

# A Brief History of Stoneco

By John DiDomizio

August 19, 2013

Stoneco was built in 1890 as a major stone crushing facility with company housing. The region had also been known as Clinton Point ever since Vice-President George Clinton built an estate there in 1805 with a magnificent view of the Hudson River. The impressive mansion which was built on a 300 acre property existed until it burned down in 1874. It was also the home of the Tallmadge and Van Rensselaer families. At the time of Henry Hudson's arrival in 1609, the area was populated by the Wappinger Indians. On a 1798 map, an Indian word "Thanakonek" (the place where nut trees grow) is used to describe the region. Large ridges of limestone and lime kilns are also shown on the map. Stoneco was located about 2 miles northwest of the village of Wappingers Falls and about 5 miles south of the city of Poughkeepsie. It existed for about 60 years as a populated place.

The work force peaked at 400 men in the late 1890's and the total population including women and children was about 250 in 1900 when the first U.S. Federal Census was made of the community. The early work force was of Irish extraction, then Poles and Slavs arrived, and by 1900 the population was largely Italian. The workers lived mainly in boarding houses although a few families lived in individual dwellings. Early on, the boarding house keepers were quarrymen but by 1910 most of the boarding houses were run by the wives of the Italian men who were the boarding house "bosses". Typically, a boarding house would consist of the boss and his wife, their 3 young children, and 8 boarders. The work of the boarding house wife was, in some respects, harder than that of her quarryman husband because she had a longer work week.

Although the stone crushing process was highly mechanized, there was much hard manual labor. By far the most numerous positions in the quarry were those of coal shoveler and sledge. The coal shovelers kept the steam boilers going and the sledgers broke up the larger pieces of stone to a size sufficient for hauling to the stone crusher. Twenty pound sledge hammers were used. A typical work week was 60 hours consisting of six ten hour days. The men worked from 7 AM to noon, took a one hour break, and then worked again from 1 PM to 6 PM. The main meal of the day was served at noon. It was also the time reserved for blasting more stone from the quarry walls with dynamite. At the start of the twentieth century, the typical pay was just 15 cents per hour although the more skilled positions (drillers, blacksmiths, machinists, etc.) made about twice that amount.

Injuries and accidental deaths were not uncommon from 1890 to 1920 with about one fatality per year in the time period leading up to WWI. The Hudson River Stone Supply Company employed Dr. Thomas K. Cruse of Wappingers Falls as the company surgeon for the better part of the 1890's. Subsequent operators of the quarry in the early years included the Clinton Point Stone Company and the Upper Hudson Stone Company. The New York Trap Rock Corporation took over operations in 1919. All company housing was removed some time around WWII and the quarry is currently a major operation of the Tilcon corporation.

As we look back in time, the significance of Stoneco seems to be two-fold. First, the men of Stoneco help build the infrastructure of the eastern United States. The crushed stone was shipped down the Hudson River and then to many places going as far as Key West, Florida. It was used in the concrete of buildings in New York City and was used as road ballast for many miles of railroad track in New York and elsewhere. Many paved roads throughout the region also used crushed stone from Stoneco. Second, Stoneco was identified by the social reformers of the day as an isolated Italian community where education would help Americanize the immigrant Italian population. The first on-site school for immigrant labor in New York State was opened in Stoneco in October of 1907 by Miss Sarah Wool Moore who dedicated the last years of her life to this worthy cause. Schools were then opened at other large labor camps in the state. A similar school in Wappingers Falls coexisted with the Stoneco school for several years.