

Bethinking of

Old Orleans

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Museum Building

The photo accompanying this article is believed to have been taken in the 1890's and is the earliest known view of the building most recently moved to the Cobblestone Museum Complex. It was taken when Gates Knickerbocker used the structure in Gaines as a watch, clock and jewelry shop. Special appreciation goes to Gaines Historian Delia Robinson for the research of the early historical facts concerning this building which follows herein.

This small 150-year-old structure which was constructed with an unusual exterior has now in 1987 been moved for the second time in its history. It is now a unique and important addition to the Cobblestone Museum Complex and will serve as a harness/cobbler's shop.

As a young man of twenty-four, Starr Chester came to Gaines village from Connecticut in the late 1830's. A few years after arriving he met and married Lydia Scoville; they had two daughters Jane and Mary. Mr. Chester was a cobbler, or shoemaker, and constructed a shop for his business which stood on his property just east of his home on the north side of Ridge Road approximately 500 feet from the village intersection. He constructed his shop of plank but for the exterior he chose split lath and plaster, known as stucco. Even though stucco utilized the same ingredients as the mortar in cobblestone buildings of the period, lime, sand and stone, it was not only uncommon in Gaines, but also in most the Northern States until the end of the century. As the famous architect Andrew Jackson Downing wrote in his 1853 "Architecture of Country House", over thirteen years after Mr. Chester built his shop, "outside plastering or stuccoing is generally so little understood in this country.....that there is an unjust prejudice against it." He explained its benefits by citing common lime stucco buildings in Pennsylvania which had stood for a century.

Mr. Chester used his shop until his death on September 23, 1880. On May 21, 1883 Gates Knickerbocker purchased a building lot 22'x36' for \$30.00 approximately 150' west of the intersection at Gaines on the north side of the Ridge. At the same time he purchased the Chester cobbler shop from Mr. Chester's widow and moved it to the lot. He had constructed a stone cellar on which to place the shop and the year of the move is confirmed by the date "1883" which was found written in the cement of the cellar wall. It is believed Mr. Knickerbocker modernized the building with a wooden facade and mounted a large wooden replica of a pocket watch on the porch roof to advertise his jewelry and clock repair business which occupied the building from 1883 until his death in 1914.

In 1921 Alfred Bentley purchased four lots at the corner including the Knickerbocker store, which he then sold to Clifton Nestle in 1922. Mr. Nestle used the building as his gun repair shop and owned the building until 1939 when he sold it to Floyd Berns. For the last forty-seven years the building has been reportedly used as a paint shop, for town court sessions held by Fred Berns, and rental property including The Cycle Depot, a small business owned by Gary and Veronica Pahura around five years ago. This was the last business enterprise to occupy the space.

Frequently it has been used as housing in connection with the Chatterbox Restaurant as was the case during the 1950's when Frank Benkert owned it. Since the Cycle Depot it again was used as housing until last March when it became vacant.

Thanks to the generosity of donor Rose Wells, owner of the Chatterbox Restaurant in Gaines, this valuable and colorful portion of Orleans County history has been saved for generations to come. And thanks also to the generosity of Rice Homes for moving the building to the Route 98 parcel of the Cobblestone Museum Complex in Childs. The employees of Rice Homes are to be highly commended for their superior workmanship. It was not an easy job!

Anyone wishing to contribute financially toward the preservation of this historic building, may do so by sending a check made out to the Cobblestone Society, designated for the Harness Shop. Mail to Donald B. Ross, Treasurer Cobblestone Society, Albion, N.Y. 14411. Names of contributors will be listed in a dedication publication when this occurs.

Note: The photo included with last week's article about this