

SUN SPOTS

By LILAH HENRY



THE EDDY RIDGE COBBLESTONE SCHOOL

Where is the cobblestone school house in this area which Winston Churchill's ancestors attended? That was the question members of the Rochester Art Club were asking on June 4 when they spent a day sketching and painting in the Marion area.

The following day several people called in to ask if I knew about the famous school house supposed to be located in the Marion area. I had never heard about it, but the tale seemed to have interesting possibilities, so I started out to locate the cobblestone school house and ascertain whether or not Winston Churchill's ancestors really did go to school there. It seemed quite possible, since I recalled that Churchill's mother had been American born.

Remembering that J. C. Eddy of this village is familiar with all the country roads throughout this entire area, I asked him first, if there was a cobblestone school house on the Eddy Ridge Road, since the Art Club members seemed to think it was located in that area. Mr. Eddy said that there was such a school house on the far end of the Eddy Ridge Road in the Marion township, although he knew nothing about the Churchill ancestors having attended it.

* * * *

SO I WENT IN SEARCH of the school house and, sure enough, there it stood at the junction of two country roads, its solid square lines rising staunchly above the high grass completely covering the school yard and concealing the lower part of the building.

There was a rectangular upright part with the familiar gable roof, which most of the cobblestone buildings along the lake plain re-

gion here seem to have. There were three windows along the side facing the Eddy Ridge Road, with the entrance door in the end facing the cross road. The structure from the outside looked as if it were still in good condition, with its field cobblestones placed in neat rows, just as they were laid up by the cobblestone masons of more than a century ago.

After a bit of exploring I located the owners of the farm on which the school house stands. Mr. and Mrs. Merritt W. Means. Their home is on the Eddy Ridge quite near the school house. One wing of the Means residence is also cobblestone and, I believe Mrs. Means told me, over 125 years old.

But Mrs. Means had not heard the tale of the Churchill ancestors attending the cobblestone school on her farm. She said that her home town, Pompey, in the central New York area had claimed that distinction. Nevertheless she graciously invited me into her home and suggested that I call a former owner of the farm, Isaac Shippers of Marion, who might throw some light on the subject.

After making several other contacts, I finally found the person who knew all the answers. She is Mrs. Vera Curtis of Marion, the town historian, who told me that she had done considerable research on the subject and had all the data on the Churchill ancestors. Some of the children did attend the cobblestone school on the Eddy Ridge Road, Mrs. Curtis even had pictures of some of the family!

"You know, I approached this story about the Churchill ancestors and the cobblestone school here in Marion in much the same way you did," she said. "I began with only the rumor about the family attending the school on the Eddy Ridge and now I have the story of the family down through seven generations ending with Winston Churchill of England."

CHURCHILL'S MOTHER, it seems, was a member of the now famous Jerome family, whose members first came to America from England in 1709. Churchill's maternal grandfather, Leonard Jerome, was the great, great grandson of that first settler.

Leonard, who later married a Palmyra girl, was born on a farm on Pompey, near Syracuse in 1817 and as a young lad worked as a store clerk in the then thriving canal town of Palmyra in the 1830's. While Leonard was studying law at Princeton his parents, Isaac and Aurora Jerome, moved to a farm in the Marion township between the Eddy Ridge Road and Hall Center. Their low frame house, with a wide porch, still stands today, a bit back from the road on a hillside, and is owned by Raymond Murphy.

When the Jerome family arrived in Marion there were three sons under sixteen and a daughter, Mary Sophia, who years later, in 1847, became the wife of Judge George H. Middleton of Newark. Records of the old Marion Academy list the names of two of these sons, Isaac Jerome in 1838 and '39 and of Charles Jerome in 1841. The Jerome family names are also listed in the records of the old Congregational church at Marion. Apparently it was during the family's stay on the farm in Marion that the younger children attended the little Eddy Ridge cobblestone school house.

* * * *

BUT, TO CONTINUE with the story, Leonard, after completing his law studies came back to Palmyra and went into partnership with his uncle Hiram, who was the Wayne County Judge about 1840. Leonard must have prospered, because he purchased 170 acres of land north of Mud Creek in Palmyra in 1841 and five years later bought the Jerome house on Canal Street in that village.

In 1849 Leonard married Clarissa Hall, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Ambrose Hall of Palmyra. The next year after his marriage he was appointed consul at Ravenna, Italy and he and his bride sailed for Europe. Returning from Europe at the expiration of his consular term at Trieste, he opened a brokerage firm in New York City with one of his eight brothers.

Leonard and Clarissa had four daughters. The second daughter, Jennie, who was born in Brooklyn in 1854 was the mother of Winston Churchill. When Jenny was 13, the mother took her four daughters and went to Europe to live, and educate the daughters. One summer they spent a month on the Isle of Wight in the English Channel, and it was here that young Jenny met and fell in love with Lord Randolph Churchill. It was love at first sight for both of them, so the story goes, and Churchill proposed on the third day of their acquaintance.

Jenny's father Leonard, who was still in America was now a millionaire and called the "King of Wall Street." After his retirement, he became a figure in the sports world and being interested in horses, built a magnificent three story stable with brick front faced with marble. He was the founder of the famous Jockey Club and shared with August Belmont the title of "Father of the American Turf."

When his daughter, Jenny, became engaged to Lord Randolph Churchill, Leonard converted his beautiful Madison Square house into cash to provide her dowry. She was married in the spring of 1874 and on November 30, 1874 her first child was born, a son, Winston, who was destined to become the great Winston Churchill of England.

* * * *

THIS IS HOW it came about that the brothers of the fabulous Leonard Jerome, (Winston Churchill's maternal grandfather) attended the little cobblestone school house on the Eddy Ridge Road in the Marion township. Because very few people seem to have heard the story I have related it from information given me by Marion's most obliging historian.

The Means family, who now own the school house, tell me that they are starting to remodel it to be used as a dwelling for a DP family, whom they are bringing into the country this fall.

I do not know, whether the members of the Rochester Art Club, who were seeking the cobblestone school on the Eddy Ridge found it or not. If so, someone probably painted a picture of it. At any rate, I'm glad they came asking questions about it, because that gave me a clue to an interesting bit of local history.