

The Narrative

“We had reached the rugged quarry
And stood peering up at it
Then, like really true explorers,
Never satisfied to rest,
We decided we must scale it
Oh, those awful gaping chasms!
How they stunned your baby heart!
Oh, those frightful stony ledges
Seeming twenty feet apart.”

This is a poem by an Athenia (Clifton) historian and landscaper as he visited the 18th century sandstone quarry land. Later, in 1884 that same land was established by the Federal Government to be part of the United States Animal Quarantine Station for hoofed animals. The Quarantine Station would prevent the introduction of disseminator of livestock disease from other countries. It would be the largest one of its kind for a very long time up until the end of 1979.

During the years of the Quarantine Station operated, a constant parade of hoofed- exotic animals, cattle and birds from overseas passed through the inspection station.

Fourteen barns and existing structures were built between 1900 -1907. In addition to the gothic style barns, an 18th century wooden barn, an artesian well and three 19th century Victorian houses were constructed. Today, they are listed on the American Register of Historic places.

A Superintendent- Veterinarian, maintenance director, and a foreman occupied the residences.

At first, sheep, goats, deer, and cattle passed through the Quarantine station. As the years passed, many exotic zoo animals were examined, including varieties of antelope, giraffe, camels, zebra, and (after 1949) birds of major collectors. Horses were flown in and out for racing and show events. A most unusual herd of 34 mean, strong musk oxen traveling from Greenland to Alaska stopped off at Athenia (Clifton) in the mid 1930's for examination. Watching the unloading of any railroad car of animals was most memorable, but the handlers' struggles with the musk oxen provided a lasting impression. If an onlooker got too close to the imported animals, fumigation was required of the contaminated spectator.

The Clifton Arts Center is located in two of the 14 brick barns found on the 26- acre grounds of the Clifton Municipal Complex. The barns are D-1 and D-2. In 1903 these barns were constructed.

The Clifton Arts Center is a municipally operated facility with changing art gallery exhibits, studio workshops, historical lectures and tours, special performances and sculpture garden outdoor exhibits.