



Fig. 2. Panoramic view of western end of clay industries landscape, showing Hycroft Pottery and Alberta Clay Products sites at extreme right, CPR mainline and yards at left.
(E. Mills, August 1999)



Fig. 3. Central section of proposed cultural landscape. National Porcelain site is in left foreground, Medalta Pottery in centre, commercial greenhouses in background.
(E. Mills, August 1999)

Edward Mills is historian and consultant in architectural heritage.

Edward Mills

Medicine Hat Clay Industries Cultural Landscape

This article summarizes a presentation report prepared in November 1999 for the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada at the request of Parks Canada. The report was written specifically to address the question of the sites potential national significance, and it has been condensed and reformatted for publication purposes.

Introduction

The clay industries cultural landscape in Medicine Hat is comprised of five sites containing factories or factory remnants associated with various facets of the clay industry, which has been located in this city since the 1900s. The sites include structural remnants of a former brick and tile factory, remnants of a porcelain insulator factory, two intact pottery factories currently in use as museums and interpretive centres, and a major operational brick plant that has evolved in successive stages since its inception in 1909. All five sites are located along a former CPR spur siding which serves as a visual and interpretive axis. This spur, along with several shorter feeder sidings, served the shipping requirements of the various clay industries from 1910 until the 1970s (Figures 1-4).

The cultural landscape is located in a river bottom area of Medicine Hat known as the North Flats. Wedged between the CPR mainline and yards and the meandering bank of the South Saskatchewan River, the North Flats evolved as a distinct urban entity dominated by the industrial development that took place there. In its eastern section, street names such as "Clay," "Pottery," "Porcelain," and "Medalta," underscore the role of the clay-based industries in the development of the area. Here, various brick, tile and ceramics factories formed the backbone of an industrial district that also contained extensive greenhouse operations, mixed light industries, warehouses and pockets of modest workers' houses.

The unique combination of elements that permitted a diversified clay products industry to emerge and flourish in Medicine Hat are revealed through tangible *in situ* resources within the area: a railway corridor linking the five key sites, former clay pit sites, gas well sites, remnants of the giant brick and tile factories that dominated the areas economy for decades, two intact potteries, relic elements of a porcelain insulator factory, along with the ongoing production facilities of a clay products

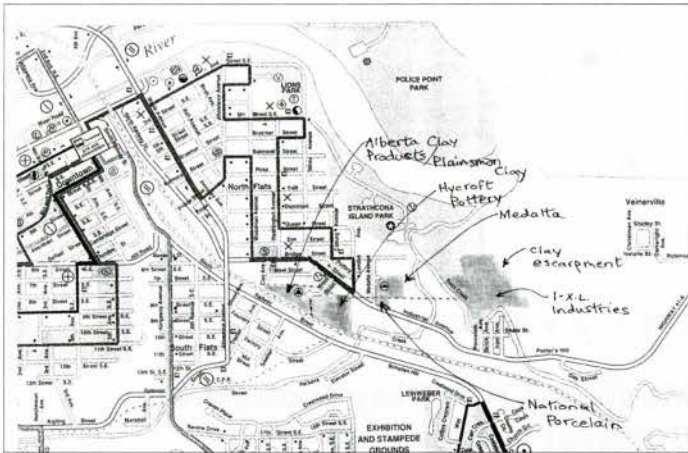


Fig. 1. Proposed clay industries cultural landscape area in North Flats district of Medicine Hat, Alberta. (Medicine Hat Transit Route Map, n.d.)

plant and of the largest brick and pipe manufacturer in western Canada. Collectively, these elements offer evidence of an evolved cultural landscape that combines evidence of a flourishing modern industry along with relic elements from past phases of its historical evolution.

Historic Values of the Industrial Landscape

Medicine Hat and the nearby community of Redcliff emerged as major clay products production centres for western Canada during the 1900s and 1910s. The reasons for this development lay in a unique set of circumstances. The first of these was Medicine Hats designation as a divisional headquarters for the CPR, which equipped the community with efficient access to regional markets. With almost 1,100 kilometres of track within the city limits, Medicine Hat offered frequent service and excellent connections to prospective investors. The CPR reinforced this advantage by offering specially discounted freight rates to industries that located within the community. While the Medicine Hat clay industry was established on the basis of locally-available common clays, its eventual diversification was facilitated by the discovery and exploitation of the Whitemud fire clay deposits of southern Saskatchewan and in the Cypress Hills area in south-east Alberta. Access to these clays enabled the industry to expand into a wide range of refractory and ceramics products.

Although small-scale local brick plants were a common feature of virtually all areas of sustained settlement in 19th century Canada, few places contained the delicate balance of elements necessary for the sustained development of a diversified clay industry during the 20th century. These elements, comprised of proximity to raw materials and to markets, in combination with favorable transportation and production costs, determined the profit margins in a highly competitive industry. In most parts of the country, long term growth of brick and ceramics factories was curtailed by the low quality of regional clays, high production costs and by the boom and bust cycles that wrought havoc upon the economic stability of large-scale ventures of this type. In Ontario and Quebec, the combination of good common clays and proximity to large population centres fostered the growth of numerous large-scale clay products plants, particularly in the



Fig. 4. Eastern end of proposed cultural landscape, showing I-XL complex and clay escarpment. (E. Mills, August 1999)

Montréal and Toronto-Hamilton regions. While these areas dominated the clay industry from a statistical standpoint, other locations managed to sustain viable clay industries throughout much of the 20th century, usually on the basis of their proximity to high quality clay beds. In western Canada, the discovery of large deposits of high quality fire clays in southern Saskatchewan, south-eastern Alberta and at Sumas Mountain southeast of Vancouver, B.C., resulted in the establishment of long-lasting clay industries.¹ The most distinguishing feature of Medicine Hats clay industry was the diverse range of products produced by its various factories: bricks, tiles, sewer pipes, stoneware and pottery, porcelain insulators. In 1950, this diversity was matched or surpassed only by the concentrations in Redcliff, Alberta and in Toronto and Hamilton, Ontario.²

Medicine Hats second advantage for the clay products industry was an abundant supply of clay. The steep banks of the South Saskatchewan River which winds through the lowlands of the city offered large quantities of common clay suitable for brick making. This clay forms part of a vast deposit of sandy shale known as the Oldman Formation. By the late 1880s several small brick plants were in operation on the grounds of the present-day I-XL plant. These modest plants, which relied on coal to heat their kilns, supplied red bricks for Medicine Hats initial building boom. In addition to the clay sources within the city, brick manufacturers established substantial quarries in the Medicine Hat vicinity, particularly at Dunmore, located five miles south-east of the city, and several miles to the west, at Redcliff. The Dunmore quarry operated continuously from 1910 until 1955. The Redcliff quarries have produced steadily from 1913 until the present day. A still larger quarry was established five miles east of Medicine Hat in 1951.³

The third and perhaps most important factor that ensured Medicine Hats stature as the major clay products manufacturing centre in western Canada was the availability of low cost natural gas. A major expense in manufacturing clay products was that of maintaining a heat source capable of hardening pliable clay into vitrified ceramic. Natural gas provided reliable, consistent heat at the intensely high temperatures needed for firing the kilns. The first major gas well was struck within the city limits in June

1904. Further testing revealed that the city was sitting over a gas field located at a depth of between 1,000 and 2,000 feet, covering an estimated 150 square miles. This discovery gave Medicine Hat a competitive edge in its battle with Calgary and Lethbridge to become the regions predominant industrial centre. Starting in 1905, the city enticed various industries to locate there through the offer of free building sites, free water, tax concessions and cheap gas. This triggered a development boom that saw the establishment of flour mills, woolen mills, greenhouses, foundries, glass factories, breweries and clay industries between 1909 and 1914⁴. In the case of several major clay products factories, this incentive included permission to drill and operate private gas wells on their properties. This was a potent attraction, particularly when coupled with favourable freight rates and nearby clay deposits.

Moreover, the use of natural gas to fire the kilns at Medicine Hat was an advantage shared only by rival plants in nearby Redcliff. A 1950 inventory of operational plants indicated that virtually all other Canadian clay products manufacturers relied on coal, oil, electricity or wood as heat sources.⁵ This favourable set of conditions encouraged extensive investment and diversification in Medicine Hats clay industry. This diversification permitted it to compete and ultimately survive the numerous vicissitudes that caused the eventual demise of most domestically-based clay industries in Canada⁶. The durability of Medicine Hats clay industry was succinctly summarized by Luke Lindoe, a noted clay expert and founder of Plainsman Clay Products, in 1965:

“Clay products plants failed due to some combination of shortcomings involving location, market, raw materials, fuel and experience. In the Medicine Hat area, due to advantages in raw materials, fuel and experience, they dominate the industry in western Canada.”⁷

The preliminary phase of Medicine Hats clay industry began with the establishment of several low volume common brick plants during the 1880s, and persisted until 1907 when natural gas became available to the industry. The significance of this initial phase resides in the establishment of the North Flats area of the city as the primary location for subsequent clay industry development. The earliest brick factory sites were located along the banks of Ross Creek, directly below the steep clay banks on the present-day I-XL factory site, and in close proximity to the CPR tracks. Two or three small brickyards operated within this vicinity during the 1880s and 1890s. The earliest of these, known as McCords Brickyard, was located on the same site as the I-XL factory, and marked the start of continuous brick manufacturing at this location⁸.

By 1907, brickyards from the initial developmental stage were displaced by new highly-capitalized ventures which were drawn to the North Flats area by the citys various inducements, which included on-site gas wells and direct access to the CPR via a new spur line. Three new clay industries were established in the area during a boom period that corresponded with the peak years of western settlement and lasted until 1914. These ventures, comprised of two brick, sewer pipe and hollow tile manufacturers, in addition to a stoneware and pottery plant, marked the start of the diversification that was to characterize Medicine Hats clay industry over the next 70 years. These three industrial sites form components of the cultural landscape (Alberta Clay Products, Medalta Potteries and the I-XL site).

A key player in the success of Medicine Hats clay industries was the CPR railway, which encouraged its early growth through reduced freight rates. The most tangible aspect of its role was the development of the spur siding which was built initially to provide access to the Alberta Clay Products plant (1909-10) then was extended to service the Medicine Hat Brick and Tile plant within the next year or so⁹. Completion of the spur line enabled the City of Medicine Hat to promote industrial development in the area lying between the two plants. The Medicine Hat Pottery (later renamed Medalta) was among the group of industries that located in this area in 1912. This spur remained the principal means by which the various factories brought in raw materials and shipped out their finished goods until the 1980s when it was displaced by truck transportation.

The three factories established before 1914 formed the backbone of Medicine Hats clay products

industry. The cultural landscape which they established was subsequently augmented by two other factories: the Hycroft Pottery in 1938, and the National Porcelain factory in 1946. Collectively, the operational histories of these plants reveal the dynamics and complexities of the Canadian clay industry. The two largest factories, Medicine Hat Brick and Tile (later renamed I-XL Industries) and Alberta Clay Products, were located at opposite ends of the clay products landscape. These two companies remained the primary economic generators of Medicine Hats clay industry. Both became major suppliers of brick, hollow tile and sewer pipe products required by the construction industry and municipal development of western Canada¹⁰.

From a national standpoint, the most distinctive feature of the clay industry cultural landscape at Medicine Hat resides in the diversity of products that were manufactured there. Although this diversity was not unique in itself, the persistence of the industry, and the unique set of factors that contributed to its growth and survival (rail transportation, access to raw materials



Fig. 6. Undated aerial view of Alberta Clay Products complex. CPR mainline is in background, spur line in lower foreground. The surviving beehive kiln appears at extreme left. (Marylu Antonelli and Jack Forbes, *Pottery in Alberta. The Long Tradition*, 34)

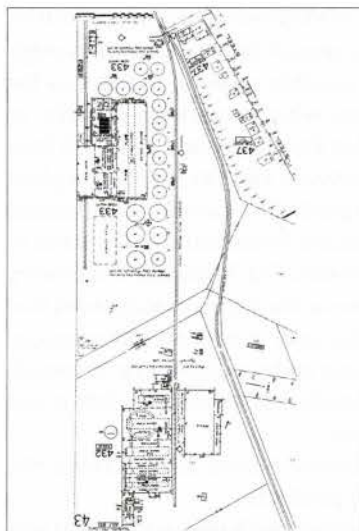


Fig. 5. Site plan showing Alberta Clay Products factory complex and Hycroft Pottery factory. (Medicine Hat Museum and Archives, Insurance Plan of the City of Medicine Hat, Alberta, July 1955, Plate 43)

and access to low cost fuel), lend a distinctive historical quality to the place.

Description of the landscape

The cultural landscape is bounded on the west by the Clay Street border of the Alberta Clay Products site, and on the east by the I-XL brick factory and adjacent clay cliffs, a distance of approximately 1.2 kilometre. The conspicuous railway presence, along with remnants of the on-site gas wells that supplied cheap fuel, and excavation sites on nearby clay banks which provided some of the raw

materials for the industry, offer tangible evidence of the unique combination of factors that led to Medicine Hat's emergence as the dominant supplier of clay products in western Canada.

The area presents an evolved landscape comprised of relic elements dating from successive developmental phases of the clay industry, modern facilities associated with present day clay industries, open fields and adjacent commercial facilities that are not linked with the clay industry. The landscape has a linear form comprised of three concentrations of clay industry activity spread along the 1.2 km. railway spur. Between the three concentrations are two open areas comprised of fields and flood plain. Moving from west to east, the landscape elements are as follows:



Fig. 7. Railway spur skirting north-west perimeter of former Alberta Clay Products site. The former stable/garage associated with that firm is on left ; clay piles associated with Plainsman Clay Products Ltd. at right, with beehive kiln in center background. (E. Mills, August 1999)

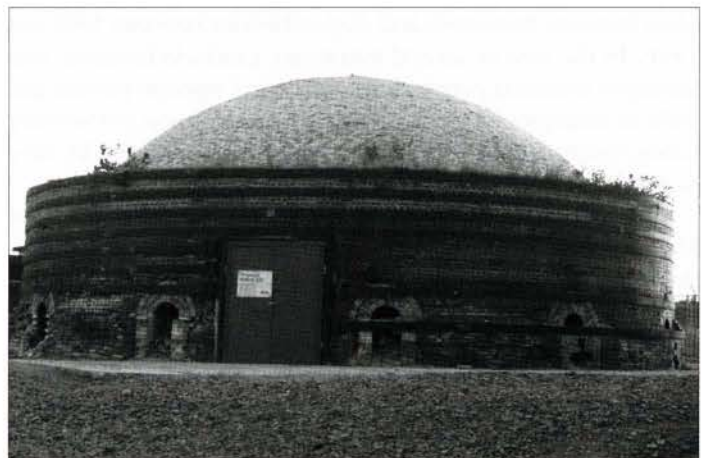


Fig. 8. The remaining beehive kiln on the Alberta Clay Products site. (E. Mills, August 1999)



Fig. 9. Beehive kiln and Plainsman Clay factory, eastern end of Alberta Clay Products site. (E. Mills, August 1999)

Alberta Clay Products Company site (Figures 5-11)

This site is wedged between the CPR mainline and the clay industries spur. Established in 1909, this industrial complex was comprised of a large four storey factory ringed by 18 circular beehive kilns and various outbuildings until 1962 when much of it was destroyed by fire. Surviving remnants consist of a single beehive kiln, two gas regulator sheds, and a stable/garage (Figures 8-10). The kiln, a provincially-designated historic site, is located on the former factory site. This is the largest beehive kiln remaining within the Medicine Hat area and is noteworthy for both its historical associations with the industry and for its



Fig. 10. View westward to Plainsman Clay Products factory entrance, with Alberta Clay Products gas regulator shed at right. (E. Mills, August 1999)



Fig. 13. View south to Hycroft complex from Wood Street entrance. (E. Mills, August 1999)



Fig. 11. Second gas regulator building at western perimeter of Hycroft Pottery site (brick regulator shed in background at right). (E. Mills, August 1999)



Fig. 12. Alberta Clay Products site, showing Plainsman Clay Products clay sorting piles on left, brick and tile remnants from destroyed factory on right, and beehive kiln in centre background. (E. Mills, August 1999)

stands on a separate lot adjacent to the north-west corner of the Alberta Clay Products site, fronting on Clay and Steel streets. Although modified to serve other uses, the building offers references to the parent plant through its wall materials (brick and hollow tile) and through retention of the Alberta Clay Products initials above an entrance.

The Alberta Clay Products site is currently occupied by Plainsman Clay Products Ltd., a subsidiary of I-XL Industries that specializes in the production of pottery and modelling clay products for ceramic artists and hobbyists. (This is currently the largest domestic supplier of these products in Canada.) The modern cinder block office and production building of this firm stands near the site of the former brick plant and in close proximity to the relic beehive kiln. Much of the property is covered with piles of raw clay materials from which the company manufac-

structural characteristics. The two gas regulator buildings and an associated gas well site are located on the eastern perimeter of the site, within the current boundaries of the adjacent Hycroft property (see below). This small brick structure illustrates one of the unique elements that contributed to the growth of the clay industry in this area C the discovery of large gas reserves directly below the building sites. This enabled the Alberta Clay Products Company to develop private gas wells to run the plant. The former stable building

tures its various products. Scattered among these piles and around the perimeter of the site are

piles of brick remnants and tile shards dating from the Alberta Clay Products company's five decades of operation (Figure 11).

The company was serviced by two railway sidings that ran off the CPR spur line. One of these sidings was extended ca. 1938 to service the adjacent Hycroft plant, initially a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Alberta Clay Products Company (see site plan, Figure 5). The corridor of this siding, along with sections of rail, remains in place.

Hycroft Potteries Factory site (Figures 5, 13-21)

The Hycroft plant occupies a 10.5 acre site that extends eastward from the western border of the Alberta Clay products property. The site is bounded on the south by the CPR mainline corridor, and on the north by the spur corridor (Figure 5). Both properties currently share a common vehicle entrance off Wood Street. The plant complex is comprised of the factory building and adjacent warehouse, plus several small subsidiary structures. The factory and warehouse are both of double brick wall construction with steel and milled frame structural components. Completed in 1938, the two buildings comprise a cohesive operational and visual unit separated by the corridor of the former railway siding. The brick exteriors of both buildings display the pragmatic, functional approach to industrial plant design characteristic of the interwar period. The flat rooflines accentuate the low, horizontal massing and scale of the buildings (the factory contains over 47,000 square feet of operational space) (Figures 13-16). Five parallel clerestories project above the flat roof line of the factory, providing natural lighting for the production area. A curved corner on the north west side of the factory adds a hint of Moderne styling to the main public entrance area of the facility (Figure 14). A series of additions along the south and east facades of the plant reflect various expansions to the factory's production lines over its operational life. The largest of these wings enclosed a circular beehive kiln and was added during the years immediately following the opening of the plant in 1938. This kiln was later removed, but the circular chimney stack remains in place (Figure 16).

In addition to the two main buildings, the site contains the former Alberta Clay Products gas regulator building, a small stucco clad building (possibly a second gas regulator facility), and two free standing metal clad storage sheds. The western side of the property formerly served as a storage and dumping area for the plant, and abounds in pottery shards and other materials of potential



Fig. 14. Hycroft Pottery, showing railway siding corridor separating warehouse (left) and factory (right). (E. Mills, August 1999)



Fig. 19. Hycroft factory interior, showing pottery display on left, entrance to circular kiln on right. (E. Mills, August 1999)



Fig. 15. Hycroft warehouse, west and north facades, railway spur in foreground. (E. Mills, August 1999)



Fig. 16. Hycroft factory, eastern facade. (E. Mills, August 1999)



Fig. 17. South facade of Hycroft factory, showing various additions dating from 1950s, 1960s. (E. Mills, August 1999)

archaeological value. It also contains the site of a former gas well that supplied power to the plant.

The most remarkable aspect of the Hycroft Pottery plant is the intact production line, much of it dating from 1938. In contrast to the older Medalta plant further east along the railway spur, Hycroft (or Medicine Hat Potteries as it was initially named), was designed as a state-of-the-art facility in which the production line was carefully designed for maximum efficiency. The interior layout of the plant is dominated by a circular tunnel kiln, approximately 75 feet in diameter and 235 feet in length, which occupies a central section of the plant. This is the only example known to survive in Canada. To the rear of the kiln, various pieces of equipment occupy locations indicated on the 1938 floor plan (Figure 18). These components,

including blungers, clay presses, agitators, segger mills, dryers and wheels, along with remnants of conveyer systems, gas lines and compressor lines, convey a vivid impression of the commer-



Fig. 20. Interior panorama of Hycroft production line. (E. Mills, August 1999)

cial pottery production that occurred here (Figures 20-21). Additional equipment, much of it installed in the annex areas added during the 1950s and 60s, is associated with the line of ceramic sinks and toilets which the plant produced during the latter stages of its operation. In addition to its machinery, the plant retains a large inventory of ceramics products and the moulds used in their production. Many of these pieces are on display and form an integral component of the interpretive program run by the Friends of Medalta Society, current owners of the property.

A broad open field lies to the east of the Hycroft plant. Formerly used as a storage and dumping area for Hycroft and for the Alberta Clay Products plant, this field also contains a natural

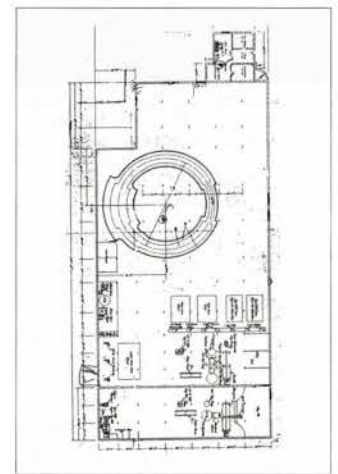


Fig. 18. Original floor plan for the Hycroft plant, dated 1937. (Friends of Medalta Society)



Fig. 21. View east from Hycroft plant to Medalta Pottery in center background. Field is part of the Hycroft site ; building at right is a commercial greenhouse.
(E. Mills, August 1999)



Fig. 22. View westward along railway spur, showing National Porcelain plant on left, Medalta Pottery on right.
(E. Mills, August 1999)

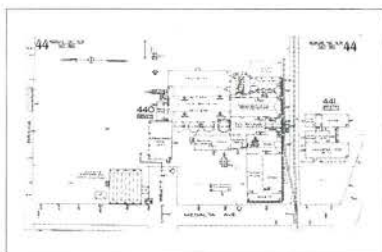


Fig. 24. 1955 site plans of Medalta Pottery and National Porcelain.
(Medicine Hat Museum and Archives, Insurance Plan of the City of Medicine Hat, Alta., July 1955, plate 44)

gas well site. The field serves as a buffer between the Hycroft site and an adjacent greenhouse operation. The Medalta Pottery site lies a short distance to the east (Figure 21).

Medalta Potteries Site (Figures 22-25)

The Medalta Potteries complex is comprised of five interconnected buildings, one detached building, and a row of four beehive kilns which occupy a 7.73 acre site flanking the north side of the CPR railway spur. Medalta Avenue marks the western boundary of the site. As noted above, the Medalta site is physically separated from the preceding Hycroft site by approximately 300 metres /yards of unassociated property, although the rail corridor serves as visual link. (The Friends of Medalta Society have acquired a boxcar and dining car which they have installed on a short siding leading off the spur line directly in front of the Medalta plant as interpretive elements see Figures 22-23). The nucleus of the Medalta complex consists of four interconnected buildings constructed in 1912 as components of Medalta's precursor, the Medicine Hat Pottery Company (1912-13) (see site plan, Figure 24). The monitor roofs, double brick walls and timber frames of these buildings convey a distinctive sense of place to the Medalta plant which is amplified by a row of four circular beehive kilns located at the rear of the buildings. In contrast to the Hycroft factory, the Medalta complex was adapted to changing technologies and industrial demands through the addition of successive buildings, most of which were attached to the existing complex. Although several of these structures were destroyed by a succession of fires that plagued the site over the years, the five-building complex continues to reflect this organic evolution through the survival of components dating from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1960s. These later additions extend northwards behind the 1912 buildings. The footprints of razed



Fig. 23. View west from Medalta Pottery site. Greenhouses to right of boxcar ; Hycroft in center rear.
(E. Mills, August 1999)

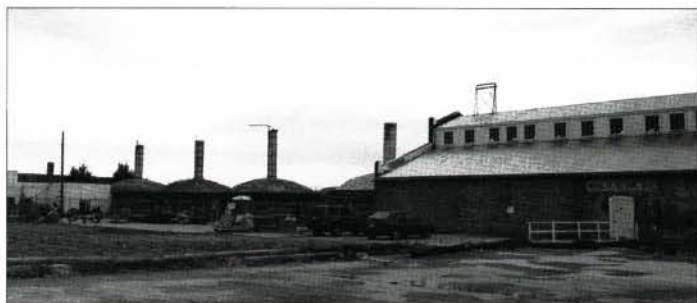


Fig. 25. Eastern side of Medalta complex, showing beehive kilns. Footprints of former buildings associated with the site are visible in foreground.
(E. Mills, August 1999)

structures remain evident in the form of concrete slabs adjacent to the surviving structures (Figures 23, 25).

Whereas the Hycroft factory features an integrated pottery fabrication system housed within a single monolithic structure, the various stages of pottery production were spread among the interconnected buildings within the Medalta complex. The complexity of this internal plan, coupled with the structural qualities of the timber framed interiors on the majority of the buildings, conveys a distinctly different impression of the industrial process than that displayed at the neighboring Hycroft plant.

The northern and western perimeters of the Medalta site are comprised of open fields containing layers of residual pottery



Fig. 26. National Porcelain factory site, view to north with Medalta at rear. (E. Mills, August 1999)



Fig. 27. View west along railway spur from trestle over Seven Persons Creek, midway between Medalta and the I-XL site. The track ends at this point. (E. Mills, August 1999)



Fig. 28. View eastwards from termination of the railway spur at boundary of the I-XL site. (E. Mills, August 1999)

operational life extended from 1946 until its destruction by fire in 1974 (see site plan, Figure 24). The surviving remnants consist of two brick structures which probably date from the plants inception, a modern one storey section, and the concrete footprint of the manufacturing section of the plant (Figure 26). The interpretative values at this site reside in its former associations with the clay industry and in its close proximity to the Medalta plant.

Directly east of the National Porcelain and Medalta Pottery sites, the CPR spur enters a grassy area surrounding the channels and convergence point of Seven Persons Creek and Ross Creek. At an undisclosed date the stream courses were altered to reduce the hazard of spring flooding of the various industrial sites in the vicinity, including the Medalta plant. This area, which extends to the boundary of the fifth and eastern-most site within the cultural landscape, is of potential archaeological interest as the location of one or more 19th century brick plants. At present, the area is owned by the City of Medicine Hat and contains a recreational trail that follows the west bank of the stream (Figure 27). Trackage on the CPR spur ends at that point, although the rail trestle and road bed remain in place. The road bed extends a short distance eastward to an embankment on the edge of the I-XL property (Figure 28).

I-XL Industries Ltd. brick plant site (Figures 28-34)

This site lies at the eastern end of the cultural landscape. It has sustained a continuous association with the clay industry since the mid-1880s when the first rudimentary brick plant was

shards, bricks and other by-products associated with the plants years of operation.

National Porcelain Insulator Company Site (Figures 22, 24, 26)

This site is bounded by Medalta Avenue on the west, by Industrial Avenue on the south, and by the CPR spur line on the north, immediately across from the Medalta plant. It contains structural remnants of a plant which specialized in the production of electrical porcelain insulators, a distinctive sub-component of the clay industry and the only example located in Canada. The plants

established on the banks of Ross Creek. The steep clay cliffs which were the original inducement to clay manufacturing in the locale serve as a prominent eastern boundary to the site and to the landscape (Figures 4, 29, 30). These cliffs, which were originally "mined" through a series of open pits, have been modified over the years to serve as storage areas for clay which is transported to the plant from active mine sites in other locations in Alberta and Saskatchewan (Figure 31).

At present, the site contains the headquarters and major brick and pipe manufacturing plants of I-XL Industries, the largest producer of brick and tile products in western Canada. A succession of brick companies have occupied the site continuously since 1885. The current I-XL plant reflects decades of steady evolution and growth that incorporates remnants of the Medicine Hat Brick and Tile Company plant, built ca. 1928-29. Solid brick wall elements and a pair of large brick chimneys associated with former updraft periodic kilns are remnants of the earlier plant (Figures 32-33). In 1952 these kilns were replaced by a continuous tunnel drier kiln system which remains in operation (Figure 34). Most of the existing structural components of the plant date from major expansion phases that occurred in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Another change which has altered one of the sites important historical associations was the removal, in the early 1990s, of the eastern-most section of the CPR spur which had previously terminated within the I-XL property.

It should be noted that public access to the I-XL site is restricted, although the company does offer conducted tours of the facility. The site and its various historical associations, including the adjacent clay escarpment, are clearly visible from the CPR spur corridor which ends just outside the western boundary of the property (Figure 28).

Fig. 29. Historical 1930's panorama of Medicine Hat Brick & Tile Co. plant from clay escarpment. Medalta is visible in background. (Antonelli & Forbes. *Pottery in Alberta*, 110)

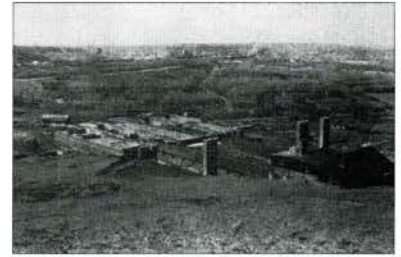


Fig. 30. View westwards from clay embankment, I-XL site. Remnants of the 1929 Medicine Hat Brick & Tile factory are visible at right. (E. Mills, August 1999)



Fig. 31. Clay storage and mixing area on the edge of clay embankment, I-XL site. (E. Mills, August 1999)



Fig. 32. Remnant of 1929 Medicine Hat Brick & Tile plant in I-XL complex.
(Alberta Culture, *Provincial Historic Resources Inventory*, 1999)

Integrity

The integrity of the cultural landscape resides in the retention of diverse elements that reflect the unique qualities that defined the clay industries in this place. Three of these elements illustrate the importance of rail transportation, natural gas wells, and local clay deposits, which collectively enabled Medicine Hat to become the predominant clay industries centre for western Canada. The remaining elements consist of factories, factory sites and associated components that illustrate the diverse range of clay industries that located here.

The combination of major relic structures, notably the Medalta and Hycroft factories and the Alberta Clay Products kiln, asserts a sense of the historical processes of clay manufacture in this area over an extended period of time (1910s to 1980s) which is reinforced by former rail transportation corridors, natural gas regulator structures, and by the clay escarpment that defines the eastern perimeter of the landscape. In the case of the former Alberta Clay Products site, the ongoing activities associated with the Plainsman Clay Products plant convey a sense of an evolved landscape with clear associations to the clay industry. Similarly, the vast I-XL industrial complex represents an evolved component of the greater landscape, comprised of a brick manufacturing plant that has steadily evolved and expanded over an 80 year period, set against the backdrop of the clay escarpment that gave rise to the establishment of the clay industry in this location back in the 1880s.

Although the aforementioned elements contribute to a distinctive sense of industrial evolution, the visual impact of the landscape is compromised by several gaps and visual intrusions. The gaps consist of open fields and a flood plain that separate the Medalta and National Porcelain plant sites from the Hycroft plant to the west, and from the I-XL site to the east. The principal intrusions within the area consist of various warehouses, light industries and greenhouse operations that occupy sites within the vicinity. Neighbouring streets on the north-west perimeter of the landscape contain modest residences, some of which were once occupied by employees of the various clay industries¹¹. These gaps and intrusions are offset to some degree by the railway spur corridor that functions as a spine for the clay industries landscape.



Fig. 33. Remnant of downdraft kiln associated with pre-1950 Medicine Hat Brick & Tile plant, I-XL complex.
(Alberta Culture, *Provincial Historic Resources Inventory*, 1999)

Comparative Context

To date the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada has recommended designation of two clay industry sites on the basis of their historical and/or historical importance. These are the Medalta Pottery in Medicine Hat (1985) and the Claybank Brick Plant, Claybank, Saskatchewan (1994). In the case of Medalta, the Board recommended that “by virtue of its *in situ* resources characteristic of the ceramics industry, and its impact on the development of that industry in Canada, the Medalta Potteries is of national historic and architectural significance...”¹² The Claybank site was cited as “an extraordinarily intact example of an early 20th century brick making complex which retains all of the key structures as well as much of the original brick making equipment. Further, the plant was one of Canada’s major producers of domestic clay refractory products used by the railways and the oil refining, power and metallurgical industries. Finally, save for the highest quality firebrick, the plant used clay mined and manufactured on site...”¹³

In 1996 the Board declined a request for designation of a third site, the Don Valley Brick Works in Toronto, on the grounds that the plant had supplied only local markets for common brick, and currently lacked key equipment and facilities associated with its former manufacturing processes¹⁴.

All three of the above mentioned sites are associated with an individual factory complex that produced a specific line of products: pottery and stoneware, refractory bricks, and building bricks, respectively.

In 1987 the Board recommended that “manufacturing is a major theme in Canadian history, which should be commemorated on a scale appropriate to its significance.”¹⁵ In 1990 a study entitled “Manufacturing Locations in Canada: The Identification and Evaluation of Significant Multi-Industry Manufacturing

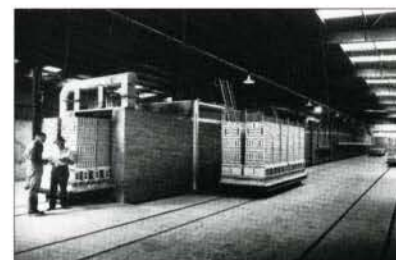


Fig. 34. 1953 continuous tunnel kiln, Medicine Hat Brick & Tile Factory.
(Provincial Archives of Alberta, A 5556)

Complexes and Evaluation of Significant Multi-Industry Manufacturing Complexes" was prepared and tabled in response to the Boards 1987 directive.¹⁶ In 1996, on the basis of the 1990 study, the Board recommended the commemoration of the Lachine Canal Manufacturing Complex "because of its role in the industrialization of Canada and the number, extent, and variety of its surviving manufacturing establishments."¹⁷ At the same time, the Board declined to recommend designation of three Ontario manufacturing complexes (Toronto-Lower Don Valley, Brantford-Grand River Valley, and Galt-Grand River Valley) on the grounds that they lacked sufficient cohesiveness.¹⁸ Comparisons between the cultural landscape in Medicine Hat and the industrial complexes in Lachine or in the three Ontario locations examples are difficult owing to substantial differences in scale and to the more specific focus of the Medicine Hat landscape. The distinguishing feature in this instance is the concentration of factory sites associated with various components of a single industry, whereas the Quebec and Ontario examples were selected on the basis of the diversity of industries which they contain. Like the three Ontario examples, it must be conceded that the Medicine Hat landscape suffers from destroyed elements (the Alberta Clay Products and National Porcelain plants). Conversely, these absences are balanced by the emergence of new clay products industries on historical sites (Plainsman Clay Products), by the ongoing dynamics of the I-XL plant, and by the rich interpretive potential of the two former pottery complexes.

The merits of the clay industries cultural landscape are based on its qualities as an environment that uniquely illustrates the many facets of an industry that has previously been recognized to be of national historical importance through individual site commemoration. In this case, no landscapes associated with the clay industry contain a comparable range of relic and evolved landscape elements. The former clay industry landscapes located in Toronto, Hamilton and Montréal no longer contain sizable concentrations of historical resources¹⁹. Similarly, the former clay industry landscape at Redcliff has been extensively redeveloped, though I-XL Industries continues to operate a large brick plant in that community. A former concentration of clay products factories at Clayburn, B.C. has also been demolished.

Summary of significance

The historical significance of the clay products cultural landscape resides in its associations with the growth and diversification of an industry that has played a vital role in the economic and physical development of western Canada. Medicine Hats emergence at the centre of the clay products industry for western Canada was attributable to the unique combination of local

clay beds, an excellent transportation infrastructure and vast supplies of natural gas. The cultural landscape contains resources that illustrate all three of these factors, along with an array of factories and factory remnants that reveal the diverse range of products associated with this industry. The combination of relic elements dating from past developmental stages and current clay products industries presents a compelling blend of relic and evolved landscape resources.

Notes

1 Gordon Fulton, "Claybank Brick Plant, Claybank, Saskatchewan," HSMBC Agenda Paper 1994-16, 388-390.

2 Canada. Department of Mines and Technical Survey (Mines Branch), "Manufacturers of Clay Products in Canada", 6-3 (Ottawa: Mineral Resources Division, April 1950), 4-13.

3 John M. Manson, *Bricks in Alberta* (Edmonton: Alberta Masonry Institute, 1983), 20.

4 Medicine Hat Board of Trade and Industrial Bureau, *Medicine Hat, Alberta. The City where Industrial Plants are of more importance than Real Estate* (Medicine Hat, Jan. 1, 1913), 3-5.

5 "Manufacturers of Clay Products in Canada," 6-3, 4-13.

6 Manson, *Bricks in Alberta*, 79. The five gas-fuelled brick plants located in Medicine Hat and Redcliff were able to remain operational during the Depression years due to their low fuel costs and easily accessible clays. All but three other Alberta brick plants closed during the same period.

7 Quoted in Manson, *Bricks in Alberta*, 19.

8 *Ibid.*, 55-63.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 58. The spur line reached the Medicine Hat Brick factory in 1912.

10 "Manufacturers of Clay Products in Canada," 6-3 (1950), 4-13.

11 Unlike clay industries located

in remote locations, those in Medicine Hat did not need to supply workers housing due to the availability of low cost residential lots in close proximity to the factory sites.

12 HSMBC, *Minutes*, 1985-06, 20-21.

13 HSMBC, *Minutes*, 1994-06, 15.

14 HSMBC, *Minutes*, 1996-11.

15 HSMBC, *Minutes*, 1987-11, 8.

16 Felicity L. Leung, David McConnell and Jean-Claude Parent, "Manufacturing Locations in Canada: The Identification and Evaluation of Significant Multiple-Industry Manufacturing Complexes," (HSMBC Thematic Study, November 1990), 18-20. Medicine Hat was not among the 60 Canadian cities identified as major pre-1940 industrial centres in the 1990 study.

17 HSMBC, *Minutes*, 1996-11, 5-6.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

19 Jean-Claude Parent, "Les installations de la compagnie Don Valley Brick Works," HSMBC Agenda Paper, 1996-11, 16 ; Gordon Fulton, "Claybank Brick Plant, Claybank, Saskatchewan," 1994-16, 393-394.