never wrote a book on his work for posterity and went about rather secretively in his endeavors. We have no evidence that these rural artisans sat down to a drawing board and drew up intricate interior and exterior floor plans. Quite obviously then, the creation of the cobblestone wall was purely a mental process or a product of the spirit.

The cobblestone mason knew what he was going to do before he mixed his mortar,

but he was influenced by his stone material. Cobblestones were gathered, transported, and selected from many sources. This also helped to influence the finished product, including the area where the work was done.

And gathering the material was not accomplished in a short period of time. We have records of a farmer who hauled his wheat to Sodus by ox cart and returned with a cart load of cobblestones each time he made the trip.

From a page of an old diary, a reputable country squire wrote that he was preparing to build himself a cobblestone house after gathering stones for more than two years.

Rural sorting bees were common, using plank boards drilled with various diameters of holes. Neighborhood women and children were often employed actively in this preparatory work.

Yet as cobblestone architecture advanced towards the second period, the rough walls of the earliest homes are now judged by appearance in simplicity.

Although we always find exceptions to the rule in the second and third periods, the use of large fieldstones, so commonly found in the flush walls of earlier times, were now being laid for the base of the building. And, most often, the larger material was relegated to the side walls and especially to the rear.

In most cases, the best of the supply went into the front walls with great care for sake of appearance. This was a natural thing to do, since the frontage usually faced the road in a full view.

Thus, in our cobblestone travels, we will discover an exceptional and varied display of stone selections such as the use of the herringbone pattern.

But when we come to the Herring-Mills cobblestone in Murray, a short distance of the Chugg-Merrill farm house, we have somewhat of a rarity to study. The walls are a conglomeration of what we have studied in previous articles.

At first, one might claim that the mason went overboard with his selection of stone material, or was guilty of an overly-zealous attempt at

displaying his creativity. We doubt this since there was no set of rules.

For some reason, the mason took an unusual amount of liberty with his material. He may be forgiven for not being contemporary, since it was the "dawn" of the late period, and he seems to have helped introduce it.

The great difference now is more associated with mechanical skill or artistry in place of the rustic and conventional use of cobblestone material common to the past.

Study the photo of the cobblestone as would be seen while riding by in your car. Now, study the close-up of the front wall: start from the base of the building and work slowly to the peak, running your eye across from left to right.

Beginning at the base of the building, notice the rougher stones and crude mortar joints.

At the base of the front entrance or step-well, the stones are more carefully laid and are of smaller size. The entire surface of the front wall consists of fieldstone and rounded waterwashed stones of various colors, shapes, and sizes.

Although—technically speaking—there is no collision between one course and another, the multiple array of stones have lost middle period continuity.

Yet in between the pronounced mortar joints, a certain consistency does prevail due to the clever selection of small stones. The fourth, seventh, and 12th quoins (or cornerstones) show three courses of stones set in herringbone pattern similar to the nearby Chugg-Merrill building. Again, we have an effect of a band or a division across the front wall.

Proceeding upwards, the stones become smaller and smaller. Although a large assortment of small stones are intermixed among the lower courses—excluding the herringbone section—and with the exception of a few larger stones here and there, the courses from the bottom part of the second story window to the lintels are almost entirely

made up of a very small cobblestones with little restraint.

When your eye comes to the peak of the building, the smaller stones are divided by a course of very thin stones laid horizontally, a row of smaller stone, then another course of thin stones. The remainder of the area consists of courses of very small stones intermixed with slightly larger varieties. Yes, the mason "sure went to town with his material."

Now, as for the history of the house, one need not delve too deeply in abstracts or deeds, because the original family name and date is chiseled above the front door in sandstone: O. Spaulding—1844.

The Orleans County Clerk's Office has a record of Ephraim Spaulding's existence. In 1845, he deeded one-half acre of land on the corner of the Ridge and the West Kendall Roads to Oliver Spaulding.

Ephraim Spaulding came from Monroe County in 1828 and took up a farm on the Ridge, west of Sandy Creek, and cleared it. He had nine children, the third being Oliver.

Two sons, Edwin and Mathew, were all who settled in Orleans County territory. Edwin was a farmer in the Kendall area and died there. Mathew settled on the old homestead and was always a farmer. Mathew and his wife had two daughters, Jane and Alice. Jane married Daniel H. Bidwell of Murray.

The property was owned by Ephraim Spaulding until 1863, then it was transferred to Jane Bidwell, Ephraim's granddaughter. There were several other owners (such as the Bidwells) and in 1945, it was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Herring and is presently owned by Mr. and Mrs. Peter Mills.

Unfortunately, Oliver Spaulding, the original occupant continues to elude the historian.