

512-76

Childs Schoolhouse Served District For 103 Years

By William Aeberli

It's appropriate in Gaines, "the center of cobblestone country," that you'd find at least four rural schoolhouses constructed of cobblestones.

Old District No. 5 located eastward near the crossroads of Route 98 and the Ridge in Childs was built in 1849 and served its district for 103 years.

The school itself is our first, real close-up study of Late Period workmanship. Notice the use of small, rounded water-washed stones and the uniformity of selection. This is the principal difference between late architecture and early and middle.

The front wall of the school contains the smallest selection of stones with five courses to the quoin; the side walls have four courses and the rear wall (instead of reverting to the common fieldstone variety laid flush to the wall) has three courses of the largest size-selection in the group.

The veneering, so painstakingly arranged, rests against a wooden plank frame and together is eight inches thick. This is not commonly found in the majority of

cobblestone walls, since most cobblestone facing and fieldstone backing together range in thickness between 18 and 20 inches.

Notice the horizontal mortar joints rendered with a special tool. The selection of fieldstones for the basement walls and the walk-in entrance to the rear. Also, take note of the cut stone slab resting between the top of the cellar wall and the bottom of the first floor.

With the exception of the bottom (ground) portion laid up with large fieldstones, this building with its four walls entirely of small cobblestones is one of the best examples of what is meant by "Late Period Workmanship." Most other buildings erected in the late period were not completely laid up with the same selective or related material.

Another interesting point is the cellar entrance or lower level. This reverts back to alluvial times -- the source of cobblestone material. Due to the slope of the terrain which varies in different areas but is most pronounced on the North side of the Ridge, we find testimony of the glacier-made shoreline of ancient Lake



DISTRICT NO. 5 -- Cobblestone school house in Childs is from late period, built around 1849.

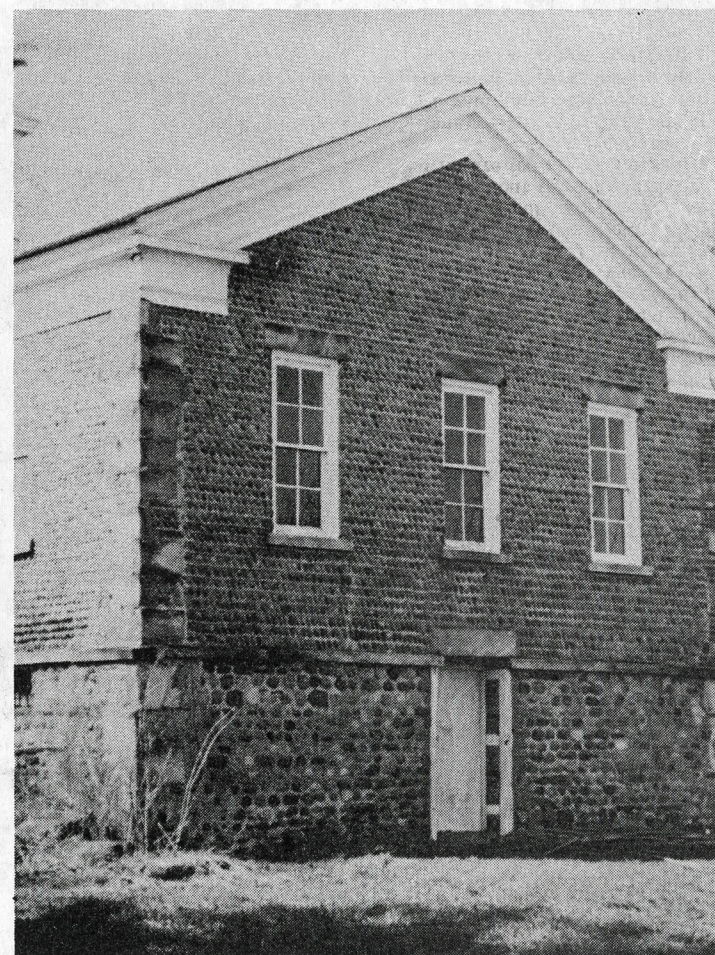
Iroquois.

In 1847, the land for the school was purchased for \$50 from John Proctor, one of the earliest settlers in Gaines. William J. Babbitt supervised construction and also donated the bell.

The school has two doors on

the front (which is a rarity) as well as a window in the attic space (another rarity,) plus an artistic cupola where the bell hangs.

Babbitt was another early citizen of the town who, besides his blacksmith trade



NORTH WALL -- Rear of building shows basement entrance.

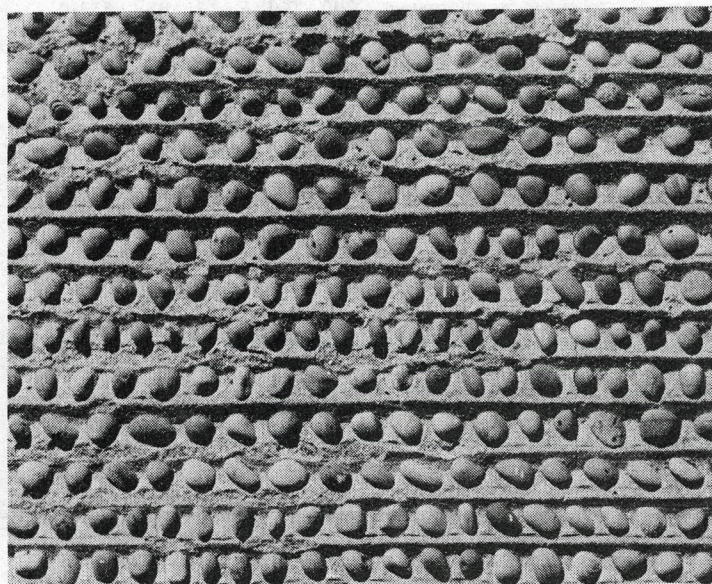
was appointed first Postmaster of Gaines in 1816. He was always working to promote and improve on the town's interests and prosperity and had great concern for a rural child's primary education.

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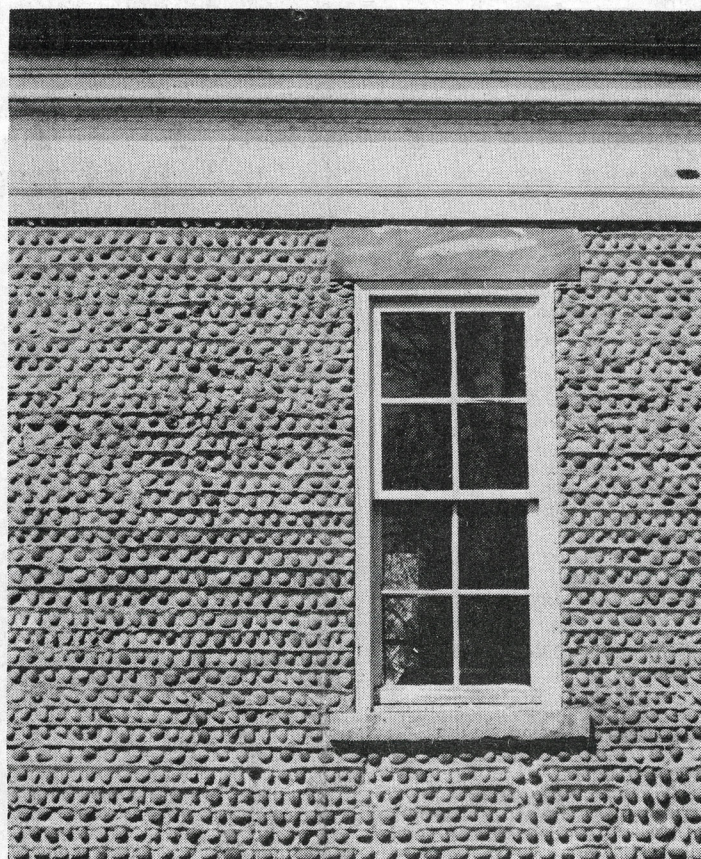
Prior to the building of District No. 5, Babbitt was among other leading men in Gaines who were instrumental in establishing, by securing a charter from the State, an Academy of higher learning in 1827; Regents followed in 1830.

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Records state that Gaines, in its prime, was noted for an exceptional educational system in its 10 school districts and on par with neighboring towns of larger size, population, and wealth.



CLOSE UP -- Detail of east wall is shown. Schoolhouse was constructed of small, rounded, water-washed stones.



EAST WALL -- East and west walls of Childs schoolhouse are identical.