

THE HISTORY OF BRICK MAKING IN AND AROUND VANCOUVER

The Hudson's Bay Company were the first to make brick in Vancouver, some time before 1846. Their yard was located on the low land west of the city, not far from the present railroad passenger station. Frank DuPuis told me that he often saw the old pits as he went that way to the old Petran place to play. This was a soft mud yard, as were all the early yards here and in the Portland area.

The clay in this locality is located in shallow deposits on the surface, so when one wanted to make brick in those early days, he would select the clay as near the sight on which the brick were to be used as possible and start the yard. A level drying ground was prepared with a kiln ground on one side and soak pits on the other. These pits were about four feet deep and large enough to hold clay for 8000 brick—a day's run. The mill was an upright box about $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet square in the center of which was a wooden shaft with knives for pugging the clay. The shaft was turned by a sweep on the end of which was hitched a horse. Three of these pits and mills were usually used by one crew consisting of one moulder, one temperer, two off-bearers and one pit man who usually had a horse and dump cart, a total of five men and two horses. This crew would place on the drying yard 8000 brick, the quality depending on the moulder and the skill of the crew. The moulder stood in a hole dug beside a table on which a bar of plastic clay was squeezed from the mill by the pony as he traveled round and round. The moulder with his two hands would cut off a block of clay large enough for a brick. This he would throw into a sanded mould holding six brick. After filling the mould he would strike off the surplus clay and the mould would be taken away by the off-bearer who dumped them on the drying yard. I saw one man, Victor Coiteux, mould 1,200,000 brick in one Summer, i.e., 150 days. He probably averaged moulding 300,000 brick each year for more than twenty-five years—a very remarkable man.

The brick were placed on the yard in rows and after a few hours of sun they were turned up and bobbed, i.e., hit with a board to help smooth them up a bit. After drying a day or so, depending on the weather, they were hacked up on boards for further drying. It was not necessary to hack them during the fine weather of July and August and they were usually wheeled direct from the yard to

the scove kiln. The setting was the same as in the scove kilns today. Wood was used for fuel and from ten to fourteen days were required for a good burn.

Nine or ten soft-mud yards have been in operation in and around Vancouver at different times. The one at 15th and Main Streets started in 1871 by L. M. Hidden operated continuously until 1928, when it was moved to 27th and Kauffman Avenue. For many years it was operated as a hand yard. The brick were used in the early Vancouver buildings, also in Portland and Astoria and, after the Seattle fire, 900,000 were shipped to Tacoma to build the Tacoma Hotel.

About 1900, this hand yard was changed by installing a Potts soft-mud machine, the brick being dried on pallets in the open yard. The founder retired at this time and the business was carried on by his two sons Foster and Oliver Hidden under the firm name of Hidden Brothers until 1929, when the yard was moved to its new location by Foster Hidden, to be known as Hidden Brick Company, his brother having retired from the business.

There have been a number of brick factories outside of the city in Clark County, using the stiff-mud, wire-cut process. The one at Image, five miles east of Vancouver, was burned a few years ago and has not been rebuilt. The clay from this pit is used by Gladding McBean in their Portland sewer pipe plant.

R. B. Muffatt operates a brick and tile plant near Ridgefield, Washington. They have a fine bed of clay.

The Molyneux brick yard, a small wire cut plant operated for a few years on Salmon Creek about six miles North of Vancouver.

The Farger Lake plant located about 26 miles northeast of Vancouver, have been producing a light-colored wire cut brick.

The Portland area for many years was supplied with soft-mud, hand-made brick, some of the yards employing six or more moulders; later, this was changed to machine made, soft-mud brick. Now they have all passed out of existence and the wire-cut brick has taken its place.

There is much to say for the soft-mud brick produced in this locality. They have a beautiful, cherry-red color which is mellowed to a softer tone by age, as shown by St. James Cathedral in Vancouver.

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