

History of Beaver Dam Quarries

Almost two hundred years ago, around 1815 (Gontrum, 1966)¹, quarrying began in what is now the Beaver Dam Swimming club. Over time there were many quarries in the area, working a vein of stone that runs from the Lake Roland area, near the Baltimore city line, north, to just above the Cockeysville area. (Maryland Geological Survey, Vol II, 1898)² The only quarry still in production in this area is the LaFarge quarry at Texas, Md. The Beaver Dam quarry is the only marble quarry in the area used for recreation.

Marble can vary greatly in quality from area to area. The marble from Beaver Dam is a dolomite and due to its hardness was considered one of the best and made an excellent building stone (Maryland Geological Survey, Vol II, 1898)³. Other quarries in the area had deposits of marble and limestone. Over time these quarries ran out of buildable stone and were used only as a source of lime for agricultural use.

Work in the quarries at first was done by hand using hand drills, hammers and chisels and the number of workers employed was as high as 200. Many Irish immigrants, who had fled Ireland during the potato famines of the 1840s, worked the quarry (Brooks, 1979)⁴. In 1878, Hugh Sisson acquired the property and began using the newest equipment available—derricks, shovels, drills with diamond bits and cutters – all run by steam. Prior to a spur being run from the North Central Railroad (now the NCR bike trail) to the quarry in 1866, the stone was loaded onto heavy duty wagons, drawn by teams of oxen, and taken to the rail line at Cockeysville, less than a mile away (Beaver Dam Quarries, 1879).⁵

Early projects using stone from Beaver Dam include the Washington Monument on Mt. Vernon Place in Baltimore and the columns for the Capitol building in DC. (Beaver Dam Quarries, 1879)⁶ The law that authorized the building of the Capitol required that native stone be used in the construction. The columns are twenty –six feet in length, three feet six inches at the base tapering to two feet nine inches at the top. Beaver Dam was the only quarry that had stone of sufficient size to make them.⁷ (Scharf, 1881)

Beaver Dam marble was used in many national projects including the spires for St Patrick’s cathedral in New York City, the Peabody Library in Baltimore, the Fisher office building in Detroit and of course, the white steps for the row houses in Baltimore; about sixty percent are from Beaver Dam. (Schmidt, 1963)⁸

The most well known project that used Beaver Dam marble is the Washington Monument in DC. The monument was begun in 1848 and used stone from what is now the LaFarge quarry in Texas. Only 150 feet were completed before construction was stopped due to a lack of funds. When work began again in 1880, officials realized the stone on the completed part of the monument was not holding up well so a new source of stone had to be found. Due to its hardness, stone from Beaver Dam was chosen to complete the 550 foot monument. In 1998 the monument needed restoration and stone was donated by the present owners of Beaver Dam for the project (Loudermilk, 1998).⁹

¹ p.8

² p.135

³ p.176

⁴ p.207

⁵ p.5

⁶ p.3

⁷ p.421

⁸ p.10

By the early part of the twentieth century new building methods and materials (cement and concrete block) were developed. With these new materials the demand for marble dropped dramatically and the quarry only employed about 30 workers. The last project constructed of Beaver Dam marble was the Arts and Science building at the University of Maryland at College Park, built in 1934. (Baltimore County: It's People and Progress, 1953)¹⁰ Equipment was removed from the quarry at that time and the pumps, that had removed spring water from the quarry, were turned off and the quarry filled with water.

Beginning in 1936 the first swimmers paid 25 cents to enjoy the clean, fresh spring water of Beaver Dam. Of course there were no lifeguards and swimmers could use the entire quarry. At one time there was a zip line running from the high side of the quarry into the water; it was removed in the late 1950's. Over the years the area of the quarry open to swimmers has been reduced greatly in order to comply with Baltimore county pool regulations. To have the quarry completely open to swimmers -today would require a minimum of twenty life guards on duty at all times, regardless of the number of swimmers in the water.

Beaver Dam Swimming Club Today

Today, Beaver Dam covers about 25 acres with many picnic tables and grills on the grounds. Even though the quarry swimming area is reduced, there is still plenty of room for good swimmers to enjoy the water and use the Tarzan swing, rafts, and diving board. There are small "cliffs" to jump from and a deck and sandy beach area for sunning. In addition, there are two pools, one with a sliding board, a basketball court and two volley ball courts. A snack bar is also on the premises and there is plenty of free parking. (McCathy, 2008)¹¹

¹⁰ p.47

¹¹ p.23

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