

Exploring Historical Brickmaking in Minnesota

Minnesota Bricks

June 2019

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Chaska Brick

Brickmaking in Chaska Minnesota



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This is a view of Lake Benton, Minnesota, from the north. Barely visible on the dirt road is a team of horses and a wagon. One of my favorite brick buildings, the Lake Benton Creamery, is shown along the lake in the far left center. This building was built of Ochs brick from Springfield, Minnesota.

1. What's New?

- With summer finally here, I tend to spend more time outdoors and less time researching or making videos. However, this past month, I was able to complete my historical YouTube video about President Hayes visiting Minnesota in 1878. You can find this video 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 via email, you can do so at www.mnbricks.com



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2. Photo of the Month



Constructing the High School, Madelia, Minnesota

This postcard is from 1913, so the Madelia High School is not as old as some Minnesota buildings. However, it shows stacks of clay bricks and blocks that were used in its construction. I am not sure which brickyard made these products, but it is rare to find a picture of them being used in any sort of construction.

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

There are other posters for sale on various brick towns, historic Minnesota River Valley churches, and Minnesota brick silos on my shop page as well.



4. A Look Back

THE NICOLLET HOUSE

MINNESOTA HISTORY SEGMENT



I have come across numerous mentions of the Nicollet House during my historical searches. The Nicollet House was often referred to as the best hotel in Minneapolis in the late 1800s. However, I have not come across many descriptions of the hotel, until recently. This sketch of the hotel was published in 1874, as part of the Andreas Atlas. The descriptions, which are shown on the next page, were made in 1867 and 1870. Therefore the dates of the picture and the descriptions are off a little, so the hotel could have changed slightly over this period.

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Nicollet House. We were very much astonished and gratified while being shown through this magnificent hotel, yesterday, to see the costly and elegant manner in which it has been furnished throughout, since it was purchased by the Gibson Brothers. The stairs and halls are carpeted with a beautiful English imported tapestry carpeting, which cost the proprietors \$5.50 per yard in gold, by the quantity. There are eighty-three sleeping rooms, all being furnished with the finest Brussels and velvet tapestry carpeting. The furniture is of black walnut, heavily carved in most of the rooms, and oil finished. The beds, to which persons always pay attention in selecting a first-class hotel, are laid on springs and composed of two mattresses, one seagrass and the other hair. The parlors and gentleman's sitting rooms are furnished with the latest style of furniture and decorations. The house has been undergoing constant repairs for the past year, and stands now as the best hotel in the Northwest. The Gibson Brothers, the present proprietors, have had extensive experience in keeping public houses, and with the experienced cooks from the famous Taylor's Saloon in New York, they get up a table that cannot be surpassed in point of variety and elegance in any region. Their enterprise is meeting with a hearty support from our citizens and the traveling public. With Mr. C. C. Coombs, the gentlemanly clerk, in the office to attend to every want of guests, one can enjoy hotel life at the Nicollet House. (*Minneapolis Daily Tribune*, Sunday, July 14, 1867, Page 4)

The Messrs. Gibson Brothers, the enterprising proprietors of the Nicollet House, have consummated the purchase, of Mr. H. T. Welles, of all the ground at the corner of Washington avenue and Nicollet street, being 81 ½ feet front on the avenue by 165 feet on Nicollet street, upon which they purpose [propose] at once to extend their hotel, clear out to the corner, as well as to build a large billiard room and dining hall in the rear. The plans for the proposed enlargement are now in the hands of Mr. A. M. Radcliff, the architect, and as soon as completed, the work will be pushed forward. The hotel, when completed in accordance with these plans, will be the largest hotel in the West, excepting the Sherman House, Chicago, and will be a hotel that every Minneapolitan will feel justly proud of. The first floor of the new hotel will be cut up into nice store rooms, and on the second floor will be located the ladies' and gents' parlor, reading rooms, hotel office &c., while the rooms in the upper part, together with the dining-room, parlors and office on the same floor, will be cut up into handsome suits of rooms. This will give the Nicollet advantages over other hotels, and enable it to maintain its front rank as the leading and popular hotel of the northwest. As soon as the plans are completed we shall give our readers a full description of what the hotel is to be. (*Minneapolis Daily Tribune*, Saturday, April 2, 1870, Page 4)

**President Rutherford B.
Hayes stopped at the
Nicollet House in 1878.**

5. News Nuggets

Maj. A. Van Vorhes of this city, in one of his recent tramps has made an important discovery, and one that is destined to make the possessor of land a wealthy man, bring to our State an important revenue, and that is no more nor less than the discovery of a ledge of Burr Stone, for the manufacture of Mill Stones. The stone is pronounced by several good judges to be superior to that found in Ohio, which, we believe is the only State in the Union in which this stone is quarried and made into mill stones. (*The Stillwater Republican*, Tuesday, September 15, 1868, Page 4)

During the thunder storm, last evening at about 7 ½ o'clock a "streak of lightning" ran off the track. The electric current followed the wires of the Northwestern telegraph into their office, in Warner's block, played havoc with the instruments, and then exploded, with a report like a pistol. The operator, Edgar Hughes, was sitting at the table, and although he escaped injury, considered it a pretty "loud call." (*Minneapolis Daily Tribune*, Saturday, September 12, 1868, Page 4)

That first class hotel the Huff House of Winona, has lately been lighted with gas. Said gas being manufactured by Messrs. Huff, Lake and Everson, of Winona, from Gasoline and can be afforded much cheaper than the ordinary coal gas. On the evening of its being thus illumined the house was filled with spectators examining the lights. The proprietors say it has cost them \$1,000 per year to light their house with oil, and a man's services to take care of the lamps. Gas light will cost them but one eighth of what the oil cost. (*The Mantorville Express*, Friday, September 18, 1868, Page 3)

Mr. Editor: The bright, warm sun of to-day reminds us that the winter, which has been a stern reality, is about passing away; spring will gradually follow in its wake and revivify the whole vegetable creation to a renewed life. Shall our citizens be benefitted by its creative influences, or shall it be a source of destruction and death dealing to our first born, youth, manhood and old age? This is an important question and is for our City Fathers to answer in the affirmative or in the negative. Our town has never been noted for its cleanliness any more than its moral character, for, it we have six churches where the gospel is retailed every Sunday, we have about forty dram shops [bars or taverns], as an offset, and our school houses are in a prospective future. As a proof of our want of cleanliness, we have the accumulated filth of past years lying in our alleys; added to this, we have the large aggregations of the present winter. Alleys are filled up and vacant lots spread over with the manure which has been thrown from stables, and some of them in the business part of the city. Some of these manure heaps have

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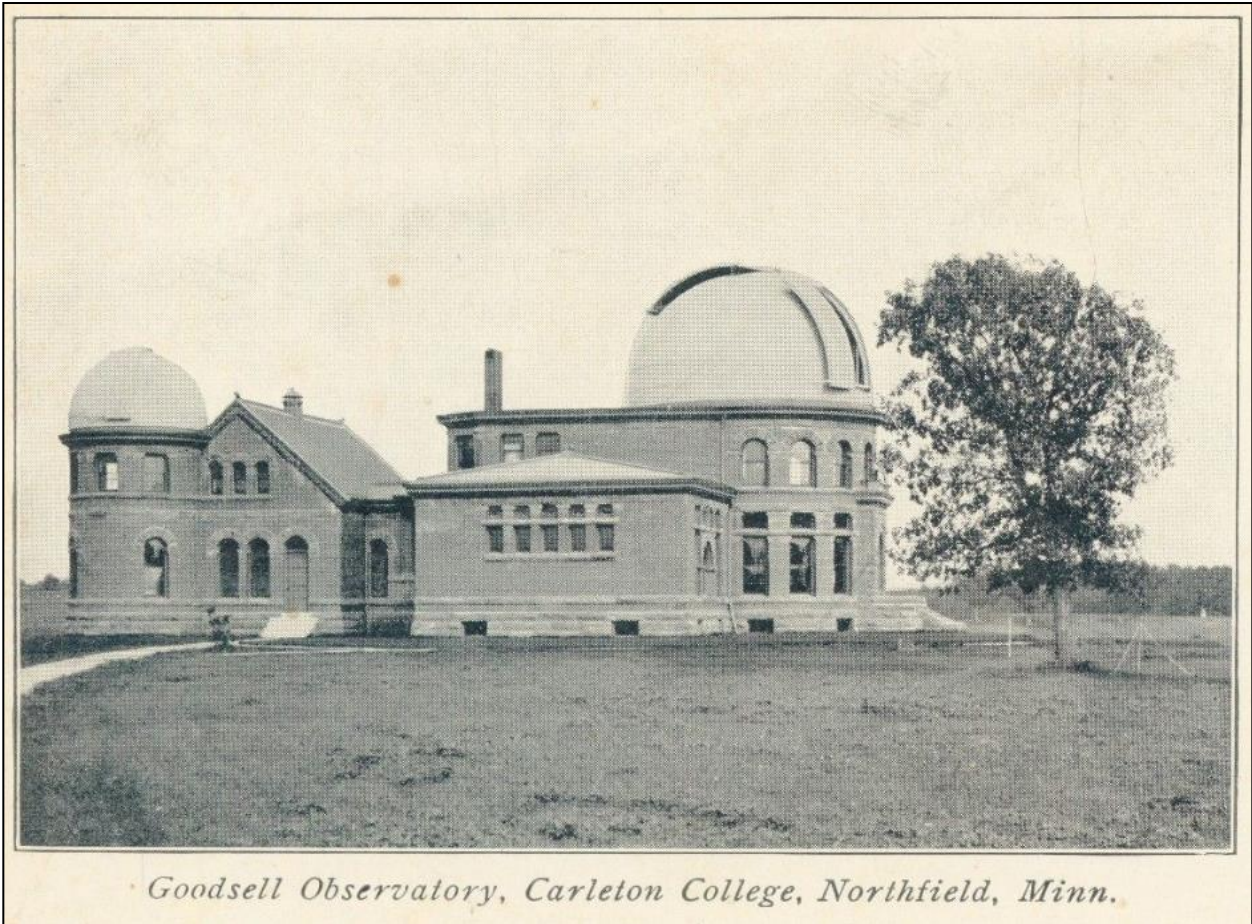
**News Nuggets
from the late 1800s**

become the grave of all kind of quadrupeds, including cats, hogs, and dogs, and in one instance, I am credibly informed, one of these heaps has become the last resting place of a horse. Refuse of all kinds is cast out upon our public streets, and there left to rot or be eaten by the numerous droves of hogs which infest our streets, in spite of our city laws and city Fathers. The side walks are occupied with salt barrels, old kerosene barrels, and empty dry goods boxes. The side walk on Third street is so filled up with this kind of trash that it is almost impossible to pass upon it. If two parties meet, one of them is necessitated to step on one side upon the accumulated filth which is thrown over the balustrade [railing on a porch or balcony] from the tenements above. The unwary traveler in passing along this section is fortunate if he does not become the recipient of the contents of an unmentionable utensil which would render him unsavory to refined nasal organs. If he should remonstrate [protest] against this carelessness, he is simply laughed at by the unseen operator above. This day I saw two ladies make the attempt to pass this place and after going along a few yards, stopped, consulted and concluded to "back out," and cross to the other side. I have seen two of the City Fathers themselves, more than once, swerve off to the left and take to the middle of the street rather than run the gauntlet. In wet weather, every one has to vacate this portion of the side walk on account of the drip from the balustrade above. It is impossible to avoid this drip as the stairs which are private property takes up two-thirds of the public side walk. Mr. Editor, these are some of the inconveniences we feel and suffer from, every day, and the persons who should protect the public from them, neglect to do so for reasons best known to themselves. But what we see and feel is not the worst, it is the "Death in the pot," to which we wish to call the attention of our citizens. All these piles of manure, ashes and filth of whatever kind and nature, obstruct the surface drainage of the city, and this surface drainage is the only kind we have, and causes stagnant water. The various dung piles absorb it like sponge; the heat of the sun decomposes it into a putrifying mass, and from this rotten filth we get the putrid exhalations of animal staleings [excrement], of animals themselves, and all their deteriorated articles of food. Now Mr. Editor, this very quintessence of rottenness becomes a portion of the air we breath [breathe]! How do you like it? Bah! The very detail of it must make you sick at stomach. But, Sir, we are not only compelled to breath it but to eat it and drink it. You can have oyster soup without oysters, and your fine Mocha can be flavored with these excrementitious soakings of pollution which is percolated through a few feet of loose soil, until it comes down to the magnesian limestone rock and there it follows along this impervious table until it pours itself into all your nicely drilled wells and you pump it up a clear solution of all this nastiness. Add to this, the soakings of all the private privies and you have the sum total of the cause of the Rochester fevers. For the benefit of all those who get their water from the river, the public slaughter house, instead of being placed below the town, is so situated that we get the benefit of the soakings of the blood and garbage of the slaughtered animals, and the hot south winds can become fully impregnated with the foul odors and answer the purpose of a death dealing sirocco [hot wind] upon our city. There is no doubt in the minds of scientific men that decaying offal and refuse vegetable matter, and unclean streets, will produce fatal diseases upon a people who neglect proper sanitary regulations. I have been led to express my views upon the sanitary condition of our city, in as forceable [forcible] language as I think the subject needs, in order that the public may be awakened to a fact which they give no thought. The gradual approach of the cholera to our shores makes it certain that our sea-board will be infested with this fatal disease by early summer; and from thence it will spread along all the main lines of travel. We cannot flatter ourselves that we are so far north that we shall not be affected by it. (*The Rochester Post*, Saturday, February 24, 1866, Page 8)

6. Brick Structure of the Month



NORTHFIELD OBSERVATORY



The Northfield Observatory was built on the campus of Carleton College, in Northfield, Minnesota. I have not been able to determine where the brick used in the buildings came from, but there were brickyards in Northfield. This observatory kept the official time for many institutions in Minnesota in the late 1800s and early 1900s, before the advent of standard time in 1918. An article in the *Minneapolis Tribune* on October 30, 1897, said "It is from this point that telegraph and railroad companies secure the correct time each day." I do not have much other information about the observatory, but I know many of the early colleges built them.