

Exploring Historical Brickmaking in Minnesota

Minnesota Bricks

October 2019

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Chaska Brick

Brickmaking in Chaska Minnesota



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Early Brick Advertisement from the Pembina/St. Vincent Area

1. What's New?

- I received an email from one of my good historical counterparts from the Pembina/St. Vincent area. In it was an advertisement for the Pembina/St. Vincent brickyard(s), which is shown on Page 2. Mr. Brawley, one of the men mentioned in the ad, was the first brickmaker in Minnesota (he started making brick in St. Paul in 1849)
- Check out my historical videos 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



**SHARE INFORMATION
& OLD
PHOTOGRAPHS!**

2. Photo of the Month



Brickyard Art

Working in brickyards was grueling. However, some workers still found time to play around with the clay. This is a clay sculpture of a frog made by a brickyard worker.

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

A NORTH DAKOTA FARMSTEAD

MINNESOTA HISTORY SEGMENT



I know this section is supposed to be about a Minnesota story, but in my recent travels, I came across a fascinating old farmstead near Niagara, North Dakota. Most of the original wooden buildings are still standing, which is rare for this day and age. The image above shows the farmstead from about a mile away. The house, one barn, a grain storage building, and several other buildings are still neatly arranged about the site.

My brain always starts imagining when I see a site like this. Who lived there? What was the family like? What was it like to live on the flat North Dakota prairie year round, especially in the winter. Can you imagine being isolated on a farm like this in the winter? If you are from North Dakota, you know how the wind can blow. I wonder how many of the children left the farm and how many of them stayed. It had to be a brutal life, but it also probably had its share of good times!

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There was a bay window on the front of the house, with a spectacular view to the south.

5. News Nuggets

Aurora Borealis. Last Tuesday night we had a most brilliant display of this beautiful phenomena. Great shafts of light shot up almost to the zenith, and after standing a few minutes would melt away, or assume all manner of strange and beautiful characters. This is a peculiarity of high northern latitudes, and a rich treat which we often enjoy in early winter. (*The Stillwater Messenger*, Tuesday, November 24, 1857, Page 3)

A few evenings since an ex-policeman met one of our most quiet and peaceable citizens on Main street, and without the least provocation whatever struck him with a slung-shot [sling-shot]. The blow not being very well aimed, the injury was not sufficient to prevent the assailed party from pursuing and knocking down his assailant with his cane. The next day the ex-policeman was arraigned before Justice McKinstry and fined one hundred dollars. Two other individuals were fined and committed for contempt of court during the progress of the trial. We are glad to see the evidence of back-bone manifested by Justice McKinstry – a continuance in the course he has commenced will do much towards “drying up” the rowdyism which has so long disgraced our city. We understand that some complaint is made in reference to this heavy fine, on the ground that the assault was made while the party was intoxicated to such an extent that he was unconscious of what he was about. We think differently in reference to the responsibility of drunken men. Some person must be responsible for their conduct – otherwise intoxication becomes a free license for all manner of crimes. The seller of intoxicating liquors is not made responsible by the laws for the misdeeds of the man intoxicated – the liquor which produces the intoxication cannot be made responsible. The intoxicated man, then, must be the responsible party; for there must be responsibility somewhere. Otherwise we would soon have a nice state of society. (*The Stillwater Messenger*, Tuesday, November 24, 1857, Page 3)

On Sunday evening of last week we had one of the most beautiful exhibitions of the solar phenomenon known as the “Sun dog,” or “mock sun,” we have ever witnessed. There appeared on either side of the sun, and on a parallel line with it, what appeared to be two solar orbs, from which ascended a bright bow, forming a complete arch over the sun – resembling the rainbow in every particular. We have never witnessed so brilliant a display of this truly beautiful phenomenon. (*The Stillwater Messenger*, Tuesday, December 1, 1857, Page 3)

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**News Nuggets
from the late 1800s**

On Thursday evening last, about 11 o'clock, an attempt was made to fire our city, by placing and igniting some [wood] shavings under the building on Main street occupied by the Eagle Saloon. The fire was discovered and arrested before making very great progress – otherwise, there is no telling what amount of property would have been destroyed. This portion of our city is most dangerously exposed to the ravages of fire. Almost every available foot of ground in the two blocks extending from the Minnesota House to Nelson's Avenue, and back to Second street, is covered over with buildings – some of them of a good class, but the majority of them are old and dilapidated, and we fear will sometime make food for a most disastrous conflagration [fire]. There is danger enough in this locality without the assistance of an incendiary's torch. We have counted more than a dozen stove-pipes protruding through the roofs and sides of buildings in these two blocks – some of them apparently in connection with the shingles. The culpable carelessness ought not to be permitted – the entire city is thereby endangered. The City Council should at once take the matter in hand. They should appoint an inspector, and make it his duty to inspect and report upon every imperfect and dangerous chimney, or flue, or incendiary stove-pipe, and then compel the owner to repair it without a delay. We call the attention of the city Council to this matter, fearing, if the subject is neglected, that we shall be called upon to chronicle some disastrous conflagration before the close of the present winter. (*The Stillwater Messenger*, Tuesday, December 1, 1857, Page 3)

Mr. Weigelet, a German of this city, has a large and beautiful flower garden now in successful operation, and is devoting his entire attention to the cultivation of all the rare specimens of native and imported flowers. Those of our citizens desiring beautiful house and garden plants, should secure them of Mr. Weigelet. (*The Stillwater Messenger*, Tuesday, September 22, 1857, Page 2)

The streets of St. Paul were lighted with gas last Saturday evening for the first time. Everything worked to a charm. That will do for an eight year old town, at the head of steamboat navigation on the Upper Mississippi. (*The Stillwater Messenger*, Tuesday, September 29, 1857, Page 2)

Mr. Wallace Rutherford, a farmer near this city, presented us with a lot of English white, or globe turnips, a few days since, which excel in size anything we have ever seen. We were curious enough to weigh one of them, which weighed thirteen and one-half pounds, and measured 30 inches in circumference! They are perfect monsters, and show the productiveness of our soil. The seed was sown on the 26th of July, and the turnips harvested on the 30th of October. (*The Stillwater Messenger*, Tuesday, November 3, 1857, Page 2)

We think we are safe in saying that not more than one-half, if indeed so much, of flour, corn and other bread stuffs, have been landed at our levee the present autumn that has usually been shipped to this place, showing that our agricultural resources are either being rapidly developed and built up, or that there will be a short supply for the winter. Our agricultural products of the last season greatly exceed those of any former year; but whether the excess is sufficient to bread our people, with the light foreign supply on hand, is a question of much doubt in our mind. We understand a considerable amount of flour and pork designed for this city was shipped from the south some days since, but navigation closing unexpectedly early, these supplies can only be brought up, if needed, upon the snow. Hundreds of barrels of flour would have been sent to this place from Illinois and Iowa, if the owners there could have paid freights. (*The Stillwater Messenger*, Tuesday, November 17, 1857, Page 2)

6. Brick Structure of the Month



FEMCO FARM SILOS BRECKENRIDGE, MINNESOTA



Every now and then I do an internet search on ACO silos, just to see if someone posts a new photograph of an ACO silo. I recently was rewarded by finding some new pictures of an ACO silo near Breckenridge, Minnesota. And to top it off, it was a double silo combination. There were not many of these made, likely due to the expense or needs of the farm itself. Small farmers probably only needed one. When you come across a double silo that is also labeled with the owner's name, that is an impressive find.

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FEMCO farm was named for Frederick E. Murphy, who became the president of the *Minneapolis Tribune* in 1921. Frederick's wife was from Wilkin County, Minnesota, and Frederick had always wanted to experiment in farming. In 1918, Frederick began buying farmland near Breckenridge, and eventually owned around 5,000 acres. He built several large complexes of farm buildings on his land. One of these was the complex where the twin ACO FEMCO Farm silos were located. As of October 2019, these silos were all that was left at this original farm site.

From information I have seen, a recent landowner asked the Minnesota Historical Society if they wanted to preserve the farm complex. The Society declined, saying the condition of the buildings was too poor. These buildings were located a stone's throw from the Red River, which is known for its almost yearly flooding. I assume the farm flooded many times over the years, making it hard to protect the original buildings. So the wooden buildings were torn down, but the twin silos were left standing...at least for now.

They are not in very good shape, as they were likely built on a shifting bed of clay fairly close to the river. I am glad I got the chance to photograph them before they are gone.

