

Quincy History



Quincy, Massachusetts

Quincy Historical Society

No. 30 - Fall 1993

Much History in QUINCY HISTORY

Regularly receiving QUINCY HISTORY is one of the real benefits of membership in the Quincy Historical Society. In the forty-two issues of QUINCY HISTORY and its predecessor, there have been about seventy-five papers on Quincy history. Many of these are papers on subjects that had not been published before. This has developed into an important resource on Quincy history. The answers to many of your questions on

Quincy history will be found here. Photocopies of past issues are available to members and others wishing to fill out their sets or obtain certain issues.

Two papers of special interest are reprinted in this issue. One is the paper that throws new light on the origin of the John Quincy Adams Birthplace. In the six years since this was first published, no one has questioned the validity of the conclusions. It can therefore be

accepted that the earliest southeast part of the Birthplace today was the William Alis House, built before 1663, probably 1646 or earlier.

The paper on the Granite Quarries of West Quincy was published in 1980. Two related papers on Quincy's Granite Industries and on the North Comon Quarry Lands were published in 1990. The earlier paper is reprinted so that the three may be more readily available to tell the complete story.

List of Subjects

Historical papers published in:

Quincy Historical Society Newsletter
- 12 issues - Winter 1973-Summer 1977.

QUINCY HISTORY
- 30 issues - Spring 1980-present

- 1-1 Winter 1973 Adams Academy Property and John Adams
- 1-2 Spring 1974 Moswetuset Hummock - Part I
- 1-3 Summer 1974 Moswetuset Hummock - Part II
- 1-4 Winter 1974 Moswetuset Hummock - Part III
- 2-1 Spring 1975 Introduction to 350 Years of Quincy
- 2-2 Summer 1975 Squantum, A Distinctive History
Ruth Gordon
- 2-3 Fall 1975 Squantum Park: A Distinctive Part
of Our Heritage
- 2-4 Winter 1976 American Independence Traced
in Adams Letters
- 2-5 Summer 1976 The Ship BETHEL
- 3-1 Fall 1976 The Boston, Quincy and Fall River
Bicycle Railway

- 3-2 Winter 1976-1977 Tide Mills in Quincy
- 3-3 Summer 1977 Fire Protection in the City of Quincy
The City Hall Property
Houghs Neck Lightship
- 1. Spring 1980 Granite Quarries - West Quincy
- 2. Fall 1980 Constitution Common
Adams Academy - First
Interscholastic Football Game
in New England
- 3. Winter 1981 Town River Tidemills and
the Quincy Canal
Quincy and the Great Boston Fire
- 4. Spring 1981 Squantum 1910; Turning Point
in Aviation
Hancock Cemetery;
the Old Burial Ground
- 5. Fall 1981 Red Indians and White Invaders
History of the
Quincy Historical Society
The Town Landing

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| <p>6. Winter 1982 Old Braintree, A Parent Town
Massasoit's Fateful Decision
Spanish American War Incident -
Company K</p> <p>7. Spring 1982 Brewer's Corner
Violence at Wessagusset Trading Post
Towns Named Quincy in other states</p> <p>8. Spring 1983 The Quincy's Homes in Quincy
Josiah Quincy of Rumney, N.H.
Quincy's Newspapers</p> <p>9. Winter 1984 The History of Adams Academy</p> <p>10. Spring 1984 Granite Drew the Finnish to Quincy
Quincy Song
The Peleg Jones Granite Sloop
Half-Models</p> <p>11. January 1985 Wollaston in the 1870s
Quincy Granite Custom Houses
in Savannah and Charleston
John Hancock and York, PA</p> <p>12. April 1985 Slavery in Old Braintree
John Adams and John Quincy Adams
on Slavery
Cranch Hill Development</p> <p>13. Spring 1986 Some Famous Quincy Sculptors
A Freeman
Two Calendars - Two Dates</p> <p>14. Fall 1986 Quincy Point as I Knew it
The Quincy Point Bell
Houghs Neck 350 Years
John Holmes Morison,
Adams Academy Class of 1874</p> <p>15. Winter 1987 Civil War Memoirs of
Col. Abner B. Packard
John Quincy Adams Birthplace -
the William Alis House</p> <p>16. Fall 1987 Journal of George B. Morison,
Adams Academy Student 1879
Quincy and The Constitution</p> <p>17. Winter 1988 MANSIT - The Old Stone
Meeting House
Facts and Not Facts about Quincy</p> <p>18. Spring 1988 Coach Lace -
An Old Quincy Industry
Quincy Industries in 1837</p> <p>19. Fall 1988 South Shore Maritime -
A Brief History
When Abigail Adams Returned
to Quincy</p> | <p>20. Winter 1989 Quincy Military History 1888-1988
The Ship BETHEL
Town of Quincy 1792 - Squantum
and The Farms Nonresidents'
Consents</p> <p>21. Summer 1989 Joseph Crellius and the German
Immigration - Germantown</p> <p>22. Winter 1989 Researched Meaning of Some
Local Native American Names
A Constable's Lot was Not
a Happy One</p> <p>23. Spring 1990 Excerpts from the Diary of
Hattie L. Mears
Quincy's Granite Industries</p> <p>24. Fall 1990 The North Common Quarry Lands
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In the Name of the Law</p> <p>26. Fall 1991 The Granite Railway</p> <p>27. Spring 1992 The Constitution of Massachusetts
Town of Quincy Incorporation 1792</p> <p>28. Fall 1992 A Capsule History of Quincy
Facts and Not Facts (reprint)
Houghs Neck Lightship</p> <p>29. Spring 1993 Solomon Willard
Two Calendars - Two Dates (reprint)</p> <p>30. Fall 1993 List of Subjects Published to Date
John Quincy Adams Birthplace -
the William Alis House (reprint)
Granite Quarries - West Quincy
(reprint)
Erratum to No. 26</p> |
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Erratum

In No. 26 - Fall 1991 *The Granite Railway*, page 3, column 2. The fourth sentence now reads: "On top of this was an oak timber four inches wide by twelve inches high."

This should be: "On top of this was an oak timber four inches wide by two inches high."

Quincy History

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Quincy's 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 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.

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

The study concerns the still-undeveloped West 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 contribution 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 southwesterly 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, stonecutter, 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 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 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.

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An Interesting Find on the John Quincy Adams Birthplace

In the well-researched areas of Quincy history, and that includes many areas, it is rare to discover something truly new. It is therefore of particular interest that an unregistered deed in the possession of the Ladies Library Association of Randolph, a deed unknown to earlier researchers, has added to the history of the John Quincy Adams Birthplace.

Henry Adams, Warren S. Parker, Waldo C. Sprague and Ezekiel C. Sargent all concluded from records and physical evidence that the house was originally a one-over-one built by Samuel Belcher² at the time of his marriage in 1663 and enlarged to the present two-over-two in 1716 by Samuel's son and grandson, both named Gregory and both housewrights. Since there was no record of Samuel having purchased the land, it was assumed that it was given to him by his father Gregory Belcher who was a large landholder. Lacking record of purchase by Gregory Belcher, it was logically assumed that it was part of the land in Mount Wollaston granted to him as an early settler by the town of Boston.

The relevant provisions of the newly-discovered deed dated March 1661 are:

William Alis to Gregory Belcher "one dwelling house situate and lying in Brantree together with the Barnes, buildings, outhouses, stables, shops, orchards, open yards, gardens, and fourtene acres of land - - - - between the lands of Richard Ellison and William Penn on the south side, and the lands of Thomas Gottliff and John Saunders on the north, and bounded westerly on the Mill Brook, and easterly upon the Commons and on the land of John Saunders aforesaid, the common roadway to Weymouth running through the middle thereof - - - -"

Notes:

The Common is now the Faxon Park area.

The roadway to Weymouth was the Country Way from Boston to Plymouth, now Franklin Street.

The property could only have been at or near the foot of Penns Hill in order to abut the South Common on

the east. Sprague placed the Alis homestead on the east side of the Road farther north near present Pearl Street. Property in that location might have abutted John Saunders in the east, but not the Common, and the property across the Road was owned by others. The portion of the deeded property west of the Road is compatible with the 9½-acre house lot with dwelling house that Deacon John Adams purchased in 1744, now the John Quincy Adams Birthplace. The 9½ acres was bounded by former Thomas Gatlive land on the north. For the southern boundary, there is no record of William Ellison's land holdings in Old Braintree, nor any other record of ownership of that land prior to it also becoming Belcher property.

The part of the property on the east side of the Road had a different history from that on the west side. The sale of Belcher land to Deacon John Adams in 1744 did not include the land on the east side. Rather than this land having belonged to Gregory³, it appeared to have passed to his brother Samuel³ whose homestead was just south of Gregory's. In 1717, Comfort Belcher, widow of Samuel³, purchased from the heirs of William Penn a 12-acre

house lot bounded west on the Road, east on the Common and Moses Payne who owned the former Saunders property, and north on Comfort Belcher. The latter land to the north was almost certainly the former Alis property. A 1784 deed for abutting property shows John Adams as the owner at that date; and it later belonged to John Quincy Adams and Charles Francis Adams. When the Adams family acquired it from the Belchers is not recorded. The Adams frequently added to their land holdings.

It appears quite definite that the land where the John Quincy Adams Birthplace stands was originally the William Alis farm. It presents the likely possibility that instead of giving his son Samuel land on which to build a house when he married, Gregory Belcher¹ turned over to him the established William Alis farm that he had purchased two years before. Thus the house may be even older than the 1663 date generally ascribed to it. It would have been logical for Alis to have built his house on the property to the west of the Road since that was better farmland than the piece on the other side of the Road.

H.H. Holly

Quincy's Hills Were Golden

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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.