

# **“Profitable Trades Are Plentiful; Good Chance in Granite Work”**

By C. P. M'Donald

*San Francisco Call* ,Vol. 114, No. 36, July 6, 1913, pp. 33.

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

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June 2015

## **“Profitable Trades Are Plentiful; Good Chance in Granite Work”**

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“Young men who really want to learn a profitable trade may find one without the least difficulty, according to John J. Sloan, general manager of the Wisconsin Granite Company.

“No field-today,’ declares Mr. Sloan, affords more splendid opportunities to the young man for learning a well paying trade at which work always may be obtained than that of paving cutting, drilling and blacksmithing for a quarrier. It is a healthful work, all outdoor labor, and his remuneration is good.

“A competent paving cutter earns from \$5 to \$8 a day, a driller from \$3 to \$14, a blacksmith from \$4 to \$6. He is permitted to settle in a good locality and is given excellent advantages for acquiring his own home and a competence. He becomes rugged, strong and healthy.

“The cost of living in our communities is exceedingly low. For from \$4.50 to \$5 a week he may have substantial food and a good room. These communities, situated at Redgranite, Lohrville, Berlin, Spring Lake, Waupaca and Montello, have good schools, churches of various denominations, fraternal orders, theaters, amusement resorts, parks. They shelter from 1,000 to 5,000 persons each.



### **Cities Use Millions of Blocks**

“The extent to which the granite block industry has developed in the last few years may be estimated by the consumption of Chicago alone. \$100,000,000 of these blocks having been used in the seven years since traction rehabilitation began. Minneapolis, Detroit, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Milwaukee and many other large cities use millions of them annually.

“Young men are put to work at 25 cents an hour. They are taught the business from the ground up. A school for this purpose is conducted at Berlin, Wis. As soon as their earnings exceed that hour rate they are placed on piece work and thus enabled to earn the big wages received by the paving cutters.

“It takes about 90 days to develop the young man into a competent driller, and from driller to paving cutter is but a short step. When he advances his place is filled by a quarryman or laborer, whose chances for working up the ladder are equal to those of any other employe (sic).

“Four different kinds of blocks are made both in size and smoothness of finish. The ordinary block weighs 20 pounds and is 10 inches long and 5 inches square. The average railroad car can accommodate 4,000 of these finished blocks.

## **Process of Reduction**

“A skilled paving cutter can cut about 200 blocks in a day. The stone is blasted and quarried out in large units of approximately five tons weight, hoisted by derrick, placed on cars and...down to the paving cutters’ motions – a space along the track 15 feet long – the cutter’s berth, so to speak. It then is drilled by pneumatic air tools and split by plugs and feathers. A plug is a steel wedge and feathers are two slender bits of steel that are thrust into the drilled hole and between which the wedge is driven. The hole drilled by these pneumatic air tools is about four inches deep. The granite is so true grained that it will split straight through a three foot section.

“This process of reduction is followed until the slabs are brought down to a 10 x 10 x 20 slab – 20 inches long, 10 inches wide and 10 inches deep. It is in this size that they are turned over to the paving cutters.

“The cutter then with his 20 pound hammer traces a line in the center of the slab, turns it over, and at a point opposite the traced line strikes it three or four heavy blows, which cause the rock to part smoothly along the traced line. He continues this process with the different pieces until he has all his blocks mapped out – broken out roughly. Then with the reel, tiffler, or side hammer he dresses his blocks to conform to whatever specifications he may have before him.

## **Need Good Eye and Stroke**

“The tiffler is a sharp edged hammer weighing six pounds; the side hammer weighs about nine pounds; the reel a long flat piece of steel, finely sharpened, also is used as a hammer and weighs about three pounds. The reel is wielded with an overhand stroke.

“The paving cutter’s greatest assets are a straight eye and a sure stroke. I have seen trained cutters strike a dozen blows in the same groove and never vary a hair’s breadth on a single stroke, which makes the uniform character of the blocks as seen in the finished product.

“The dressing tools have to be re-sharpened every two hours, and an expert blacksmith or tool sharpener earns 45 cents an hour.

“The ability of a workman is shown by the manner in which he maps out a stone and minimizes the subsequent dressing required. Cutters often have contests. Ten or a dozen trained cutters

will get together, hanging up a purse, and the man who cuts the greatest number of blocks in a day receives the price. The addition to this prize, he gets the increased earnings, and if he is

working by the piece his earnings are quite high. He has his choice of pay – by the day, 50 cents an hour; \$28.50 a thousand for certain sizes, \$24 a thousand for others, and \$18.50 for a third size. As he can, if he is a good workman, dress 300 or more blocks a day, it will be seen his earning capacity is in the neighborhood of \$10 a day on piecework, and most of them prefer to get paid for what they do. He works nine hours a day and five hours on Saturday, and is paid on the first and fifteenth days of each month.

## **Steady Work Draws Good Men**

“Cutters in a granite quarry seldom are idle. About the only thing that stops work is a heavy snowstorm. The companies permit them to work along even in dull seasons. Sometimes in a representative quarry you will find millions of finished blocks on hand awaiting work that may not (be) developed for a year or more. The steadiness with which these quarries operate has the effect of drawing the right class of workmen from all over the country.

“In most instances the companies have erected scores of houses and sold them to the workmen on easy payments. Over half of the quarry employes (sic) own their own homes and the remainder will in time become property owners. They are encouraged in acquiring their own homes. Lots may be obtained on most reasonable terms of payment, extending over long periods.

“It has been my experience that the best paving cutters are those who begin before they reach their majority. Most of the cutting is done with a wrist movement, and the young men become more adept at dressing than those whose muscles are more set.

## **Foreign Wages Too Low**

“Until four or five years ago practically all granite block cutting in the country was done by men of foreign birth. In the last few years, however, many apprentices have been taken on, and a concerted effort now is being made to teach the young American citizens the business lines of this trade.

“The large quarries in Leicestershire, England, yield small remuneration to their cutters compared with that paid by the American companies. In the Leicestershire quarries a competent paving cutter receives on an average £1 a day. In Sweden, where large granite block quarries are in operation the average wage is 90 cents a day. In Wales the cutter makes \$4 a week, in Scotland about \$5. With wages running as high as \$8 a day in this country, great numbers of foreigners have sought work here.

“Contrary to the general belief, a chisel or a foot rule can not be found in a big American quarry. The cutters span the slabs with their fingers and they do it as accurately to the fraction of an inch as you or I could measure the slabs with a rule.

“Quarrying in general affords remunerative and healthful work for thousands of young men. The field is not overcrowded. Especially is this true of paving cutters.”