

Exploring Historical Brickmaking in Minnesota

Minnesota Bricks

February 2019

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Chaska Brick

Brickmaking in Chaska Minnesota



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I feature many buildings from the southern half of Minnesota, usually because there were just more built there. Here is a pretty one from the northwest corner of the state, at Hallock, Minnesota.

1. What's New?

- I have mainly been working on historical YouTube videos over the past month. I have collected a lot of information in the past 10 years, in addition to many old photographs. Putting these together is what I really enjoy doing. I have completed 3 new ones, the opening of rail service between St. Paul and Minneapolis, General Grant's visit to Minnesota in 1865, and master carpenter John Geiser. Check them out at www.mnbricks.com/mn-historical-videos
- I am always looking for new topics or neat subjects. Feel free to contact me at www.mnbricks.com
- If you want to sign up to automatically receive this newsletter, you can do so at www.mnbricks.com



**SHARE INFORMATION
& OLD
PHOTOGRAPHS!**

2. Photo of the Month



The Grand, Crookston, Minnesota

Crookston, Minnesota, is a great city to visit if you like architecture and old brick buildings. This postcard shows the opera house/theatre, which I believe is still standing. There are numerous old brick buildings all over town that are simply magnificent.

3. For Sale

I have acquired quite a bit of brick silo related material over the years, which include pictures, plans, and various drawings that are quite fascinating.

Shown below is a 20 x 30 inch collage poster showing some of these images. You can purchase it on the “shop” page of my website, www.mnbricks.com/shop

On the same page mentioned above, there are other posters for sale on various brick towns, historic Minnesota River Valley churches, and Minnesota brick silos.



4. A Look Back

LAKE VERMILLION, MINNESOTA IN 1866 MINNESOTA HISTORY SEGMENT

[To the *Saint Paul Press*, from near Lake Vermillion, Minnesota] Many of your readers, and a large proportion of the Eastern people, have no idea of the packing process as practically illustrated by the half breeds and Indians of this vicinity. For instance: the Indian trader has in his employ say a dozen men. These men have no means of bringing the fur, which the trader buys, to their places of business, which, usually, is somewhat remote, unless by dog trains, or packing. Most of the Indians are not rich enough to own trains, so packing becomes quite an extensive business, especially so among the tribe called Boisforts, or Buforts. The process is simple.

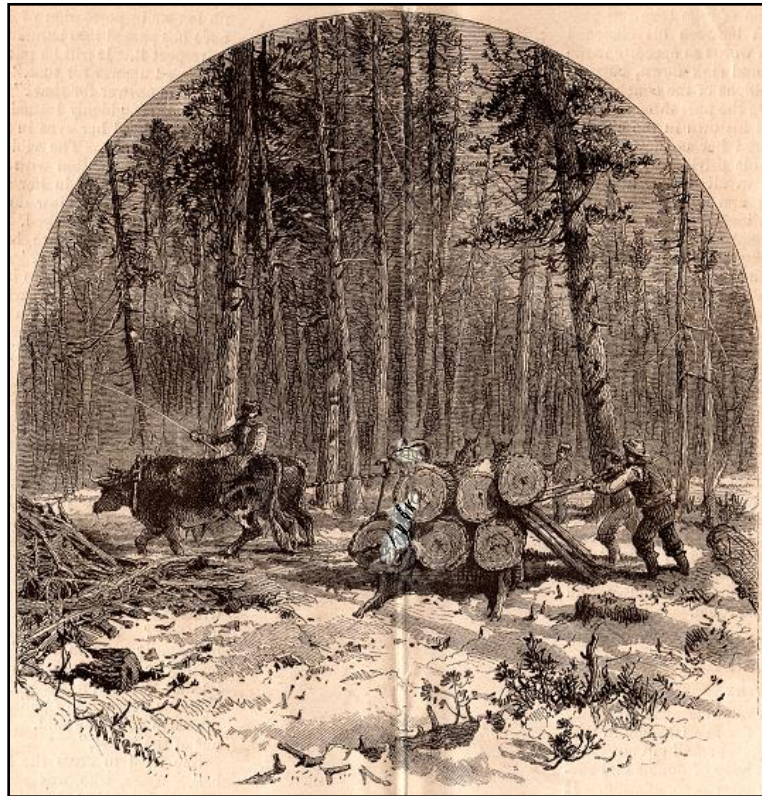
The Indian, or half breed, does up his bundle of fur or provisions in as small form as possible, straps it, and then passes another strap, attached to it, over his forehead; fastens on his snow shoes, and with a *shickle shackle* gait (resembling, somewhat, Greeley's), off he goes. He usually takes what is known as the Indian trail; dodges through trees; clammers over fallen timber; glides down hills; and handles his load with as much ease as a good stout horse would handle an ordinary man on his back. Good packers will carry 200 pounds (the pressure of the weight coming on the forehead), and travel twenty miles per day! I saw several of these stalwart fellows in the trading post of Mr. Bradshaw, at Superior, who had just come in from a day's tramp, and who, notwithstanding they had carried 250 pounds, and had traveled 25 miles that day, were quite happy, and exhibited very little fatigue.

Two sons of a chief were at our camp a few days since, when we made a bargain with them to carry provision to the falls. One of them (not more than eighteen years old) packed a dead hog weighing 240 pounds, and then took a sack of flour on top of it (making 340 pounds), and carried it over a mile before putting it down. This is not an extract from Cooper's novels, but an actual fact. These packers show well developed muscles; are usually tall and slender, with broad chests, and move with a suppleness which would astonish a wild cat.

Dog Trains. While the packer himself is a curiosity, the dog train is a greater one. Usually, the animals are of the wolf species (but there being no wolves in this section – only wolverines) accounts for the fact that most of the dogs are of a far inferior character to those I have seen on the Red River of the North, being indifferent curs, but sufficiently well trained for the purposes for which they are used. The train is ready to move; look at it. Two dogs, a little above ordinary size, are harnessed similar to a horse, the pressure of the draw coming on the collar around the dog's neck. The "tugs" are attached to a slender board, resembling a lady's slipper, with the top part off and the toe part slightly turned up.

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The opinions and expressions in this article are not mine. They are shown for historical purposes ONLY!



This board is generally from ten to twelve feet long, and from ten to twelve inches broad. The packages are tied up tightly and firmly fastened on the board, and when all is ready, a young Indian starts ahead, and the dogs after him, the train followed by another Indian who guides it by a rope attached to the board and which he holds in his hand. Both Indians trot along with the dogs at the rate of 30 and sometimes 40 miles per day. They always take the Indian trail when it is possible for them to do so, and the way they push through the woods, turning and twisting in their circuitous route, is enough to make a white man sneeze, to say nothing of the wheezing and puffing incident to a trip of this character.

Their charges are enormous! Six dollars per day and keeping, and to keep an Indian in this country, where pork is selling for \$1 per pound, and flour 50 cents per pound, is equivalent to paying him \$8 per day. The dogs are fed only at night, and then a quantity of flour is boiled up with grease, and they go in strong, gorge themselves, lie down and sleep. I saw four trains start out from Superior, and have seen six on our way. A messenger came through from the Falls a few days since for provisions for our men, when we packed a train and sent it through, paying \$10 for one day's travel – weight 300 pounds. It is significant of the march of civilization, that for one-third of the way, the train of the white man has obliterated the trail of the Indian.

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The Indian Trail. Some will ask, "What is an Indian trail?" True enough; such was my own inquiry before I had an opportunity of knowing by personal observation. An Indian trail in summer is different in this respect, from an Indian trail in winter. In the first place the Indian travels upon terra firma, but does not remove the underbrush from his path. In winter the snow is two and three feet deep, which covers up all the underbrush, and the Indian, on his snow shoes, is borne up on the snow, as he glides swiftly along to his camp. The snow may be ever so loose to day, but after it is once trodden down by snow shoes it becomes hard on the morrow, so that a man weighing 300 pounds can pass over the trail even without shoes, but he must keep on the track, for the moment he steps off, down he goes.

This trail is made in the most direct route from one point to another, and the course it takes is similar to that of a first class politician, who is devotedly attached to his constituents and his country. The trail being hard, the Indian passes over it with his dog train with great ease and with great expedition. We pass over the road, where we are not obliged to cut it, and carry, with two oxen, 3,000 pounds, at the rate of 15 miles per day. The Indian, with his two dogs and 300 pounds, goes along at the rate of 30 miles a day. Which goes the fastest?

Camp Fires. A camp fire, as set forth in the pictorials, is a familiar scene to most of your readers, but very few know the *modus operandi*. The snow is three feet deep; the thermometer is 40 degrees below zero; the pioneers tired and weary, come to a halt, and with their axes fall trees, which stand thick about them. In 30 minutes a pile of wood 12 feet long and 4 feet high is in a blaze, and the exhausted men gather about the huge fire and rest their weary limbs. Pine boughs are procured from the trees, and spread on the straw on either side of the fire, and it is not long before all is still, except the hearty laugh and joke which go the round of the party.

Supper comes, and such eating! Neither Shaw or Belote could supply a crowd of this character, (three cheers for Belote say the boys, for that *last* drink), for each man easily consumes three pounds of provision per day, making nothing of eating 20 ounces of flour and 12 ounces of pork daily, and then pick up the crumbs as they fall from the table, with an intimation that there is a gone-ness about the stomach! We have one chap who is a first rate worker, (a mere boy), who will consume eight large biscuits at one meal, (besides meat, &c.), and then ask for more. These appetites are caused by out door exercise (and plenty of it), and the clear cold atmosphere, which draws upon the physical system.

Supper over, additional trees are piled on the fire; the blankets and buffaloes are spread, and by eight o'clock each man (except the guard), is in a sound sleep. This is the ordinary mode of camping out, but we have better facilities for advancing our comfort, viz: a large square tent, with a stove in it, which will accommodate sixteen men, and a large Sibley tent with a stove in it, which accommodate sixteen more, besides the inimitable cooking car which we have found, thus far, indispensable. Before the choppers come in, the two tents are pitched; wood cut; boughs brought, and everything is in order to receive them. Supper is soon announced, and the evening is spent in conversation and singing. Without these auxiliaries, the trip would have been unbearable – with them, the Lord knows it is tedious enough.

Breaking Camp. This consists in taking down the tents, packing up the bedclothes of the men, loading the provisions, and generally gathering up everything belonging to the company. It is something like a woman's work – a pattering species of business, which is exceedingly annoying and tiresome, yet very necessary, and almost of daily occurrence. (*The Saint Paul Press*, Friday, March 16, 1866, Page 4)

5. News Nuggets

Ullman, on Jackson Street, bought a couple of Silver Fox skins last week, which are probably the most elegant ever sold here. They were caught in the Red River region, and are a scarce and much prized fur. Fashion has given them a great value, although they are not very large. These brought \$75 each. (*The Saint Paul Press*, Thursday, March 24, 1864, Page 4)

Fishermen have been having great times on our lake for the past two weeks - some of them taking as many as three hundred pounds in a day, for which they find ready sale at three cents a pound. (*The Freeborn County Eagle*, Saturday, February 19, 1959, Page 3)

It is said that a roasted onion bound upon the wrist, on the pulse, will cure the most inveterate toothache in a very few minutes. (*The Freeborn County Eagle*, Saturday, February 26, 1959, Page 3)

Stones in the streets were being taken off by wagon loads yesterday, and now there is a splendid chance for fast driving. (*Minneapolis Daily Tribune*, Wednesday, June 5, 1867, Page 4)

While two of our policemen were trying to navigate a drunken man towards the jail on Monday evening, and just as they were passing the Opera House, the shock from the lightning which struck the building knocked them both over on their faces. They thought some one was trying to rescue the dilapidated gentleman from them, and that they had received blows on the head from behind. They did not succeed in arresting the offender. (*Minneapolis Daily Tribune*, Wednesday, June 5, 1867, Page 4)

There has been for the past week a large amount of evergreens offered for sale in our streets, most of them going off like hot cakes. There seems a general desire on the part of our citizens to beautify their homes with them. Spare money could not be laid out to a better advantage. (*Minneapolis Daily Tribune*, Tuesday, June 11, 1867, Page 4)

We saw yesterday an eel three feet long, which was caught by a boy in the river below the falls. This is the first of the kind that we have ever known to be caught from the river at this point and it excited considerable attention in the street where it was exhibited. (*Minneapolis Daily Tribune*, Wednesday, June 12, 1867, Page 4)

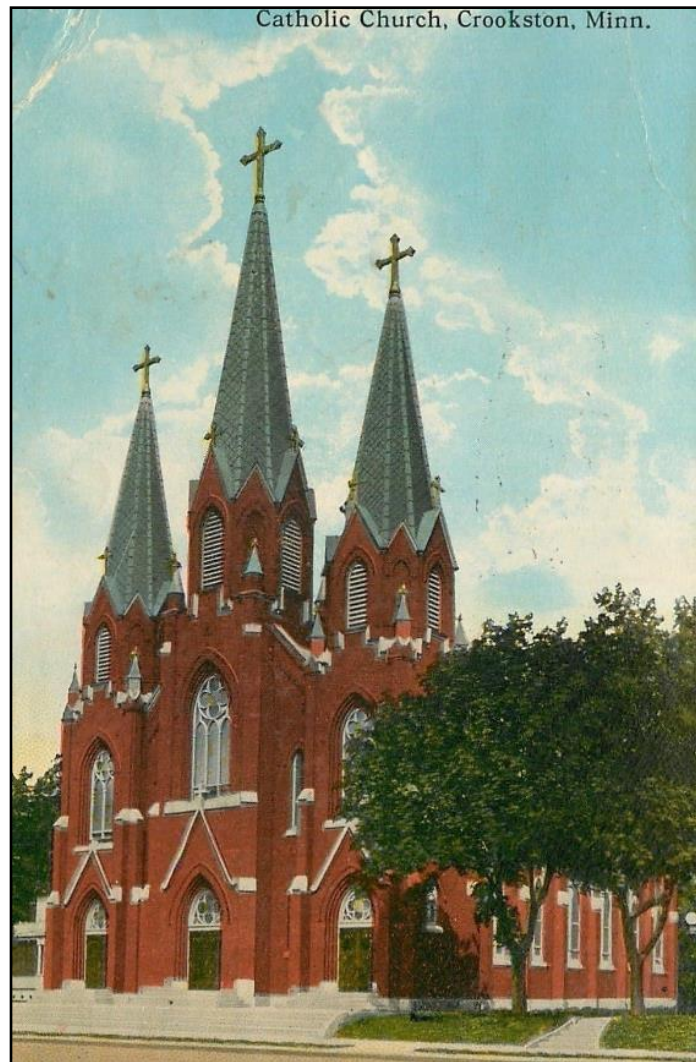
The Northern Belle on her way up yesterday morning, got aground on Pig's Eye Bar, and lay there several hours. She did not arrive at the landing until nearly noon – her first through trip for five months. She had on board a large number of passengers, and 300 barrels of salt, but no other freight. (*The Saint Paul Press*, Sunday, November 1, 1863, Page 4)

**News Nuggets
from the late 1800s**

6. Brick Structure of the Month



CATHEDRAL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, CROOKSTON, MN



I have passed this beautiful church in Crookston, Minnesota, many times. Unfortunately, it was abandoned for a new building and left to decay. Recently, it was given new life, with a new tenant. Hopefully, this church will last for a long time. I have no specific information about it, as I depend on online newspapers for most of my information, and Crookston newspapers are not yet online.