

# Medina Sandstone

by Lynne Belluscio

Last week, while a group of us attended the GoArt Awards event at Terry Hills, another group was being recognized for their contribution to their community. I had never heard of them before, but it is the Medina Sandstone Society. They were formed in 2004 to gather information about the quarries, the buildings and the people connected with the Medina sandstone business.

Medina sandstone is a sedimentary rock, characterized by a gritty surface, and it can be pink, red or variegated. The pink variety was used for architectural stone as well as street curbing and sidewalks. The sandstone was preferred for flat paving surfaces because of the grit which didn't become slippery like granite and marble, and it was easy to carve. The quarries were located in Orleans County, near Albion, Holley and Medina. The sandstone was discovered near Medina in the early 1800s, but was not commercially quarried until the Erie Canal made it possible to ship the heavy stone by canal boat.

A commercial quarry was opened in 1837 by Robert Ryan

and eventually there were nearly 50 quarries in and around Medina employing 2,000 people. That would come to an end with the popularity of cement and all the quarries closed. Recently one quarry opened to provide sandstone for renovation and preservation work.

The deposit lies below the Lockport dolomite and Rochester and Clinton shales and much deeper than our local limestone. Below the Medina sandstone is another red deposit known as the Queenston red shale deposit. The Medina layer is about 50 foot deep and extends east as far as Rochester. It shows up in the gorge below the lower falls of the Genesee River below the Driving Park Bridge.

The Medina Sandstone Society mentions on their web-site that Medina sandstone was shipped to England for parts of Buckingham Palace, and the grand staircase at the New York State Capitol is made from Medina sandstone. The Brooklyn Bridge was constructed with Medina sandstone. In LeRoy you can see Medina sandstone in the pillars and steps of the old Jell-O office building on

North Street and at the Myrtle Street Cemetery and Machpelah Cemetery.

Unfortunately the sandstone in LeRoy displays the inherent problems in a northern climate. Water permeates the cracks and crevasses and when the water freezes in the winter, it makes the cracks worse and the sandstone flakes off and exfoliates.

The Lathrop stone at Machpelah has lost most of one side and will soon lose the other side. The sandstone gravestone in the Myrtle Street Cemetery is in very fragile condition and will not survive many more winters. As I walked up to the front door of the Jell-O office, I noticed that the steps and pillars are also disintegrating. Unlike limestone and marble that is affected by acid rain, the Medina sandstone is subject to freezing and thawing. There are several interior fireplaces that are faced with Medina sandstone, and are probably pretty well protected.

If any of you know of other examples of Medina sandstone in LeRoy, I'd be interested in knowing about it and we will



Medina sandstone at front door of former Jell-O building, North Street.



Lathrop Monument, Machpelah Cemetery, North Street.



Anna Robertson's gravestone, Myrtle Street Cemetery.

add it to the files.

