

The History of Callanan Industries



The indomitable Hannah Callanan and employees in the early 1900's.

In 1883, an enterprising South Bethlehem, New York hay farmer, Peter Callanan, foresaw a need for quarried stone for road building and started the Callanan Road Improvement Company (later to be renamed Callanan Industries) at a location where there were limestone rock ledges exposed on his property in the northern part of the Town of Coeymans, in Albany County.

During the following 117 years Peter's vision has proved prophetic and the company has grown beyond the Capital District to become one of the oldest companies of its kind in the country and one of the largest of its type in New York State.

Peter Callanan felt that better roads would be a benefit to the economy of his time because they would improve the ability to move agricultural and manufactured products to market. He was so strong in his opinion that he traveled New York State speaking to various town and governmental bodies as an advocate for better roads and promoting a system to finance them.

In 1889 he published a 40 page "practical treatise" titled, "Roads and Road Making," in which he described the state of American roads in the late 1800's as "inferior to those of any other civilized country." He reminded the reader that good roads reduce the cost of hauling and provided evidence that defective highways cost the State "annually an extra \$15,346,230". And this was in 1889!

About the same time, the Buffalo and Weehawken Railroad (later called the New York Central) was building its West Shore line along the Hudson River valley and the need for crushed stone became substantial. A quote from the Albany Angus, a newspaper of 1909 stated, "When the West Shore Railroad was built, passing through South Bethlehem in the 80's, it needed rock ballast for its roadbed. Peter Callanan's farm had all the rock that the West Shore could use, and Peter Callanan's quarries became an established institution. In time, South Bethlehem came to depend upon the quarries as its principal industry."

In the first years of the business the stone was quarried from the ledges at South Bethlehem literally by hand. A speech written for the company's 65th anniversary celebration in 1948 describes the quarry methods prior to the turn of the century. "Drillers used sledges and steel points to put down the holes for

blasting. It took iron men to swing a sledge from dawn to dusk. Screening as well as loading was done by hand. In fact, no power except manpower was used. The loaders or pickers as they were called usually came out at 4 am and tried to load at least three cars before the quarry started. These men worked on piece work and were paid a fixed sum for each car loaded.”

The company thrived. A steam driven crusher and mill were built, and in 1895 it incorporated as the Callanan Road Improvement Company.

Yet, in its first 30 years, the company endured severe trials, which could have put it out of business. In 1896, one short year after incorporation, Peter Callanan died of a heart attack. Devastated by this loss and with six children to care for, Peter’s wife, Hannah Whitbeck Callanan was determined in her belief in Peter’s vision. In testimony to her resolve Hannah Callanan managed to keep the stone business going.

With the landmark Highway Act of 1898, a newly formed New York State Highway Commission awarded Contract #1 to the Callanan Road Improvement Company, for two miles of road leading out of Albany in the Northern Boulevard area.

Then, three days after Christmas in 1902, another test of Hannah’s fortitude occurred when the entire crushing plant burned to the ground.

With a business crippled by a second major loss in eight years, Hannah was urged to sell out, but clinging to Peter’s beliefs and the business promise of her eldest son, John, Hannah rebuilt the plant.

In 1909, calamity struck with great force. A premature explosion in the quarry took the lives of Hannah’s sons, John and Charles, along with 21 others.

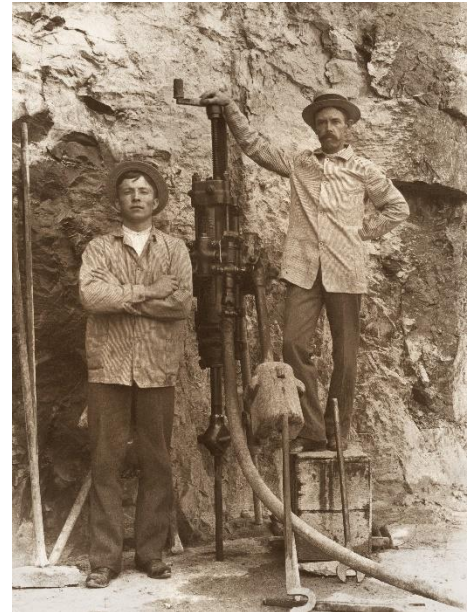
With a husband gone, a company having been ravaged by fire, and now the lives of two sons as well as others lost, Hannah was, in the words of her youngest son Reid, “prostrated with grief”.

Again, Hannah was advised to give up and offers were made to buy the 26-year-old company. But as Reid (later the company’s president) put it, “—finally she made her decision. She would not sell. Again, she was determined to keep the family business going. I don’t know how she had the strength and courage to do it.”

Peter Callanan’s wisdom and advocacy for better roads was being realized. In 1923, a competitive stone company, Albany Crushed Stone, was formed not far away near Feura Bush. Without enough business in the area to support two stone companies, a price war ensued.

In 1929 the competition finally sold out to Callanan in defeat. As Reid Callanan described it, “We ourselves didn’t come out of this struggle unscathed and it was some little time before our company was really healthy once again.”

Taken as a whole, the trials of Hannah and the early Callanan Road Improvement Company were awesome, yet the recovery process from each disaster strengthened and put the company a little farther ahead than it had been before. The mill was rebuilt in better fashion following the fire and more productive equipment replaced the old. Steam and eventually compressed air drills outmoded the steel points and sledges. The first quarry-loading shovel was purchased in 1916. It was steam powered, moved on rails and it took nine men and a track gang to keep it in operation.



Around 1937 a new quarry was started at Kingston with equipment from the Albany Crushed Stone buyout. This operation established a market in New York City via barges on the Hudson River and supplied the heavy fill in Flushing Meadows for the 1939 World's Fair (now the site of the U.S. Tennis Center).

In the 1940's and 50's the company was coming into its own and was operating three crushed stone operations and five blacktop plants, performing construction on many projects and supplying materials on many more.

During the 1950's the company was a major contributor to the construction of the New York State Thruway supplying over 1.5 million tons of materials for the building of 67 miles of mainline, 31 miles of access roads, 6 interchanges and numerous bridges.

In the 1960's the Callanan South Bethlehem quarry supplied in excess of 2.5 million tons of stone for the construction of the Empire State Plaza, which, at the time, was the largest construction project in the world.

Also, during the 1960's Penn Dixie Cement, a public corporation of N.Y.C, acquired the company from family ownership. Following a 15-year relationship with Penn Dixie during which the company name was changed to Callanan Industries, Inc. to reflect its diversification beyond road building, the company was acquired by a partnership led by A.J. "Doc" Marcelle, a lifetime Callanan employee and chief executive during the Penn Dixie ownership. During the Marcelle tenure and ownership success continued, allowing the expansion of operations and the acquisition of several other construction material-based companies including Fitzgerald Brothers of Troy, Crushed Rock and Asphalt Stone Products of Schenectady and Pattersonville, and Oxbow Stone and Asphalt, near Canastota, N.Y.

In 1985, Callanan Industries was acquired by CRH of Dublin, Ireland, an international building materials group that, through its subsidiary Oldcastle Inc. has operations throughout America.



As part of Oldcastle, successes and growth have continued with acquisitions of King Road Materials, Clemente Latham Concrete, Sullivan Materials, Fane Concrete and Asphalt, Ritangela Construction, Maybrook Materials, Walters Ready-mix, Amenia Sand & Gravel, Madden Concrete and, most recently in 2015, Albany Asphalt & Aggregates Corporation, joining the Callanan Industries team of companies.

Callanan Industries and its affiliated companies operate multiple facilities across New York State which supply quality New York State approved aggregate, hot mix asphalt and ready-mix concrete. Callanan's materials are used for infrastructure, building and home projects throughout an operational area that extends from the Orange/Sullivan County region in the south, northward to Saratoga County and westward from the Capital District to the Utica/Syracuse region of the Empire State.

In 2018, Callanan adopted the endorsement line "**A CRH Company**", as part of its company logo mark. CRH is the global name of our parent company. CRH is one of the leading global brands in the building materials industry today. It is recognized for leadership in operational performance, environmental performance, corporate social responsibility, innovative building solutions and sustainable construction.

In adopting the endorsement, we wish to leverage CRH's global reputation and to underline our credentials, both as a committed local business partner and one that can draw on the collective capability of a large global group.