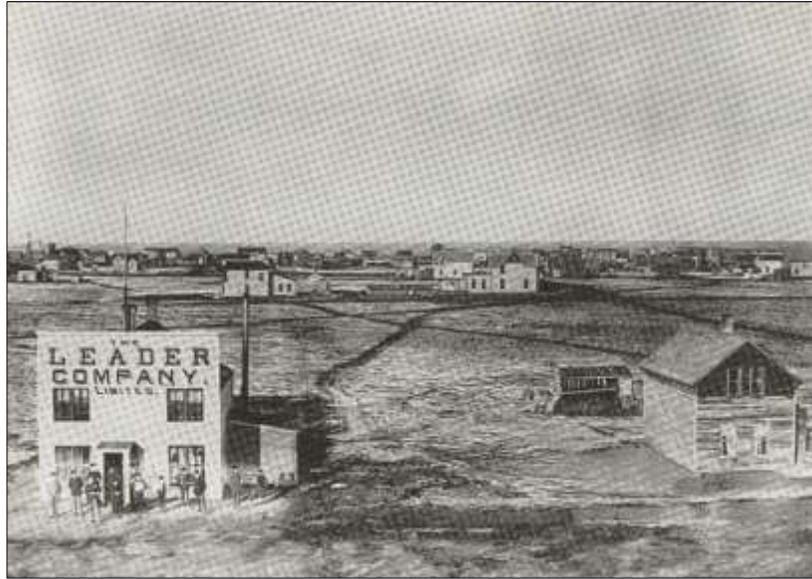
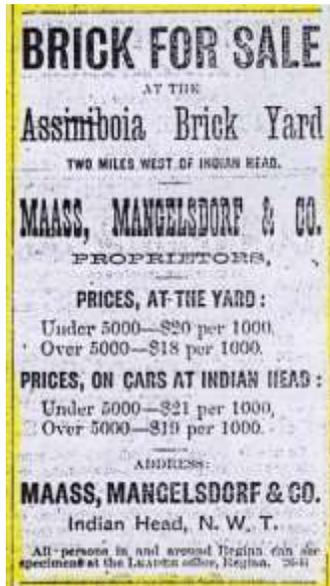


“Brickmaking On and Near the Bell Farm”



(Left) Newspaper advertisement from the “Regina Leader”: 23 Aug. 1883, p .4

(Right) The Leader Building, Regina – 1884,

where samples of the Assiniboia Brick Yard bricks were on display for potential buyers.

(Photo Credit: Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan: R-B1136)

When Major W.R. Bell and his contractor A.J. Osment set out from Winnipeg in May of 1882 to commence development of the massive farm at Indian Head, there was no place locally to purchase building materials. Therefore, they brought with them all of the supplies that they needed, except for the stones used to build his house, the round stone barn, and a few other structures. Those stones were collected by the workers off the 54,000 acres of farm land that Bell had secured from the federal government, the Canadian Pacific Railway, and the Hudson’s Bay Company.

About 25 of the 106 buildings that Osment’s massive construction crew erected during the first year included brick chimneys and fireplaces. Unless Osment’s crew included experienced brickmakers, the bricks for the buildings erected in 1882 were likely imported from Manitoba. While many of the Major’s supplies may have come from Winnipeg, it is probable that he bought the bricks from one of the new brick factories that had been established in a number of Manitoba towns along the main line of the CPR, thereby potentially reducing his freight costs. According to Hugh Henry’s *Manitoba Brickmakers*, before 1882, brick factories had been established at about a dozen communities:

- Emerson (1873)
- Grand Valley (1880)
- Morris (c.1876)
- Pilot Mound (1881)
- Portage La Prairie (1880)
- Rapid City (c. 1880)
- St. Boniface (c. 1880)
- St. James (1871)
- Selkirk (1880)
- Souris City (1881)
- Winnipeg (1871)

Therefore, Major Bell would probably have had no trouble securing the 15,000 bricks he needed to build over 30 chimneys and fireplaces in his farm cottages, as well as the blacksmith shop, and storehouses. No less than six chimneys were included in his own large two-storey stone farmhouse.



*Brick chimneys on the stone Bell Farmhouse in 1883 (L) and 1884; and a close-up view of one of the chimneys.
(Credit: Prov. Archives of Sask.: R-A4900(1); right: McCord Museum: William Notman Collection: V1386)*



*Brick chimneys were also incorporated into the frame and stone farm cottages built in 1882 and 1883.
(Credit: Prov. Archives of Sask.: GM-PH 406 (1 & 2))*



*Brick chimneys in the blacksmith shop (left) and one of the warehouses erected in 1882-83.
(Credit: McCord Museum: William Notman Collection: V1387)*

The reliance on bricks from afar was a concern for Major Bell, who, like any business person, was always looking to reduce costs in order to maximize profits. Therefore, when an opportunity came to establish a brick factory on or near the Farm, he entered into an agreement with two brickmakers to manufacture bricks at a site two miles west of Indian Head, where there was an ample supply of water and good quality clay, and ready access to the CPR tracks. According to an August 23, 1883 advertisement in the *Regina Leader*, Messrs. Maass and Mangelsdorf were the owners of the Assiniboia Brick Yard, which was situated along the railway, right in the middle of the Bell Farm.

The first reference to brickmaking on the Bell Farm occurs in a June 3, 1883 letter from Lieut. Gov. Edgar Dewdney to John A. Macdonald, the Prime Minister of Canada and Minister of the Interior:

“... brick is being made at Indian Head and yards are expected to be started here [Regina] shortly.” (Source: Prov. Archives of Sask.: Collection R70.)

Two brief reports in the *Regina Leader* document the successful production of bricks by Maass and Mangelsdorf. On page 4 of the July 5, 1883 edition of the *Leader*, the newspaper’s “own correspondent” reported:

“There is excellent clay for brick near and a large brick yard is in full blast whose owners have already sold 200,000 at \$20 a thousand.”

The brick factory, located two miles (3.2 km) west of Indian Head, employed a large crew during the summer months, when brickmaking was normally undertaken in the West during that era. By August 23rd, the *Leader*’s correspondent again reported on that summer’s work (p. 4):

“One of the most encouraging facts connected with the North-West is the success of the brick-making enterprise at Indian Head. Messrs. Maass & Mangelsdorf saw there was excellent clay for brick-making and came out to the Bell Farm and found it all they could desire. There is no lime in it, no alkali, and it makes first class bricks, compact, nothing porous (*sic*) about it. The bricks are white and superior to those made of Manitoba clay. They have already turned out 300,000 bricks and expect to turn out another 300,000 before the end of the year. They have 50 men working now and intend bringing out another gang next year.”

Without access to any round down-draft brick kilns to fire their product, Maass and Mangelsdorf would have followed the traditional practice employed by many small brickmaking concerns - constructing a scove kiln, similar to the one illustrated below. The kiln was made with unfired “green” bricks to create the overall structure. Once this was completed, it was covered with a mud plaster to keep the heat in. A series of fire boxes at the base were stoked with wood or coal 24 hours a day for at least two weeks to dry and then burn the bricks. When fully hardened, the resultant bricks varied in colour from pale-yellow to a dark red. The pale-yellow bricks were often referred to as “white”, as opposed to the common “red” bricks with which many people were familiar.

The brickmaking operation, with its billowing smoke, piles of cordwood, and stockpiles of fired bricks would have been yet one more impressive sight for travellers on the CPR main line, which ran less than 200 yards from the complex.



A nearly completed scove kiln in the USA, before being fired.

At this locale, even children were employed for this kind of work. (Credit: Frome Fables: The Lives and Loves of John Hancock: <http://fromefables.wordpress.com/2013/01/10/the-lives-and-loves-of-james-hancock/>)

It is quite possible that many of the bricks made at the Assiniboia Brick Yard found their way into buildings erected in Indian Head during the early to mid 1880s. At least one Indian Head building, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, was erected with those bricks in 1883:

"During the latter part of the summer a brick church was erected at the corner of Eden and Boyle Streets. . . . Mr. Osment erected the church, the brick being made on a farm nearby." (Source: "A Historical Sketch of St. Andrew's Church, Indian Head", 1930, by Rev. R.J. McDonald, p. 2 – Prov. Archives of Sask.: Sask. Historical Society File 220)



*St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Indian Head, photo c.1905
(Credit: Prov. Archives of Sask: R-A 4907)*

How long the Assiniboia Brick Yard remained operational has not yet been determined, however, the farm land west of town, where the bricks were probably made, is littered with remnants of broken bricks. These bricks are irregular in shape, suggesting production using hand-moulded technology rather than being pressed on one of the brickmaking machines then available on the market. The indentation, called a frog, contains none of the manufacturer's identification marks found at some other prairie brick plant sites, such as Virden, Manitoba.

During 1883 the bricks made at the Assiniboia Brick Yard were also advertised for sale in the *Regina Leader*; however, no buyers have been identified, nor have any other specific buildings made in whole or in part with bricks from the Assiniboia Brick Yard been located. As none of the bricks from St. Andrew's Church have survived, we still do not really know with absolute certainty what those bricks looked like.

On March 3, 1884, a proposal was put forward by Sam Payne to make more bricks at Indian Head. Payne was one of the brickmakers who had previously been employed by Maass and Mangelsdorf. Information on this initiative comes from a letter in the correspondence records of Prime Minister John A. Macdonald at Library and Archives Canada. The proposal was forwarded to Major Bell by Robert Crawford, who was an Indian Head merchant and possibly the same person by that name who is listed as one of the initial Bell Farm investors. How this private letter between Bell and Crawford ended up in Macdonald's papers remains a mystery.

"Indian Head, NWT: 3 March 1884

Dear Major:

Sam Payne, the man who last run the brick yard at Indian Head wishes to know if you intend running the brick yard this coming summer. As, if you intend doing so he would like to take the contract for making and burning the brick. As it may be some little time before you return will you kindly drop me a note about it & I will let him know."

No records have been found to confirm that Payne or anyone else made bricks at the Bell Farm in 1884, or that Maass and Mangelsdorf were again involved with this enterprise. Indeed, where they came from and where they went is yet another mystery that remains to be solved. However, as there was a great need for bricks by local contractors in the growing town and region, it seems likely that more bricks would have been manufactured in the summer of 1884.

The North-West Rebellion of 1885 dominated all aspects of life in southern and central Saskatchewan during the spring and summer of that year. Farmers, including Major Bell, had insufficient time and resources to plant their crops and dabble with less important issues, like new construction and brickmaking. Hence, it is not surprising that there are no references to making bricks at Indian Head in 1885

The next year or two would have been a better time for re-activating the Indian Head brickmaking industry; however, Major Bell was consumed with reorganization of the Qu'Appelle Valley Farming Company, and selling off mayor portions of the Bell Farm lands to Lord Brassey, and to the federal government for establishment of an Experimental Farm. Perhaps the Major would have been receptive for another private business proposal, wherein he would have to do virtually no work, but there is no indication that any was being considered. Maintaining the financial solvency of the Bell Farm was his main preoccupation throughout the last half of that decade, and brickmaking would only have become a concern for him if it would lead to a healthy financial return for him or the Bell Farm. It is also possible that the glowing reports of the clay quality at the Assiniboia Brick Yard site were overly optimistic, and that the resource was depleted in 1883 or 1884.

Hence, in spite of those positive reports of the Assiniboia Brick Yard's operations in 1883, it would be another decade before any further reference to brick production at Indian Head was recorded. In the *Qu'Appelle Progress* for May 3, 1894, we read:

"Indian Head. Bricks are to be manufactured here this summer."

However, it would appear that the various 1890s references to brickmaking in the Indian Head region were not for work at the Assiniboia Brick Yard site, but rather, to a brickyard established by A.J. Osment and later operated by Clem Pelletier (Peltier) at the east end of Katepwa Lake, about 13 miles (21 km) north of Indian Head, as noted in the following ten newspaper articles:

October 11, 1894, *Qu'Appelle Progress*:

"Indian Head. "Clem Peltier finished burning the last kiln at the brick yard last Friday, and will have 300,000 bricks wherewith to commence next season's business. The industry, while not productive of marked profit this season, proved sufficiently encouraging to warrant extended operations next year."

June 13, 1895, *Qu'Appelle Progress*:

"...Katepwe has already extensive fisheries, a brickyard," and "Mr. Pelletier has been making brick for the past few weeks, but not so extensively as he intends later on."

March 28, 1896, *Qu'Appelle Vidette*:

"Mr. Langlois is a brother-in law of Mr. C. Pelletier of Katepwa and proposes entering into partnership with him in the manufacture of brick etc."

"Mr. A.J. Osment has quite a force of men at work putting things in shape for his brick yard."

July 30, 1896, *Qu'Appelle Vidette*:

"Mr. Osment successfully completed the burning of his first kiln of brick last week and claims he will be able to supply a better and larger brick than any heretofore placed on the local markets."

October 8, 1896 *Qu'Appelle Vidette*:

"Mr. A.J. Osment is burning another kiln of brick."

October 22, 1896 *Qu'Appelle Vidette*

An advertisement for bricks by Osment.

December 3, 1896, *Qu'Appelle Vidette*:

“Mr. A.J. Osment’s brick yard turned out some 400,000 bricks this season, quantities of which were sent to Grenfell and Qu’Appelle Station. Mr. Osment has enough on hand to start on his new hotel building next spring.”

September 21, 1899, *Qu'Appelle Progress*:

“On Saturday afternoon we called on Mr. Osment at his brickyard and were shown the machinery and a number of newly made bricks by the proprietor. Mr. Osment is perfectly satisfied that the soil is well adapted for brickmaking and hopes to turn out a large quantity of first-class brick next year. The success of such an industry means a great deal for this part of the valley and Mr. Osment is just such a man as will make it a success.”

November 9, 1899, *Qu'Appelle Progress*:

“Mr. A.J. Osment is taking advantage of the extremely fine weather to get his brick yard in complete readiness for operations as early as possible next spring.”

February 22, 1900, *Qu'Appelle Progress*:

“ Mr. Grigg is still busy hauling bricks from Katepwa for his new house which will be built this coming summer, and when finished will certainly be a commodious looking house, possessing all modern conveniences.”

It appears that brickmaking in the Indian Head – Katepwa area permanently ended shortly after the turn of the 20th century. By that time, A.J. Osment had sold his interests in the brickyard to Clem Peltier, and Peltier, who had been in the Qu’Appelle Valley since the mid 1870s, was likely getting too old to pursue this labor-intensive business.

Most of those Katepwa bricks were reportedly transported to Indian Head and used in the construction of many of the buff coloured brick houses, business blocks and public buildings throughout the community. According to local newspapers of the day, and later history books, many bricks from this plant were also sold and transported throughout the region. Neither the Assiniboia Brick Yard, nor the Osment and Pelletier operations are known to have included any manufacturers’ marks.

Inspecting the Assiniboia Brick Yard site:

Following are photographs and information on brickmaking and on the bricks found at the presumed site of the Assiniboia Brick Yard, about two miles west of Indian Head. *(All photos taken on May 13, 2013 by Frank Korvemaker, unless otherwise noted.)*



Samples of hand-moulded bricks found at the Assiniboia Brick Yard site west of Indian Head. (L-R) Kurt MacPherson, Tim Keslering and Linda Kort examine the operation.

Hand-moulded Bricks were generally made in individual wooden hand moulds. These moulds were relatively inexpensive to manufacture, and did not require importation of brickmaking machinery from eastern Canada or the United States.



A display of wooden hand moulds at Fort Edmonton Park, Edmonton, Alberta. Each hand mould could produce five bricks at a time.



Hand-mould bricks found at the Assiniboia Brick Yard site, with a shallow frog (left) and deep frog impressed into the brick.



*Example of a machine-pressed brick manufactured at the Virden Brick & Tile Company, Manitoba between 1905 and 1915, with the company /community name impressed into the base of a deep frog. **VIRDEN** bricks are found in historic buildings throughout southern Saskatchewan.*

Extruded Brick are made by forcing clay through a rectangular opening of a brickmaking machine, and then cutting the resulting brick ribbon with wires attached to a frame, similar to the process for cutting eggs with a multiple wire cutter, but on a much larger scale. The wire cutting process leaves distinctive curved marks called “striations”. Extruded bricks found at several locations on the Bell Farm were probably manufactured in Manitoba and brought to Indian Head by Major Bell in 1882-83 or later by train.



An extruded brick, showing the curved striation marks confirm that the brick was wire cut. The rectangular holes reduce the brick weight and help hold the bricks to the mortar in a manner similar to the frogs in other types of bricks.

Although further historical and archaeological research is required to verify the full extent and original layout of the Assiniboia Brick Yard site, its presence close to the Canadian Pacific Railway, along a ready water source, and next to a supply of clay suggest that this is the correct location for this brick yard.

For more information on brick manufacturing in Saskatchewan, visit the Claybank Brick Plant National Historic Site of Canada, located an hour's drive southwest of Regina, or check out their website, at:

<https://claybankbrick.ca/>

Compiled by:

Frank Korvemaker, M.S.M., S.A.A. (Hon.)

Ret'd Archivist / Construction Historian

59 Compton Road

Regina, Saskatchewan, S4S 2Y2

Tel: (306) 586-1405 E-Mail: frank@korvemaker.ca

and

Hon. Corporate Archivist for the Saskatchewan Association of Architects

For information on the Association: <http://saskarchitects.com/>

Revised: 4 February 2020