Excerpts from the Diary of Hattie L. Mears

Edited by Ruth H. Wainwright

Editor's Introduction

Hattie L. Mears of Houghs Neck was a Quincy girl in the days before electricity and telephones, before teenagers required "wheels" to get around, and when pleasures centered on activities with family and friends. The diary is important to us for two reasons. It describes the simple everyday life of a girl that was typical of not only Quincy but most small towns of 1878, and the life of an eighteen-nineteen year old that is very different from that of today.

Hattie Lee Mears was born in Stoughton June 5, 1859, the youngest of seven children of James 1810-1894 and Martha (Hayden) Mears 1821-1906.

He was from Roxbury and she from Stoughton. They lived in Stoughton where he was a bootmaker. On July 17, 1867, James Mears purchased from the estate of Thomas Taylor the Great Hill area of Houghs Neck. From then until 1892 he was the Proprietor of the Great Hill House, a popular hotel there. On December 16, 1879, Hattie Mears married George N. Nash of Quincy, the G.N.N. of the diary. She died in Quincy February 14, 1952, age 92.

Hattie's brothers and sisters whose names appear in the diary were: J. Stanley Mears 1838-1897 who married Susan D. Marsh in 1862. He became the Proprietor of the Great Hill House in 1893. M. Francelia Mears (Martha) born 1842, married Albert N. Lunn of

Quincy's Granite Industries

An Overview

By H. Hobart Holly

It was primarily granite that made Quincy known nationally and internationally, and that transformed a simple rural town into a prosperous town and then a prosperous city.

The term "Quincy granite" applies to a stone of definite characteristics, found mostly here but not limited to the city boundaries. It is hard and coarse grained with distinctive appearance features that are easily identifiable to a person knowledgeable in the field. It varies in color from quite light and a bluish tinge to the famous dark and extra dark. The darks particularly are very handsome when polished. Polishing makes lettering more legible but finer grained stone is generally preferred for lettering. As a building stone it was second to none. It was considered virtually indestructable but in the great Boston fire of 1872, it did sustain some surface damage. The historical marker on the Custom House in Savannah, Georgia, proudly notes that it is built of granite from Quincy, Massachusetts.

Quarrying

The principal quarrying areas were the hills of West Quincy and the North Common area around present Quarry Street. There were fifty-four true quarries in Quincy. At one time thirty-six were in operation. Quarries would be opened and closed due to demand and other conditions. The deepest was Swingle's in West Quincy. This was also the last to remain in operation, closing in 1963. The second deepest was Hitchcock's in the North Common area. A quarry operation was big industry with much heavy equipment, powerhouses, blacksmith shops for making and keeping tools in condition, and other ancillary services. In the later years, the Quincy Quarries Railroad served the individual quarries and carried the stone to a main line siding.

The commercial value of Quincy granite was recognized from the earliest colonial days. Some of the early settlers had stone-strewn fields that had to be cleared which made the construction of stone fences a natural use. Almost all needed quality stone for foundations, thresholds, steps, hearths, walls and other uses might be available on his property but he would more likely have had to obtain it from someone else or from the Town Common Lands. The earliest stone building here was the Old Stone Meetinghouse that stood in the original town center at about Hancock and Cliveden Streets. Built not later than 1666, this was the earliest known stone
Hattie Mears Diary

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Boston in 1861. Nathaniel R. Mears 1844-1872 married Sarah A. Foster in 1870. He is listed as of Brockton and a hotel clerk. Mary F. Mears was born in 1846 and married Robbins Brown Glover of Brockton in 1867. William Hayden Mears, “Willie”, 1848-1918, married Crissie Wentworth of Quincy. His business is listed as trader. Eva Maria Mears, born 1852, married first Frederick T. Foss of Brockton in 1872, and second Henry A. Tilden of Milford in 1888. Of the brothers and sisters, only Eva was living with the family in Quincy in 1878, along with Hattie.

The original diary is the property of Mrs. Josephine Mulcahy of Quincy and Opa Locka, Florida, by whose permission these excerpts are published.

The Diary

Tuesday, January 1, 1878: Pleasant. At ½ past ten, Mr. Lyons, Mr. Wilde and two other Gent. came down to prove some more guns. Mr. Lyons stayed over here all afternoon. Geo. Morton called in the afternoon & I rode up town with him. Father did not go up town for the wind blew so. George N.N. did not come down for it snowed hard, commenced at 4 o’clock.

Friday, February 1: Stormy, had a very heavy N.E. snow storm. It snowed all day and the wind blew a gale, the Sea run very high. I did the ironing and cleaning today. Father did not go up town on account of the storm.

Saturday, 2: Pleasant. The storm lasted 38 hours. The Roads are drifted very bad indeed. Dick & Joe Veader, Jr. shoveled all day but the town team never turned out at all. Mr. Littlefield was 7 hours and a ½ going up town and back. Father did not go up. Baked all the forenoon. The largest storm for eleven years, all the travelling blocked & lots of vessels wrecked, houses swept away & lives lost.

Tuesday, February 26: Pleasant. Mother and myself ironed all the forenoon. Father carried Willie up town to stop over night. had a letter from Mary Hayden, wrote one to George N.N. Have got an awful cold in my head.

Sunday, March 10: Very warm & Pleasant. Mr. Lewis Richardson & Wife called. Amasa Smith also. A great deal of driving down here today. At six Nellie Howard & myself started to walk up town hall way with Brother Willie. Got as far as the Winships & met G.N.N. He picked us up & brought us home. We changed & then went up to So. Braintree & back, a lovely ride. G.N.N. & myself had quite a talk. He went home at 12 o’clock & did not stay all night as the house was full.

Monday, March 18: Stormy, rainy & windy. Father went up town at night, carried Willie up to stop over night. Had a letter from George N.N. Joe Veader had one from Geo. W. Morton. Joe has not gone home yet. So stormy we did not wash. Dick carried my letter to Geo. over to Mr. Littlefield’s for him to carry up town. Mr. & Mrs. Furnald & Carrie Furnald & Mary Dorand came down in all the storm, stopped here about an hour.

Tuesday, April 2: Pleasant. Eva & myself ironed all the forenoon; got pretty tired. Went over to Mr. Littlefield’s in the afternoon. At night I carried Willie up town, went down to Nettie French’s to tell her I would come up Saturday. Wrote to G.N.N. in the evening. Mother sick. Professor Dimmock was buried today, 43 years.

Wednesday, April 17: Pleasant. Father & Eva & myself up to Father French’s; & left us & Father F. took his team and carried Nettie, Eva & myself over to Sheriff Wood’s, Dedham to spend the day. We went over to the Court rooms & heard two cases. Then we went to the jail & went all over that, had a splendid time. Got back to Quincy at six o’clock at night. Mother met us there & brought us home... Saw G.N.N. got acquainted with lots over to F the Jail. The Best time.

Sunday, April 28: Stormy, heavy fog & rained all day. G.N.N. & Geo. Jones rode down at noon, stopped an hour, then went back. Allie, Francesia & Minnie went home today. Father carried them up to the Depot at 5 o’clock. G.N.N. came back with him, stayed all night. We raised the Old Boy in the evening. George sprinkled Eva with Flour. Willie went up home. Got an awful cold.

Tuesday, April 30: Stormy most all day but towards night it began to lighten up.

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Hattie Mears Diary
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George Morton rode down in the afternoon but did not stop. Father & Willie went up in the P.M. after the Girl but she did not come.... Commenced to eat in the dining room today. Commenced to make me another white skirt today.

Friday, May 3: Pleasant & very warm indeed. Father went up town at six this Morn. after Mr. Davenport, the Paperer. He papered the entry & half the sitting room. He carried him back at six. I went over to Mr. Littlefield's after milk at night. Aunt Hattie came down this noon, the Depot carriage brought her down. I have worked pretty hard & am awful tired; retired early.

Saturday, May 18: Regatta Q.Y.C., Quincy Point pleasant & very warm. Had the first Regatta today off Quincy Point. Lewis Richardson & wife called.... Geo. Morton & Mr. Keith came back here after the Regatta & went up town with Father. Stanley & Mr. Raymond rode down.

Thursday, May 30: Stormy, rainy all day. Geo. Morton & Mr. Keith called in the forenoon. Geo. N.N. came down at 8 o'clock, stayed all night. We made Ice Cream and had a gay time. Willie went up town at night after Father & Mother. They came from Brockton. Got up four dinners. Ice man came today, the first time. Left my flannel off last night.

Wednesday, June 5: Pleasant. Father & Willie went to Boston, gone all day. They went to Braintree in the Even. Eva & Nettie went up town at noon after Mr. Howard. G.N.N., Frank Foster, Mattie Nash & Mr. Ford came down & spent the Even. I was 19 years old today. G.N.N. went home with a sick headache at 11 o'clock. "Nineteen today!"

Thursday, June 27: Pleasant & the warmest day we have had. Mr. & Mrs. H.B. Brown came down & spent the day. In the evening Mother, Eva & myself went up town to the Graduation of the High School. It was very good....

Sunday, June 30: Pleasant & very warm. Mr. James Wilson from So. Boston came out with a party of 21 and had dinner, here most all day. Mr. Keith and Geo. Morton called. Geo. Jones came down & brought G.N.N. at ½ past 2. G.N.N. stayed all night. Geo. Wilson & Mr. W. Pattee called in the morning. We got up about 40 dinners. Willie went up home at night.

Sunday, July 7: Pleasant but not very busy. G.N.N. came down at ½ past 6. Mr. Wilson brought him down. We went out rowing after tea. Mary Lizzie Furnald & Carrie called in the evening. Mr. Keith stayed here all night. Mr. Henry Littlefield dropped down dead this P.M. at 4 o'clock in his woodshed, 70 years old....

Tuesday, July 23: Had an awful large party here today, about 200. George N.N. came down with Mr. Sproul and spent the evening, never went home till 5 of 12. Mr. S. put a page in my Scrap Album. I went out rowing after Tea, took Alice Bent out with me. Father & Uncle Willie went up town after breakfast.

Wednesday, August 14: Pleasant. We had the Weymouth Brass Band here in the evening. They played 3 hours & played splendidly. There were lots of people here but not as many as last year. G.N.N. came down early, stayed till ½ past 12, went to ride about 12. I went to bed at 1 o'clock. 7 stayed here all night so as to go fishing as soon as light. Warren Wilson here all night. Hattie Tilden called.

Monday, September 2: Pleasant. Geo. N.N. went home at ½ of six this morning. Washed got all through at 9 o'clock. Had an awful toothache in the afternoon. Claudine & Annie Vogel came over & spent the evening. Got up six meals today....

Saturday, September 7: Stormy in the forenoon & pleasant in the afternoon. In the evening the whole Neck went over to Taber's 18 to the Band Concert. It was very good. Mr. Walter Howard walked home with Eva & myself....

Sunday, September 8: Pleasant. This has been the busiest day we have had this year. Mr. Taber had two sacred Concerts over to his Hotel....G.N.N. came down about ½ past six & at 8 o'clock he took our horse & carried Willie & two other men up town; got home at nine....

Tuesday, September 10: Pleasant. Father went up town in the morn, & at night too. In the afternoon Geo. Morton & Mr. Keith came down & took Father, Mother, Eva, Annie, Claudine & Adam Vogel & myself over to the Red Lion. We stayed there 3 hours, had a lovely time....

Tuesday, September 24: Pleasant. Had a little shower towards night. Wrote a letter to G.N.N. Had a Postal from Lena. Father & Mother went up town to an Auction, gone all the afternoon.

The son of George N. and Hattie Nash, James A. M. Nash 1883-1952 was well known in Quincy as Steward of the Quincy Yacht Club from 1910-1950.

We raised the old boy all the time they were gone. Lillie, Gigge & I got up on the top of the Blacksmith shop after Grapes....


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Monday, October 7: Pleasant. G.N.N. went home this Morn at 6 o'clock. Father went up town at 7 o'clock this Morn & got Willie and Miss Rose White, the dressmaker. She came to do our dressmaking, will stay a week. Geo. Morton down about all day. She cut my walking suit, Navy Blue & Brown today. We washed today. Sewed all day.

Friday, October 25: Pleasant. We got ten dinners today for the Sheriffs. In the afternoon Father, Eva and myself went up town. Saw Geo. N. He looks real sick but hope he is not going to be sick but shall worry till I see him again.

Saturday, November 2: Pleasant. Lewis Richardson & Wife called this afternoon. Two men came very near getting drowned off Sheep Island at about 1 o'clock. Cleverly's son was one up to the Point, Bill over to Nut Island rescued them. One was pretty near gone. We gave them clothes & after they got warm, Father carried them home.

Saturday, November 10: Pleasant. Had quite a time here this morning. Mr. Farnsworth's dog chased our Cows & bit them awfully. Mr. & Mrs. Farnsworth over here most all the A.M. In the P.M. Mrs. Farnsworth, Spurgeon & myself went over to Nut Island....

Wednesday, December 25: Pleasant. At 1 o'clock I went up town after Geo. N.N. at Mrs. Ewell's. He stayed all night. We played cards most all the afternoon and evening. Geo. gave me a very handsome Cameo Ring; like it very much indeed. It is an em—ment ring. Mother gave me a very pretty Pair of Ear Rings, gold ones, & four handkerchiefs, marked H. Capt. sent me one of his Pictures.

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Quincy's Granite Industries

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meetinghouse in New England.

In recognition of the value of the stone here, and for fear that too much removal would deprive the townspeople of this asset, the Town Meeting early took steps to control the removal of stone and also wood from the Town Common Lands. These lands consisted of the North Common in the general area or present Quarry Street, and the South Common which included present Faxon Park and extended into present Braintree. In 1715 a license was required to remove stone. In 1730 the controls were strengthened but apparently were still not effective. In 1753, removal of building stone was virtually prohibited. Granite may well have been a major consideration in the Town's decision to sell off the Common Lands in the early 1760s. Thus, after this time, these sources of granite as well as the lands in West Quincy were all privately owned.

The stone taken in the eighteen century was in the form of boulders, both surface and dug, and probably increasingly from exposed ledges. These were broken into pieces of transportable size by crude methods using impact weights, heating and quenching. These were then shipped to their destination where they would be fashioned by skilled stonecutters. The earliest important building of Quincy granite was King's Chapel in Boston in 1753. Three local contractors supplied the stone; one for the foundation stone and other rough work from the South Common, and two for the better quality exposed stone from the North Common. The stone was shipped to Boston where it was worked by German stonecutters. Other significant buildings were the State Prison in Charlestown in 1815, the old Dedham Jail in 1817, and St. Paul's Cathedral Church on Tremont Street in Boston in 1820.

During this period improvements were made in splitting the stone. First was by driving wooden plugs into driven holes and then expanded by wetting. The holes in the granite for this method can be distinguished by being square rather than rounded at the bottom. Then came the "feathers and wedges". In this method, fitted shims were placed in the hole and a wedge driven between them. By properly locating the holes...
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and by skillfully controlled wedgedriving, a precise split could be obtained. In the quarries, explosives placed in driven holes were used to separate large pieces of stone.

Throughout the operation of the granite industry here, a granite contractor would agree to furnish the stone for a particular structure in accordance with specifications given to him. He would then shop around for the types of stone he would need, at the best price and delivery. Thus it was very unusual if all the stone for a major structure came from one quarry. Many times it did not all come from Quincy. At times Quincy firms owned quarries in other states to assure them of a supply of stone for which they had needs.

The lands from which stone was taken and where quarrying was later carried out were not granite properties; they were people's pastures and woodlots. A large portion of the North Common quarry area had been John Adams' Mt. Ararat pasture which he deeded to the Adams Temple and School Fund. Such properties turned out to be a very good investment. When a contractor wanted to remove a certain quantity of stone from a property, he would pay the landowner a fee for so many cattle loads of stone. The precise meaning of this term is not known but it was probably an ox-cart load. Sometimes a property owner would lease land to an operator; but when deep quarrying was involved and the operator would have to invest money in buildings and equipment, the land was generally sold. Starting in the 1890s, granite quarry owner-operators formed a consortium—the Quincy Quarries Company. This company eventually owned most of both of West Quincy and North Common quarry areas. When the Quincy Quarries Company ceased its business, their West Quincy lands went to a private owner whereas the North Common lands went to the City.

The granite operators and workers were almost all experienced people from outside of town. Quincy's Hardwick family was the major exception. In the earlier days, most came from northern Europe, often via other granite centers in New England. They were principally Irish, Scottish, Swedish and Germans, with Finns and then Italians coming later. These people made West Quincy a granite community with a character that it retains today. Established here in 1845 to serve these people, St. Mary's Church was the first Roman Catholic Parish on the entire South Shore. These people brought skills and culture to what is today.

The Granite Industry

There were three major reasons why Quincy became the great granite center. First was the outstanding quality of Quincy Granite. Solomon Willard recognized this when he selected Quincy stone for the Bunker Hill Monument. The use of Quincy granite nationwide that followed through the years proved the soundness of his judgment.

Second, it was here in connection with the Bunker Hill Monument work that Solomon Willard devised the stoneworking and stone-handling techniques that made hard Quincy granite a practical building stone and the use of large building blocks feasible. For this Solomon Willard is known as the "Father of the Granite Industry" and 1826 as the start of the large-scale quarrying industry.

Third was cheap saltwater transportation in sloops and schooners. The granite sloops were a type indigenous to Quincy and here many were built. These sturdy workboats carried the stone to nearby destinations. For longer voyages the stone was carried in schooners. For southern destinations and the Gulf of Mexico, the schooners would go down with granite and come back with coal, giving good two-way payloads. When by the 1870s, highway and railroad transportation to inland sources had improved, Quincy lost this economic advantage. About this time too, the introduction of steel-framed buildings reduced the demand for building stone which had been Quincy's forte.

Getting the stone to tidewater was the first step in the transportation process. For the West Quincy quarries, the answer was the Granite Railway of 1826. This was the first commercial railway in the United States, that it was the first railway incorporated and operated as a transportation business. It was financed by Thomas Handasyd Perkins, the prominent Boston shipping merchant. As the first railway common carrier, it required an operating flexibility that earlier single-purpose railways did not. To meet this challenge, here the engineer Gridley Bryant invented features that are still standard railroad practice today. The first railway freight contract in this country was between the Granite Railway and the Bunker Hill Monument Association. The contract was terminated after one year but the Granite Railway continued in operation until 1870, serving the quarries of West Quincy.

To serve the quarries of the North Common area, the Quincy Canal

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Corporation was established in 1826. The canal utilized the Town River and ran from Town River Bay almost up to Washington Street. It was lined with wharves for loading the sloops and schooners. There were also granite loading wharves at Quincy Point and on Town River Bay.

In 1837 there were 533 employed in the granite industry here. In a town of some 3,000, this was a significant figure. Around 1904, some 4,000 were employed in a city of around 29,000. The work was hard but the pay was good enough to draw skilled workers from other granite centers here and abroad. It was work with its hazards, but so was fishing and other occupations of that time. Lung problems resulted from inhaling granite dust which became severe when power equipment was introduced in the cutting shops and before exhaust fans were required. A major purpose of the establishment of the Quincy City Hospital was the treatment of the sufferers from this lung disease.

While it was as a finished building stone that Quincy granite gained its greatest fame, it was used for many other purposes—sea walls, and wharves, breakwaters, riprap, paving stones and curbing, and of course monuments and tablets.

Quincy granite was to be found most everywhere, and much remains in use today. Nowhere are there finer examples than in Quincy— the United First Parish Church with its great hand-cut columns, and City Hall with its handsome granite facade. The lower finish of the South Shore Bank building and the columns at the front entrance to The Cooperative Bank on Quincy Avenue are fine examples of polished Quincy extra dark. The Boston Custom House, without the tower, and the former Merchants' Exchange in New York, now a bank, are noted for their massive columns. In New Orleans beside its Custom House of Quincy granite is the old U.S. Mint, now the Louisiana State Museum which is of brick and Quincy granite. The pioneer naval drydocks at Charleston and at Norfolk, Virginia, and part of the early drydock in New York are Quincy granite. There is Quincy granite in Fort Warren in Boston Harbor and in Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. Of Quincy stone is the monument over Abraham Lincoln’s grave in Illinois, the Herndon Monument at the Naval Academy at Annapolis, and the base of the monument at Little Bighorn in Wyoming. There are cemetery monuments in many, many places but nowhere are there finer examples than in Quincy. In Mount Wollaston Cemetery and in St. Mary’s in West Quincy are the monuments to the granite men and their families. You may be sure that these would be nothing but the highest quality.

Stonecutting

Closely interrelated to but separate from the quarrying was the stonecutting industry. Cutting shops were located in various parts of the city but was centered in South Quincy. Quincy is still a center of stonecutting activity. The National headquarters of the Granite Cutters Union was located in Quincy from 1904 until 1984 when it merged with another union and the headquarters moved to Washington, D.C.

Stonecutting required different skills than quarrying. As far as we know the first cutters operated in Quincy for finishing the stone for the Bunker Hill Monument. Over the years cutting and finishing tools and techniques improved. Polishing started about 1869, and column and ball turning on lathes somewhat later. This reached its peak around 1900 with the Lyons Column Turning Mill that was the largest in the country. The impressive remains of this building still stand in West Quincy. Cutters’ tools were custom fashioned and kept servicable by granite blacksmiths until Pinel in Quincy standardized the equipment. Thereafter there was important manufacturing of granite-working tools here.

At no time was all the granite quarried in Quincy finished in Quincy cutting shops. Much of it was purchased rough and shipped for finish cutting elsewhere. Conversely, Quincy monument manufacturers always used other types of stone in addition to Quincy granite, using what was best for a particular application. Quincy monument companies would advertise stone of other types including marble. Much of the column turning was on stone from other sources. Now all the cutting is on imported stone, except for a very occasional piece for matching.

The Quincy stonecutters were among the most highly skilled in the world. Some of their work verged on true art. As a further development of this, a number of Quincy people became sculptors and other sculptors were attracted here. Quincy History spring 1986 issue gives biographies of a number of the more noted ones—Richard E. Brooks, the Kitsons, Bruce W. Saville, John and Gerald Horrigan, Joseph A. Coletti. The enduring works of these sculptors and other works of art are part of the legacy of Quincy’s granite industry.

While the Quincy granite-quarrying industry came to an end in 1963, it and the continuing stonecutting industry made a deep and lasting impression on the town and now city of Quincy. It brought wealth and development that has shaped the city. Even more important it brought people of various backgrounds who infused into the life of the town and city new cultures and vitality. Many of the leaders of today are descendants of those whom the granite industries brought to Quincy. Quincy will always be The Granite City.