

BRICKMAKING AT NOTRE DAME 1991-10

by

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From 1843 until the early 1880s, lime and brickmaking provided a source of income for the struggling community at Notre Dame. "One of the first things that Father Sorin noted on his arrival was the number of marl beds that surrounded the lake, a white putty-like substance....This marl was a prime factor in the manufacture of lime and bricks."<sup>1</sup> Old College, the first building built by the Community in 1843, was probably not built with bricks supplied by the Brothers, but purchased with the money donated by Benjamin Coquillard who financed the entire project in the first days at the lake. However, in all the other buildings built thereafter and until the early 1880s, the bricks as well as the lime used in the making of plaster and mortar came from the plentiful beds of marl found on the property.

That first year, the Council of Administration of the Brothers of St. Joseph authorized the building of a lime kiln on the western shore of St. Mary's Lake.<sup>2</sup> The Council allocated ninety dollars for the erection of the first kiln which would be capable of producing about 1,500 bushels of lime that could be sold at twenty cents a bushel with return on the original investment of about three hundred dollars, not a bad investment for a struggling community where every dollar counted.<sup>3</sup>

Sometime soon after this initial investment, bricks became a very important project for the new community. The Minutes of the Council refer to several Brothers as well as hired men to assist in the making of bricks by 1845. The hired hands were housed in a series of shacks along the road to present-day Carroll Hall (formerly Dujarie Hall). It becomes obvious that there were two

reasons for undertaking this important project: First, it would be economically feasible for the community to supply the necessary bricks and lime for the many buildings being put up at both Notre Dame and eventually at St. Mary's. Second, the surplus supplies--those not needed by either Notre Dame or St. Mary's--could be sold at a profit to the people of South Bend for the many buildings being constructed in the city at that time.

The initial projects using large supplies of lime and bricks were begun as early as 1845 and 1848. The Council in 1845 authorized bricks to be made for the new Novitiate as soon as possible.<sup>4</sup> In 1848, when the growing community outgrew the log chapel and decided to build a larger church at the cost of \$1,500, the proposal was to provide \$500 of this cost in cash, and the rest in kind, particularly from the lime kilns which by this time were successfully operating and could supply the bulk of building materials necessary to complete this impressive edifice, the largest of its kind in northern Indiana.<sup>5</sup>

With the acquisition of the Rush property in 1855, the land on which Holy Cross Brothers' Center and Holy Cross College sits today, lime and brickmaking took on new proportions. A lime kiln and brickyard were already in operation, and probably in competition with the community's venture, when Fr. Sorin purchased the property. The purchase of the Rush property was most obviously important because it gave the community access to the creek that flowed through it, which because Rush had dammed it caused the terrible cholera epidemic that claimed the lives of twenty-three priests, brothers, sisters and students by 1855.<sup>6</sup> The results of

purchasing this land with the lime and brickmaking facility quickly showed its effect. By 1858, the community's brickyards were producing a half million bricks per year, and by 1865 the number had doubled to a million per year.<sup>7</sup>

The additional capacity to produce bricks also seems obvious by 1858 when the Council approved three to four hundred thousand bricks for the building of a house for the Sisters at St. Mary's (probably Bertrand Hall.)<sup>8</sup> That same year the Council consented to furnishing lime bricks for the building of a school house by the community in one of its South Bend parishes (probably St. Patrick's) on the condition that only \$200 in cash be advanced by the community.<sup>9</sup> In 1863 lime and bricks were again provided for a new building at St. Mary's which represented a commercial cost of over \$5,000; however, because the community was to manufacture these materials, it was considered scarcely any expense at all.<sup>10</sup> In 1865 bricks again were provided for another building at St. Mary's, and a gift was made by the community to provide lime and bricks for Father Thomas Carroll, C.S.C. for his house at St. Patrick's Parish in South Bend and for the Sisters to build St. Joseph's Academy on the St. Patrick's property.<sup>11</sup>

When Father Moreau visited the young community at Notre Dame in the summer of 1857, he was appalled by the sight of Brothers working in the brickyards, and he instructed Father Sorin that the Brothers should not be doing this type of backbreaking work in the hot Indiana summers.<sup>12</sup> However, it would take another decade before the Brothers gave up the brickmaking project. Finally in 1868, the brickyard and the lime kilns were rented to a Mr. McCabe

bringing the community a cash profit of \$70 per kiln rented and \$6 for every thousand bricks manufactured thereafter.<sup>13</sup> The following year the brickyard was rented to a Mr. Kavanaugh who would furnish the tools and equipment for making bricks and would provide the community \$5.75 for every thousand bricks made.<sup>14</sup> From 1868 until the end of the brickmaking experiment, these two men would contract with the community for operating the lime and brick project on a yearly basis so that access to the bricks as well as a profit from the sale of excess bricks was still a worthwhile enterprise for the community.

In 1871 the building of Sacred Heart Church demanded large amounts of excellent quality bricks for its construction. Father Sorin advised that the brick makers go to Chicago to investigate the latest machinery and methods for brickmaking so that materials for the new church would be of the current excellent quality known to contractors of that day.<sup>15</sup>

Father Sorin also realized the chance of profit that would result from the tragic Chicago Fire in the Fall of 1871. He proposed to the Local Council that bricks be fired at full capacity so that a supply would be on hand in the spring of 1872 when the city would begin its building. It was understood by Sorin that he could get as much as \$7.25 per thousand bricks, the highest price earned for the sale of bricks in the entire project's history.<sup>16</sup>

When Notre Dame's main building burned in 1879, the brickyard was again pressured to supply bricks in large quantities to keep fifty six bricklayers busy that summer working feverishly to have a college building in place for the beginning of the school

year.<sup>17</sup> However, supplying bricks for the main building in 1879 seems to be the final major demand for brick on Notre Dame property. Thereafter, no mention is made in the Local Council Minutes for brickmaking of lime kilns. The last mention of lime and brickmaking in the Local Council Minutes is in 1899, when the Council suggested the marl holes northwest of St. Mary's Lake be filled.<sup>18</sup> An era had come to an end. For over thirty-five years, several Brothers along with a series of hired men extracted the lime and bricks that went into building everyone of the structures that would become Notre Dame and St. Mary's. These kilns produced the distinctive yellow buff "Notre Dame Brick" used for the exterior construction of these buildings. As thomas Schlereth points out in his history of the University, "With certain exceptions, the University has maintained a visual continuity with this aspect of its past by using Belden Brick, of similar hue and texture, in most of its new construction."<sup>19</sup>

Much has been said of the early men who built Notre Dame concerning the various financial schemes devised to put together the necessary resources to begin a new home in a new country. But to really understand and appreciate their contributions to this cause is certainly made more understandable when one considers that they even made the bricks that went into the very buildings they built. Those who followed these pioneers would never have to endure the hardships and hard work that the original founders experienced. Yet, in a sense, these very bricks somehow link the present with the past in knowing what these men did so many years ago still provides us with an understanding of their faith and



generosity to the Congregation of Holy Cross in North America.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Arthur J. Hope, Notre Dame One Hundred Years, (South Bend, Indiana: Icarus Press, Inc., 1978) p. 4.
2. Kilian Bierne, C.S.C., From Seat to Shining Sea, The Holy Cross Brothers in the United States, (Valatie, New York: Holy Cross Press, 1966), p. 55.
3. Bierne, p. 55.
4. Local Council Minutes, 1845.
5. Brother Gatian's Chronicles, May 15, 1848.
6. Thomas J. Schlereth, The University of Notre Dame, A Portrait of Its Campus and History, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), pp. 18-19.
7. Local Council Minutes, 1865
8. Local Council Minutes, March 8, 1858.
9. Local Council Minutes, March 8, 1858.
10. Local Council Minutes, January 24, 1863.
11. Local Council Minutes, 1865.
12. Bierne, p. 60.
13. Local Council Minutes, 1868.
14. Local Council Minutes, December, 1869
15. Local Council Minutes, May 5, 1871.
16. Local Council Minutes, November 3, 1971.
17. Schlereth, p. 18.
18. Local Council Minutes, 1899.
19. Schlereth, p. 18.