



TOWN OF SOMERSET NEW YORK  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
BABCOCK HOUSE MUSEUM

The Town of Somerset Historical Society welcomes you to step back in time and embrace the past! In the following pages we would like to highlight a few of the items located in and around our cobblestone house.

We hope you enjoy your tour and learn a few facts about our treasured museum!

**HISTORY:**

The original owner of this Greek revival cobblestone farmhouse was **Jeptha W. Babcock**. He was born in 1806 in Albany County, NY. In 1829, he married Mary Hoag and together they had four children. They moved to Niagara County in 1833. Once here, he took on many roles. He was a farmer (of 100 acres), the first postmaster, a Town of Somerset Supervisor (1843-44) and a NYS Assemblyman.



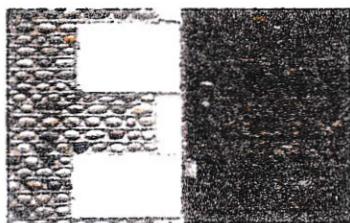
MR. JEPHTHA W. BABCOCK

**EXTERIOR:**

This cobblestone house was built in 1848 although there is no known documentation with that actual date. Cobblestone masonry used weathered stone collected from Lake Ontario. It was then sorted by hand using a **stone sorter**. This allowed them to either accept or reject stones by size and shape. Sorting usually was done by the children. Most of the cobblestone homes were erected prior to the Civil War and are not found anywhere else in the United States. Building was a slow process. The mason could only lay up to three courses of stone on one side of the house per day (about 9 inches of wall). Two to three houses would be under construction in the general area at a time. The mason would go from house to house to allow drying time for the mortar. It took about two years to build.



The stone used over the doors and windows are called Lintels. The large corner stones are known as Quoins (coins) and used to keep the walls square.



The Quoins and Lintels would have come from a sand stone quarry. Masonry between the cobblestones is slacked lime. Each mason had their own "formula" for their mortar. Cobblestones were placed in length-wise so you are only seeing the end of the stone. The rows of stones between the Quoins are not equal, meaning there is not the same number of rows between each Quoin. When the stone mason was building the exterior walls, he could only do a couple of rows at a time to allow the mortar to dry, so he would move on to the next local house and build a few rows there. There was another cobblestone house located where the Power Plant is now, but it fell into disrepair and was demolished.

The back of our house is unusual in that the cobblestones were neatly placed. In most rear facing walls, the cobblestones were just placed with no pattern because the back of the house would not be seen and so many masons were not fussy there. The cobblestones here are larger, but still uniform. You can view a closer look inside the back room of the house.



### INTERIOR:

The house was renovated in 1984 by the then owner of the Power Plant, NYSEG. They spent about \$250,000 to update it. The renovations are period and what the interior could have looked like. They collaborated with the Genesee Country Museum prior to renovations. NYSEG's start up manager lived here for three years. After that, NYSEG decided they didn't want anyone living in the house and donated it, via lease, to the Somerset Historical Society.

### KITCHEN:

Located on the front window sill is a board with two holes. This is called a sorter board. It is used to sort the cobblestones into large and small sized. Children were usually given the job to sort the stones



brought up from the Lake Ontario shore using this board. If they were found to be the correct size, they were used on the front of the house. Larger stones were used for the back of the house.

The fireplace and chandelier are not part of the original house but added during renovation. They were located where there was evidence of the original fireplace. Mrs. Babcock or a cook would have cooked over an open fire. There is also a beehive oven next to the fireplace. Once a fire was started in the box and it got to the coals stage, the coals would be moved to the perimeter and the bread placed in the center of the oven to bake. Since there was no thermometer, the general rule of thumb was if you could stick your arm in the oven for only 4-5 seconds, the oven was hot enough to use.

There is a hand pump on the counter. This hand pump was used to pump water from the cistern that is in the basement. The cistern collected rain water which was used throughout the household. There is another hand pump located outside at the back of the house.



The furniture in the kitchen is from the period and is donated/loaned to the Historical Society.

#### **BACK ROOM:**

In the original house, the room off the back was for storage of wood for cooking and heat. It is believed that during the renovation, the original foot print of the wood shed was the basis for the added area. It was thought it was added for entertainment space.

#### **DINING ROOM:**

The dining room furniture is from around 1865. The painting on the wall depicting the Emancipation Proclamation with Abraham Lincoln was used to determine what type of furniture would have been appropriate for this room.

The chandelier over the table has invisible wiring running down to the lights. The hooks are actually tubing, and the wires run inside the tubes, so you can't see them.

In this time period, there were no washing machines, so knife rests were used to help keep the table cloths clean. Large master salts and smaller individual salts were used at the table since there were no salt shakers in that time period. The master salt was filled with salt and was passed around so that each person could fill their own salt vessel with a spoon for their use. Tables would be swept of crumbs after meals.

The large globed lamps in the room are called banquet lamps and used kerosene.

Opposite the table is a picture of a quail under curved glass. Curved glass was very unusual at the time.

On the sideboard is a Chocolate Set which consists of a pitcher and cups and saucers. Chocolate was very expensive in the late 1800's, therefore the pitcher and cups were small. Individuals did not get a very big serving, unlike the size of our cups of cocoa in today's age.

The wall paper in the dining room and the living are essentially the same, but the living room is fancier with a border at the ceiling for a formal look.

### **ENTRYWAY:**

Mr. Babcock wanted a wide front door with side lights to brighten the entry. The foyer was angled out and the door way was constructed specifically to support a wider door. Notice the side lights have a deep sill.



### **LIVING ROOM:**

The wide trim around the windows and interior doors is unusual for this time period. The front windows do not have a window sill, but the back windows do. This room was probably two rooms when originally built.

There were no electronic devices or televisions, so they would use the pump organ and melodeon for their entertainment.

The picture over the sofa is a form of flower art made with wire, thread and beads. Look closely and you can see the intricate work done to make the forms look like dried flowers. This is called Ganutell work.

There would have been no central heat, so heating devices have been placed in each room such as the parlor stove.



### **OFFICE:**

Mr. Babcock's office has two secretaries. He owned about 100 acres which he farmed and managed. When he moved his family to Lockport, he then pursued business and politics.

The picture to the right of the secretary on the back wall is made from human hair. Women would typically clean their hair brushes and collect it in a vessel, some of which you will see on dressers upstairs.

### **UPSTAIRS:**

#### **CHILDRENS ROOM:**

In the children's room to the West of the staircase you will see a wicker adjustable pram (stroller). As the child grew from infant to toddler, the pram could adjust from lying position to sitting. The hood could be moved from one side to another. Located here is a child's walker. Unlike today's version, this was much smaller and made from wood. There is also a wicker potty chair. The crib is unique in that the side folds down and it also is collapsible. Notice that it was not as deep as cribs of today. Many clothes from the period are displayed here.

#### **WEST BEDROOM:**

Located in this room is a sleigh bed with a wool coverlet that was made in 1842. There is also a quilt celebrating the sesquicentennial. Notice the pot belly stove used for heat. Wood was carted upstairs and the ashes carried down.

The clothes in this room are from the period. The people of the time must have been petite to wear these clothes and sleep in the sleigh bed.

The front windows in this room are called belly windows. There are two different stories on the naming of these windows. One story is that they were called this because children would crawl on their bellies into the window wells and the second story is that the windows come to about belly high on an adult.

An antique floor sweeper is in this room.

Wash basins and thunder mugs were in each large bedroom.

#### **EAST BEDROOM:**

This room also contained a pot belly stove for heat.

Located on the bed are examples of bed clothing that might have been worn during that period.

Dresses located in both bedrooms are significant in that some are wedding dresses. Notice they were not white. In the West bedroom there is one that is a jacket/dress combo and is blue. A wedding dress located in the East bedroom is at the back of the room. It is dark blue. The red dress was worn to Grover Cleveland's wedding. (Notice the matching red shoes.)

There are several unique items located on the dressers in this room. On the dresser near the door are leather curlers. The leather is wrapped around a wire and twisted around a length of hair to form a curl. There are also several small covered dishes with a hole in the cover. These are to hold hair from a brush to be used in making human hair art. In the top of the oil lamp on the back dresser is one of the first heated curling irons. The lamp provided the heat and the curler would be re-heated after each curl. There were probably several used at one time. A beaded coin purse is on this dresser.

On the East wall there is a baby's bath tub.

Both bedrooms have covered thunder mugs. There is also an uncovered thunder mug in this room. These were used at night as toilets. They would use the uncovered one and then dump it into the covered one then in the morning take it downstairs, dispose of the contents then rinse and replace it back into the room.

**DONATIONS** graciously accepted! Keep the history of our museum vibrant and strong!

We hope you have enjoyed your trip back in time and embrace the past as much as we do! Please consider joining us by becoming a member of our Historical Society. Dues \$10 per year/\$150 lifetime. Send to: Somerset Historical Society, 8700 Haight Road, PO Box 368, Barker, New York 14012

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