

Building the Fabric of the Parks: Quarries Along the Brandywine

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When J. Thomas Scharf wrote in 1888 about the "valuable deposits of blue stone and granite" along streams in Brandywine Hundred, he could have extended his description to include the banks of the Brandywine as it threads its way past Rockford and Brandywine parks. The parks' natural features easily suggest that the parks themselves provided the material for park walls and steps, as well as for Rockford Tower. Quarrying took many forms and occurred in many places in the area included in the Wilmington State Parks.

During the late 1870s, Philip P. Tyre operated a quarry along the Brandywine below Alapocas Woods. His workers supplied granite for the Mount Salem Methodist Church congregation to rebuild in 1879 after a fire and granite for the Wilmington Street and Sewer Department to use for curbs along the city's streets. In 1886, Tyre sold his Brandywine quarry to the Wilmington Board of Park Commissioners and moved his operations to a new location at Shellpot.

The site that Tyre vacated, having come into city ownership, did not cease to supply granite. Although documentary evidence is sporadic, by 1917 Park Commissioners' reports indicate that the D. L. Taylor Company was operating the quarry. In 1918, in a cooperative project undertaken with the City and the Jessup & Moore Paper Company, D. L. Taylor supplied stone needed to pave what is now North Park Drive. Within a decade, Hubbert & Company had the lease to quarry on a royalty basis from the Brandywine location. A 1927 survey map of the quarry operation indicated not only the limits imposed on the lessee for removing 100,000 tons of stone each year, but also showed the variety of structures on the site: stone crusher, bunk houses, tool house, and stable. In succeeding years, surveys estimated the volume of rock removed and the Park Commissioners reported receipts of \$563.33 in royalties from the operation in 1933 and \$496.89 in 1934. Documentary evidence indicates that quarrying continued at least through 1938. The quarry today stands between the Brandywine Park Condominiums and Alapocas Woods. Although currently part of the park system, it is closed to the public during completion of remediation efforts.

In 1896, the Board members reported that grading along sections of South Park Drive had been completed and that rock excavated during the project was used to build retaining walls and foundations for footpaths. Beginning in March that year, masons began work on a retaining wall along the Brandywine between Market Street and the foot of West Street. The workers built the wall from stone quarried during the construction of South Park Drive. Of the 2,000 cubic yards of stone used in the construction, 1,700 cubic yards were taken when the drive was graded. The 1896 wall survives, sweeping from the sidewalk that parallels South Park Drive all the way down the embankment to the river's edge.

Some quarrying that took place in the park itself was done under the direction of the Board of Park Commissioners and provided materials for park projects, leaving behind sheer cliffs as evidence of the excavation. In 1898, the Park Commissioners, in an effort to beautify the "rocky bluff" at the north end of the Washington Street Bridge along what is now North Park Drive, removed 1,500 cubic yards of rock as well as 3,400 cubic yards of earth. They used the rock for building walls along the millrace in South Brandywine Park, between Market and West streets. Three years later, concerned about the shabby appearance of "the old quarry" area, the Board undertook the construction of a masonry wall on the top of the rock ledge and a battlement that offered a view of the river below. The cliff top also provided the site for the Sugar Bowl Pavilion constructed at the same time. Cleared last year of obscuring vegetation, the dramatic rock face is again visible along North Park Drive between the Zoo and the point where the Washington Memorial Bridge passes over the drive.

In 1903, the Board of Park Commissioners took responsibility for grading Lovering Avenue, which bordered on the park, and, with stone excavated by the road project, built the wall that stands along the avenue near the foot of Franklin Street. The next year, the Commissioners began construction of a retaining wall along Lovering between Harrison and Hancock streets, but the rock taken during grading work was insufficient to complete the wall. To supply the need for more

stone, the Board opened a quarry in the bank below Lovering Avenue and South Park Drive. The quarry site survives in the side of the hill next to the ruin of the pavilion overlooking the river. The Commissioners also used stone quarried from that site to build at Franklin Street the flight of stone steps that leads down from Lovering to South Park Drive and provides park users access to the pavilion and quarry area.

When the Board of Park Commissioners and the Board of Water Commissioners collaborated in erecting Rockford Tower, begun in 1899, they used stone quarried within the park in the construction. Although the Park Commissioners reported in 1916 taking earth from building sites elsewhere and using it to fill quarry holes within the park, visitors who explore the cliff side along the abandoned trolley route below the northern portion of Tower Drive and who can see beyond the ivy that has overgrown the area can still discern remnants of some of the quarries from which stone was taken.

Other quarrying operations left their mark on the landscape of the parks although they apparently ceased before the land was turned to public use. There is a rocky glen on the south side of South Park Drive a few hundred yards upstream from where the drive intersects Van Buren Street. In 1929, this "old quarry hole" became a rock garden, now overgrown, and the site for a horse trough relocated there by the Wilmington Fountain Society.

Park users in 2001 see powerful walls throughout Brandywine and Rockford parks without thinking about where the stone originated and visitors to the Flower Market each spring use Rockford Tower as the unambiguous meeting place in the midst of the event. What few can imagine, however, is a crew of quarrymen removing 175 tons of rock a day from the banks of the Brandywine or coyotes in the Zoo howling each evening as explosives were detonated in the quarry below Alapocas Woods.