

## SLCHA WRITING COMPETITION SECOND PLACE AWARD WINNER—SCHOOL CATEGORY

# Gouverneur Marble—

## From Great Buildings to Silent Quarries

by Alan Tuttle

*The rich geologic deposits with which St. Lawrence County has been blessed have produced, among other things, fine building materials like sandstone and marble. The Gouverneur marble industry is well documented here by this prize winning article and makes us appreciate better the buildings that we have constructed of that durable product.*

The Town of Gouverneur is blessed with many natural resources, and one which stands near the head of the long list was variously known to the outside trade as "Gouverneur, St. Lawrence, or Whitney" marble.

From the opening of the first quarry to the closing of the last, Gouverneur was well known for its established trade in marble. Several public buildings, especially churches, were constructed from this fine material. The marble sidewalks and foundations of houses have long endured the harsh weather. In fact, many houses have been torn down and reconstructed on their original, solid bases.

The fame of Gouverneur's marble was brought about by many fine characteristics including color and hardness. The marble by request of a customer could be shaped into any form and of any size. Often special blocks were printed to mark the year a public building was erected. Name plates for doors were also often sought after. Each mark on such a piece of marble was done by hand and carefully planned out. The hand tooling that went into each marble block years ago can not be matched by the machines of today.

The number of people that remember the once great marble industry has greatly decreased over the years. The industry was so famous by the end of the nineteenth century that no one thought about writing down the history of events to preserve it for future generations. The uniqueness of Gouverneur marble was



*Sketch of old County Clerk's office, on corner of Court and Judson Streets in Canton, as it appeared in Evert's 1878 history of the County. It was constructed of Gouverneur marble. (Courtesy of the History Center Archives)*

known world wide, but since the companies ceased operations, few people in this area recognize this rock's true value.

The remains of the marble companies are most clearly represented by the water filled quarries that the young people of this village swim in today. A fortune is waiting in the marble business for anyone who has the capital to drain the quarries and buy the machinery.

The marble of Gouverneur had a reputation for both monumental and building work. The marble was hard and crystalline. It was of close and even texture, which was conducive to a high polish.

Most of the quarry marble was rich, dark, blue color, finely mottled and a small amount of the output was of a lighter shade, some almost white.

Because of its marked crystalline structure, it presented when finished, rock-faced, an unusually clean and sparkling appearance. Because of this peculiar structure, it does not absorb dirt or become streaked or stained, as

each recurring rain washes it fresh and clean. The closeness of its texture makes it impervious to moisture; hence, it is not affected by frost and does not disintegrate. Its crushing strength is very great, being over 12,500 pounds to the square inch, as determined by a U.S. government test.

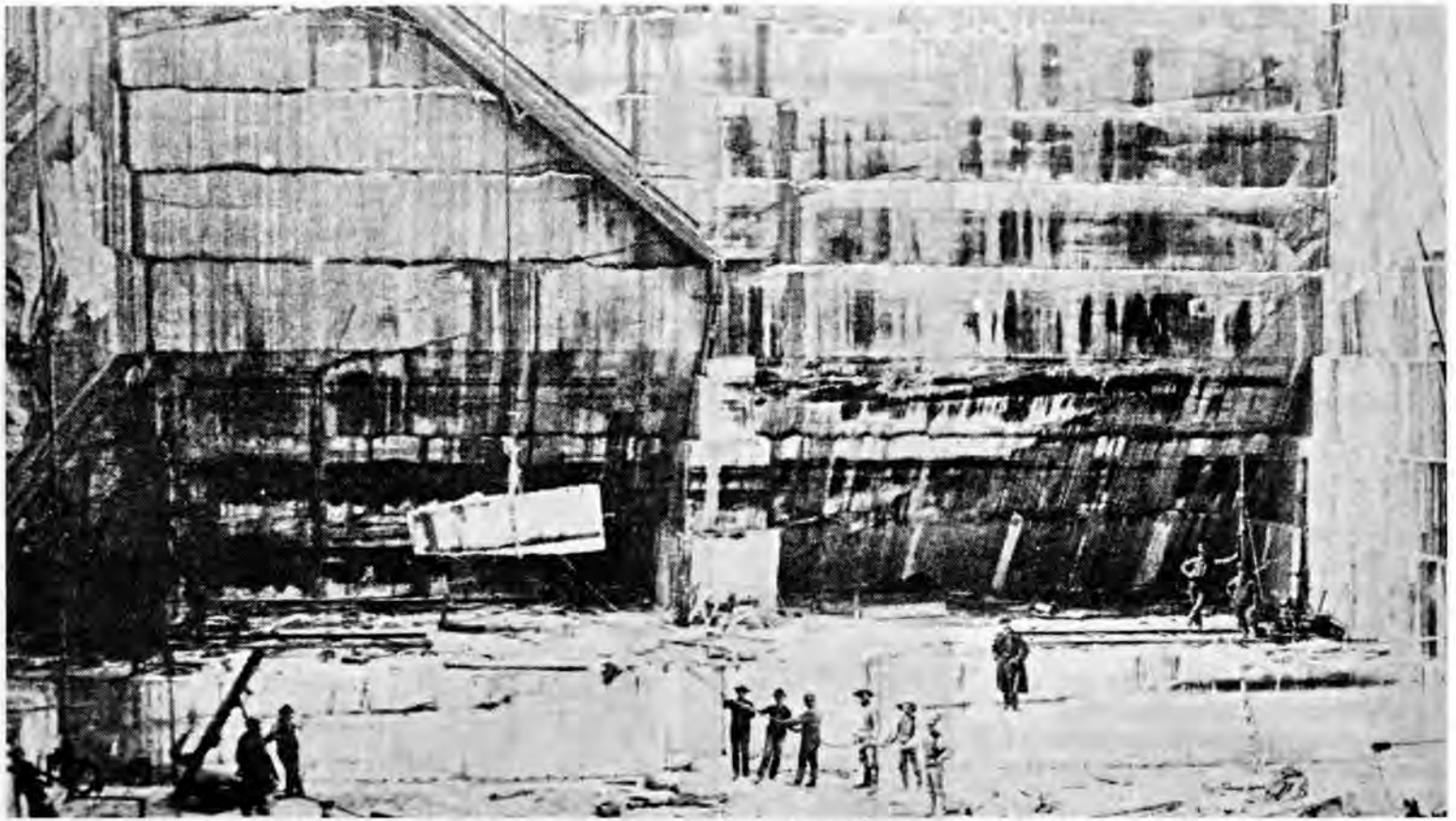
When the marble was finished either rock-faced, patent hammered, or polished, it so clearly resembled the finer grades of granite, that it was often mistaken for granite. The marble was worked with comparative ease, and by the hand of the skillful artisan, could have been wrought in any desired form.

The same qualities of beauty and endurance that made this marble so sought after for fine residences, made it adaptable for use in the construction of churches and other public buildings.

Commissioner I.G. Perry liked St. Lawrence marble so much that he wrote the following:

"To Whom it May Concern:

This is to certify, that I have examined the St. Lawrence marble, from the quarry of the St. Lawrence Marble Co.,



*The steep walls of a marble quarry. (From Jane A.W. Parker's *Gouverneur, A History 1805-1890*. (Photo courtesy of the Gouverneur Historical Association)*

at Gouv., N.Y., and find it to be an excellent marble, susceptible of fine finish and high polish, and am about using some for wainscoting in the new Capital. I find it to be of a close and even texture, capable of holding a great weight. Superior material for exterior and interior building purposes.\*"

\*John Benham, *St. Lawrence Marble* (The St. Lawrence Marble Company, Gouverneur, New York), p. 1.

This truly valuable marble, although existing in almost unlimited quantities and cropping out in innumerable places in this vicinity, was utilized only for ordinary rough wall purposes until the year 1825, when Jasper C. Clark, of Hailesboro, Town of Fowler, established a small mill at that place for sawing this material, which was then known as "gray lime-stone." This mill stood on Mill Creek, near the spot then occupied by the Agalite Fiber Company's first talc mill in Hailesboro. Mr. Clark was succeeded by Addison Giles in the marble-sawing business. This industry continued in a small way for several years, but lacking a demand which warranted its continuance, was abandoned in the year 1837.

About the year 1838, Hermon Rice, of Wegatchie, Town of Rossie, constructed a mill for sawing this marble in the village. This business continued with little success for about ten years and was then abandoned.

Early in 1874, the firm of Whitneys (D.J. and T.J.) & Honeycomb (John S.) was formed in Gouverneur for the purpose of doing the mason work for the erection of the Main Street Bridge across the Oswegatchie River in the village of Gouverneur. The company readily procured a sufficient amount of marble for their purpose from the J.C. Barney dwelling house lot on the Somerville Street. This was practically the initial step toward the revival of the marble industry, which had been abandoned many years before. This firm was dissolved in 1877, the Whitneys continuing the quarry in connection with their monument business.

Up to this time, the only marble ever quarried or sawed in this vicinity had been the cap rock, or light colored variety. In December, 1877, the Whitneys quarried a few blocks of the dark colored variety on the Barney Lot, the opening being made on the south side of the Somerville Road, nearly opposite the northeasterly end of the St. Lawrence Company's mill. In 1878 the first dark colored Gouverneur marble monument was finished by the Whitney Brothers and was subsequently erected on the Joseph E. McAllaster lot in the Riverside Cemetery, Gouverneur.

In the fall of 1878, the Whitney Brothers dissolved and the business was continued by Daniel J. Whitney, who, in 1879, sold and shipped small quantities of the dark colored and unfinished

marble to dealers in several states and to Canada. In the latter part of that year, he shipped several car loads of rough blocks to marble-sawing mills in Southerland Falls, Vermont, and Cleveland, Ohio, where they were prepared and sold to the trade for monument purposes. In the spring of 1880, the demand for this marble was largely in excess of Mr. Whitney's limited financial ability to produce. Because of legal complications between Mr. Barney and the Barney heirs, Mr. Whitney abandoned his quarry and moved his tools and machinery directly across the road to the Preston farm. He then opened what was the famous St. Lawrence Marble Company's quarry. At this time Joseph E. McAllaster of Gouverneur, having become financially and otherwise interested in the enterprise, secured a lease for about a nine acre triangular piece of the J.B. Preston farm, which comes to a point at the intersection of R.W. and O. Railroad with the Somerville Road, and July 1, 1880, under the name of the Whitney Granite and Gouverneur Marble Company, the marble business was begun on a scale more commensurate with the importance of this very promising industry. In the fall of the year the system of quarrying by cutting channels with hand drills was introduced. This method proved too slow for practical purposes and in March, 1882, a diamond-drill channeling machine, run by steam, was put into operation. A little later a



*The cutting mill. (Photo courtesy of the Gouverneur Historical Association)*

large derrick was erected and steam pumps were introduced to clear the quarry water. Thus equipped, the getting out of large blocks was vigorously pushed, and as fast as raised, were shipped by rail to Lyman Strong & Son, Cleveland, Ohio, where they were sawed, finished and sold to the trade. D.J. Whitney was interested in the business and continued as superintendent of this quarry and business until it changed hands.

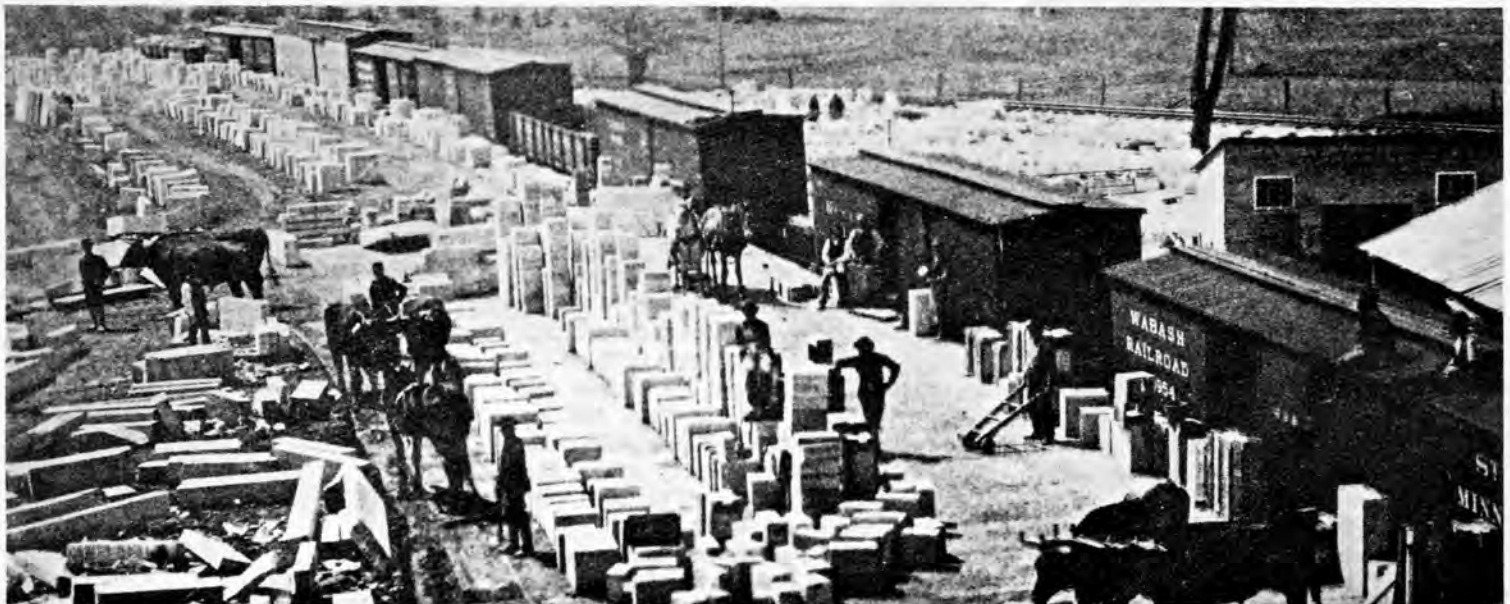
After extended negotiations, this plant was sold to capitalists of New York City, and in May, 1884, the St. Lawrence Marble Company was organized with a capital stock of \$250,000. The officers were: John Benham, president and treasurer; J.W. Griswold, first vice-president; M.M. Belding, Jr., second vice-president; John R. Emery, secretary; and T.J. Whitney, superintendent. A 16 gang mill was erected and sawing began the following November. The mill was one story high, 82 x 221 feet in area, and stood half a mile southwest of the corporate limits of the Gouverneur

village. The mill, which was substantially built, was equipped with rubbing beds, turning lathes and every other labor-saving device. A branch of the R.W. and O. Railroad ran into their stock yard alongside a wharf of the right height for convenience in loading cars. The motive power, which was steam, was generated by a battery of four boilers and ran a 150 horse-power Watertown Steam Engine, which drove the almost endless machinery of the mill, quarry, pumps and derricks. An artesian well, 450 feet deep, furnished abundant water for all desired purposes.

Quarry No. 1, which had a surface opening of 110 x 200 feet, reached a depth of 95 feet and yet huge blocks weighing 20 tons were readily raised to the surface by their mighty derricks. The stock list of this and all other companies here included building stone in all forms, rough, dressed, turned and polished, as well as "monumental material."

In November, 1881, the following citizens of Gouverneur, locally named "the Twelve Apostles," viz.; S.B. Van Duzee,

John S. Honeycomb, John W. Tracy, Daniel Peck, Henry E. Gates, George P. Ormiston, Abel Godard, T.J. Whitney, Austin Meyeur, Fred Haile, E.H. Neary and Lewis Eckman, purchased thirty acres of land from William McKean, near the southwest limits of the Gouverneur village, and January 3, 1882 organized the Whitney Marble Company with a capital stock of \$750,000. A quarry was at once opened, a four gang mill erected and equipped, and sawing begun the following fall. The business prospered until May 3, 1884, when the mill and machinery were wrecked by the explosion of a boiler, which killed the following persons: Joseph Oliver and Oliver Dashneau, boiler makers of Watertown (who were making repairs); W. Frank Newcomb, Eli Jackson, W.T. Miller and Charles Murrey, employees. The company's loss was \$20,000. The mill was at once rebuilt and business was continued until 1888, when, owing to financial complications, the company was placed in the hands of D.G. Wood as receiver. It continued operations until



*The shipping yard, where oxen hauled the great blocks of marble. (Photo courtesy of the Gouverneur Historical Association)*

the following fall, when matters were adjusted and the company was reorganized August 23, 1888, as the Gouverneur Marble Company.

The officers of the Gouverneur Marble Company were: Daniel Peck, president; A.Z. Turnbull, vice-president; Lewis Eckman, treasurer; and George P. Ormiston, secretary. The capital stock was \$75,000. They had four gang saws and employed upwards of twenty-five men. They had also purchased a few acres from the James Barney farm and the company was throwing out a fine quality of marble, with active sales that placed the owners on a solid business footing.

April, 1889, D.J. Whitney became general manager. Business prospered and the mill was enlarged to a capacity of nine gangs of saws, a rubbing bed was added and now the plant was complete and first-class in every particular. The regular force employed was fifty men, and the annual output of stock was about 50,000 cubic feet. The quarry was L shaped, being 100 x 100 feet and 100 x 60 feet.

The Davidson Marble Company was organized July 25, 1890, with Alexander Davidson, president; John A. Davidson, treasurer; Charles Stedman, secretary; A.C. Davis, superintendent of mill; and Erwin B. Hurlbut, superintendent of quarry. Capital stock was \$300,000.

In 1888, Messrs. Davidson & Son of Chicago, who were very extensive producers, manufacturers, and dealers of marble, having quarries and mills in several states, purchased from J.B. Preston, ten acres of land lying southwest of the St. Lawrence Marble Company's property, and at once opened a quarry under the supervision of E.B. Hurlbut. This quarry, which was known as No. 1, was successfully worked until July, 1893, when a superior quality was uncovered on the Milton Barney farm, during the grading of the Gouverneur and Oswegatchie Railroad. This deposit being convenient to the railroad, the company secured land, transferred their quarry machinery to, and opened quarry No. 2, from which they took material for sawing.

The leading members of this company believed that water power was preferable to steam, and a suitable building site and water power having been tendered them on satisfactory terms on the Black River, near the R.W. and O. Railroad, just east of the city of Watertown, a splendid 18-gang mill, with two rubbing beds, turning lathes and other finishing works, was erected there in 1889 and 1890. This company advertised its product as "New York Marble."

Joseph C. Callahan was the final owner of the No. 2 quarry and his estate now owns the site. The mill burned in

1911.

The deposit from which the Empire State Marble Company took its material was located on the Charles Overacker farm, a little over a mile southwest of the village of Gouverneur. In 1890 John W. Tracy of Gouverneur discovered an excellent quality of marble, which cropped out as a ledge, and after securing the right to prospect and the option for purchase, induced capitalists to join him in the marble business. The above named company was organized early in 1891, land was purchased, a quarry opened and a fine four-gang mill was erected the same year. The company officers were: John R. Wood, president; Gilbert Mollison, secretary; James Dowdle, treasurer; and J.M. Esser, superintendent. The directors were J.R. Wood of Appleton, Wisconsin, G. Mollison and J. Dowdle of Oswego, and J.W. Tracy of Gouverneur. The company employed twenty-five men and had a prosperous business.

The late D.G. Wood of Gouverneur was the active agent in organizing the Northern New York Marble Company in January, 1891. The officers were: Samuel H. Beach, president and treasurer; and Samuel F. Bagg, vice-president (both of Watertown); and John Webb, Jr., of Gouverneur, secretary.

A model eight gang mill, equipped with rubbing bed, turning lathes and all modern conveniences, was erected and put into operation the same year. The quarry and mill were located west of and adjoining the Empire State Marble Company's property on a plot of seventeen acres of land from the William Kitts farm. The company's works were connected with the R.W. and O. Railroad by a side track. This company employed a force of forty men under the supervision of Peter Finegan, and did a successful business.

Other companies tried to get into production but many of them were closed quickly due to financial need or they only worked on a very small basis.

The Extra Dark Marble Company, formed in 1897, ceased operating in 1908; a Mr. Callahan was the owner when it burned in 1910.

The Rylestone Company, opened in 1903 northwest of the village at the rear of the Somerville Road farm now owned by Merton Gollaher, had a difficult time financially. John J. Sullivan became the owner and ran it to get out church and public building stone at first, and rip rap rock in 1918 for the Aluminum Company's St. Lawrence River canal. Mr. Sullivan sold the quarry to the Onondaga Litholite company in 1922.

The White Crystal Marble Company, situated on the Seavey Road four miles north of Gouverneur, was opened by Syracuse men in 1901, due to a demand for its more-than-unusually white mar-

ble. This was another quarry which was later run by Mr. Sullivan.

On the Scotch Settlement Road three miles from Gouverneur, H.P. Bingwanger of New York started in 1897 what he intended to be a marble business, but never got into production. It was sold to the Corrigan-McKinney Company in 1905 and operated by their subsidiary, the Genesee Furnace Company, to produce fluxing material. It was closed in 1917 and the machinery dismantled. Fred J. Porter, then 89, had been the manager of this plant from 1908 to the time it was closed.

Except for a part of the vacant Gouverneur Marble Company mill, there is little left but open water-filled quarries of a business that once shipped building marble to many cities in the United States. The Balducci Crushed Stone Company on outer Parker Street, Gouverneur, is now the only reminder of the once great marble industry.

Of the many quarries that once existed just at the southeastern border of the village, the Gouverneur Marble Company, organized originally in 1884, ended its days as the Jones Cut Stone Company in 1941, the last quarry to produce. Richard Jones bought the Gouverneur Marble Company in 1936 to get out local marble to match previously constructed buildings. His purchase was made from the Hampton & Son Company, which had bought the business in 1930 from Morris Eckmann. In 1942, one year after the quarry ceased operations, the quarry and buildings were sold to Charles L. Ruderman, and were partly burned in 1953.

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#### About the Author

Alan Tuttle was a student at Gouverneur Senior High School at the time of the writing of this article.