



ROCK'S RAMBLES

By RAY ROCKEFELLER

THE COBBLESTONE ERA

The above title refers to homes, schools, churches and other structures made with cobblestones. And did you know, dear reader, that there are more than 700 of these structures still remaining in New York State? Yes, indeed. This construction practice is said to have originated in the Rochester area. But it eventually spread to other sections -- even as far as the town of Harford. There on the south extension of the Daisy Hollow Road is, or more accurately speaking, was a cobblestone home. It is now sad to relate that while the outside walls are intact, the inside is a shambles.

Last winter, Mrs. Barbara Bell of the Ithaca Journal staff, and your Rambler visited this structure. We were on an inspection tour of the vast Cornell agricultural down Harford way. But the focal point of our trip proved to be this cobblestone dwelling. I wrote about it in a Ramble with a picture of the same. I requested anyone having any information about this structure to contact Mrs. Bell or myself. The response was quite amazing. Letters came, phone calls and personal face to face contacts. In fact Mrs. Bell became so interested that she did a lot of research and eventually wrote an article on this house which appeared in the Ithaca Journal of April 17th. It is entitled, A Cobblestone Landmark.

And now your Rambler (who makes no claim of being up to the standard set by Mrs. Bell) wants to have his say about cobblestone construction. Most of his information comes from a periodical named York State Tradition. He can do this



COBBLESTONE HOUSE (1930)

with a clear conscience as the above periodical printed his article on the George Junior Republic in full.

But before we get into this cobblestone history, we want to tell about a letter received just as we started working on this Ramble. It was from Mrs. Herbert Tyler of West Brookfield of Massachusetts. Mrs. Tyler lived in this house from 1929 until 1932. In her letter she encloses two very important pictures. One is of the cobblestone house taken in 1930 -- over 40 years ago. It shows a fine, well kept structure and is a valuable addition to the history of this house. The second picture shows the well kept barns across the road from the house. Many thanks to Mrs. Tyler for these fine pictures. They will bring back happy memories to many who have lived or visited there. They are to appear in the Ramble of May 5th. They came at a most opportune time. Maybe a case of ESP. They are now being sent to Miss Dexter of the Cortland County Historical Society as requested.

Now to get into this cobblestone history. Where did these stones come from? That's a good question and we can answer it. Millions of years ago a glacier from the north covered central New York. As it retreated, it left millions of stones, large, medium and small sizes. The smaller ones were left smooth and round by the retreating action of

the glacier and also by the action of the water as the glacier melted. This is what the geologists tell us, and far be it from me to dispute them.

The building of the Erie Canal required many masons for the building of locks, bridges and runways. But when the canal was completed, hundreds of these masons were thrown out of work. It was then that some bright fellow conceived the idea of utilizing the skill of the idle masons by building homes and other structures with the millions of cobblestone left by the glacier. So construction by the use of cobblestones and good mortar (which the masons knew from their work on



BARNs ACROSS FROM THE COBBLESTONE HOUSE

the canal) came into practice. Hundreds of these sturdy structures were built and as mentioned above, over 700 still remain. Nearly all were built before the Civil War. We call it the Cobblestone Era.

In 1960 the Cobblestone Society was formed. It's main purpose is the preservation of these cobblestone structures. Each year, they have a grand tour of these buildings which still remain. Probably the most pretentious one is near Geneva and is known as the Ripley-Banfield House. It was built in 1854.

The Cobblestone Society requests anyone having photographs, family records or any other information

about these historic structures, to send the same to the Cobblestone Society, Albion, New York 14411.

This week's Ramble with its valuable photographs will be sent to them and it is surmised that they already have the article by Mrs. Bell, A Cobblestone Landmark. It is a landmark which, much to the regret of many of us, will soon be but a memory. As time marches on.