

# The Sharp Quarries

The *Lancaster Eagle-Gazette* on May 15, 1897, featured a long article about the quarry near Sugar Grove:

## ***AN IMPORTANT FAIRFIELD COUNTY INDUSTRY***

*(We are grateful to David Shiltz, who compiled this article in 1993 after extensive research of the Sugar Grove area. He has consented graciously to our use of this article.)*

Not the least important of Fairfield County Industries is the R. L. Sharp Stone Quarries situated on the C. H. V. & T. Railway near Sugar Grove, Ohio. A GAZETTE correspondent furnishes the following interesting information in regard to this successful enterprise:

Natural gas abounds in such quantities between Lancaster and Logan that it has become the wonder of the world. But in addition to natural gas and the fertile valleys, Sugar Grove boasts of having the finest and oldest stone quarries in the state.

About 45 years ago, when the Hocking canal was built, the contractors for building the locks near Sugar Grove got their stone from the R. L. Sharp quarries which are now known as the R. L. Sharp Stone Company's quarries. This company is composed of Messrs. Robert H. Sharp of Sugar Grove, Attorney William Sharp of Columbus, sons of Hon. R. L. Sharp, deceased, who was one of the pioneers of stone quarry operators in this part of the state, and the other member of the firm is Attorney J. M. Shallenberger of this city [Lancaster].

This property is located a short distance south — west of Sugar Grove, in the center of the gas belt, and due west from the Columbus and Hocking Valley railroad which operates a branch freight car line to those celebrated quarries. For equipments the R. L. Sharp Stone Co. excels any we have ever seen. For good quality building stone, they cannot be surpassed.

Such eminent geologists as Prof. Orton endorse the quality and durability of the stone taken from these quarries. For beautiful and varied colors we never saw anything so handsome. They are even more so than those found in the Grotto Mountains in New Mexico, of which history gives such a glowing account.

In a stone not over two feet square, we frequently see rich colors of brown, pink, yellow, blue, and gray, interspersed with spots and lines of pure white. Some of these stones appear as checkered with different color spots as calico.

In other portions of the quarries are found the clear yellow stone that are seen in most quarries in this county.

The quality throughout is first—class, on account of which large shipments are made to distant places, and the more the builders become acquainted with this class of stone the better they like it.

While at the quarries we saw cars being loaded with heavy dimension stone for shipment to Franklin, Delaware, and Paulding counties to be used in the masonry of important public improvements which are now being made at these various places.

This certainly speaks well for the Hocking Valley sandstone, as well as the enterprise and business qualifications of the owners of these quarries.

Last year the abutments and piers of the big bridge across the Maumee River at Toledo, Ohio, were built of stone from this quarry, after being brought into the sharpest competition with the Cleveland Stone Company's product. So the mammoth piers of this great bridge stand as a gentle reminder to the Cleveland and other stone companies that hereafter the sandstone of the Hocking Valley is to be a strong competitor in that part of the state.

Mr. Robert H. Sharp, the superintendent of the quarries, is quite a genius and has placed the best machinery and equipments for handling stone at these quarries in Ohio.



We've counted at least 15 people working here at Sharp Quarries

At that point by the use of a derrick the stones are lifted onto a flat car ready for shipment. Natural gas is used for fuel to run all the machinery connected with the quarry, for which purpose the same is plumbed as completely as a building.

While at the quarry we saw four stones weighing about four tons each all being moved by machinery at one tile. The first stone was being lifted from its bed by the use of a steel derrick where it was quarried; a second was being taken on a car to the cable line; a third was going down the cable line to the loading place; and a fourth was being put on the shipping car. It looked like active business to see all in this operation at one tile. Between the two points of the cable line there are seven derricks erected and well equipped with galvanized wire ropes and clamp hooks.

Mr. Sharp informed us that ten cars of stone could be quarried and put on the cars for shipment in one day. The property of which we have been speaking, including quarry and all machinery and fixtures, is valued at \$30,000, and produces a handsome income at that valuation.

We must not forget to say that at these quarries, stones are carried down the cable line that weigh anywhere from one to fourteen tons. [Obviously, the stones, not the cable, are in that weight range.] We must also not omit to mention that Mr. William Suderman, the blacksmith, has been in the employ of the Messrs. Sharp in all about 10 years.

This improved machinery in use at these quarries is a great saving of workmen.

This fine machinery and equipment and the undisputed good quality of stone is what adds such great value to the R. L. Sharp Stone Company's property. Whoever wants a day of real solid pleasure and wishes to gain a lot of valuable information can get it no where better than by calling on Mr. R. H. Sharp at the quarries and accept of his hospitality which he is always ready to give.

A few other newspaper items provide a little more information about the Sharps and the Sharp quarry. A Robert Sharp, student at Ohio State University, spent Thanksgiving at home. [ 1 Dec 1890] Then readers learned that R. L. Sharp was grading a road bed in order to run a railroad track to his stone quarry on the Solomon Stukeley farm that he had just recently purchased. [ E 15 Dec 1890]

In the following August R. L. Sharp--Robert Lee Sharp--died. [ E 24 Aug 1891] When Sugar Grove was first established, fourteen year old Robert took charge of a store his father had in the village. In his middle twenties he went off to California in the Gold Rush of 1849. He nearly died of cholera on that trip. Ten years later he returned to Berne Township, settled down, and married the widow Rosa (Stukeley) Rike. He was known as "Elder" Sharp at church, home, and elsewhere because he was an "Elder" in the Reformed Church for over twenty years. Dr. James Sharp was a younger brother of Elder Robert L. Sharp.

After the death of Elder Sharp, his son Robert Hugh Sharp managed the quarry. This seems to be the one who had attended Ohio State University. He had been born in 1871, and so at about twenty years of age he undertook responsibilities in the family quarry business.

Although R. L. Sharp had made preparations to bring a railroad spur to the quarry, it was son Robert H. who had the track constructed to the foot of the hill at the quarry. [E 22 May 1892] In the fall after that, R. H. Sharp placed an engine at the quarry to assist in the drilling and hoisting. [E 27 Sept 1892]

Either the fame of the stone or capable salesmanship by R. H. Sharp or someone else in the company sold stone used to erect an exhibit building at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893--a world's fair. [G 8 Feb 1893]

Sole competition in the quarry industry came two months later when Cook and Company of Columbus opened a new quarry on land owned by the Sheets brothers. [G 29 April 1893]

Accidents happened at the Sharp quarry. A man named Graham was hurt there. [E 4 Jan 1893]. At the time Robert H. Sharp called in Dr. Reese. A dispute arose over who was responsible for paying Dr. Reese.

A fatal accident occurred at the quarry on Friday afternoon, September 22, 1893. [G 25 Sept 1893; E 27 Sept 1893] Charles Stump, standing at the front end of a railroad car loaded with stone, was letting it roll down a short distance in order to make room for other cars. He tried to set the brake to stop the moving car, but when the wheel on the brake-staff broke, he fell on the track. The train car wheels ran over him, severing an arm and a leg. He was taken to his home nearby, and Dr. James Sharp of the village was summoned. Stump remained conscious and conversed with his wife and others in his family, but Dr. Sharp would do nothing to relieve the man's pain. Three hours after the injury Charles Stump died.

It was on Dr. Sharp's return trip to the village that his horse became frightened. Dr. Sharp was thrown out of the carriage and severely injured.

The quarry provided employment for some Sugar Grove men. It also provided local pride in knowing that Sugar Grove stone was used for major construction projects, including the Chicago World's Fair.