

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

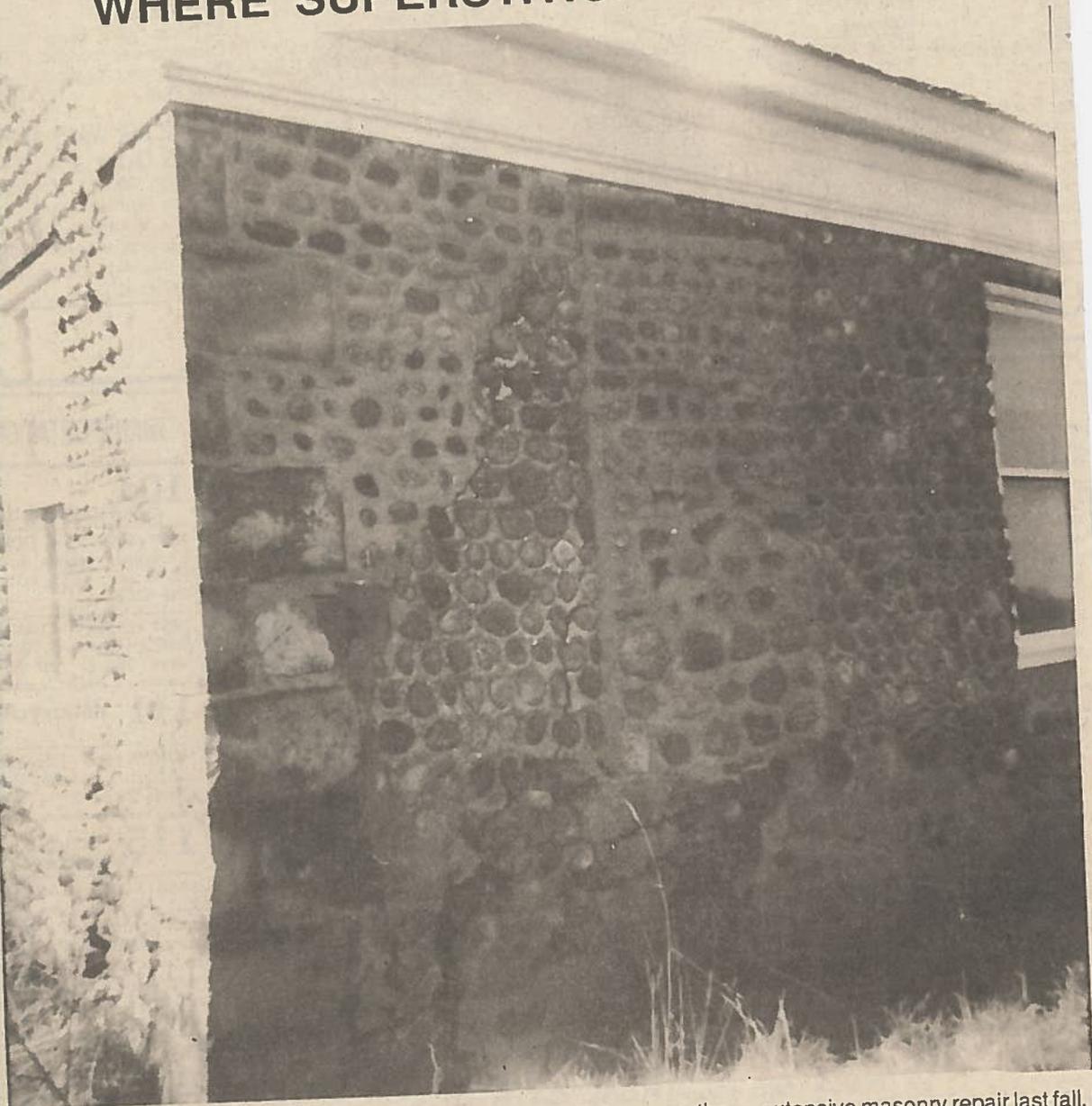
C.W.Lattin County Historian

Vol. XVIII

2-27-96

No. 8

## WHERE SUPERSTITION WON OUT



Our story this week centers around the old cobblestone school house of District No. 2 in the Town of Gaines located at Gaines Basin. As early as 1814, school was being taught in what was to be Gaines Basin, by Caroline Phipps who later founded the Phipps Union Seminary for girls in 1837. Once the Erie Canal was completed in 1825, Gaines Basin became the natural place from which to ship produce and other goods including whisky being distilled in Gaines at the time. The shortest distance between the then thriving Village of Gaines and the Canal was the Gaines Basin Road, so named for the turn basin in the canal located a little way west of the canal bridge. By the late 1830's Gaines Basin had developed into a community consisting of a warehouse with dock, general store, blacksmith shop and several dwellings.

It was in 1832 that the people of the neighborhood decided to erect a one-room cobblestone district school house to replace a log one. As legend has it, there was a great deal of discussion about the number of exterior openings the building was to have in it. At any rate, the school house was constructed with twelve windows and one door, making a total number of thirteen openings.

Ever been in a skyscraper where there is no thirteenth floor? Well, it seems there was a faction that fretted and worried and stewed and became tormented with anxiousness over superstition. Consequently, a short while after the building was in use, they obliterated

one of the windows on the north side of the building. That's right! The window casing and all were removed and the opening filled in with rows of cobblestone and plastered over on the inside. This left eleven windows and one door, a total of twelve openings. I trust they all slept better after that.

Our photo faintly shows where the window was filled in at the northeast corner of the school house.

The building was used until 1944 when students were then sent into Albion for their education. The building still stands and underwent

extensive masonry repair last fall. It is the only original building still standing at Gaines Basin that represents those early canal days and pioneer life and thought.

The Cobblestone Society and the Orleans County Historical Association continue their joint effort to publish a book on all the cobblestone houses in Orleans County. Authored by Delia Robinson, Director of the Cobblestone Resource Center, the book will include such human interest stories as the one above. It is hopefully anticipated that this publication will be off the press later this year.