

Who Was Edward A. Payne

And what did he do with his life?

Around my house are many abandoned quarries. Most were abandoned over a hundred years ago. Some of them were one-man operations and others were large operations, having perhaps a dozen or more employees. As I wander through these quarries, I wonder about the men who worked these quarries. What were their names? What were their lives? Who were they? What became of them?

At one of the quarries, a piece of granite was being cut on the day that the quarry was closed. It is fascinating to see the process, as if I were in an open class room. The operator found a fault between layers of granite and then selected the place where the cut would be made. The granite was scored to form a line at the exact place to be cut. Along the score, a number of holes were drilled. I suspect that the drill was a star-chisel, but since the tools had long ago disappeared, I cannot say for sure. Once the holes were drilled, small wedges were inserted in each hole. The wedges were hammered into the holes sequentially until the granite broke. Granite is very brittle and it is not consistent. Cutting granite from a ledge was part skill, in estimating the flaws, and part luck in finding them.



In this picture, at the lower right, you can see the holes, and at the closest corner, you can see one of the wedges.

The piece of granite in the picture was being cut the day that the quarry was closed. I can only image the anguish that the workers felt. Did they find new jobs? What happened to their families? It is almost eerie to walk through the abandoned quarry knowing that people worked here every day for years. Now, it is a quiet place, like a graveyard of dreams.

As I wandered through the quarry, I found some ledge that had yet to be touched. The topsoil had been removed leaving large areas of bare stone. During the decades that followed the closing of the quarry, many of the townspeople visited, just as I have on so many occasions. Some of the visitors do not have the same reverence as I. They find the bare stone a good place to leave their names. Some of the names are still readable while others have vanished into the stone.

One of the men, or should I say boys, who left his mark was Edward A. Payne. His marking was much larger and more detailed than the others. My camera is not the best and markings in stones are hard to photograph, even with the best camera.



The marking on the stone reads:

May 20, 1927
Edward A. Payne
Born June 2, 1910
Class of 27

He had graduated from the same school that I attended, but many, many years earlier. As I write this story, his birth occurred almost a hundred years earlier. It is unlikely that he is still alive. He left a mark that has endured rain and snow, sun and wind, and is still readable today, over eighty years later.

Many thoughts have crossed through my mind since I saw this marker. I wonder if he has made as much of a mark upon the world and our society as he made upon this granite ledge. Did he do great things with his life? Was he a scientist who made an important discovery? Was he an inventor of something we use every day? Did he write a great novel? Was he a statesman who brought peace and prosperity to our country?

Maybe he was one of the unsung heroes whose greatest works were reflected in others, like a teacher? Or maybe his mark was made by a son or daughter who did something great!

But perhaps, his greatest mark was what I saw on the granite surface. He may have been a factory worker, whose only achievement was to be a cog in a giant machine. Even being a cog has its importance, for without the cog, the machine would fail and the ripple through our society could be catastrophic.

He may have died the day after leaving his mark, or he may have served in the military. He may have saved men's lives or he may have died in the field. He may have been one of those soldiers whose lives were sacrificed so that our country could remain the shining city on the hill. His death, though so important, may have only been of consequence to his family.

Of course, I am quixotic and like to see the world as it should be and not as it is. Let me put aside my optimism and look at reality. He might have been a bad man. Maybe he was a lawyer who swindled people out of their life savings. Maybe he was a bank robber, or even a murderer. I would rather not believe this and therefore, I will not believe that a man so meticulous could ever be evil.

Perhaps, I could put his name into Google and have my questions answered, but it is unlikely. His name is probably too common. Anyway, I would rather wonder than know. I would like to maintain the fantasy that I saw, on that stone face, the first mark of a great man.