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Sent: Thursday, November 22, 2018 12:12 AM

To: Amy Sheldon <ASheldon@leg.state.vt.us>

Cc: Jon Hill <jon@greenstoneslate.com>

Subject: Act 250!and the Slate industry

Dear Representative Sheldon,

The Vermont slate quarries hay-day was in the 1880's through the 1920's. At this time, slate land was readily available, labor was plentiful, and the demand for slate was insatiable.

Now here is my backstory. Prior to WW II my grandfather was a coal miner from Morgantown WV. After an extend tour in the pacific theater , my grandfather was returning home to West Virginia from Guadalcanal. Although he was miraculously unscathed while fighting at Guadalcanal, his luck ran out , the transport ship he was on, was torpedoed. As a result, his back was broken and he remained in a hospital for nearly two years.

When he finally returned home to West Virginia, he was unable to perform the manual labor as a coal miner. In a desperate attempt to secure a job, he went to work for a subsidiary of a Vermont slate quarry. By 1952 he and his family had moved to Vermont. In 1955, he bought his first parcel of poor quality farm land and started working independently.

This first purchase was substantial to my family. For they did not purchase high quality land, as good farm land was unaffordable. He could only afford to acquire scrub land with poor soil.

In the 1950's, slate quarry properties where nearly worthless. The mineral value of the un-extracted slate was very low. The production of slate required tremendous amounts of labor to mill it in to the finished products. The war had taken its toll on the once abundant labor force. As a result the lands surrounding the quarries, where sold at an extremely cheap price. Farmland sold for the most value, followed by building land and then quarries.

This trend remained in place until the 1980s. At which time there was a socio-economic movement, in which retiring city dwellers were able to buy cheap Vermont properties. At first, the better quality land was purchased. Then later the lesser quality land (which had formerly been a quarry or was adjacent to a quarry) sold at an inflated or often unrealistic value. In a effort to thwart this situation and secure their operations from encroaching neighbors, the few remaining quarry owners had to buy adjacent quarry land with often unproven minerals at inflated pricing.

As the result of this trend, my father entered the picture. He started leasing the land adjacent to the family properties. Quite often with no intention of operating the land for slate extraction but rather to ensure the minerals were not sold for housing development. However, as adjacent properties were being subdivided and sold as building lots , the quarry owners, like my father, were priced out and it was no longer economically viable to buy these adjacent parcels. The Vermont quarry owners could no longer afford to compete with the out of state investors.

Simultaneously, the local land market heat up, and series of legal issues arose as a result. These land issues or neighbor disputes had reached critical mass by the early 1990's. As new neighbors moved closer and closer to the quarries , often times they were missed informed about the proximity of a nearby working quarry or even the existence of a near by dormant quarries.

As a result of these cases, the legislators recognized the situation, the quarries could not move but their neighbors had. Therefore the legislators attempted to rectify the problem. In essence, they produced "the right to quarry slate" act. It allowed owners to register their existing quarries under this protection.

For over twenty years, the act has protected both operators and neighbors , but at no time has it undermined the authority of act 250. Nor does it diminish any regulatory presence set forth by the governing agencies i.e. (MSHA, ATF and the Army Corp of Engineers) who oversee the slate industry.

I hope I was able to shed some light on the slate industry and it's role with ACT 250. If I can be of further assistance, feel free to contact me.

Regards and happy holiday.

Jonathan Hill
Greenstone Slate Co.
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Sent from my iPhone