

“Building Stones of the Northwest”

(Minnesota, Northern Wisconsin, & Canadian north shore of Lake Superior)

In Stone, An Illustrated Magazine, Vol. 5, No. 1
June 1892, pp. 36-40

This article, which begins on the next page,
is presented on the Stone Quarries and Beyond web site.

<http://quarriesandbeyond.org/>

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September 2013

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“The building stones of the northwest furnish a basis for many important industries. They are yearly becoming of more importance as the cheap structures which characterize the first settlement of all countries are being replaced by permanent edifices; as public buildings of a substantial character are being erected by states and counties and by the Federal Government, and as the increase of wealth leads private citizens to put up handsome homes. Our quarries are destined to constantly increase in their money-earning power and their capacity for the steady employment of skilled labor. Their value should be more widely appreciated and the area of distribution of their products should be widened by systematic effort. Up to this time the market for the building stones of Minnesota and Northern Wisconsin has been limited to these states and to the prairie states further West. From the great market of Chicago our quarrymen are practically shut out by unjust discrimination in railway tariffs made in favor of the New England quarries. To remedy this manifest unfairness, which puts Maine granite down in Chicago for a less rate than is charged for a haul of one-third the distance from St. Cloud, the intelligent cooperation of our quarrymen is needed. A strong organization should be effected and a competent executive committee appointed to persist in an effort for fair rates until the roads are brought to terms. No injustice can long resist exposure and vigorous opposition. It is no doubt for the interest of the Eastern trunk roads to keep the Northwestern stone out of Chicago, but it is just as much for the interest of our home roads running from our quarries to that city to haul our excellent building material to that market; and if they should make a fight for the right to do so at rates corresponding with the length of their haul compared with that from the distant quarries of New England they would succeed. The result would be to give them an enormous tonnage and to double or treble the magnitude of the stone industry in this region. For durability, for variety of texture and color and for economy in quarrying our stone is unsurpassed anywhere in the world. We have granite that takes a higher polish than the famous Aberdeen granite of Scotland and is found in more beautiful tints; we have jasper of the finest quality; we have a wide range of sandstones, including a dark-red stone handsomer than that obtained in New England, and we have excellent limestone. Many of our quarries lie convenient to both water and rail transportation; all of them are reached by important railway systems.

“Let us look first at the limestone, which, for its abundance along the Mississippi, and the fact that it is excavated from foundations in the business district of St. Paul, came first into use in that city for business blocks and churches. This stone is somewhat discredited of late because of its softness and the fact that it is scaly and absorbs moisture. There is a difference in the quality of St. Paul limestone from different quarries.

“The hardest of our limestone is that known as Kasota stone or Mankato stone, from the two points, twelve miles apart on the Minnesota River, where it is quarried. It has a pinkish color when first cut. It discolors in the smoky atmosphere of the city, but it is in all respects an excellent, durable stone. About 500 men are employed in the quarries of Mankato and Kasota, which are the most extensive in Minnesota. The stone finds its chief market in Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas and Missouri.

“At Dressbach, on the Mississippi, a light-colored sandstone is quarried. It is not popular by reason of its rapid discoloration under the influence of the weather. Its merit is the great ease with which it can be worked. The sandstone of Kettle River, Minnesota, is of a very different quality, being so hard that it might also be called a crystallized stone. These quarries are increasing their output and assuming an important rank. This stone has been extensively used in Minneapolis for street curbs.

“The brown stones of the north shore of Lake Superior are of high quality and of durable color. These are pure sandstone, of a ruddy color and have great crushing strength. The principal quarry is at Iron River, twenty-eight miles from Duluth.

“The Bayfield sandstone has a dark-red color and an excellent texture and has so high a reputation that it is shipped to the East and the South. It is taken out of a number of quarries on the shore of Lake Superior, near Bayfield, and Ashland, Wisconsin. It is as easily carved as marble and hardens by exposure, resembling in this respect the cream-colored sandstone used in Paris. The Portage Entry stone of the northern peninsula of Michigan, resembles closely that of Bayfield and competes with it at Eastern points. The Fond du Lac stone, quarried near Duluth, is of a somewhat lighter color, owing to a different stain of oxides, and is a strong favorite in the Twin Cities as well as in Duluth and Superior. Its texture is a little closer than that of the Bayfield stone and it is consequently a little harder to work.

“At Luverne, in the extreme southwestern part of Minnesota, is quarried a crystallized sandstone of blood color, a little somber but very novel and striking in effect.

“At North Sioux Falls, Minnesota, there is a silicified stone of strawberry color, commonly called jasper, but not a true jasper, which is exceedingly handsome and is destined to become popular. Among the useful stones may also be mentioned that of Frontenac, Minnesota, on the Mississippi, which is cheaply quarried and is used locally.

“We now come to the granites, which are the special pride of Minnesota. The most extensive ledges of gray and red granite found anywhere in the United States in a position for successful quarrying are unquestionably those in Stearns and Benton counties, near the town of St. Cloud and Sauk Rapids. The first work done on those ledges was done about eighteen years ago by Matt Breen, of St. Paul. The industry has steadily grown but is hampered, as we have said before, by unfair freight rates, and it received a blow a few years ago from a source which should have been its friend. The State established a reformatory at East St. Cloud, which is in fact a penitentiary for convicts sentenced for short terms, and these men are kept at work cutting stone. This circumstance would not necessarily have been detrimental to the stone industry had not the management of the institution cut the prices in order to at once command a market. Having nothing to pay for the prison labor except the cost of feeding and guarding the men the management of the reformatory could make a figure on curb stone and paving stone, which are the chief reliance of granite quarries, far below what the firms in the quarry business must charge. The result was that capitalists contemplating important improvements abandoned their plans and a number of quarries were closed. There should be statutory restrictions placed on these prison quarries so that it should be unlawful to place their products on the market at rates destructive of free competition. Fewer men are now at work in the quarries of Stearns and Benton than there were three years ago when the St. Cloud Reformatory was established. The State had no moral right to deal this blow at a great and promising industry.

“Mention should be made here of the Ortonville granite, which comes from the western border of Minnesota. It is not specially inviting in color, but it lies in an enormous stratum from which monster pieces are taken out. The new Hennepin County court house in Minneapolis is built of this material.

“We now come to the jasper, a pink stone of a hardness equal to granite and of a finer texture. At the town of Jasper, in Pipestone County, on the Great Northern road, are found the most important ledges of this stone. Solid pieces twenty-five feet long have been taken out.

“On the north shore of Lake Superior, about thirty mile east of Port Arthur, a very handsome variegated stone is quarried, which is called jasper, and is well suited for panels, mantels, table-tops and other uses which employ ornamental marbles.

“The Lake Superior region, long famous for its mineral riches, and just now enjoying a new distinction through the quite marvelous iron ore discoveries near Duluth on the Mesaba Range – known to the Indians as the ‘Big Man’s Hills,’ seem destined to be famed as far and wide for other and perhaps more precious deposits.

“Gold, silver and copper have been found, of times in abundant quantities, while coal deposits are believed to be awaiting the fortunate explorer and enterprising capitalist, without whom the secret stores of nature are of as little use as the flowers that felicitate the desert air.

“But though it would seem a fairy tale to assert still further claims for this realm of the inland waters, yet the recent discovery of colored marble in the beautiful Algoma district on the Canadian north shore of Lake Superior impels the truthful chronicler to do so. Explorations made last September resulted in this rich find thirty miles east of Port Arthur on the Canadian Pacific railway and almost within hearing of the breakers on the lake. The formation appears on the surface, projecting somewhat above its surroundings, and covers an area of sixty miles. Blocks of the marble were cut out and sawed into slabs which have been sent to Chicago and other eastern points for examination.

“The marble is a most beautiful variegated kind, especially adapted for interior furnishings and more rare and precious than any similar formation in the United States. It would take the place of the African and Italian colored marble for mantels, table-tops, panels, and the myriad things of convenience and beauty that give an exquisite charm to the modern home. It takes a dry polish as distinguished from the acid finish of its foreign competitors, and is unaffected by time or the elements. The reflection from the polished surface is almost that of a mirror, and as the deposit is free from cracks and blemishes, a block or slab of any desired dimensions can be secured. The same block sawed into a number of slabs presents as many different and unique surfaces, for no two are more alike than two window panes under the magic and beautiful touch of Jack Frost. One presents the appearance of mosses, another of autumn leaves, others of grasses, cones, and the innumerable growths and debris of primeval forests, as if the soul of inanimate nature had found a heaven in the hidden deposits of this Northland.

“The ephemeral creations of thousands of years ago are thus preserved in all the beauty of their original luster and outline, and there is presented to the interested observer the petrified remains of vegetation kissed into being by the sunshine before man had known the earth and while perhaps the stars were singing their matin song.

“How wondrous, indeed, are the riches of this realm in which Neptune and the Snow King contend for supremacy! In a region barren and desolate to the pioneer, forbidden even to those who could see for it a commercial future, nature has been lavish of her bounties and man has transformed them into present blessings. Not content with a variety of beautiful woods, with iron and many other metals, marble has been added in abundant quantities and of unrivaled excellence. With the growing affluence of the American people this new discovery promises to come into great demand, and the owner of a marble quarry will have a more precious possession than he who holds in fee mines of silver or gold.

“The convenience of this deposit to deep water and to railway transportation, vastly enhances its value in the ground and opens to it all the markets of the East. Lake Superior is thus rapidly becoming not only the head of navigation but the great center of many industries; and though she may be an ‘unsalted sea,’ the riches of her shores are ‘the salt of the earth.’ – *The Northwestern Magazine*.”

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For more information on Minnesota, northern Wisconsin, and Lake Superior Canadian quarries, see the online links below.

Kasota limestone (on Wikipedia)
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kasota_limestone

Sandstone Quarries of the Keweenaw (page 1), Copper County Explorer
<http://www.coppercountryexplorer.com/2009/06/sandstone-quarries-of-the-keweenaw-p1/>

Sandstone Quarries of the Keweenaw (page 2), Copper County Explorer
<http://www.coppercountryexplorer.com/2009/06/sandstone-quarries-of-the-keweenaw-p2/>

Jasper Stone Company and Quarry, Jasper, Minnesota, National Park Service
<http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/pipestone/jsq.htm>

Quarry Park and Nature Preserve, Stearns County, Minnesota
<http://www.co.stearns.mn.us/Recreation/CountyParks/QuarryParkandNaturePreserve>

Minnesota Mining History, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/education/geology/digging/history.html>

St. Cloud, Minnesota, “The Granite City,” by Ross A. Swanson
<http://www.saintcloudgranite.com/>

Pipestone National Monument (quarries), National Park Service, U. S. Dept. of the Interior
<http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/pipestone/pnm.htm>

(Stone Quarrying online links continue on the next page.)

The First Granite Quarry (the Breen and Young granite quarry now the St. Cloud Reformatory), Waymark web site.

http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WM4G11_The_First_Granite_Quarry

Historical photographs of Minnesota stone quarries, Minnesota Reflections, Minnesota Digital Library

<http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/search/searchterm/Quarries%20and%20quarrying/mode/exact>

Minnesota: A State Guide, American Guide Series (Scroll down to “Quarrying.”)

<http://newdeal.feri.org/guides/mn/ch08.htm>

Lake Superior Brownstone, Kurt Larson

http://battleaxcamp.tripod.com/lake_superior_brownstone.htm

Quarrying Industry in Wisconsin, Wisconsin Historical Society

http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp?action=view&term_id=11558&term_type_id=3&term_type_text=things

Jacobsville Sandstone “primarily found in northern upper Michigan, portions of Ontario, and under much of Lake Superior” (on Wikipedia)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacobsville_Sandstone

Rock Descriptions: Click on a Rock Type to go to a map of the Quarries that they are from..., University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Dept. of Geosciences

http://www4.uwm.edu/lets/lets/lets/geosciences/trips_tours/urban_geo_new/rock_types.html

Duck Creek Quarries, Wisconsin, Steven Dutch, Natural and Applied Sciences, University of Wisconsin – Green Bay

<http://www4.uwsp.edu/geo/projects/geoweb/participants/dutch/geolwisc/geostops/duckquar.htm>

Questions about quarry: Search for pipestone unearths answers, by Brian Lavendel (the Pipestone Quarry Trail)

<http://www.rice-lake.com/docs/forms/PipestoneQuarryarticleandmap.pdf>

Geologic Outcrops of Wisconsin Map (includes quarries), University of Wisconsin

<https://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&oe=UTF8&msa=0&msid=201287661414946146895.00049a216be1e5095ffea>

Mellen Black Granite, Geocaching

http://www.geocaching.com/geocache/GC1A3WR_black-granite?guid=f7d83efe-d20e-4770-9776-c77362b31021

Basswood Island: The Apostles’ Emerald Isle, Bob Mackreth, The Retread Ranger Station

<http://bobmackreth.com/erin.html>

North Shore (Lake Superior) (Wikipedia)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Shore_%28Lake_Superior%29