

# City Quarries Produced Baraboo Stone

*Tales of Earlier Days*

By Bob Dewel

It doesn't mean much today, but in the early decades of Baraboo's existence, the name Levi Crouch loomed large. He practiced law, sold real estate, and was engaged in "speculation". Though no streets are named after him, a lasting contribution is in his ownership of a quarry in the city, featuring "Baraboo Stone".

A 21 year old newcomer to Baraboo from Stueben County, New York on Dec 8, 1857, he soon became part of the business fabric as a lawyer, in partnership with Huntington. This is perhaps the Howard Huntington of whom we have written extensively, a Civil War hero and war correspondent for the Baraboo Republic.

### Uses of Baraboo Stone

Thanks to Harland Steinhorst, now of Citrus Springs, Florida, we know a lot about the quarry industry in early Baraboo. We do not refer here to the quartzite quarry at Devils Lake. Instead, we refer to a rather hard sandstone found in or near the city. It is a stone that could be readily worked and shaped into building blocks, unlike the quartzite.

The most distinctive remaining Baraboo Stone structure is on the NE corner of Oak and Fourth Street, now occupied by the Cornerstone Gallery, built in 1877. Though smaller than its neighbors, the sturdy stone walls seem to bookend the larger buildings to the East.

### Other Examples

Steinhorst reports several other uses still extant, including the foundations of the First United Methodist Church, the Broadway railroad overpass, and the remaining north abutment of the old high bridge on Oak Street. Note also the bathhouse at the Baraboo pool. One wonders if the attractive façade of the Trinity Episcopal Church is Baraboo stone.

Had you lived in Baraboo in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century however, you would have noted the use of the Baraboo stone in significant but no longer extant buildings such as the hexagonal Jail and the foundation of the old courthouse, which will burn down in 1905.

Going earlier, in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Baraboo stone was even more visible, in structures such as the Western Hotel, Bassett Flour Mill, the Ruhland Brewery, and the 1892 City Hall. Even some homes have the stone as a foundation.

By far the finest example, however, was the three story Warren Hotel which stood on the NW corner of Oak and Fourth Avenue. It dominated the downtown scene until its destruction by fire in March, 1964. Even after the fire, the sturdy stone walls stood undisturbed by either the fire or the ravages of time until 1968, and were difficult to demolish.

### Levi Crouch

So, what about Levi Crouch? As you may have guessed, he was the principal owner of the quarry, located appropriately on Baraboo's Quarry Street (Stone Road then) on the southwest side of town. Actually the quarry was first opened by Patrick A. Bassett in 1855, with Crouch buying it in 1874 for \$500 from the then current owner, William Andrew.

Warren Hotel, Baraboo, Wis.—5



The Prestigious Warren Hotel was located on the Northwest corner of Oak and Fourth Avenue. The stone walls matched those of the present Cornerstone Gallery, both probably mined in Baraboo

A smaller quarry operated by Smith Jennings was nearby. An even smaller one was located south of the fairgrounds. Note the 1874 date. Baraboo had just suffered the disastrous fire on Fourth Street in 1872, including a frame structure the NE corner location, which Crouch now owned. The building about to spring up on that lot was the aforementioned stone structure still there today, currently occupied by the Cornerstone Gallery.

By 1885, Crouch is listed as a stone dealer, with offices somewhere in that building. In 1902 we find that his widow, Julia, took in Minnie Bell Kruppe as a partner, selling the quarry in 1905 to Capron Pratt and Charles Burke.

Workmen associated with the operation in 1881 included John Pinneo, G.F. Fulton, James Stott, Michael Gorman, Patrick and James Meegan. Stonecutters were paid the most, getting \$3 per day. Quarrymen got \$1.85, Drillers \$2.00m and Blasters \$2.50 per day. Bernard Alexander, Fred Siebecker, and Pratt were teamsters.

#### The Baraboo Stone Quality

In 1898 a geologist described the Baraboo Stone as a “yellowish or buff color...almost as refractory as quartzite...of medium hardness...the supply at this location is almost unlimited.” He goes on to state there is an abundance of sandstone in the vicinity of Baraboo, “far better than that which is used in larger cities”.

As once owner of the structure on Oak and Fourth Street, I had the building sandblasted in the 1970's, removing decades of grime from the days of coal-fired furnaces. The walls are exceptionally thick, and have a moderating effect on changing outside temperatures. The architectural

description is “Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Romanesque Revival”

Crouch died Sept 19, 1898 at the age of 62, directing his wife to sell the quarry. This apparently did not occur until 1905. We do not know the date when quarrying was discontinued. Thanks again to Harland Steinhorst for great research on this subject. And thanks also to Levi Crouch for his business expertise and diligence.