

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

Vol. XII

6-13-90

No. 24

GREAT LAKES COBBLESTONE



On Sunday, June 24 at 12 noon, the Cobblestone Museum at Childs, N.Y. will officially open its new photographic exhibit entitled "Great Lakes Cobblestones." The noon event will entail an opening reception for this semi-permanent display and follows the annual Unitarian-Universalist Church Service traditionally held at the historic Cobblestone Church the last Sunday in June each season.

"Great Lakes Cobblestones" has been in the works for several months and is an attempt to relate the history of cobblestone masonry buildings through photographs with descriptions. Collaborating on this project are Delia Robinson, Director of the Cobblestone Resource Center; Dr. James Orr, local photographer; Robert Frasch, Director of the Gannett School of Science and Man in Rochester and C.W. Lattin, Cobblestone Museum Director. Photographs by the late Gerda Peterich and Alan Isselhard will also make up portions of the exhibit. An added feature will be the inclusion of a number of colored photographs which depict the color variation found in cobblestone structures, especially throughout New York State. Interior views will also be displayed to show construction techniques from basement to attic. Likewise, various patterns of stone, mortar and color combinations will also be displayed. For the first time, one will see various European examples from not only England but France where cobblestone structures date back to the 1100's. From this country viewers will see the only cobblestone house in Colorado (built by a New Yorker who moved west) and also an example of one from Vermont. A map of the Great Lakes region however, will pinpoint where heavy concentrations of these buildings exist.

It was during the second quarter of the 19th Century that around 1,000 cobblestone structures were erected in North America, around 800 in New York State. Rochester is somewhat the center of

this concentration and a 75-mile area around that city.

As people moved from New York to Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Canada, they took the cobblestone idea with them. Consequently, we find regional differences in the appearance of cobblestone walls as various local stone masons applied their own creative talents in this form of mid-19th Century folk art. We know that the earliest cobblestone walls constructed in the 1820's and '30's were apt to be fieldstone while the cobblestone walls of the 1840's and '50's were more apt to be made of lakewashed stone. With the advent of the industrial revolution, changing tastes and different fads, cobblestone structures ceased to be built. Presently, existing in Orleans County, we find 97 examples, mostly rural farm houses. Also there were around twenty schoolhouses and several smokehouses constructed. Our cobblestone buildings erected for commercial purposes have all been destroyed. They were: two blacksmith shops (1 at Millville and 1 at Clarendon), a flour mill at Eagle Harbor and the Curtis Foundry in Albion. The only two churches erected of cobblestone in Orleans County still remain, the Universalist Church at Childs and the Friends (Quaker) Meeting House at Millville.

One of the historical photos included in the "Great Lakes Cobblestone" exhibit will be the one shown here. This is the Reed cobblestone house now owned by John Carr on Rt. 279 north of Gaines. The picture was, no doubt, taken by a local itinerant photographer around 1900. It comes to us via a glass plate negative found in a box of old negatives by Cliff and Doris Kelley in their barn. In the museum exhibit this picture has been enlarged to a whopping 4x5 feet, thus bringing out details one never sees in a smaller version.

The public is most cordially invited to attend the opening of this exhibit which will occupy space in the newly renovated Proctor Room in the basement of the Cobblestone Church.