

THE STORY OF THE ROCK

"Well, folks, let's hitch up the horses and go back to town." So the Sunday School class gathered up their picnic baskets and with happy shouts and good-natured bantering started back to the little town of Mount Airy, little dreaming that the broad expanse of naked stone on which they had frolicked would some day become one of the greatest granite centers in the Country.

"Flat Rock"- a truly descriptive name- was then a weatherbeaten, moss-covered piece of stone, the exposed area being about twenty or thirty acres in extent, and was practically surrounded by a veritable jungle of woods and underbrush. It certainly was of no account as a farm, for as someone remarked at the time, "The only thing that could be raised on it was an umbrella!" Years later somebody did raise things on it besides umbrellas. Ledges of finest granite were raised, and lofty poles to carry the ariel cableways or "trolleys" - but that's getting ahead of the story.

While the railroad was being built to Mount Airy, several enterprising business men of Greensboro, N.C., chief among whom was Mr. Thomas Woodroffe, Sr., conceived the idea of opening up the deposit of granite and placing it on the market. With this object in view an option was obtained and just before its expiration a deed was executed by Mr. R. S. Gilmer, of Mount Airy, by which Mr. J. A. Odell, of Greensboro, became owner of the "Flat Rock" picnic grounds. The tract of land conveyed by this deed, dated May 8th, 1889, covered forty acres lying adjacent to Bingman's creek and near the Ararat River, and was a part of four hundred and seventy-three acres which Mr. Gilmer had purchased from Mr. Tyre Glenn in 1849, and this, in turn, being a part of an eight hundred and sixty acre tract which Mr. Glenn had bought from Mr. S. D. Moore in 1840.

Other deeds bearing the same date gave to Mr. Odell the "Stone Rights" to an additional tract of land containing one hundred and seventy-two acres, extending from Bingman's creeks to "Little Flat Rock" lying some three thousand feet distant towards the south, together with a Right of Way for a railroad thru Mr. Gilmer's lands from the forty acre tract to Main Street in the town of Mount Airy.

This was almost a year after the railroad - the old Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley - was finished, and many of the older citizens can readily recall that sweltering day in June, 1888 -- can readily blot out the years and see again the massed crowds - the "Celebration" - that greeted the first railroad train to reach Mount Airy. And as Captain Murphy, the engineer, brought the old wood-burner to a stop at the end of the track, cheer after cheer broke from hundreds of parched throats and perspiring faces smiled happily at each other.

Notwithstanding the fact that the new quarry was located fully a mile and a half from the "Y" switch of the railroad, work was begun to get out the stone and place it on the market. The first order of which there is any record was for the pier stones for a railroad bridge at or near Fayetteville, N. C., and a number of these stones were hauled by wagon to the depot by a Mr. Smith and his son, Irvin.

Preparations, however, had been made to extend a branch line to the quarry and to this end the North State Improvement Company was organized with Mr. Julius A. Gray as President. Mr. Gray was also President of the Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley Railroad, and thru the legal department of the company proceedings were instituted against owners of the property lying between the Dry Bridge and the "Y" switch. The first case

was begun on January 30th, 1890, against Mr. Armfield, and was compromised in the following March. Other property owners figuring in these cases were Mrs. C. W. Lewis and Mr. R. R. Galloway. As a result of these proceedings work on the branch road was speedily started and was completed early in the spring of 1891. Unfortunately, there is no available record of the first car of stone shipped directly from the quarry, but we find that during the year 1891 264 cars were loaded and sent out to various destinations.

Going back a couple of years we find that on the 14th of May, 1889, Mr. Thos. Woodroffe and his associates, Mr. J. A. Odell, Mr. J. M. Odell, Mr. J. A. Gray and Mr. J. W. Frye, had incorporated themselves under the name of "Mount Airy Granite Company", with a capital stock of twenty-five thousand dollars, notice of which was published for six consecutive weeks in the "Daily Workman", then being published in Greensboro, N. C.

At the first meeting of the Company held on June 8th, 1889, Mr. J. A. Odell was elected President, and Mr. J. W. Frye Secretary and Treasurer, Mr. Odell, however, resigned the office on November 6th, 1891 owing to other pressing business, and Mr. R. Percy Gray was elected as his successor. He was a son of Mr. J. A. Gray, then deceased, and held the office of President until his death which occurred about 1906. Mr. Frye held the office of Secretary until July 17, 1907.

In 1893 there occurred the only fatal accident in the history of the quarry. About ten o'clock in the morning of the 11th of July, Mr. William Woodroffe, then Superintendent of the quarry, left the office and had proceeded but a few steps up the "hill" when a blast was set off at the top of the quarry sending a shower of stones high in the air. One of these flying missiles, weighing nine ounces, struck him on the right temple, fracturing his skull. He was rushed with all possible speed to a hospital in Greensboro where every power was exerted to save his life but without avail,

his death occurring three days later. (July 14th, 1893)

On June 18th, 1894, Mr. Thomas Woodroffe, Sr., the General Manager, took active charge of the operating of the quarry, having as his assistant his son, George, who, on January 17, 1896, was elected Treasurer of the Company, which office he held until July 17, 1907, being succeeded by his brother, Thomas, who held it until its termination.

On the 26th of January, 1898, Mr. Woodroffe entered into a contract with the Mount Airy Granite Company, under the terms of which the entire property and equipment of the quarry was leased to him and his sons George, Thomas, Jr., and Frank, and began operating under the name of Thomas Woodroffe and Sons. Mr. Woodroffe, Sr., however, retained his position of General Manager of the Mount Airy Granite Company until his death in 1901, and was succeeded in that position by his son, Thomas.

In the meantime, the Mount Airy Granite Company had bought more land adjacent to the original forty acres to provide space for railroad sidings and buildings at the foot of the "hill". We find that on the 19th of December, 1889, they purchased twenty-one acres from Mr. Z. T. Smith. On January 18th, 1890, Mr. Odell turned over to the Company all the holdings he had obtained from Mr. Gilmer on the 8th of May of the previous year, and on October 24, 1890, about 25 acres were secured from Mr. J. A. Bingman. This latter tract connected the forty acre tract with the right of way thru the Gilmer property.

In 1907 Mr. C. B. Keesee was elected President and held the office until its termination.

Thus matters stood on the 30th of May, 1904, when there was held in Philadelphia the first meeting of The North Carolina Granite Corporation, at which time the officers of the Corporation were duly elected. Mr. Colin Fraser became President, Mr. Charles H. Dix, Vice-President and Mr. J. E. Bryant, Secretary and Treasurer. The first Board of Directors was composed of Messrs. Thomas Woodroffe, George Woodroffe, N. E. Hause, A. R. McNichol, John Whitley and Arthur D. Smith. At this same meeting, however, Mr. Dix resigned and Mr. Thomas Woodroffe was elected Vice-President in his stead.

Deeds were also executed on this date conveying to the Corporation all the lands, equipment and holdings of the Mount Airy Granite Company, and the lease held by Thomas Woodroffe and Sons was terminated.

On September 16, 1904, the Corporation assumed control of the "Big Stone Mountain" property, lying in the adjacent county of Wilkes, which property was later disposed of (in 1907) and incorporated under the name of Wolf Rock Granite Company.

The first contract for cut-stone secured by the Corporation was for the granite work in the third story of the New National Museum at Washington, in the amount of one hundred seven thousand, six hundred forty five dollars and fifty cents, the contract being dated October 17th, 1904.

On June 4th, 1907, the election of officers resulted as follows: Mr. Thomas Woodroffe, President, Mr. George Woodroffe, Vice-President, Mr. J. E. Bryant, Secretary and Mr. C. B. Keesee, Treasurer. However, on October 1st, of the same year, Mr. Bryant requested to be relieved of the secretaryship, and Mr. Keesee was elected to fill that office together with that of Treasurer.