

# “Standard Portland Cement Company”

By Rebecca Yerger

“Standard Portland Cement Company” was originally published in the “Memory Lane” column, of the Sunday, June 6, 1999, edition of the *Napa Valley Register*. This article is presented here with the permission of the author, Rebecca Yerger, and the *Napa Valley Register*. <http://napavalleyregister.com/>

This article, which begins on the next page, is presented on the Stone Quarries and Beyond web site in the Napa County quarry portion of the California state section.

<http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/california.html>

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History and photographs of the Standard Portland Cement Co./Basalt Rock Co. are available in the Napa Junction quarry section of our web site:

[http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry\\_photo/ca-napa\\_photos\\_2.html](http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry_photo/ca-napa_photos_2.html)

A 2011 photographic tour of the property is also available in the section, “Standard Portland Cement Co./Basalt Rock Co. Ruins Photographic Tour, Napa Junction,” on our web site.

[http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry\\_photo/ca-napa\\_photos\\_standrd\\_portlnd\\_cem\\_ruins\\_1.html](http://quarriesandbeyond.org/states/ca/quarry_photo/ca-napa_photos_standrd_portlnd_cem_ruins_1.html)

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# “Standard Portland Cement Company”

By Rebecca Yerger

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“Standard Portland Cement Company was once a major industrial and economic force in Napa County. And, its Napa Junction location has been the site of manufacturing and commerce since the turn of the century.

“Beginning in 1900, the *Napa Daily Journal* regularly printed detailed reports of the quarry operation at the Napa Junction property. On June 8, 1900, the newspaper noted, ‘the product from our new lime quarry will be shipped by rail to Oakland for treatment.’ The volume of limestone extracted from the Napa Junction land quickly warranted direct access to the Southern Pacific Railroad shipping lines. ‘The work (of) building a side track,’ the *Journal* stated on September 30, 1900, ‘was commenced on Tuesday. G. W. Watson has charge of the grading.’ By October 4 the Southern Pacific work crews had begun laying the track for the quarry spur. The push to expand the plant continued to accelerate. ‘Buildings are to be erected at our lime quarry,’ reported the October 26, 1900 *Journal*, ‘for the accommodation of the employees.’

“By November 1900, 30 tons of limestone were extracted daily from the quarry. The *Journal* reported on the shipments of these raw materials.

“‘Shipping Limestone. One hundred tons of lime have been shipped from A.A. Watson’s Napa Junction plant to the Selby Smelting Works at Vallejo Junction.’ The November 11, 1900, article, ‘An Oakland company, managed by W. Badgley, is getting out a carload of rock daily.’

“The limestone quarry operation continued under the direction of its owner, local attorney Augustus Watson, until 1902. That year, he sold the Napa Junction property to an intermediary for the Standard Portland Cement Company. According to one of Louis Ezettie’s history columns, dated August 22, 1962, Watson was offered ‘the choice of an outright purchase or a royalty payment.’ Watson, according to that *Napa Register* column, opted for the cash. ‘Later,’ wrote Ezettie, ‘Watson may have had some regret for not accepting the royalty method, for as matters turned out he would have benefitted much more financially.’

“After the Napa Junction area land was purchased, the composition of the quarry materials were tested to determine their quality. At first, the test results were rather discouraging as the cement samples set up too quickly. Then the noted German chemist, Dr. Irving A. Bachman, was transferred to the Napa Junction facility. After some failed attempts, Bachman perfected a formula for producing a high quality cement from the Napa Junction quarry’s raw materials. Bachman eventually became the Managing Director of the Cement Works.

“Once the feasibility of the property was established by Dr. Bachman, Standard Portland began constructing a large complex of buildings needed for the production of cement. By early 1903, the Cement Works included eight, eventually ten, oil heated rotary kilns. Each of these structures had a capacity of 200 barrels per day. The facility also included a number of large manufacturing and warehousing buildings. ‘The works are well equipped with modern machinery’, stated the *Structural and Industrial Materials of California* publication. ‘The company has its own machine shop. Electrical power (supplied by the American River powerplant) is used throughout the plant.’ An on-site laboratory was also part of the Cement Works complex as well as a cooperage shop. The final product, Cement, was often shipped in barrels. Although the preferred containers were 95-pound capacity sacks.

“The barrels or sacks of cement were shipped to market by either freight train or steamer. To transport the cement to the ships, the barrels and sacks were carried from the works to the wharf aboard a tramway. In its evaluation of the Napa Junction company, the *Industrial Materials* publication stated, ‘This plant is admirably located for the production of cement in large quantities. Good rail and water transportation, and an abundant supply of raw materials at the works, are certainly strong points in favor of a stable industry.’ And, when the Cement Works was finally completed, the construction costs totaled \$1,000,000.

“Once in full operation, February 1903, the Standard Portland Cement Company employed 150 local men. The Southern Pacific train supplied reliable means for transporting the workers to the plant. The twelve-and-one-half-hour shifts were required to keep the plant running 24 hours a day and seven days a week. The day shift was 6 AM to 6:30 PM. The wages for the unskilled laborers who worked in the quarry and shipping warehouses were \$1.75 per day. Skilled employees earned \$3 a day.

“A year later, March 1904, 50 of the Cement Company workers went on strike. The disgruntled employees wanted higher wages, an increase from 18 cents to 20 cents per hour. These men worked in the quarry and held out for two days before accepting the 18 cents per hour wage. However, during that walkout, some of the strikers became militant, as described by the *Journal* on March 4, 1904.

“‘Thursday morning a number of the strikers armed themselves with shotguns, and made a demonstration on the road near the Cement Works. They threw stones occasionally, and patrolled the vicinity throughout the day.’ As part of that article the *Journal* included the following statistics, ‘For some time 200 men have been employed at the Cement Works, the output of the plant being 2,000 barrels of cement per day.’

“The Standard Portland Cement Company continued its Napa Junction operation until about 1935 when the on-site supply of limestone and clay ran out. After determining that shipping the needed raw materials from other sources to the local plant was too costly, the Napa Junction Cement Works was shutdown. For the next ten years or so, the history of the property’s use is rather vague. Between 1940 and 1950, according to the parcel’s chain of title, the land was owned intermittently by the Santa Cruz Portland Cement Company, a sister plant to the original Napa Junction company. According to the recollections of longtime Napa Junction area residents, the Santa Cruz company conducted little if any business at the former Cement Works.

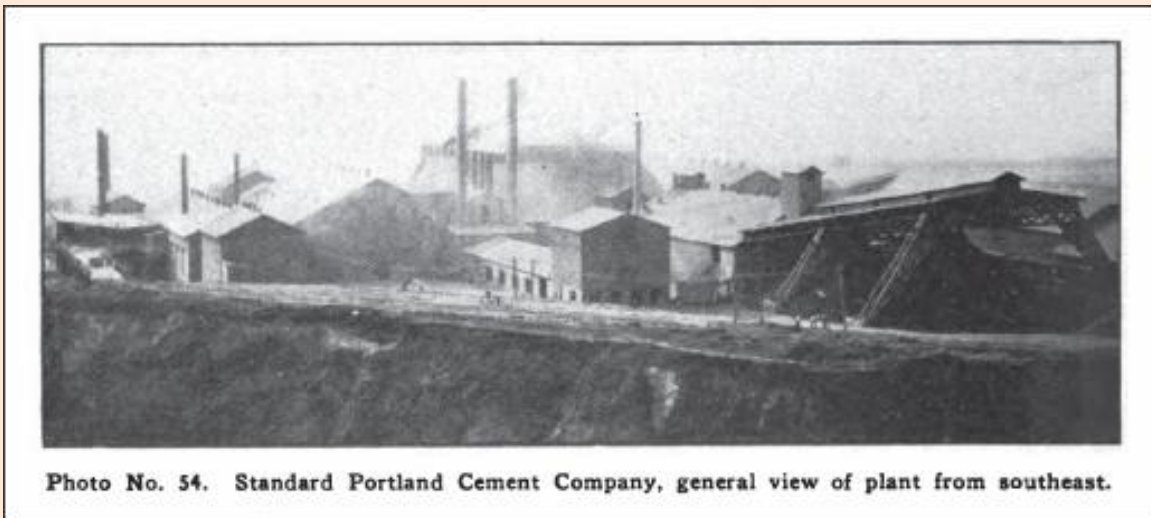
Then in 1946, also according to the memories of Napa County residents, Basalt made arrangements with Santa Cruz to begin production at the Napa Junction site. And in 1950, Basalt purchased the property.

“Basalt produced a light weight aggregate, a ball-shaped material which floated like pumice. They also manufactured a siliceous based cement additive tradenamed Pozzolan at the Napa Junction plant. To accommodate their production needs, Basalt added several buildings to the site. The Basalt plant operated between 1946 and 1978. Then the former Cement Works was abandoned and forgotten until 1984. That year, the current owner, Jaeger Vineyards, purchased the property hoping to convert the land into vineyards. However, the three-quarters of a century as an industrial site rendered the property, for all intents and purposes, barren. As indicated in various reports, all the digging and scraping of the topsoil as well as the dumping of nontoxic production tailings has left the former Cement Works property incapable of supporting most agricultural uses.

“Presently, the former Cement Works is being considered as a site for the City of American Canyon’s town center. After more than 75 years as an industrial center which produced materials to build cities, the former Cement Works could become the center of a new city.”

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***Below and on the next page are some of the old photographs from various sources of the Napa Junction property and what the ruins look like today.***





Works of the Standard Portland Cement Company at Napa Junction.  
(Ill. No. 79, circa 1906)



Limestone Quarry of Standard Portland Cement Company at Napa Junction.  
(Ill. No. 80, circa 1906)



Clay pit of the Standard Portland Cement Company (circa 1916)



Steam shovel in limestone quarry of Standard Portland Cement Company (circa 1916)



Rotary kilns in the Standard Portland Cement Company (circa 1916)



These silos were added by the Basalt Rock Co. in the late 1940s to early 1950s after the cement plant shut down, according to Linda Luippold.



Basalt Rock Co. Rotunda building in the late 1940s to early 1950s, according to Linda Luippold.



Miller's Pond, the largest of several quarries used by Standard Portland Cement Co., according to Linda Luippold.

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