

THE MUD HOUSE
992 Whalen Road

One of the most interesting structures in Penfield is the Mud House at 992 Whalen Road owned by Mr. and Mrs. Gary Lehmann. Built in 1835 by William and Esther Gors it is a fine example of the ingenuity of early settlers in the town.

Clay and cut straw were mixed together in a pen by walking oxen thru the mixture. Foot high wooden forms were placed on top of a sturdy rubble stone foundation and filled with the clay mixture. When it dried the forms were raised and the process repeated. Foot by foot the walls were raised in a slow procedure that took two years to complete.

Three fireplaces connected to a central chimney heated the house and provided cooking facilities. The inside of the mud walls were plastered over and whitewashed.

The use of mud as a building material is common to many countries from the wattle and daub shelters in Africa to the large, two story houses erected in Elizabethan times in England. In Nantucket a clay and seaweed mixture was used for insulation in the outer walls of the earliest houses on the island. A recent newspaper article described a new apartment building in China made with earthen walls.

Old adobe or mud structures are fairly common in the southwestern portion of the United States but are quite unusual in this area. However, there are two mud houses in Penfield; the other one on Qualtrough Road was also built in the 1830's.

At one time the house and property on Whalen Road were the site of Brown Brothers Nursery - one of the largest in the Rochester area. The adobe house was used as an office for a short time and later as an interior decorator's shop but its principal use over the years has been as a residence.

The Mud House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and it is also a Designated Penfield Landmark.

Submitted by:

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