

**FORM H - PARKS
AND LANDSCAPES**

**Massachusetts Historical Commission
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Massachusetts Archives Building
Boston, MA 02125**

Assessor's Number 226-4 USGS Quad Area(s) Forms within

Town Groton

Place (*neighborhood or village*)

Address or Location Off Longley Road

Name Groton Soapstone Quarry

Ownership *Public* *Private* X

Type of Landscape (*check one*):

park	farm land
green/common	quarry X
garden	training field
boulevard/parkway	
other (<i>specify</i>)	

Date or Period 1828-1868

Source Dr. Green, Vol. 1, Chapter IV, pp. 18-20

Landscape Architect

Location of Plans

Alterations/Intrusions (*with dates*) building dismantled, 1868

Condition Good

Acreage Approximately 5 of a 72 acre parcel

Setting Rural

Recorded by Sanford Johnson

Organization Groton Historical Commission

Date (*Month/Year*) 12/08

Photographs

See continuation sheet

Sketch Map

See continuation sheet

VISUAL/DESIGN ASSESSMENT

Describe topography and layout. Note structures such as bandstands, gazebos, sheds, stone walls, monuments and fountains. Note landscape features such as formal plantings, agricultural plantings, and bodies of water. If possible, compare current appearance with original.

The former Soapstone Quarry is a rock outcrop in a forested section of the Soapstone Quarry parcel owned by the Groton Conservation Trust. Undulating ground east of the Nashua River Rail Tail and west of Longley Road rises toward the south where the outcrop was worked. Exposed rock is oriented nearly vertical and faces north. The quarried section below is now filled with water. The southern edge of the quarry is the site of stone foundation ruins that presumably supported the mill building that is no longer extant. Evidence of derrick anchors appear in the form of iron pins and rings set in stone. A stone culvert to the west of the quarry is approximately eight feet in length and four feet above a seasonal stream. This was on the access road connecting the outcrop to Common Street.

In a historic photograph, the mill is depicted as a low-pitched gabled building with roof monitor, double hung 12/12 windows and a square brick smokestack. A derrick and piles of stone slabs occupy the yard around the mill. This replaced two earlier wood frame buildings with gabled roofs that burned c. 1864 and are depicted in a drawing made at the scene in 1862. The photo and drawing appear in Groton at 350 on page 67.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE:

Discuss history of use. Evaluate the historical associations of the landscape/park with the community.

The Groton Historian Dr. Samuel A. Green states in The Natural History and the Topography of Groton, Massachusetts, published in 1914, that the name Nonacoicus, originally applied by European settlers to the 17th century farm of Major Simon Willard in what was South Groton, was a Native American reference to a “dry pot” or a type of cooking vessel that might have been made of soapstone. Dr. Green quotes William Wallace Tooker, an expert in Indian philology on this subject.

The soapstone quarry was re-discovered by a farmer living on Common Street named John Fitch in 1828 as he was chopping wood and accidentally encountered the soft stone with his axe. The anecdote comes from an 1830 *Groton Herald* article reprinted in Dr. Green’s topographical history of Groton. Recognizing the material as useful in making house wares such as bed warmers, hearths, sinks, stove tops and ink wells, Mr. Fitch began working the outcrop by hand, gradually making it into a small quarry that he worked by hand and later with a steam mill. According to Edward A. Hitchcock’s 1835 Report on the Geology, Mineralogy, Botany and Zoology of Massachusetts, “In Groton is a bed of soapstone on which considerable labor has been expended. Its width appears to be 10 or 12 feet, and it descends into the earth towards the southeast; dipping about 30 degrees and lying between layers of mica slate. It is not of the best quality, being somewhat too hard; yet its proximity to Boston, Newburyport, and Salem, will probably render it an object of importance”. Another publication from (January) 1835, *The American Journal of Science and Arts*, notes that extensive beds of soapstone, or steatite, exist at Groton where the product was used for making pumps for delivering domestic water with pistons made of wood. Elijah Whiton, resident of 163 Main Street, worked as an inventor and industrialist and was granted a U. S. patent in 1834 for his pump designs. State census records list 130 soapstone pumps manufactured in Groton which may be attributable to Mr. Whiton. He wrote a letter to the journal *Scientific American* in 1857 stating he built pumps of wood, glass, metal and soapstone and powered them from his steam engine in Groton from 1833-1842.

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

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Groton	Off Longley Road and Common Street
Area(s)	Form No.

The 1850 Non-population Census Schedules describe Mr. Fitch as a soapstone worker with a water and steam powered mill that employed two men making hearths, funnel stones and other articles. After Mr. Fitch's death around 1855, his heirs sold to Samuel Adams of Townsend and Daniel McCaine. After this time, Mr. McCaine worked the site with his brothers and enlarged the shop, machinery and scale of the operation. Fires in 1859 and 1864 caused the loss of the buildings, after which the McCaines sold the property in 1864 to an entity called the Groton Soapstone Company. Despite the sale, Mr. McCaine continued to operate the quarry and built a third mill with a 75 horsepower Corliss steam engine that powered a six-gang saw.

According to a pamphlet published in 1864, by McCaine and geologist Charles T. Jackson regarding the property's value and characteristics, soapstone was considered a relatively rare type of stone and was important to making housewares and construction. They state that only four or five such quarries had been worked previously in the country (possibly meaning the region) and that it cost more in Boston than marble from Vermont. Groton, being closer to Boston than the sites of other soapstone quarries, would have a price advantage over them which the authors used as a selling point to potential investors. The scale of the quarry at this time was 416 rods in width and 16 feet below grade. The steam mill in May of 1864 (It is unknown weather this is before or after the 1864 fire) was 60' x 28' with one-story in front and two in the rear. Derricks were capable of removing blocks of up to ten tons. The authors indicate the quarry had supplied customers in China and California and that, despite running day and night and operating a satellite mill in Harvard, were unable to keep up with demand.

It is worth noting that Charles T. Jackson remains a controversial figure who made potentially false claims and reports regarding such varied subjects as the nature of iron deposits of the Lake Superior region, his invention of the telegraph and his discovery of the surgical uses of ether. Indeed, Dr. Jackson claims the quality of the material was unequalled while other sources, such as Edward A. Hitchcock writing in his 1835 report mentioned above, state the soapstone was too hard to be considered of good quality. Despite Dr. Jackson's reputation, the R. G. Dun Credit Reports for the quarry business indicated that in 1866, the credit was perfectly good. By 1867, however, the operators had had some financial trouble and were expected to fail. The Dun credit report from February 1, 1868 states that the concern is to be sold "this day" at the office of N. A. Thompson of Boston, the result of financial failure.

In 1943, the Groton Town Diarist noted that, according to a recent article in the local paper, on February 12, 1868, an auction of the property and assets of the Groton Soapstone Company took place where \$24,000 was raised. It is likely that the buildings were dismantled and the materials removed for use elsewhere, as there is no evidence of a mill at the site. The diarist indicated that many samples of the stone are found around town and on farms in New Hampshire.

The site was purchased for conservation purposes in 1988 by the Groton Land Foundation as its first enterprise as a subsidiary of the Groton Conservation Trust and remains in recreational use.

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Town

Groton

Property AddressOff Longley Road and
Common Street**Area(s)****Form No.****BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES:**

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Town
Groton

Property Address
Off Longley Road and
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Area(s)

Form No.

Sketch Map

North Toward Top



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Photos



Quarry



Bridge over seasonal stream