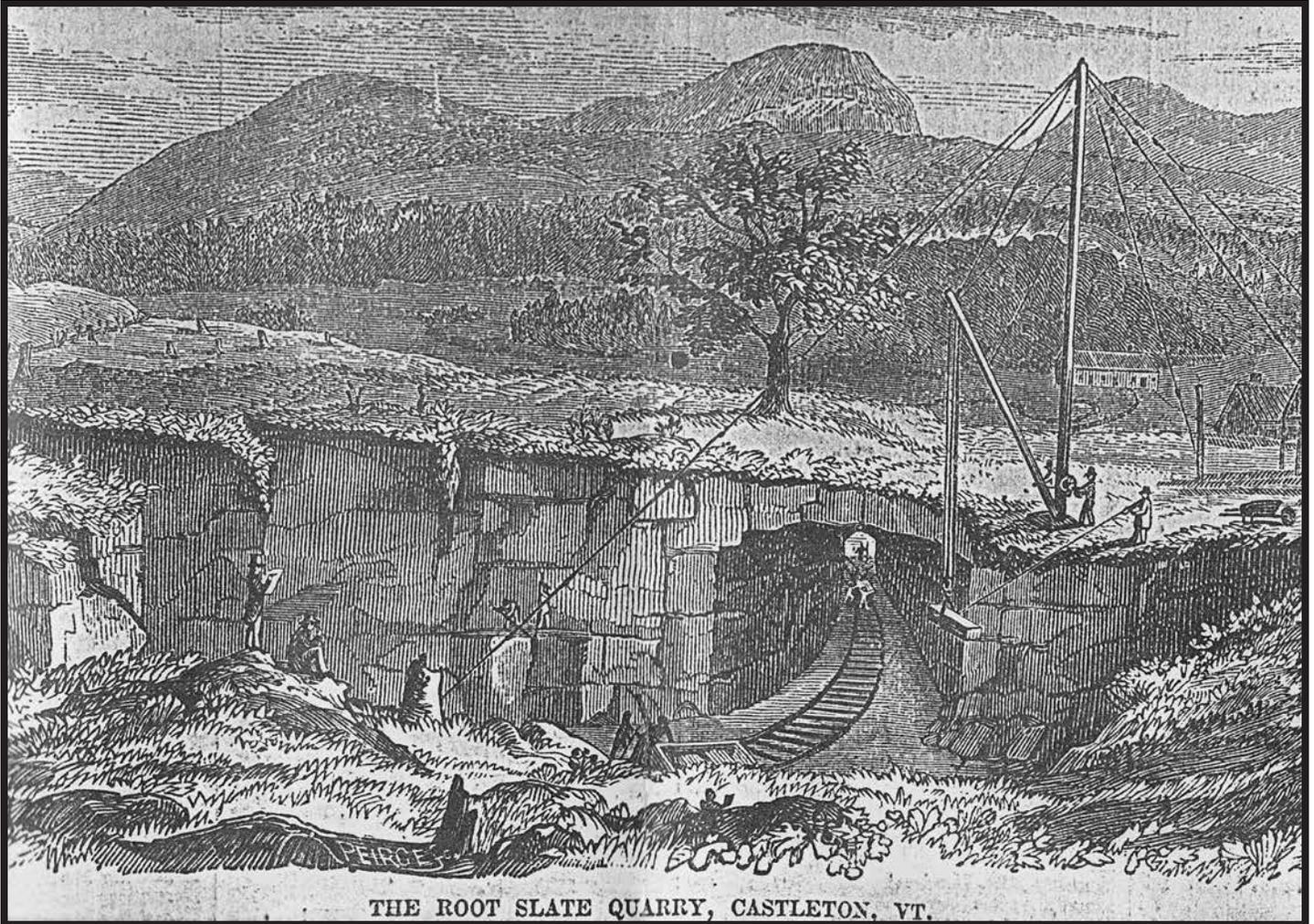
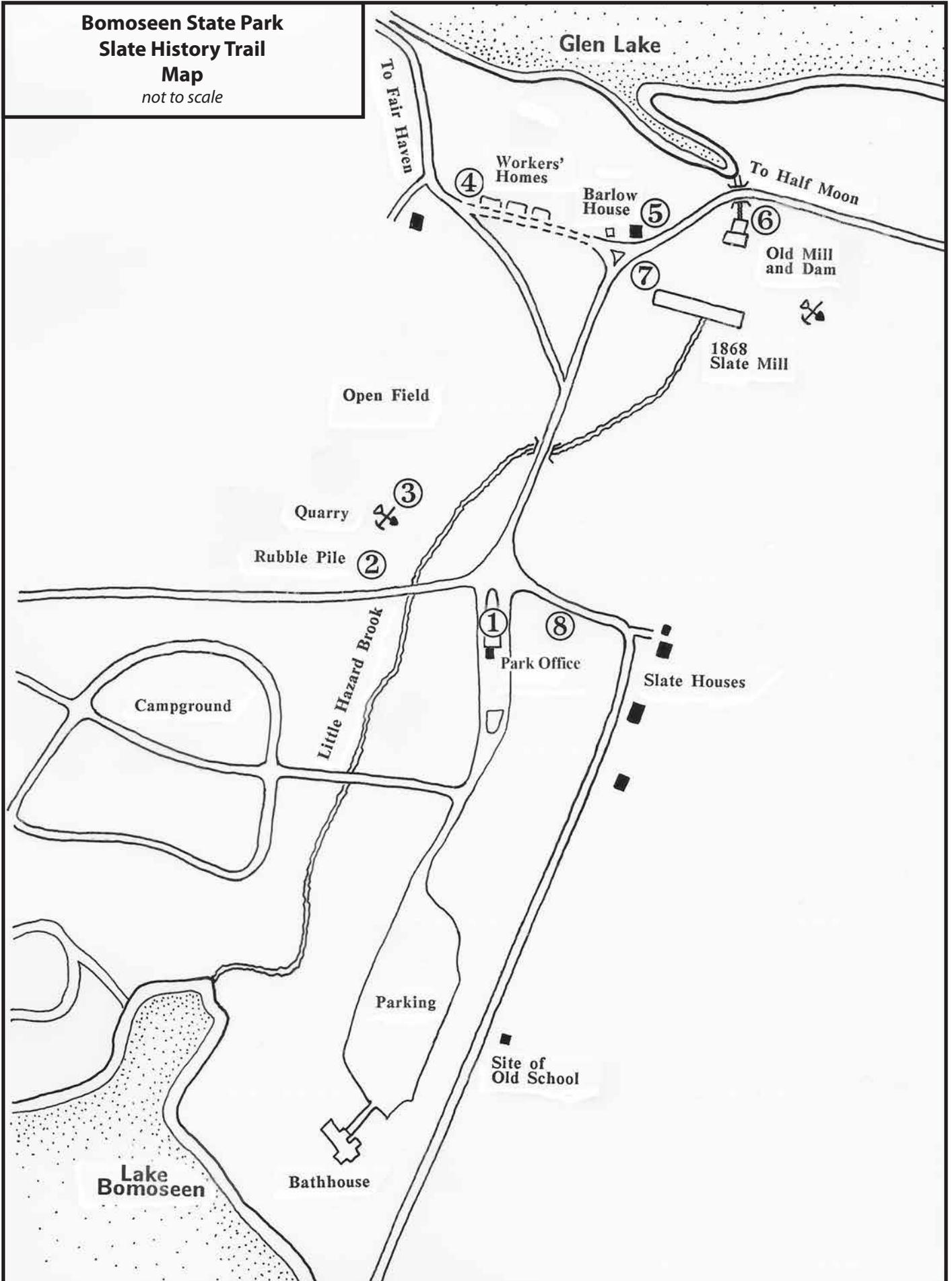

BOMOSEEN STATE PARK



SLATE HISTORY TRAIL



**Bomoseen State Park
Slate History Trail
Map**
not to scale



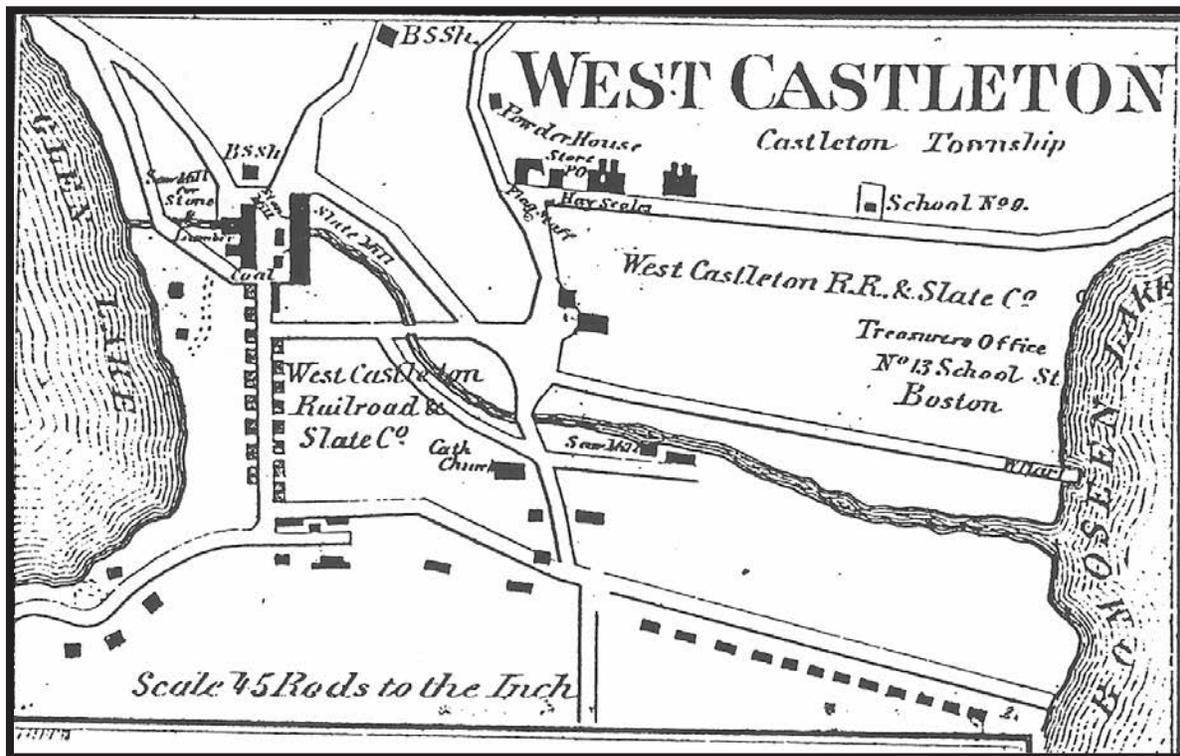
Bomoseen Slate History Trail

This walk will guide you through the remains of West Castleton. Please use caution around the quarry pits and rubble piles.

Within Bomoseen State Park lies the abandoned village of the West Castleton Slate Company. It is difficult to image these quiet hills as the scene of industry- busy quarries, churning mills, a company town crowded with immigrant workers. West Castleton is now silent, the slate industry of the 19th century Vermont, largely forgotten.

Those who explore the ruins and quarries here and the excellent slate work in the surrounding towns will rediscover this fascinating history.

This guide will introduce the history of Bomoseen and its slate, then lead you to the remains of the village.



1. Park Office

In 1853, the directors of the West Castleton Railroad and Slate Company wrote in their bylaws: "Nature has not formed a more convenient or a more desirable spot in the country for supplying our cities with the best of slate than this location."

At that time, the slate company owned 600 acres of land between Glen Lake and Lake Bomoseen. The town had 43 houses, a store, a school, three barns, two sawmills and several quarries.

Leave the park entrance and turn left on the public road. Soon you will see the path of an old road on the right. Walk up a short distance to the next stop.

2. Slate Rubble Pile

There are three important slate belts in Vermont. This area, the western Vermont-New York belt, was the most profitable and contained the most diverse colors. Vermont's slate production was surpassed only by Pennsylvania.

Slate colors include "Vermont Sea Green" which weathers unevenly, "Unfading Green" which retains its original color, "Purple Variegated" and "Unfading Red". West Castleton produced Purple and Unfading Green slate. These can be seen in the waste piles, slate outcrops and roofs in the Castleton area. As this rubble illustrates, up to 85 percent of quarried slate was wasted.

Head up the path of the old road toward the field. Turn left and walk along the edge of the field. Follow the arrow to the quarry.

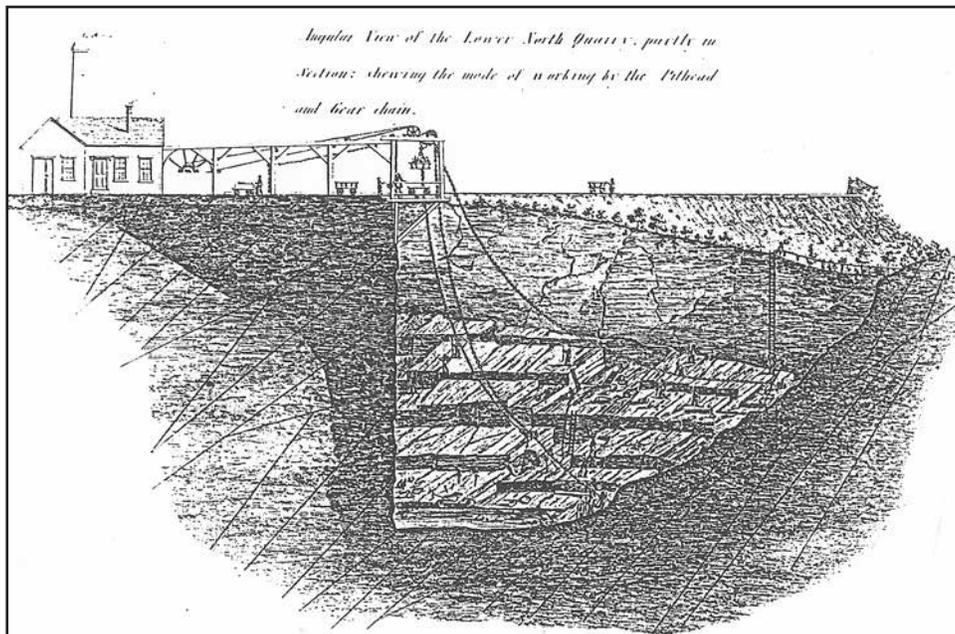
3. The Quarry

The double stacks of slate piled here are called "dead men." These anchored the derricks and pulleys used to hoist slate blocks from the quarry, now filled with water.

Slate mining was difficult and dangerous. Early quarries used blasting, manual labor and animals to remove slate, rubble and water. Workers were sometimes killed by collapsing rock or blasting accidents.

By 1854 there were 25 slate quarries in the area more than 800 employees. The men worked a ten-hour day for which they earned less than two dollars.

Return to field and walk directly across to the paved road. Turn left and walk up to the dirt road on the right.



The constantly increasing demand for slate from these quarries bids fair to render them, if they are not now, one of the principal sources of wealth in Vermont. - The People's Journal, April, 1854

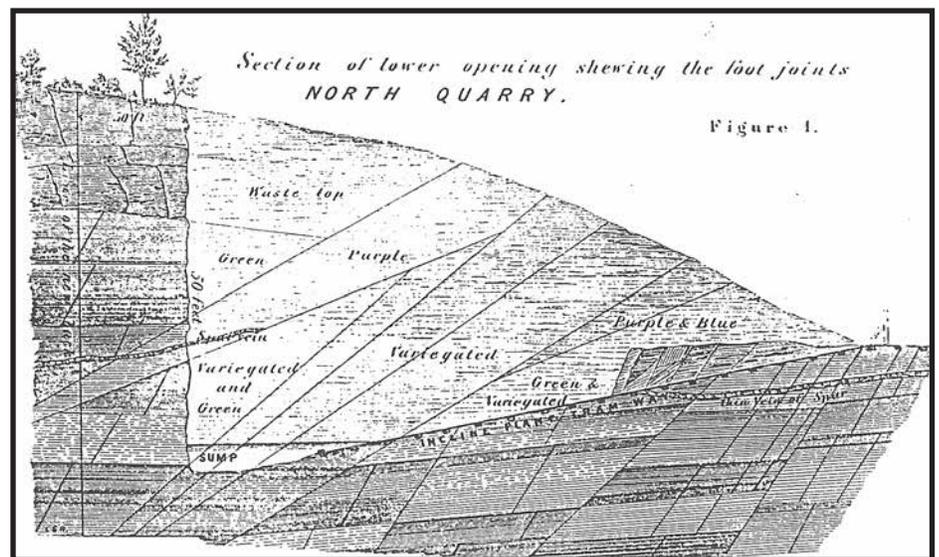
4. Workers' Homes

On either side of the road you may find foundations, the remains of workers' quarters. Each residence was divided into two or more tiny units, probably wood-framed. The company planned to build 100 of these by 1854, but an 1869 map showed only two rows of dwellings. The quarry workers here were mostly Irish Catholic immigrants.

In West Castleton, the company owned housing, sold food and clothing, provided transportation and generally controlled the workers' lives through its hold on their credit. Even social institutions, like school and church, relied on company support.

Scrip, a form of bank credit issued in lieu of money, was issued by companies and stores and given to employees and customers during times of currency shortage-such as the Civil war.

A map of the geologic formation of the North Quarry



5. Barlow House and Museum

The Barlow house stands on the foundation of one of the old row houses. Built around 1900, the house is notable for its style and the use of slate in the foundation, chimney and landscaping. The museum contains a small slate exhibit.

Continue up the road to the left. The next stop is at Hazard Brook.

6. Old Mill and Dam

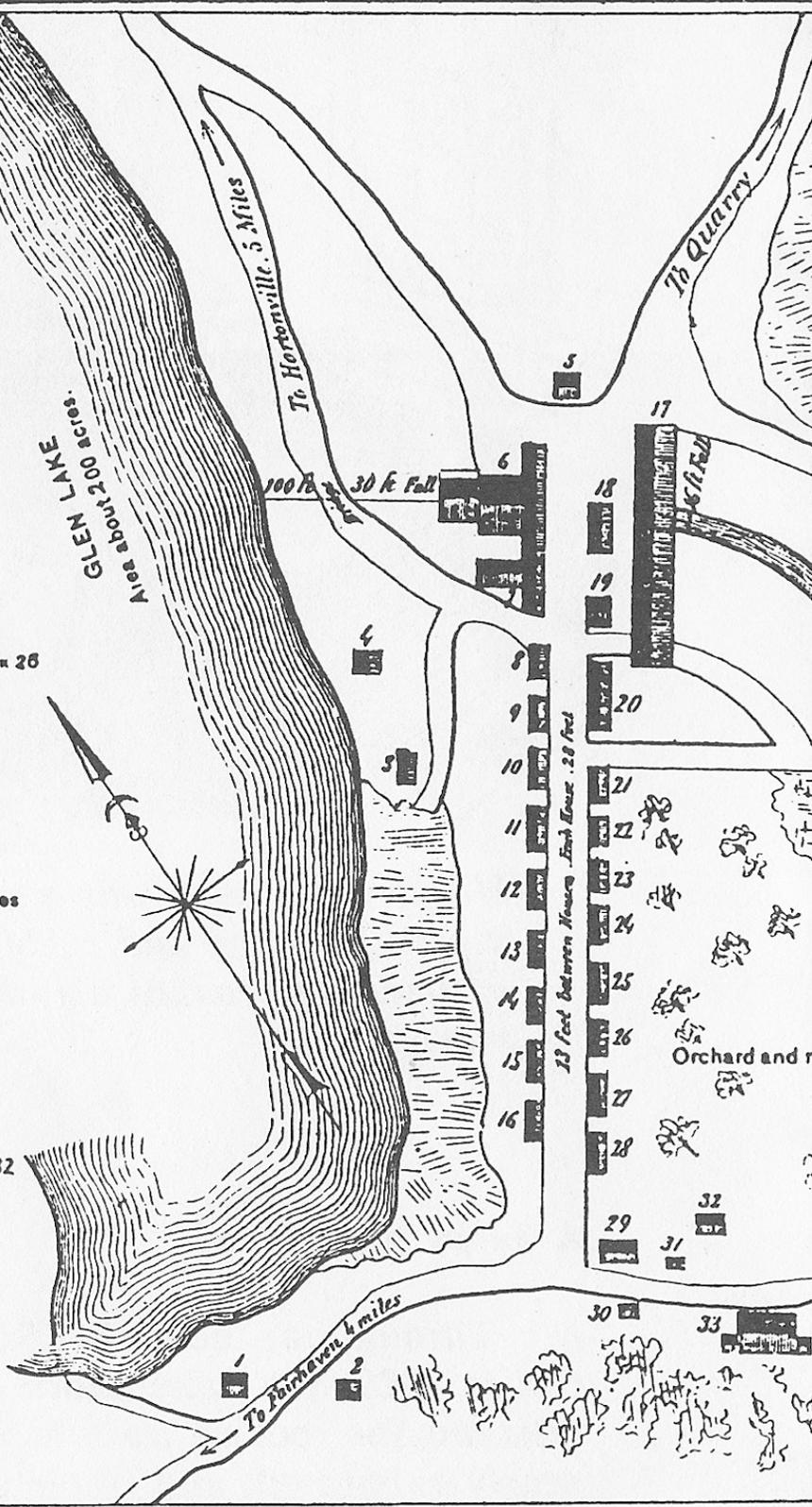
Little Hazard Brook once powered sawmills and slate mills as it wound its way from Glen Lake, or Screwdriver Pond as it was known earlier, to Lake Bomoseen. Across the road from the lake and slate dam, the brook tumbles onto the foundation of an old sawmill. This mill sawed both coal and lumber and had an attached coal shed.

From the sawmill, Hazard brook ran underground to the waterwheel in the slate mill. An old outlet near the Barlow house may have furnished water power for earlier mills.

Return to the Barlow House and turn left on the dirt road. Take path immediately on left to the next stop.

REFERENCE.

- 1 Single House
- 2 Double ..
- 3 Tenement
- 4 ..
- 5 Blacksmith Shop
- 6 Saw Mill for Stone & Lumber.
- 7 Coal Shed
- 8 Double House
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17 New Mill of Stone 265x64
- 18 Stone Mill 40x60
- 19 For Rubbing Billiard Tables 22 x 26
- 20 Three Tenements
- 21 Two ..
- 22 - - ..
- 23 - - ..
- 24 - - ..
- 25 - - ..
- 26 - - ..
- 27 - - ..
- 28 - - ..
- 29 Large Farm House Two Families
- 30 Frame Building
- 31 Shed
- 32 Barn
- 33 New Double House
- 34 Blacksmith Shop
- 35 Powder House
- 36 Four Tenements 68 x 27
- 37 Wood Sheds
- 38 Stone Store 43x27
- 39 Barn
- 40 Stone Dwelling, Double } 40 x 32
41 " " } 6nd
42 " " } L
- 43 School House
- 44 Hay Scales
- 45 Flag Staff
- 46 Carriage House
- 47 Barn 60x36
- 48 Dwelling, Double 26 x 33
- 49 " " 26 x 36
- 50 Old Saw Mill
- 51 Old Tenements 50 x 18
- 52 Wharf



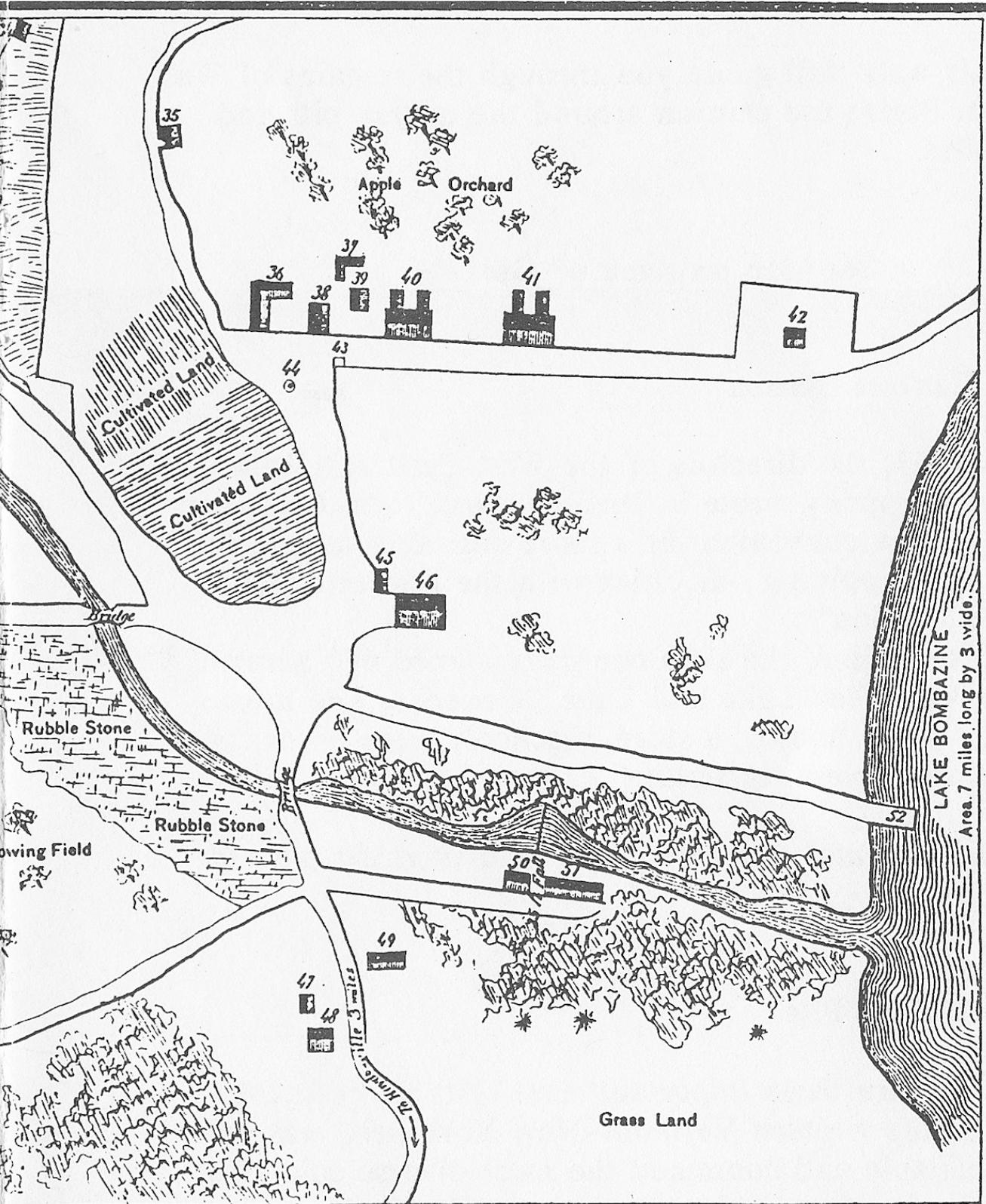
TOPOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

TO THE

WEST CASTLETON RAILROAD

WEST CASTLETON

OFFICE



OF PROPERTY BELONGING
 D AND SLATE COMPANY
 ON, VERMONT.
 CE No. 13 SCHOOL STREET, BOSTON

7. The Slate Mill

In 1868, the slate company built a new mill for the preparation of purple and green flooring, billiard tables, sinks and washtubs. At the time the mill was constructed, it was one of the largest slate finishing mills in the country.

The mill was powered by a waterwheel 24 feet in diameter. It had seven circular saws, and band saw, a jig saw, five planers, two rubbing beds and a jointer. The mill burned in 1870 and was rebuilt on a smaller scale.

In the 1880's, Samuel Hazard Jr, the former treasurer and supervisor of the slate company, ran the new mill and the quarries as the Lake Shore Slate Company. Hazard's great-great granddaughter, Martha Warren, left the slate company land to the State of Vermont.

Although the beautifully carved date stone is still standing, the mill walls are crumbling. ***Please do not climb on the old foundation.***

Continue down the road toward the park. Bear left on Cedar Mountain Road.



Scrip



8. Stacked Slate Houses

Preserved as residences, these are excellent examples of stacked slate houses. All three buildings were built in the mid 1880's. The house to the left was the company store, built of slate and laid in cement. The store was also the company office and post office. The front of the building retains its bell, used to ring starting and quitting times at the quarries and mills. The other houses were for mill supervisors.

The slate company also deeded a lot down the road to the West Castleton School District #9. The school, built in 1852, stood until 1954. Today a private residence occupies the site.

This is the end of the Slate History Trail.

Quarrying History of the Lake Bomoseen Area

Nearby Fair Haven and Poultney, Vermont, as well as Granville, New York, are excellent places to see colored slate roofs, sidewalks and tombstones. Several scenic byway driving tours are available on both sides of the state border in the “Slate Valley.”

True Slate Production

The slate industry owed its success to geologic processes that occurred 500 million years ago. Long before land animals existed, Vermont was covered with tropical seas. The soft sediments-clays and organic debris-of the ocean floor were thrust above sea level during mountain building times. Tremendous heat and pressure were generated, eventually turning the sediments to metamorphic rock-slate.

The First Inhabitants

Some believe the name Bomoseen is derived from an Abenaki word meaning “keeper of the ceremonial fire.” Others argue that the lake was originally named “Bombazine” after a fine twilled cloth often dyed blue or black. Whatever the origin of this unusual name, we do know that the Abenaki Indians had seasonal camps along the lake.

Farms and Quarries

These tree-covered hills were logged and farmed by early settlers. Logs were floated on the lake to a mill at its outlet in Hydeville. By the early 1800’s, there were farms, three sawmills and a school here. As late as the 1950’s, the park campground was a field, the staff quarters a farmhouse.

The first slate quarry in western Vermont was just a few miles from Bomoseen. In 1839, Caleb B. Ranney and Alonson Allen worked a ledge near Ranney’s home in Fair Haven. They hoped to produce school slates, but the outcrop was too hard. The rock was used for hearths and tombstones instead.

In 1849, Allen tried a new idea. He convinced a Fair Haven resident to cover his barn with slate. The man agreed on the condition that Allen wait a year for payment. If the roof held, he would pay. If the roof collapsed, Allen would pay for the barn. The roof was still good for many years.

Slate Industry Boom

Rail construction in the 1840’s created new markets for Vermont’s high quality slate. Experienced and ambitious Welshmen were lured from the slate district in northern Wales. They quickly purchased ledgy farms with slate deposits and applied their knowledge of efficient large-scale quarrying. The Welsh immigrants, followed by Irish, French and Slavic, brought their traditions and culture to Vermont.



By 1850, the West Castleton Railroad and Slate Company was in operation. This was said to be the only slate company in Vermont at the time. Business was good. Slate was in demand for roofing tiles, fireplace mantles, billiard tables and blackboards. Where slate was readily available in surface deposits, it was used for foundations and steps.

A path still traces the old railroad bed used to haul slate from the mills and quarries to a wharf on Lake Bomoseen. The slate wharf extended out into the water. A “horse boat,” or horse powered ferry, took railroad cars loaded with slate to the railroad in Hydeville.



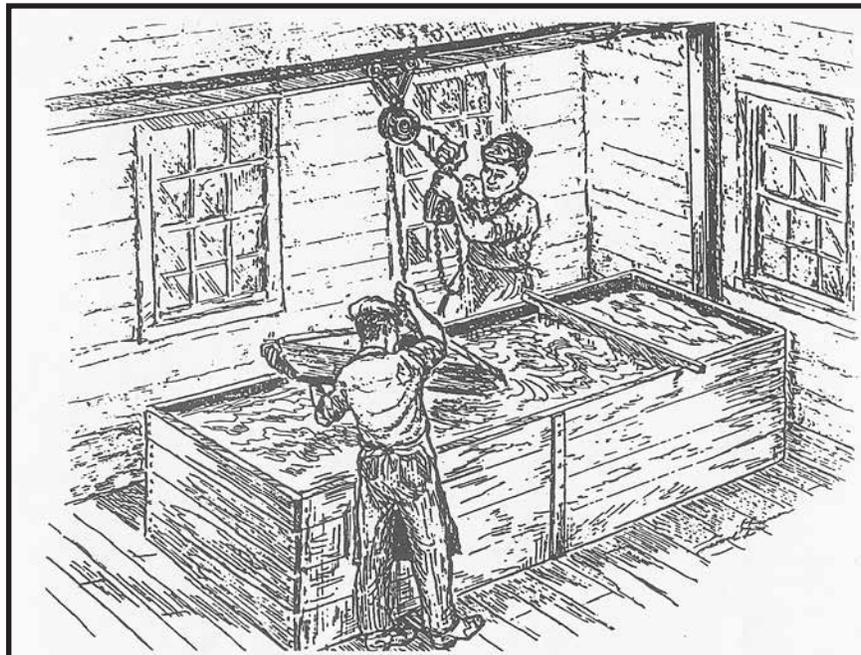
From the Fair Haven, Poultney, Castleton and Hydeville directory, 1896

Marbleized Slate

A process that made inexpensive slate resemble marble led to the development of a marbleized slate industry. By 1855, the West Castleton Company had built a \$2000 kiln to marbleize slate on the west shore of lake Bomoseen.

One of the first slate marbleizers in the country, Rylan Hanger, worked at the Castleton Mill. He stayed with the company for three years, keeping the details of the process secret, marbleizing at night after the other employees had left.

Marbleized slate meant the middle class could possess some of the same symbols of wealth and success as the gentry, but at a much lower cost. It was especially popular for the mantels, bring color and interest to the hearth, the symbolic center of the home and family life.



Marbleizing slate was a complex process of dipping, baking and rubbing the slate a number of times to produce a finish which simulated marble

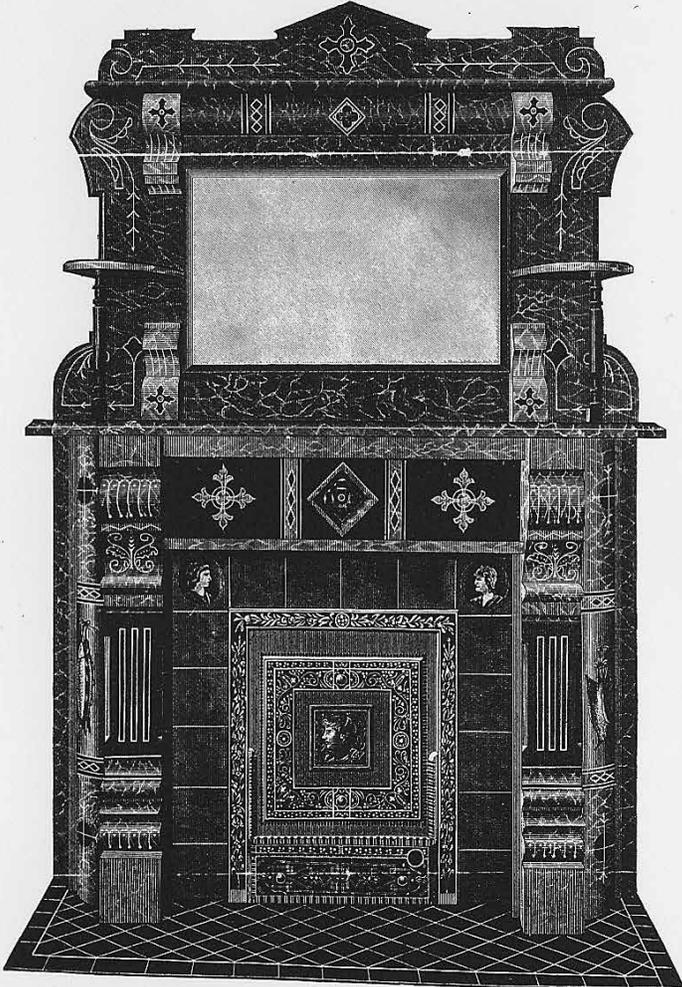
A Town Abandoned

Throughout the early 1900's the slate company profited. But in 1929, the Lake Shore-West Castleton Mill closed. Demand for roofing slate had declined, the quarries were nearly exhausted, and water and rubble removal had become difficult. Labor shortages during World War I, subsequent strikes and the Depression may have also contributed to the decision to close the mill.

West Castleton village was abandoned and became a ghost town. The village remains as cellar holes, quarry rubble and mills scattered among twisted grape vines, goldenrods and maple saplings.

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