

*Exploring Historical Brickmaking in Minnesota*

# Minnesota Bricks

February 2020

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## Chaska Brick

Brickmaking in Chaska Minnesota



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*(The Willmar Argus, Thursday, May 21, 1896, Page 1)*

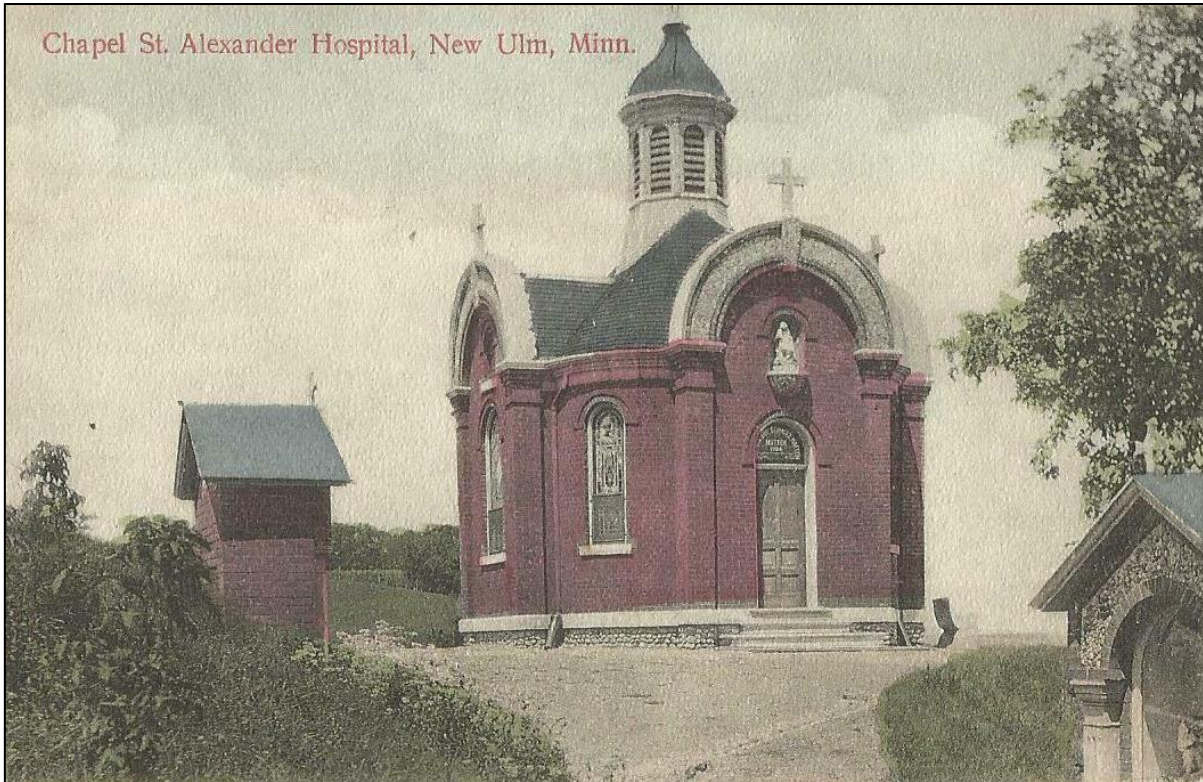
# 1. What's New?

- Last fall, I started working on a YouTube video about Charles J. Swanson, a brick manufacturer from Fridley, Minnesota. I have come across hundreds of brick makers, but he has always fascinated me. I am finally finishing up the video, and hope to have it posted in the next week.
- Check out my historical videos at [www.mnbricks.com/mn-historical-videos](http://www.mnbricks.com/mn-historical-videos)
- I heard from a YouTube viewer who appreciated the video I did of General Grant's visit to Minnesota. It is great to get feedback from people, it keeps me going!
- I am always looking for new topics or neat subjects. Feel free to contact me at [www.mnbricks.com](http://www.mnbricks.com)
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& OLD  
PHOTOGRAPHS!**

## 2. Photo of the Month



### **Hospital Chapel, New Ulm**

This chapel must have been built in the early 1900s on the hospital grounds in New Ulm, Minnesota. It has the distinctive reddish tone of New Ulm brick. It is a small building, but its architecture is impressive. The professional touches in brickwork back then, even for these small buildings, make them look like masterpieces.

# 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](http://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.

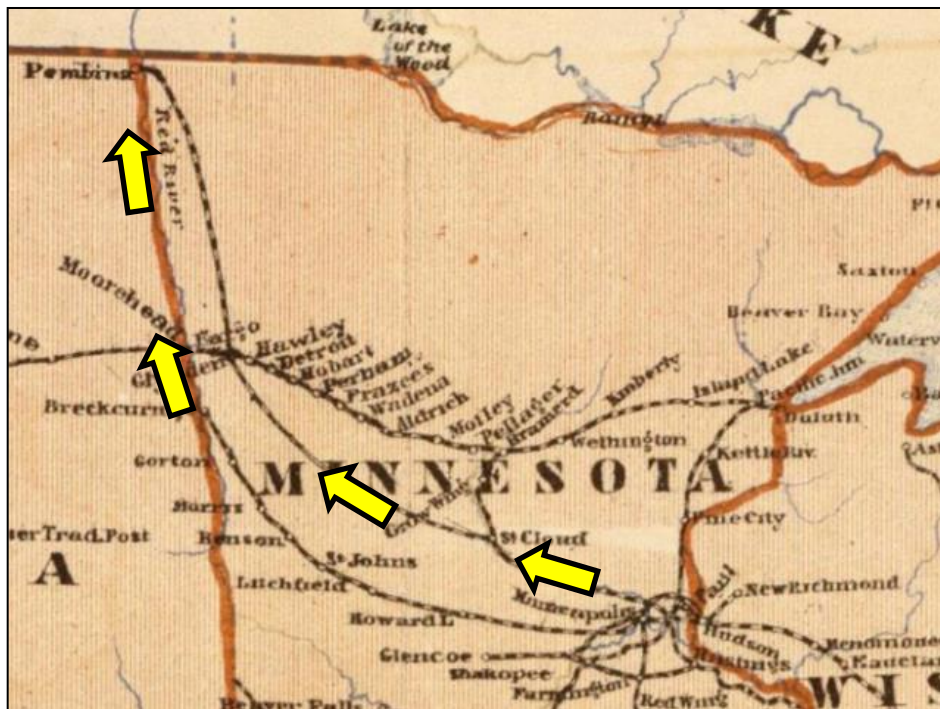




# 4. A Look Back

## PEMBINA EXCURSION PART 2

### MINNESOTA HISTORY SEGMENT



This story is a little long, but it is very descriptive and interesting. The article describes soldiers from Fort Snelling making a trip to Pembina, North Dakota, in 1849. This is the conclusion of the article. The first segment was published in the December 2019 newsletter.

[July 1849, in present day North Dakota] Here 11 of our horses broke away from picket and left. Fifteen men went in pursuit, who shot a buffalo, a part of which was taken into camp in a light wagon. At about 1 o'clock, P. M., we encamped, [and the] detachment returned with 10 horses (the 11th probably a dead loss to Uncle [Sam];) [...Then] about 4 miles of prairie, we crossed, almost swimming, the water 3 or 4 feet deep; one of the wagons failing, we launched a canoe which we had on the wagon, changed the load into that and were off again, to where land was visible. Two mules were sent back after the wagon and we all got into camp, after a march of 15 miles, on the bank of [the] Maple river. We noticed several mosquitoes that day.

Continued on the next page...

On the **18th** in the morning, a rope was extended across [the] Maple river [north of present day Fargo, ND], to aid in ferrying; and in 6 hours, we were encamped [on the] opposite [side], bag and baggage, with some loss of blood by mosquitoes. A booming thunder shower [kept us awake] last night and this morning. Here we caught [an] abundance of fish. On the **19th** we marched 15 miles and encamped near Rush river, having unloaded once to cross a slough and having crossed 4 miles of prairie covered with a foot and a half of water. We had a fine morning on the **20th**; the river had fallen 2 feet. We crossed in our ponton [pontoon] wagons and encamped [on the] opposite [side]. Having 2 days march across the prairies, before us, we had to wood up here, as the steamboats [workers] express it.

The **21st** took us 20 miles, weather bad, and [the] water much of the way [was] a foot deep, some of the teams petering. We encamped upon a woodless expanse of prairie. The **22d** fetched us up after 23 miles, at the first branch of [the] Goose river. That fine, warm day, we spent an hour in the agreeable work of ferrying over a slough. You were very kind Uncle [Sam], to furnish us these ponton [pontoon] wagons. On the **23d** we came in view of buffalo, pursued them, in small parties, killed a dozen or so and encamped near Salt lake, say 3 miles from timber; here we smoked some buffalo meat; it was a good day for mosquitoes. Our detail with 3 teams, brought in about four buffaloes. The whole herd numbered only about 100. Uncle [Sam], the stock in your great pasture, is getting thinned out. We marched that day about 8 miles. On the **24th**, we marched 15 miles and encamped expressly for the convenience of smoking buffalo meat.

We marched 22 miles on the **25th**, our teams growing weaker every day; but then we had a fine breeze to blow away the mosquitoes. Here we are, on the **26th**, after [a] 20 miles march, encamped on the west side of [the] Big Salt river, 341 miles from Sauk Rapids. Uncle's [Sams] mules are getting very feeble. Carrying fuel along, we marched 19 miles on the **27th**, crossing the Little Salt and Cart rivers, and encamped on a ridge of prairie, 2 miles from timber. We marched 20 miles on the **28th**, through rain, with a considerable mixture of mosquitoes. Poor hungry things! How would they have been saved from starvation but for this expedition of ours to the North? On the **27th**, we had a severe march, although but 4 miles and encamped on Poplar island. The rain started just after we did [,] and a Northwester, cold enough for January; and just after we got in camp, one of our mules up and died. Death appears to be after some of the rest them with a sharp stick. Poor mule! What does ancestry avail him now? "Sic transit Gloria Mundi" [thus passes the glory of the world], (although I think it happened on Sunday instead of Monday, but we must use our Latin when we have a chance.)

On the **30th** we marched, much of the way through water, 13 miles, and encamped in a dry spot, 5 miles from the woods, having to bring fuel on horseback. Here one of our teams knocked under and we left it and one wagon in charge of 3 men until we could send back for it from Pembina. Near camp, we found a dug-out canoe which was carefully distributed pro rata [equal portion] to the messes. If there was any trespass or damage done, Uncle [Sam], you must foot the bill. On the **31st**, we had a hard march to make 12 miles, though mud and water, which took us within 6 miles of Pembina, in good timber. The weather was fine again for a new country; and we met 3 or 4 carts which were going after the load of the wagon we left behind.

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On the **first day of August**, we crossed the Pembina river in canoes, leaving our wagons on the south side, and encamped on the prairie north side of the river, within 60 miles of the Selkirk settlement. About dusk, a drenching thunder storm came booming up, continuing 4 hours, [and it left] water in the tents 6 inches deep. The morning of August **2d** [2nd], found us, drenched as we were, wide awake; we had to move our tents to higher ground, about 150 yards, where we found the grazing scanty on account of its having been fed down by the beeves [beef cattle] of the Pembinese; but the sun was warm and kindly dried our blankets. Although the **3d** [3rd] of August opened up fine, we had rain and very respectable thunder from 4 to 5 o'clock in the afternoon and rain again in the night. Our guide left yesterday for the Selkirk settlement to buy provisions for us and our beasts.

We lay in camp on the **4th**, slight rain in the morning, but pleasant afterward. Last night the mosquitoes [mosquitoes] attacked our horses in de-tail and probably all over, making them break their lariats. The **5th** was a regular mosquito day. We had to build smudges [smoky fires] around the picket line, so save our horses from being carried off, many of them being thin enough to be easily translated... The mosquitoes were overwhelming. Thanks, Uncle [Sam], for those mosquito-bars! We had another "desperate mosquitoey" day on the **6th**. We practiced some at target-shooting and struck our tents to let the sun dry the ground under them and then pitched them again. On the **7th**, the mosquitoes bit so that we had to hold our horses until we could raise a breeze, before picketing. Uncle's [Sams] mountain howitzer [machine gun] was allowed to break [the] silence here, with a few discharges of grape and shells...

On the **8th**, we remained in camp, having hereafter one regular morning and evening gun fired. [The] Pembina river has fallen 9 feet since we crossed it. The **9th** was a rainy, dismal day. Fine again on the **10th**, the river still falling; plenty of fresh beef at \$4.00 per hundred; plenty of wild ducks, pigeons, cat-fish and other quadrupeds [4 legged animals]. The **11th** raining and wet with a heavy rain in the night with a few touches of thunder. The morning of the **12th** cloudy, the camp a perfect mud-hole, horses turned out to feed and caught up and tied at night to the picket line. The singing and the drum of the Indians, a band of Chippewas returning from a fight, with six Sioux scalps, assist the mosquitoes in making night hideous. The **13th** was a fine day.

On the **14th** we planted a post 1 1-2 miles from Pembina, to mark our boundary line with Great Britain, which bears [the] date August 14, 1849. John, if you even dare! - but no matter - you know enough to keep your own side of the hedge; don't he, Uncle [Sam]? On the **15th** our guide returned from Selkirk with provisions, except flour, which was not to be had, there being no wind to turn their flour mills, which, like our 4th of July orators and Congress men, go by wind, it seems. On the **16th**, the weather being fine we sent down the river again to get flour, if to be had, any how. The **17th** was a warm breezy day; but that night it rained and the thunder was No. 1; so we kept quiet on the **18th**, experiencing the same showery kind of weather through the **19th, 20th, and 21st** of August. On the **22d** more half-breed Indians [Metis] arrived from the buffalo plains with their winter's meat.

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The **23d** was a fine day, on which the Chippewas at Pembina held an election for Chief, but adjourned to the **24th**, when they chose a Chief and two sub-Chiefs. The Half-breeds [Metis] held a Council and were advised by Maj. Woods to organize and elect their rulers, before we left and not to interfere in any way with the Indians. Our teams were to-day all crossed over the Pembina river. On the **25th**, we remained quiet in camp. On the **26th**, Capt. Pope wishing to survey Red river &c. with Lieut. Gardiner and the 1st Serg. of Dragoons, left Pembina in a canoe 31 feet long, manned by 15 half-breeds and made Fort Gaines [Alabama], about 1200 miles by water, in 28 days.

On the **26th** of August, we left Pembina on our way back again made 8 miles, of our course through mud. We found some buffalo in our way back; but nothing of particular interest occurred, until we reached Sauk Rapids and encamped on the bank of the Mississippi river, on the **14th day of September**. Did we do that expedition up about right, Uncle? (*The Minnesota Pioneer*, St. Paul, Wednesday, March 13, 1850, Page 1)

# 5. News Nuggets

A gentleman from the Minnesota River, who was driving his horse at a furious rate along Pacific Avenue, and in turning the corner around the Willmar House, his sleigh upset, and dashed him out (into the snow we were going to say, but we had no snow). (*Willmar Republican*, Thursday, February 9, 1871, Page 3)

We noticed a few days ago a very large fish caught by John Bradson in Eagle Lake, about three miles from this place. It was a pickerel, and four feet in length. We do not know its exact weight, but would judge it to be about 40 pounds. (*Willmar Republican*, Thursday, February 9, 1871, Page 3)

We were visited by one of those pleasant cool breezes on Tuesday last, which makes a man's hair stand in all directions, and which keeps him constantly on the run after his hat, if he does not hold it on. (*Willmar Republican*, Thursday, February 9, 1871, Page 3)

We would also state that Willmar is located at the end of the First Division of the St. P. & P. R. R. where the company is making improvements which would be an ornament to any village in the way of round or Engine houses[,] Machine shops, boarding house &c. Their buildings number now eighteen besides their depot which is the largest on the road, size 30 by 160. Their grain house was built late last Fall 30 by 75, from which there has been shipped 45,000 bushels of wheat; besides what was shipped before the grain house was built; which is a proof of the rapid growth of this country when we take into consideration the time of the first settlement of this part (and we will here say the first breaking, about here was done one year ago last July.) The railroad company have also set out a Park of ten or twelve hundred maple trees, between the town and lake, which will add greatly to the beauty of the town, when grown. (*Willmar Republican*, Thursday, February 23, 1871, Page 3)

On our journey to Green Lake last week, we noticed that the leaves on the trees, in nearly all the forests which we passed through, were so badly eaten by some Insect, that they were in many places decaying and turning to a yellowish color. In some places the leaves seemed to be fully half destroyed. No one seems to know what the insect is; but fears are entertained that, whatever it is, when the leaves are destroyed, it will take to the wheat fields. (*Willmar Republican*, Tuesday, July 11, 1871, Page 3)

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**News Nuggets  
from the late 1800s**

We are in receipt of a huge old watermelon from the farm of J. W. Burdick Esq. of Green Lake. It measures in girth, 43 inches one way and 26 the other, and weighs 20 1/3 pounds. We are going to eat it. (*Willmar Republican*, Tuesday, August 22, 1871, Page 3)

There are over 100 wheat stacks in sight of Willmar. (*Willmar Republican*, Tuesday, August 22, 1871, Page 3)

Wild geese are getting plenty in the "Howling Wilderness." (*Willmar Republican*, Tuesday, September 19, 1871, Page 3)

The railroad track will be laid to Breckinridge [Breckenridge, MN] in a few days. It is said to be done already, within ten miles of that place. The cars will run there as soon as the necessary buildings are erected. We have no positive information as to the time that the company expect to run regular trains to that point, but our impression is, that within a month from this time the Red River of the north will be accessible to the outer world by way of the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad – Main line. (*Willmar Republican*, Tuesday, September 26, 1871, Page 3)

Night Watch. Now that there is but little reliance upon Insurance Companies it would be well for our citizens to take precautionary steps. We suggest that a night watch is one of the precautions that can be taken. Mr. A. C. Bush, a short time ago undertook to perform that duty in our village. He wanted \$9.00 per week as compensation. Our citizens contributed all the way from 15 to 50 cents until a promised fund of \$8.50 per week was raised. Mr. Bush watched one week, and then all he could get for his week's work, was about \$4.00. Of course he cannot spend his time for that, and if our citizens desire that their property should be watched, they must take some measures to secure the compensation. (*Willmar Republican*, Tuesday, September 17, 1871, Page 3)

The largest train ever run over the Main line of the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad, came into Willmar from the west, one day last week, containing 60 freight cars. (*Willmar Republican*, Tuesday, October 24, 1871, Page 3)

P. M. Jones of the Willmar House presented us, the other day, with a can of honey from the bee-hives of F. H. Harkins of Home, Brown county. It is of an excellent quality, clear as crystal, and as sweet as it could be made under the supervision of the Italian queen. (*Willmar Republican*, Tuesday, November 7, 1871, Page 2)

Flouring Mill. This is what we need in Willmar more than a court House or Jail. There are but two within 40 miles of Willmar. Farmers, travel 60 miles to get their milling done, and we understand that the mills of New London and Green Lake are nearly or quite a month behind on their custom work. (*Willmar Republican*, Tuesday, November 14, 1871, Page 3)

Farmers are busily engaged in sowing their grain; consequently it is a little dull in town for the time being. (*Willmar Republican*, Tuesday, April 23, 1872, Page 3)

# 6. Brick Structure of the Month



## **NORTHWESTERN BRICK & FIREPROOFING COMPANY FRIDLEY, MN**



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Charles J. Swanson founded the Northwestern Brick and Fireproofing Company in Fridley, Minnesota, around 1880. The complex, shown in the picture above, was on the western bank of the Mississippi River, and was massive. The complex was in use until around 1935. There is nothing left of the buildings today, the property is now used as a water treatment facility for the Twin Cities area.