

Portland's Historic Site Markers (part 2)

by Bill & Chris Sullivan, May 2001

Six historic site markers were erected in 1979 by the **Portland Historical Society** with Community Development funds. They are located at sites where evidence of past activity is gone - except in the case of the brownstone quarries although even this site is very different from when the quarries provided Portland's major industry.

Doris Sherrow has done research on Portland's 19th century Jewish community, who buried family members at their small cemetery on a hillside to the north of William Street. It is now believed that all of these graves were transferred to Middletown to be with those of later family members or the larger community. The **Eastern Tinware Co.** was a large industry not far from the southeast corner of High Street and Rt. 66. This marker is hard to see, being below the road.

The Old Jewish Cemetery

Here lie those of Jewish faith who came from Eastern Europe to seek employment in the Eastern Tinware Co. (organized in 1888) and begin a new life.

[below, in Hebrew lettering]

"May Their Souls Rest in Peace"

The next two markers were not installed in brownstone blocks. The WPA wall at the brownstone quarries was the site of the first marker, which was vandalized over a decade ago.

It disappeared, after some time returning to Portland from another state via a scrap metal company that had received it. Since its travels it has rested in a case in the Historical Society's Museum Room in the Portland Library awaiting a more secure installation.

Brownstone Quarries

For nearly 3 centuries these quarries supplied brownstone for use in construction of early Connecticut homes and later in major American cities. The Triassic stone, formed during the Ice Ages, was noted for its high quality. The quarries have been worked to 300'. Quarrying peaked in the 1880's with 1500 men and 50 ships employed. Cement usage and the 1936 flood helped put an end to major quarry operations.

The marker below was mounted on the bridge over Cox's brook below the falls on Cox Road.

After vanishing, it was later found nearby. It is also in the Historical Society museum room. Mills were sited on many brooks in the early towns; water power provided energy for all kinds of daily production. A gristmill, sawmill, and carding mill were reconstructed at Old Sturbridge Village. Carding mills mechanized some of the process of preparing wool for spinning; fulling mills were used to shrink and thicken woven wool cloth, making it denser and warmer.

Mill Sites

A grist mill near this site as early as 1741 supplied flour for Revolutionary War troops. A new mill built in 1801, bought by George Cox in 1852, ground both flour and spices; was torn down in 1967. There was a fulling mill and cloth dressing establishment in the ravine up the brook before the Revolution; carding machine added 1813; later manufactured horn & ivory combs. Below here, there was a sawmill and a brickyard.

See April's column for notes on the markers for the First Ferry Landing, Shipyards and Indian Grounds, and the First Meeting House.