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THE MOUNT AIRY GRANITE INDUSTRY

The quarrying of Mount Airy Granite as a commercial venture dates back to a short time after the coming of the railroad to Mount Airy in June, 1888, the charter of the first Corporation being dated May 14, 1889, which would make the industry in its fortieth year.

Since that time the project has shown a steady growth and has been in continuous operation, never having been shut down for the causes common to almost all new ventures of this character. During the Corporation's formative years it had to contend with the problems of introducing an entirely new and untried granite into markets where several splendid granites were already established, and to overcome the conservatism and prejudices of architects and the buying public. This is invariably the reception given any new granite entering the field. In addition to this there was a marked stringency in the money market all the time. In spite of these handicaps the industry made a consistent growth and the material established itself until it came to be considered one of the standard granites.

The original holdings of this Corporation was a tract of land near Mount Airy, through the center of which extended a long, narrow strip of naked rock of approximately twenty five acres. Since then additional parcels of land adjacent to and surrounding the original forty acres have been purchased until the acreage has reached approximately two hundred and sixty acres, with mineral rights on approximately four hundred acres more. The exposed granite has grown from the original twenty five acres to about seventy five acres due to the continuous strip-ping during the last ten years.

In addition to the above property, five mountains of granite have been acquired in Wilkes and Alleghany Counties, approximately eighteen hundred acres. The deposits in these tracts give every evidence of being the same granite as that at Mount Airy. This fact insures a supply of the raw material that is practically inexhaustible.

The equipment installed to date is such as is standard for such operations, except possibly the cableways, which, on account of the area of the deposit being worked, take the place of derricks in pit quarries.

There are two very large cutting sheds capable of serving three hundred granite cutters, and equipped with four electric overhead traveling cranes of thirty and twenty ton capacity and sixty foot span, three polishing machines, three granite cutting lathes, one polishing lathe, two very large carborundum saws, two complete sand-blast installations, forty five surfacing machines, and the usual smaller tools found in up-to-date cutting plants.

The power plant consists of three Heine Water Tube Boilers of 215 H.P. each, two return tubular boilers of 150 H.P. each, five air compressors of a total capacity of ten thousand five hundred feet of air per minute, two direct connected electric units of 100 KW each, and a Motor generator set of 55 KW. These units are to generate the current for the traveling cranes.

About all of the repair work and part of the new work is taken care of by very complete machine shops, wood and wagon working shops and a forging shop. The tools for the granite cutters are taken care of by two of the very latest type Pirie Tool Sharpening Machines and the other tools by a large and well equipped shop at the head of the quarry.

All of the later equipment is electrically driven, the current being furnished from hydro-electric power by the Southern Public Utilities Company, but should this fail for any reason there is ample steam equipment in reserve, so there need be no shut-downs.

The quarries are served by heavy compressed air pipe lines, fourteen cableways (each with its hoists and other equipment), two heavy inclines for stones too heavy for the cableways, each equipped with its derricks and heavy hoist engines.

The waste stone is taken care of by a heavy gyratory crusher, having a daily capacity of 350 tons, equipped with the necessary housing, bins, shafting, and delivery equipment; and the whole plant served by several miles of railroad sidings, a new Porter steam locomotive of 65 tons, 11 flats, 6 all steel 20 yrd. air dump cars, one locomotive crane of 40 tons and another of 20 tons capacity, and also a crawler crane of 12 tons. The locomotive has a new steel fireproof house with standard pit and additional capacity to house all supplies and repairs.

The requirements for water have been taken care of by a Goulds Triplex Pump, electrically driven, pumping from a seepage pool 40 x 100 and of sufficient capacity to fill the two elevated steel tanks of 50,000 and 60,000 gals. capacity in four hours. In addition to this, an emergency equipment will take care of all needs should the other fail for any reason. Provision has also been made for suitable outlets and fire hose to give good fire protection to all the important buildings.

During the past ten years thirty five modern dwelling houses have been provided for employees who do not already own their own homes. The quarry is in a rural community about a mile from Mount Airy and the employment has been so steady that the operation is surrounded by workmen's homes, within a radius of three miles, each with its garage and large garden, and all paid for or in process of being paid for from their earnings. There is a small floating population, almost all of the workmen being tied to the industry by ownership of realty, or marriage or other relationship; so that of the 700 men employed in the granite industry here, it is safe to say that over ninety percent. are fixed to the community by some stable tie. There are a great many granite cutters who served their apprenticeship here, and although they are now veterans in their line of work they have never cut any granite other than Mount Airy. Fathers and sons are working side by side and in some cases the third generation is following in their footsteps.

Mount Airy Granite is used for all the purposes where granite can be applied. It has been shipped all over the country, even into New England and Cuba. At the present time its chief uses are for heavy monuments, both public and private; building, public and private; mausoleums, private and community; bridges of all kinds; dry-docks; street curbing and paving blocks; broken range facing for residences and churches; rubble and riprap for various purposes; and crushed stone.

The attached tonnage sheet will show there has been a gradual increase in the quantities shipped, both as to the number of cars and the quantities on each car, but it does not show the most important detail. The character of the stone shipped is not indicated at all, but in addition to the increase in quantities there has been a marked increase in the value of each unit, the tendency being more and more towards granite work having higher values. In the earlier years of quarrying it was necessary to dispose of greater quantities of low grade material, as there was more of this class of stone in the surface ledges and in addition the merits of the material itself were not so well recognized and appreciated. Each year the quantity of Mount Airy Granite sold for its commoner uses remains nearly stationary, while that for the higher class is increasing.