

Clay Bricks

Over 12,000 years ago, a glacier covered the Capital Region River Valley Park. Glacial Lake Edmonton was formed as the glacier melted and the drainage of the North Saskatchewan River was blocked by ice near Fort Saskatchewan. Thin, dark clay-rich bands were deposited on the bottom of the lake during the winters when the lake was covered with ice. Glacial Lake Edmonton clays found in the Capital Region River Valley Park have been used locally to make textured, wire-cut bricks. Sewer tile, flue tile and hollow building tile have also been produced from these clays. Different colored clays from different areas in Alberta (for example, glacial lake clays from Athabasca) are used to vary the color of bricks and other clay products.

15 brick-making plants have operated within the region since the first plant opened in 1881. Only one plant is functioning today. The largest brickyard in northern Alberta, the Acme Brick Co. Ltd., started in 1907 and is still located today at 137th Avenue and 170th Street.

In 1881, William Humberstone started Edmonton's first brick making operation. The Humberstone Brick and Coal Company fired bricks made from river terrace clay with the coal that it mined just east of the present Edmonton Convention Centre.

In 1892, J.B. Little arrived in Edmonton after working on the Banff Springs Hotel; he purchased four hectares of land and began making bricks. The J.B. Little and Sons Brickyard operated in present-day Riverdale.

In 1898, Frank and John Pollard abandoned their trip to the Klondike during a stop in Edmonton. They saw opportunity in the local clays, and started making bricks by hand on the south side of the river, just below today's High Level Bridge. Bricks fired at Pollard Brothers were used in the construction of many of the older buildings at the University of Alberta. Brick rubble can still be seen west of the first High Level Bridge pier in the lowest river terrace bank.

P. (Pete) Anderson and Co. opened a brickyard in Cloverdale in 1901, operating on the river flats between the current location of the Muttart Conservatory and the south end of the Low Level Bridge. Fire completely destroyed the building and machinery in 1929.

Scotland's Charles Sandison arrived in Edmonton in 1878 and opened the Sandison Brickyard in 1902 at the present site of the Mayfair Golf and Country Club. He relocated the brickyard to the river flats at the current location of the Victoria Golf Course (the west end of the Groat Flats, below 122nd Street). The major dip in the seventh fairway is a remnant of his clay quarrying operation. Wesley Methodist Church in Oliver is made with bricks from his



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operation, as were buildings throughout the city including the former Sandison Block at 99th Street and Jasper Avenue.

For delivery purposes, a road was built that ran up the bank from the Sandison Brickyard, and emerged at what is now 121st Street. The gravel road became known as Brickyard Road. Look closely and one can still see traces of Brickyard Road visible in the bank above the golf course.

Charles Sandison died in 1905 after an accident while at work; his estate sold the brickyard and it was renamed the Edmonton Brick Co. Ltd. This company continued making a pressed brick until 1914.

Clay is a raw engineering material that was important in the early development of the city of Edmonton. The Edmonton brick was available locally and the price was right; however it was known to be softer than many other bricks. As transportation and hauling improved, better quality brick was available from elsewhere in the province. Brickyards in the Capital Region River Valley Park gradually lost business and closed.

Sources

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