

ROCK OF AGES

The Rock of Ages granite quarry is an awesome sight of truly epic proportion - an open-pit granite quarry nearly 600 feet deep and 50 acres in surface area.

From humble beginnings, Rock of Ages company has continued to expand its holdings to include many colors of granite – Barre gray, Bethel white, North Carolina gray, South Carolina pink, Oklahoma pink, Pennsylvania black, California grays and pinks, Ukraine galactic blue - in the United States, Canada and Ukraine. But Barre gray granite continues to be the mainstay.

Barre granite used in building construction ranges from state capital buildings - including the Vermont State House in Montpelier – to the 2002 Winter Olympic Headquarters in Utah and Union Station in Washington, D.C.

Worldwide, white and colored granites have been used for the Rheinpark Wiesbaden in Germany; The Bountiful Temple, Salt Lake City; the Grand America Hotel, Salt Lake City; and the Island Center Plaza in Hong Kong.

Locally, perhaps the most lasting testament to the Barre granite industry are nearby cemeteries in Barre, such as Hope Cemetery, that are filled with a breathtaking array of finished granite memorials, from simple markers to large mausoleums. There are numerous exceptional statues around Barre by, and honoring, some of the industry's most famous artisans and their ancestral history such as the statue of the Italian Stone Cutter on North Main Street in Barre.

Rock of Ages began when George B. Milne – a skilled stonemason from Aberdeen, Scotland – immigrated to Barre in 1883. He opened his first granite manufacturing business in 1885. After several short-lived partnerships, he joined forces in 1905 with quarry owners James Boutwell and Harvey Varnum, forming the Boutwell, Milne and Varnum Company. They purchased the White Brothers Granite Quarry in 1889 after an explosion tragically killed one of the White brothers. The quarry was noted for its dark granite, highly prized for monuments.

In 1914, the company began using the slogan “Rock of Ages” – developed by a Burlington advertising company – in a national advertising campaign to promote Barre gray granite as the finest-quality stone for burial markers, headstones, monuments and mausoleums, prized for its uniform color, texture and durability.

The success of the ad campaign and rising sales allowed Rock of Ages to expand, and the company was incorporated using the name Rock of Ages in 1925. The company's success allowed it to purchase 10 of the largest Barre granite manufacturers in 1930. It brought one-third of Barre's production under one roof, helping to reinforce the company's reputation for consistent quality of products.

In 1941, Rock of Ages bought the E. L. Smith Quarry, believed to be the largest dimension, “deep hole” quarry in the world. It yields mostly light and medium shades of Barre gray granite, and accounts for about 70 percent of Barre granite quarried each year.

With enough granite to supply the industry for the next 4,500 years, the future of Rock of Ages seems assured for many generations to come. Rock of Ages is, quite literally, the Goliath of the granite industry, both at home and abroad.

Civic memorials produced by Rock of Ages include the Carl Stotz – Little League Statue; the Pope John Paul II statue – rising over 30 feet in the air with 10-foot outstretched arms; the Saratoga, New York, County Veterans Memorial; the West Point – Class of 1961 Reconciliation Plaza; and the new Lake Champlain Navy Memorial in Burlington, Vermont.

Rock of Ages is also one of the largest suppliers in the world of precision-made machine plates and bases for the auto, aeronautical, optical and paper industries, and even the NASA space shuttle program.

A new rotunda-style visitors' center was completed in May 2004. Here, you will find a circular theater with an 18-minute video on the history of Rock of Ages which charts the early history of Barre and the granite industry in general.

The visitors' center has a model of the E. L. Smith Quarry, and there is a circular photo-mural timeline of landmark changes in the industry, and interactive display terminals. The gift shop has a wide range of gifts made of granite... clocks, pen sets, earrings and jewelry, and there is a Memorial Design Studio devoted to fine examples of exquisitely finished monuments.

Narrated tours by shuttle bus of the quarry depart from the visitors' center every 45 minutes. The tour passes along roads lined with huge blocks of granite, once described as “silent sentries.” The blocks all feature corrugations, marks cut through the stone with high-pressure pneumatic drills, to cut channels through the rock to allow it to be split along the grain – much like wood – using wedges and hammers.

The tour continues by the mammoth Manufacturing Division, a 600 foot-long building where you can take a self-guided tour to see cut slabs of granite being polished, split into smaller pieces, sandblasted, carved and etched with diamond-tipped tools to produce a stunning array of finished markers, monuments and lifelike statuary.

Before you leave Rock of Ages, take a moment to look at the bowling alley lane using durable granite for the bowling surface, near the parking lot. The idea never took off commercially, but Rock of Ages has renovated the bowling lane for your interest and amusement.