

An important Part of Our History

by Sanford B. Church

No great events of historical importance have ever taken place in Orleans County. We can boast of no Fort Niagara or Saratoga Battlefield, no Shaker settlement or Oneida Community, no Indian Long House or Painted Post. True, there exist sites of ancient Indian towns, notably in Shelby; several main Indian trails ran through the county, and we have some interesting legends — most never substantiated — such as the tale of a British sloop, during the War of 1812, sailing up Oak Orchard Creek and lying off Fiddler's Elbow for two or three days. To the best of our knowledge, no battle of any kind was ever fought here, and the closest Orleans County ever came to one was when in 1813 a large group was aroused by John Proctor, of Childs, "the Paul Revere of the Ridge", and marched into Niagara County to check the advance of British and Indian raiders from Canada.

However, from an architectural point of view, we possess within our geographical boundaries, something of increasingly great historical interest: our cobblestone buildings. There are approximately 100 of them in the County.

Cobblestone architecture started here about 1825, and buildings so constructed were erected until about the time of the Civil War. It is thought that the idea of this type of building was brought to this country by masons from Europe who worked on the construction of the original Erie Canal. For instance, the great cathedral at Chartres, in France, is a type of cobblestone building.

While it is true that some of these old buildings are far from perfect, most of them are very beautiful and are well worth preserving.



With the thought of preservation of these landmarks in mind, the Cobblestone Society was organized at Childs in October of 1960. Homer Brown, Cary Lattin, Howard Pratt, Miss Katherine Billings and Robert Frasch (at that time of Holley, but now a Professor at Cortland State Teacher's College) were among the group of founders.

The Society has purchased the very lovely church at Childs, as well as the old Childs schoolhouse, both of which are outstanding examples of cobblestone architecture. They have been largely restored, and it is expected that they will be open to the public this coming summer. It is the hope of the Society that it will eventually be able to create a "Cobblestone Center" at Childs, restored as of the era when this kind of building was new.

When we realize that there were no white settlers in all of what is now Orleans County until 1803 (when James Walworth built a cabin at the mouth of Oak Orchard Creek), it becomes obvious that these cobblestone houses, schools and churches were among the first permanent buildings erected here. Hence the task of the Cobblestone Society in attempting to preserve them is most important, from a historical point of view.

There are, we are told, cobblestone buildings in Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, and an occasional one in other states, but that at least four fifths of all those known are located within 80 miles of Rochester and in several other counties, of which Orleans is one. Far from being limited to this county, the Cobblestone Society's activities and membership encompasses all of this area, and even beyond. We feel that the Society should have the unqualified support of everyone who is interested in our heritage (which really should include us all), and that we here in Orleans County ought to awake to a full realization of the historical value of these important landmarks.

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