

5 Hard as Rock: the enduring history of granite in Ogden

It is remarkably fitting that one of the principal and long-standing industries in the Stanstead region is the quarrying of granite, for the derivation of Stead is “place”, and that of Stan is “stone”, so Stanstead actually means “place of stone”. The stone in question is granite, which is quite literally the bedrock upon which the Municipality of Ogden rests! This 370-million year old igneous rock directly underlies about 15 percent of Ogden. More importantly, for about 150 years, granite has been the natural resource that has been the very foundation for our municipality’s commercial life. At times in the past the quarries and cutting sheds provided hundreds of jobs to the men of Ogden and surrounding area. This article provides a brief synopsis of the birth and growth of this local industry, and its vital role in our history up until the Second World War.

So what is granite?

Granite is a plutonic igneous rock, which is to say that it slowly crystallized or solidified from a molten magma at some depth, commonly Kilometres deep, below the surface of the Earth. Granite’s crystals tend to be just visible to the naked eye, and are made up of three light-coloured minerals (quartz, potassium feldspar, and plagioclase), plus typically a smaller percentage of darker (or mafic) minerals such as biotite, muscovite and/or hornblende. It is the proportion of quartz, a very hard durable mineral, that makes granite such a robust building and monument stone.

In the Ogden area we have two principal varieties of granite that have been quarried. The more common type is known as the “Stanstead Grey”, where mafic minerals make up about 12 percent of the rock and give it its grey colour. The second variety, “Beebe or Beverley White”, has far fewer dark minerals and as a consequence is much lighter in colour.



Polished (above) and rough (below) surfaces of Stanstead Grey (left) and Beebe or Beverley White (right) varieties of our local granite. Very roughly the darker or mafic minerals make up about 10-12% of the Stanstead Grey and 5-7% of the Beverley White.

Geology is oblivious to such transitory human constructs like national borders and our granitic rock mass, referred to as the Stanstead Pluton, is only one of a series of igneous intrusions that form a broad linear trend extending from southern Rhode Island in New England to Aylmer in Quebec. Some of the plutons exposed at the surface have areas of less than 25 km² (like the Stanstead Pluton), others exceed 300 km². All of these intrusions are genetically and compositionally related. They were all emplaced (intruded into the pre-existing rock as a magma), between 360 and 390 millions of years ago, during what geologists refer to as the Devonian Period. The fact that today these plutons are exposed at surface, is a testament to the relative density of granitic magmas and the power of erosion over hundreds of millions of years. Glacial erosion during the ice ages was only a relatively small component.

Early exploitation

To the early settlers of what was the southern portion of Stanstead Township (now Ogden), granite on your wilderness lot was both a blessing and a curse well mostly a curse. The settler could anticipate relatively thin soils on top of his granite, and due to granite’s impermeability, in low areas above the granite, boggy areas could be expected.

The use of uncut granite field stones for cellar and well walls in the Stanstead region, dates back to the earliest period of homesteading (late 1790s). By the early 1800s the flow of immigrants into the Township of Stanstead was considerable and by 1815 the population had reached at least 2,500. Almost certainly amongst these were experienced masons, and of course the blacksmiths capable of making and sharpening the masons’ tools. Very early on, the masons, or even self-taught farmers, would have been shaping granite blocks into door steps, hearths, lintels, and foundation corner posts for houses and barns.



Old shallow working of a granite ledge at Millstone (Dale Bullock's farm in Ogden). Portion of granite ledge removed shown by blue arrow.

In many places in Ogden granite ledges are well exposed and the action of frost on the joints and small fractures in the granite would result in natural blocks of granite of manageable size capable of being transported by oxen teams pulling stone sleds or simple sturdy carts. Over time many farmers endowed with granite on their property would have had small workings at the ledges to provide their own needs and perhaps their neighbours. Some of these workings or small quarries were more accessible, or provided better block sizes, or better stone, and the operations became commercial (if only barter) operations at least on a seasonal basis.

Praise for our local granite

The geologist Sir William Logan grew up on his parent's farm in Montreal, part of which is now Parc Lafontaine. After conducting field work in the Eastern Townships in 1847 and 1848, he commented on the commercial potential of our local granite, describing the outcrops near the border in Stanstead Township as representing an *"inexhaustible amount of [building] material of a very beautiful and probably enduring quality"*. Samples of Stanstead granite were evidently on display at the Provincial Exhibition being held at Bonsecour Market in October of 1850. A reviewer from the Montreal Witness was quite impressed *"We were much struck by specimens of granite from Stanstead, precisely similar, so far as we can judge, to the celebrated Aberdeen and Peterhead granites [from Scotland].Here then is a treasure in Canada, provided it be rightly used, which has not hitherto, we presume, been at all adequately appreciated"*.

Problems of extraction, or the quarrying of granite, had largely been worked out and the technology at mid-century was being advanced by the use of steam power. The real challenge was getting such bulky heavy material to urban centres where it could be profitably sold and utilized! Fortunately the solution, a railway, was on its way.

Jonathan Hall Haselton and the first commercial quarries

The man credited with transforming the scale of quarrying in our area and truly making it an industry, is Jonathan Hall Haselton. In late 1864, the then 25-year-old Jonathan arrived in Stanstead with his young family from Auburn, New Hampshire. He initially established himself in the leather business with a small shop in Stanstead, but his true calling was that of a stone mason. Jonathan may have brought with him experience in the granite trade gained from quarries in Auburn or neighbouring Manchester. By 1868 Haselton had probably opened his first small quarry and started a business of cutting and shaping this stone for local needs.

In 1863 the railroad had reached Newport and by 1870 it was extended north via the Massawippi Valley Railway to Sherbrooke, where it had connections to Montreal and Quebec City. Market access for the quarried stone was now secured. In 1873, Jonathan Haselton, in partnership with Portus B. Kingsley, began commercial quarrying operations on House Hill, but this met with limited success. However, by 1876 Haselton had formed a partnership with Elmer Roundy and they acquired quarrying rights from farmer David W. Moir in the vicinity of what would become Graniteville. Moir himself would soon become implicated in the partnership and eventually became a prominent dealer in granite. In 1877 Haselton and his family purchased the old Parker Salls farmhouse property and moved in to be adjacent to his new quarry. By 1880 the quarry was formally under the operation of a partnership styled as "Haselton and Moir", and for somewhat obscure reasons was known as the *Harris Quarry*. The quarry first established here by Haselton has remained in operation ever since,

although obviously greatly expanded.

Jonathan himself died suddenly at the relatively young age of 51 in 1890. His four sons, Charles, Herbert, William, and eventually Clarence, initially under the name Haselton Brothers Ltd. carried on the granite trade, but focused mostly on the wholesale and finishing side of the business.

Other early pioneers of the industry

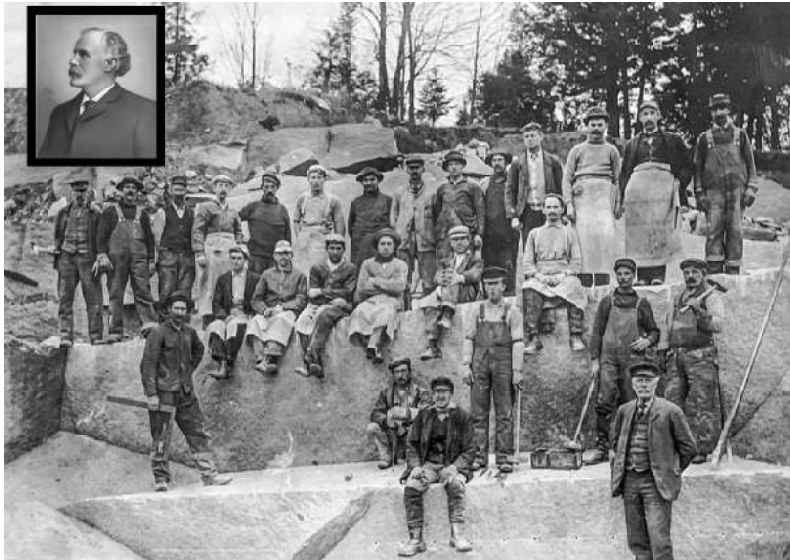
David Walter Moir (1842 - 1924) was the son of Scottish immigrants and was born on the family's Graniteville farm. He grew up to be a temperant, community-minded man of uncommon enterprise. Foreseeing the commercial benefits of a custom's establishment at Cedarville, as a 23-year-old he led a group of locals in constructing a steamboat wharf there in 1865. He was also a Stanstead Township councillor, and was a founding trustee of the Graniteville Methodist Church, and indeed donated the land for the new church in 1897. When approached by Haselton and others for quarry rights on his land in the 1870s, he was quite ready to oblige, and within a year had joined the stone cutters and re-purchased a third share in the granite.



David Walter Moir (inset) and family at their Graniteville farmhouse.

After Haselton's death in 1890, Moir acquired all residual rights in the Haselton quarry properties, formed the Moir Granite Company (MGC) and instituted a major expansion in activities, including the building of the Moir Granite Company Railway spur from the quarries to Lineboro. His quarry business eventually became unprofitable then insolvent, but Moir showed remarkable business dexterity and while MGC was going bankrupt he formed D.W. Moir, Son & Co., that focused on the granite finishing business. Eventually he sold this profitable business to Stanstead Granite Quarries Company Ltd., turned his back on granite and returned to farming.

Samuel Bennett Norton (1856 - 1932) was a native son of this region born near Gline's Corner. Early in his career he worked as a carpenter and contractor in the area, and interestingly even when fully involved with the granite business, he built several homes and hostels in Graniteville to help accommodate the growing number of quarrymen employed there. Norton was very civic-minded and served as Beebe's mayor for six years. He first became involved in the granite business as a founding director of The Stanstead Granite Company (SGC) in 1893, whose letters patent list his occupation as farmer. The Stanstead Granite Company had a relatively short (until 1898) and rather unsuccessful business run, and by 1896 Norton was no longer involved.



Samuel Norton (inset and lower right) and his quarrymen in the Norton Quarry.

In that same year, Norton was serving as an agent for D.W. Moir, Son & Co. and travelling the country obtaining contracts for the stone the company was retailing. However, in August of 1899, the company was sold and Norton decided to strike out on his own. In November of 1899, and then again in 1902, he purchased quarry rights from Russell Rediker on the southeast corner of his farm property (adjacent to the Harris Quarry), where Rediker already had a small quarry. By the early 1920s, Norton was operating the largest granite quarry in Stanstead County.

His relationship with Rediker was congenial, almost brotherly. In some of the tougher years Norton was so broke he and his family had to lodge with the Redikers. Norton was known himself as a very considerate and fair employer, and as a quarryman, someone who had an uncanny eye for the characteristics of granite. Indeed Norton had but one eye, having lost the other in a quarry accident, but we are told that with that one eye and the feel of his hands,

he could examine a cut paving block and determine precisely where and in what orientation, that block had come from in his quarry. By 1929 his was perhaps the most successful of the three major Graniteville quarry companies and in that year he sold his business to Brodie's Limited. He died three years later.

James Brodie (1848 – 1920) and his wife Margret Dornan were Scottish immigrants to Canada, arriving in Stanstead Township in 1889. James' father and grandfather had worked as stonemasons in various quarries in southwestern Scotland, so granite was in the family blood. By 1871 James had emigrated to Connecticut and continued to work in the stone cutting trade. In Connecticut, he met his Scottish-born wife. They returned to Dalbeattie, Scotland for a time, and settled in a district known for the production of granite paving stones. Undoubtedly the opportunities in granite in Stanstead enticed the family to cross the ocean once more, but no specific details are known. In 1890 he purchased much of fellow Scotsman Alexander Munro's farm just south of the Harris Quarry.

Brodie's quarry largely produced paving and curbstones, a function of the limited thickness of the granite sheets (layers) on his property, and Brodie's prior experience in that field. He suffered a serious injury in his quarry in 1903 requiring surgery, and also suffered from partial deafness. He was a Freemason and his obituary states that he was "identified in some degree with every movement of the advancement of the neighbourhood". When he died after a lengthy illness (likely silicosis) in 1920, his entire workforce followed the funeral cortege from Lineboro to the Methodist Church in Beebe.

John McIntosh (1856 - 1929) was also from foreign lands, ... Toronto! In fact McIntosh was born in Perth, Scotland, but arrived in Canada in 1872 as a teenager. He and his father both worked for a Toronto company led by the very successful businessman William R. Brock, whose concerns included finance, insurance, electrical utilities and real estate. By May of 1899, McIntosh was in the area inspecting the former assets of SGC and MGC and was in negotiations with the D.W. Moir & Son Co. By the end of August the old quarries, equipment and sheds formed the core of a new Brock company, the Stanstead Granite Quarries Company Limited (SGQCL). In that same month, John McIntosh and family moved to Beebe Plain so John could be the operating manager of the new company. As befit his heritage, his was a thrifty operation and as stated by a former employee "If he paid you a dollar, he wanted you to earn a dollar and then a little bit more". Others characterized him as a "driver" and a man that "couldn't get enough", and who often could get his workers confused with successive but somewhat contradictory orders. Nonetheless he became a pillar of the community and SGQCL, unlike its predecessors, became a profitable enterprise.

Russell Albert Rediker (1859 – 1959) The Redikers have been long-time residents in this area. Russell's father Simon moved here from St. Armand, Quebec in about 1850, and married a local girl from Derby, Vermont. Russell grew up in the family's log cabin, that is until he and his brothers accidentally burned it down!

Although the precise date is uncertain, Russell, or perhaps his father Simon, first opened a small quarry on the family property in the 1880s following Haselton's lead on the adjoining land. Russell subsequently sold this first quarry to Sam Norton in 1899, but then developed another one just to the north. At least by 1911 he was also working a quarry on Lot 157 just north of Arnold Road with granite rights leased from farmer S.P. Salls. Russell, when he was well into his 70s, and along with his son Ezra were working a quarry just west of Lineboro owned by another of his sons, Harold, and a Mr. Charlie Berry. Russell died in Graniteville just a few months shy of his 100th birthday, in the wood-framed farmhouse built by his father Simon to replace the original log cabin that he and his brothers had burned down.



Russell Rediker (left) and his son Ezra transporting a block of granite

Boom and bust

In the period immediately following Haselton's death in April of 1890, the nascent granite industry underwent a re-organization and several new players, many quite inexperienced, joined an industry whose outlook seemed very promising. In the period from August 1890 to July 1893 James Brodie & Son, the Moir Granite Company, and the Stanstead Granite Company all became operating enterprises. In all cases new quarries and cutting sheds were built, derricks installed, and most impressively, a standard gauge four mile rail spur was surveyed between Lineboro and Graniteville in the fall of 1891, which was completed by July of the next year.

The panic of 1893, caused by the collapse of the Reading Railroad in the States, brought the boom period to a close. The period 1893 to 1896 in Canada was known at that time as the "Great Depression". It was a time of limited growth and the demand for building and monument stone declined significantly. Neither the Moir Granite Company nor the Stanstead Granite Company ever recovered from this period and both went into receivership in August and December of 1898 respectively. The considerable assets of these two companies were purchased at a Sheriff's Sale for a mere \$100 and \$1602 respectively, by William Farwell,

bank manager of the Eastern Townships Bank (ETB) in Sherbrooke.

Consolidation, stability, and resilience

Although not formally stated, Farwell was likely acting on behalf of the ETB, and within eight months had sold the assets of the two bankrupt companies to William Rees Brock of Toronto for \$50,000, a very tidy profit indeed! Brock also purchased the D.W. Moir, Son and Co., as well as two additional quarries at Mount Johnson (near St-Jean, Quebec). All these properties were consolidated under the name the Stanstead Granite Quarries Company Limited (SGQCL), which was incorporated on October 24, 1899. Not all of the local granite enterprises were swallowed up at this time. James Brodie continued his paving stone quarry, Rediker had his quarry, and various Haselton and Moir sons continued their businesses largely focussed on granite finishing. Also late in 1899, Samuel Norton became a quarry owner-operator in the Graniteville area.

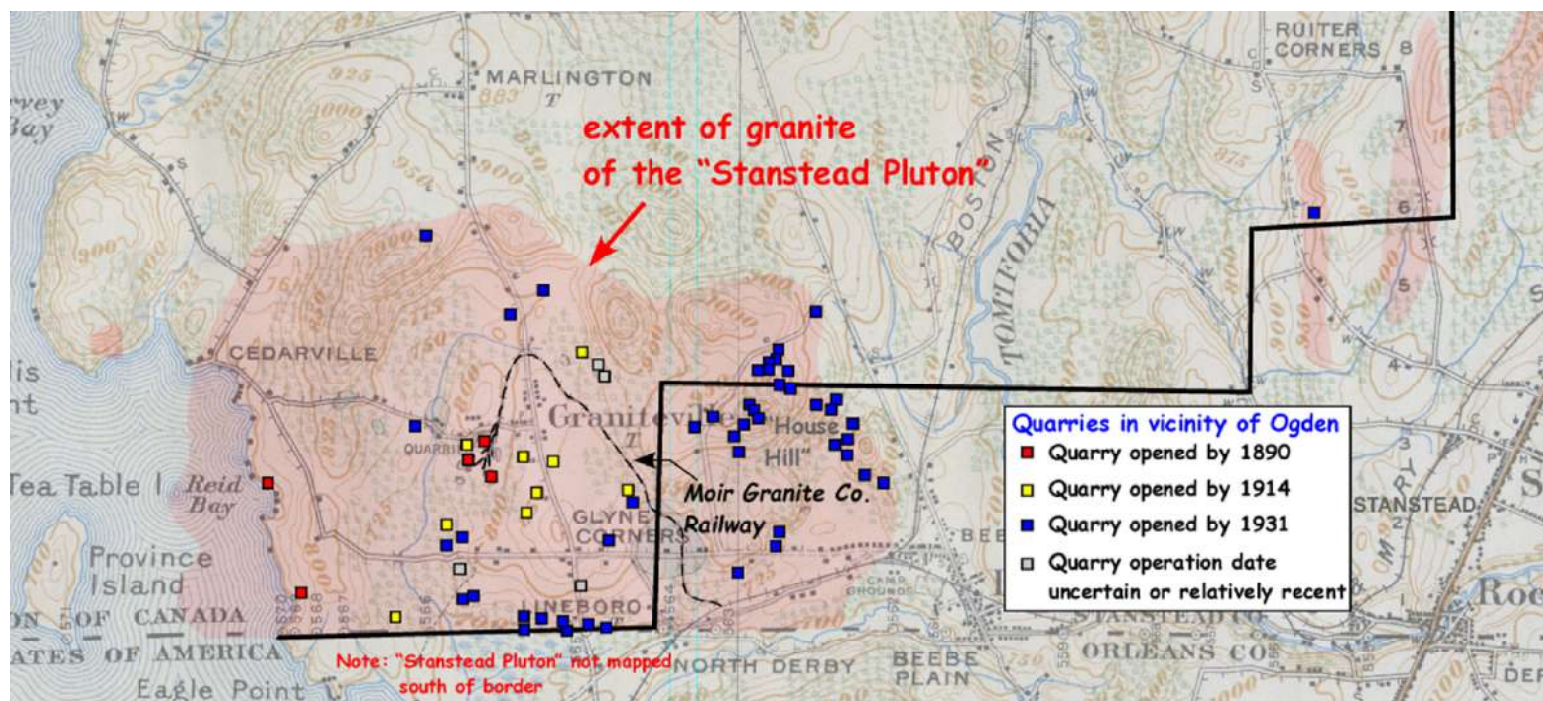
Through the 1900s and 1910s the industry gradually expanded, significant new capital was injected and the workforce, both in the quarries and the sheds increased, largely by the influx of men from Scotland and the States, as well as from Italy. The SGQCL in late 1899 started to build a massive finishing shop in Beebe, 260 by 80 feet, and as a consequence the smaller cutting shops at its quarries were shut down. Employment at the new shop soared and for a while, housing in Beebe for the recent hires was at a premium. In May of 1900 the shop was unionized, but over the decades few strikes occurred at either the shops or the quarries. Starting wages were about 16¢ an hour, more experienced quarrymen got 18 to 20¢. By the late 1920s, quarrymen could command from 30 to 50¢ an hour, some of the highest wages available locally.

The impact of the Great War was twofold. Many men enlisted of course, but the demand for building stone plummeted as money was largely directed towards the war effort. Post-war, the obvious demand for monuments, both in Canada and overseas, helped to restore the industry. In the early, to late '20s some major building projects incorporating granite were initiated, most notably the construction of the largest building in the British Commonwealth at the time, the Sun Life Assurance Company head office in Montreal. This building alone required some half-million cubic feet (40,000 tons) of Stanstead Grey granite!



Two icons from August of 1930; the R-100 dirigible and the partially completed Sun Life Building.

In February of 1929, Samuel Norton sold his quarry to Brodie's Ltd. for \$35,000, and the company shortly thereafter abandoned their existing quarry and focussed their efforts on the Norton Quarry.



Mapped extent of the Stanstead Pluton from the work of Robert Marquis of Ressources naturelles du Québec. Quarries and approximate dates of first operation are shown. In addition to those shown there would have been numerous smaller workings over the years. Base map was published in 1917.

The repercussions of the onset of the Great Depression initiated by the stock market collapse in October of 1929, was buffered somewhat for the local granite industry, because of two factors. Firstly the major quarries were still fulfilling their contracts for the Sun Life building, and secondly, there remained a relatively high demand for paving and curbstones. Indeed from 1926 to the early years of the 1930s, at least 22 small quarries in the House Hill area were opened. The smallest of these were called "motions", and were opened by quarrymen laid off from the larger quarries in 1930 who scrambled to continue to make a living with their skills.

Many of the House Hill enterprises were led by French-Canadians such as the Cloutier brothers, Albert Desrosiers, and Jean-Remi Fournier amongst others. J.-A. Boulais along with Jean Lacasse, were early pioneers here, opening a quarry in 1915. By the 1930s the workforce across the industry was also increasingly French-Canadian, but a surprising number of Swedes and Norwegians were also involved. In the spring of 1931 the contracts were finished and the market for curbstones and paving blocks was saturated and demand was falling. Asphalt was being increasingly used as a preferred paving choice. Employment for quarrymen (i.e. excluding cutters and finishers) fell from about 200 in 1931 to maybe 100 two years later.

Wages were also cut. Nonetheless, the continued if reduced employment of quarry wage earners was vital to Ogden and allowed neighbour to support less-fortunate neighbour during the Depression.

The Second World War brought with it similar challenges as with the Great War. Demand fell sharply, jobs were lost and men either enlisted or attempted to work at Butterfields where war work was booming and workers were exempt from service. The railroad spur line was closed down for good in 1941, with granite transport shifting to trucks. Many quarries simply filled up with water. The post-war recovery was slow and most quarries were abandoned. The finishing shops continued work, although now more commonly with imported stone as the local Stanstead Grey granite was deemed an inferior monument stone.

In early May of 1960 Rock of Ages, headquartered in Vermont, started negotiations to purchase certain quarries belonging to Brodies Limited in Ogden. In 1963 they were also successful in buying SGQCL, creating a subsidiary named Fairmont Granite. In 2016 Quebec based Polycor Inc. purchased Rock of Ages and all its assets. In 2022, on the site of the original *Harris Quarry* in Graniteville, the quarry work continues. About eighteen men are employed there full-time.



Aerial photograph taken in late summer 2015. View is towards the northeast encompassing the hamlet of Graniteville. The present day quarry is owned by Polycor Incorporated, a Quebec City headquartered company. The water-filled quarry at A is the abandoned Norton Quarry. B very roughly marks the location of the “Harris Quarry” opened up in 1876 by Jonathan Haselton and Elmer Roundy. To the right of C is where James Brodie had his quarry; it is now largely filled in with quarry waste (grout). Visible in the distance are D and E, the Salt and Pepper Granite quarries owned and operated by Granite DRC.