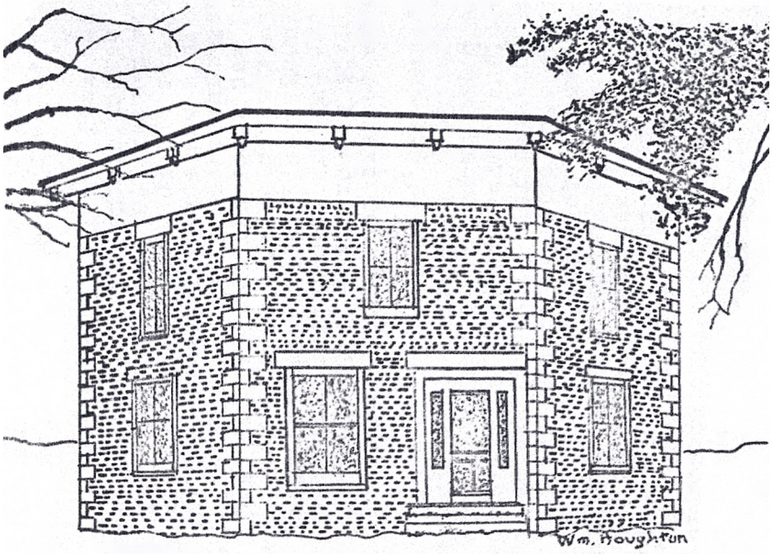

OCTAGONAL COBBLESTONE HOUSE

How the Walls of Cobblestone Houses were Constructed

There is an eight-sided cobblestone house in the Village of Madison, N.Y. that was built in 1835 by the Cleveland family. At present it is occupied by the James Gerow family. Since no information was available as to the method of construction of this particular house the writer had to search elsewhere. The following details were obtained from a local mason, Clifford Jones, and from personal observation of the laying of a cobblestone chimney a few years ago. Incidentally there are several cobblestone buildings in the Town of Madison.

It was of more than ordinary interest to the one who made the drawing and who is writing this article to be able to describe the laying up of these old stone walls. Special skills were required over and above laying an ordinary stone wall. The matter of footings will be omitted as they have not changed much over the years.

An inside wall was laid first. Flat stones with straight edges toward the center of the house were laid first, using a stiff lime mortar. The mortar was of slaked lime, sifted sand and water. Since stones will not absorb water like bricks, a drier, stiffer mortar was used. This was especially true when laying up the cobblestones on the outside. In order to lay the inside stones in a straight line a taut string was stretched for the full length of the course. Since cold will go through a solid masonry wall, some provision must be provided for insulation. This was accomplished by inserting vertical studding part way into the inside edge of the wall. Later on lath and plaster will be put over the studs thus obtaining the desired insulating air space to make the house warmer..

After laying the inside wall up a foot or so, the cobblestone finish was started. These stones were usually found in open gravel beds, stone piles around fields and along brooks. In some areas they are easy to find. They should be of approximately uniform size. The stones were mortared into place, guided by an outside taut line. The mortar must be very stiff to hold up the weight of the stones without squashing downward. The space between the two stone walls was filled with broken stones and mortar to give strength to the whole wall. The mason who laid the stones had a helper to mix mortar, bring the mortar and stones to him as needed. After laying about 3 courses of cobbles, the mason moved to another section of the wall. This was necessary in order to give the fresh mortar a chance to set, usually about 24 hours. If more than 3 courses of cobbles were laid there would be a tendency for the wall to settle some, compressing the fresh mortar. If compression does take place it will be necessary to re-do that part of the wall, a trouble that a good mason rarely ran into.

Blocks of quarried, cut stones were used in various places as Quoins at the corners, lintels and sills for windows and doors.

At the end of each day's work the cobblestone finish was cleaned thoroughly, formerly with clean water, later with muriatic acid. Since the cobbles are decorative they must be absolutely free of traces of mortar.

Prepared by W. M. Houghton 1978