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Read in  
Jamestown at  
the Jan's Meeting  
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BY  
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Jamestown NY

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## AN EARLY INDUSTRY OF JAMESTOWN

Wherever the races of man have lived, the availability of materials have been the determining factors in the erection of buildings.

The pioneer settlers in the American colonies, coming quite largely from England, had been compelled in their home-land to resort to the use of stone and brick, to a large degree, in building, because of a shortage of timber. Here the pioneers found an abundance of timber for building purposes, and they readily made use of it.

The movement westward from the Atlantic seaboard, by the sons and daughters of the early comers to America, meant the continued use of timber, as it was everywhere available for the taking.

The pioneers of Chautauqua County, so largely settled by New England people, were destined by their mechanically minded natures to perpetuate the New England styles of architecture, - so chaste and so practical. The choice of our white pine and the inherited styles, was a movement along the lines of the least resistance, and, for our Chautauqua County settlers, a continuance of a purely American culture, whereas for <sup>our</sup> earliest New England ancestors, the adoption of new materials and styles was the abandonment of an old culture for a new.

After a time brick and stone came into use among American builders, but at first, only as accessory materials to wooden buildings. A wide use of brick and stone waited upon settled and economic conditions of security.

The subject of "Brick Making" for a review, of one of Jamestown's early industries, <sup>Should</sup> ~~will~~ begin with the second and third decades of our settlement here. Brick making can be divided into two distinct periods; the first period, the one of the hand made bricks, beginning before the writing of history and continuing <sup>ing</sup> until the second, the mechanized period.

of to-day, where hand<sup>work</sup> has been eliminated in every possible way. There is no sharp line dividing these two periods, yet the division has taken place within the memory of persons living today.

The period of the hand made brick adapts itself, to an address before an Historical Society much better than to include the modern mechanized method of production. Whatever can be said of this "hand-made" period of brick making in Chautauqua County would apply as well, to all brick-making since the dawn of history.

Chautauqua County maps and histories are very deficient in information regarding this industry, - one of the oldest of human endeavors. Most of the tradesman and artisans are more in evidence, in the writing of the historian, than the maker of bricks.

The Chautauqua County directory of 1873 - 4 mentions eight brick manufacturers, they being scattered about the county as follows: - Lord and Babcock, in the town of Busti, John F. and Samuel Leavers, Sinclairville, Micheal Cummings, Dunkirk, J. and W. Hilton, Dunkirk, Reuben Neate, of Levant and Jamestown, Samuel M. Nickerson, Fluvanna and Levant, Charles A. Morley, Silver Creek and Warren Rickard, of Findley's Lake. To this list of 1873 - 4 properly belongs many other names.

The 1854 wall map of Chautauqua County shows the location of a brick yard on the Henry Baker farm in the south west corner of Jamestown. There is documentary evidence <sup>and the evidence of living people</sup> ~~given by persons living today~~, that a brick yard was situated on West 3rd street, near its junction with Fairmount Avenue, in Jamestown. This brick yard belonged to James Harrison, who was the first watchmaker, the first dentist, a very extensive land owner and builder in the little village of the Rapids.

There is an interesting contract in existence, entered into between this James Harrison and one William Cheney of Dunkirk, dated February 14th 1861, whereby James Harrison rented his brick yard to William Cheney for one year. It was agreed that Cheney was to manufacture, for Harrison two

million bricks, Harrison to pay Cheney at the rate of two dollars per thousand.

Patrick Moynihan, the "Patey" Moynihan of sport fame, the genial "hail fellow well met" leader and promoter of athletic events some sixty years ago, well remembers the Harrison brick yards on West 3rd Street. Patey and his husky Irish pals, the boys of the Boatlanding gang were no strangers to this brick yard, for them a playground. The green pasture land overlooking the Boat landing had been gradually sold by James Prendergast and Henry Baker to these hardy Irish emigrants. The names upon the 1856 wall map of Jamestown, show, INYK in this section of Jamestown, west of Lafayette street, as far as the "outlet" and the boat landing a full roster of the sons of Erin. Their sons made up the "Boat Landing Gang!"

What more attractive to the little fellows than the brick yard? Bill Hollister mixing the clay and Pennock firing the kilns! Happy days! The brick yard of the Henry Baker farm seems to have reached its end in 1849, and an agreement between Henry Baker and one Pennock and others, covered the disposal of the brick maker's tools and other articles as well, the bricks in the yard and the bricks in the kiln.

The journeyman brick maker was much in evidence throughout the "hand made" brick period. Often the bricks used on a farm were made right there from clay beds near at hand, by the journeyman brick maker. There are several very interesting examples of home made brick dwellings in the neighborhood of Jamestown, two of them are over a hundred years old.

One is the Nicholas Dolloff house in the town of Poland, at the junction of the Cassadaga and the Conewango creeks; this had been a fine country home, until recent years of neglect have left discouraging marks of decay upon it. The other made at home house, is the Guy C. Irvine home just south of the Chautauqua County line in Pennsylvania.

This man Guy C. Irvine was much identified with Jamestown through his long career as a lumberman. Irvine was one of five men who purchased from

James Prendergast all his unsold property in Jamestown, later it was all sold to Henry Baker.

This old/<sup>brick</sup>mansion of Irvine's was the work of journeyman carpenters, stone cutters, and journeyman brick makers. It has ever been the proud boast of the Irvine family, that all of the timber, stone, and clay used in constructing the house was obtained right on the farm. This old house was erected in 1833, but for neglect and a century's wear-and-tear, is still a monument to Guy C. Irvine, the river boatman.

The exhibition of taste and intelligence in the planning of this dwelling is unexplainable unless Guy C. Irvine "The roistering river pirate" as he was called, had a spark of genius greater than the average man.

In the list of brick makers, mentioned in the directory of 1873 -4, Reuben Neate comes near being an ideal example of the brick maker of the hand made brick era. Mr. Neate came to Chautauqua County from the central part of New York state, as a young man of about thirty six years of age. After a brief period of lumbering and river boating Mr. Neate started brick making at Levant, a short distance East of Jamestown, in the year 1840. Through the kindness of his son, Mr. Menzo Neate, a member of this society, I have been able to reconstruct a picture of his Father's brick making business.

Mr. Reuben Neate selected a site for his business on the bank of the Cassadaga creek, where a bed of clay eighty feet deep provided the basic element of our common red brick. As clay alone will not make bricks, and according to the chemical content and physical condition of the clay one finds that certain/<sup>mineral</sup> and organic additions/<sup>are</sup> necessary. Mr. Neate discovered that an addition of loam to the clay made possible a mixture capable of being worked, dried and fired, and came from the kiln a finished brick, proper in color, texture, hardness and undistorted in shape.

The clay, in proper quantities was first removed from the bed of of eighty foot clay and spread upon a yard or mixing floor, where the

necessary loan was added. Reuben Heate's methods of work called for a vast expenditure of labor, but he succeeded in reducing the labor of <sup>mixing</sup> ~~mixing~~ the ingredients for the bricks by hauling, with oxen, around and around over the clay and earthy mixture, a log bristling with stumpy short limbs. This was not exactly a chopping bowl, yet it served much the same purpose. After sufficient treatment on the mixing floor of stirring and mixing then <sup>came</sup> a long exposure of the mass to the atmosphere.

The next operation consisted of mixing the earthy materials with water to form a plastic homogeneous mass. This was accomplished by the use of the "pug-mill," ~~WHICH REMAINS~~ a tub like affair, in principle, not unlike the revolving cement mixer of to day. The pug-mill however remained stationary and a central <sup>vertical</sup> shaft studded with paddles and cutting knives revolving by horsepower, which gradually forced, to the bottom of the mill, the mass of clay and water, now mixed into a mass adhesive enough to be forced into moulds and sticky enough to retain its shape.

In a pit at the foot of the pug mill stood a man who received in his bare hands a gob of the clay mixture. By his side were the wooden moulds, all sanded so that the wet bricks would not stick to them. The man at the pug mill with main strength forced the mass of clay mixture into the moulds, then as neatly as a housewife trims off the surplus pie-crust, he trimmed the surplus clay from the moulds. The full moulds were then carried to the drying grounds and ever so often <sup>the bricks</sup> were turned and tended much as a setting hen turns her eggs.

The day ~~came~~ when a kiln was empty and ready for a new lot of bricks to be burned. Here as ever the endless lifting, moving and placing of the partially dried bricks, was the business of the brick maker. The man who filled the kiln was an important factor in the long journey of a lump of clay on its way to a brick house.

How important the size of a brick, <sup>too</sup> and how important that it fit the hand that was to place it in the kiln. Of all the millions of bricks

every single one must be taken into the hands of this man of the kilns. The burning of the bricks, day and night, so like those other endless fires of industry!

The burning of the bricks, meant just the right heat, length of time to burn, drafts to be closed, when the ~~right~~ proper moment arrived. One must look for the colored gases which at a crucial moment began to leap forth from cracks and openings of the kiln. These fierce dancing colored gases were signals to the kiln burners. More than <sup>one</sup> kiln is necessary, for some are hot while others are cold.

In the beginning of Mr. Neat's brick yard the bricks sold were, as in earlier days, largely accessory parts of buildings made of wood. The gradual replacement, of burned or inadequate wooden buildings, by substantial brick structures makes an interesting picture of the growth of the village at the Rapids, to that of the fine city.

In the growing city of Jamestown, some of the citizens became economically competent, and as usual socially prominent. What better way was there to demonstrate these acquired characteristics than by building a fine brick house, and build it in a large way? Two such <sup>large</sup> evidences of business and social success were built on adjoining pieces of land in Jamestown in 1862 and 1863.

Daniel Grandin, he of the woollen mill, had about completed a brick residence in 1862, when, Reuben E. Fenton, he of the extensive lumber interest of the Fenton family, the representative to Washington, the Governor of his State, rich and successful; began ~~to~~ erecting a brick residence adjoining the ne Grandin residence. Both were built in the large way, a way open only to the competent. Reuben Neate furnished the bricks for both these jobs.

Governor Fenton began buying bricks May the tenth, <sup>eighteen</sup> ~~nineteen~~ and six <sup>three</sup> ~~two~~, and deliveries took ~~place~~ place nearly every working day, ranging from six or eight hundred bricks to three or four thousand and continued until by the last of October when more than a quarter of a million bricks had been delivered.

In a conversation between Governor Fenton and Mr. Neate, the Governor assured the latter that if all the bricks were first class in every way, he would remember Mr. Neate with a present. The Summer passed, the bricks were used, the large and handsome residence completed, the bricks were paid for and all was well, -- but no present ~~was~~ had materialized.

One day Reuben met Reuben, - greetings passed, the Governor, always the careful gentleman, embraced the opportunity and announced that the present so faithfully promised would now be given to Reuben of the good bricks. The Governor produced from his pocket, and placed in Reuben Neate's hand a something not unlike a ten dollar gold piece, and with his blessing departed on his way. Reuben Neate looked - it was a quarter of a dollar! Perhaps the Governor was a practical joker but, the deal was closed.

Menzo Neate tells of another episode <sup>which</sup> <sup>in 1881</sup> occurred during the building of the "New Sherman House" where now stands the Samuel's Hotel. This large brick job <sup>for Mr Neate</sup> was the last one of forty years of successful brick manufacturing. Reuben Neate on this particular job delivered all the bricks of the ~~bricks~~ large contract with his own teams. Menzo, now a man working as one of the teamsters, one day, after unloading a thousand or two of bricks, overheard by chance, a conversation between A.M. Sherman, the proprietor of new hotel and Jones the contractor, <sup>w</sup> wherein Sherman suggested that they have some one count those bricks to see if they checked with Neate's figures. "Hell no" replied Jones, if Neate ~~says~~ says there are so many on a load then they are all there, and possibly we'd find more bricks than he charged for."

Probably young Menzo related to his father this conversation and Reuben Neate could not do otherwise than accept such an unpremeditated compliment.

The day of the hand made brick was drawing to a close. Speed and modern machinery had taken the place of hard manual labor at every stage of the manufacturing, and the story of Reuben Neate, an entirely complimentary story, ended with the "New Sherman House" - speed and machinery sooner or later spelled the doom of every hand made establishment.

We can but wish that every early brick maker's record of achievement could have been so gratifying as that of the one which it has been my good fortune to attempt to picturize.

*John M Cushman*  
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