

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

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## COBBLESTONE BUILDINGS OF ORLEANS COUNTY



Cobblestone Buildings of Orleans County, N.Y. is the title of a book by Delia Robinson to be released on Friday, December 20. A book release event with the author present for signing, is being planned for that day between the hours of 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. in the Cobblestone Museum School House on Route 104 in Childs, N.Y.

The book is the joint effort of the Cobblestone Society and the Orleans County Historical Association. The committee for the publication has been: Delia Robinson, William Nestle, Evelyn Lyman, Ellen Blake, Alan Isselhard, Ronald Herlan, and C.W. Lattin. The release of this book will culminate several years of work on the project. Computer layout of the book was done by Judy Behr of Clarendon, while printing is by Sharp of Sanborn, N.Y.

Following the book's release after December 20 it will be available at the Medina Chamber of Commerce, the Swan Library in Albion or the H & A Superette in Childs for \$14.95 including tax. By mail order write the Cobblestone Society, Box 363, Albion, N.Y. 14411 and add \$3.00 for postage and shipping costs.

It was my privilege as County Historian to write the Preface for Cobblestone Buildings of Orleans County, N.Y. It's as follows:

"The ubiquitous cobblestone, by-product of Earth's geological evolution, became a regional, coveted building material during the second quarter of the twentieth century. Armed with a natural sense of aesthetics, ingenious masons re-invented cobblestone wall construction here in New

York State. It is plain that the humble cobblestone soon became a status symbol, often in residential architecture for prosperous farmers. After all, they had access to the stone (either glaciated or lake-washed), the oxen to haul it and the labor to build it.

We are fortunate in Orleans County to have retained so many cobblestone structures which are vestiges of this time-intensive, faddish folk craft.

"I once asked some students what they thought was the most important thing in the world. After some kooky answers, one bright girl said, "People". She was right! Other publications on cobblestone masonry have dealt specifically with techniques and architecture. With this book however, Delia Robinson has delved into the folk aspect of our cobblestone buildings. We might well call this endeavor "An Orleans County Guide to Cobblestone Buildings and the Folks Who Built and Lived in Them". After all, it's the people who have breathed life into these historic bastions of rock and mortar. Indeed, this publication is from a perspective which is not so readily visible. It has taken several years of research to document and compile the folk history that so many cobblestone buildings mutely hold. Not only do we find information here on all our original cobblestone buildings still standing in Orleans County, but also those that no-longer exist.

"Surely, we can appreciate the beauty, marvel at the skill and calculate the time involved for erecting a cobblestone building. But beyond this there is a charm of quaint stories dealing with the

folk who have inhabited cobblestone buildings. Through this book, it is these folk who draw us inside and give us a closer and more personalized view of their lives and our rich cobblestone heritage."

The photo illustrating this article is one of those cobblestone buildings that no longer exists. Until recently we did not realize that the old distillery at Oak Orchard on the Ridge was made of cobblestone. Our photo, taken in the 1920's, shows it then as a ruin. It was built in 1838 by John B. Lee of Albion at a time when early farmers sold their wheat, rye or corn to distilleries for whiskey. The distillery was located on the flats along the west side of Oak Orchard river.

Nellie Vagg wrote this bit of information on the back of our photo: "My mother told of how the pigs eating the mash thrown out on the large acreage east of the building, would go on a regular drunken rampage after eating it."

Cobblestone Buildings of Orleans County, N.Y. contains over 100 photos of past and present cobblestone structures along with many interesting stories relating to the buildings.