

Claybank Brick Plant Backgrounder

The Claybank Brick Plant is located one kilometre east of Claybank, on the Claybank Brick Plant Road, near Avonlea. The plant is North America's most intact early 20th century brick factory. It is open to visitors daily mid-May to Labour Day. For a small admission fee, visitors can tour 10 walk-in kilns and see how bricks were made from clay to kiln 100 years ago. Active from 1914 to 1989, the plant is still ready to fire up and turn out more bricks. It has also has a visitor centre and gift shop.

Background:

On April 9, 1999, the federal government and Government of Saskatchewan announced a cost sharing agreement that contributed \$2 million to the conservation and preservation of the Claybank Brick Plant historic site. With this joint funding, the Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation was able to continue and expand its program of restoration development and interpretation. A visitor centre was developed in the bunkhouse building on the site as part of an enhanced visitor program of exhibits, tours and publications. Conservation work included new roofs on several buildings, brickwork repair and structural repair of kilns and smokestacks. Parks Canada and the Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation each contributed \$954,500 over five years. In 1997, Parks Canada provided \$45,500 in emergency funding to the site after storm damage. On June 29, 1997, Canadian Heritage unveiled its plaque from the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, commemorating the historic importance of the Claybank Brick Plant, Canada's most complete example of an early 20th century brick making complex.

The plant was built in 1912-13, and operated until 1989. When the Canadian Northern Railway built a branch line near the Dirt Hills in 1909, a group of Moose Jaw investors decided to build a brick plant near the rail line to exploit the clay deposits south of the city. The plant was opened on June 16, 1913. It included a main factory, a clay storage shed, engine room, boiler room, a stock shed and several kilns. Later, a 33-bed brick bunkhouse was built to house workers at the isolated location. More kilns and other buildings were later added. These features all still exist at the site.

The plant specialized in producing heat-resistant, or refractory brick, and its products were used extensively in the Prairie provinces and beyond. Brick from Claybank was used in such prestigious projects as the additions to the Chateau Frontenac in Quebec City during the 1920s. The plant remained in operation until 1989, when owner A.P. Green Refractories closed the operation. The entire complex, a model of functional layout and efficiency, had changed little since the 1930s.

The Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation obtained the plant in 1992 and preserved it with the co-operation of the Claybank Brick Plant Historical Society.