

Inyo County, California, Stone Industry Circa 1887

Excerpts from the

Second Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of California for the years 1885 and 1886, California Office of State Bureau of Labor Statistics, Sacramento: J. D. Young, Supt. State Printing, 1887, pp. 193-195.

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This excerpt, which begins on the next page, is presented on the Stone Quarries and Beyond web site in the California state section.
<http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/california.html>

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August 2011

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“Inyo County lies between the State line and the high Sierra Nevada Mountains, the western boundary being along the summit of the latter, at an elevation of several thousand feet above the general level of the rest of the country and 8,000 or 10,000 above the sea. Northerly and southerly it extends from township line between townships 5 and 6 on the north, and a sixty standard line on the south, and contains 8,120 square miles, and a population of between 3,000 and 4,000. It is a country where extremes meet; a country of startling contrasts, such as are to be found, probably, nowhere else on the continent; a country of rugged and giant peaks, among which are Mt. Abbott (12,400 feet), Mt. King (14,000 feet), Mt. Williamson (14,500 feet), Mt. Tyndall (14,386 feet), Mt. Whitney (15,000 feet), and Inyo (some 15,000 feet), upon which the snow of ages forever rests, and forming a giant wall upon its west, as if to shut it from all connection with the State of which it forms a part, marked by precipitous and sharp outlines and deep chasms, such as to render an ascent to their summits from their eastern slopes almost an impossibility; a country where to the eastward of those peaks pointing heavenward the earth’s surface ins hundreds of feet beneath the level of the sea, as in that valley, once the valley of mystery and fear, known as Death’s Valley; a country of beautiful and fertile plains, and of forbidding wastes; a country of almost Arctic frosts and torrid heat...”

“...But there is another source of wealth possessed by this county of comparatively recent discovery. We allude to a vast quarry of the finest marble. A writer, speaking of the discovery, says:

It is virtually a mountain of marble, rising to nearly 1,000 feet above the level of Owens River Valley. Whether or not its existence had before attracted attention is not known, but about 4 months ago D. A. Bender, of the Nevada and Colorado Railroad Company, procured a piece of the marble, and sent it to Israel Luce, a well known and experienced marble worker in Sacramento, to be tested as to its quality. Mr. Luce, after making several tests, became convinced that it was of a superior quality. He then visited the Owens Lake section, and satisfied himself of the fact that the ledge, or mountain, was practically inexhaustible, and the marble extra fine throughout - by all odds the best ever found on the coast. Further tests convinced him that it was better even than the famed Italian marble, and for these reasons:

1. It is whiter, clearer, and of a better uniform color throughout.
2. It is stronger, having double the power of resistance to crushing weight.
3. It is free from flint.
4. It will not stain as readily as Italian or other marbles.

5. It will not effervesce by the application of muriatic acid, and if acid will not work on it, it is but reasonable to suppose that atmosphere will not. Geology teaches that dolomite (marble) or magnesian limestone is the most durable stone of the secondary formation; also, that being burned into quicklime it makes a more desirable cement than common limestone, owing to the fact that it absorbs less carbonic acid from the atmosphere than the latter. The eminent geologist, Von Beach, maintains that this peculiar quality of dolomite has been given it by volcanic vapor or gas. Some deny this, but give no better - nor, indeed, any other - cause for this change in the nature of marble.

“If this marble is all that is claimed for it in quality and quantity, Inyo has in this a better source of wealth and prosperity than in all her mines.

“The Carson and Colorado Railroad runs through the valley from end to end. Fine marble quarries are being opened and worked at Owens Lake, and works for the evaporation of the waters of that lake to obtain the soda are now set afloat.”

“The tax list for 1885 shows no falling off from 1884, but in the last few months the population has increased and the county has obviously made material progress. The advent of the Carson and Colorado Railroad upset old conditions, and the transition state was a trying one. That state, however, is now past, and the county is coming every day to a basis more and more permanent and thorough, and more in accord with the new conditions.”