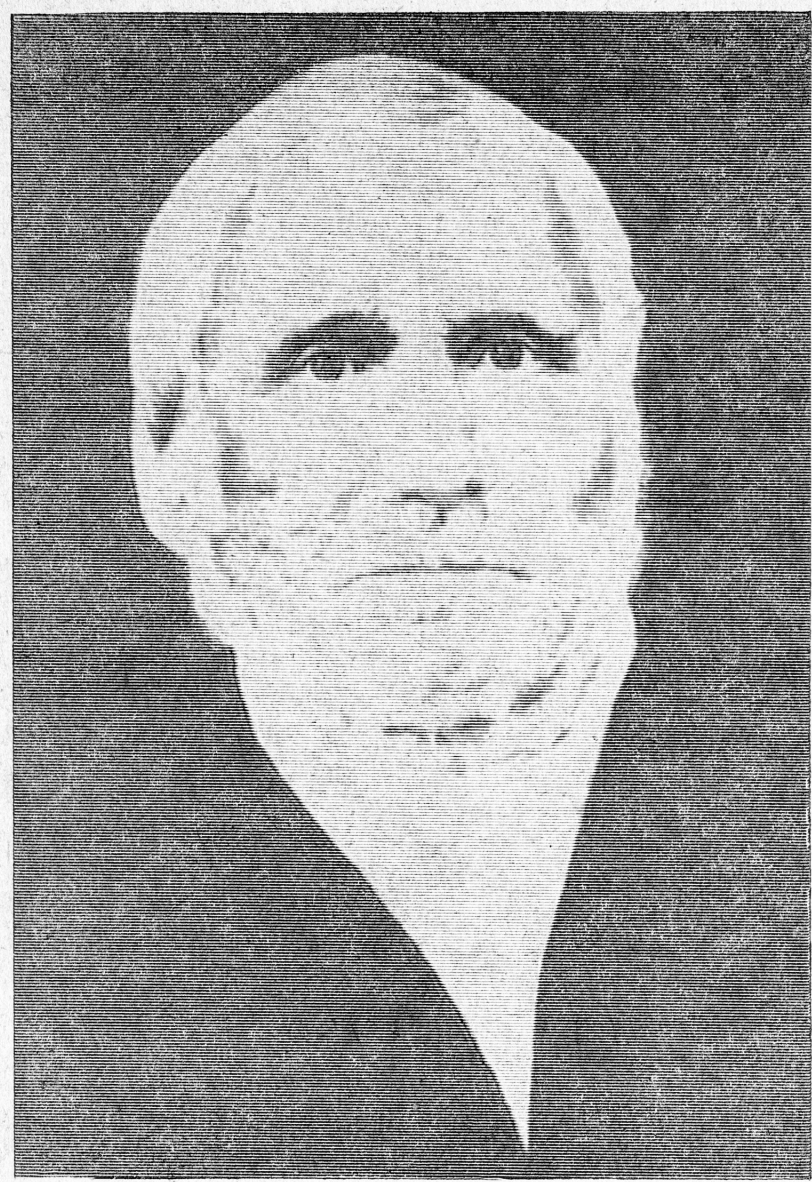


Society Gathers A Century of Area Lore



DONOR—John J. Proctor, the "Paul Revere of the Ridge Rd.," who gave the Universalist Church at Childs and provided for its continuance through the years.

He Was The Paul Revere of Ridge Rd.

CHILDS — A legend rides again along the historic Ridge Road. It is the story of a man who grew with a pioneer community, lived to endow it with a church and was able to provide for its continuance down through the years. That man was John Proctor, best known as the Paul Revere of the Ridge Road.

First let us turn back the pages of history to Salem, Massachusetts in 1692 when a John Proctor and his wife, Elizabeth, were arrested for witchcraft. John was executed and Elizabeth died in prison. They were later proved innocent but this may have been part of the heritage that motivated John Proctor to assume his place in the pioneer community.

But let him tell his own story as he told it to the Pioneer Society in 1863.

"I was born in the town of Dunstable, Mass., Jan. 22, 1787. In March 1810 I arrived in Batavia, since changed to Gaines, on the Holland Purchase, and purchased a lot of land near the Transit Line. I chopped over five acres of land and built a log cabin in what was then called 'Nine Mile Woods.' My cabin was seven miles from any cabin going east and two miles west and no inhabitants nearer south than Batavia village. Here I kept bachelor's hall, sleeping in the open air on hemlock boughs until I had completed the roof of my cabin, which I covered with bark. I had to travel several miles to get bread baked. In the spring of 1811 I cleared off and planted three acres of corn and in the fall sowed five acres of wheat. In December I went back to Massachusetts on foot.

"On Feb. 11, 1812 I was married to Miss Polly Cummings of Dunstable, Mass., and started on the 12th with my wife for home in the woods in a sleigh drawn by two horses.

"When we arrived at our new home at what has since been called Fair Haven (Childs) there were but three families in Gaines. The nearest grist mill was at Black Creek, twenty miles distant, on account of the bad roads it was as easy for us to go to Rochester to mill, a distance of thirty miles.

"In the fall of 1812 I harvested a good crop of wheat and corn.

"In the winter of 1813-14, the British and Indians came over from Canada and massacred several of the inhabitants on the frontier, and many of the settlers fled out of the country for safety. The people throughout this region were in great consternation. The news of the approach of savages spread rapidly.

"William Burlingame, who resided about four miles west of my place on the Ridge, called me out of bed and requested me to go immediately and arouse people to the east. I immediately mounted my horse, the only horse then owned in the vicinity, and before the next daylight visited all the inhabitants as far east as Clarkson.

"The effect of the notice was almost electric, for quite a regiment of men in number were on the move the next morning, to check the advance of the enemy. We marched west to a place called Hardscrabble near Lewiston, and there performed a sort of garrison duty for two weeks, when I with some others returned for having been elected collector of taxes, it became necessary for me to attend to the duties of my office."

In September he again volunteered, taking part in the sortie made from Fort Erie in which the enemy was routed. Several

bullets passed through John Proctor's clothing, one grazing his finger.

On February 1, 1815 he was notified to attend a sitting of the Court of Common Pleas in Batavia where he was excused. He then collected over one hundred dollars in taxes, made returns as town collector and took over a deed of one hundred acres of land from the Holland Land Co. Judge John Lee of Barre, the father of John Proctor's second wife, Clarissa, and fourth wife, Cynthia Mudgett Hurd, had been appointed Judge of the Court of Common Pleas of Genesee County.

The story is told of the deer John Proctor shot as he started on horseback to visit friends in Massachusetts and returned two months later to enjoy the last piece of the venison with his family.

On June 22, 1825 he was sworn in as a grand juror in the first Court of Common Pleas held in the town of Gaines at Bronson's Hotel.

Three years later he laid his 12 year old son John N., his two year old daughter and his 41 year old wife to rest by his two infant sons both named Jerome M. Soon he married Clarissa Lee but she died in the fall of 1832 at age 33 years. It was her daughter Clarissa E. who survived to adulthood and married Josiah C. Proctor. A son, William W., also grew to adulthood and survived his father but Clarissa pre-deceased her father. Neither had issue so John Proctor left no direct descendants.

It was following the death of his second wife that John Proctor began thinking seriously about a Universalist Church at Childs, then commonly referred to as Proctors Corners.

After looking around for a lot on which to build, he bargained with Caleb Knapp for the present site in 1833. A misunderstanding followed and the verbal contract lapsed. The following spring negotiations were renewed. When it appeared terms would be agreed upon he directed George Brown, who worked for him, to have a load of stone ready to take possession at a moment's notice, when the bargain was completed. He gave the signal and within two minutes after the fence was opened the first load of stone was deposited. Work was begun on the trenches for foundation walls and the church pushed to completion.

The inscription on the church reads: "Erected by the First Universalist Society in the year 1834 A.D. God is Love."

J. Proctor wrote from Boston, Mass., "The girls are thicker than grasshoppers at haying time" but he returned to marry his third wife, Elizabeth.

Tales are still told in Gaines of John Proctor and his good-natured, tall, amiable wife called "Aunt Betsey" who was such a careful and painstaking housekeeper.

John Proctor bought property and sold it at a profit. One day a man came to pay him a bill, sat on one chair and relaxing, put his feet on another. Very quietly Aunt Betsey informed him her chairs were not footstools but if he wanted one she would get it for him, meanwhile removing the chair.

The Proctors were active in the Pioneer Association. They attended a Universalist meeting in Kendall as delegates from the Childs Church on May 17, 1861 along with Joseph Billings and his wife.

It was on January 14, 1862

(Continued on page 5)

Childs Church May Have Been Joint Project

A paper showing that the Universalist Church at Childs may have been a community endeavor and not alone the gift of John Proctor has been found by Miss Katharine Billings of Albion among the papers of her great-grandfather, one of the original donors. All Orleans County histories state that John Proctor, at his personal expense, built the stone house of worship and donated it to the Universalist Society at Fair Haven (now Childs).

The paper reads:

"We the undersigned agree to pay the several sums set opposite to our names respectively for the erection of a meeting house for the use and benefit of the first Universalist Society of Gaines to be built at Fair Haven and erected on a sight (sic) to be designated by the building committee and we agree to pay the said before mentioned sums as shall be required by said committee who are to be chosen by the subscribers at a future meeting of the same each voting according to the sum subscribed.

"Fair Haven, Aug. 29, 1833.

"The annexed is a copy of the original subscription to which the name following & are annexed.

"John Proctor \$200; Joseph Billings \$100; Caleb Knapp \$50; conditionally that he does not sell his farm, \$100; Henry Ripsons \$10; Lauren Billings \$25; John Wm. Keitz \$10; Thomas Smith (timber) \$5; Wm. Wright in 2 years \$25; Samuel N. Tanner \$25; Robert Caswell \$20; Saml. B. Perkins \$25; Phineas Rowley \$20; Henry Luse (in

lumber) \$10; Spencer Graves \$25; John Hutchinson \$50; Joshua Rockwood \$20; Smith Brown \$20; Charles L— \$25; Alexander C— \$10; Stephen Mead \$2; Foster Keley \$2. \$4; David Atkinson \$25; William Loomis \$20; Joseph S. Drake \$5; John Basset \$5; Henry Foster (in work) \$3; Orange Butler (lumber) \$10; George Lawrence \$10; Harvey Noble (lumber) \$5; Almyra Nichols \$5; and Chauncey Woodworth \$50."

What may have happened to the pledges made by the group interested in contributing to the church building is not known. Perhaps the funds may have been used for furnishings.

History tells us that John Proctor was the major contributor in the church building, purchasing and donating the lot the church was built on, and later made provision in his will for continuing its service.

Of the contributors listed, Chauncey Woodworth and Harvey Noble operated taverns and were Gaines town assessors. Joseph and Lauren Billings, brothers, worked large neighboring farms. In 1834 Caleb Knapp appears as an original stockholder of the Farmers Bank of Orleans, the first bank in the county. Joseph S. Drake and Henry Luse were connected with pioneer sawmills and Orange Butler was the first licensed attorney in the town of Gaines.

Samuel N. Tanner lived in the homestead across from Mount Albion Cemetery.

The Universalist Church at Childs carries this inscription "Erected by the First Universalist Society A. D. 1834. God is Love."

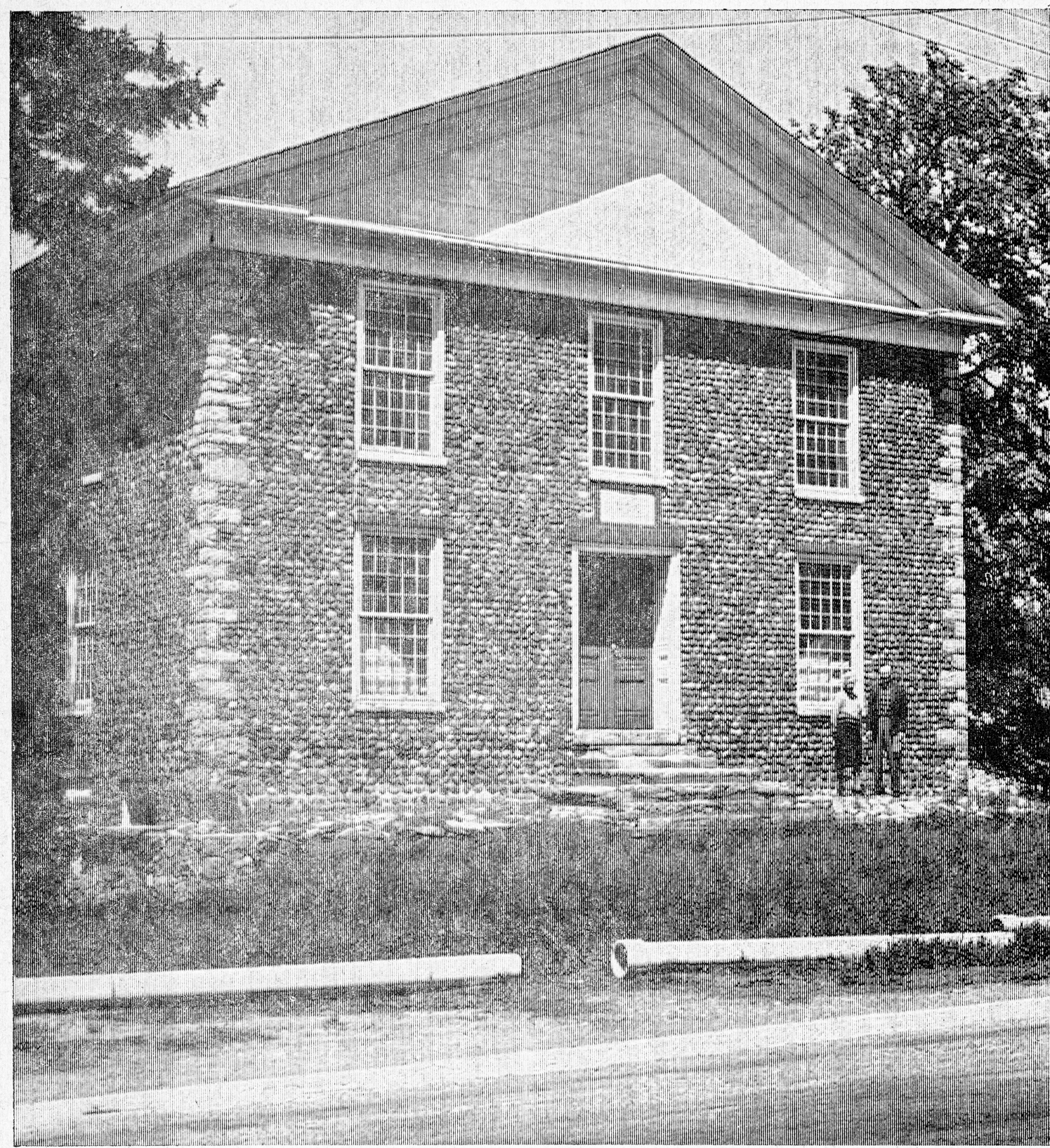
Surveying All of N.Y.S. Cobblestone Structures

Of particular interest to area residents is the survey being conducted by the Cobblestone Society to list all cobblestone structures in New York State. To date nearly 400 cobblestone buildings have been listed in Western New York and architectural sketches of many of these have been made by Carl F. Schmidt of Scottsville, noted authority. He is a director of

the Cobblestone Society. Photographs have been taken of many of the buildings by Miss Donna McAdam of Fairport for the permanent cobblestone library records.

Anyone living in a cobblestone house or having a cobblestone building on their property is asked to write Cary Lattin, Orleans County Dept. of History, Courthouse Square, Albion, N.Y.

Restoration Eagerly Begun



Childs church, an excellent cobblestone example.

The Universalist Church at Childs stands today as a memorial to the men who vowed "to serve God by serving humanity" and after 130 years is on the threshold of becoming a shrine to pioneer religion. For by its restoration the Cobblestone Society beckons not only to people to view this rich architectural heritage of Western New York, a cobblestone building, but points up the place each church has held in the forming of pioneer communities since men found the need for religion as a part of every day living.

The history of the Universalist Church at Childs has been like that of many pioneer churches. It survived through dull and enthusiastic periods and then the change in the center of population closed its doors except for the services held in tribute to its pioneer founders.

It was through the efforts of

Joseph Billings, Chauncey Woodworth, John Hutchinson and John Proctor that the First Universalist Society of Fairhaven (Childs) was legally established in 1834 and the church erected.

As the church life of today shows its lean years and inspiring accomplishments, so it was during the years that followed in the life of the First Universalist Church. In 1861 when John Proctor provided for the future of the Church Society in his will the church was reorganized and a constitution adopted. Through his bequest there has been possible a continuance of service through this church until the present day.

The year 1865 brought hard times and the church was forced to close its doors for a decade. Then the enthusiasm of Charles Danolds induced a complete reorganization of the church in

1877 as the Church of The Good Shepherd. Rev. T. D. Cook was called as pastor marking one of those uplifting experiences of church life and the congregation increased to 125 members. The church again became a center of the community and the enthusiasm of the congregation working together carried it for another decade.

It was this enthusiasm that prompted George Pullman to give the Pullman Memorial Church in Albion in memory of his parents. The handsome sandstone structure is built in the form of a cross. The stained glass windows are by Tiffany in deep jeweled tones and the organ the largest in a rural church in Western New York but the church was not endowed.

When the Universalist Church at Childs closed its doors the trustees of the church entrusted in John Proctor's will with "maintaining public worship" diverted the bequest to the new church but returned to Childs for memorial services.

Today the First Universalist Church at Childs, just east of the four corners, has had few alterations through the years. The morning sunlight highlights the inscription above the center entrance just as it did when it was built by John Proctor "Erected by the first Universalist Society in the year 1834 A.D." "GOD IS LOVE." It is reflected again in the many panes of the single double hung windows with twenty over twenty sash that flank the entrance. There are similar windows over the three lower openings. The Tympanum of the front gable is filled with flush wood siding.

The cobblestones for this Early Period church were picked up in the fields. They are of various sizes and colors laid in courses about four and one quarter inches on centers. The quoins at the corners are roughly cut from ledge limestone and vary from eight by fourteen inches to nine by twenty-three inches. The window sills are four inch thick wood planks and the lintel above the entrance door consists of a double row of brick headers laid flatwise above.

Bricks laid on each side of the entrance steps carry the Lafter brickyard stencil. The wood cornice is Post Colonial design.

Plans have been made to restore the bell tower.

The interior of the church is very interesting to the architectural historian because few alterations have been made since it was first built.

Of special interest are the mural paintings in back of the pulpit done in perspective making the altar look as if it stands in front of a deep recess probably at one time centered with a cross or religious symbol.

The interior of the church is topped by a balcony along two facing sides reached by stairways from the vestibule. The double row of straight backed pews in the balcony match the pews in the church sanctuary finished in grained pine with walnut scroll arm rests.

Original seat cushions, carpeting and a few kneeling benches have been preserved. The original church organ and pulpit furniture including a communion table and communion service need little restoration.

The hand turned spindles in the balcony of the choir loft at

Church Deeded To Society

September 30, 1963 was a red letter day for members of the Cobblestone Society for at 1:04 p.m. a property transfer was filed as Deed 947, page 510 in Book 311. It recorded the transfer of the site of the Childs Universalist Church from the New York State Convention of Universalists, East Syracuse to the Cobblestone Society at Childs for \$500.

The transfer was recorded at the Orleans County Clerk's office where the original deed had been filed October 13, 1835 when John and Elizabeth Proctor had given the premises on which the Childs Universalist Church stands to the Trustees of the Universalist Society on June 10 of that year.

The Trustees of the New York State Convention of Universalists had sanctioned the transfer in 1961 but the transaction was under litigation for three years with Curtis F. Lyman, Society director, as attorney.

Provision is made in the deed that if the Cobblestone Society's charter is revoked the property will revert to the original owners.

Cyrus Built Many Homes At Gaines

THE MASTER BUILDER

Cyrus Witheral signed the certificate on April 17, 1850 as a witness to the marriage of John T. Anderson and Mary Cliff at Gaines, N. Y. Finding his signature today settles the century old dispute that his name was not Weatherwax or Wetherhill but Witheral.

Cyrus Witheral left his mark in the pioneer community of Gaines as a carpenter, stone mason and master builder. He was a slight wisp of an Englishman and came to Orleans County about 1814. He lived and worked near the village of Gaines. He no doubt helped raise many a log cabin home but when the stagecoach line turned Gaines into a thriving village he built with stone and mortar using lake-washed stones as an artist creating such patterns as the herringbone and other pleasing effects. Later he used bricks killed in the local brickyards to erect pioneer homes.

The classic doorways in many of the cobblestone houses within a three-mile radius of Gaines remain as they did when they were built by Witheral nearly a century and a half ago. The lumber was selected from standing pine woods with such care that even today it shows few flaws.

the rear of the church, are of black walnut, matching the pulpit furnishings.

At one time doors with name plates led to each pew but the doors were used to face the pulpit when it was enlarged.

The Cobblestone Society plans to plaster the church ceiling as a first step in restoring the interior of the building and to cement the basement floor where a museum will be established.

John Proctor, strange as it may seem, was never a formal member of the Universalist Church but he believed so firmly in its covenant that he insured its future through his will. The church covenant reads in part:

"that we may more cheerfully love God and keep his commandments, and recognizing our need for mutual aid, watchcare and communion . . . we will not be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit serving the Lord . . . we will speak in love to those of contrary part, and thus seek to turn them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God . . . We will endeavor to keep the unity of spirit in the bonds of peace, and so make it an object of others to seek our communion and fellowship."

YOU CAN JOIN

The Cobblestone Society will send information on its activities and a membership application to anyone on request. Address inquiries to the Society, Albion, N.Y. (Childs). Annual dues are \$2, for students 50 cents and for patrons \$25. A life membership is \$100.

Cobblestone Society Born in 1960



PLANNING MUSEUM—Cobblestone Society directors are shown consulting a museum authority in planning Cobblestone museum at Childs. Left to right, Homer Brown of Albion, a director; Robert Frasch of Cortland, society president; Miss

Records state that the Cobblestone Society began officially in October 1960. It was a cold day when sixty hardy individuals gathered in the unheated, unused Universalist Church at Childs. They were concerned with saving the church and the nearby cobblestone schoolhouse from being sold for commercial purposes. Some even wrapped newspapers about their heads to keep warm, but they stayed until basic objectives were adopted and a slate of officers named. So the Society was born.

Actually the Cobblestone Society has sprung from many sources. It exists today because of the work of the cobblestone masons themselves, over a century ago. They left us a heritage of irreplaceable cobblestone buildings that with few exceptions do not exist outside of Central-Western New York. There is the pride of Gaines townspeople in their church and schools; the affection of the cobblestone homeowners for their unusual old buildings; the determination of some church

members, such as Homer Brown to preserve the historic Universalist Church as a church; the pioneering architectural research of Carl Schmidt; the willingness of area historians Cary Lattin, J. Howard Pratt and Miss Katharine Billings to help organize a society and finally, those who care about the preservation of the past.

Hoping to bring together enough people to make collective action possible, I wrote a nine-page report in June 1960 outlining the need and the possibilities of putting the unused cobblestone school and church at Childs to use as the headquarters and museum of a regional organization devoted to the preservation of cobblestone architecture. Orleans County Historian Cary Lattin welcomed the proposal. Together we distributed copies of the report throughout the area, called a meeting and the Society became a reality.

Now, three years later, the dream has come true. The Cobblestone Society already owns

Ruth Home of Toronto, Canada, a specialist in historical museum displays; Cary Lattin of Albion, county historian, and Olaf W. Shelgren, Buffalo architect now making blueprints for restoration of Childs church and school.

three cobblestone buildings, the Universalist Church at Childs, the nearby cobblestone school being turned into a school museum, and the second school at Gaines to be developed as headquarters. The organization issues a newsletter and has published two folios on cobblestone architecture, sponsors an annual cobblestone tour in Western New York, has held three country auctions, operates the school museum, sponsors two traveling photo exhibits and has spent several thousand dollars toward the complete restoration of the church and school in Childs.

Our present project is the year-end membership drive. Only with the solid support of a large membership can we insure continued success. This is why we have kept the membership at \$2 for adults and fifty cents for students. Anyone interested can join by writing to our secretary, Miss Katharine Billings, 120 W. State St., Albion. Those who wish may become patrons for \$25 or life members for \$100.

During the winter a committee is planning the Cobblestone Museum, a large exhibit space to be developed in the lower level of the 1834 church. This will not be just another museum but the only museum with exhibits explaining cobblestone architecture from its origin. A concrete floor will be laid in the exhibit area. Other plans include the plastering of the church ceiling and restoration of the bell tower.

On Saturday, June 6, 1964, the fourth annual Cobblestone Tour will open private homes along the scenic Lake Road from Webster to Sodas Point.

During the summer months the 1849 cobblestone schoolhouse museum in Childs will again be opened to the public on Saturday afternoons.

Next fall our country auction will be held at the Gaines cobblestone schoolhouse. No article could possibly tell the whole cobblestone story. If you are interested in what we are doing and would like to help, please consider this an invitation to become a member of the Cobblestone Society.