



Photo courtesy of June W. Kennedy

An early photo shows the beginnings of the H.E. Fletcher stone quarry off Route 40, with a steam locomotive hauling slabs of granite from the site. Today the ledge has been worked to a depth of several hundred feet, and a private rail line continues to move the cumbersome stone.

Westford holds solid position in history of granite industry

By Lucille K. Fales

The mining and cutting of granite has been one of the most important industries in Westford for the past five generations. Granite by definition is any very hard natural rock formation of visibly crystalline texture consisting essentially of quartz and potash feldspar, with black spot of biotite.

The outcroppings of granite in this area are in a belt which extends from Ayer to Pelham, N.H., in a northeasterly direction and is approximately one to three miles in width. Westford granite is too coarse for monuments or statuary, but is excellent for structural purposes, bridge abutments, curbing and road building.

Use of granite in Westford antedates the history of the industry, for granite was used by the very early settlers for door sills, hearthstones, hitching posts, millstones to grind grains, and for marking boundaries. Rev. E.R. Hodgman's "History of Westford" states that "the granite industry began in 1823-24 with Charles Hollis hewing granite for the pillars of the [Quincy] Market House in Boston from huge boulders found in the north part of town."

The boulder area to which he referred was at the rear of Barretto Granite Inc. on Route 40, where one

used to see a display of cemetery memorial stones. Barretto Granite, Inc. has left Westford and presently quarries in Milford, N.H., Fitzwilliams, N.H., and Hopkinton, Mass. They still make cemetery memorial stones. This, however, was not the beginning of granite quarry operations in Westford, but rather the cutting of

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boulders left there during the last glacial age.

Middlesex Canal work

The first impetus for the promotion of the granite industry in Westford was the Middlesex Canal, on which construction began in 1797 but did not reach what is now the city of Lowell until about 1820. Granite soon became an important tonnage item for the Middlesex Ca-

nal, so the benefits were mutual to both the canal and the granite industry.

The second event which gave the granite industry a boost was the opening of the Nashua & Lowell Railroad in 1847.

The first quarry to be opened in Westford was the Oak Hill Quarry bought by Isaac Carkin in 1826-27. It is located off Tyngsboro Road in the north part of town and has continued in operation under several owners, the last one being John M. Viera. It closed about 10 years ago.

On Oct. 23, 1847, Benjamin F. Palmer came over the road with a pair of oxen from Camden, Me., to what is now Graniteville and bought six acres of land on Snake Meadow Hill. He kept buying small parcels there until he eventually owned 80 acres. The quarry on this land was operated by the Palmer family until the 1940s. It is presently owned by the Essex Bituminous Concrete Corporation of Peabody.

Samuel Fletcher, in 1848, came from Groton and hired a ledge on the same hill. At this time there were only two houses and a grist mill in the village. The first granite he quarried that summer was used in the construction of the dam across the Merrimack River in Lawrence.

He also furnished granite for the Middlesex Canal, as well as sills and engine beds for the Hamilton Mill in

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Quarries at foundation of many granite projects

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Lowell. At the time that Samuel Fletcher was furnishing much stone to be used in Lowell, there were 12 loading derricks at the loading platform of the Stony Brook Railroad in Graniteville.

Samuel Fletcher's home is now the Healy Funeral Home. Samuel's son Harry inherited the quarry and continued to carry on the business until his death in 1938. The quarry closed in 1940.

In 1853 William Reed of Acton bought 61 acres on Snake Meadow Hill and with his brother, David, began quarrying. Later son-in-law Herbert V. Hildreth carried on the venture.

Pilgrim Monument work

At the March 1908 Town Meeting, it was voted to raise and appropriate \$40 to furnish a block of Westford granite to be placed in the Provincetown Monument. To those tourists who climb the Pilgrim Monument today, take note that the granite block from Westford came from the Herbert V. Fletcher Quarry of Graniteville. The price was \$32.28.

This quarry closed about 1930, when there was no more granite to be taken out. It is interesting to note that Reed, Palmer and Samuel Fletcher supplied a large quantity of stone for use in the construction of the Concord Reformatory during the late 1870s and '80s.

There was also a plot of 20 acres on this same hill which was given to the First Parish of Westford by Deacon John Prescott, who owned a sawmill in Graniteville. Ephraim Abbot and John W.P. Abbot were authorized to sell stone from the so-called "church lot" for the benefit of the church. Charles Couture later worked this quarry.

Hodgman's "History of Westford" says that Noah Prescott owned land near Flushing Pond in the north part of town. There was granite to be quarried on this land.

In 1872 or '73 John DeCartaret came from the Isle of Jersey, England, to Westford. He bought a quarry on land which is now between routes 3 and 40. In 1913-14 his son, Arthur, bought land from Clyde Prescott which he had inherited from his father and uncle, Noah Prescott. This was adjoining the H.E. Fletcher Company.

In 1955, Arthur's son, Clarence DeCartaret, sold the majority of his 74 acres to the H.E. Fletcher Company.

In 1922 George Morris bought a quarry on Forest Road about 1/8 to 1/4 mile northeast of Flushing Pond. The Noah Prescott heirs had sold this property to Robert Bell and later his son Alan inherited it.

In August of 1973 the land was sold to Velmos H. Stone of N. Chelmsford.

George Merrill owned land which joined the Noah Prescott quarry. Sweatt & Gould leased the land and operated a quarry there in the 1890s. When they went out of business, Frank Mallory took over the lease. Vernon Morris operated the quarry from 1935 to 1968 when it closed.

Off Route 3, the LeMasurier Granite Company is owned by three brothers. They have been in business about 60 years and quarry highway curbing. Also the Guillette Brothers Corporation in this area quarries road materials.

The largest, representative of the granite industry in Westford at the present time is the H.E. Fletcher Company, now owned by Peter Lyon. The quarry, located on Route 40, was opened in 1880 and the third generation was active in its management until the mid-1980s. The company also owns quarries in Jonesboro and N. Jay, Me.; Bethel and Plymouth, Vt.; Mason, Milford and Madison, N.H., and Milford, Mass. In order to fill the demands of their customers, they also import granite from Canada and Europe.

Regardless of the increasing use of cement and concrete, granite remains a valuable and necessary material in the building industry and for curbing for city streets. Granite has the power to withstand the elements of weather. Sea walls must be built of durable stone, and concrete bridge abutments or piers must be faced with stone to protect them against salt and water which penetrate and eat into the cement.

Through the granite industry, Westford bears testimony to beauty and usefulness throughout the country.

This article was written by the late Lucille K. Fales for the "Westford Recollections Series", which has been compiled by June W. Kennedy.