

'Feels Like an Earthquake'

Quarry Blasting Upsets Town

By Donald E. Graham
Washington Post Staff Writer
To Bob White, a D.C. corrections department employee, "it feels like an earthquake."
At Edson Lynn's electrical company, people stop talking and look at you as if they should go to the bomb shelter.

In Air Force Sgt. Charles Pugh's home, the candlesticks dance on the dining room table loudly enough to be heard in the kitchen.
This, many residents of Occoquan, Va., say, is what it's like when the town's old neighbor, a rock quarry across Occoquan Creek, sets off its most powerful dynamite blasts.

Some of Occoquan's 800 residents say that when blasts are set off on the side of the quarry near the town, their walls shake, their windows rattle, and their nerves roll off their moorings. That end of the quarry is no more than 200 yards from many of Occoquan's doors. It is, however, in a different county — the creek divides

Fairfax from Prince William.
The most recent big blasts, set off on Feb. 23 and March 1, brought more complaints to Occoquan Mayor J. Robert Ritenour than any in the four years he has been mayor.

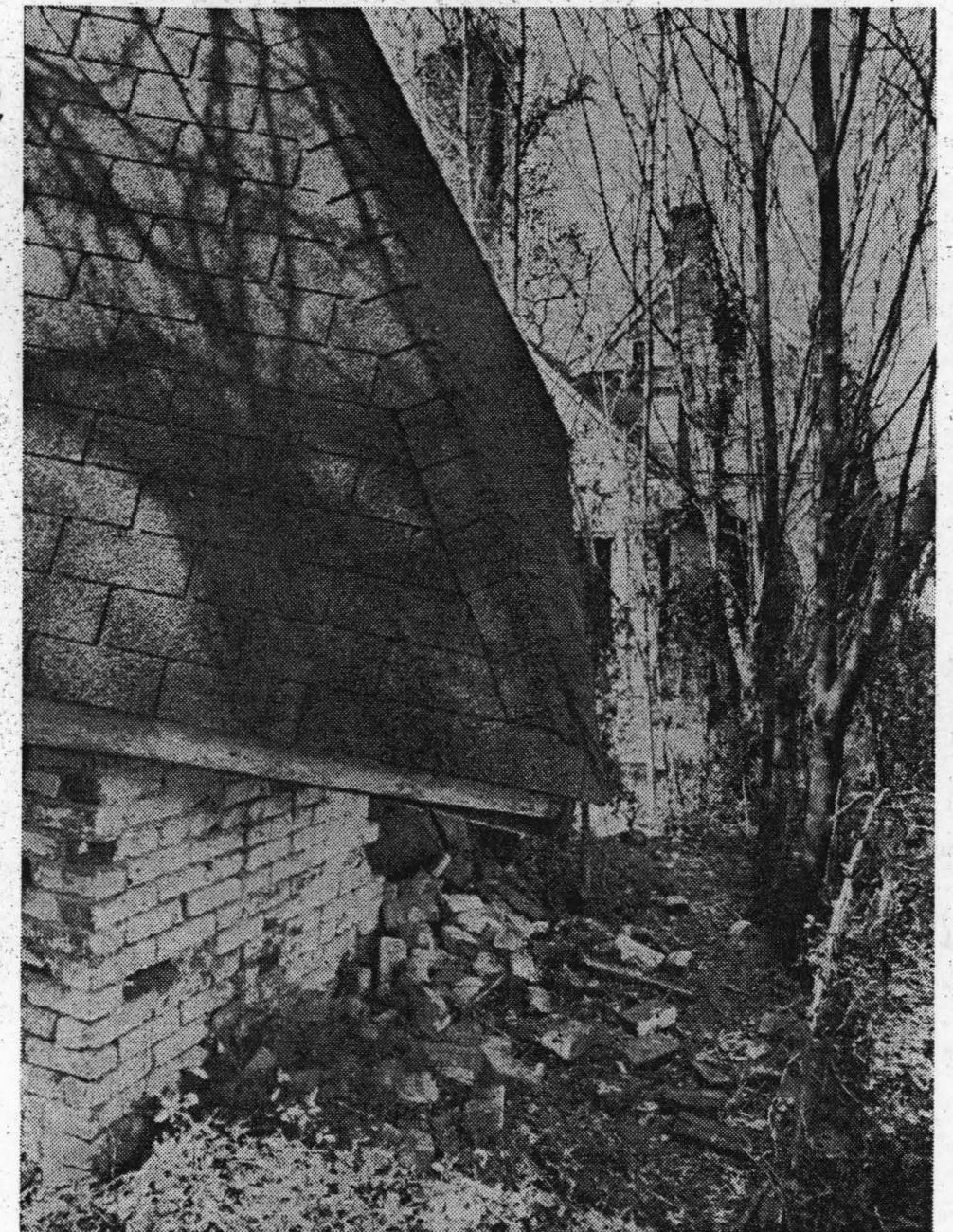
There were even letters from three Woodbridge residents whose houses are more than two miles from the quarry. "We live in a mobile home and each blast shakes our home. It's a very frightening experience to go through," one Woodbridge man wrote.

The quarry maintains a seismograph to measure the intensity of the blasts. But Lytton H. Gibson, attorney for Vulcan Materials Co., which owns the quarry, wrote Fairfax officials that the machine was not working, "apparently due to the failure of the operator," on the two dates Mayor Ritenour says the worst blasts occurred, although it worked on previous and subsequent days.

After the complaints, the company stopped blasting on the side of the quarry nearest Occoquan. Citizens said this has greatly reduced the jolts they feel from the blasts and Gibson says that as far as he is concerned, the withdrawal from that edge of the quarry is permanent.



This is how the main structure and outbuilding at Rockledge appeared in the 1930s.



The outbuilding at Rockledge as it appears today, its roof and outer wall crumbled.

See OCCOQUAN, B6, Col. 3

Photos by Jim McNamara—The Washington Post

Occoquan Residents Upset By Blasting at Rock Quarry

OCOCOQUAN, From B1

Gibson, who has years of experience representing quarrying companies, says, "I don't blame these people. A quarry isn't a white-collar operation and there's no way it can be. You hear the same complaints wherever you go."

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same type as Mrs. Garstang's, and her wedding ring, which had been stolen from her body, testimony showed.

Walter also signed a confession that night at the Hyattsville police substation, telling police, "I've been blamed for a lot of things I didn't do. I guess I just wanted to be blamed for something I did do." That confession, read at Walter's arraignment in 1969, was suppressed by Judge Taylor at a later pretrial hearing.

Pale from his 20 months in the tiny Hyattsville lockup, where he worked as a kitchen trusty and studied through the county's home-study tutorial program, Walter appeared calm throughout his trial. While his mother cried in the courtroom after her son's sentencing yesterday, Walter kissed her and his father goodbye before leaving for the Patuxent Institution.

The quarry produces rock used in federal soil and shore erosion projects, and by road and house builders. A quarry has been in operation at the site since the 1800s, when Occoquan Creek was a navigable river. Regular intensive blasting has gone on since 1959.

Gibson said the company had limited the size of its blasts. The company, he said "wants to do good, wants to do the best they can. But they don't want to close the quarry, where there's a tremendous investment."

Mayor Ritenour and several other Occoquan residents agreed they didn't want the quarry to close. "We just want the county to supervise the blasting and to control this dust that comes up when they blast," Ritenour said.

The county involved is Fairfax, where the quarry is located. The townsmen, Prince William residents, think Fairfax County is not taking their complaints against the quarry, a Fairfax taxpayer, seriously enough. On the Fairfax side, the quarry is surrounded by the Lorton correctional complex.

William S. Hoofnagle, Fairfax board of supervisors' chairman said that, on the contrary, he is very sympathetic to the Occoquan residents' claims and that the county has been inspecting the quarry which operates under a special use per-

mit. Gibson added that the quarry has taken active dust control measures.

Several Occoquan residents say their houses showed signs of damage they say was caused by blasting. Mrs. Arthur Harris, whose house is a block away from Occoquan Creek, said a chunk of plaster fell from her ceiling, almost hitting her, several weeks after the most recent blasts. Air Force Sgt. Pugh and his wife pointed out cracks in the walls of the well-kept house they remodeled only last summer.

But the prize exhibit in the town's case against the quarry is Rockledge, a splendid grey stone mansion built in 1758 and designed by Matthew Buckland, who also designed Gunston Hall for the George Mason family.

An Interior Department survey of historic buildings some 15 years ago found Rockledge "worthy of most careful preservation for the benefit of future generations."

Soon after those words were written, Rockledge's owner, Laurence A. Barnes, moved out, claiming that the blasting had opened crevices in the foundation that made his house unsafe.

He sued, but Fairfax County's Circuit Court found that Barnes had not proved that the blasting, rather than the age of the house, was responsible for the damage.

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