

## [Vermont Quarrying]

19725

F. C. Slayton

Vermont Writers' Project

For Horace [B?]. Davis

"Living in New England" Vermont Quarry

"I don't care much for paper work."

A hard-muscled Irish stonecutter had spoken. He looked at the gray granite walls and golden dome of the Vermont State House, at the smooth green lawns and tall lazy elms surrounding it. Here in the shadows of high granite columns in the Doric Portico, behind which the sovereignty of the people of the State voiced its democracy every two years, this man had, in a few words spoken in calm decree, put middle class culture on the spot. To this Vermont Irishman, who produced his work in everlasting stone like the artists of ancient Rome, Greece, Babylon, and Egypt, the middle class workers of America, straining at mountains and bringing forth only little scratches on thin paper, were the boondogglers of culture.

Whereas ancient cultures used stone for arenas, public baths, official buildings, and decorative statuary designed for centuries of use by the living, modern culture uses stone sparingly in its public buildings and lavishly only to mark grounds where lie the dead.

Stone is Vermont's chief industry, both in value of products and number of workers employed, and has been for over forty years. Production by cubic feet in the United States in recent years has shown three times as much dimension building stone as monumental stone, though the value of the latter may exceed the former because of the

## Library of Congress

greater labor-time value [C 3 VT.?] 2 in monumental stone. In Vermont the value and volume of monumental stone exceeds those of building stone. Imports and exports of dimension stone to and from foreign countries about balance, and represent but a very small percentage of total domestic production.

Technological improvements have been made constantly, and, indeed, the making of stone working machinery has also been a major industry in Vermont. Improvements are being made today, yet despite a high degree of mechanization compared to its crude beginnings, the most important agent in the stone industry is still the labor of men. A visitor at the sheds in Barre pertinently commented that granite working was picturesquely like a medieval craft shop. Perhaps it was the unconscious association of stone cutting with the remains of the world's oldest civilizations that brought the picture to mind. Perhaps it was the individual responsibility, neat craftsmanship, and absence of the assembly line. But ancient stone working was done largely by slaves; and these steel-[sinewed?] men are not slaves. That is, not the slaves whose welted backs tell the story of their exploitation.

In the more than a hundred years that stone has been removed from Vermont earth to be molded to the needs of men, many changes have taken place. Scattered over the Green Mountains that run north and south through the center of the State, the [Taconic?] Mountains, running north and south along the southwestern borders and the valleys between, 3 are the empty quarries of discarded slats, granite and marble. Competition, substitutes and depressions have concentrated quarrying in those deposits yielding the best quality of stone at the most profitable operation. There are occasionally isolated quarry holes where the deposit has been exhausted. Back off the main roads these abandoned quarries are quietly being reclaimed by persistent Nature. The holes fill in with spring water that seeps through the walls. Grass and bushes venture nearer and nearer the former paths of laboring man. Discarded machinery lies rusting; buildings fall, railway tracks twist through the long grass. All is quiet, save the movements and songs of birds in the young trees, and the desultory croak of frogs in hiding near the water.

## Library of Congress

Occasionally, riding along Vermont's main highways, one may see the white gashes in the mountain sides, or on the plains, where generations of quarrying have accumulated huge piles of waste stone. The slate section, in the towns of Fair Haven, Poultney, Castleton, Pawlet, and Wells, on the southwestern border in the [Taconic?] Mountains, is easily identified by [?] dark gray piles of waste slate. In the marble section of the lower Green Mountains and the valley of Otter Creek, in the towns of Danby, Dorset, West Rutland, Proctor, Pittsford, and Brandon, marble waste piles loom high and white in the sun. In the northwestern part of the State along the shores of Lake Champlain, in the towns of St. Albans and Swanton, are quarries of red dolomite, called marble in the trade, so colored by the iron oxide typical of many of the Lower Cambrian rocks in the Lake Champlain region.

Most of the granite is now quarried in what is called the "Barre Area." This includes Barre and a few adjoining towns set aside by agreement of quarryman, and so named to prevent outside granite of inferior quality being advertised as "Barre" granite. Though first quarried at Cobble Hill, in Barre Town, most production now centers around Millstone Hill nearby. Here, a thousand feet above Barre City, in the north central part of the Green Mountains, the top of Millstone Hill had literally been laid open, and a steady stream of granite blocks go down the steep winding road by trucks, or by the switchback railroad.

"Although there are tales of asbestos and other quarrying or mining enterprises throughout the State, the above three contribute by far the most to Vermont's income from quarrying.

### Granite

Barre, the most cosmopolitan of Vermont's cities, has a population (1930) of about 11,000. It is situated in a valley of the Stevens and Jail Branches of the Winooski River. Lining the long and busy Main Street are stores, office buildings, and apartment blocks, punctuated here and there by a Colonial residence, hard pressed for space. Parallel to Main Street on the southeast side, along the banks of Stevens Branch, are long rows of gray, gloomy and noisy granite sheds, where men of all nationalities work into thousands of forms one of the

## Library of Congress

hardest common stones in the world. Three large machine plants making stone working tools and machinery are located in Barre, where equipment from hoists to small pneumatic drills are shipped all over the world. Barre, then, is a one industry town, and that a highly specialized one.

Soon after the War of 1812, granite was quarried at Cobble Hill for millstones, doorsteps, hitching posts, window-lintels, and fireplace mantels. From here, and from Millstone Hill, granite was taken by ox-team in [?] for the construction of the Capitol building at Montpelier. Quarrying on Millstone Hill, so named from the use to which early granite was put, has, then, been continuous for over one hundred years.

Granite quarrying around Lowell and Quincy, Massachusetts, had been going on for several generations prior to the opening of Vermont quarries. King's Chapel in Boston was the first public building in America to be constructed mainly of granite. The rocks were crudely broken to size by building rows of fires atop them and dropping cannon balls on the line. [Early?] German immigrants to Quincy introduced the use of blasting powder. Some years later an American named Tarbox introduced the drill and wedge for breaking stone. Solomon Willard chose Quincy dark granite for Bunker Hill Monument. It is interesting to find that the first railroad in America was built in 1826 to carry blocks of granite from Quincy quarries to tidewater. Horses provided the motive power.

The Massachusetts industry thus early gave not only impetus to the use of granite as a building stone, but practical methods of quarrying and cutting it. 6 The first derricks were operated by oxen treading around a sweep. Hoisting was at the rate of fifty or sixty feet an hour. The use of drills and wedges was extended until men were at last driving tunners six to twelve feet long into the hard stone.

However, the use of granite, either as a building or a monumental stone, progressed slowly until the opening of the railroad to the Barre Quarries in [?] 1888 . The railroad when

## Library of Congress

completed ran twenty-six miles back and forth across the hills, using switchbacks to cover the four miles and 1,000-foot rise above the city of Barre.

For the next thirty years Barre boomed with expansion and prosperity. The population rose from a static 2,060 in 1880 to 6,812 in 1890. In the seventeen years ending with 1897 homes were erected at an average rate of one a week. By 1897 there were seventy-five operators employing 1,000 men, and fifty-six trains left or entered the Barre depot every day.

In those early days stone was shipped to Quincy, Massachusetts, for finishing, that place having already an established reputation as a granite center. In 1881 there were barely half a dozen finishing plants in Barre, and but fifty cutters working in them. By 1897 there were 1,500 cutters employed.

From the start the [entrepreneurs?] of granite were the workers themselves - thrifty cutters and quarry workers who rose from employees to employers. J. H. [Walbridge?], writing in 1897, said of these industrialists - "The term capitalist and laborer are a misfit as applied to Barre, for there the capitalist is a laborer and the laborer expects soon to become a capitalist."

In the quarrying and of the industry consolidations and associations in ownership have now been made and the number of quarry owners is reduced to seven. The eighty owners of the finishing plants in Barre City were almost without exception Scotch, Swedish, and Italian immigrants or their descendants. Even here, however, the trend at present points to capitalistic ownership, with more plants coming under single or interlocking directorates. One company now operating both quarries and plants is formed with thirteen directors, of whom a Vermont Senator in Washington, is one, and of whom but two live in Barre.

In 1937 nearly the entire Barre granite production was for monumental use, and this production was over twenty times the Quincy, Massachusetts, production. In 1936 the

## Library of Congress

value of quarry output was over \$2,000,000, and the value of the stone finished into memorials nearly \$8,000,000.

Granite is now cut out of the hills in more or [less?] stock sizes, and to sizes ordered from Barre. Holes are drilled into the stone by compressed air drills to the required depth - up to six feet or more. The stone between the holes is broken out with a flat broach. Granite is quarried in open pits, many of which are nearly 300 feet deep. Along the brim and down in the pit is a network of boom derricks, and railway tracks run to the quarry's edge. After the large 8 stones are taken to the surface, they are cut to dimension by jackhammer runners operating compressed air jackhammers, who split the rock along its grain by inserting plugs and feathers - wedges - into the hammer holes, and striking them in rotation with heavy hammers.

In Barre there are mills that saw the granite to size. Long smooth steel blades in a gang-frame swing back and forth over the granite, and under the blade a steady stream of water and steel shot plays as an abrasive. At one plant a swiftly revolving circular saw slowly cuts into a car loaded with stone and fed toward the saw. This also uses steel shot and water - the shot for abrasion, the water for cooling. Small carborundum saws are used as edgers and bevelers.

Polishing is done by setting the stones into beds and running a huge flat steel polishing wheel, some weighing a ton, over the surface. Here shot, granulated carborundum, or tin oxide are used as abrasives, and for high polish a felt buffer is used. A new process for mirror polish recently developed in Aberdeen, Scotland, uses five different operations; the fourth operation calling for iron oxide - rouge - as the abrasive.

Surfacing machines and carving tools are operated by compressed air kept at from ninety to one hundred pounds pressure. Overhead immense travelling cranes raise and lower the stones at any designated place in the shed. At one end a blacksmith pounds red hot steel tools back into shape. At the other and huge electric motors ran air compressors. Off 9

## Library of Congress

the yard is the boxing shed where stones are boxed and marked for shipment, after being cleaned with acid. From every quarter comes a terrific din, making conversation next to impossible, as hard steel slowly pounds away at hard stone. The air is misty with dust - the dust that causes silicosis and sends granite workers to an early grave.

If the building of the railroad to Millstone Hill gave impetus to the quarrying of stone, the influx of Scotch, Italian, Swedish and Spanish immigrants, who had learned stone carving in the old country and had come to America along with the great unskilled in those forty years from 1880 to 1920, supplied the impetus to the finishing and carving of stone which began at Barre City after 1885.

The granite workers of Aberdeen, Scotland, the marble workers from Carrara, Italy; the granite workers of Goteberg, Sweden, and of Saragossa, Spain, have come to the shores of America and settled, to continue their trades in the eastern stone centers. Once familiar with new America, they have migrated to stone working centers all over the country, and are almost as restless as the French-Canadian textile workers. Most of them have come to Barre from other New England or southern quarries and plants. The Scotch and Italian workers came in the greatest numbers. Between 1880 and 1890, 868 Scotch and 92 Italians become residents in Washington County - which would include beside Barre, the three towns of Waterbury, East Montpelier and Northfield, where granite manufacturing plants are located. In the 10 following decade the number increased to 1,189 Scotch and 990 Italian, and the third decade later to 1,634 Scotch and 2,159 Italians. The Swedes were numbered at slightly over 300 by 1910. The Spanish markers came to Washington County in the three decades between 1900 and 1930, numbering 573 in 1920.

Hundreds of French-Canadians have come to Barre, particularly during and since the lockout of 1922. During that year the quarry owners instituted a lockout and brought back from the Province of Quebec train loads of poverty-stricken French-Canadian farmers as strike breakers. They marched the men up Main Street, with bands and American flags frantically asserting the utmost patriotism. Immense boarding houses were built at the

## Library of Congress

quarry, and here the Canadians were housed [?] [???] and Sunday dinners of chicken and ice-cream served free by the quarry owners, who finally broke union demands. This lockout of 1922 was the Barre chapter of a country-wide movement of Chambers of Commerce, Trade Associations and Manufactures' Associations to install the open shop in every business enterprise in America - the Liberty League of the post war period - and called, with the customary catchpenny jingoism of profit and loss patriotism, The American Plan. It has taken Barre unionism years to recover from this blow - and there are still men who have not worked a day in the granite industry since the 1922 lockout.

In other ways, as in this, the history of Barre's organization of labor follows country-wide trends. Quarry workers 11 were first organized in 1877, received their charter from the A. F. L. Sept. 8, 1903, and at the present time have charters from both the C. I. O. and the he A. F. L. Barre in the international office of the Quarry Workers' International Union of North America, which organizes the quarry workers and a few classifications in the finishing plants. Quincy, Mass. is the international headquarters of the Granite Cutters' International Association of America which organizes the remaining finishing plant workers. Though Barre is highly organized by both unions, granite and stone-working centers in general throughout the country have only a minor percentage of unionization, and as a consequence Barre sets the national pace in union standards. The unions are the strongest agency uniting in a common interest the many nationalities of Barre. They have been able to obtain for the granite workers a relatively high wage scale. This scale ranges from 69 cents for carving, experienced carvers earned up to \$25.00 a day. These men, many of them from northern Italy, had studied six to twelve years with native artists and sculptors before coming to America. Of these there are but a handful left since the sand-blast, the draftsman and the stock design have taken over their work,

Though for a few workers there is employment the year round, for by far the most there are lay-offs, so that, though Vermont granite workers are among the highest paid in the country, their yearly income is estimated by some 12 sources at about \$900.

## Library of Congress

On the other hand, the manufacturers and quarrymen are equally well organized, so that, though practically every establishment is now owned, or was begun, by men once workman themselves, they are now set off in employers' camp by membership in the various associations - a circumstance that, it must be said, works against the active sympathies of many of the shed owners, some of whom have betrayed their fellow members by quickly granting organized labor complete cooperation. The most prominent of these employer organizations are the Barre Clearing House, the Barre Granite Manufactures' Association, the Barre Quarries Quarriers Cooperative, the Memorial Extension Institute, and the Associated Industries of Vermont.

The lively spirit that pervades Barre is truly a [?] [?]. For over the heads of all the workers employed in the granite sheds hangs the persistent menace of premature death from silicosis. Granite dust, floating in the air they breathe, is crystalline, and cuts and clogs the lung tissue till the congestion becomes too great. The men all know, even when they were boys, that if they undertook to spend their days working in this powder-soaked air they would die of "stonecutter's consumption." They are long hardened to this fate - and gaily they drink their wine, spend their money, dance their dances, and slap their bambini, for tomorrow they will die. If they have been only a little frugal they will have saved enough money for one of those enduring monuments, the making of which has brought them their living 13 and their death.

Bills introduced to provide for proper dust-removing equipment have been killed year after year. Some manufacturers voluntarily installed this equipment. Others balked. Finally, the unions wrote into their last contract a dust-removing clause, and equipment is now being installed for piping away the dust by vacuum from every stone-cutting machine in the plant.

But even these machines do not take away all the dust. Finer powder still settles over the walls, over the stones and machines, on to the clothes of the workers.

## Library of Congress

Down the long shed each man slowly works over his stone. Near the center a group of three men are setting stones in a polishing bed. Even through the roar of this place the high-pitched ear-shattering grind of the circular saw penetrates.

In the far corner of the carving room Mario Poletti carves carefully, high up on a staging, finishing the statue of a saint pointing, hand high with promise, toward heaven. It has been a long time since Mario has done carving like this. Modern memorials are simpler - less expensive. Carefully he plays his carving tool around the last unfinished piece - the thin finger of that uplifted hand. Slowly little chips of granite fall away, and slowly the finger emerges. Suddenly - San Antonio, - the staring has slipped. Mario grasps the cold Santa Maria for support. His carving tool hits the finger and - zt-t - off it comes!

[Ho?], Pietro! [Ho?], Arturo! Santa Maria! She has no 14 finger left!

The three of them stare at the hand. Mario is right. She has no finger. Mario leaps to the ground. They rush behind the monument. There lies a finger in the red wet dirt. Mario pounces upon it. Eh bene! It in at least whole. They sit down on the edge of a stone. Mario's fat face is very puzzled. Thousands of dollars are in that stone. Now the Santa has no finger to point the way to heaven. Arturo starts to laugh. Pietro starts to laugh. Maria glowers at them. Suddenly his face lights with hope. He grins. Pietro, got the dope. Pietro runs to the sand-blast room and comes back with a pail of cement. Once before Mario had to run for the dope, and it,worked. He leaps upon the staging, clutching pail and finger. He laughs. The boss will never know. In a minute he jumps down. High up is the finger, see! Again it points to heaven!

Without a word they put an their hats and coats and grab their lunch pails. They leave the shed by a side door and stalk over to Virgilio's on Main Street. They sit at a table. Not Chianti or Milanese or Toscana, but, indeed, three red wines for laughing Arturo, Mario and Pietro. The cards, Virgilio!

## Library of Congress

The rest of the afternoon and into the evening they played rummy and drank wine and laughed because the Santa had a sore finger. But at last Arturo rose to go. His wife was cooking a very grand dinner tonight for eight of those young people from Montpelier who liked to eat good 15 Italian spaghetti with meat sauce cooked all day long slowly, and big anti-pasto salads, and sometimes chicken cacciatore. He had better be home to eat before those hungry people should come and his wife give them all of it.

But tomorrow morning at seven-thirty they would be back in the shed, the broken finger would be solidly mended, and no one would ever know what deep anxiety it had once caused to Arturo and Pietro and Mario. Marble

Marble is a softer stone than granite. Sixty color varieties are quarried in Vermont, from the white statuary marble of Brandon and the green-and-white and gray-and-white veined of the Rutland area, to the dark red of the so-called Swanton marbles. The latter are really hard dolomite, and are quarried now only on special order. The Rutland marbles are metamorphosed limestone, and from the calcareous nature of the stone the dust is not injurious to the workers as is the dust of granite.

Many of the quarries are really mines, going straight down two or three hundred feet as on the plains of the Otter Creek at West Rutland; or hundreds of feet into the side of a mountain, as at Danby.

The first marble quarry was opened in Dorset by Issac Underhill. In 1795 Jeremiah Sheldon opened a quarry twenty-five miles north in the town of Pittsford. In 1804 Eben W. Judd of Middlebury opened a mill for sawing marble, using sand and water as abrasives under moving iron plates, after 16 an ancient stone-sawing method described in ancient times by Fliny.

## Library of Congress

From 1804 on, saw mills sprang up in many parts of Rutland County. These were operated by water power, and the saws were built in gangs of multiple saws stretched parallel in a frame.

At first marble was used for grave markers, chimney backs, hearthstones, lintels, and fire jambs. In 1836 the U. S. Bank at Erie, Pennsylvania, was built of marble, and from then on marble was used extensively for building construction. By 1840 there were sixteen companies in the business of quarrying marble, though none of them appeared overburdened with prosperity.

In the fall of 1849 when the Rutland and Whitehall Railroad was opened, connecting the marble country to a port on the Champlain Canal, the problem of long-hauling was solved, and markets in the West were opened to Rutland stone.

As early as 1832 the General Assembly of the State recognized its duty toward the marble men, in that year passing a resolution exhorting their representatives in Washington “to use all honorable means to procure the passage of a law which shall effectually protect our citizens engaged in the manufacture of marble from foreign competition.” The more we change the more we are the same.

by 1860 the industry was supporting thirty-three companies, and outside capital was being attracted to the marble business as it was to the mining industries opening in the Far West. 17 Fly-by-night stock companies were organized in Philadelphia, Boston and New York, selling shares in Vermont marble enterprises. Eventually most of them went bankrupt.

In 1869 Redfield Proctor, a lawyer of Rutland, was appointed receiver for the Dorr and Myers business, and in November, 1870, he reorganized the Sutherland Falls Marble Company of Proctor, suppliers of marble for the Dorr and Myers Company. By 1880 this company was free of debt and prospering. Unlike the Barre owners, who had served an apprenticeship in the business they later managed, Proctor had no experience in the

## Library of Congress

marble business. But he did have organizing ability, boundless energy, knowledge of the law, and ruthless practicability.

In 1880 he combined the Rutland Marble Company and the Sutherland Falls Marble Company into the Vermont Marble Company. In 1883 he persuaded nearly all the marble companies in the area to combine in an association called the Producers' Marble Company, a selling organization set up to control price-cutting and agency problems, and other competitive activities. The association was limited to a life of five years, and after its expiration Proctor was able to acquire, one after another, most of the larger companies.

Today the Vermont Marble Company does by far the lion's share of marble business in Vermont, has quarries in Alaska, Colorado, and other states, and in good years has shipped a million cubic feet of marble and employed 2,500 workers.

Organized vertically, the Vermont Marble Company owns 18 quarries, saw mills, plants, branch offices, timber lands. For years it operated a company store, but finally sold it. It owns hundreds of company houses, although, since the strike of 1936 with the subsequent publicity, it has sold many to workers. It has its own foundry. Channeling machines, patented by other companies, are copied part for part without infringement of copyright, since the machines are not sold; this can be done for around four thousand dollars, three thousand five hundred dollars less than the patent-holders' selling price.

In seventy years of operation the Vermont Marble Company, dealing in both building and monumental marble, has accumulated assets of over ten million dollars, and the Proctor family boasts of millionaires, which Barre granite has yet to produce. After ten years of calamitous depression, the Marble Company has today a ratio of current assets to current liabilities of twenty-to-one. A conservative bank rates well any company showing this ratio at two-to-one, so the Vermont Marble Company is a good risk ten times over.

The two towns of West Rutland and Proctor are company towns formed by the marble interests in 1888. Thus was political control localized and the threat of higher taxation from

## Library of Congress

the growing community of Rutland avoided. Town officers, state legislators, Governors, and U. S. Senators have burst from the marble area like corn popping over a hot fire.

In general the machinery used in working granite is used in the marble shop. Channeling machines are used in the quarries. Abrasives are sand and water, however, instead of steel shot and water. Sand and water run under the long gang 19 saws, which are lighter than granite saws, cut thinner slabs, and carry more [?] to the gang. Sand and water are used in the rubbing beds, immense revolving plates on which the slabs of stone are held and ground to size. There are five types of exterior finish and three types of interior. Some polishing is done by felt polishers using various kinds of polishing powders, and some is done by hand.

In 1868 most of the workers in Proctor were Irish - hardy men who first built railroads, then built mining towns. That year, the year of the big turnout, saw two carloads of French-Canadian peasants brought in as strike breakers.

Other nationalities have since replaced the Irish workers to a large extent. In 1870, when Proctor first started on his career, he hired in New York a Swedish immigrant named Larson, who was instrumental in encouraging the first Swedish workers to come from the old country to Proctor in the next decade. Between 1880 and 1890, 535 Swedes settled in Rutland County.

By 1890 there were over two hundred Italians in Rutland County, encouraged by Proctor when in the 80's he made a trip to Carrara, Italy to enlist experienced carvers in his new monumental projects. Twenty years later there were over twelve hundred Italians resident in the county.

Between 1900 and 1910 nearly 800 Polish people had settled in Rutland County, most of whom were employed in the marble industry.

## Library of Congress

Although the Vermont Marble Company has always assured itself of a constant oversupply of labor, a condition unfavorable to labor's living standard, there have been sporadic attempts at unionization, and a few strikes. The strike of 1868 has been mentioned. In 1904 an attempted organization of the marble workers by the A. [P?]. L., which had risen to preeminence in labor consolidation during the two preceding years and was riding the wave of huge membership, ended in failure after a strike of short duration.

In the winter and spring of 1935-6 the Danby, West Rutland and Proctor employees of the Vermont Marble Company went out on one of the most bitter strikes Vermont has ever seen. Marble workers in the area, nearly all employed by one company, had always received far less wages than the granite workers under eighty companies. There were other causes of complaint outside of wages. There were workers' accusations of excessive deductions from their pay for rent, electricity, water, insurance, hospitalization, and even cow pasturage; that polishers were forced to buy the polishing heads for the Vermont Marble Company's machines, and to pay for the polishing powder used.

Men had received weekly pay checks of two cents, twenty cents, sixty-eight cents. Many had received pink vouchers marked in ink "No Check." Many were in debt for rent in company-owned houses - were working but a few hours a week. The towns were filled with unemployed marble workers ready to take their jobs if they became dissatisfied. W. P. A. and relief rolls were heavy. 21 In the face of heavy odds, the union had made considerable headway in organization. On November 4, 1935 the men voted to go on strike. During the course of this nine months' struggle, the State of Vermont spent over thirty thousand dollars fighting the workers, and the salaries of sixty-five State and town deputies were openly paid by the Vermont Marble Company.

In January the company attempted to run in [scab?] labor and the striking workmen joined battle. At one time during that day seventy figures lay in the bloody snow.

## Library of Congress

It was a winter of the severest privation. Weekly contributions to a strike relief fund were made by their fellow union workers in Barre, Graniteville, and Websterville, and by many educational and social institutions. One of the town overseers of the poor, a foreman for the company, was convicted in court of withholding town aid for destitute school children.

In March, the Associated Industries of Vermont, affiliated with the American manufacturers' Association, boasted, "An entire series of bills sponsored by organized labor was prevented from being passed and every bill detrimental to employees was defeated." During that sitting of the august legislature of the sovereign people of the State of Vermont, the voice of Democracy was reduced to a feeble croak.

After nine months the struggle ended, with but a few minor gains for the workers. Union recognition had lost. The hourly rate was raised from thirty-seven and one-half cents to forty cents for labor in the quarry and plants. A 22 twenty-five percent increase in the general wage scale was demanded. About one-fifth of the workers got a raise of less than seven percent in wage rate. Nearly ninety percent of all the workers would continue to receive fifty cents an hour or less. The rate of pay in the entire marble area, ununionized, was from fifty to thirty-five percent less than the rates for the same occupations in the granite area, unionized, where the annual income has been estimated at \$900.

Three years have elapsed since this strike was called out. Workmen are again complaining that the company is deducting from their pay checks the cost of polishing powder.

Acute surplus of labor, the standard policy of many American industrialists, is seen throughout the marble area. Relief costs and W. P. A. enrollment are higher in West Rutland and Proctor than the average for the state, and heavier than most towns. The largest local project has been the widening of a marble bridge at Proctor, which necessitated an expenditure of several thousand dollars for marble.

## Library of Congress

It is a gloomy picture of rural company towns. Workers fear spying and intimidation. They are loathe to speak to strangers about any aspect of their lives, and if they do offer information, it is guardedly given, and then not before a cautious glance around the neighborhood to see who is abroad. Some of the sons and daughters of workmen gladly accept clerical positions in the company's offices. Others are bitter against the town and the company. They make their escape to work in the cities, to bum the country 23 over with no money in their possession, free men so long as they are away from marble.

The worker's home is usually clean and comfortable, but most of his furniture is cheap or second hand. His radio is ten years old, and if he has a car it is most remarkable for its age, noise, and inefficiency. His food budget is close to the emergency figure, to be resorted to only in case of national catastrophe, as classified by the U. S. Department of Agriculture. This budget is stretched the limit of its capacity by the thriftiness of his ingenious wife. A few workers have gardens, some raise chickens, occasionally there is one with a cow quartered in a crude hut behind the house and pastured on the outskirts of the village. The leaders closest to the workers in the struggle for higher wages and better living conditions discourage widespread agricultural pursuits by marble workers. The reasoning is apparent. These pursuits require several hours weekly work on top of the hardest kind of manual work, thus in effect increasing the workers' laboring hours in getting-a-living activity. Again, they argue, they are taking so much business away from the farmer, whose living - also scanty - comes from supplying the nation's industrial workers with food. Industrial wages, they claim, should be high enough to supply a decent standard of living without the necessity of carrying on two occupations.

Other dimensions of the picture are no more cheering. The marble worker votes for his bosses because the machine 24 offers him no one else; by himself he tries to repair the houses rented from the company and always in need of repairs [them?] it wont make; or tries to keep ahead of the mortgage if he has bought it; he may view with alarm the publicized paternalism of his employer.

## Library of Congress

But there are bright sides to life in West Rutland, Proctor and Danby, and the brightest is the cleanliness and health of his home and family. There are few slums comparable to those urban slums that border the railroad tracks. If there has been long-continued poverty, some family may find itself living in a cold, squalid barn, or a one-room shanty with canvas in the windows, and then their lot is more desperate than those in city slums. But in the main, the marble workers live in houses on which there is at least some vestige of outside paint; the lawns are smooth, and flowers bloom near the walls of the house and along the borders of the street. The children, sun-tanned, clean, sturdy-legged and sturdy-voiced, play hard on the lawns and in the streets. For many a worker there are few things of which he privately boasts, but among these are his clean children, his neat and orderly home, his hard-working, capable and talkative wife.

At weddings his wine flows generously, and his small coins are thrown to the bride and groom to foster the early establishment of a home.

On Saturday nights he watches the kids dance his own Polish dances, and sometimes he joins in, too; he goes to 25 the movies at Rutland City, four miles away; he makes his own beer the year round and is likely to get well-corned on a holiday eve.

At Proctor on a Sunday he goes to mass at a beautiful church of marble, a gift of the Proctor family. Week-days he participates in the activities of the Sutherland Club, sponsored by the Proctors.

The summer sun shines bright and hot on piles of marble waste; it touches into dancing color the flowers of the workers' homes; it brings into reluctant sparkle the sluggish, muddy waters of Otter Creek; it makes twinkling spangles of glossy leaves on the mass of village trees. It is clean sunlight, full of promises of cheer and clean living. It is a promise hard to keep. Slate

## Library of Congress

Some of the old sidewalks in the village of Fair Haven are large squares of multi-colored slate: the new sidewalks are of cement. That is the story of slate.

In 1839 Colonel Alanson Allen of Fair Haven began the quarrying of slate on "Scotch Hill." School slates were cut in the first few years, but in 1847 the making of roofing slates was begun, and for nearly a hundred years the output of roofing slate has furnished the bulk of income to the slate quarries. In the earliest days slate slabs were extensively used for cemetery stones. Because of its structure of slaty cleavage, this stone can be split into thin, smooth-faced 26 slabs by a few blows of mallet and chisel. It can also be carved and molded much in the same way as marble and granite.

During the latter part of the last century and the early years of the present, slate quarries prospered, turning out billiard table tops, lavatory accessories, flooring and interior finishes, school slates, and electrical switchboards.

Styles changed, substitutes were found. Billiard tables were bedded with metal; pro-cast stone was used for flooring; slate grew out of favor for interior decoration; cheaper and less durable roofing was used. What slate roofing is being done today supplies the bare subsistence of the industry. A large amount of slate is ground and used for coating asphalt shingles. The quarry operator leads a hand to mouth existence.

The antiquated methods of forty years ago still prevail - with the electric motor the only improvement. Roofing slates are still cut by hand at piece work.

The average slate quarry rarely gives employment to more than eight or ten men. It is slow work. Huge flat slabs of slate, weighing ten to fifteen tons are raised from the deep quarry by hoists operating on cableways, then taken by truck to the nearby saw mill, or loaded onto a flat car at the quarry edge and pulled by cable to the mill. Here they are loaded on to platforms and fed into the slow-moving saws. These saws, circular, are toothed, and cut without abrasives into the slate, which is softer than marble. Sawed to size on four sides,

## Library of Congress

the block is sent to the slate-makers shanty. Here the worker sets 27 the block on edge, chips off thin slates, and sends them to the trimmer's shanty. The sawyer, slate-maker and trimmer often work on a production basis, dividing three ways the piece work pay for the number of slates made each day. On good days they may earn nearly four dollars each.

Each quarry has its own small shanties where the slate is worked. Some plants have large rubbing beds similar to those in the marble plants, where large slate slabs are rubbed to size to fill occasional orders for building and flooring slate. Piled on edge against the side of the mill, or against tree trunks, are large irregular slates that will be sold for flagstones. In neat rows through the grass, stocks of roofing slates are piled on edge, assorted by sizes.

Ownership is in nebulous state in the slate industry. Most operators lease the quarries from the land owner, and credit him with royalties in the amount of stone removed. One operator fell in arrears on royalties of thousands of dollars, and gave the land owner a job in the quarry at thirty-five cents an hour. Another operator has sold his business six times and still remains its owner. Some operators own half a dozen quarries, and work two or three.

The workers are of all nationalities. During the height of its prosperity many [Welsh?] came to the slate areas from the coal and slate sections of [Wales?]. There are only a handful of these men left now, their places having been taken by the French-Canadians and the [Poles?].

Wages are low. It has been many years since there was 28 a union, though on February 9, 1939, and A. F. of L. Union was organized and a membership drive started. One old Welshman and his son work in the quarries of Poultney for twenty-five cents an hour - ten dollars a week each. Rates vary at different quarries, but average from thirty to thirty-seven and one-half cents an hour. One quarry has been working steadily for over two years.

## Library of Congress

The homes of the workers are a mile or two distant from the quarries, in the nearby villages. Workers drive to work in old cars up grass-grown runts called roads, bringing their lunches in boxes, and parking their cars under the trees. Here, high up in the hills, they solemnly ply their old-time trade.

Over the succession of rolling hills, peaked, barren, dark gray piles of waste slate make a jagged horizon - like tiny new mountains. Networks of cableways criss-cross from waste piles to quarry holes. It is a quiet scene. No smoke or steam or light gives any clue to men working. A distant carrier climbs the cableways with a refuse box hung below. The engineers, the slate-makers, the sawyers are housed in dilapidated shacks, gray unpainted ruins, that seem too feeble to resist even the winds.

No one in the slate business is sanguine enough to predict improvement. They pounce upon the crumbs of business that fall their way and are deeply thankful. Swan-Song

This, in brief, is the story of a stone in Vermont. The cost of getting it out of the ground, of shaping it into its hundreds of forms, precludes its use in our daily culture. 29 Many workers die prematurely. Their children are only eager to escape to less rigorous climates and occupations in distant places.

The alternating current of State politics flows now to the granite interests, now to the marble interests.

A war chest of considerable size was in recent years accumulated to fight the California experiment of building a cemetery without gravestones. Barre granite men this month (Jan. 1939) raised [\$100,000?] to publicize Barre granite. Ever jealous of any threat to their business, they view with alarm the contributions of modern science in substitutes and plastics. Among themselves, the operators secretly admit their enterprises are faced with permanent depression, and only hope that it will not become disastrous in their own time.

## Library of Congress

Perhaps they are too pessimistic. It is conceivable that fickle fashion may some day welcome household gods made of polished stone. It is also conceivable that city planners, architects, governments of the future will re-discover stone as a medium of building and park beautification. But the singing of this hope may be the swan-song of granite and marble.