

Some Historical Facts About Mt. Airy's Granite Quarries

No story of this mammoth industry is complete without some sidelights on conditions in Mt. Airy and the surrounding Country along about 1878, or roughly fifty years ago.

At that time the city was hardly more than a village with its business centre in what is now its southern portion. Its main street was a dusty road in summer and a bottomless quagmire in winter. It was hopeless to attempt to cross it except at certain places where stones at regular intervals protruded from the slimy, muddy filth. Heaven help the hapless wight whose unsteady head made him miscalculate the distance or position of these oases of safety. The town had no lighting plant, nor water (except wells) nor sewage systems. It had no railroad and all the food and goods that came into the town from outside had to be hauled in from Winston-Salem by heavy wagons and spans of oxen or mules or horses. We are told that the trip from Winston to Mt. Airy with these teams frequently took more than a week. There were taverns along the road at intervals and one of the chief topics of conversation on winter nights was concerning the best route to follow in getting from that road-house to the next. In thawing weather the regular road soon became impassible and new ways had to be found, and they in turn had to be abandoned quickly and yet another sought.

The surrounding Country was all owned by a few large landholders who were what we would now call "land poor" as the values were low. As a matter of fact there was a very large section of land south-east of Mt. Airy and not ten miles away that changed hands on a basis of about one dollar per acre. The roads radiating from the town were little more than trails, rutty and dusty in summer and almost unbelievably terrible in winter. Horse or mule-back was about the only method of travel from December to April.

Schools were generally one room log buildings, chinked with clay and were far apart and operative for very short terms. Getting an education was a very difficult matter in those days and the only wonder is that as many learned the rudiments of learning as did.

The social life of the people was much restricted by these conditions and consisted largely of activities subject to the conditions of the roads. For this reason a great many of the jollifications where any considerable number could gather together and mingle with any degree of comfort had to occur in the summer time and took the form of picnics. Of course young folks courted and "set up" with each other but this was irrespective of external conditions, just as they have done through the ages, and men attended court together, and folks met at church and funerals, but the real old jamboree where folks could bring all hands and spend all day and air their suspenders if they so desired could remove their shoes and sit around and be real folksey was at picnics and the "Flat Rock" on the road to Stuart about a mile east of Mt. Airy was the best of these. At this place there was a naked rock smooth and dry and warm and from fifteen to twenty-five acres in extent. This was surrounded by acres and acres of the old original forest and at its foot were two fine bold springs of pure cold water. In these ideal surroundings for a festivity of this nature the older folks sat in the shade and talked and heard and told the news and discussed the thousand and one matters that make up life, the children ran and played all about in the perfect freedom of childhood and the young folks eyed one another sheepishly or wandered off on various ostensible errands in couples. Many a staid substantial citizen now on the sunset side of life sits before his open fire and after he has tired of the news in the daily paper gazes into the flickering flames and in the borderland between reality and dreams is transported back through the years to that old gray rock where he first met her who has since shared his little triumphs and sorrows, mothered his children, and helped him to attain his present comfortable position and who now sits just within the rays of the lamp on the centre table, with her dear head, frosted by the years, bent over one of the various and interminable tasks that seem to belong to her sex.

That is his reaction to the "rock" and is also that of many, many of our older people, but then the owner had an entirely different point of view. To him it was a worthless incumbrance on which he suffered the unjustifiable oppression of having to pay taxes. In fact we find records where one of the former owners petitioned the County Authorities to relieve him of the necessity of paying taxes on this entirely worthless piece of land.

This was the general condition of matters pertaining to "The Rock" when the old Cape Fear & Yadkin Valley Railroad first crept into Mt. Airy. The oldsters tell us that it was a swelteringly hot day in June, 1888 when the first train pulled into our city, with Captain Murphy, the engineer at the throttle of the old woodburner. They had a celebration that day with much cheering and speechmaking and most wonderful and complicated prophecies as to just what the railroad would do for the whole district, but in their wildest flights of fancy the possibilities of that old patch of granite, lying quiet and sleeping in the sunshine never entered their heads. Had anyone hinted at any such a thing he would have been hooted to the echo.

But others had been seeing visions and dreaming dreams. Thomas Woodroffe, a carpenter and contractor of Greensboro, had built the modest stations along the new railroad and in some manner became interested in the granite deposit and was able to communicate his enthusiasm to some of the prominent men of his city and the vicinity, as on May 8th, 1889, the owner of the "rock" Mr. R. S. Gilmer deeded the forty acre tract, of which the exposed granite was a part to J. A. Odell, of Greensboro. Other parcels of land adjacent were acquired and also the mineral rights to approximately 175 acres to the South of the deposit, and on May 14, 1889, the Mt. Airy Granite Company was incorporated under the laws of North Carolina, with Thos. Woodroffe, J. W. Fry, J. A. Odell, J. A. Gray and J. M. Odell named as the incorporators. The capitalization being \$25,000.00 with the privilege to increase to \$200,000.00. At the first Stockholders Meeting we find the names of J. L. Cochran, Frank Massie, Moses Kauffman and J. VanLindley. J. A.

Odell was made President and J. W. Fry Secretary & Treasurer. The first Board of Directors consisted of Thomas Woodroffe, J. A. Gray, J. M. Odell, John L. Cochran and J. VanLindley. Later on we find the names of Thomas Woodroffe's Sons, Thomas, William, George and Frank. Also R. Percy Gray, Laurence S. Holt, H. W. Fries, and later still Colin Fraser, C. B. Keesee, G. W. Hinshaw and D. E. Hoffman.

Thus was this great industry started and we who can look back at the activities of these men, in the light of history as we know it, cannot help a feeling of amazement at their temerity and admiration of the almost boundless enthusiasm and bulldog tenacity that carried them through the years. These were panic times, when it was almost impossible to finance anything and when the product was an unknown granite that was looked upon with the utmost skepticism by architects and prospective builders the task seems unusually arduous. A careful reading of the old minute book of this Company discloses the almost pathetic efforts to secure the necessary money to carry on a growing business. The Stockholders would have a meeting and decide on a method of raising money and this would be followed by a Directors' Meeting where a different method of handling the matter would be decided on and this would be followed by a meeting of the Executive Committee who would offer a still different solution. We find minutes of meetings where the officers voluntarily rescinded their salaries.

A few of the happenings of note follow:-

Shortly after the incorporation the North State Improvement Company was formed to try to secure a railroad siding from the railroad to the deposit. J. A. Gray was the President of this company and also of the C. F. & Y. V. R. R. and through the legal department of his R.R. he instituted proceedings against the owners of the land between the railroad and the Dry Bridge on North Main Street. The owners of this land were a Mr. Armfield, Mrs. C. R. Lewis and R. R. Galloway. These suits were settled and the building of the spur commenced, and as the quarry already had a hundred foot right of way from the Dry Bridge to the quarry

work was prosecuted rapidly and finished in 1891. The records show that there were 135 cars shipped in 1890 but this must have been transported partly by wagon. As a matter of fact we know that the first contract was for material for a bridge near Fayetteville, N. C., and this was carted over to the railroad by Mr. Smith and his son, Irvin.

On November 6th, 1921, J. A. Odell resigned as president and R. P. Gray was made President and served until his death in 1906. From this time on until the Company's dissolution C. B. Keesee acted as its President.

The first Secretary, J. W. Fry, acted in that capacity until July 17, 1907, when Thomas Woodroffe, Jr. was elected to fill his place.

Thomas Woodroffe, Sr., was made Treasurer & General Manager, August 25, 1891, and seems to have served until the election of his son, George, in 1896. Thomas Woodroffe, Sr. was formally made General Manager and Quarry Superintendent on June 18, 1894 with the privilege of employing one of his boys with him on full time. The combined salary of both was to be \$125.00 per month.

In July 1893 William Woodroffe was struck and killed by a spawl from a blast, and so ended a very promising life.

On January 19, 1898, the Stockholders voted to put the entire quarry in the hands of the Executive Committee to sell on the best terms possible, and the salaries of all officials were abolished.

A few days later, on the 25th instant, Thomas Woodroffe, Sr., offered to lease the quarry and equipment on certain terms, and, next year on January 18, 1899, his offer was accepted.

At the above meeting it was voted to increase the capital stock to \$75,000.00, \$25,000.00 of which was to be cumulative Preferred Stock with interest at 8% and redeemable at 8% premium. (This stock was taken over by Laurence S. Holt and H. W. Fries, the former having 125 shares and the latter 100 shares. This later became a liability of the later

Corporation and was redeemed by them on October 10, 1908, the owners at that time being L. S. Holt and Mesdames C. F. Shaffner, M. F. Patterson, E. T. Bahnson and L. F. Moore.)

Mr. Woodroffe, Sr. was given a five year lease at this meeting in 1899 and the Stockholders evidently felt they were entering upon a new era under better conditions than the old one as they voted to bind themselves not to sell their stock until their associates had a chance to buy it.

Thomas Woodroffe, Sr. held his position as Manager until his death in 1901, when Thomas Woodroffe, Jr. took his place.

On April 15, 1904 application was made by certain interested parties for a charter in the State of Delaware for the North Carolina Granite Corporation, and on May 19th, 1904 an amended charter was presented and the franchise secured. The first Stockholders meeting was held in Wilmington Delaware, the stock being held by

Colin Fraser,	15	shares
J.E. Bryant,	52	"
Dr. G.E. Warren,	15	"
Chas. H. Dix,	15	"
J.G. Gray,	3	"

The authorization of Capital Stock of the New Company was fixed at one million dollars in shares having a par value of ten dollars each, \$400,000.00 being preferred and \$600,000.00 being common stock. The new Corporation took over the holdings of the Mt. Airy Granite Company for a consideration and at the same time some of the stockholders secured title to about 1800 acres of granite deposit in Wilkes and Alleghany Counties and later on incorporated the Wolf Rock Granite Company with an interlocking directorate.

The First Directors Meeting was held in Philadelphia on May 30, 1904, at which time Colin Fraser was made President, Chas. H. Dix, V. P. and John E. Bryant, Secy. & Treas.

A determined effort was made to secure the sale of stock and later in the year considerable building work was contracted for and machinery bought; a new cutting shed was erected and equipped with 2 cranes and a lot of machinery and a new air compressor, boiler plant and generator for electric current. On June 30, 1905 the improvements listed in their financial statement make the very respectable total of \$62,204.93.

The officers on November 15, 1905 were:

Colin Fraser, President
Thos. Woodroffe, V. P.
J. E. Bryant, Secy. & Treas.
Chas. H. Dix, Acting Treas.
George Woodroffe, Asst. Treas.

Other Stockholders were:

J. Whitley, New York
N. E. Hause, Harrisbury, Pa.
C. B. Keesee, Martinsville, Va.
Col. G.W. Hinshaw, Winston-Salem, N. C.
E. A. Van Wagenen, Newark, N. J.
O. P. Thompson, New York
W. T. Killinger, Lancaster, Penna.
J. P. Lewis, Martinsville, Va.
C. A. Hege, Winston-Salem, N. C.

June 4th, 1907. Thos. Woodroffe made President,
Geo. Woodroffe, V. President & Asst. Treas.
J. E. Bryant, Secretary,
C. B. Keesee, Treas.

October 1, 1907. C. B. Keesee made Secretary & Treas.

August 1, 1908. Voted to issue bonds in the sum of 150,000.00
Voted to appoint Mr. Keesee a Committee to amend the By Laws

October 6, 1908. Mention of name of W.F. Shaffner in connection with
business of Corporation. (As Director)

February 9, 1915. J. D. Sargent made Director.

February 10, 1914. F. H. Fries made Director.

March 6, 1919. J. D. Martin made a Director. Also Secretary.
February 10, 1920. C. Binder made Director.
February 8, 1921. W. S. Martin made Director.
January 18, 1922. Went open shop in the Granite Cutting Shop.
July 1, 1926. Last of bonded indebtedness paid.
Feb. 9, 1915. W. F. Shaffner elected President.
J. D. Martin " Asst. Treas.
Thos. Woodroffe " V. President & Manager.
Feb. 8, 1916. J. D. Sargent added to Executive Committee.
Feb. 8, 1916. Cutting shed leased to the J. D. Sargent Granite Co.
Aug. 25, 1916. J. D. Sargent elected as General Manager.
Jan. 1, 1918. The Woodroffes sold out their interests and left.
Feb. 12, 1918. J. D. Sargent made V. President.
J. D. Martin elected Secy. & Treas.
Nov. 1, 1918. Bought out the J. D. Sargent Granite Company
Mar. 6, 1919. C. Binder made Asst. Manager.
Aug. 19, 1919. W. S. Martin elected Asst. Treas.
Feb. 10, 1920. C. Binder made General Manager & W. S. Martin, Secy & Treas
Feb. 8, 1921. J. R. Sargent elected General Superintendent
Feb. 22, 1922. J. D. Sargent made President & W. F. Shaffner Vice- Pres.
Feb. 22, 1922. First declaration of dividends paid from earnings.

There are several outstanding events during this time which have influenced the fortunes of this Corporation to a marked extent. The business had been making reasonable progress all along but was always badly handicapped by lack of working capital and in addition had been dealt some staggering blows by customers failing when they owed large sums of money. The failure of Mr. McClure of Cincinnati, Ohio caused the loss of about \$85,000.00, and although it is dismissed by a few short words on the Minutes it really paved the way for Mr. Sargent to gain control of the management of the business.

Mr. Sargent came to Mt. Airy from the North and succeeded in leasing the cutting sheds at a nominal figure, the Corporation's idea being that as they were not able to make it pay they could at least sell the rough granite to Mr. Sargent until he went broke. He made such an outstanding success of this business, that the Stockholders of the Corp'n

finally prevailed on him to assume the management of the quarry. Intense friction developed between Mr. Sargent and the Woodroffes and the latter finally made a proposition to sell out to the others and withdraw. When later in the year Mr. Sargent's cutting company was merged with the rest of the Corporation it was a fine move as it consolidated the entire operation and assisted materially in its financing.

Next followed the initiation of the Open Shop policy in 1922 which did away entirely with friction between the men and employers and enabled the latter to take contracts without fear of lockouts.

Next followed the cancellation of the last bonds in July, 1926 and the freeing of the Corporation from fixed debt.

The latest turning point in the Corporation's history was the signing of the contract for the granite for the mammoth new bridge across the Potomac River, connecting the Lincoln Memorial with Arlington Cemetery. The contract is in excess of \$1,500,000.00 and called for nearly three years' work and the purchase of large quantities of new machinery. None of this would have been possible except for the other events just now enumerated.

A word about the Arlington Bridge. This bridge is another link in the mammoth conception of a beautiful parkway extending from the Nation's Capitol to Arlington Cemetery and when the idea reaches full fruition it will be the most beautiful boulevard in the world. The bridge itself is a memorial and an allegorical promise between the States that a combined nation that ate together and shared each others blankets and spent their blood and treasure together on the fields of France in the desperate struggle against a common enemy would never again engage in deadly strife each with the other, and that the sleep of the North would never again be broken by dread of gray clad ranks striking at the Nations' Capital, nor the blue coated soldiery of the North again ravage the fair fields of its Southern neighbors. It seems consistent that North Carolina that furnished a larger percentage of its citizenry in proportion to its population to fight the North in the dark days of the Civil War should now furnish the granite that makes this structure possible.