

# QUARRY DAYS

BY DICK DIXON



VISITORS TO THE Salida Granite Co. Federal Quarry today must walk or ride horseback because the road is closed. Once there, they find elaborate concrete foundations and a few small cabins still standing.

A concrete powder house is badly battered by vandals. A 4,000-gallon oak water tank, hidden in trees on a hillside, remained until someone carried it away in 1980. Dozens of "boulder quarry holes" pock the countryside and the main quarry is partly filled with water.

The Salida Granite Co., producer of the famed Salida rose pink granite that was used to build the Mormon Battalion Monument, was in its heyday during the 1920s.

But over the years, especially right after the turn of the century, there were many quarries in the Turret district.

The Cameron Mountain Granite Quarry east of Turret sold stone to Denver finishing plants for headstones and similar monuments. By January 1, 1904, the company was a steady producer. A Denver consumer praised the stone as "the most beautiful granite for monument purposes to be found in Colorado. It is dark blue, takes on a satin polish, and is finer-grained and harder than the far-famed Gunnison granite."

E.T. Bowen was then operating a granite quarry on Calumet Iron Mine patented land near Manoa Camp. Business was "quite profitable" despite the 14-mile haul over a bad road to Salida. Business at Bowen quarry thrived in 1905 and supply could not keep up with demand.

Stratton Gold and Copper Mining and Milling Co. took over the Bowen granite quarry east of Manoa in

July 1908. It changed hands again in 1909 and became Hecla Granite & Mining Co.

During Turret's peak year, 1905, Dr. A.B. Phillips, the town physician and pharmacist, located a granite quarry east of town. Men from Turret — likely working off medical bills — "donated" time to build a road from the quarry to Ute Trail. Some stone was shipped. In April 1909, Phillips sold a controlling interest and his operation became Chaffee County Granite Co.

George Williamson was 16 years old in 1911 and was working for "full pay" despite his youth. He worked with Pete Schlosser and Mike Lavin at Chaffee County Granite. Wages were \$3.50 per day — 50¢ more than in Turret gold mines — but 90¢ per day was deducted for room and meals at the company boarding house. Turret miners worked eight-hour shifts; quarry workers put in nine to twelve hours when there was enough daylight.

At his Denver home in 1976, Williamson remembered that one of the granite cars overturned on a bad section of quarry track, trapping Lavin.

Williamson and Schlosser unchained the seven-ton block of stone and were attempting to move the car off Lavin when the stone shifted, mashing Schlosser's foot. The men had to dig a hole to release the pinned appendage, and the accident put Schlosser out of work for several weeks.

When he returned, Williamson said Schlosser complained of pain for some time. Lavin, lucky to be alive, suffered a crushed pelvis and broken ribs. He was treated at the Rio Grande Hospital in Salida and eventually returned to the quarries.

OBVIOUSLY, WORKING WITH GRANITE could be a hazardous undertaking, and that proved to be true in more ways than one.

Although, in the long run, Turret's granite industry lasted longer than its gold mines, the business of granite quarrying seldom ran smoothly.

The Columbine Granite Company was started by David Heaton, a mining promoter, and Pete Schlosser. A series of letters from Heaton, saved by Schlosser, explained the hopes and life of that company.

Schlosser proposed the idea. He was looking for a way to make a living. Both men were without their families, so on Christmas Day, 1919, Heaton toured possible sites with Schlosser, who staked and filed dozens of granite claims.

By May 30, 1920, with Schlosser as partner and general manager, Heaton was ready to begin work at what he called Hathaway quarry.

He ordered Schlosser to build a boarding house. He wanted it quickly and said Schlosser could tear down the rear of the Heaton home in Turret, a barn, and buildings at the Vivandiere Mine to get lumber. Heaton urged, "Get all the help you need."

Schlosser hired several men.

But Schlosser's income from his partnership with Heaton was stock in the Columbine Co., and that couldn't pay bills or put groceries on the table until the operation began shipping. So, he continued working on other projects that put cash in his pocket.

By July 29, Schlosser hadn't started construction on the boarding house. Heaton sent six letters urging Pete to hurry. Quarry workers were living in tents, and were beginning to complain.

Pete agreed to start, stipulating he wanted cash in addition to stock. Heaton first wanted "a good water closet with a door on it and two compartments, one for ladies and one for men. Build it large enough for two holes in the men's compartment."

On August 19, men quit the quarry, saying they wouldn't work until they got a building. Heaton wrote an angry letter telling Schlosser to hurry construction.

Pete swung his hammer steadily for most of a month. Meanwhile, Heaton told his manager, "We are going to make a big company out of the Columbine Company and for all interested with us. Just sit tight." By mid-September, Heaton wanted to buy out all of the small granite shippers and amalgamate the entire operation.

By then, the outside of the boarding house was complete. Heaton wanted a sink in the kitchen. Pete was to use pipe from the Vivandiere mine at Turret for a "drain to the cesspool or let it run on the hillside, that would not hurt it any."

At 9,000 feet altitude, nights were getting cold for tent living. On October 6, Heaton again spurred his partner to finish the boarding house.

Soon, Heaton was smoothing bad feelings between quarry boss John Bailee and Schlosser. By October 21, with the boarding house almost finished, Heaton showed up for an inspection.

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# Gambles

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At that point, Pete wasn't working. After receiving his first cash payment a few days earlier, he had packed his tools and left.

But with permission from Heaton to dismantle buildings at the Vivandiere, Pete made the best of it. Not only did he remove materials he needed for the boarding house, but also others that he sold in the valley for cash.

Heaton figured it out quickly, and asked for a detailed accounting. Meanwhile, Heaton wanted Schlosser to nail strips over cracks between the boards of room partitions and to cover the worst of the knot holes. Doors needed hardware, the kitchen needed a door and threshold, and the cellar needed a trap door and steps.

Heaton wanted a large dining table and a small kitchen table built, in addition to six or eight shelves about eight feet long to hold dishes.

Pete finally completed the job and received another pay check. On December 29, Heaton reminisced that it was just a year earlier the company started and "whilst we have not done much, we have made a good start."

John Bailee, quarry superintendent, made some small granite shipments, but Heaton said the bottom dropped out of the market. The company had two carloads of granite on tracks in Salida with no buyers. There was too much snow to work, so Heaton suspended operation until spring. He promised to pay Schlosser for surveying and similar chores.

By January 9, 1921, Heaton was in Independence, Kan., trying to drum up business. He wrote, "Leave all work go. Trade conditions are bad every place I have so far visited."

Schlosser kept working and bragged he had a market for ten carloads of granite. Heaton fired back that he thought Pete was talking through his hat, and again ordered work stopped. Pete complied.

On March 12, Heaton was angry because he received a payroll demand. He wondered how men could be working because in a letter a few days earlier, Schlosser had said it would be a month or more before snow would be gone. Heaton warned, "We will pay (this time), but until you hear from me again, don't do any more work."

Little was done that summer. Heaton scraped up \$90 of his own and an additional \$353 from a cautious investor. He warned the money would be for wages for Pete and one man to finish patent work on two granite claims, "but no more."

Pete went back to selling salvage from Turret. On January 18, 1922, Heaton wrote, "If we go ahead with the Columbine Co., just as we told you in the beginning, you should be paid for whatever service you have rendered in stock, and if we don't go ahead, then we shall forget it and charge it to another incident of this uncertain life."

Work resumed cautiously in July and Heaton wanted a weekly progress report. He thought \$3.50 per day wages — what other companies were paying — was too high.

He believed the company would make more money if room and board were deducted from weekly pay rather than having the men pay individually. Heaton warned, "Be sure [the men] do a day's work."

Schlosser bought quarry tools out of his own pocket. He sent an itemized list to Heaton on August 1 requesting reimbursement of \$62.45. Heaton sent a check for \$7.50 and deducted \$10 from the total because Schlosser also used the tools for personal projects. Pete never marked the remaining \$44.95 debt as paid in his ledger.

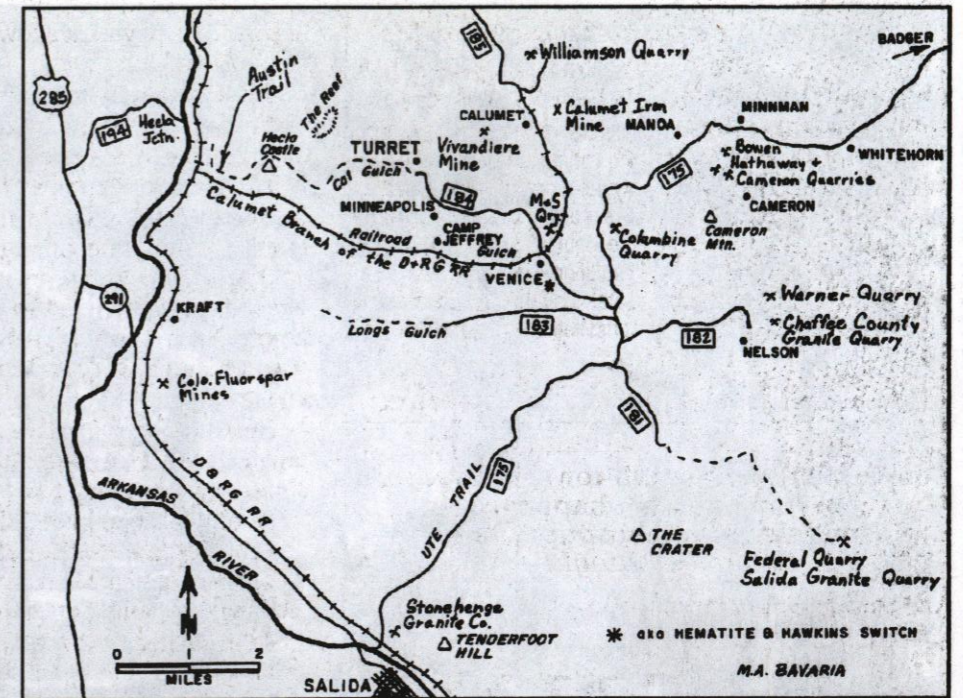
Schlosser complained there were not enough tools for the crew. Heaton's answer was simple, "Lay off the men and send me a list of what you need. We'll buy used tools."

He authorized Schlosser to buy in Salida. Pete attempted to get some of his money back when he sent the tool bill to Heaton. Schlosser wrote in 20¢ per pound for used drill steel. Heaton replied flatly he could get it for a nickel a pound.

He had been doing some homework and learned Bateman Hardware in Salida sold new drill steel for 18¢ per pound. Schlosser claimed Bateman was getting 26¢ a pound. Heaton concluded the exchange with a curt note, "If that 20¢ is your price, keep it. We don't want it."

The whole problem was lack of money. On October 30, 1922, Schlosser received a brief telegram from Heaton in Denver. Columbine quarry was done.

A letter followed a day later with details, but the bottom line was the company was dead. With its demise, Schlosser and Heaton ended their constant battle



to skin each other financially and went back to being "just friends."

SOON AFTER THE Salida Granite Company's success with the Mormon Battalion and other monuments in the 1920s, another company began. Stonehenge Granite Co. started construction of a 900-foot-long finishing plant at the foot of Ute Trail near the D&RGW mainline. A spur and a wye for turning engines were built to serve the plant.

Construction on the building continued between November 1928 and January 1929. Experts from the east constructed a pair of gantry derricks inside the building to handle stone. One had a capacity for twenty tons and the other was rated at ten tons.

There were two granite saws — huge blades more than 12 feet in diameter. The tempered-steel teeth were flat, rather than pointed like modern circular saws.

As they rotated at a speed of less than 150 rpm, a slurry of water and grinding compound was pumped

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into the cut. Abrasion from the blade cut through huge granite blocks relatively fast — a foot or more every two hours.

Once cut, surfaces which needed to be polished were honed to a glistening, mirror-like finish. Visitors from a Vermont granite quarry said the new Stonehenge operation was “one of the best equipped [granite finishing] plants in America.” By April 12, at least 14 men were working to get stone out of Stonehenge quarry east of Turret.

But it had been a tough winter, leaving roads washed out, rough, and muddy. Little granite was hauled to the new plant, which delayed production — and income to pay for the new facility — for more than three months.

During that time, the name changed to Mountain Cross Granite Co. It apparently died during the early 1930s from the Great Depression and perhaps, as newspapers charged, mismanagement. Either way, the large plant didn't operate long, and there were few piles of spall to indicate there was much production.

There was no fanfare or newspaper story about closure of Mountain Cross Granite Co., and the building so proudly erected was torn down in the 1940s.

**W**HILE GRANITE was the primary quarry attraction, Ray Williamson and his son Arthur of Minneapolis (a tiny bedroom community a mile south of Turret), located a marble deposit near the abandoned Colorado Fuel & Iron Calumet Mine in about 1908. The discovery

gave the present name to Marble Quarry Gulch.

Williamson quarry development depended entirely on family finances. By March 31, 1909, family members were digging a well and building a road. Two buildings in Minneapolis were dismantled by the Williamsons and were moved to their quarry.

It never produced fine marble. Much of what was found crumbled easily and had a coarse, sugary grain. In spite of earlier claims, it wasn't of monumental quality, nor was it good enough to use as common building stone. In the 1970s and again in the 1990s, some of the rock was mined and crushed for white decorative gravel.

The most visible quarry in the Ute Trail country is the M&S Quarry at the junction of Chaffee County Roads 184 and 185 leading to Turret and Marble Quarry Gulch. A sheer rock face drops almost 100 feet to the water line. A couple of ledges that formed part of a spiral road to the bottom are often visible above the waterline. Men who worked there claim water is almost as deep as the cliff face is high.

The M&S produced sodaspar (fluorspar) beginning in the 1930s, and operating sporadically until 1962. The largest number of men employed there was about 20.

In 1948, D.P. Porco was foreman and worked eight men. They shipped about five rail cars per day of sodaspar to the grinding plant at Western Feldspar in Denver. John Falgien became foreman in 1950 and

continued until the M&S closed because of rising freight rates, which buyers of the rock would not accept in higher costs.

The quarry shipped 25,000 tons of pure sodaspar — used for hardening glass. Falgien estimated at least the same amount remains.

Rock was hauled in trucks out of the pit on a corkscrew shelf road and then down Ute Trail to a crusher located near the junction of Ute Trail with the D&RGW tracks. Drivers used sledge hammers to break rock into chunks small enough to feed into the crusher that handled about 130 tons per day.

Much of the product went to Pittsburgh Plate Glass in Illinois and to a Coors beer-bottle manufacturing plant in Waco, Texas. Overburden from the sodaspar deposit spilled out of the quarry pit and down the side of the small mountain, burying a portion of the old Calumet Branch of the D&RG.

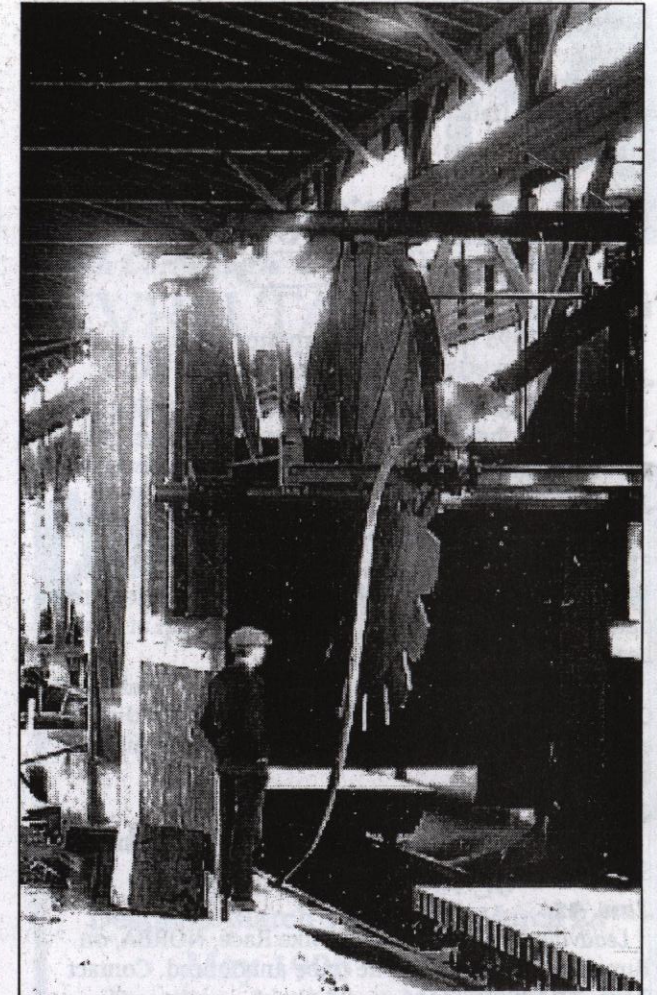
A similar operation was located near the mouth of Brown's Canyon from 1945 to 1948. Colorado Fluorspar Mines, Inc., quarried metallurgical and ceramic grade fluorspar. About 50 men worked there. During its short life, about \$800,000 worth of mineral was extracted through open-pit and shaft mining.

**T**HE Colorado Fuel & Iron Company's Calumet Iron mine closed before gold mines reached producing status. It produced more tonnage than did all the other operations combined — but that's another story.

However, the Calumet mine had an advantage. It was served by an operating railroad. Production for granite, fluorspar, sodaspar, and low-grade gold might have been greater if the Calumet Branch of the Denver & Rio Grande had remained in operation a few years longer.



As it was, miners fought a dozen or more miles of steep, twisting Ute Trail road. The alternative was six or more miles of rougher, steeper, narrower road via the old Austin Trail to reach Hecla Junction where rail service was available.

Thus, in the end, those days of old when they dug up the blue, pink and green granite passed into history. Turret's granite rush was over.



The square-toothed saw at the Stonehenge Granite plant was 12 feet in diameter and turned at about 150 rpm. Its abrasive power came from a slurry of water and rock dust — the hose is visible above.

Dick Dixon teaches journalism and American history at Salida High School. This is the final installment of a series on quarries in the Salida area, and it will all someday form part of a book about this oft-neglected facet of regional mining history.

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