

# The Town With Marble Sidewalks

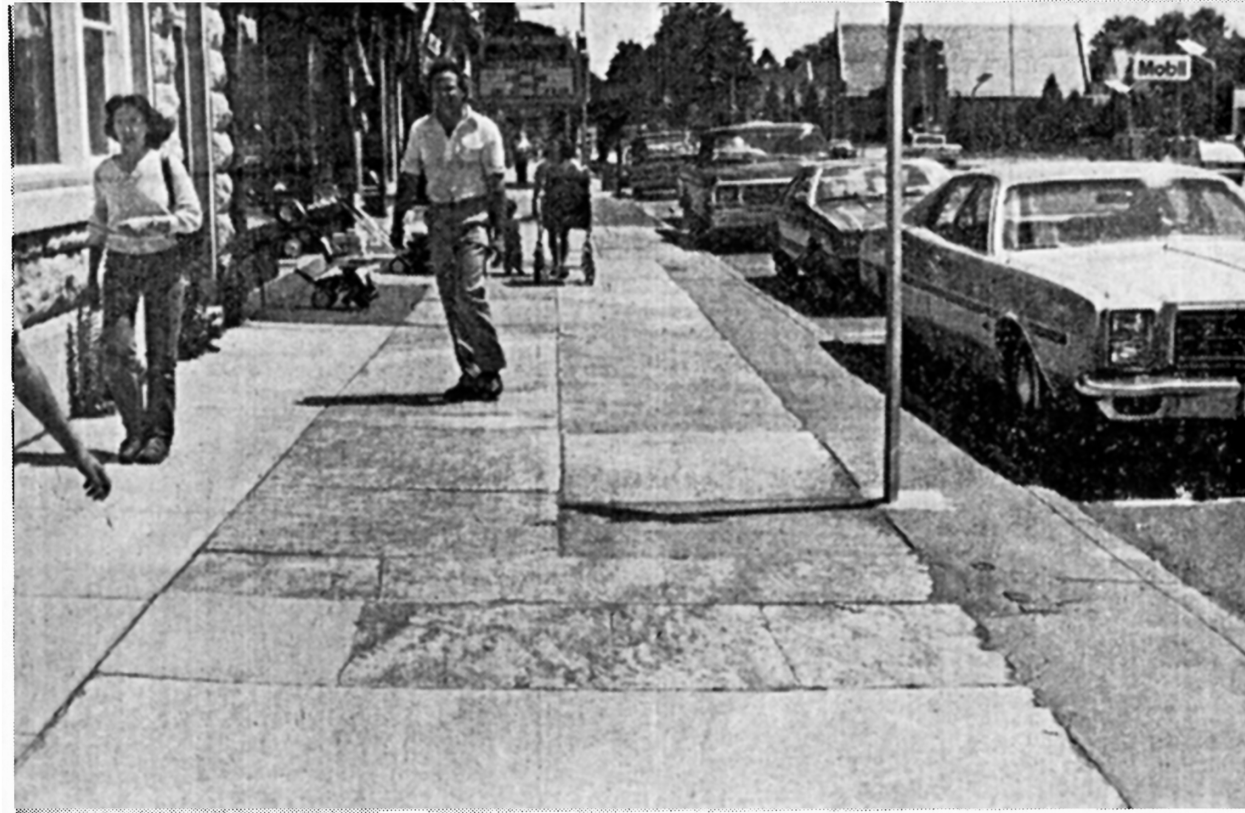
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Gouverneur, once known as the "Marble City" and the "town with marble sidewalks," was once the center of a thriving marble quarrying industry which at its peak in the late 1880's and early 1900's had eight companies in operation and employed over 200 men.

Both finished and rough stone, in demand for public buildings and monuments, was shipped from the village in large quantities, with trainloads of marble leaving daily.

Most of the quarries have remained idle since the early 1930's when the industry succumbed to time and the Depression and when major construction projects turned to cheaper materials. Although there is now little left but water-filled open quarries, a new local industry, North Country Aggregates, Inc., has been mining marble from White Crystal Quarry on the Seavey Road for four years and marketing a marble chip product for decorative use.

From the first settlement of Gouverneur it had been the practice to blast out stone from field ledges for foundation walls and road building. A mill for cutting gray limestone was built at Halesboro in 1825 by Jasper C. Clark, with headstones as the main product, but it was not until 1865 when the first retail marble business was established at Gouverneur by N. E. Whitney and J. H. Sawyer. Whitney and Sawyer were succeeded in the spring of 1866 by N. E. Whitney and in 1867, D. J. Whitney was admitted to the partnership. Trimmings of the Presbyterian Church at Canton was the first building job to be done in what was later known as Gouver-



Once called the "Marble City" and "The Town with Marble Sidewalks," Gouverneur still has many of the walks remaining in the village. A portion of the marble sidewalk in front of the former Bank of Gouverneur building on East Main Street remains today.

neur-marble.

Later, dark marble came into demand for monumental work and large quantities were shipped to Canada and the midwest as well as in New York State.

Until 1880, quarrying had been done by taking advantage of natural open seams and powder was used to loosen large masses so it could be broken to the required size. Later, hand-channeling was instituted, but this slow and expensive process was replaced in 1881 by a diamond drill channeling machine, the first modern quarrying machinery

used here.

Marble saws had blades ten feet by six inches by 1/4 inch and with the use of water and coarse sand, could cut three inches of marble an hour. Men were kept on the night shift just to apply sand to the water.

In 1880, J. E. McAllister developed a quarry west of the village called St. Lawrence Marble Co. In 1884, J. Benham, O. W. Griswold, A. Stevens and T. J. Whitney erected a mill with 16 gang saws and had a yearly gross of \$125,000. In Chicago, 14 residences were built of this marble as well as buildings

at Gouverneur, Antwerp, Carthage and Watertown.

In November, 1881, the Whitney Marble Co. was organized with great success until May 3, 1884, when the mill was destroyed by a boiler explosion, killing six men.

The local quarries furnished stone for many local buildings which still stand today—the Presbyterian and Baptist Churches, St. James Church, the former Masonic temple, old Bank of Gouverneur, local library, other building fronts and house foundations. Most of the village sidewalks were

made of marble slabs called "roughbacks" as they were taken from the first cut. The stone is very slippery in snow and rain and many have been removed, but examination of today's village walks show many marble sections remaining.

Marble from local quarries also was used for public buildings at Norwood, Chateaugay, Cortland, Lowville and at Ithaca, for Cornell University buildings. A large cathedral at Glens Falls was erected by John J. Sullivan with the help of 400 stone cutters as there were no power tools.

Quarries of 1880 and 1900 included those owned by Davidson Brothers of Chicago, and St. Lawrence Marble Co., the largest operation for many years until 1915, closed at about the end of World War I and was purchased by Mr. Sullivan. Empire Marble and Northern New York Marble Co., Inc. ran with varied success until 1912 when fire burned both plants. Extra Dark Marble Co., which furnished the material for the village Memorial Arch, operated from 1897 to 1908.

The Rylestone Co., formed in 1903, was purchased by Mr. Sullivan who quarried church and public stone at first, mined "rip rap" rock in 1918 for Alcoa, and was sold in 1922 to Onondaga Litholite Co. White Crystal Marble Co., four miles south of the village, was opened in 1910 by a Syracuse firm due to a demand for the unusually white marble. This mine was later operated by Mr. Sullivan.

Gouverneur Marble Co., organized in 1884, ended as Jones Cut Stone Co. in 1941 and was the last quarry to produce for many years. It was bought by Richard Jones in 1936 to get out local marble to match previously constructed buildings. The quarry was sold in 1942 to Charles I. Ruderman.

When Alcoa was building its Massena plant, the water was too low to run the generators so marble was dumped to raise the water level.

Alcoa leased a pit on Quarry Road and operated it for two years, removing the "rip rap" material, chunks of which weighed from one to 30 tons. The stone was shipped to Massena on flat cars, towed out in the St. Lawrence River by

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