

# The Quorum Review

Official Newsletter of the Brownstone Quorum, Inc.  
Published in Portland, Connecticut since 2002

Vol. II No. 3

September 2003

## Quarry Focus Day IV

Saturday, September 20th will be a busy day for Portland. The Quorum will be celebrating their 4th Quarry Focus Day at the Quarry/Riverfront Park on Brownstone Avenue. For the second year, QFD will coincide with Youth Services/Parks and Recreation Family Day to be held at the Town Green on Main Street. The three groups have been cooperating to make it a great day for everyone.

To make sure that townspeople and friends have the opportunity to participate in all of the planned events, the Quorum, along with Jeff Kelsey and the Chiabrero brothers, will be operating a hayride shuttle service between the two events. We'll have two hayrigs that will run, one from the Portland Middle School and one from Brownstone Avenue at the end of Silver Street, on half hour schedules to carry riders from the Middle School, down Middlesex Avenue Extension, along the riverfront property, out to Brownstone Avenue and Silver Street, and back. The second rig will follow the same route but from a different starting point. Riders will be able to get on and off along the way as they choose.

A highlight of the Focus Day will be the exciting third "annual" Challenge Volleyball Game between the reigning champs, the Portland Republicans and the underdog Democrats, with the self-proclaimed "lame duck," A Portland Party, officiating. This event is great fun and "political" in the best sense. Come and cheer for your "team." The game will begin around 11:00 am. You can park in the lot at the end of Middlesex Avenue and walk down the path. After the game you can hitch a hayride in either direction and take part in the other events.

You can walk any, or all, of the over two miles of riverfront trails. Pick up a trail map at the NEW park sign, designed and built by Bart Barresi, next to the Brownstone Avenue gate, or just follow the clear and well-marked paths. Sue Fiedler will lead an archaeological walk from the quarries along the riverfront starting at 11:00 am from the area of the WPA wall. She will explain different aspects of quarrying and the unique aspects of the riverfront property. (QFD cont'd on page 4)

## The Portland Brownstone Quarries - 2003

In the last issue of *The Quorum Review*, readers were introduced to Mike Meehan, geologist and operator of the Portland Brownstone Quarries. We thought readers would like to learn about the quarrying operation itself. Few Portlanders other than Gildersleeve third graders, who visit the quarries as part of their study of Portland, have had the opportunity to observe firsthand what happens there.

Many Portlanders are surprised to learn that we actually have an operating quarry a few feet off Main Street, but, 300' behind the Portland Middle School and Geato's greenhouses a small company operates a thriving business that cuts, shapes, and hauls huge blocks of ancient brownstone out of the cliffs on which the Middle School and much of Main Street stand. Since 1994, Mike Meehan has operated the Portland Brownstone Quarries on land leased from the Geato family.



*The New Quarry Operation*

"Not in my backyard!"

"In the middle of a neighborhood?"

"Next to a school with over 200 kids? No way!"

"Quarries are dangerous. Dirty, noisy, awful places. They don't belong in the middle of town!"  
(PBQ cont'd on page 2)

*(PBQ cont'd from page 1)*

These are some of the expressions members of The Brownstone Quorum hear frequently as they work to bring the reality of our National Historic Landmark into the minds and hearts of town residents. In interviewing Mike Meehan for this article, we asked him to approach his operation from the point of view of the skeptical citizen.

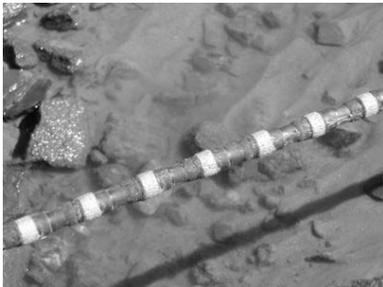
The quarries ceased to operate extensively almost a century ago. Building methods and materials changed and brownstone became obsolete. But as the 20<sup>th</sup> century drew to a close, owners of old brownstone buildings all over the world began to realize the true beauty and significance of their buildings and began to renovate them.

Because of its unique qualities, Portland brownstone could not be replaced by other sandstones, and renovators inquired about their original source. Enter Mike Meehan.

When you have a valuable resource, it demands to be exploited. All of the negatives about quarries in the center of town might operate against that exploitation, but human ingenuity and new technology come into play and most of the problems are resolved. It is that ingenuity and technology that are key to keeping the current operation a "secret" of which most are only dimly aware.

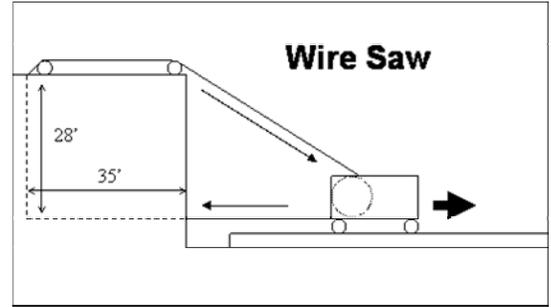
The Portland Brownstone Quarries are relatively quiet. Local noise ordinances require that the operations be kept so. In full operation, the noise generated from the quarries is less than that generated by the traffic on Main Street. Here size is important. Mike's is a small, low production, three-man operation supervised by Jake, the gregarious yellow Lab. No constant flow of heavy equipment and trucks disturb the neighborhood.

When he began quarrying here, Mike used chemicals poured into drilled holes to break loose the stone from the rock beds. That was quiet but inefficient and time-consuming. He has since moved to the use of diamond-banded cable "saws."



*Diamond's are a Quarryman's best friend!*

In this process, a series of up to five rows of three inch holes, 5' to 10' apart, parallel to the rock face, is drilled into the surface of the rock bed to a depth of 25' to 30', creating a checkerboard effect. Next, a second series of holes, is drilled horizontally back into the exposed base of the rock bed to meet at right angles to the first set of holes. The noise generated by this step is the "Putt! Putt! Putt!" of air from the diesel-powered compressor that drives the drill. The high walls of the site help keep even this sound to a minimum.



*Figure showing path of the diamond-banded wire through the rock bed.*

It is at this point that the diamonds begin their work. The diamond-banded cable is threaded through the holes in a loop; the two ends are crimped together and attached to a pulley connected to a drive motor. The motor maintains a constant tension on the wire by moving away from the rock face on a pair of rails. Water is fed through the top and bottom holes to cool the wire blades and flush the saw "dust" from the holes.



*The Wire Saw in action, note water mark on rock face marking the cut.*

Wire cutting is accompanied by a quiet, rhythmic "Schwooshslush. Schwooshslush." as the water flows over the diamonds cutting through the rock. The water keeps the dust of quarrying to a minimum. Mud is a principal by-product of the cutting operation, so, yes, the quarry is a dirty place.

When the cutting of the bed is complete, the checkerboard is comprised of a series of columns of brownstone roughly 5' wide x 8' deep x 25' to 30' tall. At this point each block is addressed individually. A rubber or metal cushion is inserted into the back cut, inflated with air or water and moved down toward the block base, tipping the blocks out from the rock face so that they can be grasped by a crane and flipped or lifted out, dropping the block to the ground, where it either breaks naturally along the main sedimentation planes, or it can be inspected for quality and grading and then cut.

Prime quality stone represents only 15% of all rock taken. (That explains the huge slag pile that forms the riverfront property stretching between Brownstone and Coe Avenues.) That 15% is reserved for special architectural uses and for sculptures and monuments. The ideal prime block is 10' x 5' x 5' and weighs about two tons. All the stone cut away to provide this ideal block is cut into smaller pieces and classified according to suitability for blocks, veneers, paving and small ornamentals.

The blocks are shipped out on flat bed trucks to job sites where they are further cut for specific functions. Smaller pieces are kept on site to fill orders as they come in.

The year 2004 will mark the 10th anniversary of the new Portland Brownstone Quarries. In 2004, Mike will invite architects to tour his operation not only to show them the quality of his product, but also to learn about their needs and concerns relating to the use of brownstone. His goal for 2004 is to inaugurate on-site fabrication of the stone to meet architects' specifications.

Having visitors on site will be unusual, because although Mike Meehan's operation is very professional with safety always in the forefront, operating quarries remain hazardous. When Mike does do site tours, as he will each year with Portland schoolchildren, the operations cease, except for the diamond-saw cutting demonstration. When operations cease, production falls behind schedule. With a weather dominated business, maintaining a production schedule is vital.

But all is not lost for the interested viewer. You can see Mike's operation from the south side of Middlesex Avenue, west of Geato's. It's like having a balcony seat. And from that viewing point you can also observe that the quarry is quiet, still a little dangerous; dirty, but only to those who work there; and a place of pride for Portland. Standing beautiful in the shadow of the Arrigoni, with the quarry lake in the near

background and green growing things all around, the Portland Brownstone Quarries are our link to the ancient and recent past - and to the future.

### **Canoe Days – ONLY 2 MORE!**



Only two **Canoe Days** left this year: Saturday, September 20th - Quarry Focus Day IV - and Sunday, October 19th from 12:00 noon to 3:30 pm. Don't miss out.

### **Picnic on the Promontory**

Quorum members are a hardworking bunch. They cut brush, clear trails, clean roadsides and quarry waters. They paddle canoes and provide programs so others can enjoy the Quarry/Riverfront Park. They plan and carry out Quarry Focus Days and Portland Fair displays. They lead hikes along the trails by day and by dusk. And even produce *The Quorum Review*. And they have fun doing it all and are basically a happy group of people who believe in what they are doing and enjoy doing it together. But they rarely stop and just have FUN.

So, for the regular August meeting, they decided to do just that. They had fun. No business, just a "Picnic on the Promontory." Great weather. A clear sky. Bright Sun, but not too hot. A light breeze that lifted the Stars and Stripes over the clear blue-green of the quarry lake - and over tables laden with delicious food. It was strictly a pot-luck affair with members asked to bring a salad, a casserole, or a desert. We could have had all brownies, but, would you believe it? We didn't. We had a wonderful spread of all categories, no duplicates - except for the hamburgs and hotdogs the treasury provided and everyone could have as many of those as they chose.

It was a real pleasure to have the company of people who consider themselves "only" supporters. And to have members from other towns care enough to join us. We cleared up by headlight, but the smiles on everybody's faces were enough to light up the whole park. We'll have to do that again.

P.S. If you are missing a casserole or utensils, call Jeanne at 342-2260.

(QFD cont'd from page 1)

Around 2:00 pm, John LeShane will lead a Tree Trail walk starting from the junction of Middlesex and Brownstone Avenues. With John you'll get to see the Laughing Frog, the Ghost Tree, and the Great Cherry Tree and have some fun doing it.

Beginning at 11:00 am, the free canoe and boat rides provided by the Quorum Paddlers on the quarry lake will be accompanied by live music from the Mike Troderman Group with their sophisticated jazz (very popular last year) and Kent Archer and Pal, with their bouncy country rhythms, both playing on the Promontory. Dave Kuzminski is providing the sound system so everybody can catch the beat.

Betsy Graziano will be at the promontory helping "kids" make Flying Fish. Sue Fiedler will be at the riverfront with Meadow Crafts - Tap bags and flower cards and maybe some stone sculptures - starting around 12:30 pm.

If you missed seeing the refurbished brownstone arch last year, or, if you just want to see it again, close up, Mike Giuliano will be proudly pulling it along Brownstone Avenue with his restored antique John Deere tractor.

And don't forget, through it all, you can get delicious sandwiches and sides, cookies, ice cream and beverages served by Sari Rosenbaum and her crew at the beautiful BQ Cafe by the WPA wall. Eunice Wiseman promises that the Quorum Store will be in full operation with the usual mementoes and our new framed antique postcard reproductions, as well as tickets for the canoe raffle, on sale at reasonable prices..

The day's activities will culminate with tours of the newly renovated Buck-Foreman Building (the old town hall). Representatives of the Police Department, Youth Services and Parks and Recreation will be on hand to show off their new digs from 3:00 to 5:00 pm.

It promises to be a really great day, with fun for everybody, whatever your interests and tastes. Join us. And pray for good weather.

## The Williams Group

The Town of Portland has contracted with The Williams Group, a real estate consulting firm, to do a market analysis of the quarry-riverfront property to determine the best uses for this valuable asset. Beginning in the summer of 2000, with guidance from John Monroe of the National Park Service Rivers and Trails Program, who conducted a three day Charrette with experts in all fields of park development, through 2002, the Town has sought the opinions of residents and visitors as to the appropriate means of developing this National Historic Landmark.

The C. R. Johnson Design Group made design suggestions for the property and presented them to townspeople in 2002. Included in their design suggestions were several ideas for commercial development for both the quarry/riverfront property and Main Street. The ideas were great, but before making any new investment in the property or in refurbishing Main Street, the Board of Selectmen wanted some assurance as to which types of commercial and recreational ventures would be most beneficial to the town.

That is where the Williams Group comes in. They have been working with the town for eight months and will be presenting their recommendations at a public meeting to be held Thursday, October 16th at 7:00 PM at the Mary Flood Room at the Portland Library. Everyone is urged to attend.

## Membership

The envelopes that went out with the last issue of *The Quorum Review* have been very helpful in drawing in new members - about 120 so far. If you haven't yet sent in your membership, you can use the enclosed form to do so. It is the support of all members, physical and financial, that make the REVIEW, Quarry Focus Days, Fair participation, programs and park improvements possible.

### **Schedule At a Glance**

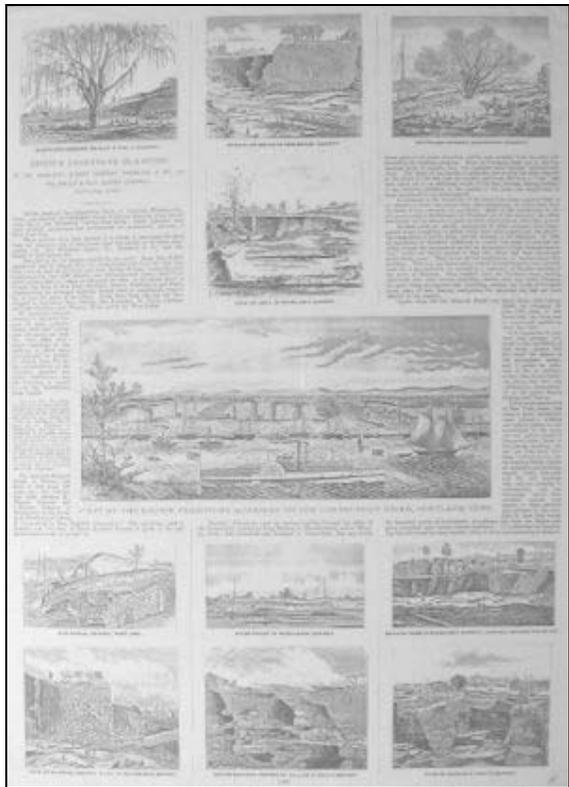
#### *Hay Rides All Day – Middle School – Riverfront - Promontory*

11AM	Challenge Volleyball	Riverfront
11AM	Canoe/Boat Rides	Promontory
11AM	Archaeology Walk	WPA Wall
11:30	Music	Promontory

11:30	Crafts: Flying Fish	Promontory
11-3	BQ Café/Shop	WPA Wall
12:30	Meadow Crafts	Riverfront
2PM	Tree Walk	Riverfront

**From the History Corner, a chip off the old block.**  
A copy of this page from an old newspaper is on file at the Ruth Callander House Museum of Portland History.

Note the unusual spelling and grammar in this old essay, parts of which were taken from an even older source. The text was accompanied by several hand drawn sketches of the quarrying operations of the period.



### **Brown Freestone Quarries**

of the Middlesex Quarry Company, Brainerds & Co.,  
and the Shaler & Hall Quarry Company,  
Portland, Conn.

On the banks of the Connecticut River, at Portland, Middlesex Co., Conn., are situated the celebrated Brown Freestone Quarries, from whence come the no less celebrated "brown stone fronts" which ornament with their palatial proportions and adornments, the aristocratic portions of New York City.

These quarries have been worked to a greater or less extent for more than two centuries, and at the present time are carried on by three Companies, viz: The Middlesex Quarry Co., Brainerds & Co., and The Shaler & Hall Quarry Co.

They are by far the largest quarries in the world. Some idea of their magnitude may be formed from our illustrations, and from the fact that they cover an area of 175 acres, and that during the busy season they give employment to over 1500 laborers, and 100 horses and mules; while it requires quite a fleet of

vessels to transport the stone to the places where it is used, the cities of New York, Brooklyn, Boston, Washington and Philadelphia being the principal markets, though there is considerable demand for it from all parts of the Union. Stone from these quarries has been shipped to Galveston, New Orleans, San Francisco, St. Louis, Chicago, and other Southern and Western Cities, and to the West Indies.

We quote two extracts relating to the early history of these quarries, which, while their quaintness will amuse our readers, their dates bear ample testimony to the early era at which stone was quarried for market. In colonial days the entire neighborhood of the Portland Quarries was called Middletown, and the following is copied from the Middletown town records.

*"Sept. 4<sup>th</sup>, 1665. At a townmeeting it was voated that whosoever shall dig or raise stones at ye rocks on the east side of the river for any without the towne, the said digger shall be none but an inhabitant of Middletown, and shall be responsible to ye towne twelve pence per tun, for every tun of stone that he or she shall digg for any person whosoever without the town; this money to be paid in wheat and pease to ye townsmen or their assigns, for ye use of ye towne, within six months after the transportation of the said stones."*

The historical Hancock House at Boston, was built of this stone 139 years ago; the contract was made between Mr. Thomas Hancock and "Thomas Johnson of Middletown, in the County of Hartford, and Colony of Connecticut, in New England, stone-cutter." The equivalent paid to Johnson was "the sum of Three Hundred Pounds, in goods as the said stone-cutter's work is carried on."

Deposits of freestone occur at various localities through the valley of the Connecticut, notably at Long Meadow in Massachusetts, and at Windsor, Rocky Hill, Cromwell and Portland in Connecticut; but only at the latter place is the stone of perfect quality and suitable from its color and durability for building purposes. Even at Portland, itself, out of the five hundred acres of deposit, only two hundred acres contain merchantable stone. The depth of the deposit is unknown, but as rock has been quarried to the depth of 150 feet from the surface, and from this level a "core" has been taken out to an additional depth of 313 feet, without finding bottom, or any material variation in the quality of the stone, the supply may be truly considered to be inexhaustible.

In reference to the durability of the stone from these quarries there is no occasion to make statements from

mere conjecture; we make them from the facts of two centuries of experience. Most of the tombstones in the old grave yards at Middletown and Portland are of this material; the oldest inscription we can discover is 1689; as clear and legible as when first carved.

In these yards the marble monuments of equal antiquity have disappeared or are crumbling to pieces, while their more humble and less assuming companions of brown stone, still bid defiance to the elements. In 1836 an association of Hartford undertook to repair "the waste of time and accident among the monuments erected as memorials of their deceased ancestors", in the old burial ground in that city, which had been abandoned about thirty years. They re-set all the monuments, in number about five hundred. This step was taken with a view of determining the most durable stone for a monument to be erected as a memorial of the first settlers of the town of Hartford. They decided upon the Portland stone, having discovered that other stones, including marble, were very much decayed, the parts being decomposed and crumbling, whereas the tombs of Portland stone, many of them bearing inscriptions two centuries old, had not been affected by the weather.

Again, when the Old Hancock House was taken down, after having defied the elements for over 130 years, it was found that the stone was as sound and perfect as when first used.

It is impossible to produce any stronger evidence of the durability of this stone; granite will not stand the effects of the atmosphere better, and it resists the influence of fire as perfectly as any other known building stone, this fact was conclusively demonstrated at the great fires in Chicago and Boston.

The avenues and streets of New York, where this stone is most extensively used, present a striking and unique picture to one accustomed to the gray, red and yellow stones of European cities; these in hot glaring sunshine, tire the eye with their brilliant reflections; our brownstone fronts present an agreeable and soothing aspect. Their rich color and the soft shadows they cast are pleasing to contemplate; and one advantage which they certainly possess over marble or other material that glistens in the sunlight is, that they reveal the beautiful points of architecture at a glance, free from the bizarre and glare attendant upon lighter colored structures. It is therefore not surprising that this stone has been steadily rising in favor and increasing in demand.

*(Typed by Darren Anderson – September 2, 2003)*

## **SBC/SNET Community Connections**

If you missed the opportunity to participate in the SBC/SNET Community Connections program, it is not too late!!!

All you need to do, to make this "no-cost-to-you" contribution, is to call 1-800-635-SNET (7638), say "I want to sign up for Community Connections" and give the representative the Brownstone Quorum **PIN 3775**. Then every three months, the Quorum will receive a check representing 5 percent of all the long distance telephone charges associated with our PIN. You will receive this information twice a year.

A good deal for everyone. Call today.

## **Quorum Raffle**



Raffle ticket sales at the Farmers Market have been brisk. The fourteen foot canoe, a real eye-catcher, sells the tickets. The raffle prizes this year will include the canoe with paddles and PFDs (personal flotation devices); a \$100.00 gift certificate to Home Depot, \$75.00 gift certificate to Farrell's a \$50.00 gift certificate to the Happiest Paddler in East Hampton, and two sets of three framed antique quarry postcard reproductions.

Tickets are on sale now for \$5.00 each and will be available at Quarry Focus Day IV, the Farmer's Market, the Portland Fair and from Quorum members. The drawing will be held at 7pm, October 20<sup>th</sup> at the Portland Library on Freestone Avenue.

## How to Contact Us

Email: BrownstoneQuorum@Yahoo.Com  
 Web: www.BrownstoneQuorum.Org  
 Phone: 860-342-2260  
 Mail: Brownstone Quorum, Inc.  
 P.O. Box 402  
 Portland, CT 06480-0402

## 2003 Officers

**President** Jim Tripp  
**Vice President** Tom Bransfield  
**Treasurer** Mike Susca  
**Recording Secretary** Jean Harmon  
**Corresponding Secretary** Eunice Wiseman  
**Member-at-large** Wayne Andrus  
**Member-at-large** Bob McDougall  
**Member-at-large** Mike Troderman

## 2003 Committee Chairs

Design/Property Sue Fiedler /  
 John LeShane  
 Organization / Promotion Jeanne Dilworth/  
 Nan Zimmer  
 Economic / Finance Mike Susca  
 Newsletter Jeanne Dilworth/  
 Bob McDougall  
 Canoe Rides Tom Bransfield

## Meetings

Regular Brownstone Quorum meetings are held on the 4th Monday of every month, at 7:00 pm, at the Mary Flood Room of the Portland Library. All are welcome. Program reminders will be placed in THE RIVEREAST NEWS BULLETIN.

Executive Board Meetings, also open to the public, are held on the first Monday of each month at 239 Main Street until further notice.

## 2003/2004 Meeting Schedule

	<b>Board 1<sup>st</sup> Mon.</b>	<b>Regular 4<sup>th</sup> Mon.</b>
<b>September</b>		<b>22</b>
<b>October</b>	<b>6 – SF</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>November</b>	<b>3 – SF</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>December</b>	<b>1 – SF</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>January</b>	<b>5 – SF</b>	<b>26*</b>

\* - Annual Meeting

SF - Store Front, 239 Main St. UBD (Until Building Demolished)

## Membership Roster

We would like to recognize the following individuals for supporting the work of the Brownstone Quorum through their membership dues: Wouldn't you like to be on this list too?

Cindy Andrus	Jack Hetzel
Wayne Andrus	Nancy Kinsella
Jonathan W. Appell	Steve Kinsella
Jean Barresi	Marion Kollias
Bart Barresi	John LeShane
Eric Bender	Joanne Luppi
Sue Bransfield	Frank Magnotta
Tom Bransfield	Dorothy Magnotta
Colleen Brede	Susan Malecky
Dick Carella	Thomas Malecky
Elaine Carella	Bob McDougall
Nancy Caruso	Ruth McGowan
Leon Case	Philomena McKinstry
Marilyn Case	Jacqueline McMahan
Dorothy Ceulemans	William McMahan
Barbara Clark	Nancy Mueller
Margaret Coe	Tom Mueller
Charles Coe	Philip Nanfito
Fred Cohan	Sam Palfrey
Susan Cohan	Luiza Penachio
Maureen Cooper	Ernest Peterson
Linda Cunningham	Phyllis Peterson
Betty Curley	Phil Queden
Lorel Czajka	Virginia Rollefson
Ken Czajka	Ellen Roman
Jann Dalton	Howard Rosenbaum
Gordon Dalton	Sari Rosenbaum
Jan Davis	William Sanborn Sr.
Dan Davis	Harriet Sandborn
Marge Dill	Audrey Scheer
John Dillon	Alice Schumacher
Bernadette Dillon	Lauretta Scionti
Jeanne Dilworth	Gert Scully
Chris Fiedler	Bob Scully
Sue Fiedler	Suzanne Shultz
Ruth Freeburg	Brian Shultz
Lanie Gorcenski	Andrew Sloan
Betsy Graziano	Nancy Sneider
Victor Graziano	Jack Sneider
Susan Green	Francis Sprague
Patrick Green Jr.	Dave Sundell
Dennis Griswold	Bill Supinski
Romaine Gussenhoven	Mike Susca
Bruce Gustafson	Alfred Sutkowski
Elsie Hale	William Svihovec
Bud Harmon	Martha Swanson
Jean Harmon.	Diana Tine
Bruce Heerdt	Jim Tripp
Mrs. Bruce Heerdt	Liz Tripp
Buddy Hernandez	Michael Troderman
Mike Hernandez	

**Brownstone Quorum Inc.**  
**P. O. Box 402**  
**Portland, CT 06480-0402**

**Inside This Issue**

- Quarry Focus Day IV
- Portland Brownstone Quarries - 2003
- Canoe Days – ONLY 2 MORE!
- Picnic on the Promontory
- The Williams Group
- Membership – Join now!
- From the History Corner
- SBC-SNET Community Connections
- Quorum Raffle
- Meeting Schedule
- Membership Roster

# *The Quorum Review*

## *September 2003*

---

*Next Meeting:*  
*September 22, 2003*  
*7pm Portland Library*