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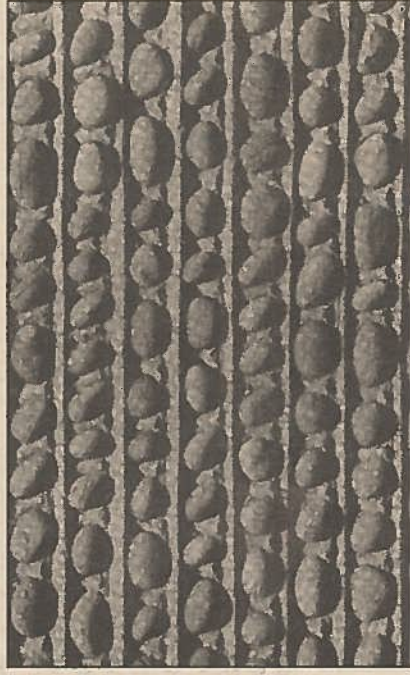
MAKING SOFT LIME MORTAR

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With spring upon us, owners of historic buildings begin to think about maintenance. When it comes to old masonry, either brick, cut stone or cobblestone, careful attention should be paid to mortar. Soft lime mortar was generally used in this region until the 1880s when we began to see a transition to cement mortars.

When patching or re-pointing old lime mortar walls you should be sure to use a soft mortar that has the same physical components as the original. This is because the old mortars are somewhat flexible and will give and take with drastic temperatures and slight settling. Modern concrete can actually cause damage to old low fired brick and good old mortar in the surrounding wall because it is so hard and unforgiving.

An old traditional formula for a lime-based mortar was two-and-a-half to three parts sand and one part hydrated lime. Some contemporary masons find this difficult to work with for its softness. To



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make a repointing mortar that is still compatible with what's in an old wall, The Cobblestone Society recommends: six parts sand, three to three-and-a-half parts hydrated lime and one part Portland cement (optional).

Early mortar was not necessarily colored on purpose, but derived its color because of impurities in the lime and variations in the kind of sand and its quantity in the mortar. Over the years, the generally white colored mortar has absorbed dirt, darkening it as some of the lime whiteness eroded. Therefore, masonry joints in buildings that are

now 150 years old are darker than they were even 75 years ago. a contemporary mason can color a mortar with chemical coloring additives so a patch won't show up too much. This however can never be true because the old mortar is its present color over time.

Before the use of cement, lime kilns existed locally where quick lime was produced for various purposes, including mortar. It has now been close to 100 years since these kilns in Clarendon, Barre, Albion or Shelby have operated.