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Some Facts about the Mt. Airy Quarries.

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venture for profit

Beginning of the quarry as a profitable venture was coincident with the coming of the railroad to Mt. Airy. Prior to that time the stone was worked in a desultory manner and it was chiefly distinguished as a picnic ground. Many an old man now living has very tender memories associated with the quarries as the place where he first met and courted her, who later was the sharer of his joys and sorrows and the mother of his children.

The beginning of the quarrying operations as we now know them dates back to 1889, at which time the property was acquired and the Mount Airy Granite Company was organized, with J. A. Odell as President. Associated with him in this venture were J. VanLindley, J. W. Fry, Julius A. Gray, Thomas Woodroffe, Sr., J. M. Odell, Judge John L. Cochran and M. Kauffman. As soon as the corporation was organized, additional property was purchased and arrangements made for the building of a two mile railroad from the quarries to the Town of Mt. Airy, to connect with the new railroad.

After this was completed the quarry was equipped in a modest way and contracts were solicited and won. At this time the exposed rock was but a narrow strip through the middle of the original forty acres purchased, all the balance being covered with earth and decomposed granite in varying depths and the portion having this overburden was in turn covered by the original forest. At the present writing the only survivor of all this verdure is a fine white oak on the edge of the roadway near the cutting shed. This tree was the corner marker for the original forty acres mentioned above.

It was an uphill ~~journey~~ fight for the original quarrymen, as the stone was new to the market, the operators inexperienced and their competitors actively hostile, so much so that they seem to have descended to an almost unbelievable campaign of misrepresentation and villification. In addition to this times were hard and money was scarce and almost impossible to obtain.

In spite of these handicaps the granite made a steady progress towards recognition by reputable architects, and it gradually became known as a standard granite.

For several years prior to 1904 the Mt. Airy Granite Company ceased active operations and leased the quarries and equipment to Thos. Woodroffe & Sons until in 1904, when the North Carolina Granite Corp'n. was organized by some of the Stockholders of the old Mt. Airy Granite Company and a lot of outsiders, Thos. Woodroffe being President of the new Corporation. In the autumn of 1904 the ~~first~~ first portion of the present cutting shed was erected the work being finished in 1905. Two new twenty ton electric traveling cranes were installed, together with large compressors and other equipment, and with the influx of additional capital from the sale of stock and bonds the granite industry received a new impetus and from that time until the present the growth has been a gradual, healthy one.

In looking back over the history of this quarry one may easily see where misplays were made and unbusinesslike things were done but one must admit that the present enviable status of the quarry is a direct and positive result of the dogged persistence and unbounded optimism of the personell that saw the possibilities of the industry and year after year kept hammering away, through lean years and fat, until an unknown and we might say- unwanted stone, has become a standard by which almost all other granites are measured. "As good as Mt. Airy" is supposed to give a new granite a settled standing, or at least entitle it to respectful consideration.

At the present time the quarries consist of about two hundred acres, seventy two of which are in active operation. The deposit has an extreme height of about one hundred feet above the railroad and is known to extend at least two hundred feet downward. How much further it goes down no one knows, although geologists surmise that it extends to a great depth.

Mt. Airy Granite is used in the following forms:-

Cut and finished for

Statuary,
Monuments,
Public Mausoleums,
Private Mausoleums,
Buildings,
Kellergong Stones for paper mills,
Bridges,
Dry Docks,
Engine Beds,
Turn Table Pivot Beds for Railroad Round Houses,
Street Curbing,
Paving Blocks.
Etc.

And in the rough for

Monumental ~~yard~~ Yards to be cut.
Building stone yards.
Rubble for rock faced ashlar for churches, residences
etc.
Riprap for its various uses.
Crushed stone for roads, buildings, floors, stucco,
Artificial stone and sand for dressing station plat-
forms on our railroads.

Production amounts to over three thousand carloads yearly, valued at well over one million dollars.

Shipments are made to every state East of the Rockies and south of Maine. Several ~~prominent~~ prominent buildings in Cuba are built of this Granite.

Over 750 men are employed in the granite industry here and they receive in pay over \$ 900,000.00 yearly.

The mammoth cutting sheds are ~~now~~ equipped with all the latest and best machinery and the cranes and other lifting apparatus is capable of handling anything that a railroad car can transport.

There is no limit to the size of the stone that can be gotten out. Quite frequently they break a block free from its bed one thousand feet long twelve feet wide and six feet deep. This piece of stone is without any seams or cracks and would weigh ~~22,000 tons~~ 7,200 tons. This is then broken up into sizes that can be transportation.

This ability to get any sized piece wanted together with its quality and the facility with which it can be handled has made the granite extremely popular for large monuments, and the wide and long roof stones required by certain mausoleums.

This company has specialized on community mausoleums and now has over one hundred of these structures to its credit, and some of them have had as many as six additions built to them since the original one was made. This method of caring for the dead was at first looked on with considerable disfavor but now has become a standard structure in almost every large city. Some of them are fitted inside without regard to cost and are really dreams of beauty.

The granite lends itself particularly well to the better forms of private mausoleums and literally thousands of them have been built of it. At the present time the company rarely has less than from eight to ten mausoleums in course of preparation at one time.

Mt. Airy granite was chosen for the memorial bridge over the Potomac River from Lincoln Memorial to Arlington Cemetery forming a link in one of the most stupendous undertakings to make Washington the most beautiful city in the world and to form a fitting tribute to the dead who have perished that the country might live.

One hundred and two cars have already gone on this bridge, all loaded to capacity with finished granite of the monumental grade and yet it will still require about two years to finish this part of the work.

When Loreda Taft, the noted sculptor, was commissioned to erect the war memorial for the men of Danville, Ill. who gave their all in the late World War that Democracy might survive, he chose Mt. Airy Granite as the vehicle that would best convey his ideas, although he had a free hand as to expenditures and had all the finest granites and marbles of this and other countries to choose from. The entire pedestal and approaches of this monument are Mt. Airy granite and at each corner of the monument there are four granite figures carved in full relief, each over eight feet high and each representing a branch of the Service.

The grief-stricken friends of "Pop" Gears, the veteran horseman, looking around for a stone that they felt would best commemorate their loving respect for him, chose Mt. Airy and the lofty shaft now stands on the sunny hillside as a fitting tribute to a splendid sportsman and honorable gentleman, one who took his reverses without whining and his successes with a becoming modesty.

Very many of the firms now buying Mt. Airy have been doing this since the quarry started business and would not dream of using anything else where a light gray granite can be used.

One of the later developments in Mt. Airy granite is the making of rubble for rock faced broken range work such as is seen in many churches and residences. This has become so very popular that this branch of the business has grown from purely local use to the shipment of thousands of tons yearly, chiefly to cities in the North, and this is against high freight rates and keen local competition from quarries having scarcely any freight to pay. Some architects have used this material in as many as twelve churches each during the past five years. One large seminary required the shipment of eight thousand tons.

Mt. Airy granite curbing is standard for many Northern cities and hundreds of miles of their streets are paved with Mt. Airy Paving Blocks.