

Pardee House

WE about Rochester are all acquainted with cobblestone houses, those staunch, substantial old structures built of small round stones. The city itself has few enough of them—only three, we believe. However, the



surrounding country possesses a representative collection of buildings constructed of this material. We have in the past taken them pretty much for granted, wondering perhaps in a general sort of way when they were built and by whom, but recording little of their history. In the past decade we have begun to realize that we possess in them something unique and of a local flavor. This is our one contribution

to the architectural history of America.

Cobblestone construction first appears about 1830. Its source we have been unable to determine. Theories there are, of course, but these we have been unable to authenticate. However, the work is unusual and is confined to a very limited area of which Rochester is approximately the geographical center. Along the historic old Ridge Road both east and west of the city may still be seen many interesting buildings erected of this material. They may be found as far east as Mexico, New York and south to Nunda. To the west they dwindle away short of the area of fine building stone that becomes evident near Lewiston. They do occur on the north shore of Lake Ontario where two old houses still remain the property of some of my family connections.

Cobblestones are small rounded stones, rolled and smoothed by the action of water or glacier. These were used as a facing material for a rough wall of larger stone. The angles of the building were trimmed with cut stone quoins. These were usually of the local limestone or red sandstone, dressed and measuring 12 inches high by 18 inches long and were 6 inches thick. These dimensions were, of course, not always adhered to but can be taken as standard. Cobblestones were graded to size and laid in courses, the number of courses in height per 12 inch quoin determined the scale of the work. Usually the front and often the most prominent side of a house were faced with smaller cobbles than were those walls considered of less importance.

As an example let us consider the Pardee house in Irondequoit. The front wall is of lake cobbles, five courses to the quoin, all carefully selected

red sandstone laid with a raised V-joint. These stones are approximately the size of a goose egg and about as regular. They were laid with meticulous precision and neatness. The south wall of the house likewise was laid up with five courses per quoin. These were smooth and regular, carefully selected for size but without regard to color. They appear to have been glacial drift for many are of granite, black and white, along with gray sandstone. These glacial pebbles had been further smoothed as for centuries they rolled back and forth on the lake bottom.

The north wall of the house was laid up of slightly larger stones, only four courses to the quoin. They are less regular and no thought was given to color. They and those in the rear wall, only three courses per quoin, are glacial pebbles such as might have been gathered up at any of the local gravel pits.

This practice of employing what they considered their best material and their most precise workmanship on the front of their houses was often carried to a fine degree. Occasionally we discover six courses of very small stones laid in the height of a 12 inch quoin. Such precision coupled with color monotony produced an extremely formal and rather stiff facade, far less interesting than that on which the larger and varicolored stones were employed.

The architectural style of the cobblestone buildings, whether house, church, school, store or blacksmith shop, followed that of its specific period. The earliest work was of the Post Colonial style. This was soon crowded out by the heavy influence of the Greek Revival of which the Pardee house is an excellent example. In the Fifties architecture was definitely on the decline. Several instances of the Gothic Revival appear in steep roofs and pointed windows, the final aspect of the cobblestone era.

Several years ago we learned from a woman whose father had worked at this branch of the mason's trade since 1811, that in 1854 he had been obliged to take up a new craft. However, we do find scattered examples of cobblestone work dating late into the decade, ceasing just short of Civil War days.

Thus disappeared a type of construction which has never been revived. Many of these fine old houses still stand, monuments to a discontinued and forgotten craft. We should remember that they are unique and should endeavor to preserve them unspoiled. Necessary alterations should be made with understanding and with that feeling of responsibility which is imposed with a trust.

