

# *Interesting Custom of the Past*

*by Frederick Wickert*



Every now and then, one learns of peculiar things of the past they never heard of before. As Halloween approaches, old superstitions come to mind. People used to say breaking a mirror brings seven years bad luck. Walking under a ladder is bad luck. Having a black cat cross your path is bad luck.

People talked about throwing salt over their left shoulder or hanging a horseshoe over the door or finding a four-leaf clover for good luck. Some gamblers even today blow on the dice for good luck in a crap game.

There is an old school house in the town of Gilboa, New York that was built around the 1860's. There was a new Central School built in the late 1920's and the school became part of the large Wyckoff Farm property. The Wyckoff's used the building to store odds and ends or tools used only occasionally.

The son of the Wyckoff family that I knew in high school married and raised a family. One of his sons became a well driller and water specialist. He married and raised a family. One of his children grew up and married.

The young couple needed to make a home. They liked the idea of making the old school house into a home. The parents thought it was a great idea and chipped in to help with the project.

The building was cleaned out, fixed up and given a fresh coat of paint. Part of the repairs involved the foundation that was crumbling in some parts of it. The old concrete was broken out and removed and new concrete was installed in place of it, making the foundation good as new.

In the process of removing the deteriorating concrete, both adult and children shoes were found in the cement. There was great wonderment about why anyone put shoes in the concrete.

The mother is an active member of the Town Historical Society. She went to work researching all she could find and discovered that in the 1800's when the old school house was built, it was common practice to put old shoes in the foundation of buildings in the belief that it warded off evil spirits.

All thought that was a rather quaint tradition or superstition and had a good laugh over it. When the new cement was installed, just to be sure they weren't taking any chances, the old shoes were replaced into the concrete foundation.