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## Cobblestones Along The Ridge

# 'My Cobblestone Alma Mater'

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Third In a Series

The exact number of years we attended the Gaines Basin school is vague, but one year, Dad transferred us down to the Gaines Corners cobblestone school--this was out of our district and I am sure he had to pay extra.

We remained there until Dad bought a house in Albion,

in the late 1930's.

Yet our removal from the Basin Road district was not too much of an abrupt change for myself or my two brothers and two sisters. We continued on with our rural education among children we knew since all of us attended the Gaines Congregational Church.

Although we were still in the immediate neighborhood with friends and relatives, it took time to get used to the Corners school. What was largely missed was a more composite or closely-knitted kinship at the Basin school.

The Corners school was friendly enough with fine instructors but everything was strictly business and in the process, lacked those little extra things we enjoyed with but one teacher in charge.

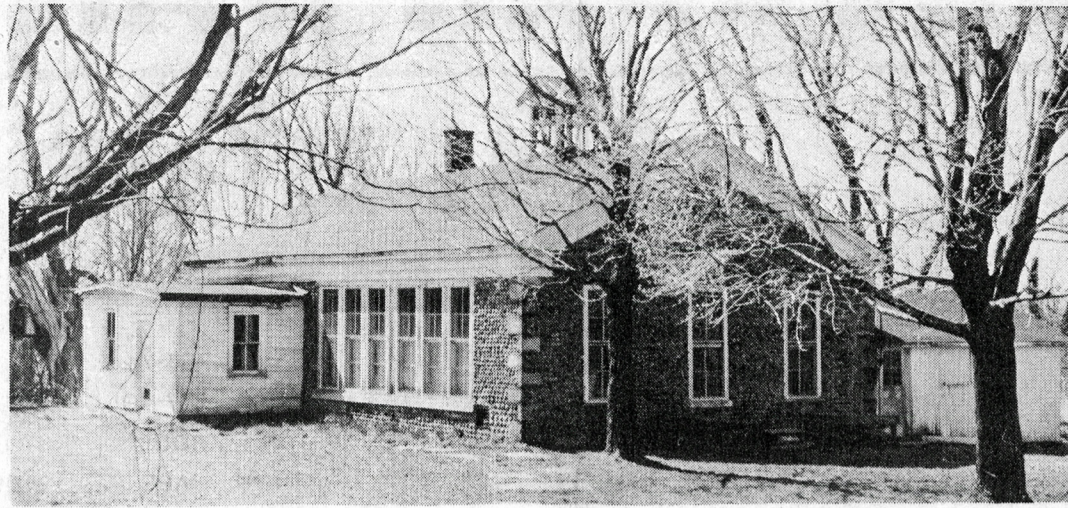
The cobblestone schoolhouse was located just below the north slope of old Gaines village crossroads.

The most prominent building in Gaines Corners was the Grange Hall, a huge barn-like edifice that still stands and was standing when my grandfather, Kelsey Sandord, was born.

This was the time when the Grange was quite active in our farming community and served many purposes such as: dances, suppers, meetings, and seasonal parties. At one end of the structure was a general store on the ground floor.

The store typified a Norman Rockwell crackerbarrel scene. Most of the local old-timers congregated on the premises, smoking their pipes and discussing the day's events, national or international news as well as local and state politics.

Upon entering the store, we were always met by the familiar aromas of coffee,



GAINES CORNERS SCHOOL - Built in 1840 of water-rounded stones and fieldstones of various colors, the school building was considerably altered with a frame addition to its front and rear. It is now the property of the Cobblestone Society.

brown sugar and spices. As I recall, the store was rather dimly-lit. Baskets and straw hats were hung at designated places and there were brooms and barrels of things and glass cases filled with cheese and penny candies.

On the opposite side of the road was another general store run by Mae Coventry. Across from Mae's was Burns' Garage where a few grocery items were also available plus a large display of penny candy.

All three merchants pumped gas but Burns, besides fixing or tuning-up cars, definitely had the monopoly on candy sales because he was nearest to the cobblestone school. Oddly enough, and as poor as we were supposed to have been at the time, we always had a few pennies with which to buy candy.

The school was about a mile from our house, and we generally walked cross-lots by cutting through a field and using a lane that used to be

the pathway to the old Gaines Academy.

The remains of the historic building were still visible but had deteriorated to such a degree that only a pile of rubble existed among weeds and stones.

We never were allowed to walk to and from school alone, if it could be helped. It had nothing to do with fear of crime or abduction. Our parents were concerned that we were still quite young to walk along the busy Ridge alone.

The Corners school building was much larger than the Basin Road cobblestone. Perhaps in the beginning it was a one-room affair, but in later years the interior was partitioned-off with out-buildings added.

Also, there were three teachers: Miss Dutcher, Miss House, and Mr. Applegate. Classes were divided in the usual manner, but upper grades were taught by Mr. Applegate in a partitioned-off room.

After beginning our

education at the Basin Road school under one teacher, it was quite different for us to join a district that had many more children, three teachers, electric lights and although still using the old-fashioned privies, we did not have to venture outside.

All our teachers lived close by, in contrast to our Basin Road teacher who had to come out from Albion in her tin-lizzy no matter what the weather was.

True, the homelike atmosphere we had enjoyed at our former school was superceded by a businesslike academic program, but it prepared us for our next move.

This became evident when our family moved to Albion and we were enrolled in the old grammar school on Academy Street.

I entered the fifth grade but was not there long enough to become acquainted with my new school chums. The teacher soon discovered I was ahead of the lessons being taught, and my new teacher decided I should be sent to the first part of the sixth grade.

As a child of the farmbelt, I was not confronted with a loss of opportunities due to an unequal or inferior education. While still quite young, many of us learned to understand the simplicities of life and their merits long before the world became so complex.

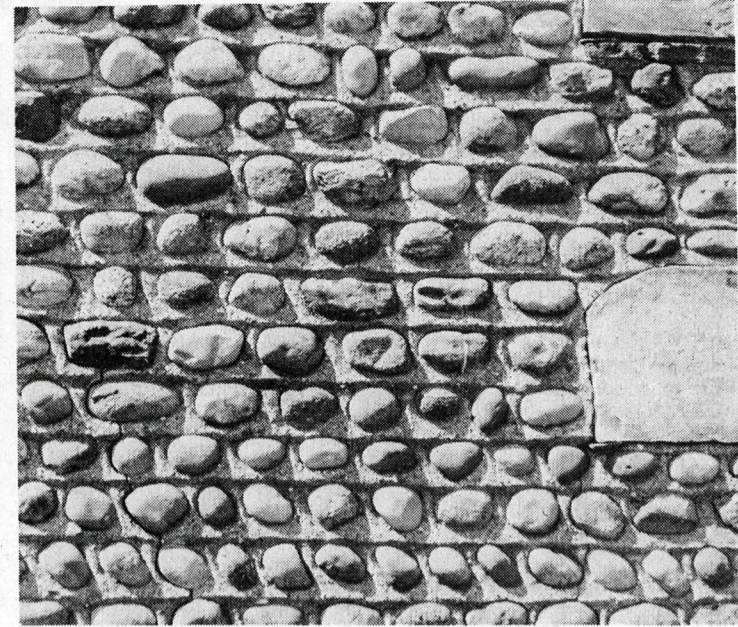
A rural upbringing is an education in itself, and country kids seem to absorb a stronger respect for the forces of nature surrounding them.

One case in point has nothing to do with our cobblestone school.

Years ago, Winter in the country could often tax the patience of the saintly. Snow would build up along the fences in drifts and after reaching the top, the ferocity of the bitter winds now had little opposition with gale force, the drifts easily covered the roads. The situation made walking to and from school an endurance test.

One very bad storm caught us at school. Dad's concern had been made known to us when he, somehow, was able to contact our teacher with a message. We were instructed not to head for home but to visit our mother's aunt and uncle, who lived next to the school.

Our relatives tried to make us as comfortable as possible. Still, we were on edge even



CLOSE-UP - South wall of Gaines Corners School building, in detail, shows a rough attempt at troweling the mortar joints. Note the deliberate placement of four courses of smaller stones on an angle (one course above the other); then the random selection of larger stones arranged in the usual rustic, Middle Period manner.

when Dad pulled into the driveway.

He hastily instructed us to get into the car, for he had to be at the front of the Highway Department garage by a certain time. We learned that the boys operating the big plow were going to make a special run (just for Dad) to our farm, but no further and only once.

Everything went according to plan until well into the

Basin Road. As soon as the plow opened a path, the winds filled it in again. Often the truck had to reverse and make a powerful push forward.

After what seemed an eternity, the silhouette of our barn came in view and the big plow made an opening in our driveway so we could get off the roadway.

We were back in school the next day.