

Welcome to Cobblestone Country

IF YOU'RE driving on State Route 104 west of Rochester, New York, you'll see one of my favorite backroads discoveries—colorful cobblestone buildings. They're literally just a stone's throw from the road!

Here, between the shores of Lake Ontario and the banks of the Erie Canal, you'll find churches, schoolhouses, homes and even barns and silos built from cobblestones—smooth round rocks not much bigger than your fist.

Nearly 90 percent of the estimated 1,200 cobblestone buildings in North America can be found within a 75-mile radius of Rochester.

That's a result of two seemingly unrelated things—glaciers and the Erie Canal. It all began when glaciers deposited loads of "cobble" in the area thousands of years ago. When lakes formed at the end of the Ice Age, the rocks were worn down by water.

Eons later, in 1825, the Erie Canal opened. This allowed farmers to ship crops to previously unreachable markets. They reaped profits beyond their wildest dreams.

As they prospered, many wanted

In western New York, you can take a rocky but enjoyable tour of some beautiful and historic buildings.

By Jim Hughes, Syracuse, New York

nicer houses. And with a large supply of skilled masons looking for work after the canal's completion, it was only natural that folks turned to the abundant stones for building material.

By 1860, cheap lumber produced by steam-powered sawmills ended the cobblestone era. By then, however, an estimated 1,000 cobblestone buildings had been constructed, with the heaviest concentration running parallel to Lake Ontario, along what's known today as Route 104.

Any visit to cobblestone country should begin at the Cobblestone Society Museum, a cluster of eight historic buildings located in Childs, a few miles north of Albion and 30 miles west of Rochester.

The society headquarters is based in

one of the buildings—the beautifully preserved Cobblestone Church. It's the oldest of 26 such churches still standing in North America. Other classic examples of cobblestone construction include the Ward House and Cobblestone School. In fact, the church, house and school have been designated as National Historic Landmarks.

Some buildings have links to famous people. One of the church's most famous parishioners was George Pullman, who eventually moved to Chicago to manufacture Pullman sleeping cars. And the Ward House at one time was owned by Horace Greeley, the noted newspaper editor and one-time presidential candidate.

Step into the Past

The Cobblestone Society provides guided tours of the three cobblestone buildings. Four other structures are open to the public: a blacksmith shop, print shop, harness shop and an exhibition hall that houses agricultural tools and implements from the past.

The society holds several annual events. One of my favorites is Old-Timer's Day on the second Sunday in September. Members dress up in period costumes and demonstrate vintage skills and crafts ranging from cobblestone masonry to wool spinning.

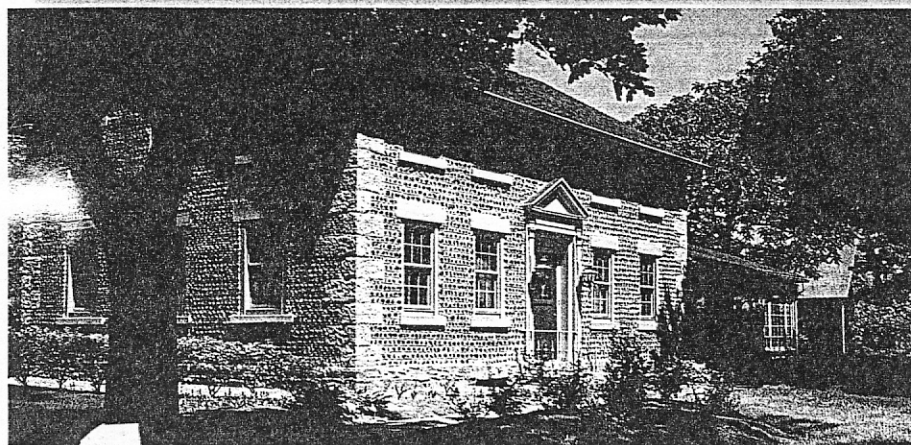
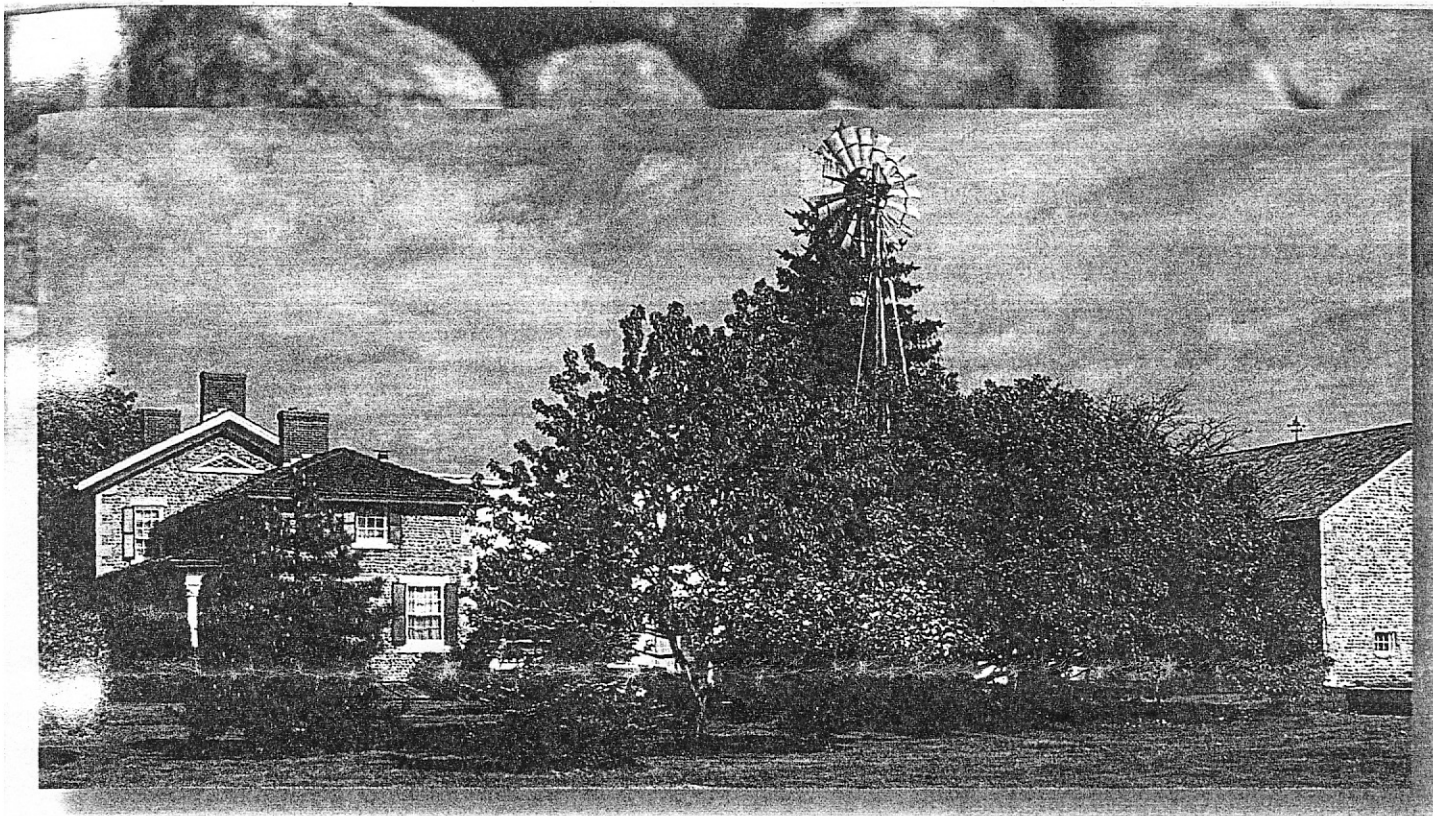
While visiting the museum, you may want to grab a bite to eat at Tillman's Historic Village Inn, which was built in 1837. In fact, if you'd like to stay overnight in cobblestone country, the adjoining Fair Haven Inn features several comfortable rooms, all with modern amenities in a historic setting.

After you're rested up, hit the road either east or west along Route 104. No matter which direction you travel, you're sure to see more distinctive stone buildings. Just follow the "cobblestone road"!

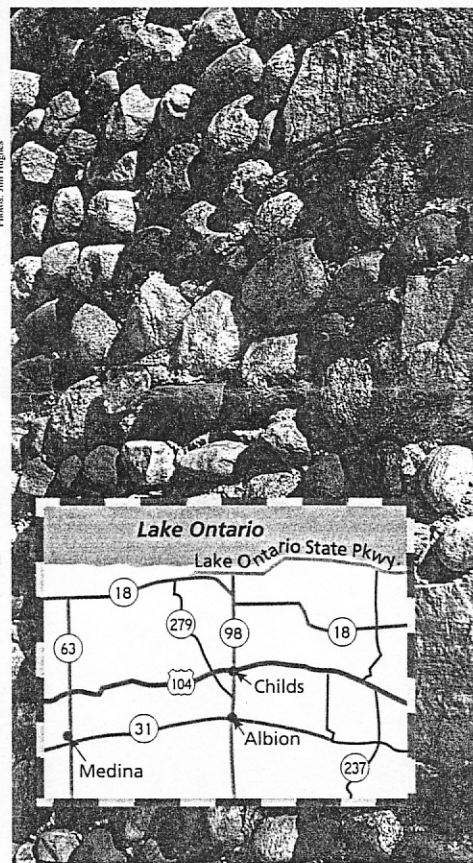
STILL STANDING. This church at the Cobblestone Society Museum was built in 1834. Its cobblestones were transported from surrounding farmfields in ox-drawn carts.



Editor's Note: The photograph is of the Gaines District No. 5 school house built 1849, not the church. Both are owned by the Cobblestone Museum.



SOLID AS A ROCK. Buildings on an Ontario County farm (above) and a house in Onondaga County (at left) offer good examples of cobblestone construction. As you can see from this closer look (below), building with these small stones must have been extremely painstaking work.



WORK

If You Visit... The Cobblestone Society Museum is at the intersection of Routes 98 and 104 in Childs, New York. In September and October, the museum is open on Sundays from 1 to 5 p.m. From late June until Labor Day, the hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday. For more information, call 1-716/589-9013 or visit the society's Web site, www.homestead.com/cobblestonesocietymuseum/.

For more information on Tillman's Village Inn and Fair Haven Inn, call 1-716/589-9151 or visit their Web site at www.tillmansvillageinn.com.

More to See... There are lots of specialty shops in the area, including Watt Farms Country Market (south of the museum on Route 98), which sells 20 varieties of homemade fudge, or Brown's Berry Patch (north of the museum on Route 104), where you can enjoy one of the store's famous waffle ice cream cones.

In Albion, you can walk along the Erie Canal and view a historic courthouse square. About 15 miles west, in Medina, you can ride a vintage New York Central Railroad passenger train or take in the largest HO scale model railroad in the eastern United States—a 2,700-square-foot exhibit at the Medina Railroad Exhibit Center. For details, visit the Orleans County Tourism Office Web site at www.orleansny.com or call 1-800/724-0314.