

Detroit Free Press, July 9, 1995



## *Elf Space*

BY JUDY ROSE

The mushroom houses of Charlevoix sprouted from the imagination of Earl Young, inspired by the personalities of individual stones he found. Young started with a sketch for using his best stones, then adapted and invented each house as it went up.



The strange and famous stone houses of Charlevoix pop up around town like mushrooms sprung from a mutant spore. They might have wavy roofs or huge stone arches or vertical boulders reminiscent of Stonehenge -- a hundred details dictated by the personalities of individual stones.

The houses are not the midnight work of elves on acid but the artistic legacy of Earl Young, a pillar of Charlevoix who died in 1975. Young, a real estate and insurance agent, built the free-form houses as recreation. He created the first one in 1921 for his own family. By 1970, when he'd gone almost completely blind, he had built 30, many clustered in a subdivision he established behind stone entrances.

Actually, "build" isn't exactly what Young did. He would find stones that intrigued him, sketch



buildings incorporating them, then rework his plans on the site while masons did the assembly

"His houses just sort of grew," says one daughter.

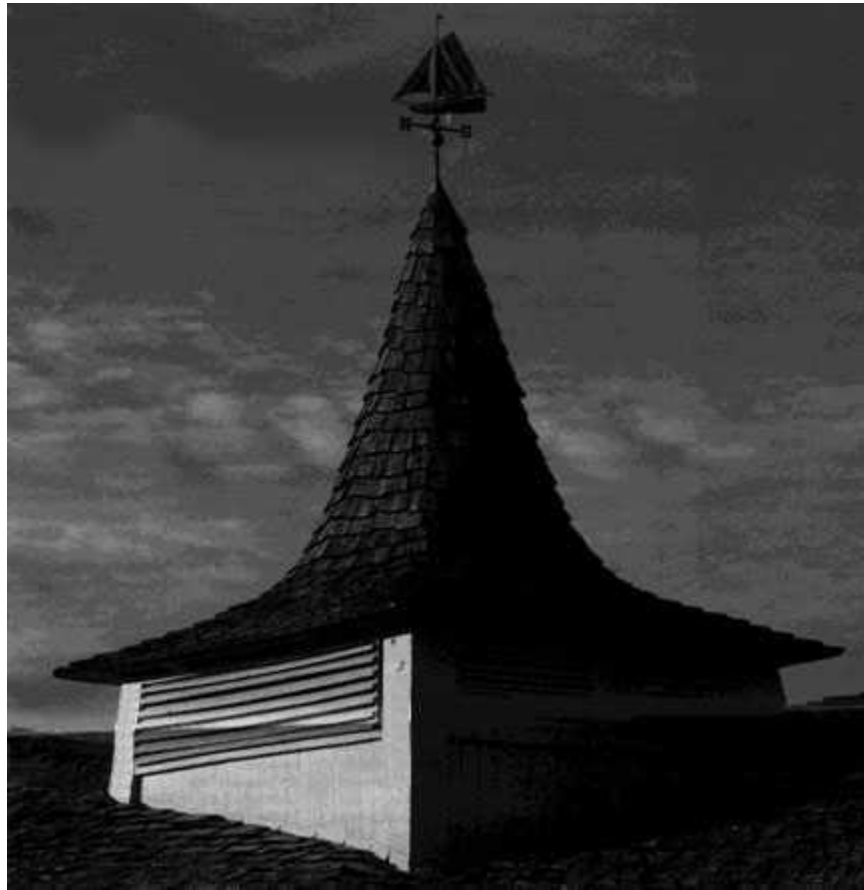
Young's stone houses jumped from one style to another as his eyes scanned the area for stones and his restless mind sought inspiration. After traveling in Europe, he ordered thatch from England for one roof. When Sault Ste. Marie replaced its boat locks, Young bought the cut red stones from the old locks and used them in two handsome houses.

And he was very possessive of his finds. If he discovered a special boulder in a field, he would buy it and pay the farmer extra to bury it safely until he had the right project. He hid one huge boulder for years by dumping it into Lake Michigan.

Space often was elf-like inside these houses, as small as 800 square feet for one bedroom, living room, bath and kitchen. But Young also built in full scale, up to about 3,500 square feet.

Uniqueness can command a pretty price, from about \$100,000 for a tiny stone house to a lakeside estate now listed at \$999,999.

Not bad for a mushroom.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY J. KYLE KEENER