



A crew from Luck Brothers pours cement along the main street area.

Marble gone now from main street walks

by Jean Gardner

The marble that once graced the main street sidewalks has all 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 trainloads 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 1880's and early 1900's. There were eight companies and over 200 men employed at the quarries. Most of the quarries became idle during the early 1930's 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 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.

Trimmings at the Presbyterian Church in Canton was the first building job to be done in marble from Gouverneur.

Later, dark marble was wanted for monuments. Large quantities were shipped to Canada and the midwest and in New York State.

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 this was slow. In 1881 an expensive, modern process was started with

a diamond drill channeling machine.

Marble saws had blades ten feet by six inches by one-quarter inch and with the use of water and coarse sand the blades could cut three 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. The quarry was called the St. Lawrence Marble Company. 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 this marble. The marble was used for buildings in Gouverneur, Antwerp, Carthage and Watertown.

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

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

In November of 1881, the Whitney Marble Company was organized. The business was successful until the mill was destroyed by a boiler explosion in May of 1884. Six men were killed from the explosion.

Other stone quarries during the 1800 and 1900's were those owned by the Davidson Brothers of Chicago and the St. Lawrence Marble Company that was the largest operation until 1915. It was purchased by Mr. Sullivan, Empire Marble and Northern New York Marble Company, Inc. It operated with much success until it was destroyed by fire in 1912.

Extra Dark Marble Company furnished the material for the Memo-

rial Arch in the village park and operated from 1897 to 1908.

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

White Crystal Marble Company was opened four miles south of the village in 1910 by a Syracuse firm. The quarry opened due to the large demand for white marble. Mr. Sullivan later operated this mill.

Gouverneur Marble Company organized in 1884 and closed as the Jones Cut Stone Company in 1941. It was the last quarry to produce for many years until 1936 when Richard Jones bought it to quarry marble to match the previously constructed buildings. The quarry was sold to Charles I. Ruderman in 1942.

When Alcoa was building its plant in Massena, the low water prevented the generators to operate 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 rip rap marble chunks that weighed from one to 30 tons. The stone was shipped to Massena on flat cars that were towed out in the St. Lawrence River.

The early growth of Gouverneur was spurred by quarrying but as stone quarrying declined an even greater growth was mining that began in nearby areas that included zinc, fibrous talc, pyrite and iron ore.

The dairy industry was also a leading factor for the region.

The marble may have been removed from the main sector of the village but the local moniker, "Marble City," will always remain.

Editor's Note: much of this information came from the files of Village Historian Nelson Winters.

Gouverneur Tribune Press, Wednesday, November 1, 1955