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BRICK MAKING IN SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY

By Gladys R. Boynton

Sources of Information:

California State Mining Bureau. Preliminary Report No. 7, 1920
Bulletin No. 99, 1928
Stockton Album, by V. Covert Martin.

Records kept by the following people:-

Nell Locke, whose grandfather, Dr. Dean Jewett Locke, founded Lockeford.
Alice Perry, whose family have lived near Clements for several generations.
Gertrude Kettelman, granddaughter-in-law of David H. Kettelman who came to Lodi in 1859.
William J. Lange, who is now living in the B. F. Langford home which was built in 1856.
Earle Williams of Tracy, who has done much research in Corral Hollow.
John C. Boggs and J. A. Simpson of California Clay Products, Stockton, gave information about brick making today.

In the 1950's many Americans who came to California in the gold rush were deciding to stay and make their homes here. Especially was this true in the fertile farming country of what was to become San Joaquin County.

One of the first things they had to consider was of what material to build homes for their families. There was no nearby lumber, and lack of transportation made it expensive and hard to get. There were no rocks available in this alluvial soil. The ever present danger of fire made fire-proof material preferable.

Then some one discovered that in many places close beneath the top soil, or sometimes exposed, was a clay which, when burned, would easily harden into red brick.

In the California State Mining Bureau, Bulletin 99, published in 1928, it is stated:- "Common clays suitable for the manufacture of brick are abundant in San Joaquin County" ---- "A clay to be used for the manufacture of common brick should burn red, if possible, since there is then more possibility of its burning dense at a comparatively low temperature, and thus avoiding the use of too much fuel. Best results are obtained with clays carrying 5-7% of ferric oxide". This is the iron oxide which causes bricks to be red after being kilned. Only common brick clay is found in San Joaquin County.

But there were no mining books to help our pioneers. They evidently just experimented and found out. Possibly a brick maker from the East discovered the clay.

In many places all around the county from the 1950's on for some thirty odd years it became common practice to make bricks close to where buildings were to be erected. When a usable clay was found, pits were dug, bricks were crudely fired until enough were made to build a kiln, and manufacturing began. There were plenty of trees around to be cut and used for fuel. The bricks were formed in molds made of wood. I recently acquired an old brick made in Lodi, where the city presently is, one hundred ten years ago and the imprint of the rough wood of the mold can plainly be seen on one side of it.

The earliest brick yard of which we have any record was that of J. Doak and Company, situated in the eastern part of Stockton in 1850. Bricks were made there to build a bank in Stockton which failed to be erected because of financial troubles. So the brick was sold in San Francisco.

The first brick used for construction in Stockton was shipped around the Horn from Massachusetts and sold to Captain Charles Weber to build a chimney for his home on Weber Point in 1851.

In 1854 Erastus S. Holden erected a two story brick building on the corner of Main and El Dorado Streets to house the Holden Drug Store. It was undoubtedly made of local brick as there were several brick yards in Stockton at that time. The building was demolished in 1967 during a redevelopment project.

J. C. White started a brick yard in Stockton in 1851, and James Talmadge in 1852. Dr. Nelson Taylor made bricks where Baxter Stadium now stands. Some of his brick was used to build the original Palace Hotel in San Francisco.

Brick making in Lockeford began about 1856. Dr. Dean Jewett Locke, founder of Lockeford, hired a Chinese contractor and Chinese laborers to work at the kilns. Nell Locke, grandson of Dr. Locke, has the old contract signed by his grandfather and the Chinese contractor. The kilns were built beside the pits where clay was dug. Trees were cut for fuel. Bricks for all the old brick buildings in Lockeford were made in these six early kilns.

In 1864 Dr. Locke built a large brick house to replace his first wooden house. His daughter, Mrs. Thorpe, is living in the brick home now. Back of this house is an old granary built of adobe brick in 1858, and faced with red brick in 1862. Other old brick buildings still in Lockeford are Dr. Locke's warehouse, built in 1883, and the Goehring Hardware Store.

Brick for the Old Harmony Grove Church finished in 1859 was made in the Lockeford area.

The oldest brick house in Lodi, the David H. Kettelman home, was built in 1858. The bricks were kilned across the road where the Lodi Academy now stands. The walls were made of three thicknesses of brick and were eighteen inches through. Five generations of this pioneer family lived there. The place was recently sold and the house is being demolished. Some of the old bricks are being sold to use again in someone else's home.

Near Lodi B. F. Langford built a home in 1856 using brick produced nearby on his own ranch. The old house has been modernized but changed very little in general appearance. William Lange and his family now live there.

Thomas Clements, founder of Clements, settled on his ranch in 1872. Between 1872 and 1882 he built three two-story brick buildings on the main road through Clements, using brick from the brick yard on his ranch. He also built the brick warehouse across the road from these buildings. The warehouse at the east end of town was built by the Farmers' Warehouse Company. They used brick from a pit just east of the warehouse on the Stillman Magee property. The top

stories of the three brick buildings have been removed, but the lower parts are still in use. The top from the store building was removed in 1950 and the bricks used in building Dr. Hooker's home in Lodi. Those old bricks seem very durable!

In 1877 Thomas Clements gave bricks from his brick yard to build the Athearn School, located about a quarter of a mile from town.

There are some interesting old brick buildings still standing in Woodbridge. The oldest, where Wein's Tavern now stands, was built in 1865 by Dr. Horace Bentley. The Odd Fellows Building was built in 1874. In 1882 the Masonic Hall was built. All were probably made of red brick from kilns near Woodbridge.

With the coming of the railroads and better transportation to the county many of the small common brick kilns were closed down.

In Corral Hollow south of Tracy the Carnegie Brick and Pottery Company made brick 1895-1912. They used a high grade clay from Tesla Coal Mine, situated four miles west in Alameda County. They produced fire brick, face brick, and terra cotta. A town of 2,500 people grew up around the plant. A flood in 1911 destroyed much of the place and parts of the railroad connecting it to Stockton. Also the clay at Tesla was about exhausted, so the business was discontinued.

In the 1920's San Joaquin Brick Company in Stockton was making brick from clay dredged from a slough at Roberts Island on the San Joaquin River. Also at that time Stockton Fire Brick Company had a factory in Stockton. They obtained the high grade clay necessary for their products outside of San Joaquin County.

In 1921 the Stockton Brick and Tile Company on South McKinley Avenue was founded by a group of Stockton business men headed by Ralph Wilcox and Paul Weston. The name was changed in 1956 to California Clay Products. This is now the only brick manufacturing company in San Joaquin County. The clay is obtained from a pit near the factory and from nine acres a mile west of the plant. They get a higher grade clay from near Lone in Amador County. Machinery for brick making is run by electricity and the fuel is gas. They produce building brick, fire brick, roof tile, drain tile, mortar clay and roofing granuals. John C. Boggs is president and J. A. Simpson is general manager.

I have given you some examples of old brick buildings of our county and their early day kilns. There are others. The pits where clay was dug have long since been covered over and farming or general living is going on where once they were. I leave to you the interesting fun of searching out more of them.

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O R G A N I Z A T I O N

San Joaquin County Historical Society meets on the fourth Monday of each month, except July and August, at Micke County Park, at 8 p.m. Visitors are always welcome.

The Society is organized to discover, preserve and spread the knowledge of historical records and events, particularly those involving the history of San Joaquin County and the State of California. Anyone interested in the activities of the Society is invited to join. Dues are \$3.00 per year. Contributions to the Society are deductible for income tax purposes.