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Belfry Restoration

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These two recent photos show the belfry at the Gaines District No. 5 Schoolhouse at the Cobblestone Museum in Childs.

It was 155 years ago that the school was built of lake washed cobblestone. Construction was overseen by William J. Babbitt who gave the bell for the belfry.

Since 1849, the belfry has gone through winters and summers with ice, snow, sleet, high wind and penetrating sun. It has stood well over those 155 years, but time, like on all things, has taken its toll.

About a year and a half ago, an insidious leak was discovered around the edge of the little dome on top of the belfry. It may well have been there for years as upon investigation, it was found that the interior of the four support posts or columns were rotten on the inside.

The structure was deemed in perilous condition and standing erect only out of habit. Something had to be done immediately.

Thanks to Assemblyman Charles Nesbitt, a grant was procured for this National Historic Landmark paying for about half of the cost of restoration, the other portion being footed by the Cobblestone Society Museum.

This past week Kevin E. Johnson, a local contractor from Holley, started the process of rebuilding the belfry. He appears in one of the pictures on the roof of the Cobblestone School by the project.

During the 1930's the lower portion of the belfry was altered in appearance. This project now gives the museum the opportunity to completely restore the belfry to its original appearance based on old photos from the early 20th century.

Therefore, when the project is complete, a little decorative gallery with fine straight spindles will encircle the



belfry thus giving it the appearance of how it was conceived and built 155 years ago.

The Cobblestone School at Childs is one of the region's architectural gems. It is not only a superb example of the Greek Revival Style, but also an equally superb example of cobblestone masonry.

The preservation of our landmarks is an important facet of maintaining our unique American heritage of which local history is such an important contributing factor. The United States Department of the Interior believed this to be true and therefor designated this building a National Historic Landmark in 1993.