



The Calvin Vanderlike home on Rt. 96, Phelps — a cobblestone structure
(Times photo)

Society offers Phelps tour of unique cobblestone structures

By CHRIS SCHARF

PHELPS — Not many of them are haunted, but cobblestone houses are among the strangest and most unique in the world.

The sturdy stone buildings that upstate New Yorkers take for granted are virtually unknown anywhere else. A few cobblestone buildings exist in Michigan, Ontario, Ohio and other places but almost all of them are known to have been built by masons who once lived in upstate New York.

And then there is the short span of time in which almost all of the houses were built. The first cobblestone buildings were constructed in the late 1820's in the area east and southeast of Rochester.

Some of the oldest cobblestone sites can be found in Palmyra, Macedon and Farmington.

But cobblestone work suddenly ended about 1860 at the time when the Civil War broke out. Since that time many of the buildings have been destroyed or damaged, but there are still more than 700 cobblestone structures in New York State — and about 100 of them in Ontario County.

In 1960 the Cobblestone Society, located in Childs, N.Y., west of Rochester, was founded and it has dedicated itself to the preservation of New York's remarkable architectural heritage.

Each year the society sponsors an annual tour of homes and this Saturday, June 7, area residents will have the opportunity to visit eight cobblestone buildings in the Town of Phelps.

The buildings are the Phelps Baptist Church on Church St., the Brickle home on Vienna Road, the Vanderlike residence on Rt. 96, the Hopkins home on Pinewood Road, the Tiffany home on Ontario St., the Brancato house on New Pre-Emption Road, the Cargill house on Smith Road and the Cunningham residence on Rt. 488.

Tickets may be purchased at the Phelps Baptist Church beginning at 11 a.m., Saturday. The ticket is actually a brochure with a picture, description of the home and directions. The tour is self-guided and the houses may be visited in any order.

The Women's Association of the Baptist Church will serve a soup and sandwich luncheon between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

Carl F. Schmidt, in his book "Cobblestone Architecture," offers the best description available:

"Cobblestone houses are sturdy, compact structures built of small stones, laid up neatly, in horizontal rows between straight lines of exceedingly hard mortar, with square cut quoins of red or gray stones at the corners, giving an impression of

dignity and solidity.

"Due to the materials, which are local, of warm colorful tones, the structures appear to have grown from the soil on which they stand."

Schmidt in his book suggests that the cobblestone architecture of the region resulted from a fortunate coincidence of prehistoric geography and modern history.

This area once lay in the path of a glacier that left behind the small stones needed for the 19th century dwellings. But the stones would never have been used for anything more than farmers' walls if it hadn't been for the Erie Canal.

The construction of the canal and especially its locks drew skilled masons to the area and they remained here after the canal was finished.

Although most of them remain anonymous, the cobblestone houses they built are enduring evidence of their craftsmanship.

The origins of cobblestone masonry have been traced by some to houses in the south of England near Brighton built at the end of the 18th century.

Masons who emigrated to this country refined and developed the craft, especially the emphasizing and embellishing of the vertical and horizontal mortar joints between the stones.