

# TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

## "TURNPIKE TALES" #21

*(Historical items from the "Madison Bouckville Antique Week" region)*

*By Jim Ford*

The Madison-Bouckville area has been rich in history from the arrival of the first settlers to the present day. As an addition to the website, we have decided to share some of that history in order that the patrons who travel to the Madison-Bouckville Show will have a better understanding of our truly unique region.

### **James E. Coolidge – Surveyor And Carpenter**

A number of citizens of the Town of Madison have certainly left a lasting mark on our area. Included in any list of notable citizen's names would have to be that of James E. Coolidge. Mr. Coolidge proved himself in the occupations of farming, surveying, carpentry, and civil engineering. His most notable achievement, the design and construction of what is now known as the Landmark Tavern building in Bouckville, visually displays the unique abilities of this man who influenced the area for many decades during the 1800's.

James E. Coolidge was the eldest son of James D. Coolidge. He was born in Massachusetts in the year 1786 and moved with his family to Johnsville (early name for Bouckville) in 1806. The family farm was located near the intersection of present-day Routes 20 and 12B. James D. Coolidge is credited with raising the first hops in the area and a marker on Rt. 12B denotes this and also marks the area of the farm.

Although James E. had received a very limited education, he studied the art of surveying and found ready work in the area.

One of the parcels of land surveyed by him that we have documentation for was the Madison Cemetery. Mr. Coolidge surveyed the land into burial lots in 1821 when the cemetery was established. C.1847 he also surveyed the lot prior to the construction of the Cobblestone Store in Bouckville, today's Landmark Tavern.

In 1833 the new Baptist Church was completed in Madison Village and their previous church at Indian Opening was sold. The church was purchased by James E. Coolidge for \$100. He dismantled the church, but what he did with the lumber we do not know.

At some point between 1833 and 1847 James E. constructed a scale model diorama of the Town of Madison. A number of past citizens have made reference to the fine craftsmanship of this work. The hills, valleys, flat farmlands, and streams were shown along with elevations of the land. Unfortunately, we do not know who ended up with this fine art work.

Farming did not seem to be in his blood and he left agricultural pursuits for a career in structural design and carpentry. He certainly continued to take surveying jobs, but the design of buildings intrigued him. The completion of the Chenango Canal through the community of Bouckville quickly convinced the citizens of that community of the need for a place where locals could come and trade their goods.

Moses Maynard, who had already built a warehouse along the canal and a hotel known as the "White House," (known today as the Bouckville Hotel) proposed that a joint stock company be formed. He, along with James E. and William Coolidge plus other area investors, formed the stock company. A building was to be constructed with James E. as the architect and chief carpenter. The completed structure would be known as the Cobblestone Store.

The construction of the new store was from 1847-1851. During that time planning was done, materials gathered, and the building constructed. After a huge hole had been dug for the foundation, the basement walls were built. They were 48 inches in width, which Mr. Coolidge had determined would be sufficient to hold the weight of the proposed structure.

Design features of the building included outside walls which were perfectly vertical, but interior walls that would become narrower and narrower as the structure grew in height. At the peak, the walls would be 12 to 16 inches wide. On each floor of the building the walls would start out tight against the stone and show a wider and wider opening toward the ceiling. This certainly presented a challenge for the carpenters on the job.

The completed Cobblestone Store building would have a basement area, three distinct floors and a cupola built on the roof. Triangular shaped windows were installed on the east and west ends of the building.

The completed building had four distinct sides on the front, but only two sides on the back. The roof construction ideas clearly showed the complexity and ingenuity of Coolidge's design. Many leading architects have studied the techniques used in the roof design and marvel at his genius. His completed work was certainly a "Landmark." As a recent newspaper article stated: "The Landmark Tavern – A Building Well Named."

Speaking of that cupola, a very unusual thing about James E. Coolidge was that he was married six times during his lifetime. Each side of the six-sided cupola is supposed to represent one of his six wives. When researching each of his marriages we see the effects of problems in childbirth and epidemics which ravaged the region. He and his wives would have four children but only one, Francis, lived to adulthood. The following chart gives the names of his wives and some information concerning their lives:

<b>NAME</b>	<b>BORN</b>	<b>MARRIED</b>	<b>DIED</b>	<b>LOCATION OF BURIAL</b>
Jennett Kendall	1792	1814	May 26, 1816	Paris, N.Y.
<i>(Jennett Kendall was born in Paris, New York. She is buried in the Hillcrest Cemetery, Paris, N.Y. Inscribed on her gravestone – Wife of James Coolidge.)</i>				
Sophia Stebbins	1798	1819	January 6, 1832	Sherburne, N.Y.
<i>(Sophia's parents were Samuel and Sarah Stebbins. Sophia died at Bouckville, N.Y.)</i>				
Sally Simmons	1801	1833	September 24, 1834	Madison Center, N.Y.
<i>(Sally had previously been married to William G. Woodworth. He died in 1820 at 31 years old.)</i>				

Harriet Hazzard 1802 1834 October 12, 1838 Madison Center, N.Y.  
*(Inscribed on her gravestone – 4th Wife of James Coolidge – died in the 36th year of her age.)*

Phebe T. Lawrence 1798 1842 January 26, 1849 Madison Center, N.Y.  
*(Inscribed on her gravestone – Phebe T. 5th wife of James Coolidge – died at age 51 years, 18 days. The T. in her name was Tompkins.)*

Mary Coburn Smith 1803 1851 May 11, 1877 Indian Opening  
*(Mary Coolidge died in 1877 at 74 years old. She is buried with her husband in the Indian Opening Cemetery, located just north of the village of Madison, N.Y. She was married to James E. Coolidge for 26 years. He would die three years later in 1880 and be buried in the Indian Opening Cemetery.)*

It is interesting to look at the cupola on the Landmark Tavern when we know the information concerning the six wives and that James E. had outlived them all.

It is also interesting to note that the executor of the estate of his last wife, Mary, was Samuel Rogers Mott, head of the famous Mott's Company of Bouckville.

During his lifetime, Coolidge also served as Town of Madison Judge for 24 years, c.1850's to the 1870's. James E. Coolidge died on December 23, 1880 at 94 years of age. He had certainly led a very full and productive life.