

Penn State Obelisk

November 22, 2011

The Penn State Obelisk – *One of the World's Oldest Weathering Experiments*

Erected in 1896 under the supervision of Magnus C. Ihseng, then the current dean of the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences, the obelisk represented the College's founders three-pronged mission of teaching, research, and service to industry and society. Collaborators in this project included students, faculty, and members of the Pennsylvania building stone industry. One freshman in the mining program, William C.B. Alexander, rode his bicycle across the state of PA to visit a lot of the quarries which the stones for the obelisk were procured from. In total, the obelisk contains 281 stones from approximately 139 locations across PA and some from NY.



The stones are said to have been arranged in their natural geologic order by Thomas C. Hopkins, who was an associate professor of economic geology. However, with no way to date crystalline rock during its building and by following theories of the day, they were placed lower than the sedimentary rocks. Nowadays, we know that the sedimentary rocks are actually older than the crystalline rocks.

The primary purpose of this obelisk was to see how the stones would endure throughout Pennsylvania weather and which stone is best for building. Although the original buildings around the Obelisk have changed (ie. the Armory Building), you can still visit this monument located between Sackett, Electrical Engineering East, and Willard buildings on the University Park campus.

More Information on the Obelisk can be read here (pdf):
<http://www3.geosc.psu.edu/~jte2/references/link086.pdf>

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