

# A little granite goes a long way

JAN. 1, 1987

The Bullfinch Building, (original Massachusetts General Hospital), Boston, the old Lowell Post Office, a Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Ga.—What do these structures have in common?

They are just a few of the buildings that were constructed of Chelmsford Granite.

George P. Merrill, in his "Stones for Building and Decoration", says, "It was not, however, until early in the present (19th) century that granite began to be used at all extensively in and about Boston, when the material was introduced in considerable quantities by canal from Chelmsford, thirty miles distant."

Waters' "History of Chelmsford" tells us that originally boulders, not quarries, provided the granite: "In the northwest part of the town, are granite (boulders) of superior beauty and excellence. They are not found in quarries, but on the surface of the earth, or partly sunk into it. They are of various sizes and dimensions, from one to a hundred tons' weight. They are first split with iron wedges, and then wrought into any form by hammers and other tools, at the pleasure of the workman.

"They are in so great a demand for the construction of dwelling houses, churches and public edifices, that eight workmen, the

## The way It was

By George A.  
Parkhurst



last season (1817) were not able to answer the urgent calls, which were made for them. A quantity of the value of twelve thousand dollars and upwards was transported the last year, in a rough state through the Middlesex Canal to the State Prison in Charlestown, where they were hammered and prepared for the builders' use by the convicts...So extensive has become the knowledge, and so celebrated the beauty of them, that an elegant church was built of them at Savannah, Georgia, in 1818...They are found in diverse parts of the town; but the best and whitest are in Merrimack plain, or Newfield (North Chelmsford) and the adjacent part of Tyngsborough.

They have acquired the common and discriminating name of 'Chelmsford Granite'."

For many years of late, Chelmsford granite has been, and currently is, taken from quarries in Chelmsford and Westford.

But just what is granite and where did it come from? It has been described as a coarse-grained, light colored, hard igneous rock, usually but not always gray. It was formed millions of years ago when the liquid rock of the earth's crust cooled and hardened.

Some of the projects that used Chelmsford granite are the National Gallery of Art in Washington, the steps of the Supreme Court Building, Washington, the Littauer Building of Harvard University, the State Capital in Harrisburg, Pa., and the Mystic River Bridge in Boston. Curbing along the New Jersey, New Hampshire, Maine, and Massachusetts Turnpikes came from Chelmsford/Westford quarries, as did the curbing for Routes 3 and 128.

The largest quarry to supply Chelmsford granite was the H.E. Fletcher Company located on the West Chelmsford-Westford town line. Fletcher's main product was granite curbing but waste material was processed into paving blocks, crushed stone, and poultry grits among other things.

At the present time, there are granite quarries operating off Ledge Road in North Chelmsford.

A little bit of Chelmsford has been spread far and wide in a form that is not biodegradable, thanks to Chelmsford granite.