

Gateways to Cobblestone Houses of Yates County



by

CROOKED LAKE YORKERS

Penn Yan Academy



COBBLESTONE HISTORY

Among the most important types of architecture in New York State, at least to us in Western New York, is cobblestone masonry. For it is, within this area, a circle with a radius of approximately fifty to seventy-five miles and with a center at Rochester, that the art of cobblestone construction in New York State was begun and where four-fifths of all existing cobblestone structures are located. Other cobblestone houses are found in Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ontario, Canada and were constructed by people who moved from this area of New York State.¹

The first construction of cobblestone shelters was influenced by two main factors. Fieldstones, of which the first cobblestone houses were built, were a great hindrance to cultivation and, out of necessity, were cleared from the fields. Their abundance made them feasible as construction material. These stones were usually sorted according to

size by dropping them through a hole cut in a board or through an iron beetle ring. But, before any stone homes could be built, masons were needed. And as history often has it, the right people were in the right place at the right time. Masons came here from Scotland, Holland, and Wales, to work on the Erie Canal in the 1800's. When their work was completed, many of these masons stayed on and took up farming. Thus masons were plentiful, which was the second major influencing factor. Their skill made possible the first construction of the cobblestone homes, as they were "glad to supplement their farm income."² They made sincere attempts to keep their particular methods secret; if people persisted in watching them, they would move to other work about the house under construction. These masonry methods were never recorded and, consequently, the particular secrets of laying such a wall have been lost.³

In addition to masons, "the opening of the Erie Canal brought increased commerce and wealth. It also brought contact with the East and the well established Greek Revival style of Architecture. As prosperity continued, we had the Gothic and Victorian styles of Architecture."⁴ All three of these architectural styles were adopted in cobblestone construction and were utilized in each of the three main periods of cobblestone masonry in New York State: the first being the Early Period, 1825-35; the second, the Middle Period, 1835-45; and the third, the Late Period, 1845 to the end of the Civil War.⁵

Cobblestone masonry in Yates County, as in all other counties in the cobblestone area of New York State, developed slowly over the forty year period, following a pattern of gradual evolution of architectural advancements and sophistications. But, "the plain, simple dignity that makes each cobblestone house a tribute to man's determination to form a beautiful and lasting homestead, is exemplified. Masonry, carpentry, and joinery make the buildings one of the finest specimens of cobblestone construction."⁶

¹Schmidt, Carl F., A Mystery of Masonry p.3

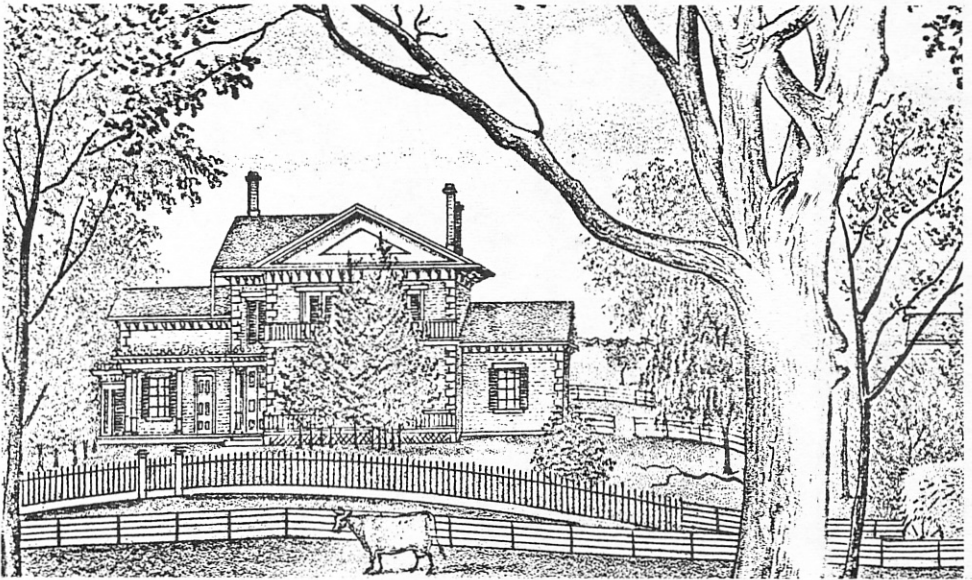
²Ibid. p.3

³Hobart, Mrs. Guy, Cobblestone Houses

⁴Ibid.

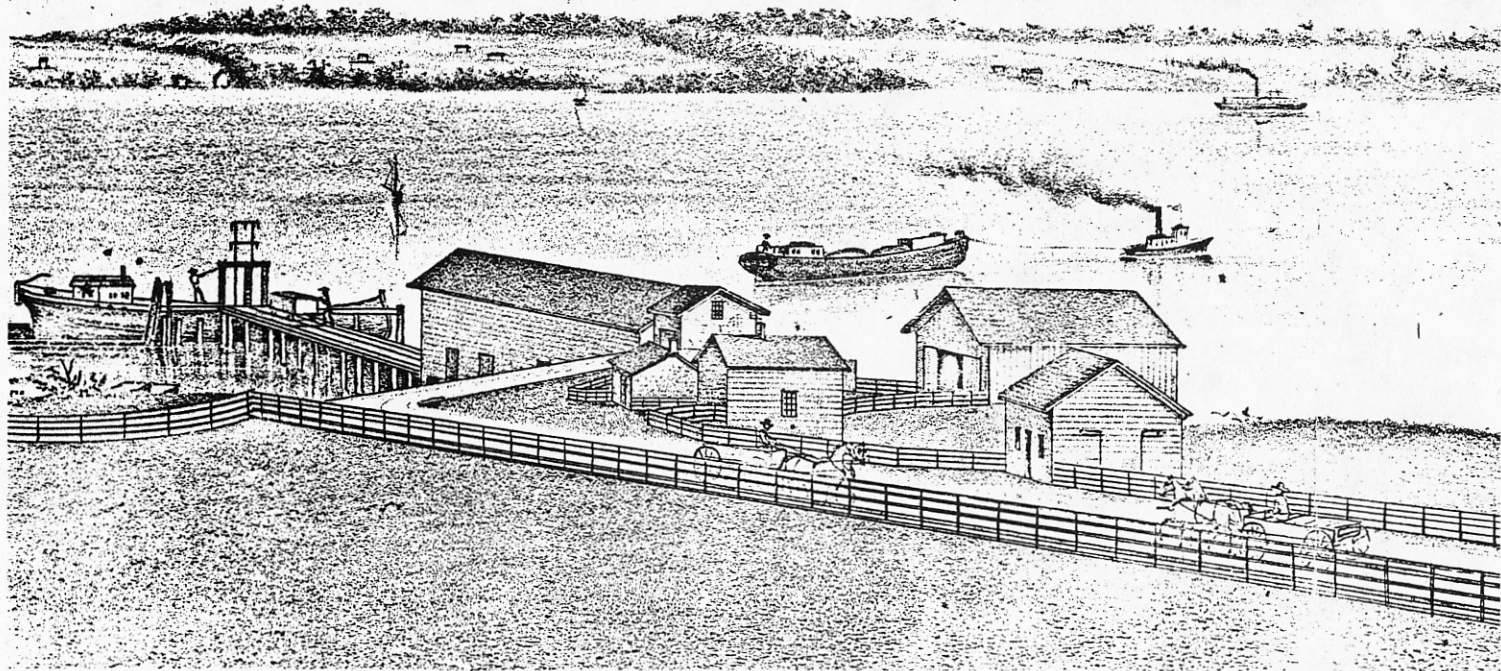
⁵Schmidt, op. cit. p.3

⁶Hobart, op. cit.



JEPHTHA EARL-BOERNER HOUSE

Located on Route #14 Yates County, this home was constructed in 1844 of oval shaped lake stones laid in a diagonal pattern. The lake-washed stones were shipped by barge from Sodus Point to Earl's Landing, a distance of about 45 miles. They were then hauled by stone boat or oxen to the site of the house. The exterior is Victorian Trend whereas the interior is Greek Revival.



View of Earl's Landing on Seneca Lake shows where barges landed to bring the cobblestones from Lake Ontario to build nearby houses.



OLNEY - RYAL HOUSE

This house, located in Yates County, on Route 14 north of Dresden, was built of fieldstones, in the year of 1835. The construction, with the field stones is very fine. Each stone used has to be a certain shape and size. The walls of the house were built of solid rock about a foot thick, this was done so they wouldn't burn in case of a fire. Larger stones were used on the rear of the house. The main part of the house has never been changed except for painting and wall-papering.

The house contains many antique chairs, picture frames, and lamps.

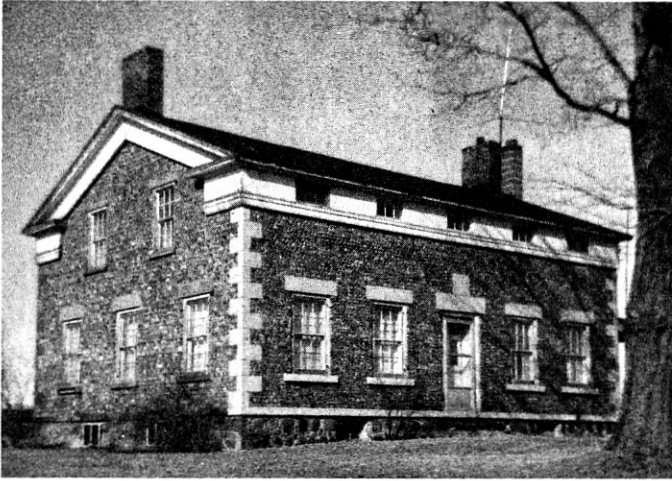
There is a lovely spiral stairway in the front hall. The front entrance has red window panes, outlining the doorway, which is a rarity in Cobblestone houses.



WAGNER - GUYLE HOUSE

Located at 105 Highland Drive, adjacent to the Penn Yan Academy parking lot, this house was built for Roderrick Morrison in 1834, by his father. The house itself was constructed of large field stones, arranged in random order. Morrison was a stately Southern gentlemen, who surrounded his home with orchard, open field, timber, and a white picket fence, all tending to isolate the house from other structures.

In 1843, Mr. Morrison sold his home to Abraham Wagner, often called the founder of Penn Yan, and moved to California. While the house was vacant, part of it burned. Wagner later replaced it with a wooden addition. The Guyles purchased the house in 1950 and found that the whole structure had been badly misused. They set about restoring the house to its original condition.

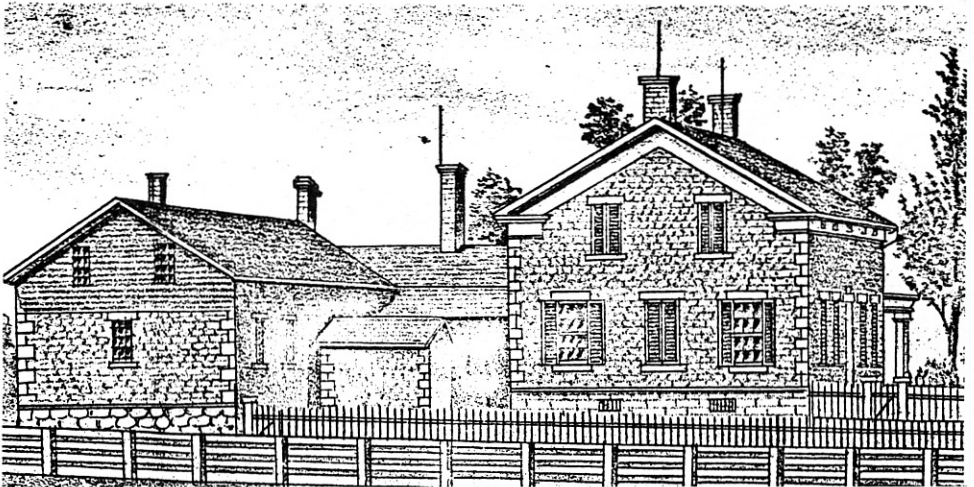


BARDEN HOUSE

The stones used to build this house were of the cobblestone variety, largely collected on the Barden farm. The stones were graded by being dropped through a hole in a board.

The contrasting stonework is the only decoration that the house has. The main entrance has a date of 1843 over the doorway.

It was built by George and Dolly Witter Barden. The deed to the land was given about 1800 from the Van Renshlear tract.



View of the Barden house as pictured in the Yates County Atlas, 1873.

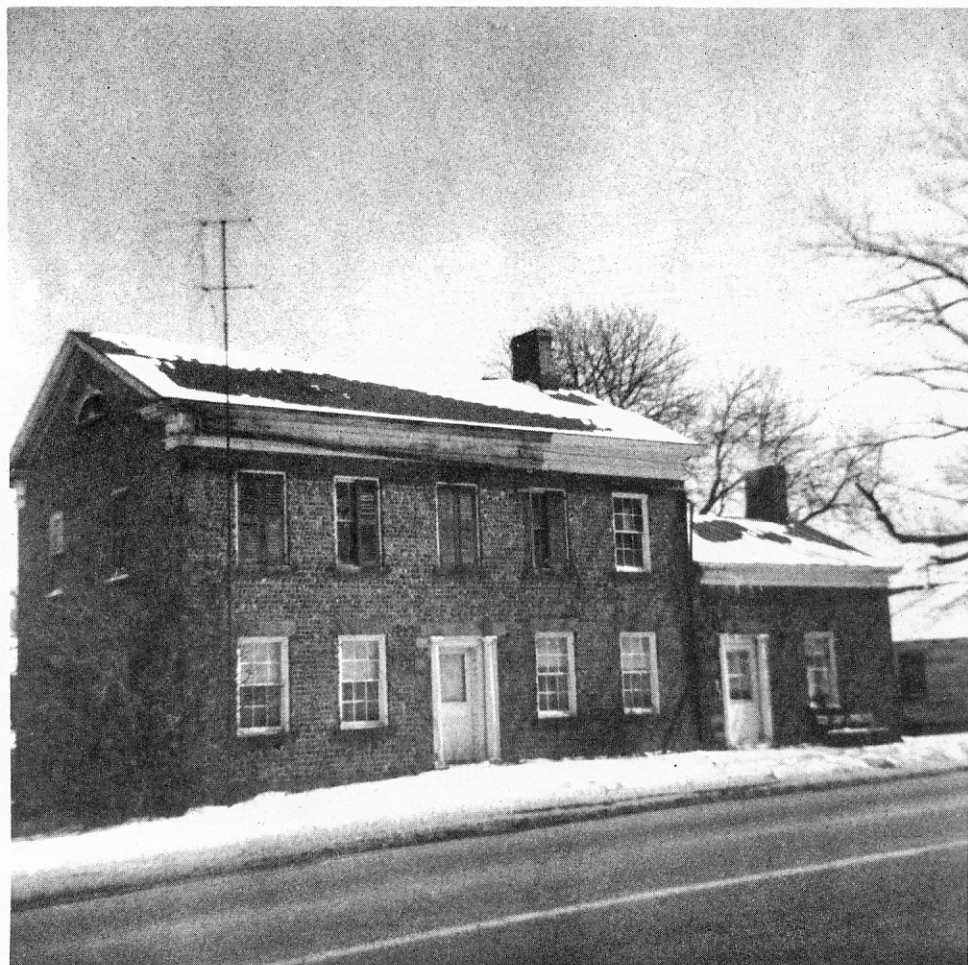


ANGUS - JENSEN HOUSE

This house is located on Rt. 14 in Yates County. It was constructed of Fieldstones between 1830-34. The present owner is Kendall Jensen, of R.D#1, Penn Yan. The land came into the Angus family by purchase on April 29, 1831, from Samuel Chapman. It stayed in the Angus Family for five generations.

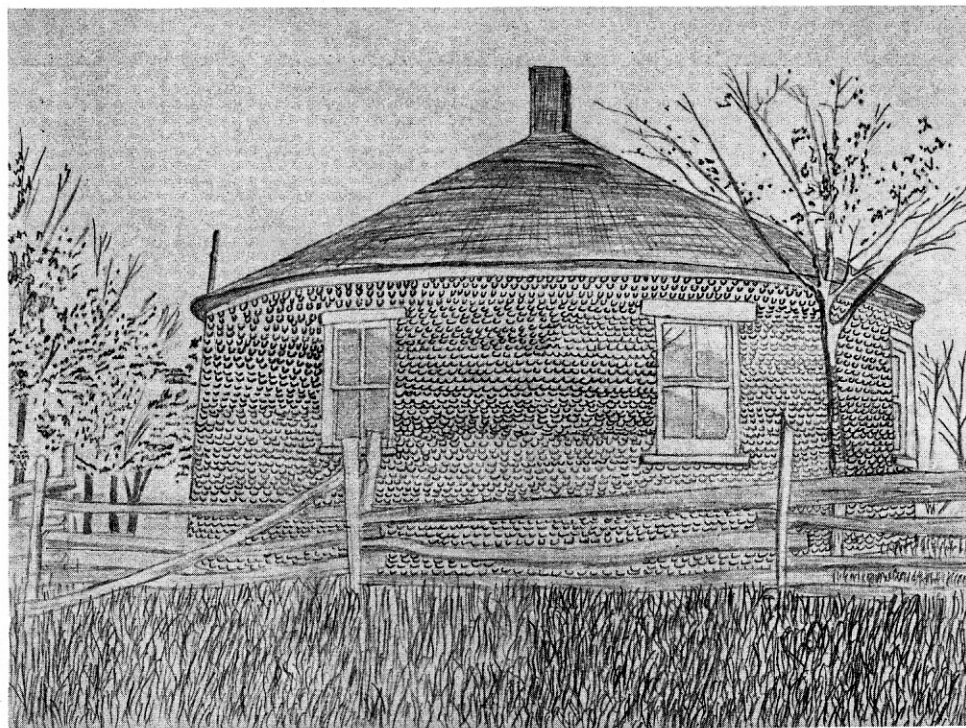
The property was sold to Kendall E. Jensen, the present owner, on July 20, 1960.

It had once been used as a stopover point for the Indians going to Geneva, to trade fur and game for goods and rum.



LEACH HOUSE

The field stones for the house were taken from Lakemont area and Ontario Lake. Three sides are a herringbone pattern. The back wall was made in straight row. No cement was used to put in the stones. A mixture of sand and lime produced a fine, hard mortar. Originally, the Leach House had ten rooms, but one room partition was torn out. Otherwise, the house has never been changed. George R. Young was the Mason. The deed to the land was dated 1813. The house was constructed in 1837. The present owner is Frank Leach. It has been in his family for six generations.



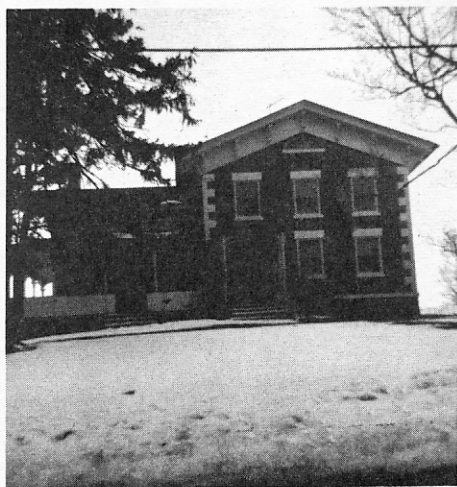
ROUND STONE SCHOOL HOUSE

Dist No. 5 Town of Potter, Yates Co. This school house was built in 1838, It was 30 feet in diameter and 11 feet high. The seats were circular. The teachers desk was on a platform in the center of the room on a raised platform. A painting of this cobblestone schoolhouse hangs in the Middlesex Valley Central School, Rushville, New York. The schoolhouse burned Jan. 20, 1920. At this time there were ten scholars under the teaching of Miss Gertrude Wheeler. The interior was badly damaged, but could have been restored. Unfortunately, the state department ruled it should be destroyed and replaced by a wooden structure. This was done but a few years later the wooden structure was moved to another site after the school district consolidated. The deed to the land reverted to the Underwood family, who had deeded it for the use of educational purposes.



'NICHOLS - SCHULTZ HOUSE

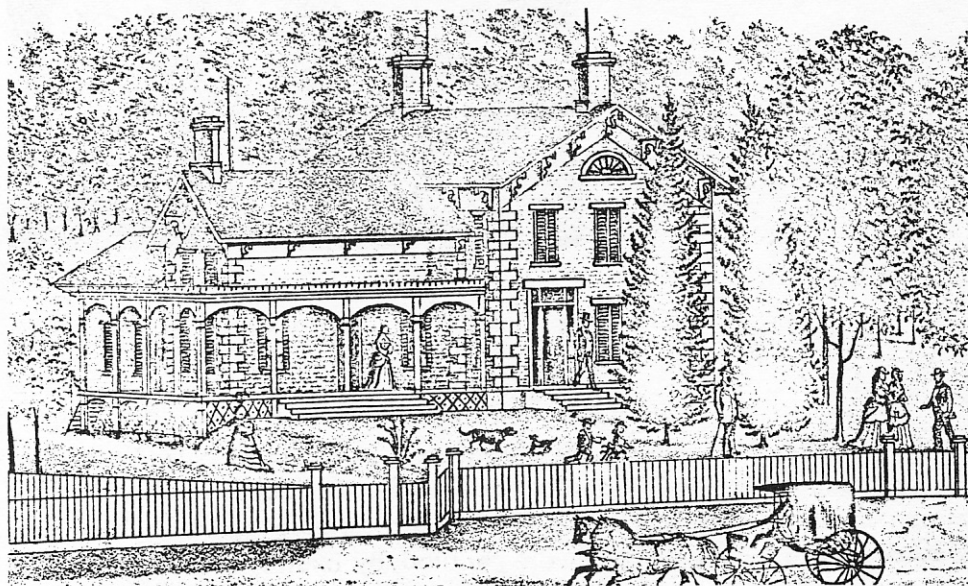
Located on Alexander Road, Northwest of Bellona, New York, this house was built by Mr. Nicholas for his wife, (Elizabeth Barden). The mason was Elmer Grow, who constructed the house about 1838 of lake washed brown stones. These were hauled by oxen from Lake Ontario. It was said to have taken about three years to accumulate the stones that went into building the house. Dr. and Mrs. Schultz, the present owners have the original deed to the house.



SUPPLEE-GREEN HOUSE

It is said to have taken almost four years to obtain the stones that went into building this house.

The present owner is Harry & Laura Green.



Built by Daniel Supplee in 1876.



SPENCE HOUSE

The lake-washed stones, for the facing to the Spence house, located on the Himrod to Starkey Road, were shipped from Sodus Point, by boat to Starkey Point, a distance of about 45 miles, and then by ox-team were hauled another thirteen miles to the site of the house. The mason was Lamoreaux.

The present owner is Mrs. Robert B Spence Sr. This house has been in the family for five generations.

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