

“An Interview with a Progressive Granite Dealer”

(Burton Preston)

By Arthur Hayden

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(In this article, Burton Preston discusses the condition of the granite trade in the United States; Carrara, Italy; Europe; and Aberdeen, Scotland. Mr. Preston was involved in the monumental business for many years, circa the 1890s.)

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An Interview with a Progressive Granite Dealer.



BURTON PRESTON.

Will we ever adopt the ancient custom of the Egyptians and make mummies of our dead?

I do not think we will. Our people, said a man well posted on cemetery matters a few days ago, are mainly descendants of the Anglo-Saxon race and follow their customs closely in burying their dead in well kept cemeteries. Even cremation has not made much headway in the thickly settled countries where civilization has reached the highest plane. The country churchyard cemetery and the family cemetery on the old homestead are not kept in a satisfactory manner, so that the interments in the city cemeteries are made by the major portion of the country residents. Crematories have been adopted in large cities as a means of lessening the extent of the Potter's field. The custom of erecting large monuments has a strong hold upon the people and more money is being spent every year to mark the location of burial places, especially in the United States. The desire to have the latest design, the largest shaft, the most artistic statue is prevalent among the wealthy, while the less ambitious deny themselves other luxuries to purchase memorials in proportion to their prominence in the community.

Soon after the above interview I met Mr. Burton Preston while en route East.

Still in the Gravestone business?

Yes. Thanks to the Microbe killing Ozone of Colorado, I'm able to push it as fast as formerly.

Where are the finest monuments in the world, I asked knowing my informant could give reliable information from observation?

In the cemeteries of the large cities of the United States. The Carrara, Italy, Cemetery is only a place for burial, and no monuments of any consequence are erected at that city, which ships monumental work to every part of the globe.

How long were you in Carrara?

Nearly two years, shipping monuments and statuary to the United States, as buyer for the principal importer at that time.

How are the monuments in the countries where granite is produced?

The cold countries of Northern Europe produce desirable stone and only in the United Kingdom do the people expend any considerable sum in proportion to their wealth. During several years residence manufacturing and polishing at Aberdeen, I shipped much larger work and much finer work to this country than I saw used there. The designs are much different and the

bulk of the home work is either tall slabs or headstones standing up, or flat slabs or ledgers lying down.

A marble dealer told me he was using a Red Swede Granite.

A very fine Red Swede Granite Monument erected in front of the National Gallery at Berlin, Germany, first called my attention to this stone. It was of even texture, took a fine polish and without defect. I investigated it at once and found it quarried in a very primitive manner near the edge of the North Sea on the east Coast of Sweden. From careful examination I concluded that it was a desirable and durable stone and brought a cargo to Aberdeen and it was placed on the American market for the first time. Its success has been phenomenal.

Are Foreign Granite Monuments cheaper than home productions?

Yes and no. It depends on the size and the design, either one or both. The rough stone abroad is more expensive but labor and polishing are cheaper. The time required to import foreign goods is detrimental, yet the trade is a growing one. When I first went to Aberdeen the total value of all the granite from that consular office was not \$300,000 and now it is nearly ten times that sum.

I presume new quarries and different colored stone are being found in this country and used for monuments?

The consumer is conservative. He looks over a cemetery and wants a stone such as has been erected. He thinks time is the test and of course it is, but the Barre, Quincy and Concord that are the most popular of our native quarries and likely will be for many years. The quarries and facilities at those points are the most extensive. Other localities have desirable granite and the production of good stone is increasing under a steadily increasing demand brought about by more wealth and a higher developed taste. A new stone of merit in color and texture can find a market and no one quarry has a monopoly of the trade.

Mr. Preston, has the promoter of trusts attempted to consolidate the granite industry? You know there has been something in that direction in coffins.

Not to my knowledge. There is a strong union among the stonemasons and an association of manufacturers and wholesale dealers, which has accomplished much good in the way of lessening bad debts. I was one of the original members and the first Secretary and Treasurer of the Boston Wholesale Dealers Association, but there is no attempt to pool issues or inflate prices at the expense of the retail dealers or customers.

What is the outlook?

Good. The quarries are producing more stone than ever before. Prices advanced slightly this year but still rule low. I am having a satisfactory growing trade.

Mr. Preston has had a wide experience abroad and afterwards at Boston on his own account, until by advice of physician, he sold out and went to Colorado for health purposes. Having completely recovered he re-entered business some time ago and has met with his usual success in obtaining business.

Arthur Hayden.

