Building Stone

Although stone has been quarried in many places in Northampton County, no important building stone industry has ever been developed, other than the roofing slate industry which is discussed elsewhere. Locally, the Cambro-Ordovician limestones, the Hardyston sandstones and quartzites, the Shawangunk sandstones and conglomerates, and the pre-Cambrian gneisses have all been used but only in small quantities. Waste slate blocks have been used for the construction of small buildings near some of the slate quarries. After exposure to weathering these building present a bizarre appearance as the bands or ribbons become objectionably prominent.

Limestone. Northampton County contains some attractive stone houses built before 1850. Since then limestones have been quarried rarely for building purposes. The limestones that have been used in residences and barns have come mainly from local quarries that have been worked for lime.

The principal reason for the limited use of limestones for building is the expense of dressing the stone. The great compression that all of the limestone strata of the region have suffered, developed several systems of joint fractures along which the stone breaks. Rectangular blocks can seldom be obtained by the ordinary quarry methods. Both thin and massive beds yield angular blocks of all shapes and sizes. Masonry construction under these conditions is unduly expensive.

Also, the shallow-water origin of the limestones resulted in rough surfaces, interbedded shaly laminae and beds of varying thickness. Veins of quartz and calcite are numerous where the rocks were shattered by folding and faulting. In places secondary flint nodules are abundant.

The limestone has been used in irregular blocks, called "rubble construction;" in rectangular blocks of fairly uniform thickness, designated "coursed ashlar;" and in rectangular blocks of varying thickness known as "random or broken ashlar." Most of the old stone houses have walls several feet thick, with rough-shaped blocks in mortar inside the more neatly built external walls. In some cases the masonry of the outer walls is of poor construction and the exterior has been covered with plaster.

To satisfy the small continuing local demand for limestone for buildings and walls, some quarries now operated for crushed stone will set aside the occasional desirable well-shaped blocks that may be shot down in blasting. In this way some fine building stone has been obtained at reasonable expense. It is probable that local limestones