



Quincy History

Quincy Historical Society, Quincy Massachusetts

Spring, 1980



Granite workers and stone angels pose at Barnicoat cutting shed in Quincy.

Quincy's Granite Hills Were Golden

By H. Hobart Holly

It was the gold that came from the granite quarrying activity in West Quincy and the North Common area that was primarily responsible for the transformation of Quincy from a small, rather rural town, to a prosperous city.

From the rugged solitude of the West Quincy quarry area today, it is hard to visualize the activity that once took place there. Work might have been going on in as many as twenty quarries, large and small. Each had its derricks and many had substantial buildings. The area was laced with roads over which horses and wagons, and in the later days trucks, hauled their heavy loads. Starting in the 1890s there was the Quincy Quarries Railroad* with some five miles of track and sidings. In the early days it was all

muscle power, man and horse. Then came steam and compressed air to power the hoists, the pumps, and eventually the tools. From dawn to dusk there were the sounds of hammers on drills and chisels, blacksmiths working tools, heavy loads being raised and dropped, the slow turning of wheels, and frequent blasting. Later came the noise of steam engines, steam railroad locomotives, and the sharp noises from air compressors and tools. All the sights and sounds were those of great activity and hard work. This was big business by any index.

Today there are few reminders of this activity. The smaller quarries are

overgrown, the larger ones filled except for four that are still open but are water filled. Some old roads remain, but most are covered or overgrown. The old railroad bed shows in places. There remains part of the Granite Railway Incline, and the impressive ruins of the Lyons Column Turning Mill. Time has removed almost all vestiges of this once great industry that thrived for over a century.

Because of the importance of granite in Quincy's history, and the shortage of information available on the once vast industry, a study of land records was undertaken to gain a better understanding of how the quarrying started, grew and declined. The study concerns the still undeveloped West

*Not to be confused with the famed Granite Railway which operated from 1826 to 1870, carrying granite to the Neponset River.

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Granite Was Gold for Many Years

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Quincy area of some 400 acres bounded roughly by the Southeast Expressway, the Blue Hills Reservation and the Milton line. The selection of this area as the core of the quarrying industry in no way minimizes the contributions of the North Common area, the granite-working shops in West Quincy and South Quincy, many of which are still active, and isolated activities.

This West Quincy area was originally woodland and very important as such. Some stone was undoubtedly taken from here from earliest times but there was no record of it. Part of it adjoining the Furnace Plain was included in the 230 acres around the Iron Furnace. Some wood for charcoal was undoubtedly taken from here but the Furnace's main source was the 3000-acre grant in present Braintree. When the Iron Furnace operation ceased in 1655, the West Quincy property went to a creditor, Thomas Savage, who in 1670 sold it to Gregory Belcher and his son-in-law, Alexander Marsh. The Marsh holdings in the area were distributed to heirs in 1747 and eventually, through marriage, purchase, etc., came into the possession of John Hall. The south-westerly boundary of this property exists today. It runs roughly northwest from a point west of Bunker Hill Lane and contained the ancient landmarks of Hangman's Oak and Crazyman's Bound.

The second large portion was the 220-acre tract which Josiah Quincy purchased in 1763, and which was known as the Quincy Wood Lot until its sale by the family in 1889. This land extended west from the Marsh-Hall property along the present Blue Hill Reservation to the Milton line west. In 1886 there is a recorded lease of a 7-acre lot for quarrying, indicating that some quarrying activity may well have taken place here earlier.

The third large portion was along the Milton line to the north. Here were located a series of woodlots belonging generally to Milton residents. Among these were the Pierce and Rowe families, Governor Jonathan Belcher, Edward Cunningham, J. Murray

Forbes; and shipbuilders Vose, Babcock and Briggs. There is no question that timbers cut here went into the China Traders and whaleships that Daniel Briggs built on the Neponset around 1800. In 1836 the Rowe family sold to Thomas Hollis, stone-cutter, a lot "which is a quarry or stone ledge." This became the famous Fuller Quarry in 1869. It was the earliest quarry in this area of which we have definite record.

In 1837 Quincy was a town of about 3,000 souls; there were 533 men engaged in the quarrying industry. Thus there must have been many quarries in large-scale operations by this date. Bunker Hill (1826) was probably the first true quarry, followed shortly by Granite Railway, Wigwam (later Badger's), Bed Bug (Laver's Lyons), Goldleaf, and others with less colorful names. The properties remained generally in local hands and were leased to operators, virtually all of whom came from out of town. Some were from Boston but many were from a distance; Frederic J. Fuller was from Maine, Horace Beals from New York, William Townsend and J. S. Swingle

"The smaller quarries are overgrown, the larger ones filled, except for four that are still open but are water-filled."

from Ohio. A few of the names will bring back memories: Badger, Beals, Belknap, Berry, Cashman, Cantley, Clarke, Dean & Horrigan, Elcock, Fitzgerald, Fuller, Hollis, Jones & Desmond, Laver, Lyons, McDonnell, McGilvray & Jones, Mannex, Milne & Chalmers, Prout, Reinhalter, Robbie, Shawmut Spring Water Co., Swithin Bros. & Jones, Swingle, Townsend & Clements.

A major change in the industrial organization took place in 1889 when the Quincy family sold its 220-acre "woodlot" to Swithin Bros. & Jones, who in turn sold quarry lots to some ten operators. Individual ownership must have presented problems because in 1893 the Quincy Quarry Company was incorporated to "carry

on granite and other stone business and to buy and to let quarries." The incorporators were Barnabas Clarke, Thomas H. McDonnell, John Swithin, F. J. Fuller, Andrew Milne, John Jones, Thomas Swithin, and Clarence Burgin. All were local men; all except Mr. Burgin were granite operators. The "Syndicate" as it was known soon bought up the former Quincy - Swithin area properties, and others as well, and leased most back to the operators. In 1904, Quincy Quarry Company apparently ran into trouble, and it was placed under a trusteeship. In 1906, most of the properties and other assets were conveyed to the Quincy Quarries Company, a Maine corporation of which Theophilus King, a banker, was the only Quincy shareholder. William M. Payson, a Boston lawyer, was President. Three of the six shareholders resided in Portland, Maine. The purposes were very broad covering all aspects of granite and stone work. The individual operators continued in business. In 1930, Quincy Quarries Company conveyed 181 acres, the bulk of its property, to Atlas Powder Co.

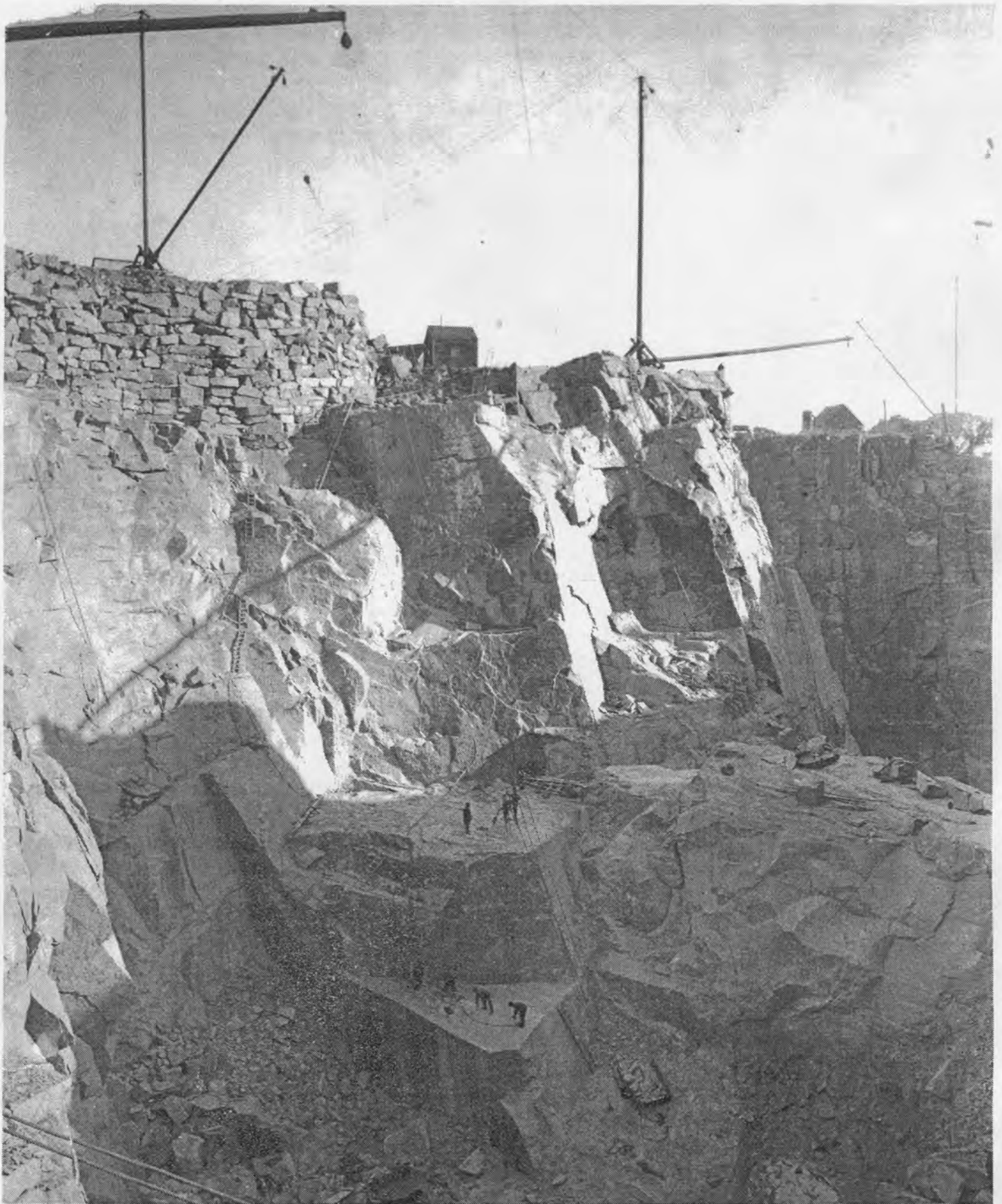
In 1963, Swingle's Quarry ceased operation, and the era came to an end. Where once the landscape was dotted with buildings, derricks and heavy machinery, and large-scale industrial activity dominated the scene, nature and man have left but few physical reminders of this great history. Yet three important legacies remain:

The fashioning of granite, be it largely imported stone, is still an important business here, perpetuating the skills that made Quincy famous.

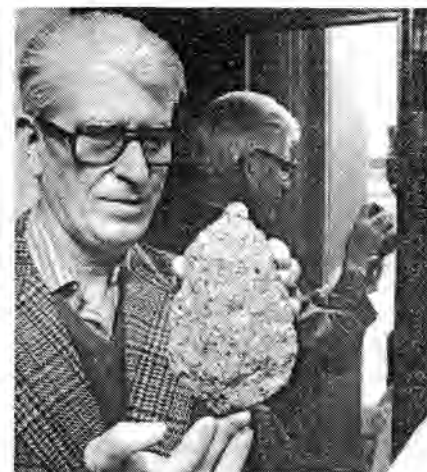
Many enduring structures and monuments of Quincy granite still stand here and all over the country as true memorials to the granite men of Quincy.

Finally, Quincy of today and especially West Quincy strongly reflect the granite community of former years, in its people and its character. Quincy is still The Granite City.

(Mr. Holly, author of this article, is the society's historian and was its president for two decades.)



A 1925 photograph of a Quincy granite quarry, unidentified.



GRANITE HOE, fashioned by an American fifteen centuries ago, is exhibited by Dr. George Horner, archeologist for the Quincy Historical Society. [John McDonnell photograph courtesy of *The Patriot Ledger*.]

Granite Industry's Early Ancestor Revealed In Hoe

An intriguing stone chip given to the Historical Society recently by its archeologist, Dr. George Horner, serves as a reminder that industrious Americans were working granite here long before Quincy existed.

Dr. Horner, who found the two-pound rock on a field trip near the Quincy-Milton line, has no doubt that it is an Indian hoe, suitable for agriculture and for the digging of clams and quahogs along the mudflats of our river estuaries. On each edge of the hoe are indentations where a thong could be bound to a shaft to form a handle.

"It probably dates back between 1,000 and 1,500 years, prior to contact with white men by the Indians," Dr. Horner said, and added that there were a number of Indian quarries in the Quincy area, some dating as far back as 7,000 years.

"There were extensive fields under cultivation by the Indians long before the advent of the white man. That is why stone agricultural implements are found from time to time," he said. "In addition, fishing along the coast and the inland rivers was a very busy occupation."

Glassworks & Lots More

"All indications and implications point to the conclusion that glass made at Germantown was used in the original windows of King's Chapel; some may still remain. During the American Revolution both the British and Tories worshipped there since, at that time, it belonged to the Church of England. It was not used as a stable or vandalized as were other Boston churches which supported the Revolution, thereby protecting the glass and the church."

That is the conclusion of Dr. George R. Horner, Quincy Historical Society's archeologist, in "Report of the Excavation of the Glassworks at Germantown, (old Braintree) Quincy, Massachusetts." Reprinted from the "Bulletin" of the Massachusetts Archeological Society, this report has been made available by the Quincy Society in a 16-page, 8½" by 11" pamphlet for \$2.

In it Dr. Horner details the methods and the work of the archeological "dig" at Shed's Neck marsh beside Town River, a project undertaken by the Quincy Society in cooperation with Eastern Nazarene College. His report includes maps and helpful sketches, as well as pertinent citations from letters and records concerning the 1752-1755 glassworks.

Other publications available exclusively at the society's offices at Adams Academy, Hancock and Dimmock Streets, Quincy, include:

Calendar of the Papers of General Joseph Palmer (1716-1788) by James R. Cameron. An important information resource on this notable local industrialist and patriot leader in colonial and Revolutionary War times. \$10.

Descendants of Edmund Quincy—1602-1637 by H. Hobart Holly. A genealogy of the Quincy family listing all persons who have borne the name by birth or marriage down to the present time. \$3.

New Beginnings—Quincy and Norfolk County, Massachusetts by James R. Cameron. A study of the conditions that resulted in 1792-1793 in the subdivision of the old town of Braintree, and the formation of Norfolk County. \$1.

Index to Three Hundred Years of Quincy, Daniel Munro Wilson by James R. Cameron. An index that makes the 1925 history of Quincy a useful reference book. \$1.

Wollaston of Mount Wollaston by H. Hobart Holly. The newly researched story of the 1624 expedition that resulted in the first settlement here and remembered by the name of Wollaston still with us today. \$1.50.

Quincy—350 years edited by H. Hobart Holly. A condensed history of Quincy in 13 chapters published in 1974 by Quincy Heritage, Inc. \$3.50 soft cover, \$5. hard cover.

The above prices, subject to change, are plus sales tax, and \$.50 if mailed.

Smallest Lightship?

Labeled "the smallest lightship in the world" and probably the shortest-lived was the tiny 19-foot dory anchored in five feet of water at Houghs Neck near Quincy, Massachusetts. The vessel was never recognized by the United States Government but was the brainstorm of Captain Joseph C. Riley, the jovial commander of the Houghs Neck steamer. Lying in the steamer's path was a shallow sand bar which could have grounded the craft.

Captain Riley, reputed to be the "most capable steamboat man on the coast", secured a small dory that had washed ashore and fixed it up to look like a lightship.

The dory was painted red with a white band amidships and towed to her station at the sand bar. Two large gasoline cans donned the two masts and two red lanterns were suspended from the stays. The words *Houghs Neck Lightship* were written on the white background with the number 15 painted below them. She remained in the channel during the summer of 1909.

When asked why the number 15 was painted on the little dory, Captain Riley replied that since the steamer's fare was 15 cents, no other number seemed appropriate.

[Quotation from manuscript of Frederick Thompson, South Portland, Maine.]

Quincy History

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The Quincy Historical Society is a non-profit, educational organization founded in 1893 to preserve information and material relating to the history of Quincy and its area, and to promote interest in local history. The Society maintains the Adams Academy building as a museum, library, visitor information center and meeting area complex.

You Are History

This is the first edition of Quincy History, a bulletin which your society expects to publish at regular intervals.

Quincy History will emphasize original historical research. It will also excerpt and re-focus local history already recorded. And it will try to present all such information in clear, non-technical language.

Quincy History also hopes to publish a printed version of "oral" history, the "only yesterday" life and times of Quincy inhabitants.

To do this, the Society needs your help. If you are eighty, you remember life during World War I and the Twenties. If you are seventy, you may have been one of those publicized "Flaming Youths" in the Twenties and you have memories of coping during the Great Depression. Younger members remember World War II at home and abroad. And if you are young enough to have grandparents living, as well as parents, they can remember the past for you.

So think about the past and talk with your older relatives and friends. Then put down on paper the interesting aspects of real-life history you have recalled or have been told. Send your addition to local history to Editor, Quincy History, Quincy Historical Society, Adams Academy, Quincy, Mass. 02169.

If there is sufficient response, the "oral history" essays will be published as a regular feature of Quincy History.

Do-It-Yourself Tips On Research

By James R. Cameron

Have you thought about doing some research in local history but did not know how to begin? This article will offer a very general introduction for the beginner.

Your first task as a prospective researcher is to discover a subject that interests you and will be worthy of investigation. Four questions or sets of questions will prove helpful: Where? Who? When? What?

The first question is one of geography. This is in part determined by your choice of local history. What do you mean by Quincy? The whole city? Your neighborhood? The county? The South Shore?

The second set of questions is biographical. What person or persons are you interested in? A famous person? Your ancestors? An ethnic group?

The third set of questions are chronological. What period of time do you wish to study? The Civil War? The period of the American Revolution? The period of settlement? If you choose to investigate this geographical area prior to 1792, your subject becomes Braintree rather than Quincy.

The fourth set of questions is functional or occupational. What spheres of human interest or activity concern you most? Your church? Education? Shipbuilding? Politics? The most common error for the beginning researcher is to select too large a topic.

The above questions will help in limiting the areas of investigation, or conversely, in expanding your topic if the sources of information should prove to be meager.

The second task of the researcher is to locate relevant sources of historical information. What do you mean by research? Are you looking for a report on your subject that has been written by someone else? If this is how you define your task, the card catalogues of the Thomas Crane Public Library and the Library of the Quincy Historical Society are the places to begin. Do not be hesitant in requesting the assistance of a librarian to help you locate either books or articles which deal with your topic. The Thomas Crane Public Library has a subject index to The Patriot Ledger as well as a complete file of the newspaper.

If you do not view your task simply as research, you face an almost endless process of interrogation. Begin with a general search as indicated in the paragraph above, paying particular attention to where others found their information. Where possible, go directly to their sources, rather than merely accepting their opinions and conclusions. Follow the clues from the work of others and trace every source as far as possible. Next use your imagination. If you could have any kind of information that you wanted, what kind would you request? Under ideal conditions, where might such information ever have existed? If these sources ever existed, what might have happened to them? Assume that your wish has been fulfilled and begin a systematic investigation to locate them.

By way of illustration, let me cite a recent experience of my own. I became interested in General Joseph Palmer who lived in Braintree in the eighteenth century. He is mentioned in the town records, church records and in histories of the Town of Braintree. I looked for his diaries, and letters to and from him and members of his immediate family, in: the Massachusetts Historical Society, The Adams Papers, The Boston Public Library, the New England Historic Genealogical Society, the society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, and other research libraries all over the nation. Since he served as a town, state, and national official, all of these archives together with the Library of Congress were checked. Court records were examined for his will and for property transactions. Since his papers had to be traced through the members of his family, genealogical research was necessary. Scholars studying John Adams and Robert Treat Paine, friends of Palmer, were interested in my research and generously shared their information with me.

Members of the Quincy Historical Society as well as the staff of its Library and Museum stand ready to assist you with your research project.

[Dr. Cameron, author of this article, is the head of the department of history at Eastern Nazarene College, Wollaston.]



Herbert Holmes and Hobart Holly, volunteers, discuss library operations of the society. (Oberg Photo)

Society's Library - A Good Place To Start

For research into the history of Quincy the library of the Quincy Historical Society is a good place to start. In fact, it's a good place to start when researching almost any Massachusetts town.

"The first focus of the library is on Quincy, secondly on Old Braintree, of which Quincy was originally part, and thirdly on Massachusetts and New England. The library contains the vital records for all Massachusetts towns, probably the largest collection of its type in the nation," explains H. Hobart Holly, society historian and the individual most responsible for the present arrangement of the library.

There are approximately 5,000 books, some dating back to the 1600s, 800 pamphlets on a variety of subjects, many early deeds, maps and court records, scores of old photographs, old newspapers, slides, building plans and oral histories in the collection. Most of the material dates back to the 18th and 19th centuries, although there is considerable material from an earlier period.

Historian Holly cites specific examples: "Quincy's industrial history, especially the granite industry and shipbuilding, including all the records of the old Bethlehem Steel shipyard where General Dynamics is today, are all available." Another important element of the collection are the land records compiled by Ezekiel C. Sargent, who was city engineer for Quincy and the society historian. Of these, the late Boston historian Walter Muir Whitehall said: "I have never seen such a record of 20 years' work by one so eminently qualified to do it."

The library, on the second floor at Adams Academy, is open to researchers by appointment and on two days: Wednesday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. when volunteer Herbert Holmes is librarian, and Saturday, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. when Mr. Holly is in charge. Assisting them in accessioning, cataloguing and care are Eleanor Brown, Helen Morris, Virginia Pratt, Edith Howlett and Doris Oberg.

This year the library committee,

chaired by Mary Clark, has had the primary goal of writing a collections policy for the library, defining purpose and scope of the collection. In pursuit of this goal the committee examined over thirty policies and procedure statements of area societies and historical societies. The revised policy will be announced soon.

The ongoing goals of the committee are preservation of and access to the library materials. Others on the committee are Helene Crofts, Louise Dinegan, Dorothy Newton, Catherine Roeder and Robert W. Sillen.

In Memoriam
GEORGE DARES HALL
 1901-1979
 President
 Quincy Historical Society
 1945-1946