

## Places We Call Home

# Gouverneur-Area Quarries Prospered When Marble Was King

*The following story, reprinted from the Gouverneur Tribune Press and written by Jean Gardner, was submitted by Nelson B. Winters, village of Gouverneur historian.*

The marble that once graced the main street sidewalks has all but vanished and has been replaced with new cement walks. Many side streets still have sections of marble sidewalks.

While the quarries flourished, finished and rough stone was in great demand for buildings and monuments. Large quantities were shipped daily by the trainload from the area to other regions.

The village of Gouverneur, also known as Marble City, was the center of a prospering marble quarrying industry that peaked in the late 1880s and early 1900s. There were eight companies and more than 200 men employed at the quarries. Most of the quarries became idle during the early 1930s when the industry fell to time, the Depression, and use of cheaper materials.

From the beginning, when the first settlement in Gouverneur was formed, the stone was blasted from the field ledges for foundation walls and building roads. A mill for cutting grey limestone was built in Hailesboro in 1825 by Jasper C. Clark. Headstones were the main

product. In 1865, the first retail marble business was established in Gouverneur by N.E. Whitney and J.H. Sawyer. Mr. Sawyer and Mr. Whitney were succeeded in the spring of 1866 by N.E. Whitney, and in 1867 D.J. Whitney joined the partnership.

Trimnings on the First Presbyterian Church in Canton were the first building job to be done in marble from Gouverneur.

Later, dark marble was wanted for monuments. Large quantities were shipped to Canada, the Midwest and around New York.

Until 1880, the quarrying had been done by working the natural open seams, and powder was used to loosen large masses that could be broken down to the required sizes.

Later, hand channeling was done, but it was a slow process. In 1881, an expensive, modern-day process was started with a diamond drill channeling machine.

Marble saws had blades 10 feet by 6 inches by one-quarter inch, and with the use of water and coarse sand, the blades could cut 3 inches of marble per hour. Men were kept working on the night shift just to apply sand to the water.

In 1880, J.E. McAllaster developed a quarry west of the village named St. Lawrence Marble Co. In

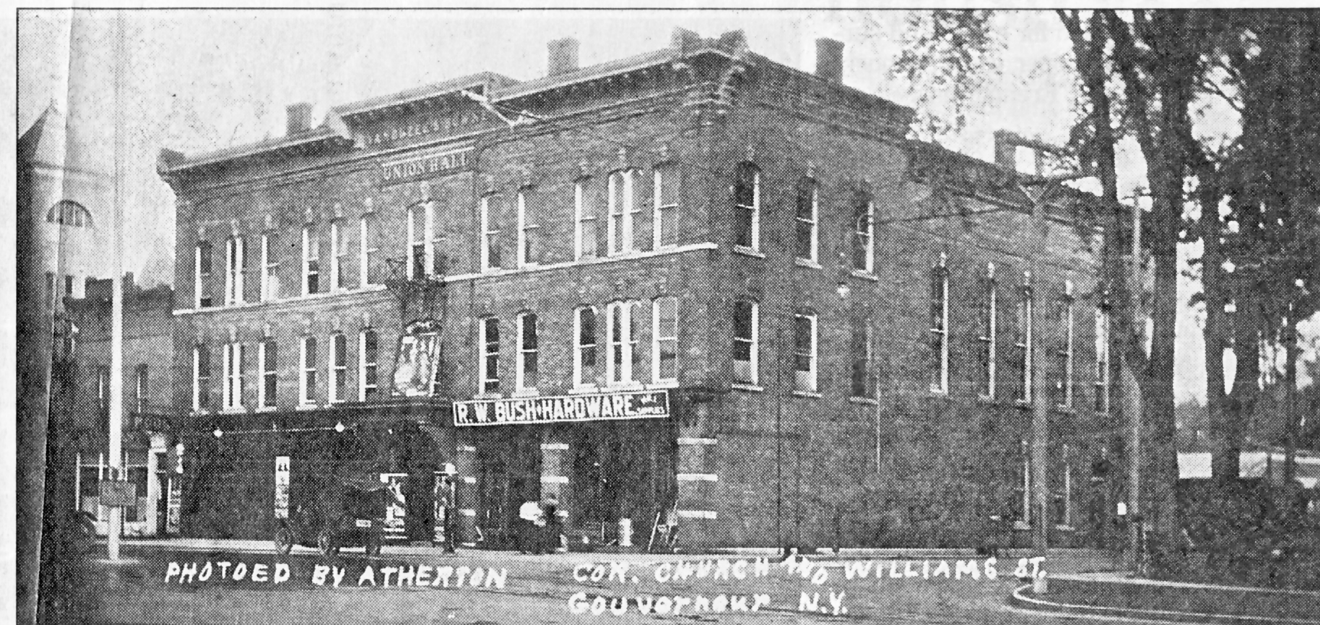
1884, J. Benham, O.W. Griswold, A. Stevens and T.J. Whitney built a mill with 16 gang saws. The company grossed a yearly income of \$125,000. In Chicago there were 14 residences built from Gouverneur marble as well as buildings in Gouverneur, Antwerp, Carthage and Watertown.

The local quarries furnished stone for many Gouverneur buildings that are still standing, such as the Presbyterian and Baptist churches, St. James Church, the former Masonic temple, the library and fronts of other businesses and foundations. Marble was also used for buildings in Norwood, Chateaugay, Cortland and Lowville, and at Cornell University in Ithaca.

A large cathedral was built in Glens Falls by John J. Sullivan with the help of 400 stonecutters.

In November 1881, the Whitney Marble Co. was organized. The business was successful until the mill was destroyed by a boiler explosion in May 1884 in which six men were killed.

Other stone quarries during the late 1800s and early 1900s were those owned by the Davidson Brothers of Chicago, and St. Lawrence Marble Co. St. Lawrence Marble was the largest of these operations until 1915, when it, too, was destroyed by fire.



Buildings at Church and Williams streets, Gouverneur, early this century.

Extra Dark Marble Co. furnished the material for the Memorial Arch in the village park and operated from 1897 to 1908.

The Rylestone Co., formed in 1903, was purchased by Mr. Sullivan, who quarried church and public stone in the beginning, and mined riprap rock in 1918 for Alcoa. He sold the company in 1922 to Onondaga Litholite Co.

In 1910, White Crystal Marble Co. was opened by a Syracuse firm 4 miles south of the village because the

demand at that time for white marble was great.

Gouverneur Marble Co., organized in 1884 (closed as the Jones Cut Stone Co. in 1941), was the last quarry to produce for many years until 1936, when Richard Jones bought its quarry marble to match the previously constructed buildings. The building was sold to Charles I. Ruderman in 1942.

When Alcoa was building its plant in Massena, the low water prevented operation of its generators, so marble was brought to the site and dumped

to raise the water level.

Alcoa leased the pit on the Quarry Road for two years, taking the riprap marble chunks, weighing one ton to 30 tons, on flatcars to Massena and towing them into the St. Lawrence River.

The early growth of Gouverneur was spurred by quarrying, but as stone quarrying declined, an even greater growth was mining for zinc, fibrous talc, pyrite and iron ore. The dairy industry was also a leading factor in the growth of the region.

## Gouverneur Unique to NNY

The village of Gouverneur was named for Gouverneur Morris, a statesman, U.S. senator, signer of the Constitution and minister to France.

Nicknamed the Marble City, Gouverneur is the only United States community with that name. The settlement was once known as Cambray.

Among the area's first settlers were Pardon Babcock, Willard Smith, Eleazer Nichols and Isaac Austin. The village was incorporated in 1805.

The area is best known for farming; Gouverneur Marble, which

was in operation from the 1800s to the 1940s, and zinc, iron ore and talc, which are still being mined.

Gouverneur is noted for its Memorial Arch, which is built of Gouverneur marble. The town was also the boyhood home of Edward John Noble, philanthropist and developer of Life Savers candy; home of Jay Corbin, inventor of the disk harrow farm implement still used by today's farmers, and home of Rhoda Fox Graves, first female state senator.

Somerville, Richville, Hailesboro and Natural Dam are nearby.  
—Joseph Laurenza