

# Doukhobor Industry Is But History



THIS ANCIENT STEAM TRACTOR was the source of power for the operation of the brick factory at Grand Forks. Author Bill Rozinkin clambered aboard to study the rusted machinery. The old engine has been left to rust right on the spot where it worked for so many years.



IDEAL BRICK CLAY was found on the property adjacent to the old brick factory, and thousands of cubic yards were removed and processed over the years. Now overgrown with hay and littered with debris, the depression, about eight feet in length, is still easily discernable to the naked eye.

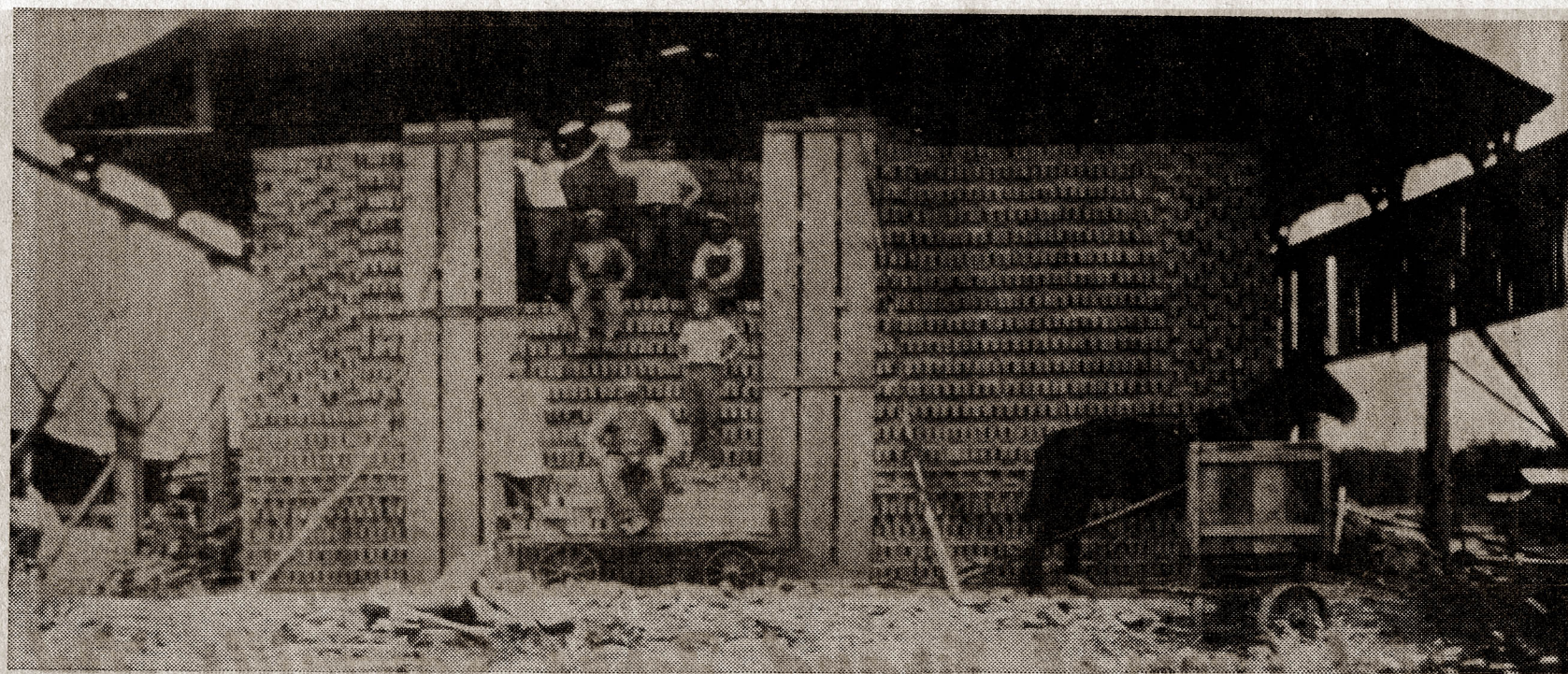


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ANCIENT MACHINERY used for mixing clay to the proper consistency and brick molding still rests in the ruins of the old factory near Grand Forks. In spite of its long disuse it could be readied for active production again after an overhaul. The old building is fast falling into ruin around it.



THOUSANDS OF BRICKS were produced by the old factory when in full operation. This old photograph shows some of the workers seated atop bricks in the kiln under the protecting roof

of the factory. Many buildings in the Kootenays were constructed of brick from the Grand Forks factory, and many of them were used by Cominco.

## Brick Plant Launched in 1909

By W. M. ROZINKIN

Early in 1909, Peter Lordly Verigin, leader of the Doukhobors, purchased over 4000 acres of land for the communities in the Grand Forks area, including a ranch owned by the Coryell family. On this ranch was a horse-powered clay mixer, a small hand-operated brick molding machine and a promising clay pit.

Located three miles west of Grand Forks, the small operation was put to immediate use and soon reached its capacity as demands grew for quality brick.

The following year production was increased with the installation of new steam-powered machinery and equipment that manufactured bricks until 1932, supplying both employment and materials.

Annual production at times reached close to three million bricks with a large percentage finding a ready market in the Cominco smelter at Trail. The Doukhobor organization itself, the Christian Community of Universal Brotherhood, was also a heavy consumer. Its building programs included brick in the construction of villages, warehouses, canning and preserving factories, retail stores, packing sheds, community public schools for which the government supplied English language teachers, community halls and other buildings. There are also commercial buildings in Grand Forks and Nelson that were built with these bricks.

Not all the CC of UB brick came from Grand Forks. Another plant was started in Winlaw in Slokan Valley in 1916, besides the two similar operations

maintained by the organization in Saskatchewan, where its first brick plant was built in 1904 at Verigin and the second at Yorkton, a couple of years later.

Mike W. Rozinkin of Salmo worked many years at the brick trade and was familiar with the operations. His father, William W. Rozinkin, was in charge of the kiln firing in the two prairie plants previous to moving to British Columbia. Here he looked after the Grand Forks plant from 1909 to 1927. In recalling the history and work of this plant, Mr. Rozinkin named many workers that spent considerable time at the brick trade.

There was Eli A. Gretchin, who looked after the clay-mixer, with Alec M. Negraff, George F. Semionoff and Mike J. Demoskoff on the "Martin" style power-driven brick machine. The steam engine that turned this 11,000-lb. "modern" machine was worked by Alec Wishoff. Raw bricks were piled on racks by John A. Gretchin, John Varabioff and Sam A. Gretchin. Philip J. Danshin transported air-dried brick to the kiln. Here Alec W. Semionoff, John Pereversoff, John J. Demoskoff and Mike W. Rozinkin stacked it in special kiln form. The firing operation of the kiln was maintained by four men, Koozma W. Kalesnikoff, Peter J. Danshin, William Maloff and Nick Jmaeff. In the Winlaw plant (here a nearby village was named Claybrick) it was William Salekin and Trofim Makortoff. There were also others who worked in these plants over the many years of operation.

The clay pit that fed the brick making machine was worked by four men whose job was to load horse-drawn dump cars with clay for the feeder who administered the exact measures of clay, sand and water required for the mixture. As clay is too dense, sand was mixed with it to give it a porous texture. This permitted the brick to dry without cracking or warping as moisture escaped more easily and evenly during the firing.

Fine screened sand was also used to sand or "dust" the molds previous to their filling, so the

clay mass would not stick to them. This was accomplished by a mold-sanding machine. The sand was dried in a sand-drier housed in a nearby 12 foot by 14 foot building. Alongside the "Martin" were mold washing facilities where they were scrubbed clean to keep the excess clay from building up inside.

Clay was deposited in the hopper of a side mixer from where it passed into a revolving mass feeder of the brick machine. As the machine turned, it continuously mixed the clay mass into an even consistency, and filled the six-brick molds with enormous pressure to ensure a dense, compact brick with well defined corners and edges. This also eliminated soft centres and stratified texture when fired. The full mold was then ejected onto the delivery table where an attendant levelled it with a striking knife. The third man emptied the molds (the formed clay was now hard enough to maintain its shape) on wooden pallettes that were placed on a 300-foot conveyor leading to the drying shed. With this repeat operation up to 24,000 bricks were produced daily.

These compressed, raw bricks were taken off the conveyor, loaded on special wheelbarrows and distributed inside the drying shed for piling on racks in a manner that allowed maximum ventilation. Each row contained 3000 bricks that were still kept on the pallettes. During the drying period it was necessary to turn over each fragile brick by hand for uniform drying. Under favorable summer conditions this took eight days, other times up to two weeks and over.

Brick color and quality depend on the amount of iron oxide in the natural clay and the intensity of temperature it is subjected to. The clay's oxide content also may vary from one region to another. The firing stage of the operation brings out this color as it renders the six-pound raw brick to the four-pound finished product.

From the bone-dry rows, two men loaded horse-drawn spring carts and transported them to the kiln shed. Here two men passed the bricks while two

others piled with specified space between each brick to allow free circulation of heat during firing. At the bottom they were stacked to form fire boxes or ovens (the Russian term was "pechi") that measured 16 inches wide tapering to four feet high and stretched the full width of the pile. These ovens were 16 inches apart and were usually 10 in number. Special metal doors were installed to control the heat during the firing and the cooling. This was just as important as the quality of ingredients that the good product demands.

A ten-oven kiln took 10 days to prepare. It contained about 200,000 bricks and had to be enclosed by a shell of four walls and roof, roughly constructed from sub-grade bricks, discards and clay. This construction contained the heat around the whole pile besides protecting it from the weather.

All this preparation was done in the kiln shed that was equipped with a special roof constructed on rails. After the ovens were lit and the temperature rose, the wooden roof was pulled away to the side.

The firing lasted for eight days. Four men, two on each 12-hour shift, worked on this operation, using from 70 to 80 cords of wood.

When the burning ceased, great care had to be exercised as the kiln had to be cooled systematically.

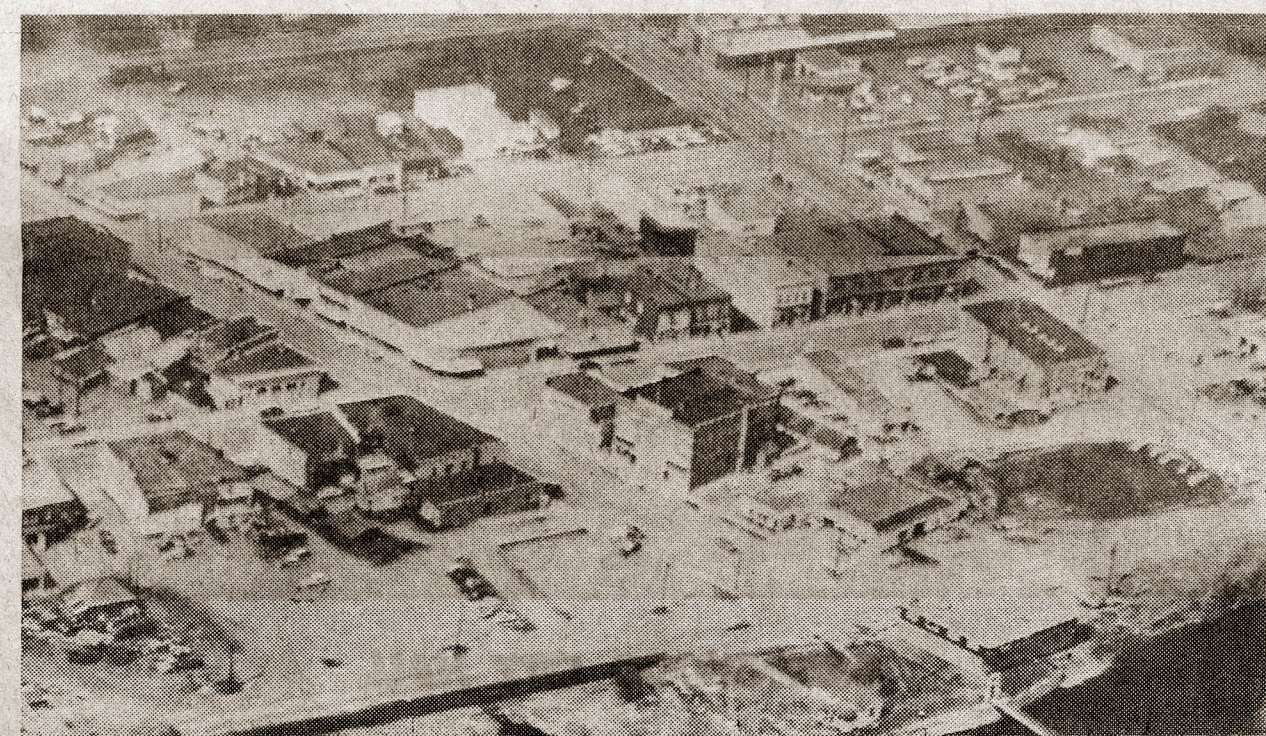
In 1928, a year after Peter Chistiakov Verigin assumed the executive post of the CC of UB, the whole plant was reorganized and the improved production continued for years after.

Nick D. Arishenkoff of Grand Forks recalled the final years when production reached close to three million bricks annually. After reaching this peak, in 1932, the economical depression of the nation forced the plant to drop to an annual production of a million bricks. As unsold bricks had to be stored, production was halted.

In 1938, during the bankruptcy liquidation of the CC of UB moveable assets, the plant was forced into abandonment and finally scrapped.

Indeed, an industry lost.

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