

STONE QUARRIES ONCE DOTTED HAMMOND

From an article written by William C. Pike and printed in the Watertown Daily Times on August 29, 1923.

Years ago, just before the turn of the century more than 600 men toiled and sweated along the sandstone ledges below and to the east of South Hammond village.

Living in company settlements of shanties, bunkhouses, stores, saloons and bakeries, the 600 cut, carried, hauled and stacked paving blocks and curbstones for the cities of the east coast.

Hefting huge œcrow bars amid the rolling dust clouds and obstinate braying of the quarrymen, as they were called by villagers, piled tons of pink, yellow and red blocks into sugar-like loads for shipment.

The eastern streets of Syracuse, Utica, even mid-western Chicago were improved with South Hammond sandstone modern paving of the time and industrial backbone of regular frontier style boom town.

Redolent of anything but peace and tranquility, the quarry Saloon was the site of frequent and well attended brawls with traditional broken chairs, bottles, windows and clients.

In fact legend has it that a quarry superintendent took up a hasty lodgings in the cemetery after picking a fight with a stout and stout-hearted woman who also happened to be a fair shot.

Villagers, understandably shocked by such indelicacies, promptly jailed the earnest woman. She then languished in Hammond's Crow Bar Hotel for well over a year until it was proved beyond a doubt that she had acted in good faith and self defense. Thereby her honest intentions were manifest and her re-admittance to respectable society assured.

Of course, at that time unions were unheard of and workers relied heavily if not totally, on the quarry operators for clothing and shelter.

Railroad spurs supplied these essentials in return for powdery sandstone which they carried away. There were three principal quarries in the area - all working into the South Hammond ledges. Two were actually in the community itself with spurs leading into them from the main railroad tracks and the third quarry closer to the neighboring village of Hammond.

Italians were employed largely and worked under a *capadrone* system directed by Mike Nicolette. South Hammond sandstone employers were the Edgar & Phillips Co. and the W.M. Lugdon Co. John Finnegan, the third quarry owner, conducted operations near Hammond village.

For a number of years car loadings ran into the hundreds but when asphalt started to take precedence as a paving material the blooming sandstone business began to wilt.

California which came to be one supplier of asphalt for smoother, if less picturesque highways, beckoned-perhaps as the *ê*land of golden promise for many of the consequently unemployed.

At last the three quarries were closed completely and pine trees, bushes and tall grass filled the once bustling work site. Delving deeper into South Hammond history, long before the sandstone industry suffered its demise at the hands of asphalt enthusiasts, local mills kept residents busy and impressed travelers as symptoms of promise and growth.

In fact, prior to the railroad's advent, South Hammond's Kings Tavern sheltered and entertained stage coach passengers on their way to and from Ogdensburg.

South Hammond's heyday population which included the quarry workers probably numbered close to a 1,000. but motorists passing through the small hamlet today would not likely guess that here was once a bustling and crowded boom town.

The quarries hidden from view below the ledge that marks the beginning of Black Creek Valley still manifest the aura of intense physical labor which created them.

But the white pines and scrub bushes have taken over nevertheless. Hammond residents who even vaguely recall the tumultuous quarry days are few and woodchucks, squirrels or chipmunks have become the only permanent dwellers at the site of a once thriving north country industry.