

Built to last with Gouverneur marble

by Bonnie Winters

St. Paul's Episcopal Church at 314 Clay Street in Watertown was recently selected for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Originally selected in April for the state register, the church was notified on May 30 of the national honor.

The church, which was constructed between 1889 and 1891, was recognized for its unusual Gothic architecture and was constructed out of marble quarried in the Gouverneur area.

The St. Lawrence Marble Company began operations in November, 1884, under the direction of the company's president, John Benham, and other influential businessmen from Chicago and New York.

A mill measuring 82 feet by 240 feet was constructed on the southwestern side of Gouverneur. The one story mill employed 16 workers and was steam-operated. Eventually three quarries were activated, employing up to 80 men.

A brochure published near the turn of the century praised the fine quality of the St. Lawrence marble. "The St. Lawrence is a hard crystalline marble. It is of close and even texture, and is susceptible of a high polish."

"The greater part of the product, is of a rich, dark blue color," the publication continued, "finely mottled...some little of it being

nearly white."

The marble produced by the Gouverneur quarries was exclusively used for building and monumental purposes and was recommended for a "handsome and enduring exterior" for any home or building.

The brochure which was published after the construction of St. Paul's Church, cites the church as an example of the value of the St. Lawrence marble in construction. The basement story used the dark marble in a rock-faced design. Above the water table, the lighter stone was used, laid randomly to contrast with the darker marble. The trimmings throughout the building are the lighter marble, finished with a patent hammer.

The brochure called the church design "artistic" and indicated the overall effect of the marble "command[ed] the admiration of all."

The church's building committee apparently felt the same way, writing back to the St. Lawrence Marble Company, "It makes by far the handsomest church building to be anywhere found."

Hose and Kieff, Watertown architects for the church building, appreciated the "rich crystalline character" as well as the ease of working with the marble in the church's construction.

Other well known area buildings which were constructed from the

Gouverneur-based company's marble include the former First National Bank of Carthage, which was the first building to be constructed with St. Lawrence marble; the former Watertown Post Office located on Arsenal Street; and the former Bertrand Taylor home on Mullen Street.

St. Lawrence marble was also the principle building material in the administration building at the State Hospital in Ogdensburg as well as the Baptist and Presbyterian churches in Gouverneur. The marble was shipped as far west as the Mississippi River for mansions constructed in cities like Chicago, St. Louis, Cleveland and Detroit.

St. Lawrence Marble was one of a dozen firms to quarry marble, beginning in 1884 until it went into receivership in 1896. The earliest quarry was opened in 1874 and the last operated until 1927 when it was sold at auction. The final company to own the operation primarily sold previously quarried blocks for repairs or additions to existing buildings.

Nothing remains of the once thriving business today except several water-filled quarries.

Reporter's note: Our thanks to Village Historian Nelson Winters for much of this information.

Northern Tribune, Gouverneur, NY

Saturday, June 11, 1977

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