

Fall River Gra

It's all around — under the city, on the ledges, in the buildings and in the memories of Fall River.

It's invulnerable granite, the rock everlasting which literally makes the city.

Granite scores the east side of the Taunton River and it can be traced from Assonet to Tiverton. But it is most evident in Fall River's mills, churches, library, courthouse, former high school and armory.

It gave its name to the former Granite Block, once the heart of downtown, to the Granite Mills, to Granite Street and Granite Row and the Fall River Granite Co.

Fall River granite also built such varied structures as a Newport mansion, some of Fort Adams and the base of the state house in Albany.

"Fall River is built on a hill of granite," wrote A.S. Phillips in his history of the city, and probably nowhere else is there to be

found such an architectural study of granite for the rock which came from its quarries went into almost all of the major buildings constructed in the late 19th century.

The pioneer Massachusetts geologist Edmund Hitchcock noted in 1841 that "no rock can be finer for architectural purposes than the granite of Troy," the name by which the city was then known.

The granite, primarily tannish in hue, made up of quartz, feldspar and hornblende, was important because of its quality of hardness.

Later, this same quality, which distinguished it not only from other types of construction rock, but from other types of granite, was to make it too difficult to work with, not so readily adaptable to newer methods and instruments.

Fall River granite had

approximately a 50-year heyday, although companies which dealt in it were in existence for almost a century.

The tons of rock which have come out of the major and lesser quarries here are inestimable. Early writers predicted that there was enough to build all of the pyramids along the Watuppa.

Not pyramids but the mills, which for so long symbolized the city, were what granite built along the Quequechan and wherever there were ponds and lakes and streams.

To travel along Route 195 is to get the panoramic impression of them that Sylvia Chace Lintner defined in her study of "Mill Architecture in Fall River." She described them as the "most impressive sizable collection of granite factories in the country."

Somehow, they seem to have stood forever, these examples of everlasting granite. Square, rugged, monolithic, differing little in concept but only in size and in the number of their towers, they range in clusters of three and four along the sides of the highway.

Their names roll out in the annals of the city, some long gone to fire or demolition, others still standing — Union, Duffee, Troy, Chace, Crescent, Granite, Stafford, Tecumseh.

As Fall River developed from a farming community, where the earliest factories, made out of stone collected from the fields resembled barns, to a position as the world's textile leader, the value of the granite which underlay the city was obvious.

Many manufacturing concerns owned their own quarries, and many mills were built where they were because the rock was there. In other communities, brick had to be imported to sites, but in Fall River the supply of rock was underfoot and all around.

Much of the granite that went into Fall River's landmarks came from the quarries of the family of a woman who long presided in a granite mansion.

The late Mrs. Mary (Beattie) Gifford, former curator of the Fall River

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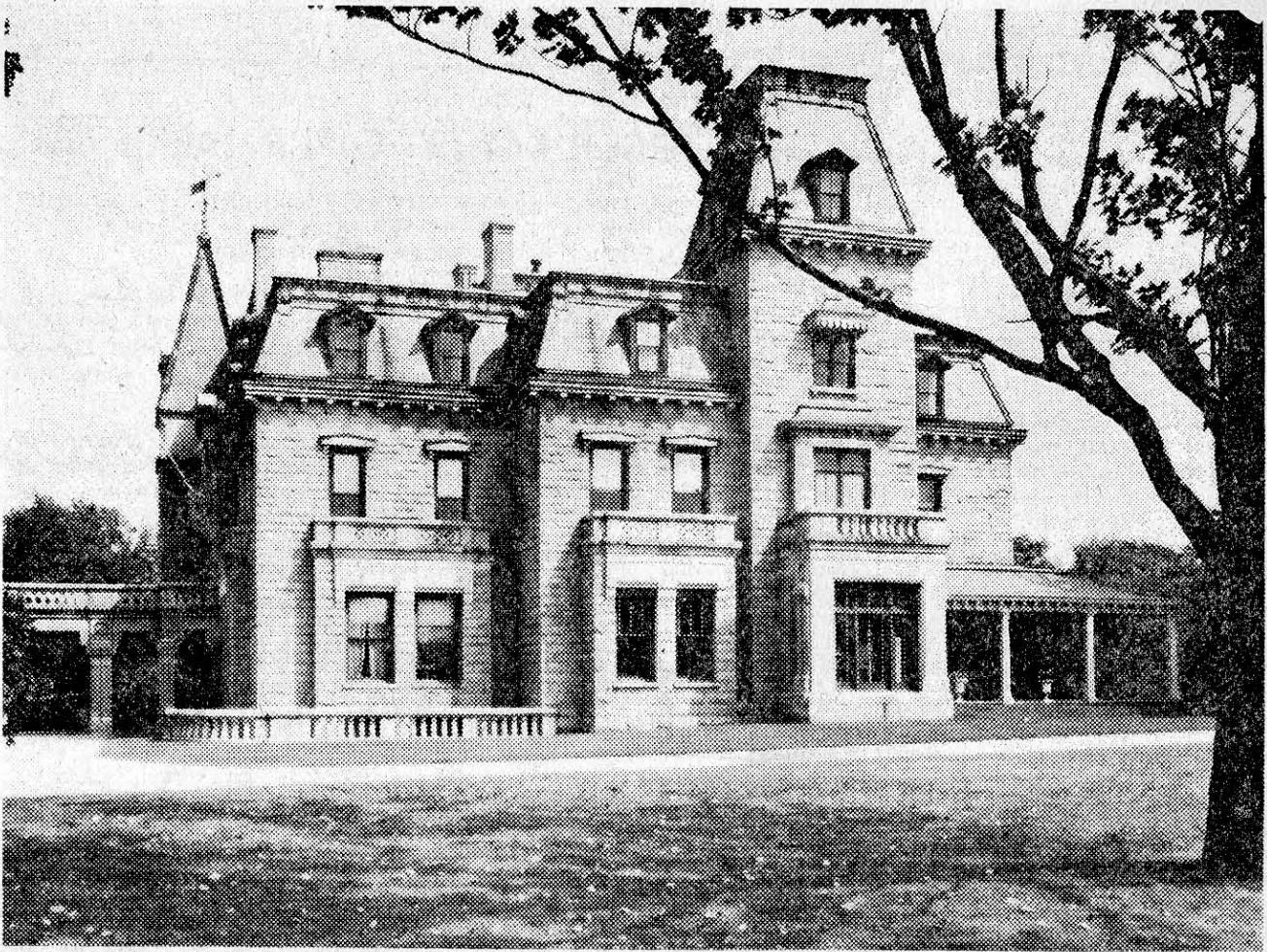
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Granite Is City's Founda



Chateau Sur-Mer, located on Bellevue Avenue in Newport, is built of Fall River granite. The massive villa is considered one of the finest examples of Victorian architecture in America.

Historical Society, in an interview several years ago, noted that her family once owned almost all of the granite here.

It was her grandfather's granite that went into so many buildings - including the former city hall and the old Durfee High School.

From the quarry of William Beattie, at Beatties Ledge on North Quarry Street, came the most and the best of the granite.

The Beatties, including John, David and Will, all had their own quarries either alone or in partnership.

Two other names have come down in the little recorded history that there is of granite here, and they were the pioneers.

Maj. Bradford Durfee, whose employees worked Bigberry Ledge on the shores of the river near 16th Street, became most active among the factory builders.

His nephew, Benjamin Davol, a contractor who worked on the rebuilding of Fort Adams in the 1850s, bought the ledge on Quarry Street which was later acquired by the Beatties.

Other major outcrops of granite were located at the Beattie and Wilcox Ledge on Eastern Avenue, the Thurston Ledge, east of Frelove Street; and on Bell Rock Road, where Lloyd S. Earle once owned a quarry.

From a ledge in Assonet came the granite for one of the Sagamore Mills, brought in on a spur railroad track, and reportedly also for a Newport mansion.

Mrs. Gifford remembered when it was an everyday occurrence to see "granite for use as cobblestones or curbstones being brought through the streets on wagons pulled by oxen."

As she remembered it, the stone was removed by men using crowbar-like implements. The larger pieces were hoisted out by a derrick. The cutting operation took place right at the quarry with varying sizes of tools depending on the size of the block to be cut. Men shaped the curbs and pavement stone by hand.

Granite, even in a curbstone, looks massive. But for an idea of just how massive it could be, there are the dimensions of

some of the singly cut stones which went into one of the American Print Works building - 12 feet long, three feet square and as much as 18 tons in weight.

Since it is no longer quarried here, the natural supposition might be that the supply of granite has been exhausted. Not so, Mrs. Gifford noted. "It's still here. Fall River's built on it, but nobody wants it."

A quarry remains at the top of Bark and Monarch Streets and East Enders attest to the section near the Kerr Mill through which Route 195 runs. In the South End, there is the ledge on King Street near South Main. There are other traces and outcrops from throughout the city and down to Assonet Ledge, but Beatties is filled in and is the site of housing projects.

The economics facts of life were that, as the costs of quarrying rose, the dressing of granite became too expensive a proposition. Granite, in effect, became dead rock as far as the life of the community was concerned.

The monuments to Fall River granite are many,

and in those buildings may be traced the developments in technique in its use from the earliest rough granite overcast, hammered stone, cut stone and finally to carefully fitted blocks.

Whether chiseled out, or blasted out of quarries, and however dressed or refined, basically it is Fall River granite which appears in a variety of architectural designs.

The range is from St. Mary's Cathedral, for example, which is 11th century Gothic in style, to the former Durfee High, which was described as modern Renaissance in style when it was built in the late 19th century.

The library is constructed of dressed Fall River granite, the YMCA of hammered Fall River granite and gray Roman brick and the Water Works on Bedford Street, of handcut granite.

In terms of new building, granite is the stone in the 57-story condominium and cooperative apartment building on East 57th Street in New York.

Commonly used for public buildings, granite

tion

was never popular for homes, even among the wealthy. But two outstanding examples survive. They are Chateau-Sur-Mer in Newport and the Fall River Historical Society Museum.

Singular amid the limestone and marble minipalaces on Bellevue Avenue is the granite villa, built in 1851-52 for William Shepard Wetmore, which was once considered the most substantial and expensive residence in Newport.

Its park-like grounds extended to the ocean. The mansion, which is considered one of the finest examples of Victorian architecture in America, is now opened to the public by the Preservation Society of Newport County which owns it.

The chateau is not that dissimilar in appearance to the Historical Society building which dates from the same period. It was originally built on Columbia Street as a home for Andrew Robeson Jr.

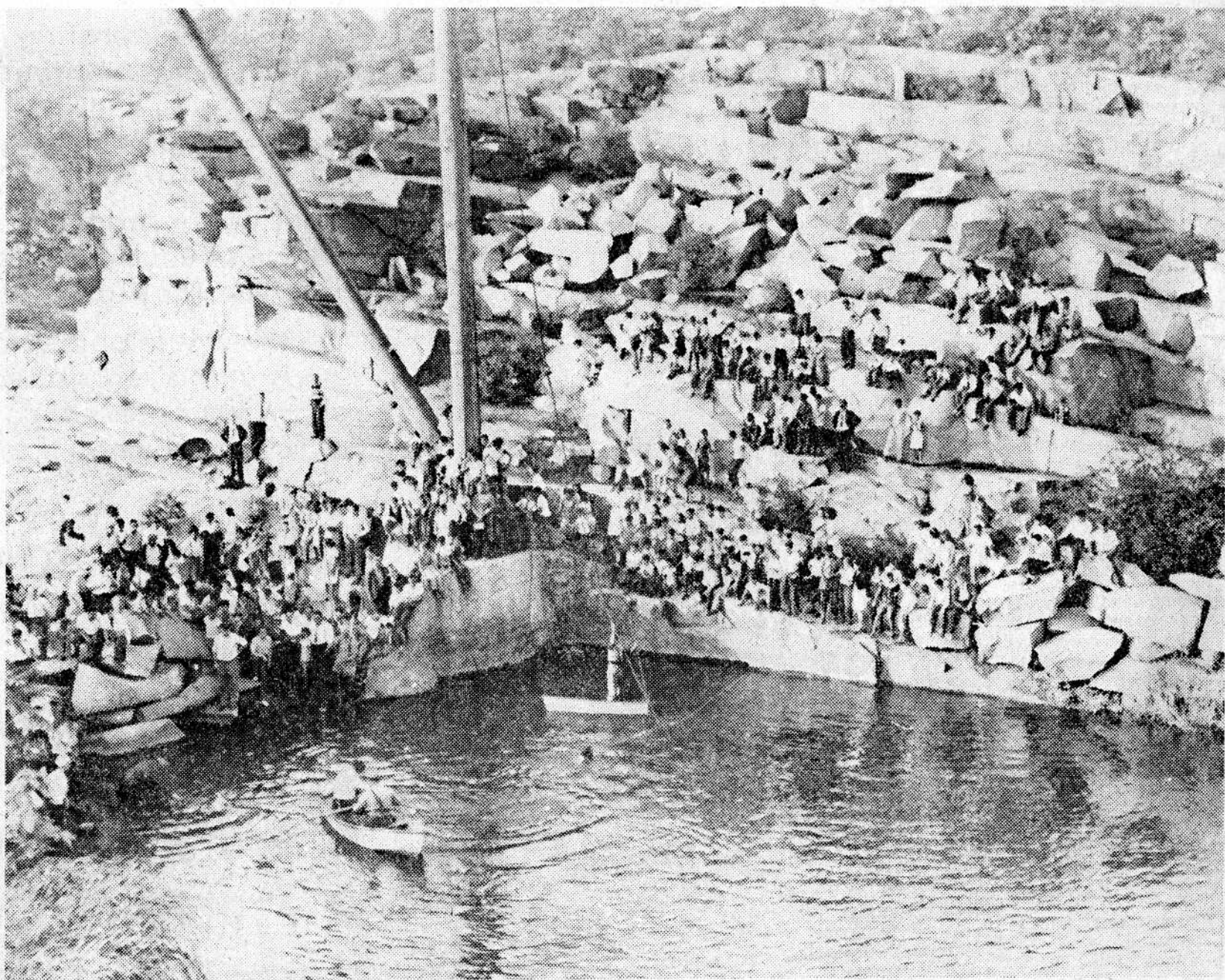
A later owner, Robert K. Remington, decided that he liked it, but not where it was. So he had it dismantled, block by block, removed and re-assembled at the corner of Rock and Maple Streets. It was given to the Historical Society by David A. Brayton, who had inherited it, and it, too, is open to the public.

Money could commission a mansion of Fall River granite on the large simple estate in Newport, or have one moved to another site in Fall River.

But there was one thing that money could not do with Fall River granite, not even for William Beattie.

His granddaughter recalled that when he bought land in Oak Grove Cemetery for his plot on a high spot overlooking his quarry, he wanted that site marked by a large and highly polished monument. He got the monument he wanted, but to have it polished, he had to have it made of granite from Quincy.

Fall River granite resisted all attempts to alter its nature. Four-square, solid and strong, it lacks style but it has substance. Its beauty lies in its ruggedly natural qualities, not in malleability or in ornamentation.



Thousands and thousands of tons of the granite that created mills and buildings, cobblestones and curbstones in the city were quarried from Beattie's Ledge on North Quarry Street. It was named for owner's family, and from that quarry of William Beattie came the granite which went into the original B.M.C. Durfee High School and the former City Hall. The late Mrs. Mary Gifford, who was curator of

the Fall River Historical Society, remembered that at her grandfather's quarry, the granite "rose up like stairs." Unfortunately, too, from that very quarry where "the best and the most" of the granite came, there were also tragic drownings. In this photograph, a search is being carried on for young victims. Now it is filled in and is the site of housing projects.