

“Bolton Flagging”

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<http://quarriesandbeyond.org/>

Peggy B. Perazzo
Email: pbperazzo@comcast.net
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Bolton Flagging.

Sixteen miles east of Hartford, Conn., in the town of Bolton, is a quarry of remarkable stone, not duplicated in its qualities by any other in this country. The stone is a micaceous slate, but is so thoroughly filled with mica that the slaty matrix is barely discernible by the eye. The best qualities of this stone are not affected by moisture and frosts, are not corroded by acids nor stained by oils, and a slab of it will bend perceptibly before it breaks. As a pavement, its durable quality is also remarkable; there are flags of it on a busy street in Hartford that have been trodden for more than fifty years, and are in good condition now. This stone is in great demand for floors and tables for chemical factories and laboratories, for hospitals, and in public buildings where constant cleanliness is a requisite. The area of these flags is limited; very seldom is one quarried with a superficies of two hundred square feet.

The quarries are in the mountains known locally as the "Bolton Range," and forming the eastern boundary of the Connecticut River valley. They are at an elevation of about 1,000 feet above the level of the Connecticut River, and are of considerable antiquity, having been worked continuously for more than sixty years. In 1820, flags of this stone were sent to Washington, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and to New Orleans. At the first, the quarrying was largely done by means of gunpowder; but this destroyed more than was gotten out in a marketable condition. Now gunpowder is used only to remove the superincumbent rock to make the ledge bare; all the slabs are taken out by the use of crowbar and wedge. The ledge has been traced for more than six miles, but much of it is valueless because of the cost of getting out the stone, the layers being at an angle, so that the surface rock may be reached in one place at a depth of less than six feet, but within one hundred feet surface distance it will be sixty feet below the soil. The rock is split into slabs only where natural divisions occur; some slabs may be only half an inch thick, while others are five inches, and as they are they must remain, for no chiseling can effect another division. Indeed, the only means of dressing the stone is by hammering, the edges being dressed in this way; the surfaces remain in their natural state, smooth and glistening. These natural divisions may be traced by the eye, sometimes entirely around a block, and where the minute crack appears, rows of thin iron wedges are inserted and gently forced in by hammers until one lamina can be lifted from the rest like the well-baked upper crust of a pie.

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