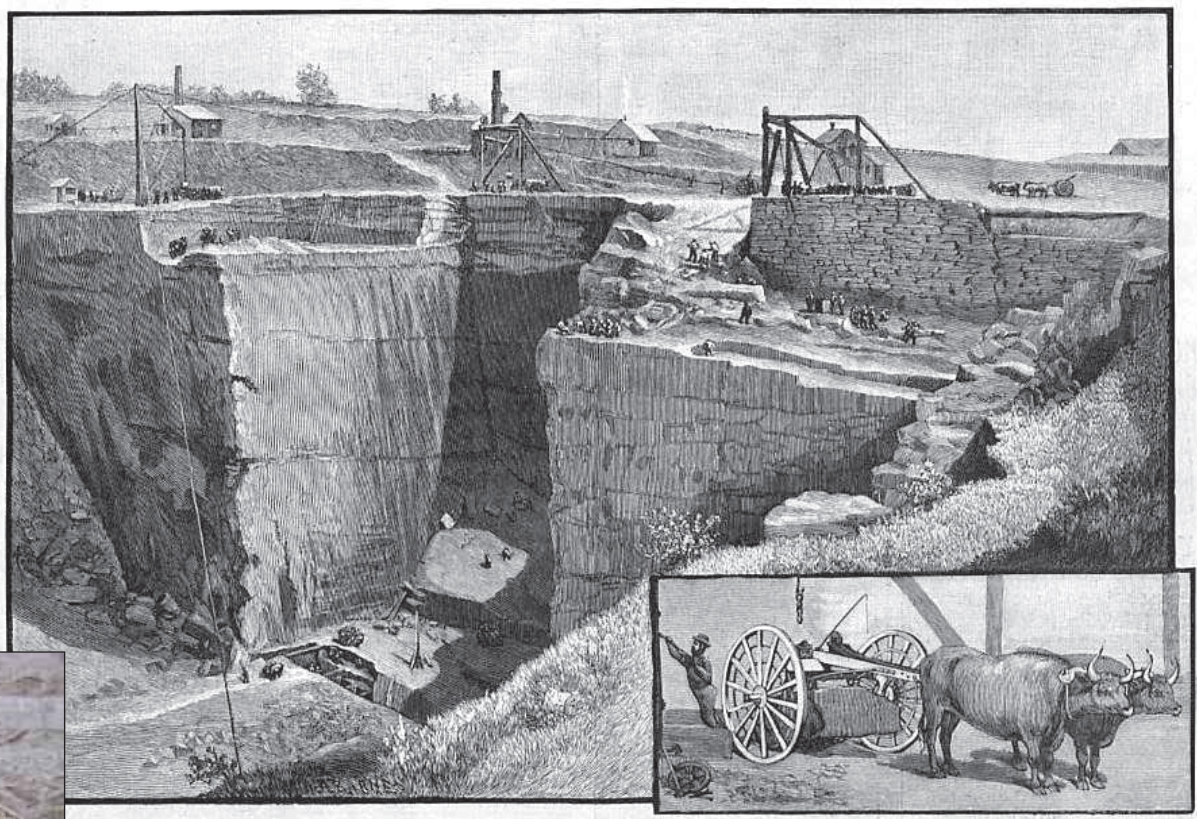


Scenes from the Past

The brown, stone trim found on many of Washington's row houses in the form of window sills, arched carved doorways and columns, and elegant front steps is often simply referred to as brownstone. In fact, it's actually known as Hummelstown Stone, and its namesake is the western end of the Lebanon Valley in Pennsylvania, 10 miles east of Harrisburg, at the small town of Hummelstown. Its quarry became the site of one of the outstanding brownstone industries in the United States.

German settlers in the area first recognized the value of this stone as a building material, and on May 2, 1867, the Pennsylvania Brown Free Stone Company was formed. In 1875, it was bought by Allen Walton who continued with the corporate name until 1891, at which time he had it re-chartered as the Hummelstown Brownstone Company. Walton aggressively sought markets in Washington, DC, Baltimore, Maryland, and Richmond, Virginia.

In 1885, the Hummelstown Brownstone Company built and chartered the Brownstone-Middletown Railroad, a standard gauge rail line that joined the Reading Railroad at the east end of Hummelstown. This



photo—courtesy Kelsey & Assoc. private collection.

Hummelstown Brownstone Company postcard showing view of its quarry.



photo—Paul K. Williams—The InTowner.

Overdoor showing typical brownstone carving design, 525-27 New Hampshire Ave., NW.

improvement increased sales tremendously. At the height of its production, the company employed about 500 men in quarrying and finishing the stone. Most of the skilled workers were Italian, German, and Scotch-Irish immigrants. However, because the nature of the stone made it impossible for the stone to be quarried in the cold of

winter, only the skilled masons were employed year round.

Many quarries were solely suppliers and purveyors of the stone, and few were involved in the finishing phases or the elaborate process of stonemasonry; rather, this was done by another company. The Walton firm was the exception, as it chose to handle all aspects of production and finishing, thereby enabling it to compete more profitably

in the market. Hummelstown brownstone and similar sandstones were known as "freestone" because of properties allowing them to be worked freely in every direction, rather than in one direction along a "grain." This characteristic made them

very popular with stone cutters and masons.

A rock face finish (sometimes called pitch-faced work) was done with the pitching chisel and the face of the stone left rough. This finish required little work and was cheaper than any other kind. The tooth-chisel finish resembled pointed finishes, but it was not so regular. Broached work was done with a point so as to leave continuous grooves over the surface, and crandalled work, which gives the stone a fine pebbly appearance, was done with a crandall, which looked much like a large comb.

Most bas relief and shallow sculptural forms could be visualized from the



photo—Paul K. Williams—The InTowner.

This view of the former mansion at 525-27 New Hampshire Ave., NW and now the headquarters of the American Political Science Association shows how brownstone was used to embellish the façade.

architectural rendering or drafting and carved into the stone, but if the shape was more complex, a three-dimensional, plaster of Paris model was sometimes made to see how the precise form would appear and to act as a guide for the stonecutter.

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Photo—courtesy Kelsey & Assoc. private collection.

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