

Limestone Lives





Limestone Lives

Voices from the Indiana Stone Belt

People to People Press
Bloomington, Indiana
2002

Foreword

The Indiana Limestone industry is situated primarily in and around the towns of Bloomington and Bedford in an area of south-central Indiana which is roughly two miles wide and thirty miles long. This area is called the Indiana building stone district, or the "Stone Belt", and contains what is identified by geologists as the Salem Limestone Formation. The Salem Formation is exceptionally deep—over ninety feet thick in some places. It is considered to be prime building limestone because of its extreme durability. It is also distinct in the world in its capacity for carving due to its ability to accept and retain fine detail. In the Stone Belt, limestone is quarried out of the ground in huge blocks that can weigh twenty tons or more. It is then most often taken to a mill where the stone can be sawed, planed, turned by a lathe or cut into any shape. Currently there are some twenty companies who fabricate or quarry the material.

Southern Indiana is characterized by a gently rolling landscape which gradually becomes more mountainous along the Ohio River, its southern border. The last glacier stopped along an east-west line approximately ten miles north of Bloomington, and its run-off helped to create the charming valleys and meadows which surround the cities. The glacier also exposed areas of ancient bedrock which contained the prized limestone that Indiana is renowned for. Some three hundred million years ago, Indiana limestone originated in a vast sea which covered most of the Midwest. At that time, Indiana was much like the Carribean Sea of today. It was shallow, and the sandy bottom was a broth of tiny crustaceans and shellfish. When the ancient seas receded, these thick deposits of calcium carbonate shells and exoskeletons ultimately transformed into Indiana's bedrock. Since these creatures were quite small, they combined and compacted to create a rock with a very fine grain. Geologists identify more than fifty different kinds of rock which were laid down during an unimaginable time span; many have been commercially exploited, but no single type of stone has enjoyed quite the same enormous use as Indiana limestone.

The first commercial quarry on record was opened in 1827 near the town of Stinesville, approximately twenty miles west of Bloomington. The coming of the railroads in the 1850's allowed limestone markets to be opened in east coast cities and the growing western area. Indiana limestone rose to popularity almost overnight in the mid-19th century. By 1870, the infant industry was on its way to domination of America's successive building booms, which lasted through the early post World War II years. A large volume of the stone was reaching Indianapolis, Chicago, New York City and Washington D.C. In 1900, sales of the Hoosier stone represented more than a third of the total limestone sales for building construction in the United States. By 1920, that figure increased to more than eighty percent. Buildings of Indiana limestone are many. They include the National Archives, the Pentagon, the National Cathedral, the Empire State Building, St. Paul's Cathedral, Rockefeller Center, the Chicago Tribune Tower and many more. This premier building material is used in dozens of United States post offices, state capitol buildings, universities, churches and homes in every state of the nation and in many foreign countries.

The qualities of Indiana limestone are still recognized today for their intrinsic value in carving and building construction. The market for the stone has varied over the years, but its performance has held up for well over a century in buildings and monuments of all sorts which are located in a wide variety of climates and environments. Indiana limestone is a remarkable stone. The stone ranges from a light gray to a bluish-gray, and some of it oxidizes to shades of buff. Its location and suitability for exploitation allowed a product to be produced that people wanted and could afford. Its consistent light-neutral color, ease of workability, aesthetic appeal and permanence are all properties of the stone that have brought the Indiana limestone industry to its prominence today, and will continue its success in the future.

Preface

This region of Indiana contains one of the richest limestone deposits in the world. The intriguing natural beauty of this local material has an incredibly powerful presence in the architecture, ornament and landscape of south-central Indiana. Limestone has formed the basis for many aspects of residents' lives here, including their economic stability, their social composition and their built environment. For almost two centuries, local limestone quarries and mills have employed generations of people who spent their productive lives working in the Stone Belt. From these limestone lives, a strong tradition has developed. Sensing that strong tradition, I realized the need to preserve a portion of this local history through oral, visual and written documentation. The local residents that I interviewed for this book have worked with limestone in the quarries, the mills, or in their own studios. They have shared with me memories of their lives and experiences, past and present. Their stories provide us with an understanding of the workers' perspective on their historic and contemporary experiences in this unique industry. These people remember growing up around stone. They tell of the ups and downs in the stone industry; they comment on the enormous changes that have taken place, such as the improved working conditions and safer working environment. I listened with enjoyment and I was enriched as each person recollected experiences; their voices became the melody of *Limestone Lives*.

Oral history interviews preserve a portion of our history; they are memories and reflections of common details in the lives of everyday people that allow us to look into their past. The human story is vital, and preserving these personal and intimate stories for future generations will help us to better understand the generations that have preceded us. The stories in this book are a transcript of the spoken word, and thus I have tried to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such sources. For the most part, the text has been taken directly from the conversations so that the integrity of each person's language is maintained. Each voice is different and distinct; each story is special and unique. This book is not meant to be a comprehensive history of this region. Instead it is meant to be a collection of stories from the lives of eleven individuals for whom limestone has played a significant role. The stories describe events, emotions, views and opinions. Although the stories are of limestone, the themes are familiar to us all—change and continuity, technology versus tradition, fortune and calamity, joys and sorrows.

Many families have been working in the industry for generations, and several of the people I interviewed are the third, fourth or fifth generation to be working in the industry. Many have sons, brothers, fathers, uncles working in the same quarry or mill. There is a tremendous sense of community among fellow workers. A quarry or a mill is like a family. Day in and day out, through all kinds of weather and conditions, these people work alongside one another, calling each other by nicknames and ably working as a team to get the job done. They have enormous pride in their job and great respect for the material they work with. They acknowledge the nature of the material—its permanence, its strength, its aesthetic appeal. They are lovers of nature and the outdoors, of all things natural and living. They present themselves to me as confident, humble, friendly, unassuming people, who are respectful and honest. They combine their labor and craft with a sense of humility. I have been impressed and inspired by their wisdom and generosity. They have shared their time, their lives and their stories with me—and now with you.

This book pays homage to these hardworking people who work with their hands, physically shaping the stone that continues to enrich our built environment. Human hands have shaped limestone into buildings and works of art that will endure for centuries. This book preserves a portion of this community's human environment and tradition. *Limestone Lives* is a tribute to those hardworking people who have worked with limestone throughout their lives, who have dug it out of the earth and who have shaped and molded this ancient material into the fabric of America.

by Kate Ferrucci



“When I sculpt with a chisel, I use it just like a paintbrush. I take a chisel and work with shadows just as if I’m drawing—and to me, there’s no difference.”



Tom Dixon

Master Carver

It All Started Right Here

When I was sixteen years old—that was the first time I ever got interested in stone work. I saw a book on Michelangelo from the Time Life books series—it was part of a collection of books about famous artists—and when I saw that work, I went nuts about it! I thought it was some of the coolest stuff I’d ever seen—and I knew that’s what I wanted to do. There just happened to be a limestone industry here, and so I took advantage of having that right here in my home state.

The Welcome to Stinesville sign that I’m carving now was originally a thirteen ton quarry block, and the figure is probably around six feet six inches if you could stand him up straight—a little larger than a typical person. We removed a lot of stone. I’m just making a wild guess, but we probably removed a couple of tons. The sign is on the site of where an old stone mill used to be. And this is where it all started—the fabrication of stone—turning it into something. For me, working on this project, and knowing that it’s where the first quarry in this area was—that’s a real big deal for somebody that’s as nuts about limestone as I am, or about carving stone. It was a hell of an opportunity. I couldn’t have thought of a better opportunity than the situation of being able to do a monument to where the limestone industry began, because you’re talking about an industry that has built the Washington Cathedral, the Pentagon, the Empire State Building, and the United States Capitol. This is an enormous industry for stone in the United States, and there is some of the best stone sculpting ever around the country that came from here, and it all started right here in Stinesville, so that’s a very big deal. Next to Italy, I’d say this is probably about one of the biggest stone industries in the world.

The Bybee Stone Company donated a rock for the sign. A rock like this could have cost five or six thousand dollars. I used myself as a model to save money, and also since I knew exactly what pose I wanted. My fiancée took pictures. Had her photograph me from all angles so I would have references all the way around, and I drew detailed ink drawings from the pictures that I had blown up, and it had views of the front and both sides, so I could see all the way around and take measurements from those drawings. And then I used the photographs to detail things—to make it look as realistic as possible. I had to fit a figure into the kind of rock we had, and also do something where limbs weren’t sticking out that could be broken, or something like that. So the pose is not only done for artistic purposes but also for practical purposes, and to make it easier to carve in the three months that we had—in our spare time, while also working our regular job.

“I’ll continue carving as long as my arms will work, and I can get at some rock to do it. My goal in life is for them to find me dead in front of a block of stone with a couple of chisels in my hand at the age of a hundred and ten.”



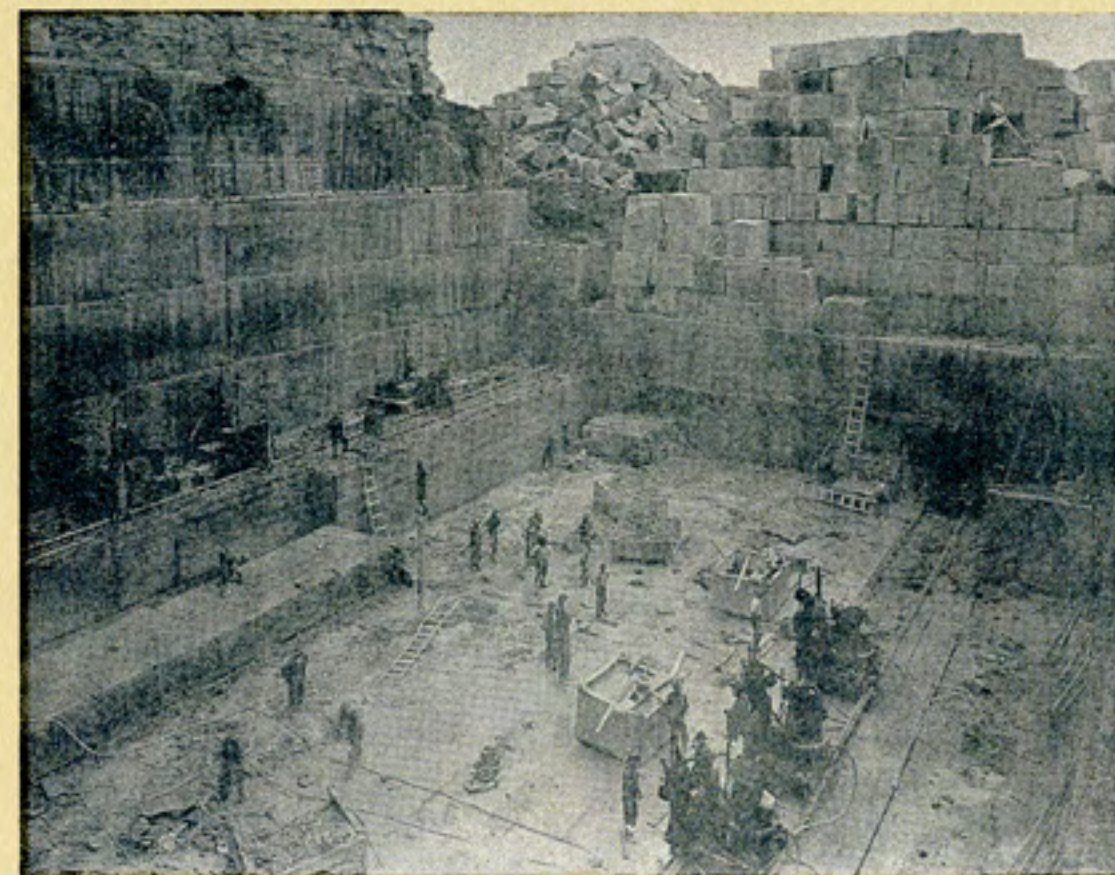


Bob Thrasher

Railway Car Blocker, Hooker, Diamond Sawyer, Euclid Driver, Foreman

What a Penny Used to Mean

A long time ago there was so many people wanting a job that they'd come and set, literally set with their feet hanging over the ledge around the quarry, and the boss would be up there somewhere, and if someone that he considered wasn't working hard enough, or would raise his head to look at the sun to see what time it was or something, well he'd just fire him right then and there, and he'd go up the ladder and he'd wave someone sitting on the ledge to come down, you know. That's really what brought unionism on—it was stuff like that.



I was a union member—I think you had to be. One time we struck for a nickel an hour. And you gotta remember—you only worked basically in weather over twenty degrees. You'd listen to the radio—some five a.m. radio, a certain station, and if the temperature was nineteen, you didn't come into work that day. You had to listen to that. So you was always hoping it'd at least be twenty. But you didn't work full-time to start with. I always farmed on the side—I always have. And so we was gonna strike for a nickel an hour. I don't know what we were making at the time—seventy cents or something in the '50s. And we struck for a nickel, but the company only offered two cents—so we struck all summer long. And finally we settled for three cents, which was only a penny more than they were offering. But we missed a year's work, which I always thought was the height of stupidity. But we'd still do things like that.

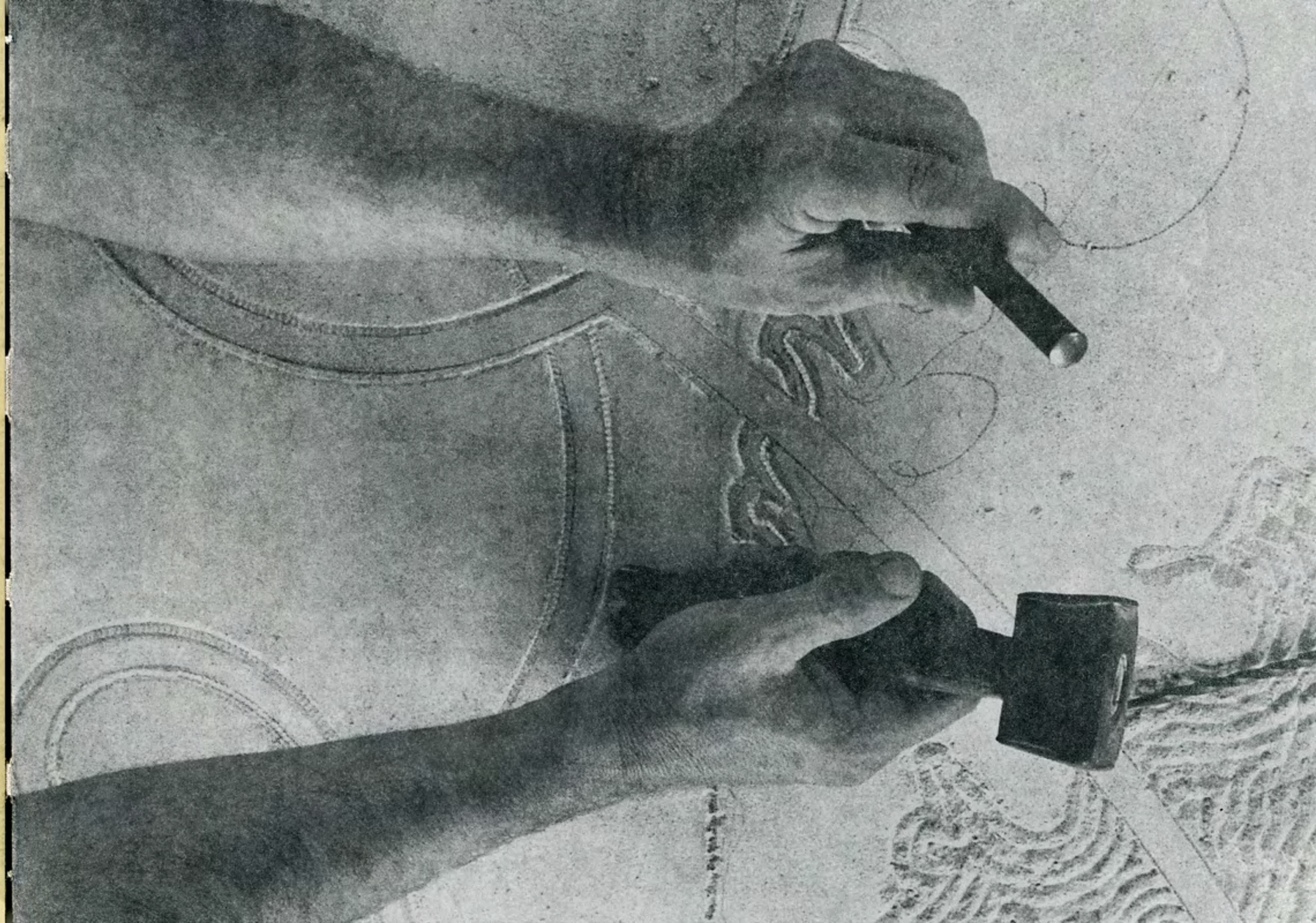
2 “Different world now—totally different world.”

“We had six kids, and one year when I worked at the stone mill—this was back in the fifties—my total stone mill income was three thousand dollars. Of course, three thousand dollars was a lot more then, but that's still not very much.”

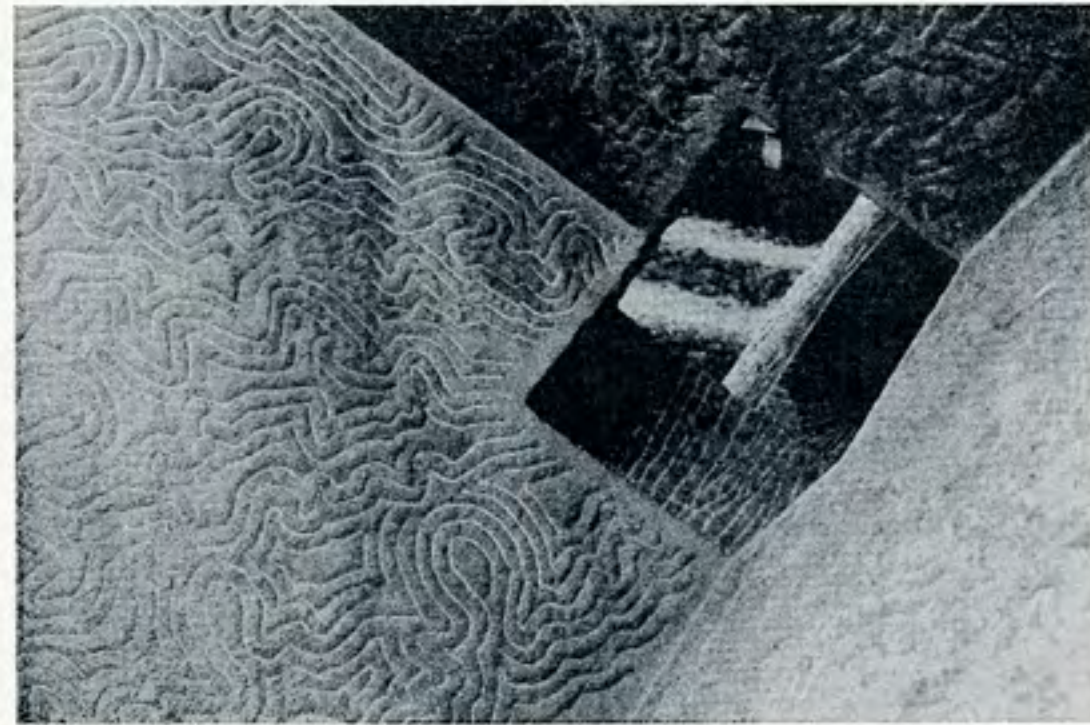
A penny doesn't even seem like anything now. I don't even bend over to pick up pennies anymore. I can remember when I was a little bitty kid. Ran on Ketchum Road one time in the early '20s, and was waiting on the library truck to come up the road—it was all gravel then. The little library truck was a little bitty early pick-up, with just a little bit of books on it. Had about, I don't know—well I've got more books in my home now than the truck had on it—three or four times more books. But I'd be out there waiting, and you never knew when it was coming. And I found a penny in the road.

I was barefooted and I walked all the way to Harrodsburg to spend that penny, and the old man that was running the grocery store had great big glass jars just setting on top of the counter up there—and he had licorice sticks a foot long in there. All kinds of things—candy canes, too. And I think they were a penny a piece, if I can remember right. It was so rare that I did anything like that. I can still see the scene. I stood there for ten minutes trying to make up my mind—what I was gonna spend my penny on. That was what a penny used to mean. It was so stupid, but we did it. To me, that tells you a lot about the times.





"I always look for the beautiful imperfections of the stone."



Dale Enochs

Sculptor

A Humble Stone

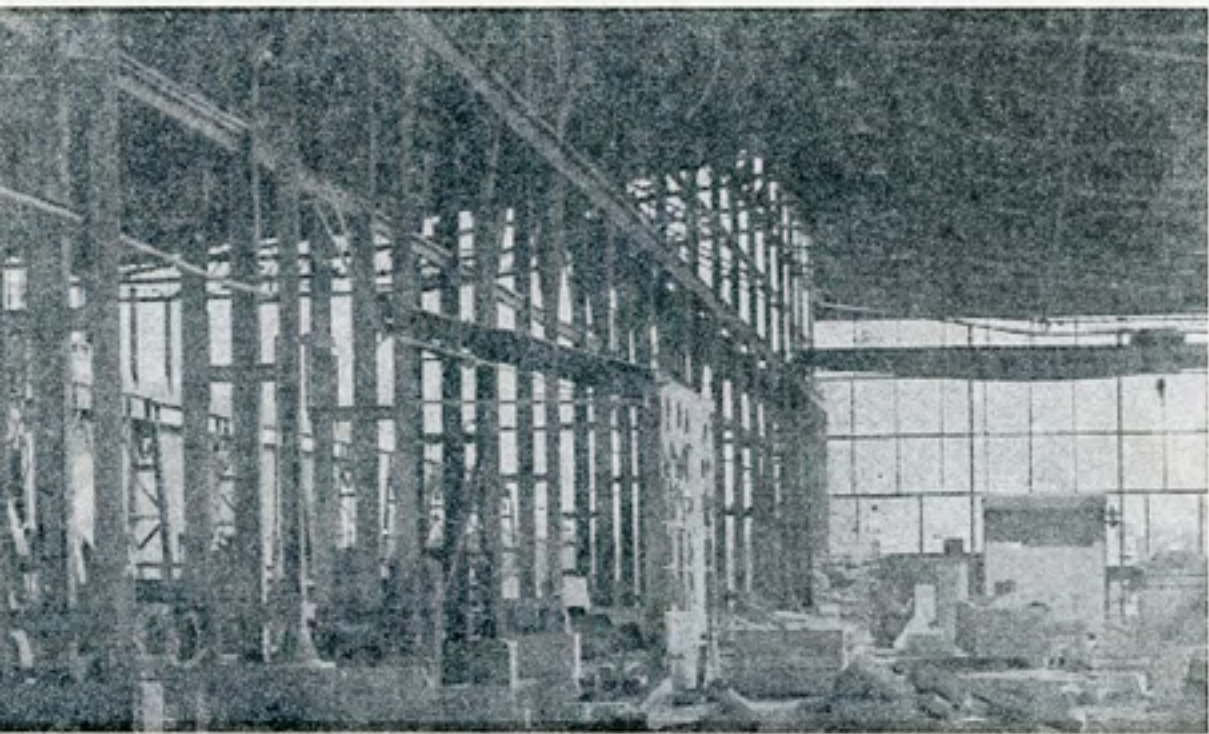
Occasionally I'll run into something that looks unique, that draws my fancy, that's been discarded in quarry piles, and I'll get a hold of that. A lot of the stone I use are discarded pieces which were thrown out because they're rough or coarse-edged, which is not good in construction. The stone itself really didn't cost anything because there's very little building material stone within that. I look for the stuff they throw away because that usually has unique characteristics of the stone. The thing that Indiana limestone is known for is its consistency, both in texture and color. It's good for the building industry because it can be used—I'll use the analogy of slicing loaves of white bread—so you can get the same slice of white bread one after the other, and that can be used on a large building. I'm more interested in the unique characteristics of the stone and working with the nature of the stone that people in the building industry are trying to avoid.

"The stone is very sensitive and soft and forgiving, and yet it's also strong and hard. It has many contrasts, and it's that dual nature which interests me."

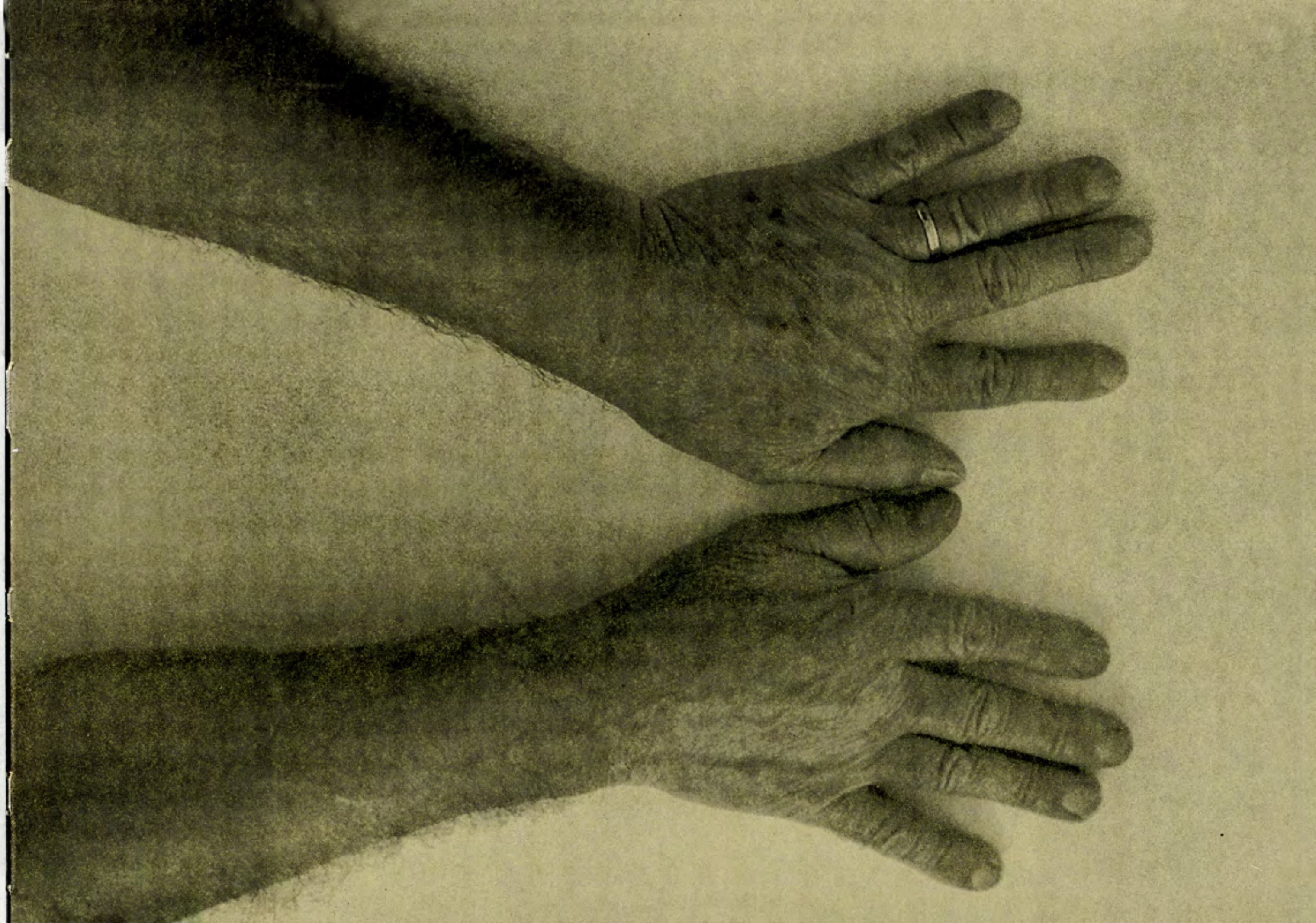
When I first looked at Indiana limestone, I thought it was god-awful ugly stuff. Now I hasten to say that I think it's beautiful and I love it. Over the years, I gained an appreciation for the nature of the material. I think that with any material, you need to learn it—what it's about, how it behaves, how to look at it—and so, with that comes an appreciation. Many people have worked with marble or granite, which is a very smooth, sensuous, sensual material. Limestone is not sensuous or sensual, but it has other ways of speaking. It's strong and it has integrity and it's perfect for Indiana, a sort of home-grown state. It's a place that has a sense of humility, yet strength and inner strength and so forth, and that comes out in different ways. I think that's what limestone is about—it's a humble stone. It's very strong, it's forgiving, and yet it has this force about it of integrity. And so these are all concepts that I think are in keeping with the material and are part of the spirit of the material.

The stone is conducive to texture and has a great ability to pick up light and shadow. And the moment you touch it with a tool, you leave a mark—a bruise. But when you freshly break it open, it has a certain crystalline broken surface that you just cannot replicate in any way, and I see that as a texture and as a natural part of the stone, and so I enjoy the process of breaking stone apart as well as I really like the texture and the natural, crude element of it—that broken surface. It's very exciting to me.





200
15
NEW
E



Vollie Staggs

Stone Polisher, Group Leader, Drill Runner, Laborer, Hooker, Epoxy Worker

Washington Crossing the Delaware

While I was working over there at Macmillian Mill in 1975, I got in on the making of the Washington Crossing the Delaware statue. The base was one huge piece of stone, and then I glued the boat down on the stone. It took about three hundred and sixty pounds of epoxy. It was cold—in the early spring, and so the glue didn't want to hardly spray, but I got her on there. They set the boat on, got it glued. And I run a drill and I drilled the holes out in the boat for them to set the statues in. There was a lug on the bottom of each statue that went down in that hole, and I epoxied all those figures in there. And it was quite an honor.

I was real proud of it.

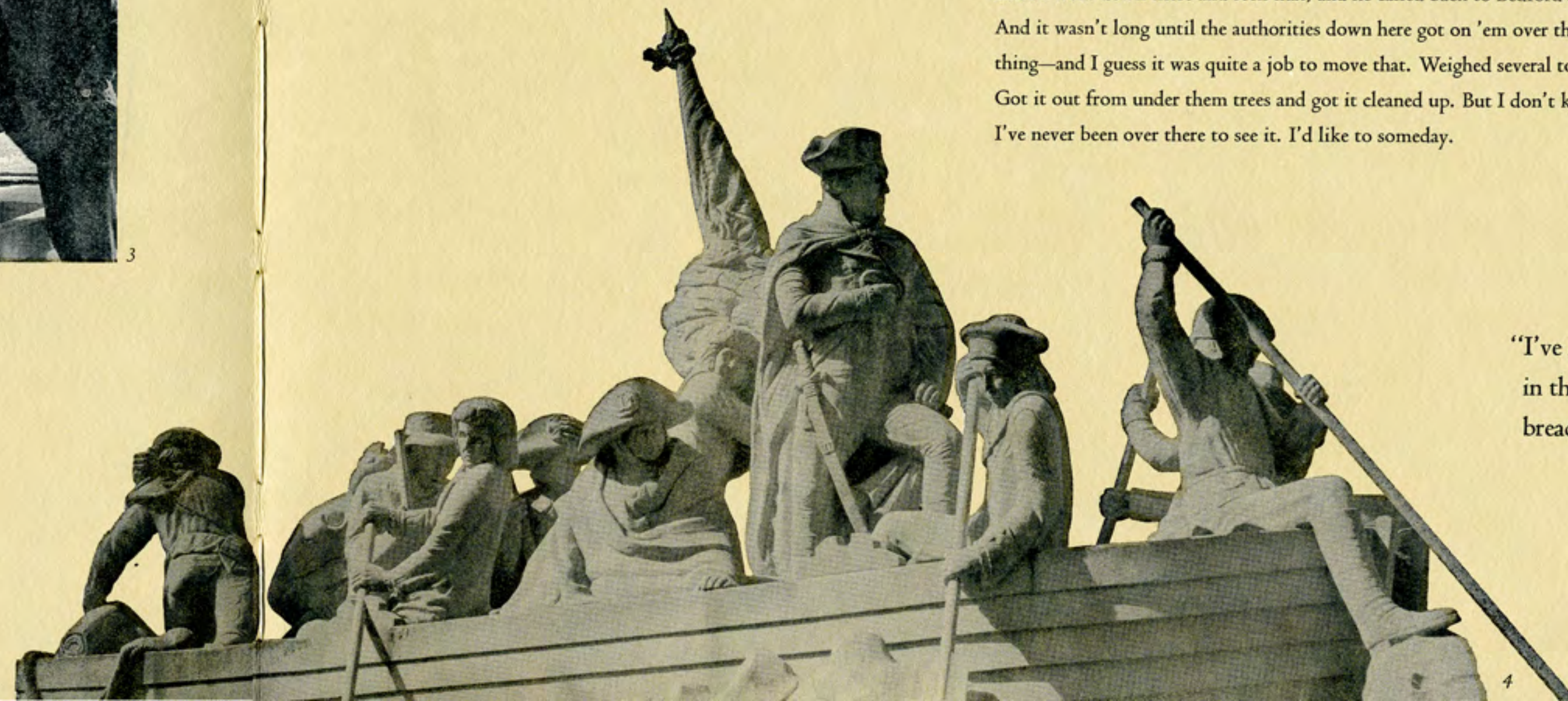
On the back of the boat, before I glued the last statue in there—I took a plastic bag, and I put an American flag in—a small miniature, and a 1976 half a dollar. And then I put the carver's name in it, and my wife and my children's name in it, and I wrote a little story and put it in there too. I said, "The Lord help us . . . we're all dying from cancer." That's all I said. And I sealed it in there, put the glue around, and they set the statue in it. I worked along with the carvers and the architects, and helped them out. The model that Frank Arena made out of clay, well the clay was so soft that the carvers couldn't get their caliper points on it—the points would go right into the clay. So I spent about a week spraying that whole unit with epoxy paint to harden up the outside surface. And I'll bet I put thirty coats of paint on that, to harden that up. And they got their points to where it would work. Oh, it was an honor working with them.



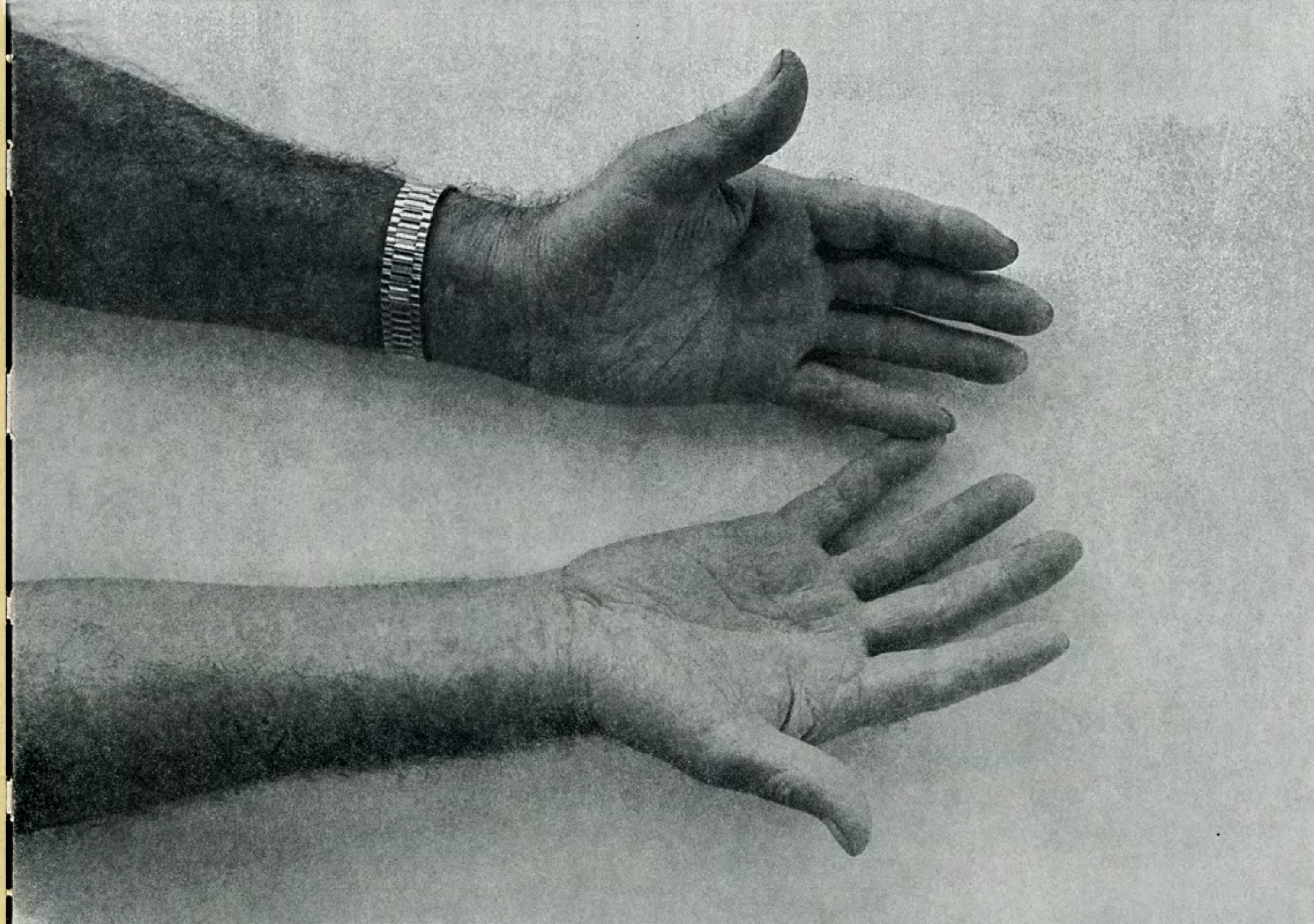
"I felt honored to be a part of that."

They shipped it out to Pennsylvania on the back of a flat bed truck. Moon Freight Lines had a new truck built, and you wouldn't believe the chrome that was on that. And the trailer—chrome all around the edges of it, and the wheels too. Man, it was beautiful. That was the prettiest thing I ever seen. And it had that big ol' statue of that stone boat sitting on that. They took it up to Indianapolis and showed it around up there. I think it toured the five hundred racetrack, too. And there was even a parade down here in Bedford on the square for it. It was a really big deal here. It was the Bicentennial, and the new uniforms they bought for the high school band were the type they wore back then—the type that looked like the Minutemen. They made a big to-do out of it. Had this big ceremony and dedicated it.

Where they originally set that statue out there, it was under some pink trees. And in about two years, the sap out of them trees had dropped on that statue, and I guess it was just a mess. The birds roosted up there and they dropped all over it and made a mess out of it. Morris Manion was in the Air Force and he went down there and seen that, and he called back to Bedford and reported the condition of it. And it wasn't long until the authorities down here got on 'em over there and they moved it—the whole thing—and I guess it was quite a job to move that. Weighed several tons—fifty-three tons, I think. Got it out from under them trees and got it cleaned up. But I don't know the shape it's in now. I've never been over there to see it. I'd like to someday.

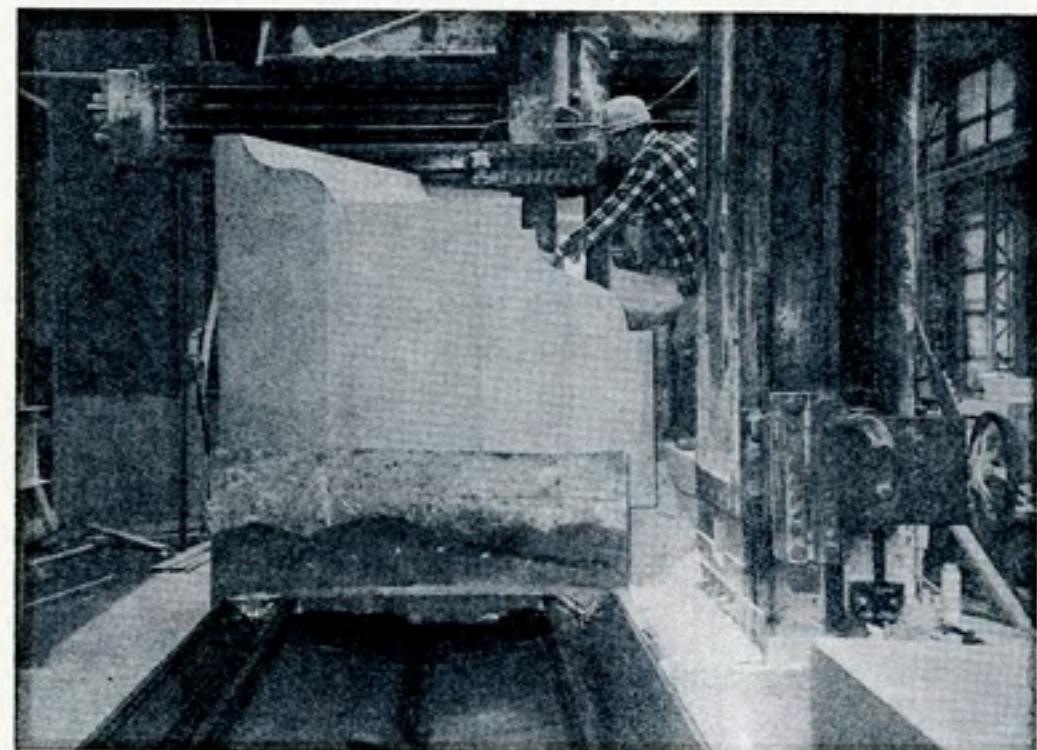


"I've had a good life of 45 years in the limestone business. It kept bread and butter on the table."



Wilbern Terrell

Sawyer, Planerman, President of the Stonecutters Union



Something Different Everyday

Back in the early '60s, at Peterson Limestone Company, we cut some stone that had been in a grout pile in the quarry for years. I was about to saw it, and I seen a fuse going in. So we dug it out, and the blasting cap was still on it—but it hadn't detonated. Well, I don't want any of them! Nobody did get hurt though. I spotted it before I had sawed into it. Fortunately that's the only one of those I ever seen. But a lot of times we'd find slips and wedges in the blocks. The breakers would just overlook one or two of 'em, and it'd get stuck there in the mud. And if you don't get them out, they'll just rip every one of them teeth off the saw.

It was a dangerous job, but it was something I enjoyed. You know, a lot of people don't realize how dangerous something like that is. But those machines and stuff, they're just like getting in front of a car. They run over you and you're not gonna hurt them any. Just like planers—they could cut you in two, and you're not gonna hurt them. So you gotta respect 'em and watch what you're doing all the time. And then you can still get hurt.

"It was hard and heavy and quite often dusty work. There were aggravating days, but when you got done, you had something that'd be there for you."

"I miss not being able to do it anymore."

A lot of men have lost fingers, toes in the mills and quarries. Some of 'em lost their whole life. They've had guys crushed. I mean, it's something that doesn't happen very often, but it has happened too often. I'm gonna say there've been two in the last twenty years or so. And a guy got his leg almost cut off a few years ago, but they put it back on somehow and it worked. Twenty years before that or even ten years before that, all they could have done would've been to go ahead and clip it off the rest of the way. But anymore they can do a lot of things that they didn't used to.

It was something different everyday, and basically, you were working with nature. You might run the same pattern three or four days or a week, but each stone was different. It's not at all like working with man-made concrete blocks—they're all basically the same thing. Of course, there's some difference there too, but not as much as with limestone. The texture of it will vary quite a bit. Some of it is coarser and one thing and another. Some of it's got a different type grain to it than others. It's just different everyday. And it's something that if you want to work at, you can learn something for years. You can't learn it all in six months or a year.

I was in it for 34 years, and I was still learning when I got out of it. Course a lot of that is the differences in the technology—different type tools than what they used to have, different ways of handling it. I'm glad that I spent as much time in it as what I did. I've enjoyed all of it. Wish I could go back to doing it again, but don't think I'm going to.





Will Bybee

President, Bybee Stone Company

Rebuilding the Pentagon

We were all affected by this horrible tragedy. We went through the same thing everybody went through—watching it on T.V. and listening to it on the radio and listening to the commentaries. And after that, to be honest, we weren't even thinking that limestone had to go back on that. We didn't get a call about doing the project until about six weeks after it happened. So we went to work right away and were able to finish the job ahead of schedule. There were a total of fifteen thousand cubic feet of stone, or about 46 truckloads that were sent to Washington D.C. I'm happy and pleased that we were capable of doing this kind of stonework in the time frame that it was necessary to have it done in, and the employees all have about the same take on it. But they have different points of view. Some of them were veterans, and it's kind of a patriotic act for them, more than some of the other guys that weren't in the service. But I think it was all a feel-good type scenario in a very disastrous type situation.

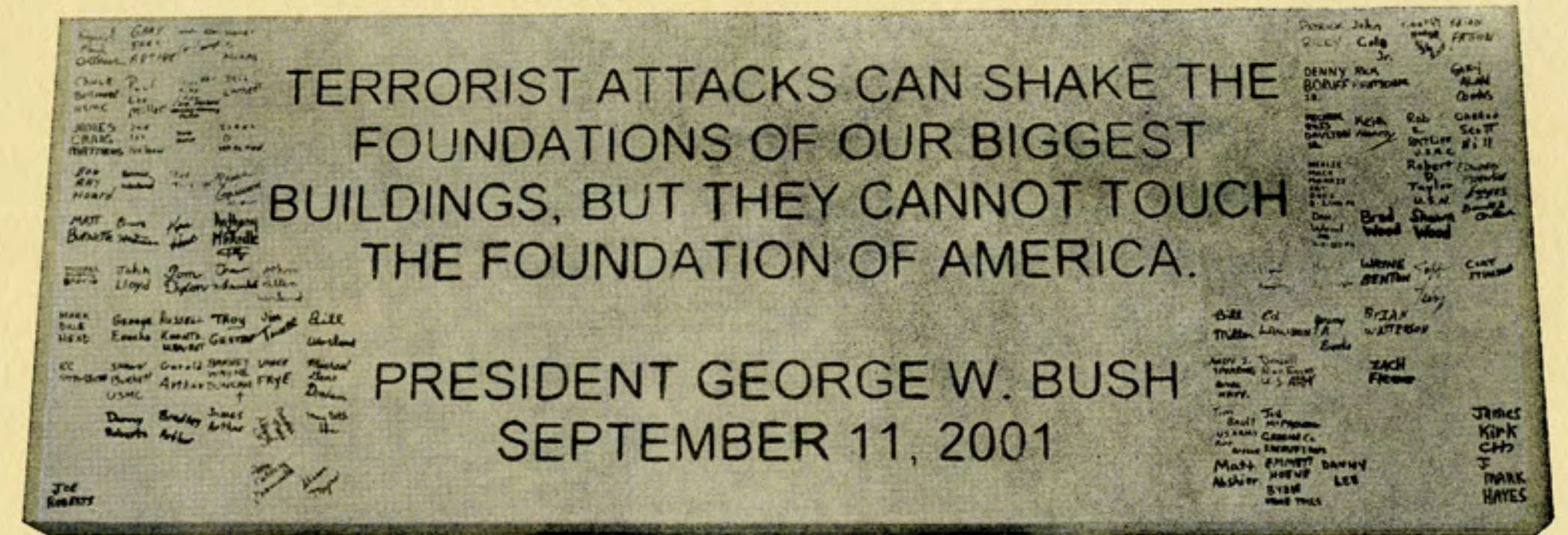
I guess anybody would feel good to do a positive thing for something that's so horrible. And I'm sure a lot of people that are doing the work at the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, who are physically out there digging through the rubble and actually putting it back to place, feel the same way. How do you put it into perspective?—I don't know. It's just too big of a picture that comes into play for why it all happened, so you just be able to do your small little thing and it makes you feel good about it, and hopefully this sort of situation won't be a commonplace thing, like it is in so many places in the world.



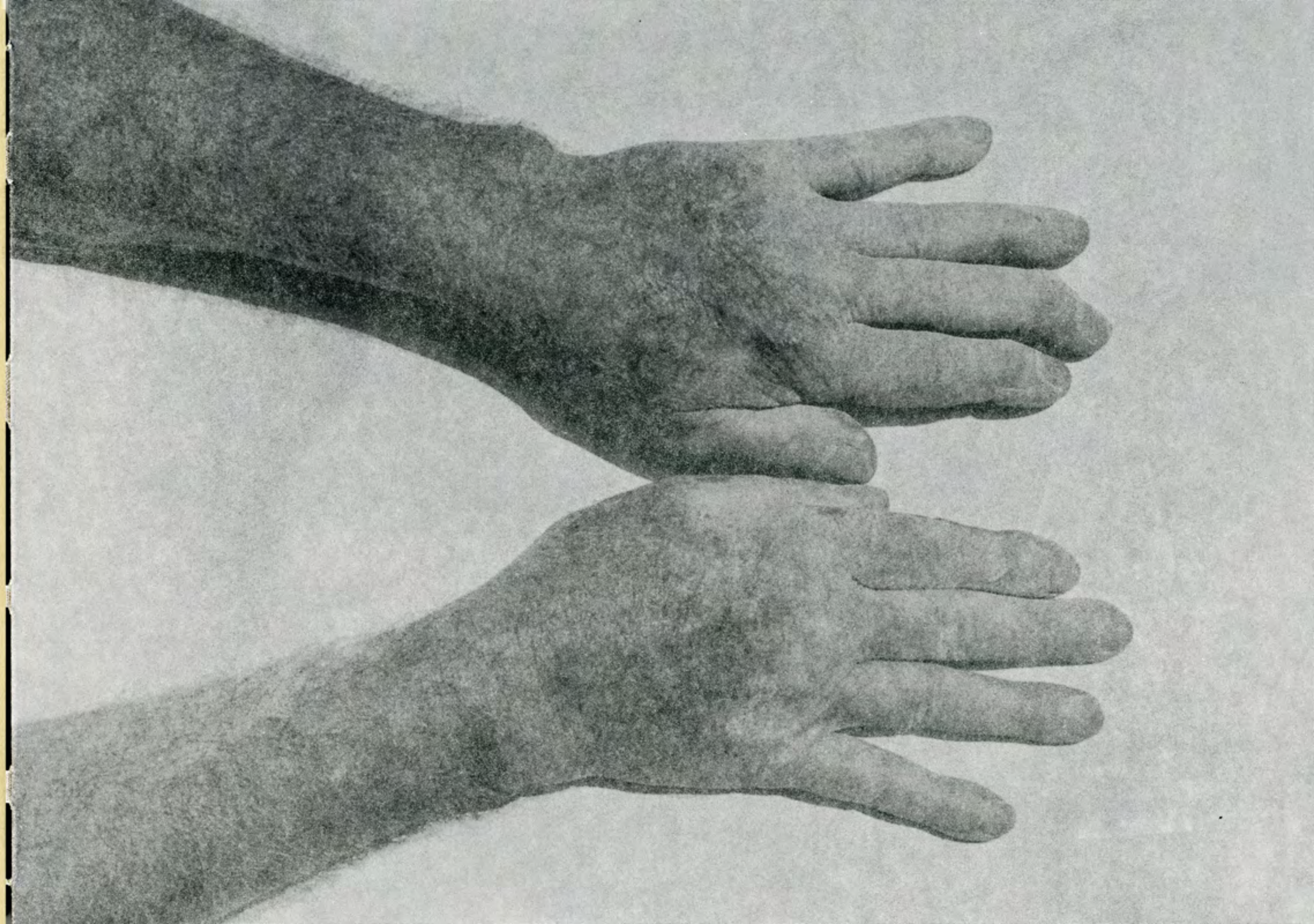
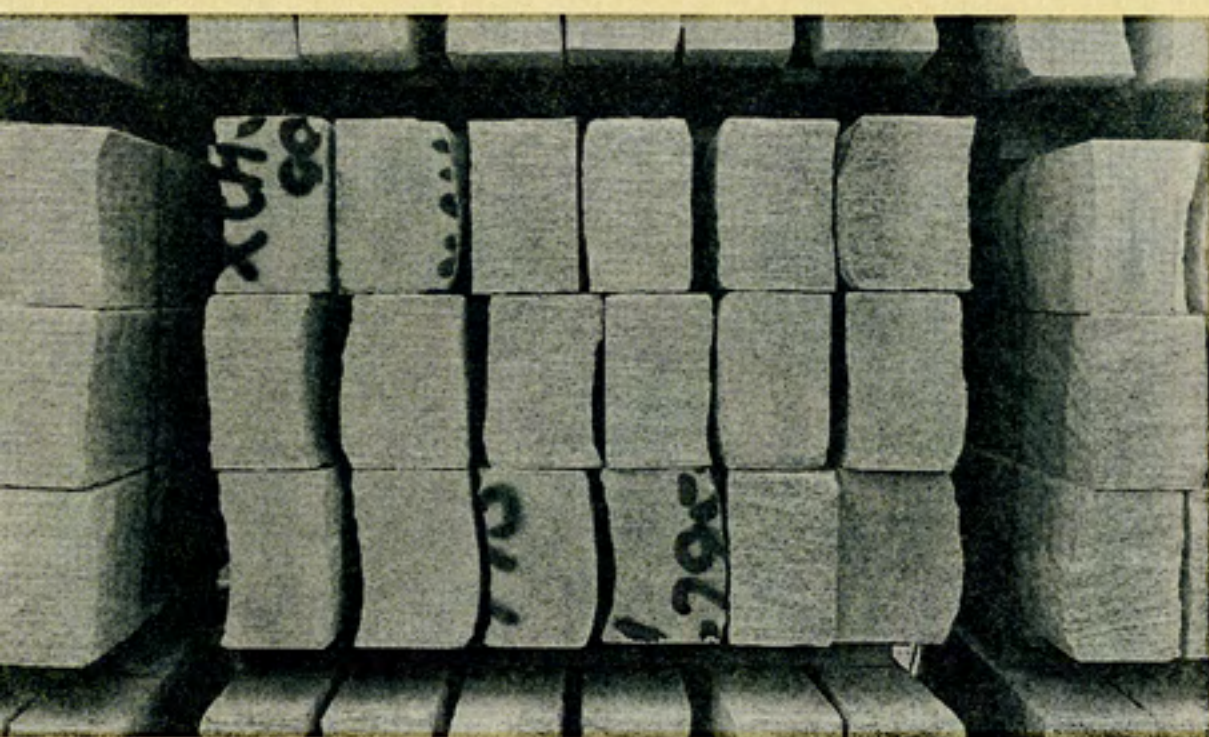
"You get so involved in the details of trying to make things work that you kind of fall out of the situation where you think about, well—wasn't that a wonderful building we built. Isn't that beautiful. Aren't you proud of that."

We do a lot of work that has historical significance, because it's gonna be stone work that people, our grandkids, will be able to see. It'll be around that long, if it's taken care of and they don't tear it down. And I think a lot of times we get calloused and think of it as just a job, but when you think about the kind of historical significance some of the buildings have, I think the workers ought to be very proud of the work they do—the stonecutters, the carvers, the planermen—everybody out there should be proud of the work they do, because it's very lasting type work. I mean, it's not a candy bar, where somebody eats it. It's not a house that you build for twenty years and expect to tear it down, and a lot of the building processes that go on in this country now have a definite lifetime—and it's short—much shorter than it used to be.

The buildings we do are built to last. They go on college campuses, they're hospitals, they're courthouses—that sort of thing. And those buildings are supposed to be built to be occupied for hundreds of years. And with this particular situation, because it's so high profile and got so much publicity, I think it kind of hit these guys in the head that, gosh—we do some pretty neat work.



"It's a soothing way of being able to deal with something that never should of happened, but did."





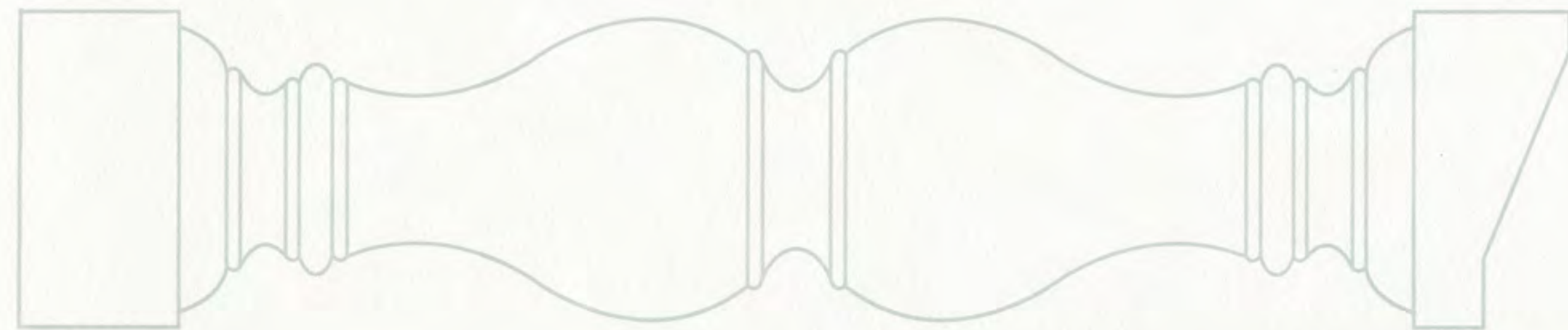
Amos Hawkins

Sawyer, Planerman, Turner

He'll Make You a Good Man

I run a planer for thirty-seven years. I retired from the mill in 1985 and bought a lathe before I retired to turn balusters. It took me about a year to get started. Then word got out. This stone company called down here one day and wanted to know if I could make some balusters or something. Somebody gave him my name. And well, I says, send me down a baluster—split it down the middle on a saw and send it down here so I can get a pattern. And he sent it. It was a real stubby-looking thing. So I cut him a sample and sent it back to him, and that's how I got started with it. I think there was sixty-five of 'em in that first bunch. It might have been a bridge they was replacing 'em in or something. And ever since then, I've been turning a lot of balusters.

"I can't rest until I get it done. My wife tells me I work too hard, but I just can't set down and relax when I've got something to do."



"It's worth a lot to just work when you want to."



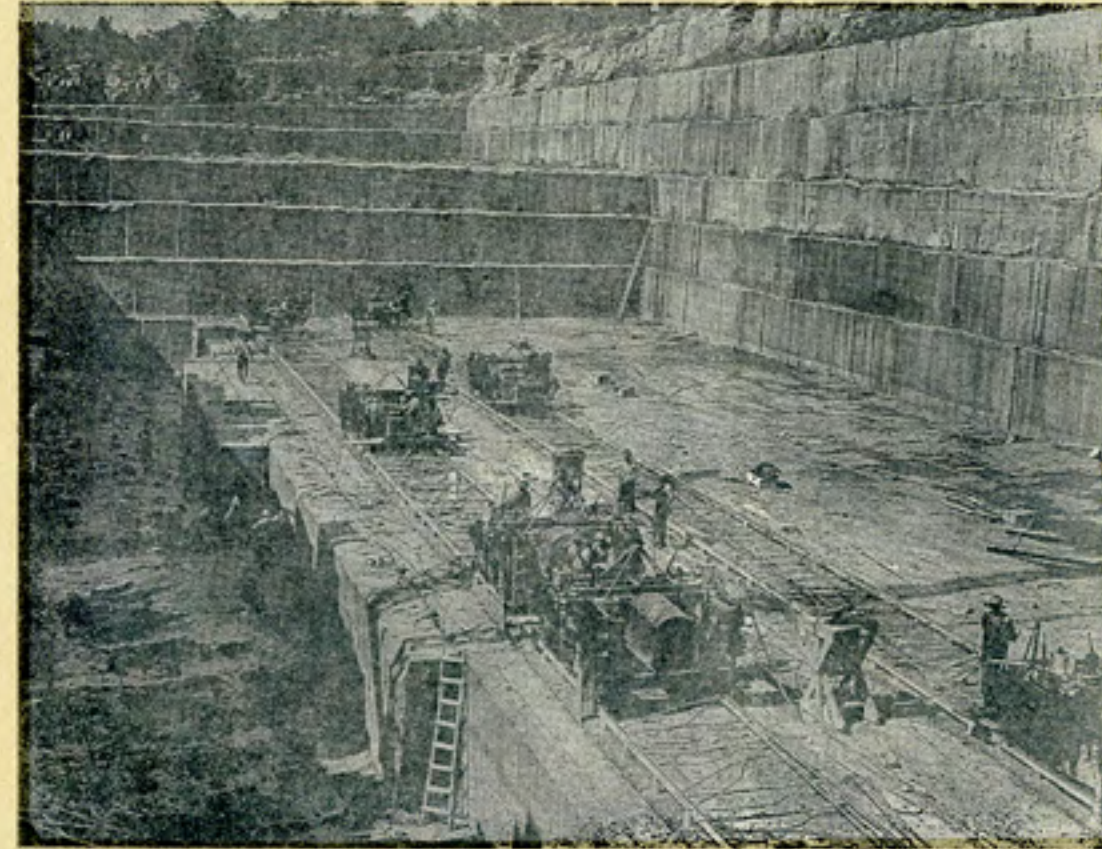
I could find a lot of work. I could keep myself busy all the time if I go around and hunt it, but I ain't hunting it. Still, I like to do a little something rather than nothing. If I wasn't doing nothing, I'd get old and stiff and wouldn't be able to get around. I'm at 76 years old and it just keeps me loosened up. I seen too many guys just retire and quit and they get so broke down and feeble. Common sense would tell you that working is good exercise and it's good for you. But it's not everyday work. And I'm glad it ain't because that's why I retired—so I don't have to work everyday. But I do a lot. And if I was going back to work again, I'd just as soon go back into the sawing mill—lathing—because it's just about what you enjoy and what you get used to.

I've got a grandson that's working over at the mill now. When I retired he took my place. Yeah, he's running my planer now. When he got of age to work, I told one of the owners of the mill when I was getting ready to retire—I said, "You give me two weeks with him and he'll make you a good planerman." And so he come down and I stayed there with him for two weeks and I showed him all the tricks of the trade, and he's as good as they've got now. He's pretty sharp. He's still got several years to go, and I may give the lathe to him when I get done with it. It's just a matter of time until I'll be done with it—when my age goes. I know I'm gonna have to quit one of these days.



Winfred "Buck" Prince

Laborer, Waterboy, Hooker, Crane Operator, Forklift Operator, Foreman



"About all of us Princes work in the quarries."

Twelve Princes

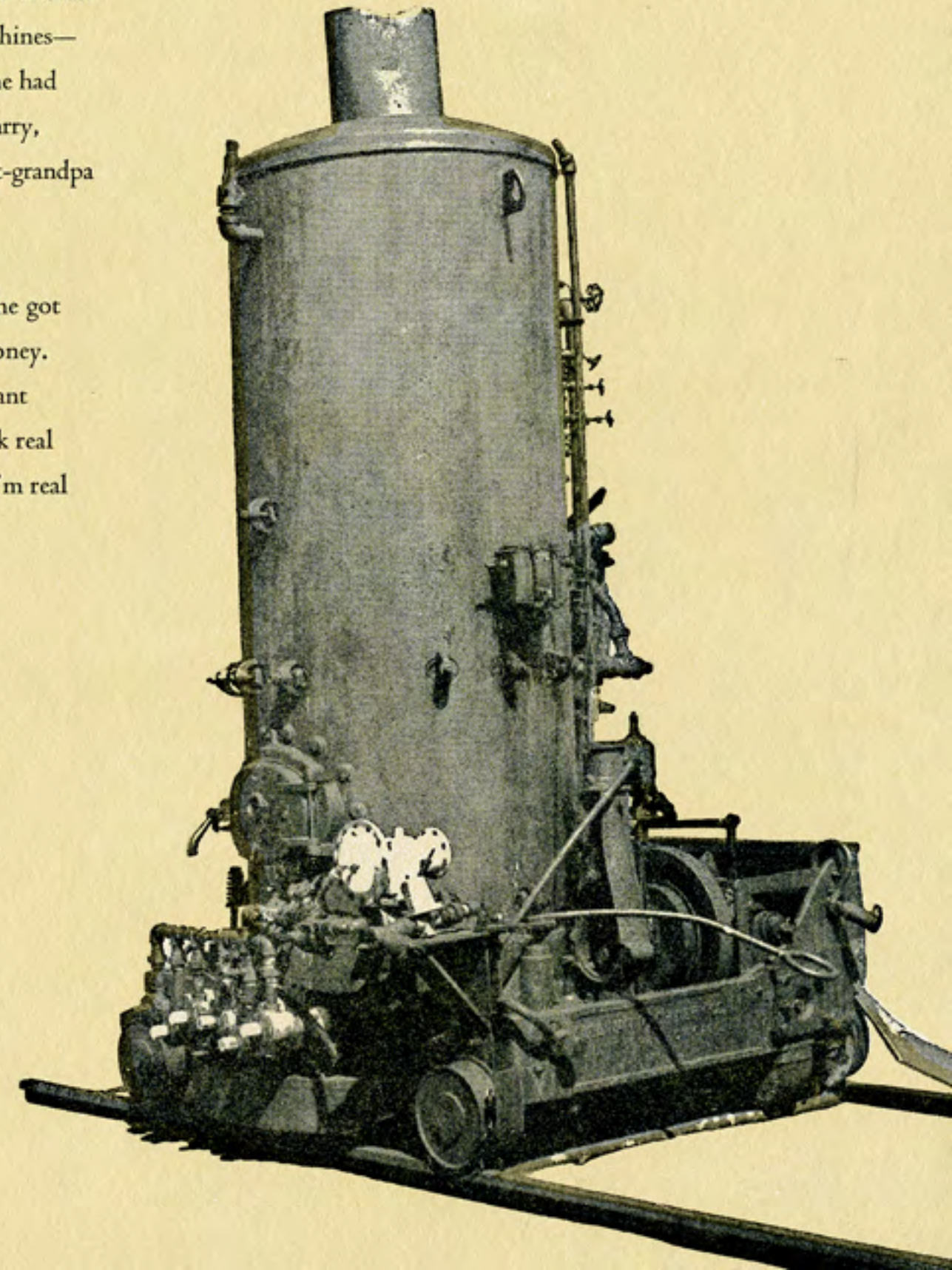
At one time, near the University Quarry up there on the Rockport Road, we had twelve Princes that worked there. All at the same time, on the same ledge. And the superintendent said, "Boy, if we ever have a death in the family, if one of the Princes dies, then we're gonna have to shut down." He said, "Hell, twelve men missing at one time, we'd have to shut the whole darn quarry down!"

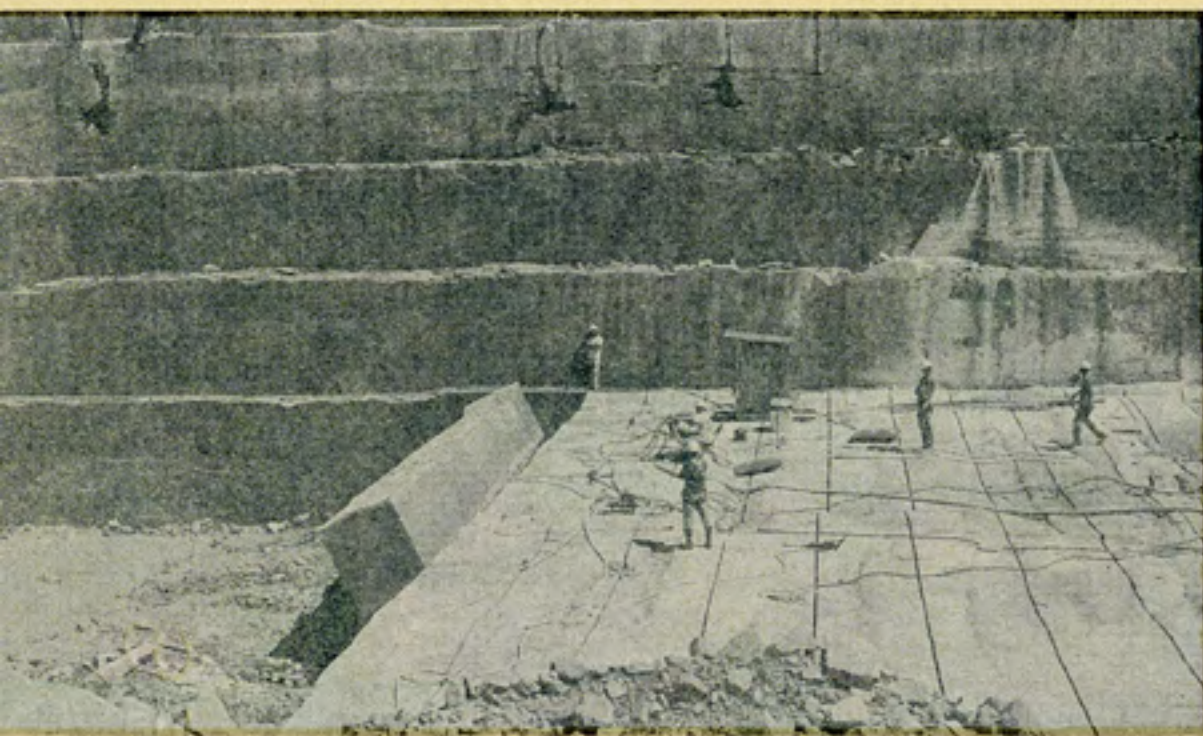
The stone business was just about the only kind of work that used to be here. Just about everybody worked in the quarry. My dad, that's where he worked. I remember when I was a little kid, back there then, when they cut that stone with them old Sullivans that were fired by coal. The coal was burning, and they'd have fifteen or twenty of 'em things in the god-darn hole, and the puff smoke was flying. And that little derrick—whoever sat up there and run the derricks—I don't know how in the world they stood it sometimes—you couldn't even hardly see off it—they had so much smoke coming through there. Well, I don't know how it didn't kill 'em. When I first got out of the army, you come down the highway and you could see the quarry on both sides of the road, and you could just set there and see them guys up there working with the black smoke rolling, and hauling coal in all the time.

My dad run a machine up at Independent Quarry. Back there then, that's when they got the chain and the wire saws. And they used to have Wardwells to cut the stone out of the ground—channeling machines—and they'd cut on both sides. That's what he done—he run one of them electric machines. And he had a tractor and a little farm too in his spare time. Biggest part of the people that worked in the quarry, that's what they done—they farmed and worked in the quarry too. And my grandpa and my great-grandpa worked there, too.

My great-grandpa got a toe bashed off in the quarry—I remember him telling about it—I wasn't old enough to remember all of it, but I think he got about eight hundred dollars out of it. Back there then, that's a lot of money. Then my boys, they worked in the quarries, too, for a while. I didn't want them to be in the business forever because it's too dangerous. They work real hard in what they're doing now—I mean, they're busy all the time and I'm real proud of 'em—there ain't no stopping them.

"We didn't have no trouble getting a job because we all knew what it was to work hard and everything, and that's what the bosses wanted."





8
105
10



“In carving, there are many times when I can’t wait to get to the next step, to see it start to actually appear and take shape; when you’ve been working towards all these points for so long to try to get it done. That’s the fun part.”

Michael Donham

Master Carver

Passion for the Unique

A lot of people don’t realize, they just take it for granted really, but when you actually start getting into it and see how limestone is processed and fabricated for a job and then to actually see it on buildings, it’s incredible the carving that you see—it’s amazing. In this town, you can just walk from house to house basically and see some form of limestone. You know, when you’re with the stone as much as I am, you really appreciate how much of it has gone from this area to other areas—not just what’s been done around here. And it’s amazing to me sometimes to see the quantity of stone and think that there’s not quarry holes out there bigger than some of them are.

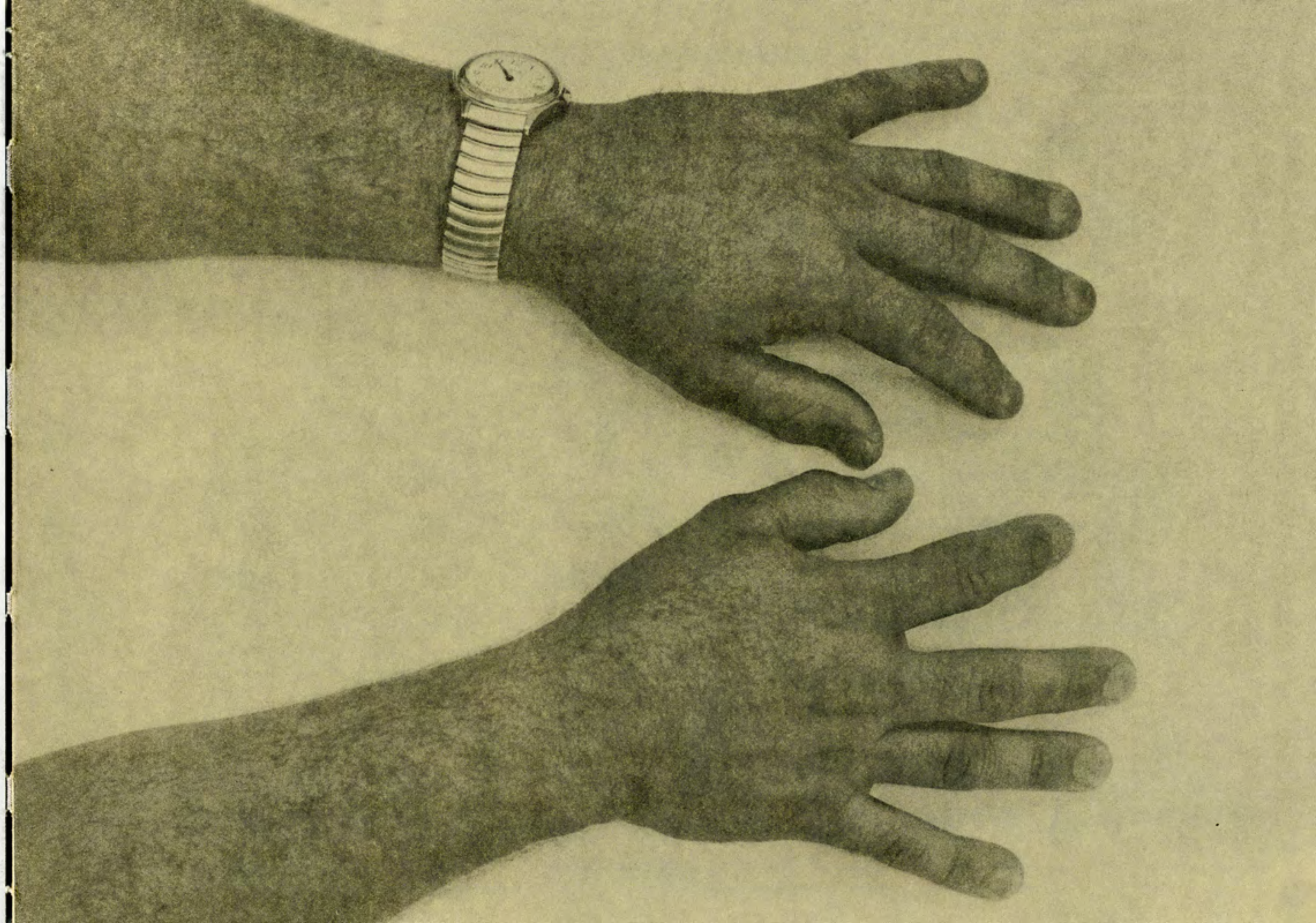


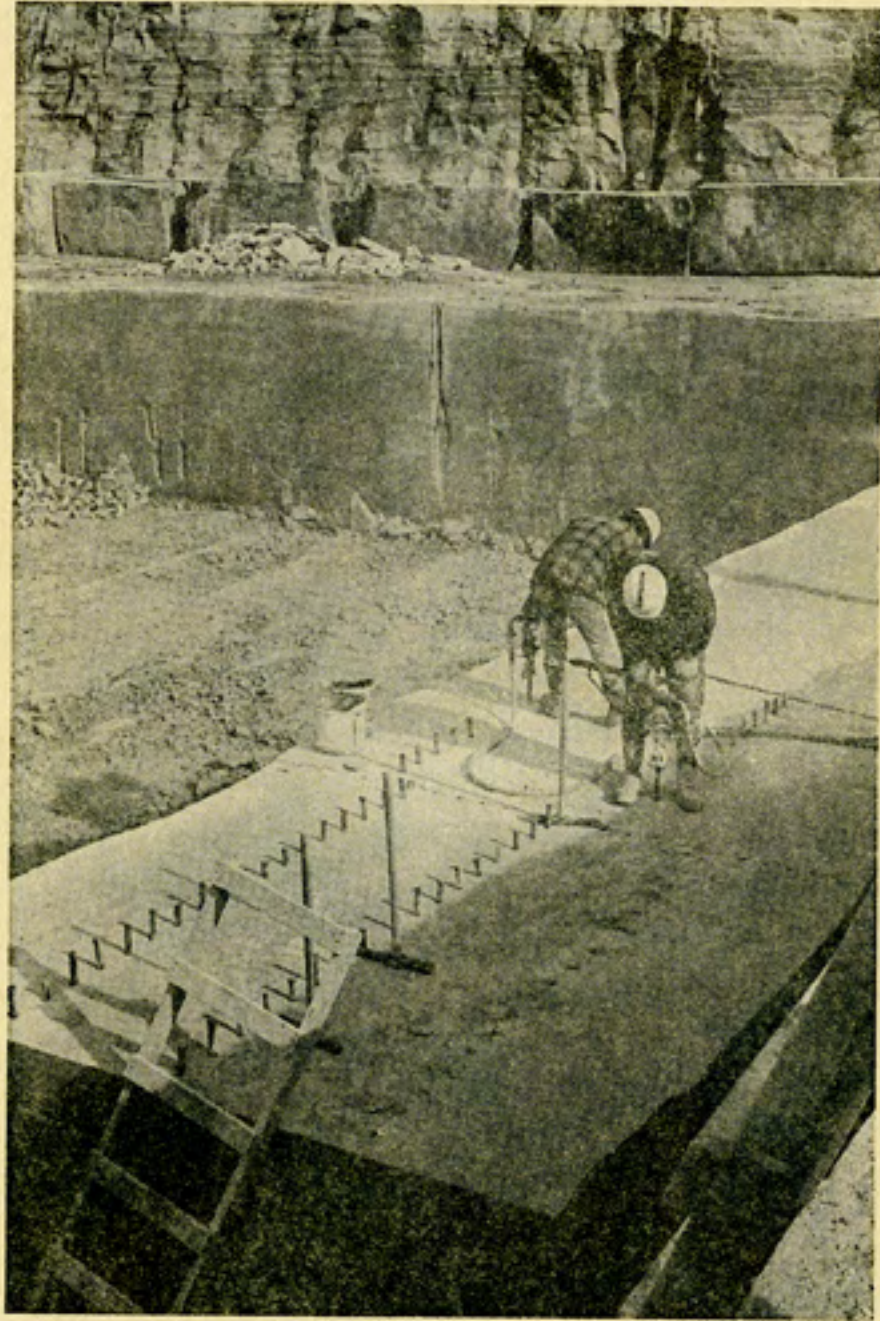
It’s a great feeling when you can go and see the building where the pieces that you made are—to see where they went and what it looks like—where they put the finished pieces. We just finished the restoration work for the Iowa State Capitol Building a few years ago. I was able to go up in the actual dome which is almost three hundred feet in the air to the top cupola, and it is just an awesome, awesome sight to go up there and to see all of that work. There were almost a hundred different capitals on that, some full-round caps and then there were pilaster caps on other parts of it, too. I took my wife out there for the Sesquicentennial Celebration. I roughed in a corinthian capital at the mill and then finished carving it out there amongst a lot of people, and it was a good experience. People really had no idea how big that piece of stone was that they were looking at up there on that building—and when I pointed out where that particular capital went on the building, they were just amazed. Someone said, “But it looks like it’s about three inches wide and two inches tall!” They couldn’t believe how huge the capital actually was when it was right there on the ground in front of their eyes.

I guess there was a point when I was just driven by learning, and where I’m at right now—they consider me a master carver because I can pretty much do anything that they put in front of me. I have a passion for doing things that are one-of-a-kind, something that’s gonna challenge me—I have a passion for that. For me, to get that piece that, you know, you’ve never seen anything like this before—that’s what I thrive after. I’ll always have a desire to cut or carve stone. I think that’s probably something that never leaves stonecutters.



“I have a passion for doing things that are one-of-a-kind.”





Brian Smith

Breaker, Drill Runner, Ledge Foreman, Superintendent

Being Green

My Grandpa Smith, he worked in the quarry about all his life, and my dad did too. And then I got started in it, and now I've got two boys in it—four generations. And probably a grandson that'll be in it down the road. And my dad told me once, when I turned eighteen—he said, "Son, it's something you be sure you want to do—get in the quarries. It seems like once you get in, you're in."—you know. It's something that you'll learn to appreciate and you'll really enjoy, and once you're in, you're in, you know.

It is something that I appreciate. My dad worked at the old Maple Hill Quarry. When I was a kid he took me up there. I remember pulling in the driveway up there at Maple Hill, and a lot of times the whistle was blowing for their dinner. Four or five or eight big guys come up to him, with their ol' hard hats and everything on. It was something else, you know. They come up chugging over the hill—come up there to get some money and stuff. For me, that was pretty exciting to see.

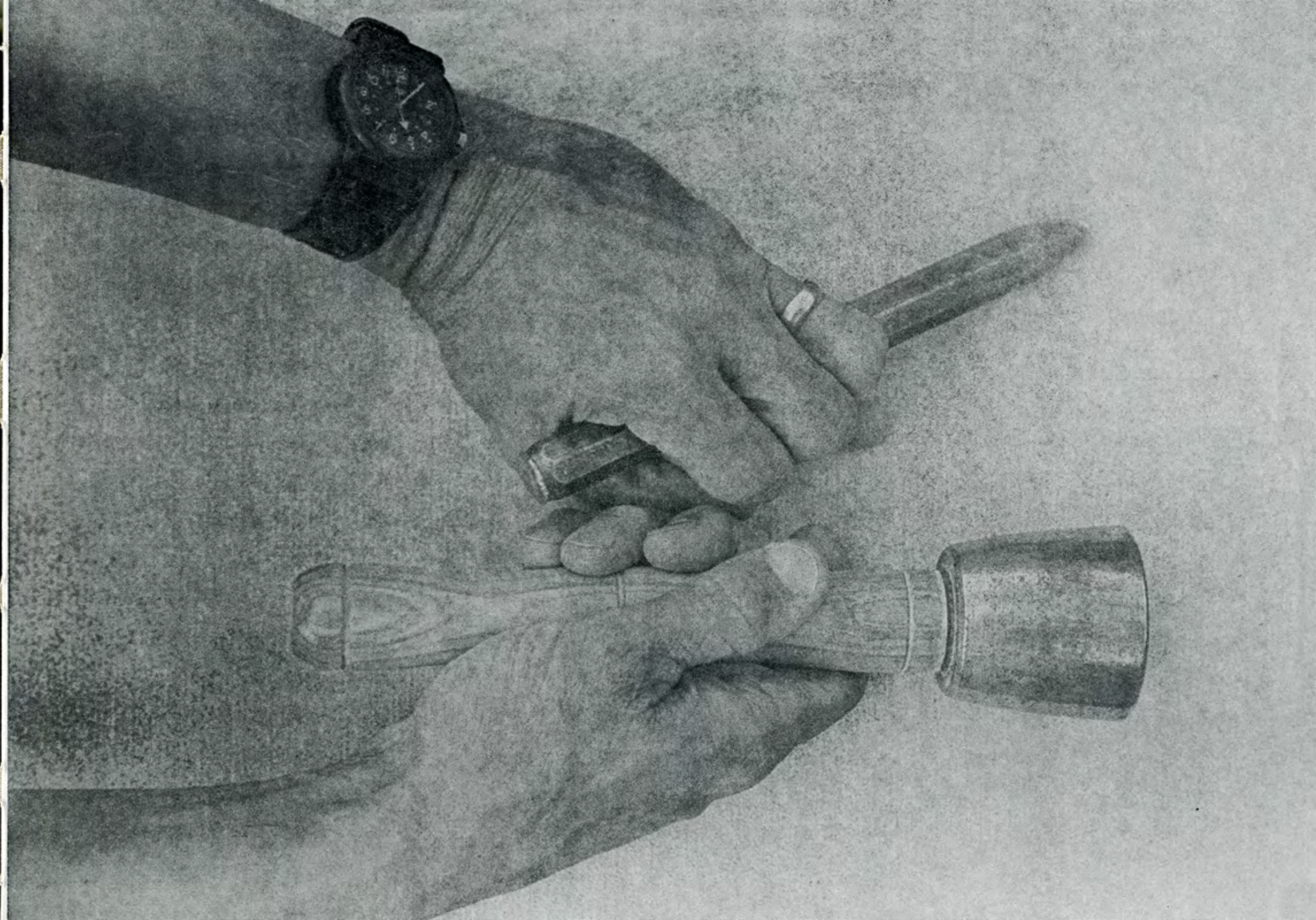
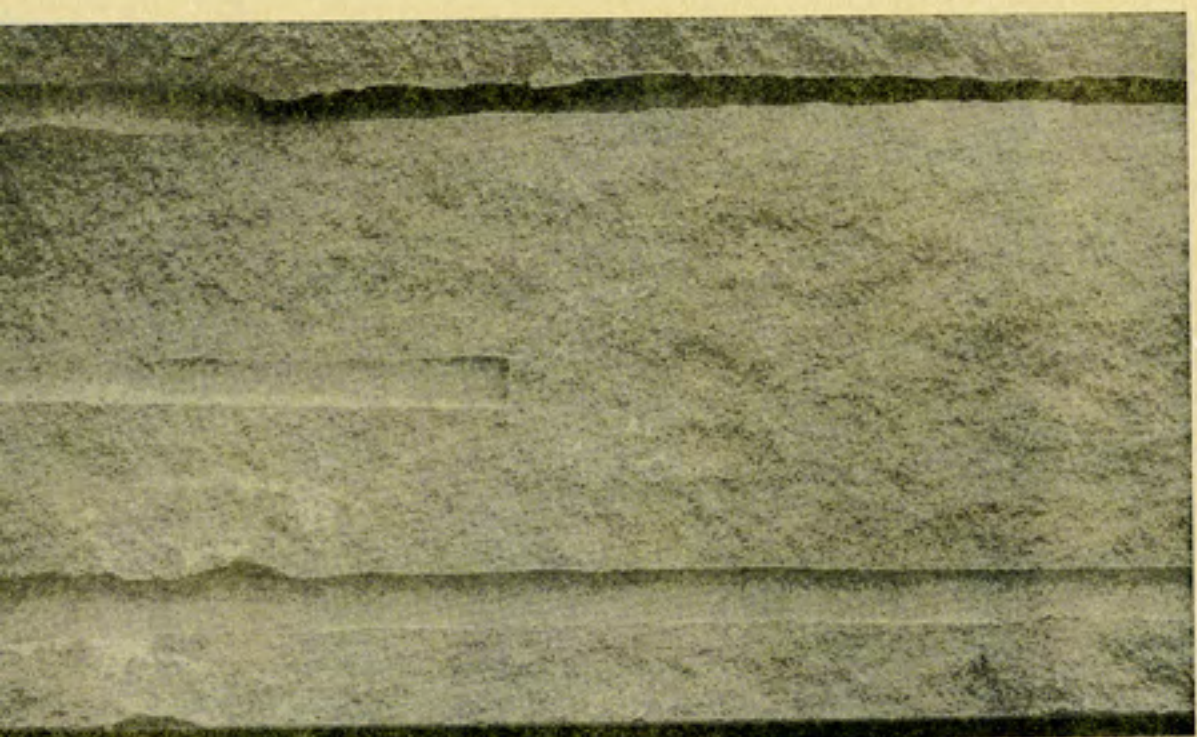
"If you go at it like you're trying to learn it all in one day, you'll just about kill yourself."

Once you get started, it seems like it's hard to get away from it. It's something that grows on you. And in all honesty, when I first started, I didn't know if this was the job I wanted to do the rest of my life or not, you know. I started when I was eighteen as a breaker, and my first day on the job was like murder. As far as I'm concerned, the breaking's probably the hardest job in the quarry, and it was probably the hardest job I had in my life, starting off. Especially when you're green like I was, you know. I'd never been out in the quarry. I felt green just like the stone. We call stone green when it's a freshly quarried block that hasn't dried out yet. It takes about six weeks to dry out and cure, if you stack 'em up or set 'em out where they can get air into 'em and around 'em, you know—all through the stacks.



I'd say a lot of breakers go at it like killing snakes when they first start. They go at it with everything they've got. If you do that, within ten minutes you'd be done. What you want to do is go in and set your own pace, and learn as you go. You can't just jump in and start swinging the hammer with all you got, or you're just not gonna last. And there's tricks to learn. You got to learn the stone—how it behaves. You can only learn that over time—by feeling the way it breaks, by knowing when to ease up and all, and by watching guys that've been doing it a long time. We're kind of like a big family out here. The guys that have been here a while will buddy up and teach the new guys what to watch for, how to do it, what not to do and when not to do it. So once you learn the stone and learn what you're doing and get your swing down, then everything just falls in place.

"I started off with some pretty good guys, and a lot of how you learn depends on who you work with and who you're working for. That's what it's all about—it's teamwork."



Frank Young

Sculptor

The Form Within

One of the things that happens when something is there in the environment all the time, is you come to take it for granted and ignore it. And I think I had sort of done that—seen limestone as being a mundane material. The sculptures that you often see in museums—often times they are of marble or granite—which are more precious kinds of stones, and so you discount limestone as a material. I came back to using limestone because it was so available here in Indiana.

When I was an undergraduate student, I had this experience of happening upon an abandoned limestone mill. Back in the 1970's, the limestone industry had fallen on hard times. It had fallen out of favor as a material for architects, and so the industry was suffering, and some of the mills were closing. And I discovered an old mill that had been abandoned. It was just as if one day they shut the mill down and walked off the site—and stacked everywhere was stone, ready for shipment. But it had been there for fifteen, maybe twenty years, and it had grown moss on it and sort of turned green, and had a nice patina to it. And so I asked if I could have the blocks, and they said that it was no problem, but that I should stay out of the mill because it was dangerous. And so I started transporting these blocks out of there, and started working with the stone. I've been carving limestone for thirty years now, and I still love the material.

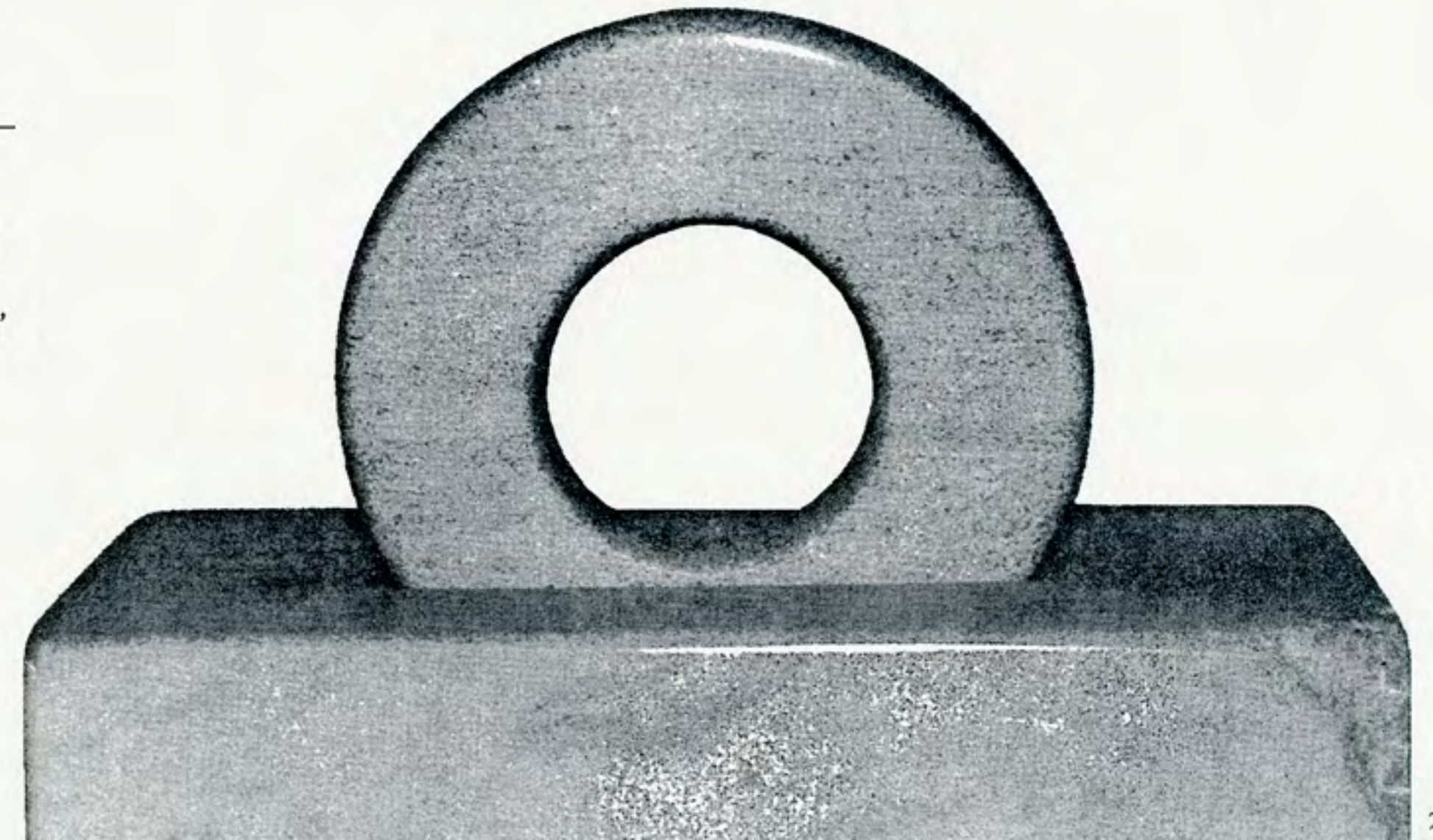
“Limestone just lends itself to so many different textures that it makes it a very exciting material to work with.”



What initially attracted me to the stone was the primitive characteristic of it. I think what I was coming to in terms of that idea of primitive is that it's a kind of primordial material. And it isn't necessarily that the process is primitive, it isn't that the work is primitive—it's that the end product has a kind of palpability, a solidness to it, a durability to it that some other artistic media don't have.

Limestone has a resonance to it. There's a solidity in the crystalline formation that makes it ring if you strike it, and allows it to be carved down to very fine structures. Limestone is also very polishable—it comes up with a very pretty, beautiful polish where you can see the crinoids and other fossils in it that make up the stone. And on the other hand, it has a beautiful rough surface as well. There's so much that you can do with the stone in its smoothed form, and so much that you can do with the rough surface of stone. I like that contrast of textures. I think they provide a very, almost comforting, contrast. The other thing about limestone is that it allows you to move very confidently into it. So when you start carving it, you can follow the inclination, and it allows you to be more exploratory—to find the form within the block and help it to emerge instead of trying to compose it.

“It is so fun to work with limestone—it's so satisfying to see these shapes emerge from it, and then they are so solid and so heavy and so real. I got hooked on working with this stone.”



REVISTA B
30/1/1973

The contributors to this project were many. With my deepest appreciation and sincere thanks to the many people of the Indiana Stone Belt who have so graciously allowed me into their lives, and have been so enthusiastic and generous in sharing their time, their stories and their experiences. They are the heart of this book.

The idea for this book was conceived three years ago, and I have met and learned from many people along the way. The wonderful community involved in the limestone industry have offered tremendous assistance, and this project would not have been possible without their help and cooperation. Thank you especially to the Indiana Limestone Institute for providing the factual information included in the foreword, and to the Bybee Stone Company and the Independent Stone Company for allowing me access to their facilities to learn about and photograph the processing of stone.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the many people who have shared with me their knowledge, guidance and inspiration over the past three years, and who have instilled in me a deep appreciation and love of books and printing, especially Paul Brown and James Reidhaar, Ed Bernstein, Jo Burgess, Wendy Calman, Jim Canary and Amos Kennedy.

Thank you to my friends and colleagues who offered their time in proofreading, their constructive criticism and encouragement. Thank you especially to my parents, whose constant support and encouragement is enormous and invaluable, and who provided assistance on this project in countless ways.

Many thanks to John Bodnar and Barbara Truesdell at the Oral History Research Center at Indiana University for their assistance. The complete set of audiotapes of all interviews conducted for this project and their full typed transcriptions will be permanently housed in the Indiana University Oral History Research Center in Bloomington, Indiana, where they will be available to be viewed and heard by the public for enjoyment, education, and other non-commercial purposes. Thank you to the Women's Studio Workshop of Rosendale, New York, and Research and the University Graduate School at Indiana University who provided financial support which enabled this project to get underway.

Above all, I would like to acknowledge the beauty, value and craftsmanship that the Indiana limestone industry and the people who are part of it, have to offer. The world is full of interesting people and things; let us continue to be inspired and enriched by them.

The contents of this book were collected, photographed, designed and printed by Kate Ferrucci. *Limestone Lives* is based on interviews that were conducted, transcribed and edited by the author from 1999 to 2002 in Monroe, Lawrence and Owen counties in Indiana. This book was printed during the fall of 2002 at the People to People Press in Bloomington, Indiana.

Colophon

Numbered photographs are courtesy of the following: 1—Tom Dixon, 2—Oolitic Historical Society, 3—Vollie Staggs, 4—Louis & Jeanne Ferrucci, 5—Wilbern Terrell, 6—George Bybee, 7—Frank Young.

Printing was done on a Vandercook Universal III letterpress that goes by the nickname of "Junior". Typefaces used are Centaur and Arrighi, cast and set at the Bixler Typefoundry. Images are printed from magnesium photoengravings, drawings from photopolymer plates, and tint blocks from linoleum cuts. This book was printed on Rives BFK Heavyweight paper in grey and buff. It is bound on linen tapes and is covered with an assortment of binders' board blocks.

This first edition is limited to fifty copies, each numbered and signed. Of this edition, numbers ten through twenty have been reserved for the interviewees who are included in this book.

This is number 37 of 50.

Kate Ferrucci

© 2002 Katherine Ferrucci

ISBN 1-893125-25-4

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in whole or in part by any means without prior written permission from the author.

Limestone Lives was partially funded by Women's Studio which is funded in part with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts. Additional funding was provided by the Andy Warhol Foundation, and by Research and the University Graduate School in Bloomington, Indiana.



