

# THE NORTH YARMOUTH GAZETTE

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## With a Thundering **Crash** and a Billowing Cloud of Dust!

by Gordon Corbett

That is how Nellie Leighton's old red barn met its demise on a hot, windless day in the summer of 1979.

My wife and I had moved into what was known as Shirley Fountain's old house on The Lane with our year-and-a-half old daughter Erica in 1976. Old cars and old barns had held my attention for years, and this barn was no exception. Now living on the opposite corner, I had three years to admire that old barn and wonder about its past.

My interest in Nellie's barn began even before I moved to North Yarmouth, for whenever I would ride by on my way to Cole Farms or to make other passes through the "heart of downtown North Yarmouth" I would spy the nose of an early 1950s model Chevrolet sticking out through the (cont'd, p. 16)



Nellie's house on Walnut Hill Road: The barn in question is behind the house, with an earlier version of that 1950 Chevy parked in front. Photo courtesy Jennifer Kimball

## North Yarmouth Rocks!

### An Overview of the Quarrying Industry

by Sue Clukey

*"During the Carboniferous period, 360 to 290 mya, an enormous bubble of hot, molten magma was slowly making its way to the surface of southern Maine. The area now called North Yarmouth was sitting on its eastern edge.*

*The magma did not erupt as a volcano. Instead, its melted granite cooled as it neared the surface to become a mile-thick horizontal sill called the Sebago Pluton (sometimes called the Sebago Batholith). Far into the future, North Yarmouth residents would make a good living quarrying the granite of the Sebago Pluton for foundations, bridges, buildings, and decorative work."*

Regular readers of **The Gazette** may remember this paragraph from the October, 2005 issue that explained the geology of North Yarmouth. This article continues the story by describing the way humans have used the Pluton for commercial purposes during the last two centuries. The area we are exploring follows the Pownal-North Yarmouth border along Royal and Hodsdon Roads. Both Pownal and North Yarmouth quarries will be discussed as they are part of the same formation.

#### GRANITE SCAVENGING

Long before quarrying became an industry in our town, people were making good use of the surface granite that was lying around just about everywhere. We can thank erosion for that. The Sebago Pluton did not reach the surface of the earth on its slow trip up from the viscous mantle. Instead, earth was eroded away from the surface over the (cont'd, p. 4)

**Quarrying** (continued from p. 1)

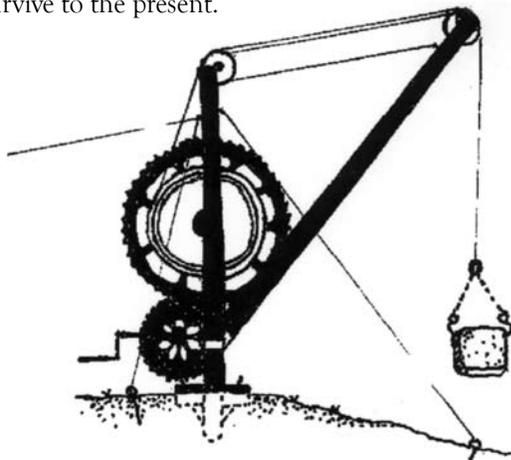
hundreds of millions of years since the Carboniferous period. By 15,000 years ago glaciers had scraped bare the surface material still covering the pluton.

The properties of granite cause it to break along approximately 90-degree cleavage planes when subjected to ice, chemical weathering, and pressure. The cleavage planes are shaped roughly like large blocks, facilitating its cutting and shaping. Quarryman Phil Knight spoke about this property of granite in 1974: "You had to drill them down, break them, and split them—rift them (granite blocks). You see, the stone's got a rift. One way it's hard going straight down through. Then you turn the stone up edgeways like that and take a face hammer and split that right down the middle, see. Two or three times you want to split it and then split it again."



Photo of natural granite blocks

You can imagine how happy this made early settlers to the area. Many houses were built on foundations of undressed granite blocks that stacked quite nicely. Bulkhead stairs, doorsteps, boundary walls, and chimney foundations could also be built using what nature had so generously scattered on the land. Pownal town officers had a cattle pound constructed of undressed granite blocks. Milestones and fenceposts were simply thin slices of granite set on edge in the ground. Many of these survive to the present.



**THE QUARRYING INDUSTRY**

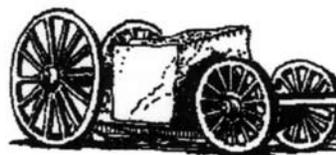
Local granite is light gray in color with a fine, even texture. The minerals that form its makeup include rose and smoky quartz, potassium and plagioclase feldspar, and mica. It makes a fine building stone, which sets the stage for a 19th century worldwide demand for this attractive, durable stone.

Indeed, the 19th century saw granite quarrying in North Yarmouth, Pownal, Yarmouth, and Freeport become an important industry. Populations grew in those towns and new homes were built to house the quarry workers. Quarries were situated in the area of Royal, Ledge, Mountfort, and Hodsdon Roads. Some were worked extensively over a long period of time, others intermittently, and one is still in use today. Their remains are visible just off the road at the Royal Road border of North Yarmouth and Pownal.



The cut blocks were lifted by derricks operated first by two men winding the handle, then a generator provided the lifting power. The blocks were hauled to water by use of special wagons or sledges pulled by a team of yoked oxen. Later, railroads and trucks carried the granite. Coastal boats specially made to carry quarried rock were called "stone sloops." As early as 1826, William Rowe tells us, a schooner tied up at Davis Landing to load granite cut from the ledges of Pownal and North Yarmouth. These stones were used to build the United States Hotel in New York City.

Left, derrick; below, a gallemander, a cart used in the quarrying industry especially designed to haul heavy blocks of granite. Artwork supplied by Ursula Baier



## LOCAL QUARRIES

During the remainder of the 19th century, local quarries were busy supplying granite for the New York state capitol, the Pillsbury Mills, paving blocks for American and European cities, the cribstone bridge between Orr's and Bailey's Islands, Sacred Heart Church and Key Bank in Yarmouth, and many midwestern and western buildings. John Neal, a Portland lawyer, bought the North Yarmouth granite quarry in 1836 to provide material for townhouses he was building on State Street in Portland.

One quarry, between the Hodsdon and Royal Roads, was purchased first in 1810 by Captain Joseph York, Jr. He owned land on both the Pownal and North Yarmouth sides of the road. Later, his son-in-law, Andrew Hodsdon, owned it, as did his son and grandson. The quarry closed about 1908.

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Another quarry at Hodsdon and Royal Roads was the Bath Granite Company quarry.\* The quarry was bought by Francis Latty, who specialized in monuments and gravestones, in the early 1900s. The land remains in the Latty family and some of the old equipment is still visible.

### *Voice of the Latty Quarries:*

#### AN INTERVIEW WITH MARK LATTY



Mark Latty is the present owner of the land that includes the quarry of his father and grandfather. Its 143 acres sit on the Pownal side of Hodsdon Road, near Royal Road. No longer a working quarry, it now appears to be a pond surrounded by woods. The setting is idyllic, but if you look closely, you can see the telltale traces of a formerly bustling



Remains of the derrick.

industry. The derrick that lifted granite blocks lies in pieces; and one piece is still connected to the cable pulley.

Two buildings that housed workers have fallen in on their sills. The old Ford on its platform that helped provide power overlooks the surrounding scatter of stone, partly finished pieces, iron, cable, and wood shims.

Francis Latty came to the United States from Italy via Ellis Island. An accomplished stone carver, he settled in Stonington and started his family there. Then he moved to the present Latty land in Pownal. He started the quarry and also a sand pit there. He did not just cut stone; he carved it, too. He was well-known for his gravestones, and also for two carved granite eagles that were commissioned for a building in Pennsylvania.

Quarry workers used steam-powered generators to run the drills, derrick, and air drills. They were able to polish their stones on site.



Francis's son, Basil, carried on the business until the 1940s. Mark has a quarry work record book from the first half of the 20th century and notes that wages were very low during the Great Depression and that demand for granite dropped rapidly during the 1930s and 1940s, necessitating the closing of the quarry. The sand pit was open much longer, and provided much of the sand in the building of Route 295 between Yarmouth and Freeport.



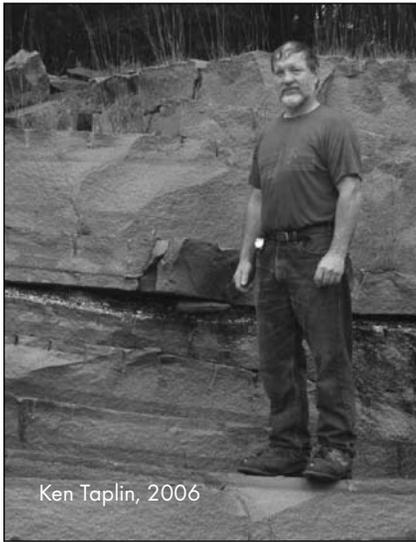
Two gravestone bases at the Latty quarry.

\* One source indicated that this was the Reed quarry. If anyone has information on this matter, please contact Sue at 829-6646.

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On the southwestern, or North Yarmouth side of Hodsdon Road, as far as Royal Road, was the Dudley Freeman quarry (later the Ross quarry). It sits diagonally opposite the Latty quarry. The Ross quarry now belongs to Ken Taplin, who is the only active quarryman in North Yarmouth. It was the Ross quarry that provided much of the granite for the Orr's Island cribstone bridge.

*Voice of the Ross-Taplin Quarries:*  
**AN INTERVIEW WITH KEN TAPLIN**



When we think of North Yarmouth's granite quarrying, we usually picture a 19th and early 20th century industry. The truth is that quarrying endures to this day, albeit in a much-reduced capacity.

Ken Taplin's cut granite has been used throughout North Yarmouth and surrounding

towns by scores of homeowners, professional landscapers and businesses. Ken's property falls on the North Yarmouth border by the Hodsdon Road, across the street from the Knight property. His father was a landscaper and used surface pieces of granite from the earlier Ross quarries, now Taplin land.

Taplin has been a quarryman for twenty-five years. He uses surface granite for steps, benches, posts, and walls. He also creates mooring blocks and well covers. Many of the granite layers are thin and split nicely for sign and fence posts. He rough cuts the granite with a pneumatic drill and transports it by backhoe. He says North Yarmouth granite is a fine-textured gray stone with few impurities. He also finds basalt seams, which have no commercial value today.

The granite in the Taplin quarries is naturally split into layers parallel with the ground. If the seams aren't sealed together, they can be removed layer by layer. Ken makes the perpendicular cuts to size the piece by drilling evenly spaced holes in the stone where he wants it to break, then pushing feathers and wedges into the holes. (Feathers, made of iron,

help expand the drill hole. Along with plugs and wedges, they are the tools of the trade.) Eventually, pressure from the wedges starts to crack the granite along the plane of drill holes. He does not use explosives.



A well-defined basalt seam found in quarry rock.



Beautiful split pieces of granite from the Taplin quarry.

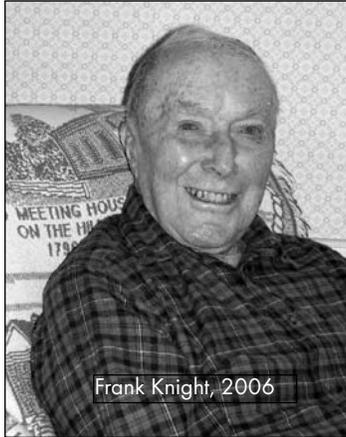
There are frustrations in working with granite. Sometimes the layers taper so that they are not the same thickness through. Other times granite will split where it isn't supposed to. Granite also splits straight, diagonally, or on a curve. Occasionally there are hidden imperfections that appear only after the rock has been cut.

I asked Ken what the safeguards are for working with stone. He said that there are none. OSHA is not involved with quarrying, and stonemasons learn quickly that common sense is the best way to stay safe, a sentiment echoed by Frank Knight. Ken works granite from May to October, keeping the industry of granite-cutting alive in the town of North Yarmouth.

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The Hodsdon and Knight families have been involved with quarrying in the Royal-Hodsdon area for many years. Frank Knight worked summers in his uncle's quarries in 1926 and 1927 when he was a college student. I interviewed him this spring when he was 97 years old. His first-hand knowledge of quarrying in the early 20th century adds a whole new dimension to our understanding of the industry.

*Voice of the Hodsdon Quarries:*  
AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANK KNIGHT



Frank was studying at University of Maine in Orono when he went to work for his uncle, Charles Knight, who owned quarries at that time on the North Yarmouth side of Hodsdon Road. Charles had learned his trade from Dudley Freeman, who died in the wreck of the steamship *Portland*. He later bought his own quarry on Ledge Road. Charles's son, Phil Knight, ran the quarry with his father for a time before entering the lumber trade. A point of pride is that the quarry ran during the great hurricane of 1938.

The quarry was worked sporadically until the 1940s, when cement and concrete, a threat to the granite industry since the early years of the 20th century, made it unprofitable.

Frank's main chores were clearing the quarries and drilling holes in the stone. He learned everything he needed to know on the job. Frank remembers some of the workers from the time that he was working there. Maurice (Mossy) Coffin was a stonemason contracted by Knight. The master stonemason was Frank McGorman, and there were twelve-plus workmen on the job at any one time. Percy York of Royal Road, Al Carter, and Ralph Jewett ran the derrick, and Millbury Grant ran the motor tractor. The Libby boys of North Road were also quarrymen.

Frank explained how they prepared the granite in the 1920s. His narrative differed very little from that of Ken Taplin's 2006 method. First, holes were made in the natural granite with hand held drills, powered by a tractor engine that ran a compressor to the drills. The holes were then filled with black powder, which blew out the ends. I asked Frank what safeguards there were. He had a good laugh at that one, and said that when Charles yelled "Fire!" everybody ran. (Incredibly, Frank only remembers one accident in the quarry.) Next, wedges were forced into the holes, pounded in with mauls. Eventually, the granite split and was ready to finish and ship.

Frank remembers the granite being shipped by truck, railroad, and barge. Some was sent as ballast to New Orleans, where it became paving stones. Much of the granite from the



Phil Knight at the Charles Knight quarry



A scene from the Charles Knight quarry

Hodsdon quarries became paving stones and curbstones in Portland. They were finished and hand-carved on the site.

Frank explained the genealogy of the quarries in his family. His mother's family and his wife's owned quarries in the Hodsdon-Royal-Ledge Road area. The Davis quarry was the oldest one. Fred Titcomb owned it, and then it went to Frances Mann, who married Frank Knight. Frank bought it, and his granddaughter, Andrea Knight, has built a house on the site. Frank bought out the other owners of the Hodsdon quarries (his mother was a Hodsdon) and transferred them to Dan Knight. It turns out that the land the granite rests upon is more valuable today than the granite itself. A residential development, Royal Quarry Estates, now occupies much of the area.

Frank liked to swim in one of the quarries. He says the swimming hole is still there, and still full of water. It is used for skating in the winter.

Today if you drive down Royal Road to where it intersects Hodsdon, and turn in either direction, you would have no idea that just a few feet off the road lurk reminders of a once-thriving industry. The geological upheaval of hundreds of millions of years eventually provided North Yarmouth with one of its most valuable natural resources.

#### RESOURCES

Interviews with Ken Taplin, Frank Knight, and Mark Latty; *Roadside Geology of Maine*; *Pownal—A Rural Maine History*; *The Geology of Pownal, Maine*; *North Yarmouth 1680-1980—An Illustrated History*; *The Notes*, 3/17/1987