"In 1831 slate was discovered on Benninger's farm, east of Slatington, and probably near the site of the present Genuine Washington quarries, but extensive quarrying on a commercial scale is not known to have been done here before 1844. In that year, according to tradition, the land mentioned was leased by William Roberts and Nelson Labar, who became interested in quarrying from seeing slate outcrops while on a walking trip from Easton to Mauch Chunk."

In 1845 Roberts and Labar searched for slate on the west side of the Lehigh River but failed to find any desirable material. Later Owen Jones discovered some slate on the present site of Slatington and with Roberts opened a quarry about 1845.

"By 1855 the slate quarry industry, stimulated by Welshmen who were instrumental in persuading experienced slaters from Wales to emigrate to this country, was already thriving and growing by leaps and bounds. Indeed in 1850 or thereabouts, Rogers, then State Geologist of Pennsylvania, and his associates found five quarries in operation at Slatington and two more near the Delaware Water Gap, one of the latter apparently being the Old Jersey quarry, east of Delaware River. Rogers even writes of one quarry as having been opened in 1812, but this statement is probably incorrect.

"By 1880, when Sanders studied the district for the Pennsylvania Geological Survey, slate quarrying was in full swing at all the present centers of production. Indeed in many cases Sanders reports large quarries that had been worked out and abandoned."

In 1884 (Mathews and Hungerford) 41 slate quarries had been or were being operated in the Slatington region.

"In its subsequent growth the district has suffered the depressions and revivals experienced by the slate industry of the country as a whole. The introduction of channelling represented a marked advance and served as a stimulus; in 1863 it was first practiced in Vermont and probably reached Pennsylvania a decade later. The appearance, however, of asbestos, paper and tar roofing materials shortly before the peak production in 1903, heralded a general decline in demand for roofing slate. At the same time, school slate consumption suffered greatly through displacement by cheap paper and at the hands of the sanitary experts of our public schools. This was accompanied by an intense price competition among the slate men themselves.

"There ensued, then, a period of marked distress in the industry. Labor costs had risen. Some of the old markets for slate products were on the wane with no possibility of any recuperation in the future; others were being invaded by substitute materials. Freight rates were prohibitive for distance shipments. Added to this, cost accounting was not recognized as furnishing a basis for proper sales prices; expenses were incurred in quarry operations, while prices were being cut in a manner wholly unjustified by the small return on the investment. Then came the greatest of all catastrophes to the industry, the World War. With the entry of the United States, slate quarrying was almost totally abandoned, being classed as unessential; labor was beyond reach. Immediately after our entry into the war the organization of the slate industry, so long projected and so long prevented by internal strife, took place to a considerable degree, and two large companies were formed, one to deal with structural products, the other with roofing slate."

During the past few years the slate industry has suffered greatly, owing to the general inactivity in the building trade and the competition with manufactured roofing products. Investigations to find uses for the discarded rock have met with little success.