

We were residing in the city of Lockport in 2000 when I began looking for a larger home in the county for our growing number of children. Years earlier, my wife found a free brochure at Lockport Chamber of Commerce that mapped and gave an overview of cobblestone structures in the county, and a few similar ones of stone. This was the first time I became aware of cobblestone architecture. I thought the look was most attractive. I have always been a fan of history. On a whim, I drove by this large cobblestone house and was stunned to see it posted for sale. Even better, it had a historical marker too.

We called our agent and arranged to see the house. The owner, a widower, walked through with us. Of greatest concern were blue tarps hanging from the side peaks. Some of the stone had fallen away, and the tarps were protecting the inner wall of stone rubble. We learned that the owner and his wife had bought the home at a foreclosure auction, and that she had recently died in an auto accident, leaving her husband and two children. It had been her idea to buy the home. The interior was also in need of much work. The realtor provided us with the name of a mason, Christopher Baker, who resided just north, in the village. After he assured us that he could repair the stonework, and quoted us a general price, we made an offer to buy the house, contingent upon selling our house in Lockport. The owner accepted. In April of 2001 we moved in.

Let's take a turn looking at each side of the house, beginning with the front. Many of the window sashes are original, including these four. When we moved in, they were covered with opaque plastic as an insulating measure. The wooden storms I found in stacked in the barn or basement; I don't recall which. All the panes were cracked. The wood had no paint and was covered with staples and remnants of plastic. It took me all season to repair and install them. The two left windows are for the family room; the two right for the living room. These two rooms retain their 10-foot height. The staircase turns three quarters, beginning at the left, and ending facing the center window in a foyer. There are 17 steps. The banister is pieced together. One spindle is missing and a couple others were taped where they had split; unknown if they are original. We have been told that the boys of a prior owner made a wreck of the house, including the stair rail. We were also told that another prior owner, a Mrs. H -, wanted to remove the stair case, but a contingent of locals visited her in protest of her plan. According to Hoyt Desso, whose mother and stepfather owned the house after WWII, the husband of Mrs. H -, painted a nasty message on the house when he left her. Mr. Desso was residing in the neighboring house set back from the road when we moved in. The upper windows are pocket-style set at eye-level, though they may appear to be belly windows. The decorative iron grates sit in a slot and are held fast by simple turns. I removed these once and repainted them. Never again. They are terribly heavy. Behind the grates, screening was nailed into the frames, which I removed in order to paint the windows. While pulling out the screens and nails I discovered both were copper! I measured, ordered, and installed storm windows. Towards the right a patch of stones barely protrudes from an old repair area. Stones are six courses to each quoin on the front, one less on the sides of the house, and less still at the back, including a short section of flagstone. We were told that this is known as a "Queen Anne front and Betty Jane behind". There is a herringbone pattern under the watertable (the belt of limestone). The front steps need repointing. The front door has a bell crank patented October 23, 1860. There is actually basement under the porch deck stone. Barn swallows have nested on the light fixture. About that anchor out front. Wilson Historical Society publications state that it came the schooner Franklin Pierce built in 1840. As the schooner was unloading at the foot of Lake Street (which is what this road becomes at the village line, and was known as Townline Rd) a storm came up, and the anchor was cut to enable the ship to escape from being dashed upon the shore. The anchor was found in 1897 by Lawson

Ackerman. The owner of the house at that time, a Mr. E.E. Stevens, bought it and had teamsters drag it here. With regards to Capt. Morgan Johnson, he owned the schooner Millie Cook. Some years after the house was built, the deed search indicates a bankruptcy.

At the south side of the house you might be able to see where Mr. Baker's partner reset cobblestones at the upper left quadrant. The master bedroom stone still was also reset. Mr. Baker later pulled the left roof line back into place; it had stressed outward. He also repaired the tops of the returns and covered them with lead coated copper. Birds have again found a way into the left return. We need to repaint this side of the house. Some stones have shifted under the stress of a very large window air conditioner that we had installed seasonally for many years. For a time, two Desso brothers split the house into two residences, hence the place for a second gas meter. The lower window is a spare room.

In 2016, after leaning out for years, the rear cobblestone wall collapsed. I think the record cold winter of 2013-14 had weakened it significantly. A local mason rebuilt it hastily. The dining room window was saved. A large forklift was used to remove the lintel and return it after the wall was finished. At some point, forced air heating was installed in the house. The ceiling was dropped in these two rear rooms to accommodate the ductwork. My brother Eric Schwarzmuehler and his partner Rick Clapsaddle pulled some of the ceiling down to install all new plumbing for the 1 ½ bathrooms on the second floor, where there had been 1 unfinished bathroom when we bought the house. They also rewired these areas. I re-wallpapered all rooms except the master bedroom (though not all rooms are wallpapered), choosing William Morris paper designed in the later 1800s and imported from England via Canada. It is rather expensive, but authentic. There are no U.S. dealers of William Morris wallpaper. The small windows are for a pass-through bedroom and the ½ bath. We discovered that many wall studs in the house are turned width-wise, which provides for slightly more living space, but is problematic for wiring. The 1920's chandelier wires literally fell off when I removed it. I bought a used period crystal replacement plus two period sconces on the right wall which had been built out on an angle from the original in order to house plumbing and ductwork. The single-story extension here at the back is a kitchen and full bath. Behind the sealed door is a pantry. I found the door in the barn and used it to replace the ugly weatherworn boards that had been covering the doorway and a monstrous empty full-length honeycomb. Due to the kitchen being in constant use, we made no improvements, not to mention the costs involved. However, my brother and his partner demolished the ½ bath at the end of this extension and they created a full bath from a larger walk-in storage area. According to Mr. Desso, a small barn was located here in the crook of the house for horses. It was placed close to the house for convenient access to care for the horses, especially in winter. He stated that his father was an engineer. His father had the barn lifted onto rollers to move it down the slope and onto the foundation of the present garage. A cat was run over in the process. The barn was too far gone when we purchased this property. We eventually were able to afford to have this new garage built by Mr. Starkweather on the same foundation. If you look briefly off to the end of the far driveway you will see a concrete bridge. The year 1912 is scratched in the top, and it is enforced by sections of rail from a railroad. We were told this house was attached to a 150-acre farm. The modern gray deck here replaced a wooden one that was decaying. My sons and I demolished it (mostly me). Underneath was a jumble of broken concrete. The contractor discovered that a metal sign in the midst of the concrete was loosely covering a deep artesian well. The other side of the sign read, "Watch for Frequent Trains". The Wilson train yard was just north of here, within sight. Penn Central pulled up the track in the late 1960s; it had been the Rome, Watertown & Ogdensburg Railroad "Hojack Line". The contractors scarfed the sign. They filled the well with the broken concrete. I

do not know the reason for the low header and sealed entrance here at the back of the extension. The underside of this extension is about two-feet high.

The concrete porch on the north side I assume replaced one of wood or merely of dirt or stone. The ridge door leads to a laundry room/ mud room from which one may proceed to the dining room across the basement stoop, to the family room at right, or up a steep servants' staircase to the second floor bedroom and the attic over the kitchen. Looking up, the stone restoration by Mr. Baker may be discerned from the top line of, and between, the upper windows and down to a point. Some settling occurred here a very long time ago, which is also reflected in a sloping floor. Mr. Baker died of cancer shortly after the Cobblestone Society awarded this house for the restoration work in 2006. His partner Marty Bryant and I emceed a slide show for the Society together by former director Lattin at the Village Inn.

In closing, I would say that old large houses are costly to maintain and can be difficult to insure. We have found the location to be ideal: just outside the village, and with land for kids to play and explore. There would have been no other way to afford a house of this size in a safe area and with a few acres to play in. I hope that in buying it we have been able to save it for others to enjoy in years to come.

Anton & Arlene Schwarzmüller