

“The Granite Industry of Quincy” **(Massachusetts)**

*Stone, An illustrated monthly magazine devoted
to Stone, Marble, Granite, Slate, Cement,
Contracting and Building*

Frank W. Hoyt, Publisher, New York

Vol. XXVII, No. 2, December 1903

This article begins:

For a number of years Massachusetts held a proud place at the head of the granite producing States. Until 1899 its nearest competitor, Maine, did not approach within half a million dollars in the value of its granite output. In the next year Maine had climbed up to within a hundred thousand dollars of Massachusetts, and in 1901 it passed the Bay State, and has since retained the lead. The largest portion of the Massachusetts output of granite comes from the famous quarries at Quincy. The quarries at Chelmsford were freely worked from 1810, but the industry at Quincy had its origin in 1825, when the quarries were called upon to furnish stone for Bunker Hill Monument. A very excellent sketch of the granite industry at Quincy is given by the Boston ‘Sunday Post,’ and this is so pertinent to the subjects to which this magazine is devoted that we venture to quote it....”

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

<http://quarriesandbeyond.org/>

Peggy B. Perazzo
Email: pbperazzo@comcast.net
February 2016

THE GRANITE INDUSTRY OF QUINCY.

FOR a number of years Massachusetts held a proud place at the head of the granite producing States. Until 1899 its nearest competitor, Maine, did not approach within half a million dollars in the value of its granite output. In the next year Maine had climbed up to within a hundred thousand dollars of Massachusetts, and in 1901 it passed the Bay State, and has since retained the lead. The largest proportion of the Massachusetts output of granite comes from the famous quarries at Quincy. The quarries at Chelmsford were freely worked from 1810, but the industry at Quincy had its origin in 1825, when the quarries were called upon to furnish stone for Bunker Hill Monument. A very excellent sketch of the granite industry at Quincy is given by the Boston "Sunday Post," and this is so pertinent to the subjects to which this magazine is devoted that we venture to quote it.

As far back as the year 1715, so we read, the residents of Quincy township had a keen appreciation of the value of the basic rock on which and of which, to a certain extent, they had erected their homes, says the writer.

Although it was not until a century later that quarrying for granite for building purposes began, the excellence of the loose boulders scattered upon the hillsides for structural purposes had even then become noised abroad, and much to the grief and discomfiture of the town authorities there was a keen demand for the stone on every side, the builders of the growing city of Boston being probably the most anxious to secure the stone. Ignorant then and for many generations afterward that under these moss-grown boulders there existed untold millions of tons of far superior material, the town Selectmen watched with lowering brows the rapid diminution of the visible granite supply, and so enacted measures to check the depredations on their common lands.

It became the absorbing topic and exciting question of the time. Year after year at the annual town meetings the oratory launched into denunciatory eloquence on the subject of highway robbery, while the lawyers, in less impassioned tones, quoted this or that authority on the law of trespass. Quincy was wrought up, and, as was her wont, acted. A stringent bylaw was passed, making the carrying away of any stone from the common lands a misdemeanor, the penalty provided being a fine of 10 shillings a load, one-quarter of which sum was to go to the committee appointed to supervise the enactment of the law. Each inhabitant, however, was allowed as much as he desired of the coveted rock for his own personal use.

Thus it will be seen that two centuries ago Quincy realized that mother earth had beneficently endowed her, although it was more than 100 years later before she grasped the extent of the endowment. The quarry owners of Quincy to-day announce in advertising their wares that the district produced the first granite used for monumental and building work in the United States, and supplement that announcement with the assertion that it still holds the first place. It is a bold assertion, but borne out by facts.

There is no city of size in America to-day that does not contain some

substantial souvenir wrought from the incomparable Quincy granite, some noble edifice, stately wall, or soaring turret; not one resting place of the nation's illustrious dead but bears mute evidence to the enduring beauty of that most enduring stone, in sarcophagi, monuments or tombs. For more than three-quarters of a century have the hewers of stone been delving deep into the bowels of the earth, each additional foot demonstrating but one thing—the increased value of that peerless granite. With granite, as with all fundamental rocks, the greater the depth the less the decomposition, the closer the grain, and, therefore, the greater the commercial value.

While the figures relating to the output of granite from the Quincy quarries are obtainable for the last 30 years, those telling of the output for the half century before are merely approximate. Still the sum total of stone taken from those vast chasms has been estimated within half a million tons. It is somewhere between 6,000,000 and 7,000,000 tons; to be conservative, 6,000,000. Six million tons! A huge quantity, truly, but who can realize how huge? With pencil and paper it can be done, 10 cubic feet of rock making one ton. Three railroads have been constructed across the northern portion of the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific, but a stone wall from East to West has not been a necessity. Suppose one were! The granite taken from Quincy's quarries would build it, from Portland, Me., to Portland, Ore., three and one-half feet high and one foot thick. Should heavier rolling stock on our three transcontinental roads necessitate a more stable roadbed, heavier ties, the stone taken from Quincy's granite pits would be sufficient to duplicate every tie on the three lines from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and it might be asserted with perfect safety that ballasting would then be an unnecessary expense, as first-class granite has never been known to succumb to the ravages of time. Much of Quincy's stone has been utilized for structural purposes, and many noble edifices bear witness to its strength and beauty. Had the six million tons been devoted to that purpose exclusively, a continuous row of granite mansions could have been built, four stories high, with a depth of 50 feet, which would have extended $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles.

Of latter years unequalled bluestone from those mountains of granite has been used almost exclusively for monumental purposes. Monuments and columns differ considerably as to thickness, and one of six feet square is of fair proportion. Quincy's output during three-quarters of a century, had it been so utilized, would have been sufficient to construct a veritable Tower of Babel, for while it might not have reached the skies, it would assuredly have pierced the fleeciery clouds. The column would have soared to a height of 315 2-3 miles, or, to make a comparison, some 7,541 times as high as Bunker Hill Monument, and as that latter magnificent work is entirely of Quincy granite, the comparison may be considered an apt one.

There would seem to be something more than mere coincidence in the construction of Bunker Hill Monument—a structure commemorative of the most decisive victory in liberty's cause—of granite from Quincy, the home of the Adamses, and oft proclaimed cradle of independence. Yet Dr. Pattee, the eminent Quincy historian, asserts that it was nothing more. The architect entrusted with that most important work, Solomon Willard, he tells us, upon

being chosen, spent several weeks and walked several hundred miles searching for an appropriate material before deciding upon Quincy granite. Then was commenced the first quarrying operations in a district that was destined to produce more granite and stone of better quality than any other on the continent. This was in 1822, and three years later Bunker Hill quarry was in full blast. From the outset transportation of the huge blocks presented the greatest difficulties, and to overcome these Willard proposed building a railway. He was laughed at by almost everybody, but, persevering in his efforts, succeed in 1825 in securing permission from the Legislature to build a railway from his quarry to tidewater at Neponset bridge, the first to be completed in America.

The first granite quarry in the country brought the first railway, and the dual venture was christened the Granite Railroad, a title it bears to-day. The road was rapidly completed, the ties being of granite and the rails of pine, capped with sheet iron. The pine, being found too light, was in the course of a few months superseded by granite rails, which continued in place for many years. Willard's two-fold venture attracted national attention and was instrumental in the construction of many similar roads, and the further exploitation of the granite mountains of Quincy. He opened the eyes of the people to the possibilities of granite as a building material, and within a very short period a large number of structures were under way in Boston and elsewhere.

Prior to the development of the quarries of Quincy some two or three large buildings had been erected of the rough surface boulders, notably King's Chapel in 1752, the old John Hancock House south of State street, a few years later, and the old powder mill in what was then termed West Boston. The first edifice built of the excavated stones, which was destined to add millions in wealth to the town of Quincy, was the United States Branch Bank, erected in 1824. Solomon Willard supervised the construction of this building, and followed it by a number of others. Tremont House, torn down to make way for the present Tremont building, was built entirely of Quincy stone and was finished in 1828. The hammering work on the portico and pillars of the old Tremont House was done by State prisoners.

Other granite structures erected at that time were the Dedham Courthouse, Suffolk and Norfolk County Courthouses, while in 1828 two famous monuments rose majestically to tell of the possibilities of Quincy stone, that to Franklin in Granary Burial Ground, and the Harvard Monument in Charlestown's old historic cemetery. The Boston Custom House was commenced in 1837 and took twelve years to complete. The magnificent Doric columns, weighing 50 tons each, necessitated the employment of 65 yoke of oxen and 12 horses to convey them to the site.

Quincy granite had now attained a national reputation and a large number of government contracts were signed. In quick succession were built the United States dry docks at Charlestown and Gosport, Va., the New Orleans Custom House, and similar structures at Mobile, Savannah, Portland, Me., San Francisco and Providence. Worcester County Courthouse, San Francisco Exchange, Trinity Church, Boston, and the New York Exchange

followed, the stone for the latter building calling, on account of the size of the fluted columns, for great care on the part of the quarrymen. Blocks 80 feet in length were quarried, and some of the pillars cost \$4,000. The last buildings of note to be constructed of Quincy granite were the Merchants' Exchange Building, Boston, and the new Masonic Temple, Ridgeway Library and other structures in Philadelphia.

By 1870 this famous granite was known throughout the civilized world, and orders for monumental work were being received from Europe, South America, and even South Africa, while every cemetery almost in the United States contained tombs made from it. Early in the '70s two factors combined to prohibit the further use of Quincy granite for building purposes. The principal cause was the rediscovery of the long lost art of polishing granite, with which the artisans of Quincy had much to do. Lost to the knowledge of man since the days of the Paraohs, it was rediscovered in 1872.

The other factor was the quarrying at Cape Ann and other points on the coast of Maine and elsewhere of a granite much lighter in color, which superseded the more sombre appearing Quincy stone. Since the rediscovery of the art of polishing, however, Quincy has not felt the loss of her building business, as her output of stone has increased year by year, there being no serious competitor in the field as a producer of that peerless dark blue granite, which, conducing to embellishment in a high degree, is the standard stone for monumental purposes.

So has the great granite industry of Quincy grown, from the scratching of the surface for a few scattered moss-grown boulders, until in the succession of huge chasms industrious man has demonstrated his ability to transform mountain tops into valleys. The greater the depth the purer the product, and the supply is seemingly inexhaustible. Where originally a few residents clamored for the possession of the rough surface stones, to-day some 1,500 toilers, representing an additional population of twice that number, delve and cut and carve that the world may have of the most durable monuments known. High-class artisans, in the main, their remuneration is high, and through the agency of granite, that most lasting and most valuable of the crusts of the earth, Quincy has ceased to be a bedchamber of Boston, and has become a thriving independent city.

There are two distinct granite ranges in the district, that of Quincy and West Quincy. First to be exploited was the latter, and here it is that the greater number of quarries are worked. The principal ones are the Granite Railway and those of T. F. Mannex and D. T. Royers. Others are small in comparison. The other group embraces Hardwicks, the Hitchcock Dell and the Merry Mount quarries. The six named have produced more than three-fourths of the entire product of the district, and each gives evidence of the excavation of hundreds of thousands of tons of stone. The Granite Railway, the first established and largest of all, has excavated in a huge open cut to the depth of 175 feet, while the adjacent quarry known as the Mannex, is 200 feet deep. In all, some 200 acres of surface have been exploited to a depth, and there are thousands yet remaining, the possibilities of which are unknown.

Upwards of 100 firms are engaged in cutting, polishing and carving the

rough product from the quarries, and in this branch of the business skilled artisans from all parts of Europe and the United States are employed. Until 30 years ago this work was accomplished by hand, and the task of polishing and cutting was extremely laborious. This is all done now by modern machinery. The pay roll for the past year of the Quincy granite workers was slightly less than \$1,100,000.
