

Historian

Demise of a Cobblestone Building

The cobblestone building located next to the post office dates back to 1830-1840. The mason obviously thought of the building's function as a blacksmith shop during construction as the building was made rather roughly compared to others in the Middle Cobblestone period.

The building was used as a blacksmith shop for many years, by W. Van Vechten and then Henry S. Randall. It became a carriage shop and was run by H.E. Hamil and later by Fred Hixon and Mr. Costello who were manufacturers and dealers in carriages and agricultural implements and sold them throughout the area. All kinds of repair and painting was done on carriages and wagons in the paint shop on the second floor. Mr. Hixon had interned at the famous Cunningham Carriage Co. in Rochester. At one time, there were three forges in the blacksmith shop on the first floor and the shop was tended by a long list of blacksmiths until the automobile became king.

In the 1940's Ward Early, Sr. operated an auto repair shop. The building was sold to the Town in 1979 and was rented to John Deats for a woodworking shop for a time. The building was then vacant, but remnants of Mr. Deats' sign can be seen on the front wall.

Over the past four years or so, the Clarkson Town Board has had the item of the Cobblestone building listed on their agenda for each meeting. In

this historic community, no one wanted to see the demise of the building even after the front of the building separated from the rest of the walls and had to be propped up. Many ideas and schemes were discussed, the last being to have the Historian office and a small museum in the building.

Don Lage from the Historical Society and the new building inspector, Chad Fabry came on board the project and many cobblestone authorities were contacted for their opinion. Among the opinions sought were that of a Historical Sites Restoration Coordinator for the NYS Office of Parks, Restoration and Historical Preservation; a coordinator of Western Pennsylvania Preservation and Restoration Counselor; a local architectural firm which had been recommended by the Landmark Society and a leading lime mortar mason (the type of mortar the building is built of).

Unfortunately, in March it was discovered that the foundation of the shop was only 24" deep and that the walls were moving, buckling and beginning to fall apart before our eyes. Because of the many changes in the structure over the years including the removal of the second story in the 1950's, the building did not qualify to be on the National Registry and therefore was not eligible for a Federal grant.

We were informed that the cost of bringing the building back to use, if it could even be done, would be approximately \$500,000. With no grants

available on the horizon, the Town and residents couldn't shoulder the cost. The Board regrettably voted to demolish the building. The cobblestones, quoins and lintels, however, will be kept safe at the Highway Department and hopefully used in a future project.

As I look at the two cobblestones that fell out of the building and now rest on my desk, I

am reminded that they are still useful, even if they are now only paper weights. The Cobblestone Shop that added to the flavor of the four corners for almost 175 years will soon be gone. But like an elderly friend or relative who has passed from this world, memories and pictures will remain.

~Leanna Blodgett Hale
Historian

"REQUIEM FOR A COBBLESTONE BUILDING"

by Leanna Hale, Sept. '09

*Goodbye, landmark of our youth,
You are a century and four score old,
No plan or scheme untried to save you,
Your demise was long ago foretold.*

*Oh, what stories you could tell,
Of our town when it was in its prime,
Of cobbles sorted and trees felled,
Of lintels cut and mortar of lime.*

*Of glorious houses made of our bricks,
An Academy of learning, the best of its kind,
A church for those to learn their faith,
Of a slower, simpler, and harder time.*

*Of crops being carried to the port,
To load the barges to west and east,
Stages and wagons of all sort,
Pulled by several kinds of beast.*

*The carriages, wagons, wheels and more,
Built in the confines of those walls,
Then autos repainted and restored,
Only memories of that time recall.*

*There's nothing left but stray sawdust,
In the shop where lathe and plane once ruled,
To preserve memory of you is now our trust,
Farewell old building of Clarkson's youth.*