

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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HISTORIC HOUSE TOUR



On Saturday, June 5 from 1-5 the Cobblestone Society will sponsor a tour of homes located along the historic Ridge Road, Adams Basin, Clarkson and one in the town of Clarendon. Tickets for this self-driving tour and a tour booklet with descriptive information about each of the nine buildings will be available at the Clarkson Town Hall (Cor. Rts. 19 and 104) beginning at noon.

One of this year's homes which will be open is the Spencer Family home located at 4690 Bennetts Corners Road in the Town of Clarendon. It is not only an extraordinary example of cobblestone masonry but it is also a superb example of Greek Revival Architecture. It was built in 1849 by Orson Butterfield. A marble date stone may be seen in the front gable with Mr. Butterfield's initials appearing on a similar stone in the rear gable. The cobbles are all lake stone which were said to have been hauled by oxcart from the shores of Lake Ontario, a distance of ten miles. The stones are of various colors and were graded as to size with smaller ones used on the front for aesthetic purposes. The stone trim is all made of limestone. This includes sills, quoins, watertable and lintels. Just under each lintel to the side of each opening are small limestone blocks which serve as a seat for each lintel. This is a rather-unique and intriguing little establishment.

The exterior wood trim is bold in its appearance with a heavy entablature, box-like porch pillars and a dominating front entrance. An attic gable window is almost over-played with Greek Revival detailing. Perhaps one of the most unique features of this residence is how the cobblestone masonry was finished up in 1849. This is still best seen on the wall under the front porch where the roof has protected it from the elements. We immediately

notice here the sharp and crisp details left from the mason's trowel. But beyond this we can also see that when the house was built, it was finished with a stain which was washed both over the cobbles and the lime mortar masonry joints. Research now indicates that a few of these later cobblestone buildings were stained with a solution to color most especially, the mortar. Because the cobbles were dark and the lime mortar was white, it caused a complete contrast of materials. For aesthetic reasons, they washed a coloring solution over everything to tame down the mortar. Residue of this is clearly visible where it is not eroded. Even the limestone lintels and quoins reveal small particles of it as do some cobbles. We notice that mortar joints which are chipped, indicate the mortar is white underneath while the surface is a pinkish-brown. We know that some 19th century brick buildings were colored with brick dust to color the mortar joints. Such an example of this is the Portico Bed and Breakfast at Clarkson which is also in this year's Cobblestone Society House Tour.

The home of Mr. and Mrs. Edmond Spencer on Bennetts Corners Road was written about by David Sturges Copeland in his History of Clarendon in 1889. Here is what he stated when the house was forty years old: "Beyond is a lake-stone house, where Orson Butterfield lately resided the material for building was brought from the shores of Lake Ontario in 1849 and these stones were nicely joined by Thompson & Steele, the cut stone all hammered out by D.R. Bartlett, the stone-cutter of Clarendon. This is the only lake-stone house in town, and presents a fine appearance at this day. The woodwork of the house was fashioned by D.F. St. John of Clarendon."