

# Westford's 'gold' in Lawrence streets

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WESTFORD - If the city of Lawrence, as it has threatened, goes to court to disprove this is the worst city in which to live in the nation, one argument could be to show that some of its streets are paved with Westford granite of the finest quality.

Rand McNally publishing company says Lawrence rates as the least desirable city in which to live in this nation, the result of it being listed in the recently-published Places Rated Almanac.

The two authors who compiled statistics for the article surely may have overlooked the fact that the mill city's streets, although not paved with gold, have stood up well for more than a century.

Score a plus for Lawrence - and Westford, too.

More than a century ago an ambitious Westford man, Noah Prescott, a descendant in a long line of early settlers, agreed to furnish the city with 1,200 square yards of "the best quality of Westford Granite to be used for paving."

At age 26, Noah was most enterprising. A badly battered memo book shows that he fulfilled his part of the agreement. We presume, too, that Lawrence paid up. The gracefully, hand-written contract dated March 6, 1971, spelled in detail the terms.

Each block was to be five to 10 inches in length, four to five in width and seven to eight inches deep. The blocks to be laid between the "horse car railroad tracks," however, were to be but five to six inches thick.

The contract called for delivery of the granite prepaid to freight yards in Lawrence. A count was taken when the blocks were removed and the number of yards of stone was to be estimated. An advance of 80 percent for the value of the material was to be made with the final payment only when the stone was laid and then measured.

The price set by the city council, with Mayor S. B. W. Davis' duly witnessed signature, was \$2.55 per square yard. The mayor also was chairman of the committee on Lawrence Streets, indicating that he held a firm hand over the expenditures of the city.

Stone quarrying in Westford began as a distinct business in the early part of the 18th century when men worked not on the great deposits of granite uncovered later which has made Westford famous, but the boulders or "erratics" that were deposited all over town by the great glacier. Some say that was 15,000 years ago.

Wandering through abandoned lands today, particularly in the northern part of the town, one finds remnants of this endeavor. Irregular hunks of granite are scattered about,

showing tool marks, but discarded because the grain was not proper for cleavage, the splitting in true lines.

Long slabs of granite were worked into proper dimensions, then cut like pieces of cake into paving blocks.

Prescott was one who chose to work these boulders or dobbles, as they were called, into paving blocks. The paving of streets and sidewalks with granite was a forerunner to our present bituminous surfaces.

Prescott left the quarrying of heavier pieces of granite, more likely to be used as foundations of buildings and heavy machinery to such quarrymen as Carlin, Palmer, Merrill and

Colburn, who worked various "ledges" scattered throughout the town. To come later was the great H. E. Fletcher quarry in the 1880's on 200 acres.

Samuel Fletcher is reported in 1848 to have drawn a "large quantity of stone to the landing near the railroad" and had it ready for shipping when the Stony Brook Railroad line was first opened. Heavy blocks were shipped over this line to Lawrence for construction of the great dam on the Merrimack River. Three small railroad lines were used over identical tracks.