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Old WNY House—If Only It Could Write History!

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A LITTLE CREEK hurries along the River Rd. at Youngstown, murmuring history.

On the bank above the stream stands a cobblestone house, which—if it could speak—could contribute an elegy.

And beyond stretches a field that has seen battle.

The cobblestone house now is the home of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Hooker. Built in 1836, it fronts on Two Mile Creek, or Bloody Run, as it's called.

Beyond lies the field of the Battle of La Belle Famille (Holy Family), fought in 1759, during the French and Indian War. It is believed the battle was named for a shrine of the Virgin and Child in the campaign area.

Cobblestone houses are a type of architecture original to Western New York. There are some cobblestone houses in Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan and Ontario, but most of them were inspired by builders from New York State.

Rochester is about the center of the main cobblestone region, which extends in a radius of approximately 60 miles.

Carl F. Schmidt, Rochester architect and artist, and an authority on cobblestone architecture, has recorded more than 300 such buildings within this circumference.

There are more than 80 cobblestone houses, churches, schoolhouses or other structures along Ridge Rd. between Rochester and Youngstown.

WHILE COBBLESTONE construction originated in Western New York, it is not a separate or individual style. It is a local expression of the late Greek Revival style of architecture, although there are examples of the Post-Colonial and Victorian style in its ranks.

The first cobblestone houses appeared about 1825, and they continued to be built until the Civil War. Roughly, they are divided into three periods: Early, 1820-35; Middle, 1835-45, and Later—to 1866. But they overlap.

The Hooker house, although built at the beginning of the Middle Period, is of early construction. It is made of colored fieldstones varied in shape—2½ to 3½ inches in diameter, and from 3 to 6 inches long, reputedly from the region around Watertown.

Cobblestone houses were built by masons who came here to

help construct the locks and abutments of the Erie Canal. When the canal was completed, many bought fertile farmland in the area.

THE FIRST cobblestone houses, like the Hooker house, were built of fieldstones dropped by glaciers that once covered New York State.

Fieldstones first were used in America to build dry-stone wall fences separating pastures and cultivated fields. Foundation walls for houses and barns also were made of them. Finally, they were used in the walls of houses, as they had been in Europe and England.

Sometimes "bees" were held, where neighbors met to help gather stones to build a house. There was a delicious supper later, with music and dancing.

The tendency throughout the cobblestone era was to use smaller and smaller stones, and to reduce the width of the horizontal line of mortar between them.

AS STONES USED in cobblestone houses became smaller, round "water-washed" stones from gravel pits which punctuate the glacial region were utilized. Then "lake-washed" stones found in gravel pits along Lake Ontario's shores were used; they were even more uniform in color, size and shape.

Sometimes masons used only squarish stones, others oval shapes. Some selected stones all of the same color.

The oval-shaped stones were set vertically or diagonally in the wall. Herringbone patterns of thin, oval-shaped stones were common.



Sorting and sizing the stones was done by dropping them through holes cut in a board, or through an iron ring called a "beetle" ring.

Sand for the Hooker house came from a pit just across the road. Cornerstones, or quoins, of the house are of limestone, squared by hand.

The back section of the house was built between 1850-60, and

Thomas Hooker, chemical engineer with the Hooker Chemical Corp., Niagara Falls, and his wife and children in front of their historic stone house in Youngstown. The children, from left: John S., Eleanor Lee, Thomas W. and Andrew.

is far rougher in construction than the front part.

THE HOOKERS are only the third family who have owned the house, which for years was known as the Swain Homestead. It was built by Isaac Swain,

an Englishman, who came to Youngstown in 1803. A cabin he and his family occupied on the land was burned by the British during the War of 1812.

Members of the Swain family lived in the house through the late Miss Sarah S. Swain, a

teacher in Lafayette High School. It was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Warren Perry before the Hookers bought it five years ago.

Old and murmurous shade filters the sun, shining down upon this ancient house. Horse

chestnuts, hemlocks and black walnut trees—one of which Sarah Swain planted as a child of 5. Great hemlocks shelter the stream bed.

A trumpet vine climbs one side of the house, as vines did in the past. Narrow strips of leather nailed into the 15-inch-thick walls to support vines still are visible.

Veritable touchstone of the house is the base of the Frank-

lin stove which warmed the original Swain cabin, and now is embedded in the living room hearth. The Hookers have used old paneling from other sources to restore the fireplace and mantel.

BUT THE FLOORS are old, old. Until they bought the house, the living room had only sub-flooring. But the attic was covered in wide boards, some measuring 18-inches across.

Thomas Hooker ripped up the garret floor and laid it in the living room. Some of the boards were tongued or grooved on both sides, others, tongued and grooved; so they had to be laid just as they came from the attic. The original square-headed nails were straightened and re-used.

Mrs. Hooker has hung white curtains throughout the house. A varicolored, oval hooked rug covers the living room floor. Empire, Victorian and Early American furniture all seem to harmonize in this room.

COACHING PRINTS, Toby jugs and a copy of a rare family silhouette—probably by Auguste Edouart, noted 19th-Century artist—pick up the period motif.

The dining-room beyond is unusual in that it has all four exposures. Seven doors and three windows open out its walls.

It is done in brown and white paisley wallpaper, with a tiger maple, six-legged table and lyre-back chair, the latter copied from one original belonging to an ancestor.

An ash wood cupboard in one corner displays horse show trophies won by Mrs. Hooker, the former Sarah Lee Sullivan of Rochester.

Beams in the cellar are literally trunks of trees—with the bark still clinging to them.

THE BRITISH—en route to Ft. Niagara on the night of Dec. 13, 1813—passed down the Ridge Rd. in front of Isaac Swain's cabin so quietly, that a dog, sleeping in a nearby kennel, failed to hear their muffled march. Capture of the fort and devastation of the American frontier from there to Tonawanda Creek followed.

But if the dog had awakened that night there might not have been a cobblestone house on the road at Youngstown, and the little stream below it could not murmur so knowingly.