

curating an old COBBLESTONE COTTAGE



few people outside of this region in Upstate New York are aware of its cluster of eye-popping cobblestone buildings. Dating from the 1830s–50s, structures that include houses, churches, town halls, and schools were constructed using cobbles shaped by Ice Age glaciers and erosion by water. Exterior walls are made of rows of cobblestones embedded in lime mortar with attention to decorative effect. This example, a Greek Revival-era addition to an earlier house, is the only one in Fayetteville.

Restoration of a surviving vernacular house has taken 50 years to complete. PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRAD LOPERFIDO, REVETTE STUDIO



The cobblestone portion was a defining addition to an older post-and-beam structure. **ABOVE** The cobblestone house was measured and drawn by Paul Briggs, a regional authority on cobblestone masonry and a restoration mason.



The primary attraction of this historic property is the house of cobblestone masonry, which has direct ties to the Erie Canal “cobblestone period” of the 1840s. Decades of informed work led to its preservation.

The Stone Cottage, as it was named by its original owners, is actually a consuming addition to a ca. 1805 post-and-beam, one-room settlement house—itself an early development in a land claim given to reward a Revolutionary War veteran from the New York regiment. Michael Hutchins acquired the farm after arriving in Fayetteville in 1818. Between 1835 and 1840, he moved here from his house in the village, and added the Greek Revival-style cobblestone portion to the old frame house.

The 1840s were the height of the so-called Cobblestone Period along the Erie Canal between Syracuse and Buffalo. The Hutchins house is the only cobblestone structure in Fayetteville. The hops and grain farm stayed in the family until 1915. Subsequently, much of the farm was sold, and the house endured a series of earnest but insensitive improvements through the 1950s. It changed hands several times more and was subjected to further compromises, all done to accommodate renters.

From 1969 until 2018, Virginia Denton and her colleague Antje Lemke owned the house. Denton served as Director of the Syracuse University Office of Design and Construction, where she oversaw new construction and renovation of all



LEFT Cobblestone masonry is laid up with lime mortar. Dressed stone was used for window lintels and corner quoins.

ABOVE The 1840 stair curves around the original foyer pendant. Plasterwork and woodwork in the cobblestone house are exceptionally fine.



FIRST FLOOR



RIGHT Today's dining room is in the ca.1805 post-and-beam house, directly connected to the cobblestone addition. **OPPOSITE (bottom)** This view from the living room, or east parlor, takes in the entry door and the circular staircase, both at the front of the cobblestone structure.



TOP LEFT The cobblestone addition comprises today's entry, living room, and study. The older frame building holds the dining room and kitchen. **LEFT** The rear of the frame building is now the kitchen; it had held a woodshed, a hired man's room, and the summer kitchen. **ABOVE** The antique dough chest came from a bakery. Wainscoting is patterned on that in a Vermont church of the same period.

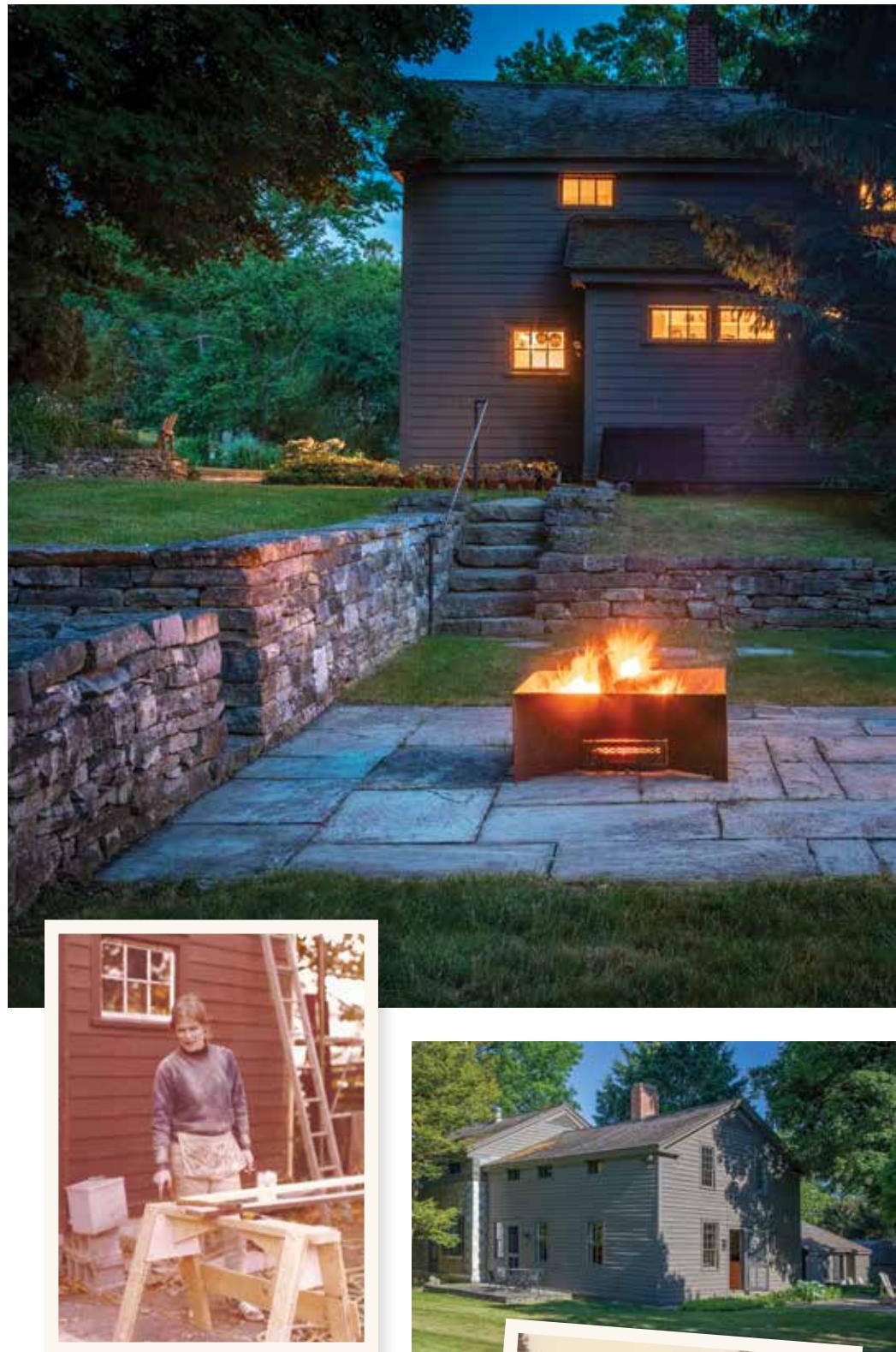


Adaptive reuse was the ethic behind conversion of a small farmhouse, which had been moved to the property, into a scholarly library.

facilities. She had a lifelong interest in historic preservation. Ginny Denton devoted her free time to the hands-on preservation and restoration of this house. When she introduced modern amenities, they were not period recreations but rather followed her “good goes with good” sympathy toward the original buildings.

Restoration efforts included bringing back the delicate window muntins and trim details that had been over-painted; and repair of the original wide-plank wood floors and window shutters. The roofing and unsalvageable plaster were replaced in kind. The historic lime mortar was stabilized and repointed in 2006 by Paul Briggs, a mason long recognized for his knowledge of cobble-stone structures.

The integrity of the 50-year effort is apparent. After Ginny Denton’s passing, her cousin Christopher Borg gathered a team of preservationists and tradespeople, who brought Ginny’s vision to the finish line in 2020. The property is now curated by new owners sensitive to its special architecture and important place in history.



ABOVE Virginia Denton, shown here ca. 1972, undertook the decades-long restoration of the historic site. **RIGHT** The ca. 1805 post-and-beam house was restored to its original intent, with informed adaptations. The entire house (inset shown ca. 1970) was in poor condition, with the older frame section suffering the most indignity.





The house is located beyond the patio, which serves the old farmhouse that became a library.



the LIBRARY

A second building on the property became an adaptive-reuse project. During the 1950s, a smaller house had been moved to the next lot from a neighboring farm. Virginia Denton's parents bought it in the 1970s so as to be closer to their daughter. Ginny provided drawings for its renovation, including a living-room addition. Later, Ginny converted the house to a library for her co-owner Antje's extensive book collection. (Antje Lemke, a librarian at Syracuse University, was an authority on the works of Dr. Albert Schweitzer and the Brothers Grimm, as well as an accomplished violinist.) The second floor is now guest quarters. In 2017, a small kitchen was added.



RIGHT (top & bottom) A small farmhouse moved to the site in the 1950s has been expanded and adapted as a library, with guest quarters above.

MIDDLE Modern incursions, like the kitchenette in the library, are simple and functional, without reference to period conjecture.

