

PETER G. BARBER
SUPERVISOR

NANCY A. LEVIS
SECRETARY

March 29, 2017

VIA EMAIL and First-Class Mail
Guilderland Central School District Board of Education
c/o Superintendent Marie Wiles
Guilderland Central School District Office
8 School Road
Guilderland Center, NY 12085

Re: Preservation of "Cobblestone Schoolhouse" (former School District No. 6)

Dear Superintendent Wiles and School Board members:

I write in furtherance of my letter dated March 28, 2017 in support of the proposed expenditure in the Superintendent's 2017-18 budget for preventative maintenance of the historic Cobblestone Schoolhouse.

Attached is a copy of a July 7, 1961 newspaper column by Town Historian Arthur Gregg about cobblestone architecture, including unique features of the Cobblestone Schoolhouse and the inscription in an upper front quoin: "R.E. Zeh, mason, 1860." This column included the attached photo with the observation that: "Externally and internally, this structure is in splendid condition, belying its 101 years of existence." These copies are from the Guilderland Public Library's local history collection.

Upon behalf of Town residents, I applaud the Superintendent Wiles' budget request to continue maintaining this educational legacy by preserving an original historic schoolhouse dating from the advent of public education in Guilderland.

Very truly yours,

Peter G. Barber
Town Supervisor

Enclosures

cc: Town Historian Ann Wemple-Person (with enclosures)

Historian Notes Three Periods of Cobblestone Architecture in N. Y. State, and in Local Area

7/7/61

By A. B. Gregg, Town Historian

At a state convention of town officials a number of years ago, an illustrated lecture was given on "Cobblestone Architecture" that interested me greatly. Since then I have had it in mind to present to the citizens of the Town of Guilderland facts and pictures of certain examples of this type of architecture that still remain in our town.

This lecture was given by the foremost authority on the subject, Carl F. Schmidt, an architect of Scottsville, N. Y. He is the author of a book on "Cobblestone Architecture," as well as numerous articles on "Cobblestone Masonry," from which he has graciously given me permission to quote.

Mr. Schmidt says: "Until about two decades ago cobblestone houses were accepted by up-state New Yorkers without much thought. That ere developed a type of masonry wall of unique beauty and interest was never realized except by a few people. With but few exceptions, his type of masonry wall is not found elsewhere in our country. There are a number of examples of obblestone houses in Ontario, Canada, several in Michigan and Ohio, one in Brattleboro, Vt., and several round Albany. In several instances these houses were built by people who had moved from this region.

"Generally, we can say that Rochester is about the center of the obblestone region. If we draw a circle with a radius of about 60 miles, using Rochester as a center, we would include about 90 per cent of all cobblestone buildings."

Mr. Schmidt says in his highly illustrated book: "Cobblestone houses are sturdy, compact structures built of small stones, laid up neatly in horizontal rows between straight lines of exceedingly hard

mortar, with square cut quoins of red or gray stones at the corners.

"The gathering of the small cobblestones that formed the facing or veneer was a long laborious procedure. It is said that the children and often women aided in gathering the stone from the fields, creek beds, and gravel pits. The stones were sized by passing them through an iron ring, called a 'beetle' ring, or by passing them through holes cut in a board.

"How did the mason build a cobblestone wall? In all cases, the small stones are only a veneer, or skin, which is backed up by regular rubble masonry of large field stones, or large stones roughly squared. . . . It appears that the backing wall about 14 inches thick was built up first, at least sections of it were built first, and after the mortar dried, the veneer of cobblestones was laid up. It was a slow process. A good mason could lay up about three courses of stone on one side of a house in one day. This is about eight or nine inches of vertical wall. It may be readily understood why it took two or three years to build a cobblestone house. The average mason received \$1 to \$1.25 per day, plus board. Ten to 12 hours a day

Claude Bragdon, who wrote the preface to Mr. Schmidt's book, said: "It would cost a small fortune to construct such a cobblestone house now-a-days, even assuming it could be done. The Civil War, which raised the price of labor, spelled the doom of cobblestone structures."

And quoting Mr. Schmidt again: "The cobblestone era readily divides itself into three periods — early, middle and late. The early period includes that work which was built from the late 1820's until about 1835 — the middle period, 1835 to 1845, and the late period those erected after 1845. The Civil War seems to have ended cobblestone construction; only a few scattered structures were built after 1866." Mr. Schmidt lists under these various periods almost 300 cobblestone structures in the Rochester area. There are numerous illustrations and architectural drawings of these beautiful farm houses, barns, schools and offices.

The cobblestone structures of the Town of Guilderland illustrated in this issue of the Altamont Enterprise, can hardly be classed as beautiful, but are presented with the belief they may add to the story of this long abandoned type of architecture.

Our first example is that of the school house of old District No. 6 of the Town of Guilderland. It is located on Route 146 in the village of Guilderland Center. It was used as a school house from the time of its erection until 1941, when the district sent its pupils to Voorheesville, under contract. Since the centralization of Guilderland schools in 1950 it has been used as an office and now as a supply storehouse by the Guilderland Central School district. Visible only to the most searching observer is this inscription, carved on one of the upper front quoins: "R. E. Zeh, mason, 1860." The cobblestones in the front of the building are small and uniform. Nine curving cut stones with smooth surfaces form an arch above the door. The front corner quoins are of irregular dimensions, becoming larger at the bottom. The three windows on each side of the building are reinforced with long, wide slabs of cut stone at the top, and long, narrow slabs at the bottom, while vertical and horizontal quoins reinforce the sidewalls about the windows. Long, flat rough cut stone slabs support the building on top of its fieldstone foundation.

The second is a close-up view of the southwest corner of the building, showing the irregular size and shape and arrangement of the cobblestones as well as the quoins, the large square stones used at all four corners of the building and about the windows.

Number three is a view of the former schoolhouse of District 10, Town of Guilderland. When old-time residents of Guilderland or New Scotland referred to "the cobblestone schoolhouse" this was the one they meant. Used as a private dwelling since the centralization of

the district with the Voorheesville Central School district, it lies just outside the southern boundaries of the extensive U. S. Army Reservation. Somewhat larger, its general construction follows that of the Guilderland Center school. No record of date or builder can be discovered.

A third cobblestone schoolhouse, that of old District 9 at Osborn's Corners was destroyed by fire about 1890, and the present wooden structure, now used as a private residence, was erected on its site.

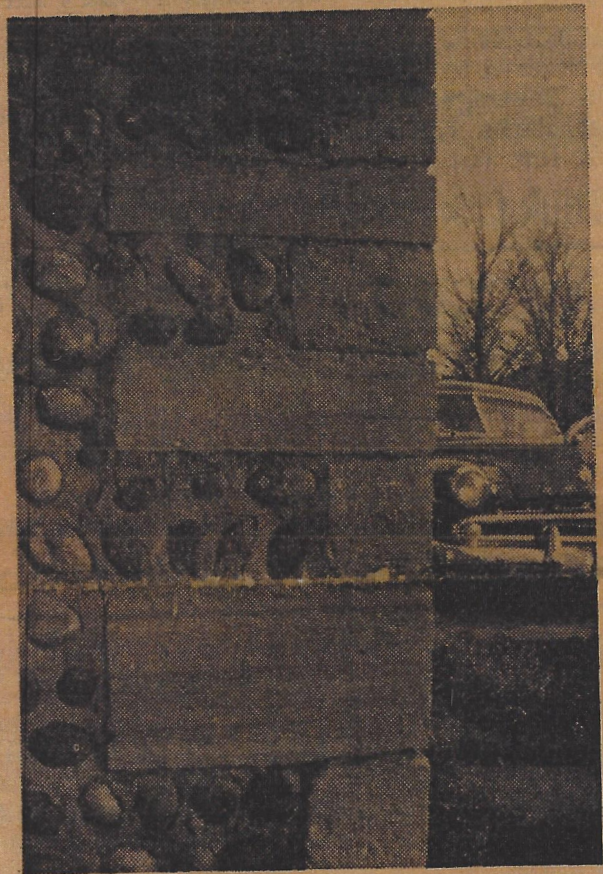
Number four is a view of the receiving vault of Prospect Hill cemetery at Guilderland. It is only a few feet off U. S. Route 20, at the base of the cemetery. The marble tablet above the door bears the inscription: "Prospect Hill cemetery, Chartered 1854. Receiving Vault, 1863."

Number 5. A view of the receiving vault of the Guilderland cemetery at Osborn's Corners. Above the door is a marble tablet with the inscription: "Guilderland Cemetery, 1872, Receiving Vault," and cut in the keystone of the arch below: "Guilderland Cemetery, 1872." The cobblestones in the side walls are large and multi-colored; those in front multi-colored, but smaller and

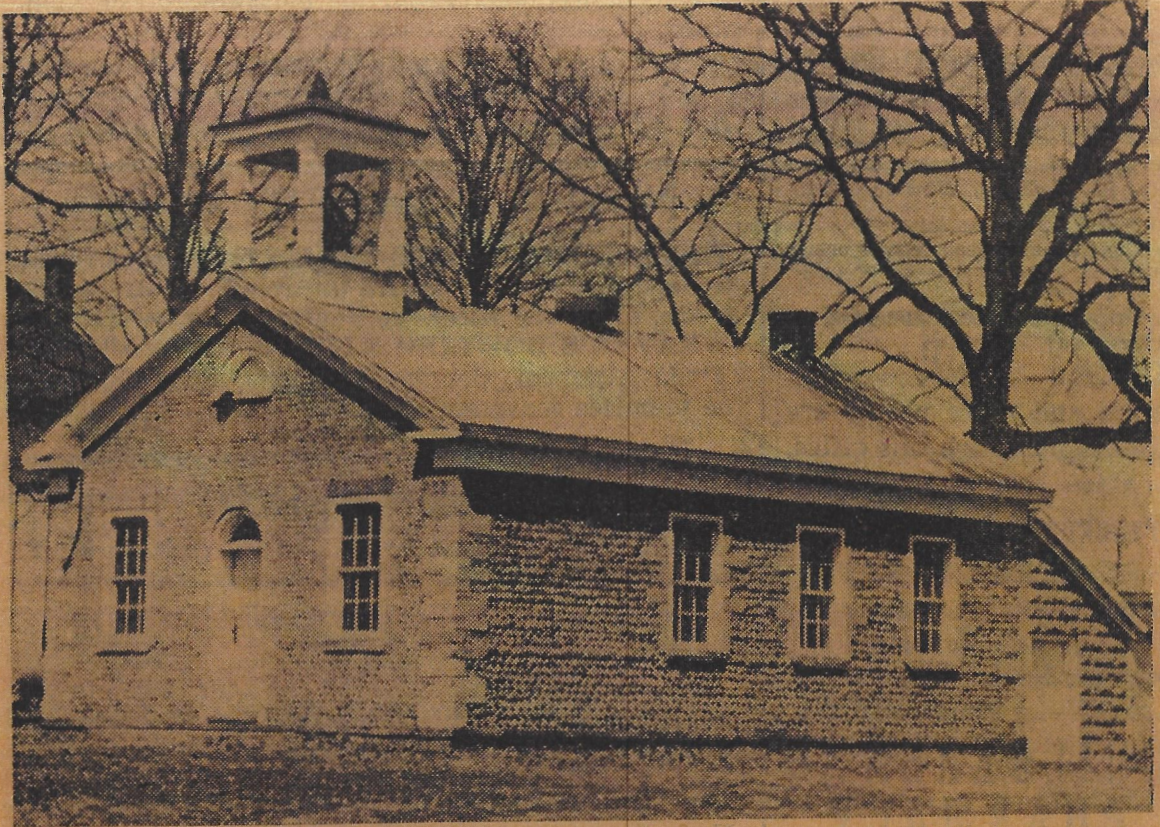
uniform. The quoins are smooth faced with rough ends. This is no doubt the latest of all the structure pictured. The cemetery itself is much older than the vault, dating at least to 1850. Prior to that, from the days of early settlement, in the beginning of the eighteenth century burials were made in private farm grave yards. The cemetery and vault lie a short distance behind the original parsonage of the Helderberg Reformed congregation, built in 1790. Their first church and for years the only one of any denomination between Albany and Schoharie, was built nearby about 1750.

We conclude from the data available that cobblestone schoolhouses in the Town of Guilderland were constructed in the 1860's and were the product of the same mason, R. E. Zeh. It is probable he also built the two receiving vaults in 1863 and 1872, respectively. Why these examples of such a rare type of architecture came into being in our town a century ago will probably never be known. They are worthy of preservation and public markers.

Again we must express our indebtedness to Mr. Schmidt, for without his skilled research and history of cobblestone structures, these pictures of our own Guilderland landmarks would be meaningless.



A CLOSE-UP VIEW of the southwest corner of the Guilderland Center school, showing the irregular size, shape and arrangement of the cobblestones used in the construction of the sides — also a good view of the large squared corner stones,



COBBLESTONE SCHOOLHOUSE BUILT FOR DISTRICT No. 6 IN GUILDERLAND CENTER. Carved in upper left front corner stone is the inscription, "R. E. Zeh -- Mason -- 1860." It was used as a schoolhouse 81 years and is still utilized for school purposes as a supply depot for the Guilderland Central school district. Its solid foundations and walls remind one of a Revolutionary blockhouse. Externally and internally, this structure is in splendid condition, belying its 101 years of existence.

7/7/61



COBBLESTONE RECEIVING VAULT of the Guilderland cemetery at Osborn's Corners. The marble tablet above the door bears the inscription, "Guilderland Cemetery 1872 Receiving Vault." The cemetery itself is much older than the vault. It is also known as the Dutch Reformed cemetery, being located on the original lease of $43\frac{3}{4}$ acres from "the proprietor of the Manor of Rensselaerwyck, Stephen Van Rensselaer, Esq., to the Minister, Elders, and Deacons of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of the Hilleberg." The lease was dated October 25th, 1794.

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