

Minnesota Bricks

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Minnesota Bricks

Exploring Historical Brickmaking & More in Minnesota

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Chaska Brick

Brickmaking in Chaska Minnesota



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1. What's New?

2023 in Review

- In 2023, I eagerly awaited hitting the milestone of 5000 YouTube subscribers to the MN Bricks YouTube channel and it's now over 6300 subscribers. Thank you all! I made 21 videos in 2023, which had 468,629 views. Looking at my lifetime stats (I've had this YouTube channel since 2018), I now have over 70 videos that have been viewed over 2 million times.
- I revisited several old spots in 2023 to see how they've changed since I started taking photos and documenting MN Bricks in the late 2000's. I didn't take any video then, so I'm trying to get video of still standing locations as I can. It's disappointing to see how many sites have disappeared over the past 10+ years, and the number that look like their days are numbered. That's why I believe in documenting and trying to share their story, since many are too far gone to be saved.
- I'm happy about the bunch of raw material gathered and look forward to sharing more with you, especially during these early winter months. I find it funny that while I'm researching one topic it's about guaranteed that I learn about something else I find interesting. That's how the [crashing railroad engines for entertainment](#) three-part series came about.
- The YouTube videos can be found on my website at <https://www.mnbricks.com/mn-historical-videos/>, or on my Minnesota Bricks YouTube Channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@MNBricks>. Feel free to contact me at mnbricks@gmail.com any time.

2. Quarter 1 2023 Videos

January:

[The Kirk Farmstead – Niagara, North Dakota](#)

If you travel the back roads of any state, you come across a tie to the past. The Kirk farmstead is an abandoned farmstead in the middle of nowhere. Like many places in North Dakota, there are hardly any trees. The remaining farm buildings have seen their share of sun, wind, and cold, and don't have much time left.

February:

[The Winter of 1880-1881 in Morris, Minnesota](#)

The “Long Winter,” as it was also known, brought an onslaught of blizzards, winter storms, and blowing snow events to the upper Midwest. From mid-October to early April, it was a 6 month stretch of seemingly endless storms. Several people died of exposure, cattle and poultry perished, and people in general suffered from a lack of food and fuel.

[Minnesota's Last Brickyard – Ochs Brick & Tile Company of Springfield, Minnesota](#)

Of the hundreds of brickyards through the years, the last Minnesota plant closed in 2016. This brickyard, which was located in Springfield, began as the A. C. Ochs Brick & Tile Company in 1891. See the abandoned grounds of Minnesota's last brickyard, with its the original clay pit, an old beehive kiln, and what remained in 2022 of this once thriving brickyard.

3. Quarter 2 2023 Videos

April:

[The Railroad vs. the Winter of 1880-1881](#)

Railroads are known for having unlimited money and power. Minnesota and Iowa winters can be long and brutal. During the winter of 1880-1881, these two combatants fought it out. Who was the winner? The Minnesota and Iowa winter of 1880-1881 beat the railroad with unrelenting wind and snow. Hear the many unbelievable stories from that long winter.

May:

[Riding the Red Jacket Trail on the Abandoned Central Railroad of Minnesota](#)

Many railroad lines across Minnesota have been abandoned. One of these lines was the Central Railroad of Minnesota. A portion of this railroad followed the Le Sueur and Blue Earth rivers from Rapidan into Mankato. Today, the old track from Rapidan to Mankato has been turned into a paved bike trail.

[Disappearing Minnesota Farms](#)

As the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota) metropolitan area continues to expand into rural areas, family farms that have existed for over 100 years are being swallowed up. See the changes on the southwest edge of the Twin Cities metropolitan area in sections 13 and 24 in Dahlgren Township, just west of the City of Carver.

[Early Minnesota Building Tycoon – Oliver R. Mather](#)

Oliver R. Mather built most of the early Minnesota institutions, which were huge complexes of brick buildings. He started at the bottom, making bricks by hand, and worked his way up to the top of his profession, becoming a master builder.

June:

[Church of the Sacred Heart – Freeport, Minnesota](#)

When driving along Interstate 94 in central Minnesota, the church steeple in Freeport is visible from miles around. The Church of the Sacred Heart is part of a complex of Catholic

buildings on the southeast edge of Freeport that is over a century old. The Hess and Moog brickyard, which was located just south of St. Cloud, provided the cream-colored brick for the church.

[The Lost Renner Farm - A Once Beautiful Minnesota Family Farm that is Vanishing with Time](#)

Only crumbling remains are left of the once thriving Carl and Lydia Renner family farm from the early 1920's. Multiple buildings, including the farmhouse, barn, silo, and other outbuildings were constructed of burnt-orange brick and block from the A. C. Ochs Brick & Tile Company of Springfield, Minnesota

[Old Red Barns of Grand Forks County, North Dakota](#)

Most of the barns built across eastern North Dakota in the late 1800s were made of wood, painted in red. Unless protected from moisture, wood decays. Therefore, a lot of the original wooden farm buildings in North Dakota have fallen apart or been bulldozed. However, a few original wooden barns and outbuildings remain in the Red River Valley of North Dakota.

[The Milwaukee Road – A Lost Minnesota Railroad](#)

At one time, the Milwaukee Road was a transcontinental railroad across the northern United States. Unfortunately, it fell upon bad times and went into bankruptcy. Many states converted the old line into biking or hiking trails. In Minnesota, after several years of neglect, the Twin Cities and Western Railroad purchased portions of the old line, and refurbished them. If you look close enough, there are still a few remnants of the Milwaukee Road left. Come along and discover a few old gems of the railroad, an artifact of the farming industry, and some beautiful Minnesota waterfowl.

[The Brickyard Ruins - Fertile, Minnesota](#)

I happened upon the brickyard ruins at Fertile, Minnesota, after attending the 2010 Polk County Minnesota Fair. The brickyard had been abandoned for a number of years, but there were still a few traces left. See what I found in 2010, and also what was left in 2022. Some history of the Fertile area is included along with several old town and brickyard views. The scenery in the area is very beautiful; definitely worth experiencing. If you have never been to the Polk County Minnesota Fair, I highly recommend it!

4. Quarter 3 2023 Videos

July:

[Fasen Concrete Round Barn:](#)

Round barns are rare. Poured concrete round barns are even more unique! The Fasen Concrete Round Barn is located near St. Cloud, Minnesota, built on the Peter Fasen farm in 1928 to house dairy cows and horses. As the cities of Sartell and St. Cloud continue to grow, historic family farms are being cleared away in the process. Since there hasn't been any interest in reusing the Fasen Barn, significant deterioration has occurred. See how the farm site changes through the years, and learn a bit of history about the original owners. This is an incredible barn, which definitely would have been a gem in its heyday. If this barn is torn down, it will be a huge loss for Minnesota.

[Farm Beautiful – Stone Farmstead, St. Cloud, Minnesota:](#)

What was once top of the line is now nearly forgotten. Thousands of people can see Farm Beautiful as they drive along a busy stretch of Interstate 94 in central Minnesota. The buildings on this farmstead are unusual. They appear to be composed of small circular field stones. About 90 years ago, this farmstead was one of the newest, best equipped, and well-known in Minnesota. Today, one farm family near St. Cloud is keeping Farm Beautiful from becoming another lost relic. The main barn and a good portion of this farmstead have been preserved, allowing future generations a chance to see it. See how Farm Beautiful came to be, where it is located, and what is left of it.

August:

[New Ulm, Minnesota – A Brick & Architecture Destination:](#)

If you love old style architecture, brick, and fancy masonry, New Ulm Minnesota is for you! The city was founded in 1854 and settled by German immigrants. The new settlement had

several brickyards and a quarry, which furnished the material for the houses and buildings that were constructed in the new town. Many of these houses and buildings still remain today, making it a great historical destination. Even the Schell Brewery remains today, with tours and beer tasting providing a fun excursion. I have visited the town many times, and it is still one of my favorite destinations in Minnesota.

[Winnipeg Manitoba – Railroad Sights and Sounds:](#)

The city of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, is rich in history, and railroads were a big part of it. Two of the main railroads serving Canada are the Canadian National and the Canadian Pacific. Both of these railroads continue to have a large presence in Winnipeg, and many of their historical buildings still remain. Come along and take a look at some of the railroad remnants left in Winnipeg in 2023.

September:

[Northern Pacific Shops at Brainerd, Minnesota:](#)

Brick railroad buildings from the late 1800s are getting hard to find. So, when I came across the complex of Northern Pacific shops in Brainerd in 2010, I was in heaven. The Northern Pacific was the first northern transcontinental railroad. It was started in 1870 near Duluth, Minnesota. The company invested a huge amount on money in various railroad buildings in Brainerd, Minnesota, where the railroad crossed the Mississippi River. Repair shops, engine shops, blacksmith shops, depots, a tie plant, a park, and a hospital were all constructed in Brainerd, making it a huge railroad town. In 2023, about half of the original brick buildings still remained at the shops complex, and were still being used for various purposes. Learn some of the history of Brainerd, the Northern Pacific shops there, and the other railroad sites in town.

5. Quarter 4 2023 Videos

October:

[Northern Pacific Railroad Shops at Brainerd in 2023:](#)

The Northern Pacific Railroad Shops in Brainerd, Minnesota are a good example of how old brick buildings can be converted into useable business space today. Although only a handful of the original railroad shop buildings at Brainerd still remain in 2023, most of them are being converted for other uses. Throughout the years, the Brainerd Railroad Shops employed thousands of people inside their rare architectural structures. It is important that some of these places are preserved for their historical significance and their link to many families today. It is easy to walk around the complex and view the buildings today, as several paths have been made. View the grounds as they exist in 2023, and see a few flashbacks to the past.

November:

[Revisiting the 1875 Northern Pacific Bridge Collapse at Brainerd, Minnesota:](#)

When the Northern Pacific Railroad bridge at Brainerd, Minnesota, collapsed on July 27, 1875, it left a huge gap in the transcontinental railroad line. Goods and other supplies quickly piled up on either side of the Mississippi River. To get the railroad line back up quickly, railroad officials built a temporary pile bridge to fill the gap in the line, and rebuilt a new bridge to replace the collapsed one. The temporary bridge took 15 days to build, while the replacement bridge took about eight months to complete. Take a closer look at the process involved in replacing the collapsed bridge. Learn about what may have been the

cause of the initial failure. See the latest engineering features and hear about the individuals responsible for the reconstruction.

[Central High School, Duluth Minnesota – Abandoned:](#)

Schools are the heart of a community. A place for education and employment, as well as social and sporting events. With declining population and enrollment, school consolidation has become common in rural areas, but it can also occur where you don't expect it. That is the case of Central High School in Duluth, Minnesota. Central High School has been a part of the Duluth landscape since 1892. In 1971, the school moved from its original hillside location to the top of the hill. Continued declining enrollment forced its closure in 2011, and the sprawling campus has been sold to developers. By 2023, there was little left. However, even these remnants are a striking glimpse of what it would have looked like in its prime.

December:

[Crashing Locomotives for Show – Part 1:](#)

Alfred Lincoln Streeter came up with the idea of crashing locomotives in front of crowds, before the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. Although he presented the idea to the show's promoters, they wanted nothing to do with it. Streeter kept pushing his idea with various railroads, and finally found a taker in 1895. This show did not turn out as planned, but gave Streeter the proof his concept could work. About a year later, in 1896, Streeter had another taker, the Columbus, Hocking Valley and Toledo Railway Company. This time, a successful head on locomotive collision occurred at Buckeye Park, near Lancaster, Ohio. The story had national press coverage, and launched Streeter into the business of crashing locomotives for show.



6. Other

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