

HISTORY CHIPS

By MARSHALL HOPE

Monday evening Prof. Robert Frash, president of The Cobblestone Society, addressed the meeting of The Madison County Historical Society at Cottage Lawn Historical House, Oneida, on "Cobblestone Architecture."

Whether you attended the meeting or not this subject was of more interest to you if you took a ride to nearby Bouckville and Madison, on Route 20, and saw some of the finest examples of cobblestone houses in the United States.

The largest and most spectacular is the four story cobblestone structure on the main corner of Bouckville. Ride along the side streets of both Bouckville and Madison and you will notice that at least half of the cellar walls of all the houses in these two towns are made of even sized, perfectly rounded cobblestones.

Octagon House

In Madison, near the school on Route 20 is a cobblestone octagon house. Octagon houses are a rarity in themselves, without the "double rarity" of a cobblestone octagon.

The county macadam road along the Chenango Canal from Bouckville to Solsville has four cobblestone structures, all different types of architecture, within about three miles of each other.

To see these buildings, start at the hotel in Bouckville, driving north on the road between the hotel and the canal, on the east side of the canal.

About two miles down the road is a large cobblestone farmhouse built in the Greek Revival style of architecture. It is built with a setback and several sides, facing a large pleasant lawn on the east side of the house, to catch the morning sun.

Continue on this road alongside the canal to the next corner. Turn to the right at this corner, without crossing the canal, and follow the road around a large farm house ahead.

Notice the cobblestone cellar walls of this farmhouse, which are higher than usual, which appear to thrust the wooden frame section of the house up into the air.

Builder's Stone

Continue on around this house to a cobblestone house a mile or two ahead. Note the builder's stone in the center of the front wall, typical of all cobblestone houses, on which is engraved in stone, "Built 1842 by Capt. Williamson for Burton Phelps." The lettering has been worn by time and the elements and is difficult to read.

Continue on to the east, past the old Madison cemetery. Just beyond is another structure, a cobblestone barn at the rear of the farmhouse on the corner. This building was used as a hop kiln for many years when that commodity was Madison County's biggest agricultural money maker.

By this time you will have noticed that you have been traveling along the road on the north side of Madison Lake. At the corner where the cobblestone barn is located, turn either right to go back into Madison village; or turn left, down the hill and around the Solsville corner store to the right, to follow the Chenango Canal into Oriskany Falls.

The cobblestone grocery store building at Pine Woods is quite unusual, and has an interesting history. As you pass the side of the building along the Route 20 hillside, note the builder's stone in the center of the wall. The names "Stevens" and "Howard," can be made out, as well as the building date of 1844.

The structure was originally built for the manufacture of carriages and wagons. Years later it became a hotel, with the second floor divided into eight small bedrooms. The prohibition years spelled the doom of the hotel without the lucrative bar business, and in recent years it has been a grocery store.

Built Without Cellar

This building is built on top of the ground with no cellar. Like all cobblestone structures the cobblestones are set in lime mortar, which presents problems in preserving the walls from crumbling. In the middle of each thick cobblestone wall are big wooden timbers usually set horizontally about every three feet, hidden within the walls.

Another cobblestone structure is located in Eaton, on the banks of the creek, as you turn at the corner toward the County Home. Just above the doorway is the builder's stone, "S. Parker, Edge Tool Maker, 1849."

The walls are badly cracked and the building is unsafe to enter. The stream beside the building gives mute testimony to busy days, long ago, when the machine shop was operated with water power.

The structure is one of the finest examples of cobblestone construction. It must have been built by an expert cobblestone mason, with perhaps 20 years experience, in one of the later years of cobblestone construction.

Every stone is perfectly round, all the same size; about the size of a snowball you can hold comfortably in your hand. The stones for this building, like many others, are said to have been obtained from the shores of Lake Ontario and

transported to Eaton for the building of this mill.

Lake Ontario stones were preferred because they had been washed and worn round by the action of the waves. The stones were graded for size by passing them through holes cut in boards, or through iron rings.

Majority In State

Few residents of New York State are aware that in this state are a majority of the cobblestone houses in the United States.

To pinpoint their location even more, Rochester, N.Y. is just about the geographical center of their area. Within a 100 mile radius of Rochester are located 75 per cent of the cobblestone houses in America. Some are on the northern shores of Lake Ontario, and there are others in the states surrounding the Great Lakes, as well as others scattered miles apart in almost every state.

Cobblestone houses were built only between 1825 and 1860. None were built after the start of the Civil War. The succeeding generation lost the know-how of their construction when their best builders were killed on the battlefields of the Civil War. After the war this type of construction was considered too slow and too expensive.

Little is known today about the men who built the cobblestone houses except that they were all built by the stone masons who built the stone locks of the Erie Canal and its branch canals.

Build Canal Locks

Masons from all over the country flocked into New York State to assist in building the Erie Canal locks. After the canal was finished in 1825 these men were out of work.

With the completion of the canal, settlers poured into Western New York to farm the new and fertile country. They needed homes and wanted something better than log houses.

With the opening of the Erie Canal, wheat grown in Western New York jumped in price from 30 cents a bushel to \$1.50 per bushel. The ensuing prosperity made it possible for home builders to hire out-of-work canal masons to erect cobblestone houses for them.

Paint was expensive in those days. Cobblestones were plentiful on the shores of nearby Lake Ontario, so why not build a cobblestone house? Whole families including women and children helped pick the stones just as they had helped clear the fields of stones for the first planting.

In the late 1820's and 1830's the first cobblestone houses were roughly built. The corner stones were rough stone from nearby creeks. The cobblestones were not all exactly sized nor as perfectly laid in neat straight rows as those built later on, in the 1840's and 1850's.

You can almost tell in which decade a cobblestone house was built by the degree of perfection in setting the rows of cobblestones in the lime mortar.

It was in this later era of the finest craftsmanship that the cobblestone houses in Madison County were built.

As with similar houses built earlier in Western New York by Erie Canal masons, Madison County's were built by masons who worked on the locks of the Chenango Canal, which ran from Utica to Binghamton.

Build Chenango Canal

On the completion of the Erie Canal other sections of the state demanded canals. The southern counties of the state were not to be denied, but it took eight years to get a bill through our state legislature authorizing the construction of the Chenango Canal, with construction started in 1833.

The Chenango opened for traffic in 1837. With the experience gained in building the Erie Canal it is said that the Chenango Canal had the best stone masons and the finest built locks of any canal in the state.

The Chenango Canal crosses Route 20 in Bouckville. The village of Madison is only a mile or two away from the canal at Solsville. This accounts for the Chenango Canal masons being right on the spot to build the cobblestone structures in these two towns.

The Canal level across Route 20 at Bouckville was the highest level between Utica and Binghamton. Bouckville is 706 feet above Utica, while Binghamton at the far South end of the canal is only 300 feet lower than Bouckville.

The distance from Utica to Bouckville is about one-third of the total length of the Chenango Canal, yet it contains 76 of the 116 locks in its entire length. From Utica to Bouckville the canal had to be raised more than twice the height of the drop from Bouckville to Binghamton. Hence more stone masons were needed to build the 76 locks than were needed in many sections of the same distance on the Erie Canal.

In 1961 the State Education Department granted a charter to the Cobblestone Society of Childs, in Orleans County, in the center of "cobblestone country."

The Cobblestone Society is interested in preserving cobblestone buildings by furnish-

WITH MARINES — Arthur Collins, recently promoted to corporal in the U.S. Marine Corps, has landed at Santo Domingo, off the U.S.S. Okinawa LPH-3, with units of the 2nd Marine Division. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. C. P. Collins, Mt. Hope Ave.

The so-called buffalo of America is really a bison.

ing pamphlets on how to repair and care for them. These pamphlets include material on repair of masonry, doorways and entrances, windows, and roof restoration.

The Bouckville — Madison area is the "Cobblestone Capital" of Madison County. These 100-year plus buildings are a pleasant attraction to residents and tourists alike and add much to the history of Madison County.