CHAPTER I
LAND ACQUISITION, GROWTH AND DEMISE
OF THE HUMMELSTOWN BROWNSTONE INDUSTRY

The Great Valley stretches in a vast arc across the southeastern section of Pennsylvania. Bounded on the north by the Blue Mountain and to the south by the South Mountain, it is trisected by the Delaware, Schuylkill, and Susquehanna Rivers thus dividing it into the Lehigh, Lebanon, and Cumberland Valleys. In the western end of the Lebanon Valley ten miles east of the city of Harrisburg is the small town of Hummelstown. One of the oldest villages in this section of Dauphin County, it was mentioned by Alexis de Tocqueville in his classic study, Democracy in America, as he traveled through the area at the beginning of the 19th Century. It is this village that became the site of one of the outstanding brownstone industries in the United States.

The strip of the South Mountain immediately south of Hummelstown compacted on the east by Bullfrog Valley and to the west by the Swatara Creek contained an outcropping of Triassic sandstone which ranged in color from a deep, rich chocolate brown to hues of pink, purple, and blue brownstone. This exposure of sandstone strata is common, for the belt from which the stone is quarried extends in an interrupted manner from the Hudson River to Virginia and the Carolinas, a distance exceeding 500 miles. However:

The principal quarry in this formation in Pennsylvania is situated on the south side of a hill in Hummelstown, Dauphin County, the stone dipping to the north at an angle of about forty degrees and the ledge being about
eighty-five feet in thickness. --- The stone compares very favorably with any of the Triassic stones.¹

The Pennsylvania German settlers in the area first recognized the value of this stone as a building material. Arriving in the United States about 1765, Peter Berst, Sr. migrated to Derry Township and eventually purchased three tracts of land from agents of the Penn Family, two of which he later gave to his sons, John, Sr. and Peter, Jr. All three of these men were veterans of the American Revolution. John Sr.’s 106 acre tract was registered as Rapho in 1808, and Peter Jr.’s 44 acre tract was Peterton. In 1826 John’s son, John Jr., patented a 171 acre tract adjacent to Rapho which he called Petersburg. It was Rapho and Petersburg that eventually became the site of the present quarries. On Rapho John Sr. had erected a handsome brownstone house in 1800 which was razed in the 1950’s to avoid paying tax on unseated property. Great is the loss of this house, for as late as the 1930’s it was noted that the condition of the stone was excellent.

¹ George P. Merrill, Stones For Building and Decoration, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1903), pp. 159-160.
Behind this house John erected a barn with a brownstone foundation and the Berst Family Cemetery adjacent to the township road was surrounded by a brownstone wall with the majority of the headstones fashioned from brownstone, one dating as early as 1725.

Although the Berst property became the site of the Hummelstown brownstone industry, about one mile east-northeast, a tract of land, Abraham’s Plains, was patented by Abraham Coppaa (probably Cobaugh) on March 17, 1803. Cobaugh had two tenants, Edward B. Grubb and Clement B. Grubb, who purchased a small parcel of this land and in turn sold it to Benjamin Fishburn on March 17, 1841. However, the Grubb’s transaction reserved:

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nevertheless for themselves their heirs and assigns forever, the right and privilege of quarrying and removing stone of the said lot of ground as many as they shall want for their own use. They bind themselves and their heirs and assigns to pay all damages which they do to the timber on the said lot.  
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It is this deed which first refers directly to the utility of quarrying brownstone in the South Mountain in the area of Hummelstown.

The Berst Family continued to farm their land and quarry stone for their own purpose and for sale, but the emphasis from farming to brownstone occurred when two entrepreneurs appeared on the scene in 1863. Daniel Wilt and Henry Brown of Harrisburg contracted to lease from David Berst, son of John, Jr., a plot containing three acres and one-hundred and forty-five perches “for the purpose of quarrying stone.”

The lease was binding for a ten year period with the provision that if the quarrying proved to be successful the lease would be extended indefinitely. It was further agreed that:

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in working the Said Quarries the Lessees Shall not be confined to the tract of land described in said Lease but may follow the vain of Stone now worked by them beyond the boundaries set forth in Said lease ---.\(^4\)

These terms appear to be most liberal on the part of David Berst, but can be explained in that he was to receive three cents royalty on every cubic foot of measurable stone which was quarried. Moreover, the lease gave Wilt and Brown the privilege of using a small dirt road out to the “Public Road” now Quarry/Waltonville Road.

The Bersts must have established a favorable reputation for the stone that they quarried, for a price list printed for Wilt and Brown noted that their stone came from the Berst Quarry. This same price list also mentioned a number of buildings containing the stone which included Market Square Presbyterian Church in Harrisburg designed by the Philadelphia architect Joseph C. Hoxie, and the manse of their minister, Thomas H. Robinson, which was renovated around 1865 and given a handsome brownstone facade.\(^5\) Located on Front Street, this is now the home of the Art Association Building of Harrisburg.

\(^4\) Ibid.

This new venture must have been in difficult economic straits for at times Berst had difficulty collecting his royalty. In one instance he wrote to the new superintendent of the company, Dr. Thomas G. Fox saying:

Now Mr. Fox, I am doing all within my power for the Company and the Quarry now I think the Company should regard me so much as to settle this account.⁶

Six months after this partnership was formed, an important development occurred which was to be the founding of a large scale brownstone industry. Wilt sold his interest to Henry Brown on March 19, 1864. Interested in continuing the venture, but not having the capital to do it alone, Brown formed a partnership with a Philadelphia lithographer named Jacob Haehnlen on October 1, 1866. Six months later on April 5, 1867, Jacob’s brother Lewis, and Louis Brown, both of Philadelphia, entered the partnership. These four men each owned a quarter interest in the business with the exception of four shares of stock which were sold to Allen Walton, Jacob Haehnlen’s brother-in-law, on April 17, 1867. Although Jacob and Lewis Haehnlen were Philadelphians, they had a summer residence in Bellevue Park on the outskirts of Harrisburg (now part of the city), and it is undoubtedly through this Harrisburg connection that they first heard of the stone.

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⁶ Letter of David Berst to Thomas G. Fox, August 7, 1864, Hummelstown Brownstone Manuscript Group, Dauphin County Historical Society
Now armed with the necessary capital, four men with 249 shares of stock and one man with four shares, they applied for a company charter. Thus on May 2, 1867, the Pennsylvania Brown Free Stone Company was formed.\(^7\) Chartered during the administration of Gov. John W. Geary, the company would continue to operate under this corporate name until March 8, 1891, at which time it would become rechartered as the Hummelstown Brownstone Company.\(^8\)

The following eighteen months were turbulent in that it was a constant struggle to master the operation of the quarry. A capable superintendent was critical to enhance efficient production. Dr. Thomas G. Fox continued his superintendence of the pits as the man first hired by Daniel Wilt and Henry Brown. Although he was a highly regarded general practitioner and physician in the village of Hummelstown, the scalpel and the scabbling hammer proved not to be interchangeable. As early as July, 1868, Dr. Fox was aware of his ignorance of the business and the problems it incurred. In a correspondence to Louis Brown, treasurer of the company, he apologized for not submitting a progress report on time by admitting that it was “in consequence of some difficulty in learning the system of calculating different measurements (of stone), and doubt in charging prices on different sizes.”\(^9\) Fox continued to explain that he hoped that Henry Brown would give him the necessary assistance, but that it was not forthcoming. Henry Brown, however, was disgruntled, to say the least, because Fox would not honor his credit for stone despite the

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\(^7\) “Charter of the Pennsylvania Brown Free Stone Company”, Hummelstown Brownstone Manuscript Group, Dauphin County Historical Society.

\(^8\) “Charter of the Hummelstown Brownstone Company”, Hummelstown Brownstone Manuscript Group, Dauphin County Historical Society.

fact that Brown was one of the owners. Consequently, Henry Brown wrote Louis Brown a pointed letter bemoaning this fact and proceeded to relate that Fox would like to sell his position as superintendent “to a man in Hummelstown by the name of Smith who does not know any moar about the business that he does.”

However, Henry Brown’s financial record with the company left much to be desired, and Louis Brown and Jacob Haehnlen had further reason for not placing full stock in his complaint. Messrs. Schmeyer and Weider for whom Brown was supplying stone for a building proved him not to be a man of his word.

According to our bargain he (Henry Brown) promised us to furnish us the stone, as fast as we want them, and instead of that he took another Job, in our Place, and gave us just about half the stones which he ought to have sent us. --- We must have at least 8,000 cubic feet more to finish our job.

In an effort to get at the heart of the Brown-Fox controversy and establish a first-hand opinion of Fox’s competence, Jacob Haehnlen, president of the company, traveled from Philadelphia to Hummelstown. Dr. Fox relates this visit in a letter to Louis Brown saying:

I had the pleasure of meeting J. Haehnlen, Esq. this morning at the Mill at Hummelstown, where after an explanation on my part, he doubtless thinks that I have been more “sinned against than sinning.”

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Upon accusation by Henry Brown that he had been absent from the job for an entire month
Fox lashed out, “The associations at the Quarry, at one time were so disgusting, that for 3
or 4 days I was not there; any other respectable person would have acted likewise.”

On the same day, however, Jacob Haehnlen confides to Louis Brown that Fox:

confesses that he is not fit for that position among such a rude set of men --
he really is afraid of them. I fear that H. B. is putting mischief into Nugent’s
(the foreman) head as H. B. wants more stone and Fox will not deliver them
to the mill. I say that is right. We want a determined and resolute man for
superintendent. A man that cannot be trifled with.

Even one of the teamsters questioned the adequacy of Fox’s management, for Jacob

Shope notified Louis Brown that:

I have been at a loss in keeping up a team for hawling your stone, not having
been employed one-half the time and am obliged to buy feed which is a cash
article.-- There has been mismanagement somewhere with the Quarry.
There should have been nearly double the amount of stone taken out, with
the force that they had.

On September 2, 1868, Dr. Fox tendered his resignation to the directors of the
Pennsylvania Brown Free Stone Company, and it was accepted. At the same meeting,
applications for the position were submitted by Allen Walton and Franklin Smith. Despite
having sold his original four shares of stock in the company, Allen Walton was appointed
to the position and in so doing the company got their “resolute man for superintendent,”

13 Ibid.

14 “Letter of Jacob Haehnlen to Louis Brown“, August 6, 1868, Hummelstown Brownstone
Manuscript Group, Dauphin County Historical Society.

15 “Letter of Jacob Shope to Louis Brown“, September 4, 1868, Hummelstown Manuscript Group,
Dauphin County Historical Society.
the man that could not be “trifled with.” Walton’s starting salary was $1,200/year plus 10% additional for all stone sold and delivered exceeding $12,000/annum.\textsuperscript{16}

Walton was born of Quaker parentage on August 24, 1835, in Chester County, and the family moved to Philadelphia when he was a year old. Educated in that city as a machinist he went into business with his father-in-law as a plumber in steam and gas fitting. His inventiveness was evident in these early years for he patented several devices relating to this work.\textsuperscript{17} Due to poor health a doctor advised that he leave the city, so the opportunity to assume the superintendence of the brownstone quarries was a well-timed opportunity. He and his wife Emma J. and their two young sons, Allen K. and Robert J., moved to the east end of the village of Hummelstown after purchasing land that had been the pasture of Jacob Hummel. Bounded on the north by the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad right of way, on the east by a dirt road, on the south by the Horseshoe Pike and on the west by Plum Alley,

\textsuperscript{16} “Minutes of Meetings of Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania Brown Free Stone Company”, Hummelstown Brownstone Manuscript Group, Dauphin County Historical Society.

\textsuperscript{17} “The Waltons of Walton Hill,” Hummelstown Brownstone Manuscript Group, Hummelstown Area Historical Society.
the western section was elevated more than the majority of the tract. It was here that he
built his home and the area became known as Walton Hill.\textsuperscript{18}

Prior to making the move from the city, Walton had an interview with Jacob
Haehnlen at the quarry the morning of August 23 whereupon he must have been assured of
his being hired at the September meeting of the board of directors. For on that same day
Jacob Haehnlen corresponded with Louis Brown stating:

\begin{quote}
I have written to All (diminutive of Allen) requesting him to stop at the
Newark Quarries before taking charge of ours to learn all he can which I
think will prove beneficial to us and urged him to come as soon as
possible.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

During the next seven years the Pennsylvania Brown Free Stone Company fought
valiantly to remain solvent, and Allen Walton’s efforts must be considered as the primary
factor in so doing. He immediately instituted improvements, which were badly needed, but
even these innovations did not turn the tide to solvency completely, for by 1871 Walton
had to make a direct appeal to the directors to settle their account with him.

\begin{quote}
I would be very much obliged if the company would make a settlement with
me for my percentage for ‘69 and ‘70. I know they have not the money to
pay me, but if they would give me a draft for the amount, at four or six
months, I could use it. It would allow me to make some payments that I
have to do.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

Jacob Haehnlen continued as president of the company until 1869 at which time
John E. Fox, brother of Thomas G. Fox, bought an interest in the company and became the
next president. By June 25, 1870, Haehnlen had dispersed all his interest in the company

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} “Letter of Jacob Haehnlen to Louis Brown“, August 23, 1868, Hummelstown Brownstone
Manuscript Group, Dauphin County Historical Society.
and left while Henry Brown had his stock sheriﬁed in 1868. Walton and his wife Emma, as well as Alfred Hummel, were local people who bought into the company as did the Philadelphians Richard J. Dobbins, Philip Dougherty, Muller and Killen, William Armstrong and T. C. Hutchinson. Lewis Haehnlen and Louis Brown continued as the primary stockholders.21

As a contributor to the building trades, brownstone quarrying reﬂected the cyclical ups and downs of the country’s economic condition. The surge following the Civil War ended in 1873 and was followed by ﬁve years of economic instability. Consequently, in 1875 the Pennsylvania Brown Free Stone Company was sold at sheriff’s sale and was bought by Allen Walton. It continued with this corporate name until 1891 at which time Walton had it rechartered as the Hummelstown Brownstone Company. Walton owned 1598 shares of stock while his sons Allen K. and Robert owned 200 shares, and William J. Walton of Philadelphia and John J. Nissley of Hummelstown each owned one share. The par value of the stock was $50.00, and the amount of capital stock in the company was $100,000. Walton became the president of the company receiving a salary of $10,000 per year while Allen K. and Robert were secretary-treasurer and superintendent respectively at salaries of $2,500.

The sons were well prepared for their roles in the business. Both attended local public schools and Allen K. continued his education at a Philadelphia business school while Robert enrolled in the State Normal School at Millersville. In years to come Allen

20 “Superintendent’s Report to the Board of Directors”, April 1, 1871, Hummelstown Brownstone Manuscript Group, Dauphin County Historical Society.

K.’s business acumen led the company into its most productive years and Robert’s ability to manage men as well as his inventive imagination made him the ideal superintendent.

As the sons assumed more responsibility in the operation of the business, Allen Walton successfully dabbled in other ventures. He bought the controlling interest in the small local water company as well as the electric company which he enlarged to provide better and more extensive service. He was also appointed vice-president of the National Bank.22

The Hummelstown Brownstone Company made rapid progress in modernization of the equipment and in land purchases to expand its capacity. By 1894 the company was in control of almost 1,000 acres on which they had opened four quarries in addition to the original one started by the Bersts.

This land acquisition was made in the interest of protecting the company as well as for expansion, for on November 26, 1886, Samuel E. Fox of Cornwall, Samuel Erb of Lebanon, and Will E. Erb and Edwin Erb of Derry Township entered a partnership to quarry stone on the north side of the South Mountain adjacent to the Walton quarries on thirty acres leased from Adam Strickler. Strickler was given preference for hauling the stone as well as a two cent royalty for every measurable cubic foot of stone quarried. The original investment of these men in the fledgling company chartered as the Pennsylvania Brownstone Company Limited was $1,000 each, and the business apparently prospered, for only four years later the Waltons bought the business for $25,000, and in 1893, the Waltons bought the land from Adam Strickler.

With this competition eliminated and the demand for its stone increasing, the Hummelstown Brownstone Company stood prepared to launch into its Golden Age. With the installation of a standard gauge railroad in 1884 - 1885 connecting the quarries with the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad, the path was set to vastly increase the amount of stone which could be handled both at the quarries and on the rail line. Chartered as the Brownstone-Middletown Railroad Company, it replaced the teamsters who hauled the stone over the South Mountain from the quarries to the sawmill in Hummelstown.

Convinced that the company was now securely managed by two able sons, Allen Walton sold them his interest for the sum of one dollar. In so doing he turned over to them:

Twenty large derricks, four small derricks, three hand derricks, six setting derricks, one steam crane, twenty-five hoisting engines, one stationary engine, one 80 horse power boiler, two 50 horse power boilers, one 75 horse power boiler, one twenty horse power boiler, one 15 horse power boiler, one 12 horse power boiler, six 10 horse power boilers, one 40 horse power boiler, five Ingersol rock drills, seven steam pumps, eight dump cars and frames, sixteen dump boxes, cable hoist, engine and derricks, and cables, etc., twenty tons of light rails, sundry tools, shovels, picks, bars, chains, wedges, sledges, hammers, belting ropes, steam pipes, etc., etc., Knox patented system of blasting, also three locomotives and sixteen cars, and all other personal property belonging to me on the said property of the Hummelstown Brownstone Company.\(^{23}\)

From this inventory one can deduct that Allen Walton did a remarkable job in bringing the Hummelstown brownstone industry from its floundering beginnings to a secure and viable family industry. His sons later would establish it as Pennsylvania’s premiere brownstone business and one of the finest of its kind in the United States.

Despite the growth and prosperity of the company it remained vulnerable to the economic cycles of the country at large, for in May of 1892 The Sun reported that “nearly

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Devastatingly, in little more than one year they had to report that:

A cloud overshadowed the prospects of many on Saturday evening last when it was understood by the 350 or more workmen employed at the Hummelstown Brown Stone Quarries that the large plant would suspend operation indefinitely from that time. It had a disheartening influence over many a happy and well provided for family. --- The depression felt in the stone business here is nothing more than the natural result of mistrust and lack of confidence felt in every business circle in the broad land. Large orders, and many of them for the fall, were canceled one after another in rapid succession until little remained to do than wait for better times. It is hoped, however, that the quarries will yet be favored with a heavy fall trade.24

One month later the company reduced the wages by twenty percent of all those receiving more than one dollar a day. Unfortunately, this downward spiral did not end until the country at large pulled out of the depression in 1897.

Allen and Emma Walton frequently vacationed in Florida. It was here that Allen died on February 23, 1898. Just ten days earlier Robert had informed his father of things transpiring at home and in so doing has given us a rare personal glimpse of the close bond that must have existed between father and son.

Dear Father,

We got your telegram last evening. Also you(r) letter. I have been writing you every day since you left home and When you get back to Jacksonville if you go to the James Hotel - where you said you were going to stop - you will find mail & newspapers. We are all well. All (meaning Allen K.) went to the Funeral of Cousin Joseph Walton at Morristown today, he died on Thursday and we though(t) you would like to be

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* The words “at the different quarries” certainly include other quarries which the Waltons bought and later sold such as the Pennsylvania Brownstone Company Limited and the brownstone quarry at Goldsboro on the Susquehanna River. Most all other company records and news accounts that this author has seen list the maximum number of men employed at the Waltonville quarries at approximately 600. Indeed, only two weeks prior to this report the same newspaper stated that “the Hummelstown Brownstone Company now employs 515 men and are in need of 75 more.”

24 The Hummelstown Sun, August 4, 1893, Hummelstown Brownstone Manuscript Group, Hummelstown Area and Derry Township Historical Societies.
Represented. He died of appoplexy you were notified by Friends (since the word Friends is capitalized, it is unclear if Robert is referring to personal friends or Quaker acquaintances) you go to see in Phila.

Everything is going well here at home. We are getting along well with our work.

We(')re sorry Mother had so unpleasant a ride down. Hope she has fully recovered & is enjoying her self by this time & is quite well. You have maped out a nice trip & I hope you may be able to see all the sights. The little ones are all well & noisy as ever. Johnny is taking good care of everything. Hoping you may continue to enjoy yourself. With love from all of us. I am your affectionate son,

Rob

All said he would not write on account of going away.  

Following the depression of 1893-1897 the business slowly regained its former strength for a few years until approximately 1907, at which time the improved manufacture of concrete blocks and clay bricks as well as the use of steel as a construction material made itself felt. In addition, brownstone began losing ground in popularity to lighter colored stones such as Indiana limestone. In an attempt to counter the slowly dwindling sales of its stone and to compete with these other materials, the Waltons built a sand-lime brick plant on the quarry premises. Erected in 1905 the plant ceased operation in 1927 “for the reason that there has not been a market for the product at a price to yield any profit.”

Around 1910 to bolster its sales the company had published a handsome advertising booklet. Much of the exceptional photography in this publication was done by J. Horace McFarland and printed by him at his Mount Pleasant Press in Harrisburg. Considering the fact that McFarland was a conservationist of the highest order having worked with both John Muir and Gifford Pinchot on various projects, it is somewhat surprising that he would have worked with Hummelstown Brownstone Company.

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26 "Hummelstown Brownstone Company, “Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors”, December, 1927, Hummelstown Brownstone Manuscript Group, Dauphin County Historical Society.
photograph working quarries which, to many environmentalists, represent the rape of the land.

By 1927 the quarries ceased operation while the sawmill and stonecutters’ shed continued to process quarried stone that was on hand, but at this point the Company was in its death throes. It struggled valiantly to thwart the final blow by selling many small tracts of land, but the Great Depression of 1929 delivered the coup de grace. The dissolution of the company occurred at a special meeting of the board of directors called by Allen K. Walton on December 3, 1929.

The Hummelstown Brownstone Company for the value received does hereby assign, transfer and, set over unto Allen K. Walton his heirs and assigns, all right, title and interest, in and to all the personal property consisting of quarried stone, finished product, brick machinery, tools lumber, etc., etc. --.27

27 “Minutes of Meetings of Board of Directors”, loc. cit., December 1929, Hummelstown Brownstone Manuscript Group, Dauphin County Historical Society.