

Further West On The Ridge

By William Aeberli

According to survey reports, the government took note that our 'grand ole Ridge' has always been listed among the oldest and best-known roads in the country, but added the fact that the highway is characterized by

its continuous series of 'rural neighborhoods' following an ancient shoreline.

By using the word 'neighborhoods,' Washington inadvertently was describing the eleven closely-knitted townships of three counties through which the Ridge traverses between the west side of the Genesee and Lewiston on the Niagara River.

Also, we may add, there are forty-four cobblestone buildings (still standing) along the road so relative to the glacial origin of the Ridge itself.

Now we have dwelled on this subject many times before, but lest we forget, Orleans County is truly 'the heart of cobblestone country', for we shall soon discover that cobblestone buildings become fewer in number and further apart after passing the western limits of Oak Orchard hamlet.

Thus Gaines, by virtue of cobbled status bestowed upon the township in years past, and (for this article) not to be outperformed by its eastern sector, unfolds a finale of stone architecture with 19th century overtones most noticeably apparent west of the Gaines Basin Road.

For example, on the north slope of the Ridge near the old Anderson place stands a medium-sized cobblestone

farmhouse (letter A) so similar to the Radley house (further east near the Basin Road), the two resemble twins.

The 'twin' to the west is among seven remaining stone buildings in Gaines, four located in West Gaines bounded by the second road to Waterport and the road leading down to Kenyonville near east of the town line.

Not far from the 'twin', on the south side of the Ridge is an abandoned cobblestone schoolhouse (letter B) once serving District No. 1. but in recent years, antiques have been bought and sold from the premises.

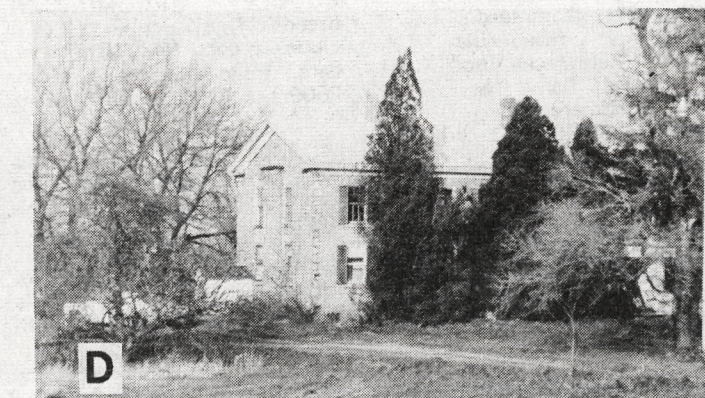
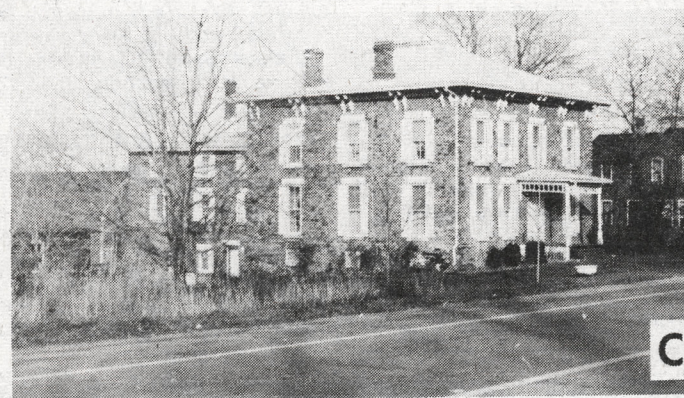
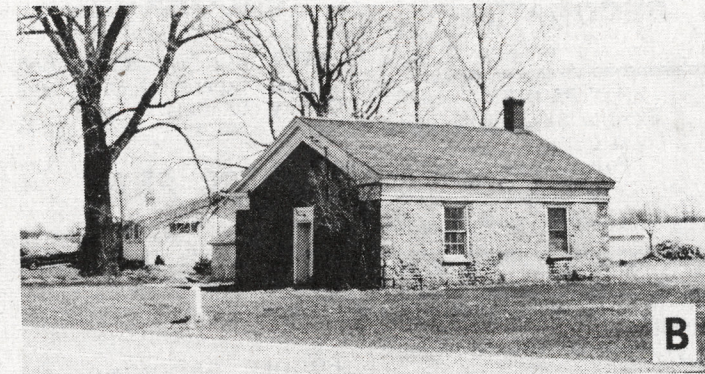
Diagonally across from the school building, on the north slope (letter C) is a large and impressive stone farmhouse that really doesn't belong to any cobblestone category.

Just the same, this rambling, stone maverick presents a rather quaint and composite picture of near-similarity among its cobbled neighbors.

It is a spacious home with a two-story, attached wing to the north is often mistaken for a cobblestone dwelling when passing by at a good clip.

The walls exhibit clean-cut masonry composed of various sizes and colors of flat fieldstones, highlighted, no less, with a few cobblestones mysteriously protruding at random from various places in the foundations. At one time the roof of the square-shaped structure was topped with a cupola. And according to a 1913 County Atlas, the location seems to justify the name Ferris Fruit Farm by using a divider for measurement.

The size of the building required more than one season to erect, it seems, and also more than a minimal amount of funds for the construction's outlay, because the work was so carefully done. Evidently, the time involved was not a factor and we are prone to believe the building first belonged to a prosperous



resident of that period in comparison to other townspeople who were able to erect a brick or cobblestone dwelling.

But whether the original owner wanted to qualify his imposing dwelling in different terms within the vicinity by his preference over cobblestone material, or made use of an overly abundant supply of flat fieldstones at his disposal, is present-day conjecture.

Yet in essence, the home represents homogeneity at work though in striking contrast with nearby Middle Period cobblestone masonry; thus we must include "The Cousin" among the authentic.

The fourth building (letter D) was quite elusive to the camera until it was noticed at the end of a long driveway and hidden from the Ridge behind a row of huge arborvitae about three miles west of Gaines Corners. Folks call the dwelling 'the old Spanton house'. It is a 2-story, center entrance type laid up with lakewashed and water-rounded cobblestones.

When the Spanton house was listed in Carl Schmidt's book, the author gave the impression that he was annoyed by some resident of

yesteryear who (for some reason) had replastered all the jointings, which in turn made technical inspection difficult. But this is a minor problem!

People like myself, who study these old homes, have become aware as the years progress that the majority of cobblestone buildings have had various owners or occupants, which at times makes researching the names of the first families a difficult chore indeed. And the masons who built the dwellings in the first place must remain in part a mystery.

But fortunately we have a small list of cobblestone masons who were responsible for most of the stone dwellings in the Gaines district on file at the Society. This is a rarity, since many masons were itinerants and when finished with a project, they simply moved on.

The Society says that four men could be credited with building most of the cobblestone buildings and other stone and brick dwellings in Orleans County beginning around 1830; the information was gleaned from the census.

By 1855, at least five locally known masons had been living in the Town of Gaines

for a number of years. The oldest mason (in years) was Archibald Watson who was sixty-one in 1855 and had lived twenty-five years in Gaines.

Thirty-five-year-old Cyrus Witheral was born in Gaines and worked almost two decades at this trade. He built or helped build many homes such as: The Janus Cobblestone, Childs; the Whipple-Hunt Cobblestone, West Gaines, and the Bullard-Lattin Cobblestone on Gaines Basin Road, which for years has been the long-time residence of Museum Curator Wilson Lattin's parents and grandparents.

Other masons on the list are James Thompson, who was

thirty-eight years old in 1855, and had lived in Orleans County sixteen years. He built a cobblestone house on the Brown Road; plus locally born Adam Armstrong, who was twenty-six years old during the mid-term census. Armstrong (could have) worked eight years in cobblestone masonry and other related projects.

In 1844, Cyrus Witheral helped build the Saunders-Harmer Cobblestone on the Ridge, which will be next week's feature. Nevertheless, wouldn't it be interesting to write a tribute to all the masons, their names and origins (that is if we had them) and add a finishing touch to our story?