

Bethinking of 5-19-83 Old Orleans

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185th Anniversary Historic Ridge Road

- L. Monacelli photo

About a year ago, the late Howard Dutton gave the Cobblestone Museum an Old Ridge Road marker. Made of cast iron at the Swett Foundry in Medina, these round signs simply stated "Historic Ridge Road 1798". It is believed they were erected along the Ridge in the 1920's, but time has seen them all disappear. Because of the historic nature of the Village Inn and its integral linkage to the Ridge Road, the Cobblestone Society sees the front lawn of the Village Inn as the most appropriate place to display this artifact from out of the past.

On Sunday, May 22, at 10:15 A.M. the sign will be dedicated in a brief ceremony with the following people participating: Gaines Supervisor Ronald Radzinski; Gaines Historian J. Howard Pratt; Assemblyman Stephen Hawley and Grand Master of Masons in N.Y. Ernest Leonardi.

Pictured with the sign are three generations of the Tillman family who have owned the Village Inn since 1952. They are grandfather Sam, son Bill and grandsons Mark and Tom

Perhaps no natural feature of the Ontario Plain in northwestern New York is better known than the singular land formation on which the Ridge Road runs. This seventy-eight-mile-long sand bar stretching from the Genesee River at Rochester to Lewiston on the Niagara River was the former shore line of what is now Lake Ontario before receding around 100,000 years ago. Its general altitude above the neighboring land has provided, from time immemorial a natural turnpike which was first used by Senecas and Iroquois. Likewise, over this trail into the primeval forest inhabited by wolves and bears, on foot, horseback, in rough carts pulled by oxen, came the brave, pioneers.

As early as 1798 Eli Granger, a surveyor employed by Augustus Porter, traced a road through the forest near its present location. On April 4, 1806, a law was passed in the State Legislature appointing three commissioners to lay out a road from the Genesee River to Lewiston. In 1810 DeWitt Clinton rode the entire distance and was much impressed by this section of the country. On April 15, 1814 the Legislature at Albany made the first appropriation for improving the Ridge Road which was \$5,000. An Act providing for a re-survey of the Ridge from Rochester to Lewiston was passed March 24, 1852. Darius W. Cole of Medina was the surveyor and the road was established at six rods wide. In 1926 it was paved for the first time.

Over the past 185 years, who hasn't traversed this ancient trail?

- from our humble ancestors to notables such as Henry Clay, Franklin Roosevelt and John Wayne to mention a few. It was John Proctor at Childs, the only man who had a horse, that rode the Ridge to Murray in 1813 to warn the settlers of a pending British invasion. And it was in 1826 that Wm. Morgan was "escorted" by the Masons via the Ridge to Lewiston.

The first Article from the Holland Land Company in the Township of Gaines was on this road in 1807 and the first house erected in the township was also by this highway in 1809. The first church between the Genesee and Niagara Rivers was erected in 1824 at Gaines on the Ridge as was the first Academy in 1825. The first burying ground in the county was established in 1812 at Gaines on the Ridge Road. Here are three Revolutionary soldiers - John Percival, John Anderson and David Bullard. On July 1, 1816 the first post office in Orleans County was established on the Ridge Road in Gaines by Wm. J. Babbitt.

A few years later there came to this area Cyrus Wetherell, a carpenter and stone mason of great talent. Many of his master works remain with us today in the numerous cobblestone buildings located on this historic road. In fact, there are more cobblestone houses located on the Ridge Road than any other road in the world. Almost one-third of all the cobblestone houses in Orleans County, and there are about 100, are located on this route.

Before the completion of the Erie Canal and railroads, the only public form of transportation through this area was by stage coach upon the Ridge Road. These ran from Canandaigua to Niagara Falls starting in 1816. As the country became settled, more taverns were needed to accommodate all the travelers. The Town of Gaines at one time, contained at least ten, each doing a flourishing business. The first one was established in 1811 at the village of Gaines. The present Village Inn was built by Samuel Percival in 1824 when Childs was known as Fairhaven. Of the many stage coach stops once used along the historic Ridge Road, only the Village Inn remains.