



Montgomery Historical Society
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The Lowell / Eden Asbestos Mine and Montgomery



BIRD'S EYE VIEW from the verge of a quarry bench shows the Vermont asbestos mine filling a high valley in the Green Mountains. Down the road at the left stretching into the distance, carefully selected asbestos fibre starts on its way to becoming the indestructible heart of Ruberoid asbestos building products.

Picture From circa 1960 Ruberoid Reporter Newsletter

TIMELINE

- 1892 Asbestos discovered by a woodsman. (Ruberoid Reporter Special Edition ca 1960)
- 1901 New England Asbestos Mining and Mill Company owns / operates mill and quarry.
- 1936 Ruberoid Co. owns / operates mill and quarry.
- 1967 Ruberoid acquired by GAF Corp.
- 1973 Workers purchase and operate as Vermont Asbestos Group (VAG).
- 1993 VAG ceases operation.
- 2007 Remediation efforts begin by State and Federal governments.
- 2013 EPA caps dry fibers stored on site.

From 1901 to its closing in 1993 the mine, or quarry, located in Lowell and Eden harvested and processed chrysotile asbestos fibers. The fibers were shipped to other factories and largely used in cement products like shingles and wall board. It was the largest mine of its kind in the U.S. There were similar mines operated in Quebec.

At its peak the mill employed as many as 300 men. In 1976 it employed 175 men and had a payroll of \$1.7 million. Average pay at the mine was \$4.00-\$4.30/hour, among the highest in the region according to an UpCountry Magazine article. About 24 men from Montgomery worked at the mine then, nearly 20% of the Town's working age men, making it one of the Town's largest employers per the Town history. A company shuttle bus picked up Montgomery workers in the morning and brought them home at night.

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SPECIFICATIONS:

Weight/Sq.	195 lbs.
Pieces/Sq.	39
Bundles/Sq.	3
Size	8 1/4" x 48"
Exposure	7 1/4" x 48"
Headlap	1"

Colors: Sno-White, Mist Green, Shell Coral, Cloud Gray and Canary Yellow.

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The mine was purchased by its workers in 1973. The purchase was viewed as a relatively novel and largely successful move at the time, and studied by workers and companies in similar situations. With State financial backing (loans and loan guarantees) the workers owned and operated the mine for 20 more years. But as times changed and demand waned (largely due to asbestos-related lawsuits against their customers), the business would close.

In 2007 the State pursued possible Federal designation of the mine site, which included land in Lowell and Eden, as a Superfund Site in hopes of significant Federal funding for cleanup and other mitigation. The State released a study to bolster its

case which concluded that those within a 10-mile radius of the mine were more likely to suffer from asbestosis and related health problems than those outside the circle. This area included a large part of eastern Montgomery, including all of Montgomery Center, but not Montgomery Village.

The study was called into question because it was based on the review of death records in the region and did not take into account individual life histories, such as previous work in shipyards. The sample size was also considered too small (6) to draw such conclusions. Air sampling showed no airborne asbestos beyond the site.

Governor Shumlin said he wouldn't pursue the Superfund designation unless the towns where it was located (Lowell and Eden) voted to support the effort. Neither did, in part fearing the

stigma that could be associated. Follow-on mitigation efforts were centered on not disturbing the tailing piles and other areas, and making efforts to prevent run off from the site.

Another round of mitigation efforts took place in 2013 when the EPA feared a building believed to have 18,000 cubic yards of finished, processed dry asbestos fibers inside was failing, and in danger of releasing the fibers. It turned out there was considerably less there and it was partially removed to a pit on the site and both locations were covered, or capped, in place.

Compiled from the following sources:

1. Montgomery Vermont: The History of a Town, Branthoover and Taylor
2. Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (Web site)
3. Ruberoid Recorder, Special Edition, ca 1960 (MHS Archives)
4. "Everybody Here is a Company Man" Upcountry Magazine, Feb 1976 (MHS Archives)
5. Discussions with Ken Cota and Fred Kinnet
6. 2007 Public hearings.
7. EPA response to VAG mine site 2013 (Web Site)

Scholarship reminder

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<https://www.montgomeryhistoricalsociety.org/pdf/mhsscholarships.pdf>



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