

# Historic Childs: Preserving history has been labor of love for ‘Dee’ Robinson

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**By Doug Farley, Cobblestone Museum Director**

The Hamlet of Childs is fortunate to have a history that is one of its greatest assets. The recording of that history, as well as its preservation, has been the labor of love for many local historians, including the subject of today's essay, Delia "Dee" Robinson, shown above center.

Dee's roots and interest in history got started in her hometown of North East, PA. After finishing high school there, she graduated from Clarion State Teachers College in 1969. She was very fortunate to travel extensively throughout Europe, the United States and Mexico. Dee took her graduate work at Geneseo and is a certified media specialist. She then worked as a school librarian for Wayne Central School District at Ontario Center NY from 1969-1974.



We will start Dee's journey as local historian with her family's arrival in the Hamlet of Childs in 1976 when she and her husband William purchased a cobblestone home in Childs, shown above at right. It was that purchase that alerted Dee to the larger picture of cobblestone masonry construction in the region, and the organization that was formed in 1960 to preserve and safeguard this architectural resource, The Cobblestone Society and Museum.

Dee immediately became interested in the history of her own home and started checking deeds, census records and old maps for more information. Dee said, "In order to find out about one piece of property, you have to find out about the one next door." This, of course, led to conversations with other residents which led to her interest in much more than just cobblestone homes, but also the storied history of Gaines, itself.



With the Cobblestone Museum in the same neighborhood, Dee found people with common likes and interests and soon became a valuable volunteer and board member. The Museum received its Provisional Charter from the NYS Education Department in 1961, and Absolute Charter six years later.

One of the purposes listed in the chartering document was “to establish a museum and library as a headquarters for the collection and dissemination of information concerning the cobblestone art and all related aspects of regional art and history.” It was Dee Robinson that moved this goal one step closer to fruition when she approached the organization’s board of trustees to offer her services to help create a library that specialized in books, printed matter and photographs that detail the history of approximately 900 cobblestone structures built between the 1820s and the Civil War. The epicenter of this construction is located at Rochester NY, fanning out with a radius of about 60 miles.



As a result, the Cobblestone Resource Center was established in early 1982 with Dee Robinson appointed Research Director. By this time, the Cobblestone Society had been very fortunate to have already amassed an amazing collection of research materials through the efforts and generosity of three of its founding trustees, Cary Lattin (left), Robert Frasch (right) and William Shelgren (center).





The Cobblestone Board agreed with Dee and gave her permission to set up a library in a small area of the Museum's Gift Shop located in the lower level of the Cobblestone Universalist Church. Members of the board are shown here in April 1983 assembled for the Annual Meeting at the Village Inn, including: (Left-right, First Row) Marcia Hart, Josephine Howard, Ruth Dagggar, Ruth Applegate, Don Ross and Patrick Roundtree; Orleans County Planning and Development. (Second row) Evelyn Lyman, Edgar Clark, Bill Lattin; Museum Director, Dick Cook, Harold Root, Paul Haines, Delia Robinson, Resource Director.



In 1984, having already outgrown its space, the research materials were moved into the room, seen here, a space most thought would be more than adequate for its purpose. Well, in 1991, another move to gain more space was needed, this time into what would later become known as the Danolds Room, in honor of local pioneers, Charles and Mary Jane Danolds.

The final move came about in 2002 following the Museum's acquisition of the Brick House from the H&A Superette and Liquor Store, next door. Moving the Resource Center, then 20 years old, was no small feat. Board member Evelyn Lyman took on the gargantuan job of designing the interior, purchasing storage units and transferring an enormous collection of books and archival materials. At the dedication, the entire ground floor was dedicated as the Robert W. Frasch Room, a space the library still occupies today.



Dee Robinson served with distinction in her role as Research Director for the Museum from 1982 to 2012, a 30-year span of time. During that time she helped acquire several hundred books on local history (a portion of the book collection is seen here in 2010) with an emphasis on cobblestone construction, and created about 900 hanging files that provide information and pictures on all known cobblestone buildings.

In that same time she wrote grants to support her efforts and to expand the collection of research materials. After submitting one grant request to the New York State Council of the Arts in the 1980s, the Museum was pleased to learn that NYSCA had not only approved the grant, but wrote back and asked Dee to request a larger amount of funding because the scope of her work was so important to this region. When Robert Frasch passed away in 1990, he, too, was very favorably impressed with Dee's efforts. He provided a substantial endowment that he earmarked to be used to help maintain the Research Room for posterity.



Dee's interest in local history goes far beyond just cobblestones. In 1982, during Bill Lattin's tenure with the Town Board of Gaines, he recognized Dee's interest in local history and requested she be appointed as Deputy Town Historian serving with J. Howard Pratt who was Town Historian. Mr. Pratt is shown above right with Stanley Vanderlaan, left.

Dee's appointment was the first of its kind in Orleans County. Over the years, Howard Pratt, who lacked a town office of his own, had collected a large amount of material that he kept at his own home. Dee served in the Deputy Historian position until 1988 when Howard Pratt died at the age of 99. Dee Robinson became Town Historian shortly thereafter. Then, following in the precedent already established, she appointed Janice Barnum Thaine to become her Deputy Historian, a very wise choice.

In addition to her role as local historian, Dee served as President of the NYS Municipal Historians, a state wide organization of government historians representing nearly all of the cities, towns and villages across the state. She served in that role with distinction for many years.





Concurrent with her other accomplishments, in 1996, Delia accepted a position as Reference Librarian at the Swan Library local history room, a position that later transitioned and continues to today at the Hoag Library at its new headquarters building on Main Street in Albion.



Dee has also written six local history books including “Historical Gaines 1809-1984,” published for the Town of Gaines Sesquicentennial. Seen here at a book signing are Bill Lattin (left), Dee Robinson (center), and Ronald “Butch” Radzinski, Town of Gaines Supervisor.

Other titles include, “Cobblestone Buildings in Orleans County NY,” a photo-filled book with many outstanding examples of cobblestone masonry in the county; “Details of Cobblestone Masonry,” “Historical Amnesia,” which focused on the forgotten history of Orleans County’s

pioneer women, and “To Preserve and Educate (Vol I & II);” written to celebrate 25 and 50 years of Cobblestone Society history.

Copies of each of these publications are available at the Cobblestone Museum Gift Shop or online at [CobblestoneMuseum.org](http://CobblestoneMuseum.org). Dee has also coauthored numerous other books and publications. She continues to offer talks and presentations for the Hoag Library and other community organizations, and has contributed to articles in “Time Life Books.”

On the lecture circuit, Dee presented several hands-on workshops on Cobblestone Masonry in the 1980s, a series for which she received the New York State Preservation League Architectural Heritage Year Award. Other programs Dee continues to present include: “Women’s Victorian Language,” “Local Women in History,” “Building Preservation,” and “The History of Childs;” which includes the history of the Village Inn and other enterprises.



In an effort to recognize the work of Dee Robinson and other local historians, she was given the Orleans County Heritage Heroes Award in 2016. Shown here receiving the award at that time are (l-r) Melissa Ierlan, Dee Robinson, Peg Wiley, Al Capurso and Tim Archer.

A wise man once said, "Choose a job you love and you won't have to work a day in your life." Delia Robinson has built on this axiom and said, "I still love my work, and that's why I am still working."