

Historic Childs: The Cobblestone Universalist Church continues as focal point of museum

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Provided photos courtesy of Cobblestone Museum: The Cobblestone Universalist Church was erected in 1834 on Ridge Road, just east of Route 98. It is the oldest cobblestone church building in North America.

(Editor's Note: This is the seventh article in a series about historic Childs in the Town of Gaines. The hamlet of Childs lies just north of Albion at the intersection of Routes 104 and 98. In 2019, Childs was selected to be on the Landmark Society of Western New York's "Five to Revive" list. In 1993, the federal U.S. Department of the Interior declared the Cobblestone Museum in Childs a National Historic Landmark, the first site in Orleans County with that distinction.)

By Doug Farley, Cobblestone Society & Museum Director

In 1833, the First Universalist Society was organized at Fairhaven (now Childs) and a building committee consisting of John Proctor, Joseph Billings, and William W. Ruggles was selected. The First Universalist Church just east of the four corners in Childs was built by John Proctor in 1834 and given to the congregation.

Built in the Federal style, the Universalist Church represents the oldest cobblestone church in North America. Bricks were used for lintels and the sills were fashioned from wood. Masons used the depressed hexagonal or "Gaines Pattern" of mortar embellishment.



The inscription on the front of the church reads, "ERECTED BY THE FIRST UNIVERSALIST SOCIETY: AD 1834. GOD IS LOVE."



In 1960, the State Board of the Universalist Church declared the Childs church abandoned and had considered selling it. Church services were no longer held there, and in fact, the church had been converted into a cabbage storage facility.

To avoid potential demolition by commercial interests, the Cobblestone Society Museum was formed and purchased the building. It was during this time, in the 1960s, that the museum carefully repaired and restored the interior and exterior.



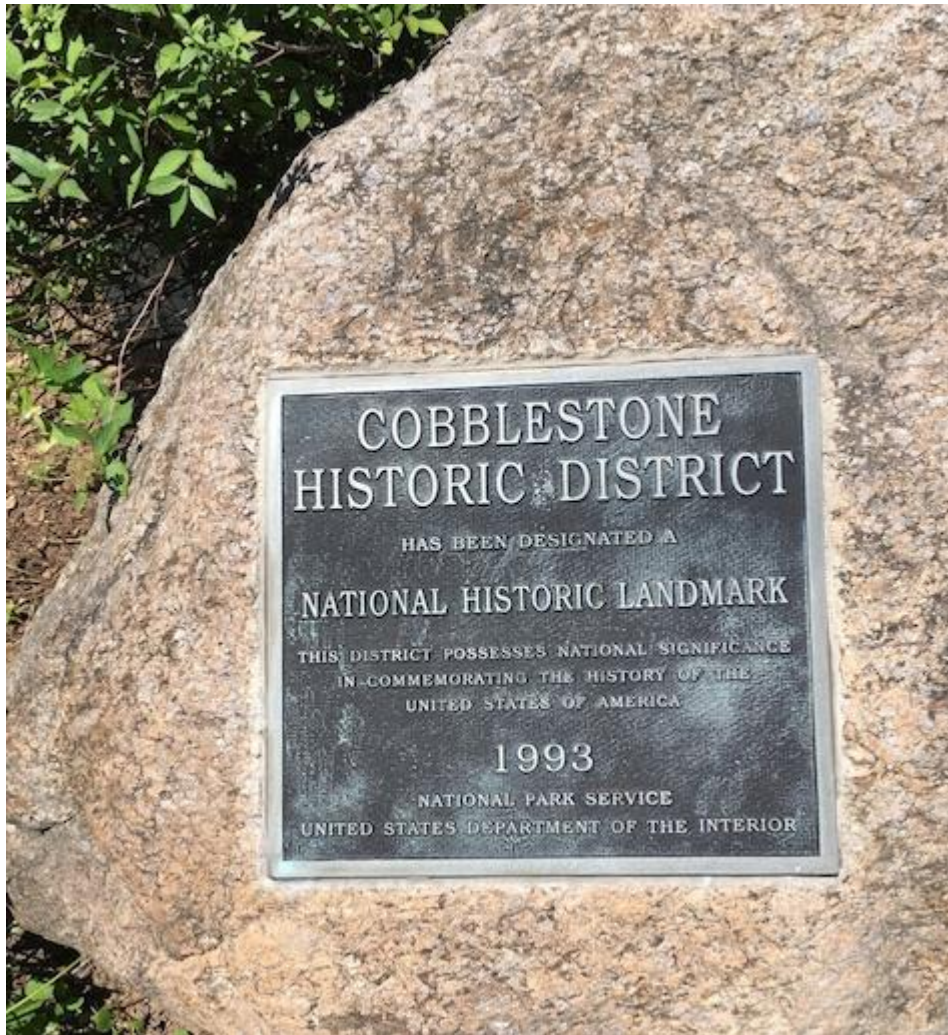
In July of 1964, thanks to a generous donation from John Brush, the church's tower was reconstructed and installed in the same location as the original tower.



The interior of the church is arranged to look as it would have in the 1880s and is included in public tours offered at the Cobblestone Museum. Here, "Elderberry Jam," a local fiddlers group, entertains a full house crowd in 2019.



Weddings continue to be held in the church, just like they would have in the earliest days in Childs.



In 1993, the Cobblestone Church, parsonage and District School #5 were designated the Cobblestone National Historic Landmark District, the highest distinction recognized by the National Department of the Interior. The latter two sites will be presented in future articles.