

The Neighbourhood Lime Kiln

Locally made lime was the glue that held many of those early stone buildings together

Some years ago, while walking along the high riverbank overlooking the Souris River near Bunclody, I found what appeared to be an old well lined with fieldstones. I gave it little thought until I learned about the small lime kilns that settlers often constructed to make mortar for the many stone buildings that dot the southwestern corner.

They are another example of small, local, do-it yourself prairie enterprises.

Angus McRuer describes one located near his Desford-area farm...

“This kiln was on a rise of land sloped to the north. A hole eight feet deep by ten feet across was made at the top of the slope. A trench three feet wide by thirty feet long was dug, starting at the bottom of the hill, up into the bottom of the big hole. It was like a big clay pipe. The trench acted as a damper.”

To prepare for a burn, stones were placed in the kiln leaving an arch at the bottom to hold the fire. The process took three days to reduce the limestone to powder. In addition to using it for making mortar, people used it to purify and freshen damp basements, and as an addition to cement and plaster and for white-washing walls and ceilings.

There were several of these small local enterprises in our region. Many are small and barely recognizable. They are usually on the side of a creek bed or hill to allow access to one side of the kiln to feed the fire and to provide the necessary draft to create a hot and steady burn.

Along the Souris River, near Napinka, stonemason L. J. Phinney operated a kiln that likely supplied the mortar for the beautiful stone school that still stands in the village.

The process took three days to reduce the limestone to powder.

Near Goodlands, William McGill Poole and a neighbor, Harry Morningstar, set up a kiln in a ravine. They took turns sitting up at night to keep the fire stoked for the kiln.

In the Lyleton area Robert Fanning and Andy Lyle were two of several settlers to build a kiln in the bank of the creek. Robert Johnston had a lime kiln on the bank of the creek where he slaked lime to white wash his house and those of his neighbors.

Like so many of these local initiatives, with the improved train service, the availability of a reliable and ready source of product in the local lumberyard saved local builders a lot of time, which they put to better use on their expanding farm operations. Most kilns had ceased operations by about 1900.

Sources:

- Boissevain's 75th Jubilee Committee. *Beckoning Hills*.
- Brenda History Committee. *Bridging Brenda Vol. 1*. Altona. Friesen Printers, 1990.
- Edward History Book Committee. *Harvests of Time*. Altona. Friesen Printers, 2003.

▼ Ample evidence remains of this kiln site near Bunclody, once you know what to look for.

