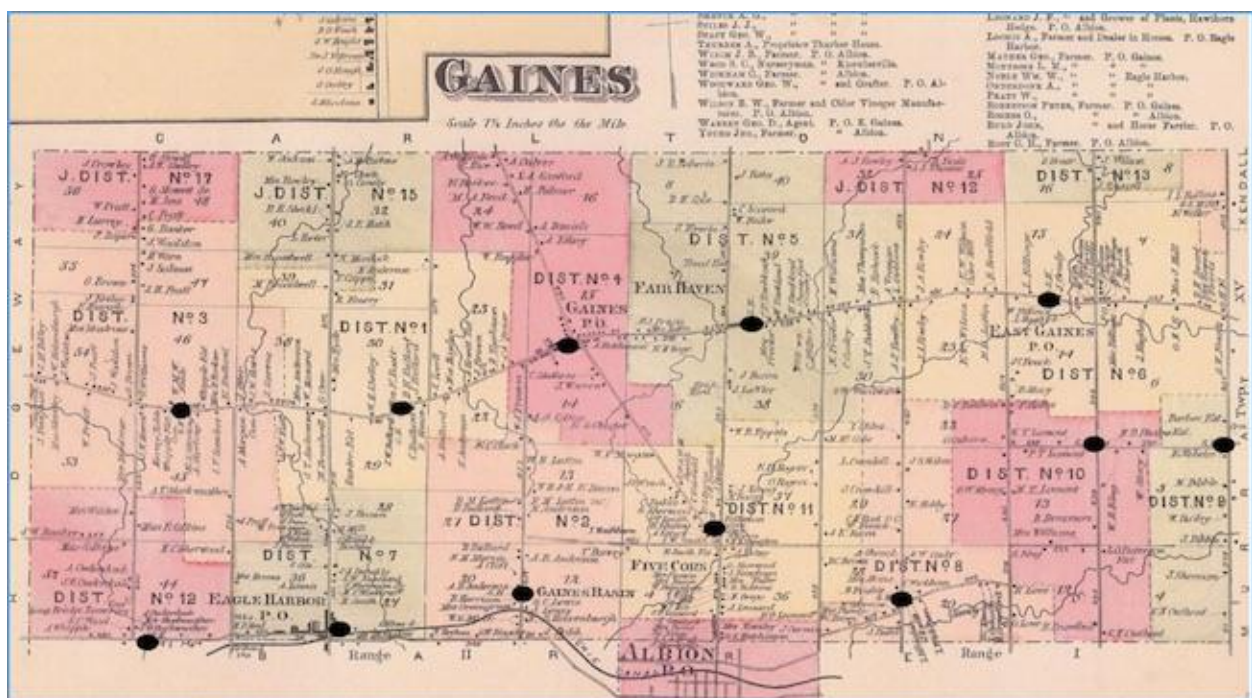


Historic Childs: Early Education, a feature on 12 public schools in the Town of Gaines

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6 of the schools were built of cobblestone, and 11 of 12 are still standing



By Doug Farley, Cobblestone Museum Director – Vol. 2 No. 26

This article is in memory of Janice Barnum Thaine (1927-2013) and Ruth Thaine Applegate (1914-1984) who spent many years retelling the old stories and providing much of the information on this subject.

As families began to settle in the Town of Gaines, the need to educate their children was close to the top of the list of things “to-do.” By 1813, a decision was reached to organize a school. It was further agreed that Orrin Gleason would teach the children in a 12’ log building on the Gates property near the corner of Eagle Harbor Road and the Ridge.

A short while later, another school was opened at the Belmont property between Gaines and Childs to accommodate the children living in that area. More and more people moved into the town and an ongoing concern was to provide schools to accommodate the children who arrived with their parents. A rule of thumb was a student shouldn't have to walk more than a mile each way, to and from school. The schools were at first, very simple, sometimes just log cabins, some without such "niceties" as an outhouse. The schools used a slightly different system than used today to raise funds to pay the teacher and provide fuel for heating, a tax was placed on the families whose children used the schools.

By the mid-19th century these early crude buildings had been replaced by more substantial structures, some of which are still in existence today. Eventually 12 school districts were established in the Town of Gaines. The northern portion of Gaines was serviced by school districts in the Town of Carlton including Districts 12, 13, 15 and 17. In total, six of the 12 schools in Gaines were built with cobblestone, a statistic that appears to be unmatched by any other township. Five of the original six cobblestone schools are still in existence today.

In the early 20th century, New York State had by then established the standards that pertained to all schools in the state. Local residents lost much of their self-determination as to what was taught or how funds would be raised, with the burden of taxation now spread out over all property owners in a district, not just the families of students attending the schools.



Beginning in the 1920s, the twelve small school districts in the town were closed, one by one as “centralization” took place. By 1953, the Albion Central School District was complete and the small districts were eliminated. A few of the old school buildings remained active as part of the larger Albion Central District. The last of the “hangers-on” was the former Eagle Harbor #7, shown above in 1953, which closed in 1963.



The fond memories of thousands of former country school students like Janice Barnum Thaine, left, or teachers like Ruth Thaine Applegate, shown right, can never be completely retold. Everyone has their own special set of recollections and friendships made.

Janice Thaine recalled: "I remember the school picnics, the field trips that really were trips to a field, the entertainments provided to parents and the community at each holiday, and especially Christmas. I enjoyed the baseball games, the state tests that came twice a year from Albany and we had to pass in order to be promoted. I remember the teacher asking us to behave whenever the District Superintendent appeared at the door.

"I like sharing my school lunches, making May flower baskets, tipping over neighborhood outhouses on Halloween, riding our bikes, roller skating or walking to and from school each day or hanging around outside the school while our parents attended the Annual School Meeting, hoping to find out if the present teacher might be replaced next year. We also tried to get everyone to write in our autograph book, working in the school newspaper and of

course, above all, doing our assigned lessons! All of this was done under the watchful eye and loving care of the one room schoolhouse teacher.”



Photo courtesy Orleans County Historian

If you were to take a tour today and look for all twelve school houses in the Town of Gaines you could still find eleven. Some have stood the test of time very well, and some are just shadows of bygone glory. Only one is completely gone. District #1 School is a cobblestone building, located next to Frenchy's Appliance store at 13592 Ridge Road. The class photo for 1924-25 is shown.

Front Row: Lilian Lacey, Louis Hollenbeck, Augustus (Gus) Watts, Harold Rush, Linwood Watts, Pauline Hollenbeck, Luther Rush and John Lacey.

Back Row: Morris Hollenbeck, LaVerne Morrison, Gordon Wakefield, Frieda Hollenbeck (Hobbs), Helen Rush (Brust), Clara Hall (Rorick), Mary Watts (teacher) and Grace Neal (Draper).



Jacqueline and Bill Bixler recently acquired the District #1 Cobblestone School and have been busy restoring it for use as a residence.



District #2 Cobblestone School on Gaines Basin Road was used as a one room schoolhouse from 1832 until 1942. This picture was taken in 2015 just prior to complete restoration.



A sparkling gem today, Gaines Basin District #2 school, built in 1832 has become a huge preservation/restoration success story. This Cobblestone Schoolhouse just north of the Erie Canal stands as a memorial to recently deceased historian, Al Capurso, who spearheaded the acquisition of this property, and to the history conscious men and women of the Orleans County Historical Association who restored it to become a State and National Register historic showcase. Special thanks, as well, to Jim Panek, who donated this school-turned-farm storage building to the Association. It is the oldest documented cobblestone building in our region.



The interior of District #2 is equally impressive as the outside. OCHA has plans to use the space for meetings, history programs and small social gatherings.



District #3 Schoolhouse is located next to the West Gaines Cemetery, on the south side of Ridge Road. The current owner is restoring the building. The adjoining cemetery has been inactive for nearly a century.



Students and teachers are shown at the Gaines District #4 Cobblestone School at the corner of Routes 104 and 279 around 1905. The Trustee of this school assumed the title to the property on July 9, 1844 for the sum of \$65.



A more recent view of the District #4 Cobblestone schoolhouse is shown here as a motorcycle clubhouse.



The Childs District #5 Cobblestone Schoolhouse as it appeared on April 21, 1942. The school continued for another decade and is a National Historic Landmark today.



The Cobblestone Museum conducts tours in the District #5 schoolhouse which is preserved and looks just like it did when the students last attended in 1952. Docent Sandy Heise speaks to a group of students inside the school in this 2019 photo.



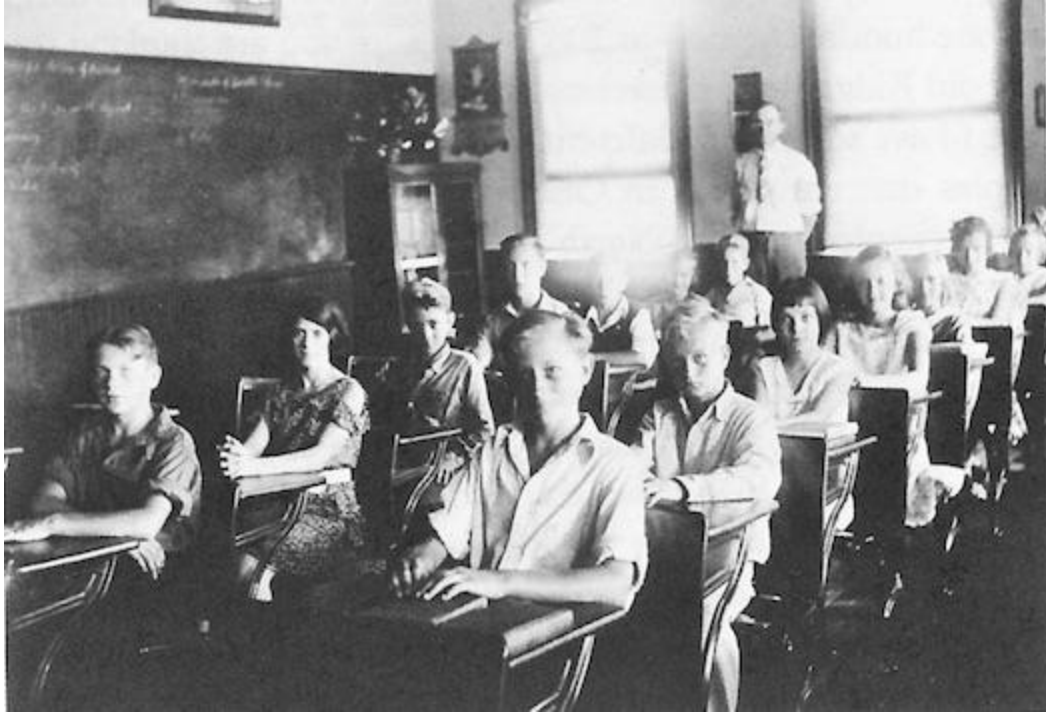
An unusual feature of the District #5 structure is that it is actually a wood plank building with a veneer of cobblestones.



District #6 School is the only one of the original 12 district schools in Gaines that is completely gone today. It was located on the north side of the Ridge Road west of Kent Road. The structure was later used for farm storage and then was removed in more recent times.



District #7 in Eagle Harbor had at least three structures that were used as schools over the years. The first school was a simple log cabin, followed by a cobblestone building (shown to right of photo) and then a wooden structure (front) under construction here in 1900, which in later years served as a Post Office and Community Center. The cobblestone building was torn down once the new wooden building was complete.



This photo of District #7 in Eagle Harbor was taken in 1931.

Left Row, Front to Back: Victor Whiting, Ruth Emery, Robert Webber, Cleon Whiting, Avery Brooks (or Dean), Adeline Bielicki and Harry Whiting.

Right Row: Robert Brooks, Nicholas Condoluci, Leona Licht, Caryl Hill, Jean Sullivan, Louise Cooper and Alice Briggs.

Standing: J. Howard Pratt, Teacher.



Today, District #7 Schoolhouse is a private residence.



This 1934 photo shows the Rudd's Corners District #8 school in the early 1900s.



District #8 Rudd's Corners School at the intersection of Crandall and Zig Zag Roads, has received several additions and is used today as the Shiloh Baptist Church. The section shown above with the higher roof was the actual original schoolhouse.



District #9 on the northwest corner of the intersection of Transit and Transit Church Roads is a private home today.



Students of District #10 in East Gaines pose with their teacher, Kate Smith on May 3, 1887. We are not sure the students posed by the schoolhouse but rather some other building.



District #10 located at the crossroads of W. Transit Church and Densmore Roads is found today at the Kast Farm and is used for farm purposes.



District #11 Cobblestone School at Five Corners is a private residence today. Note the date stone in the cobblestone gable reads 1846.



This schoolhouse, Eagle Harbor District #12, was located west of Eagle Harbor near the corner of Knowlesville and Kenyonville Roads. Students are shown with their teacher, Helen Seivert (Mrs. Louis Basinait).



Completing the tour we find District #12 on the north side of Eagle Harbor-Knowlesville Road, just east of Kenyonville Road, which has also become a home today.