

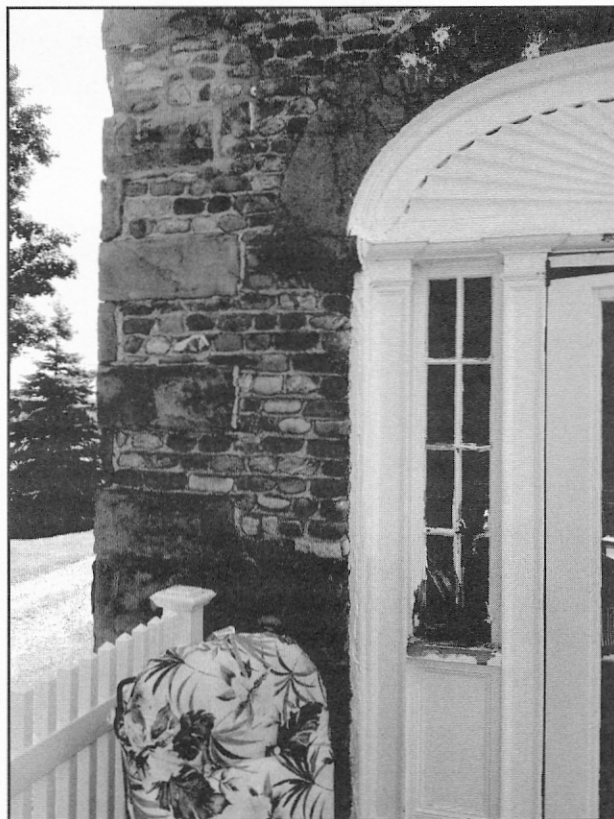
Genealogies of the Covington Cobblestone Houses

by Doris A. Bannister

Dating a house isn't always an easy task and given the variations in the previous histories of the Cobblestone house at 716 Starr Road in the Town of Covington we decided to see if we could come to any new conclusions by tracing the ancestry of its ownership.

Some of the earlier comments regarding this house include that which was published in the September 1949 issue of this periodical as follows: "...the Edward Coefield house, west of Pearl Creek, town of Covington, built c1819, and said to be constructed of stones picked up on the farm, all of which were put through a ring for sizing, a task which took six years to complete." Also, an article in the *Perry Record* of August 28, 1952: "The home of Mr. and Mrs. Dean Ewell the cobblestone house on the Warsaw-Pavilion Road, was built by Samuel Gorton in 1840. It was built of cobblestone put through an iron ring. If the stones were too large for the ring, they were too large for the building. It took six years to erect this home, one of the historic cobblestone houses found only in western and central New York. Another similar house stands just off this road one-half mile west of the Ewell home, built by Alexander McFarland in 1840." Since the two contain so many details that are alike, I feel that they might pertain to either or both.

Because the property was not always a separate parcel and others who owned the properties were not settlers, but rather were owners of large tracts of land, we will start with 29 April 1815 when Henry Newbury, of Windsor, Connecticut sold for \$864.00 to Jarius Crittenden, of Perry, "the west end of Lot number two...bounded as follows, west by the west line of the said lot number two, north on the north line of said lot, east on Allen's Creek [now the Oatka] and south by the south line of



Close-up of cobblestones of 716 Starr Road.

said lot number two containing two hundred and sixteen acres..." This included what would become the three-acre parcel on which the cobblestone sits. Although it says that Jarius Crittenden was of Perry, he was in the part of that town that Covington was formed from in 1817.

On the fourth of August in 1820, Jarius Crittenden, of Covington, sold the three-acre parcel to his brother-in-law, Jesse Sprague, of Middlebury for the sum of \$60.00. Two things lead to the belief that the cobblestone was not built in 1819. First, if it took six years to build, there is only a five-year time span between Jarius Crittenden's purchase and his sale to

Jesse Sprague. Secondly, the price of \$60.00 is not an unusually high price for a piece of property that borders on two major roads, those being the "Moscow-Buffalo" Road, now called West Middlebury Road, and the road to Wyoming, now called Transit Road.

According to *Sprague Families in America* by Warren Vincent Sprague, M.D., 1913, among the children of William Sprague and his wife Esther were: Eunice, John, Jesse and William. Eunice Sprague was born circa 1773 and married Jarius Crittenden. John Sprague was born in 1775 and died in 1862 in Pennsylvania. He married Rhoda Crittenden. "He with his brother William and brother-in-law Jarius Crittenden, were the first settlers in Covington, N.Y., in 1807." Jesse Sprague was born in 1781 and died in 1864 in Middlebury, N.Y. He married Rena Goddard.

An article published in the *Wyoming County Mirror* on 23 March 1864 by Hugh T. Brooks says that Jesse was "born in Connecticut, Feb. 17, 1783 and removed to Poultney, VT and at the age of 21 married Rena Goggard [Goddard], and commenced business as a wagon maker which he continued till 1813, when he removed to the farm north of Wyoming Village where he resided till his death. ... Mr. Sprague opened a wagon shop after a few years, working very diligently in the shop, and on the farm—his evenings were spent in the shop."

Nine years later on the 22nd day of April 1829, Jesse Sprague and his wife Rena sell the above parcel to Joel Harrison for \$100.00, again this isn't a large amount of money for the property. On another deed to Joel Harrison, dated the 18th of February 1830 in which he purchased land in the Town of Middlebury, it said that Joel was "of the town of Middlebury." The next deed along with this deed leads me to believe the house was built after 1830 and prior to 1835.

On 15 May 1835 Jarius Cruttenden [sic] sold a 1/4 acre piece of land to Joel Harrison for \$25.00. This piece was "opposite said Harrison's now dwelling house." This piece of

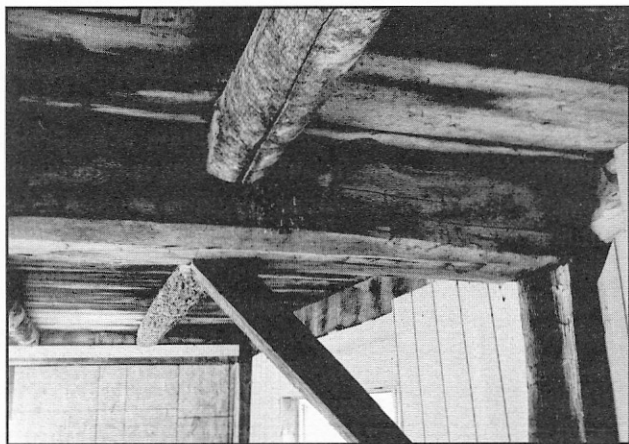
land is a small triangular parcel that is directly across the road from the cobblestone and is surrounded by Route 19, Starr and West Middlebury Roads, and the usage of the words "now dwelling house" lead me to believe that the house was of recent construction.



Interior view of 716 Starr Road, Covington.

Joel and his wife Eliza Harrison would sell three parcels on 4 April 1836 to James C. Ferris for the sum of \$5,870.00. These parcels included over 14 acres in Middlebury; the 3 acre parcel and another 128 3/4 acre parcel in Covington. The 14 acres in Middlebury and the 128 3/4 parcel in Covington were probably those purchased by Joel in 1827 for \$1,924. This shows quite a large increase in the price and is in keeping with something being built that would increase the value of the property, another indication that the house was built during this time.

Joel and Eliza Harrison would move to Murray, Orleans County where he died in May of 1860 at the age of 68.

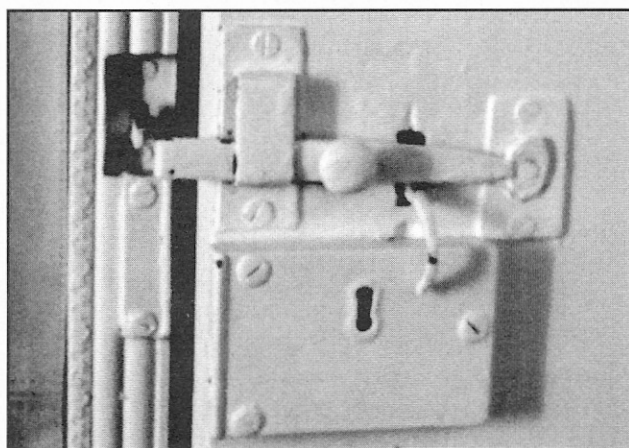


Original beams from wooden structure attached to the cobblestone house at 716 Starr Road. It is thought that this was originally a barn.

A little more than one month later, on 6 May 1836, James C. Ferris and Elida, his wife, sold the above parcels to Eliphalet Hovey for \$6,840.00.

Eliphalet Hovey died on the 18th of December 1843 at the age of 52 and is buried in the Warsaw Pioneer Cemetery. His widow, Sally, along with James C. Ferris were named executors of his estate and on the 13th of July 1846 they sold the three parcels of land for \$4,380.00 to Robert Paddock.

Robert Paddock and his wife Josephine didn't own the property for very long as they sold it on the 15th of April 1850 to Willis Kempshall for \$5,056.00.



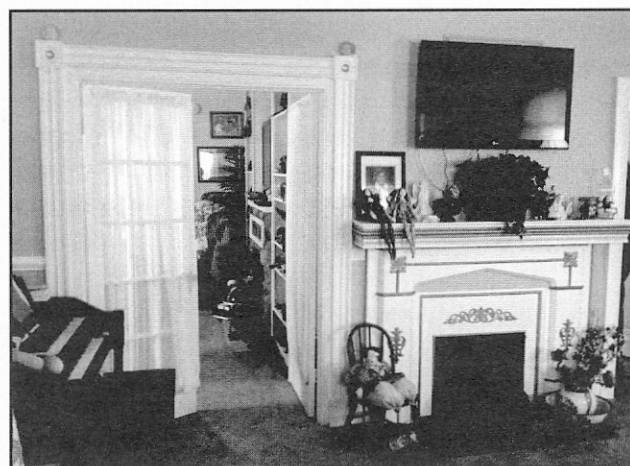
An original door latch at 716 Starr Road.

On 1 April 1853 Wallis [sic] Kempshall and Amelia, his wife sell the three parcels to

Edwin B. Sprague for the sum of \$7,000.00. Edwin B. Sprague was the son of Jesse and Rena from whom the three-acre parcel was purchased in 1829.

The Sprague's in turn sold the parcels, minus the 14 acres in Middlebury, on 14 February 1865 to Addison J. Miller for \$9,500.00

The properties remained in the Miller family until 20 January 1922 when Frances A. Freeman and Myrta M. Wadsworth, daughters' and only surviving heirs of Addison J. Miller's widow Elizabeth, sold the parcels to Frank Coefield—notice that in the 1949 article in *Historical Wyoming* that was mentioned in the second paragraph of this article it stated that Edward Coefield owned the house.



Interior view of 716 Starr Road showing an original fireplace.

Frank J. Coefield's daughter, Veronica Griffith and granddaughter, Barbara A. Moag sold the property to James F. and Phyllis M. Bleier on the 31st of December 1976.

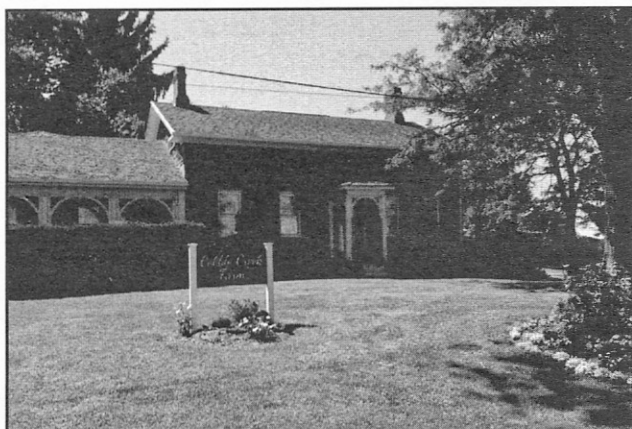
After the death of James F. Bleier, his widow Phyllis M., sold the property to Jeffres Farms, LLC on 30 August 2007.

On 7 December 2007 Jeffres Farms, LLC sold one acre, where the cobblestone sits, to Catherine Berkemeier.

Mark M. Schuetze, executor and brother of Catherine Berkemeier sold the one acre parcel on 26 August 2011 to Allen A. and Penny E. Willequer, the current owners.

Miller Cobblestone

1132 Silver Lake Road



1132 Silver Lake Road, Covington.

Formerly called the Fisher-Pettite cobblestone, land records for this home show that although the Fisher family owned the property, it was well after the house was built, so I'm putting the name of the house to the name of the landowner at the time the house was built.

Ownership of the property as far as we are concerned started with two separate land sales that are located in our mother county of Genesee. The first was found in Grantee deeds, liber 19 page 304 and was dated 28 April 1824 where Abner Huntington sells to Edward Hoard for \$350.00 eighty-two acres of land in Lot 20 of the Ogden Tract. On the same day Edward Hoard and his wife Sally sell the property, for \$610.00 to Nathan Miller. Both of these deeds were recorded on the 26th day of June 1826. On the 6th of December 1831, Charles Bradley and his wife Huldah, sell for \$175.00 a parcel of land in Lot 20, Ogden Tract, which contained 14 & 32/100 acres, to Nathan Miller. This deed was located in Liber 32 on page 379 and was recorded on the 5th of November 1834.

These two land purchases would equal the 96 32/100 acres that would in turn be sold by the heirs of Nathan Miller.

Nathan Miller or his widow, Charity, would own the property until it was sold by the executors of Nathan's will in 1862. They would

have been the owners at the time the house was built, assuming it was built circa 1837 as stated in *Wyoming County, New York An Architectural Tour* by James R. Yarrington, 1985. Although the Pavilion Cemetery listing says that Nathan died 2/21/1844, age 59, he wrote his will on 15 February 1841 and it was given to Monsieur D. Judson to "facilitate probate" on 8 March 1841; therefore, the month and year of Nathan's death are correct, but the year was either misread or incorrectly carved on his gravestone. The estate was not settled until after the death of Charity in 1861. Her listing in the Pavilion cemetery says she died 8/14/1861, age 73.

On 19 March 1862, Nathan H. Cook of Wisconsin and Monsieur D. Judson of Covington, as executors of the last will and testament of Nathan Miller, sell for \$2,974.36, the land in Lot 20 of the Ogden tract that now contained a total of 96 and 32/100 acres to Alexander McFarland of the town of LeRoy, New York. This deed was recorded on 14 April 1862.

Alexander McFarland and Jane Ann, his wife, of LeRoy, New York, sell the property on the 11th of April 1862 for \$3,274.88 to Noah J. Fisher.

It is interesting that Alexander McFarland owned the property, if only for a short time, as he was the reputed builder of the Gorton cobblestone.

Alexander McFarland was born circa 1796 in New York and married Jane Burt. They had no children living at the time of Alexander's death. He was not located on the 1820, 1830 or 1840 census' and on the 1850 census he was listed as a carpenter and was living in the Town of Covington. He had purchased land in Covington as early as 1 December 1840, so it is possible that he was living in town earlier and was "boarding" while building the cobblestone. The 1860 and 1870 census' show Alexander and Jane living in the Town of LeRoy and the value of his real estate increased dramatically between those years going from \$800 in 1860 to \$11,000 in 1870, part of which could have

included the profit made when they sold the cobblestone in Covington. An obituary for him as yet to be located which might have confirmed that he was also a mason.

Ownership of the property remained in the Fisher family until after 1900, however, we have not researched the property further than the ownership of Noah J. Fisher.

Gorton Cobblestone 636 Pavilion-Warsaw Road



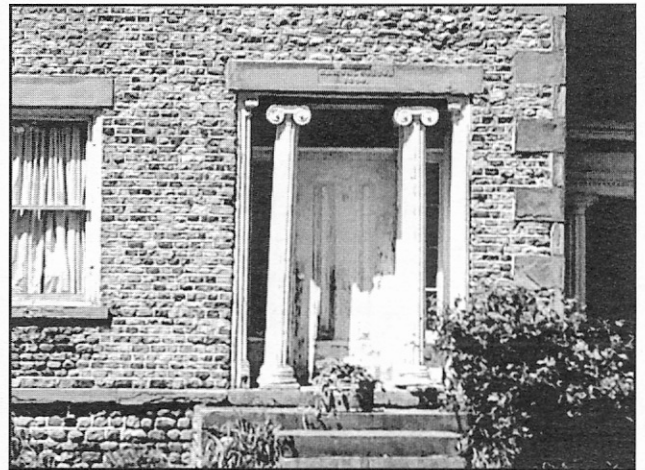
636 Pavilion-Warsaw Road, Covington.

This cobblestone house was clearly built in 1840 as it has a lintel over the front door with its date of construction. Tradition says that “it was built of cobblestone put through an iron ring... it took six years to erect this house...Alexander MacFarland was the builder or mason who built this house.”

Samuel Gorton was born, according to a January 1953 article in *Historical Wyoming*, in 1796 at Edinburgh, Saratoga County, New York. He could not be located on the census’ with any certainty until 1850 when he is located in Covington with his wife and children. Three of his children have gravestones in the Pearl Creek Cemetery with dates of death prior to 1840, so it is probable that the family came here after 1830 and were imbedded in another household in 1840 while their cobblestone house was being built.

Samuel Gorton did buy land in Covington as early as 1831, but because the ownership of the house has been well documented previously, we felt it unnecessary to do extensive research into the property’s ownership.

As to the length of time it took to build this home, it should be taken into consideration that this house also has a wing on the east side. In speaking to Jean Ewell, who along with her late husband John owned the property for many years, Mrs. Ewell confirmed that the house had two kitchens—one which she thought would have been called a summer kitchen, and that there was another cobblestone building on the back of the house which was probably a carriage house and that they had used it as a two car garage. Because of the wing on the east side of the house and also the probable carriage house in the rear, it would have made this building almost twice the size as all the other cobblestones in the area, thus increasing the amount of time it would have taken to construct and most certainly could account for the building time of six years.



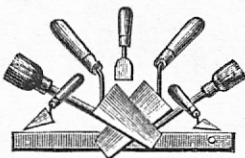
636 Pavilion-Warsaw Road, showing lintel over front door.

In the 25 January 1912 issue of *The Wyoming County Times* there is an advertisement for the sale of this farm. It says “Cobblestone house, 13 rooms, 2 halls, large kitchen, pantry and woodshed. Cistern and well

water in house.” “This farm has taken a prize for being one of the best in Wyoming County. Price \$8,300.” To date, we don’t know what the prize was, but hopefully someone out there will let us know.

Conclusions

There are numerous articles on the internet concerning the construction of a cobblestone house. At the time these cobblestone houses were built, it would have taken tens of thousands of stones, and a good supply of lime and sand for each one. The cobblestone walls were most often 18-20" thick with rubble stones used in the interior and cobblestones on the exterior. I asked a mason and carpenter that I know if it were true that a mason could lay three courses of stones in a day and if so, would there have needed to be a space of time when further courses could not be laid in order for the “cement” to cure enough for succeeding layers to be added? Using current cement, he said that you would just mix the mortar thicker, but he didn’t think there would need to be a time for it to cure back then. And yes, a mason could lay three courses in a day. However, even if there needed to be some time for the cement to cure, what if a mason were building not just one cobblestone, but two, or three? He could lay the three courses and then move to the next and then the next, allowing a few days in between. If Alexander McFarland was indeed the builder of the Gorton cobblestone, it’s interesting to note that he later purchased the “Miller” cobblestone – had he built that too?



Photographs for article by C. Amrhein.

Many thanks to Allen A. and Penny E. Willequer, for welcoming us into their home to talk about their cobblestone. They were very hospitable, allowing us to walk throughout the house and take photographs. Much appreciated!