

# Samuel Maclure's Influence on the Company Housing of Clayburn Village

by John D. Adams

In 1905, the Vancouver Fireclay Company was founded, and between then and 1918 an industrial and residential complex was built by the Company on what had formerly been farmland bordering Matsqui Prairie in the Central Fraser Valley. The centre of Company operations was known as Clayburn, a name adopted for the firm's major brand of firebrick and, after 1909, in its title which became the Clayburn Company Limited. Clayburn Village was the location of the Company's first plant and became the domicile of the senior staff and many other workers.

Clayburn Village's houses are of interest regionally because many of them were built of brick, an unusual feature of residential construction in most parts of British Columbia. Furthermore, however, they are of great interest to the architectural historian because Samuel Maclure, one of the province's best known architects, probably influenced the design of the ones built prior to 1909.

Samuel Maclure reached the height of his fame in Victoria after the turn of the century, but as a boy he had lived very close to Clayburn. His family continued to live in the old family home, "Hazelbrae", and it was his brother, Charles, who is credited with the discovery of the fireclay and who helped form the original brick plant at Clayburn, becoming the *de facto* first plant manager.

Only one brief written reference is known to exist pointing to Samuel Maclure's involvement in the design of Clayburn's houses. That is part of an unpublished note written by the late Connie Cruikshank, a local historian, who knew the Maclure family well and wrote many items about them. "Sam designed homes for the office staff,"<sup>1</sup> she wrote, but gave no other details or her sources, although the article appears to have been based on interviews with Maclure family members. This paper will focus on Clayburn Village's non-industrial structures built before 1909 and, by examining their style, provide evidence that Samuel Maclure did have a major hand in their design.

The positioning of Clayburn's first houses suggests a preconceived plan derived from principles of the City Beautiful Movement. The houses were built in a straight row according to size along the main thoroughfare into the village, the Clayburn Road. On the west were five brick bungalows, immediately to their east was a low storey and a half brick house, beside it, still further east, was a larger brick house for the Plant Manager, beyond this was a frame boarding house and a small frame store. Rising behind the entire row was the western flank of Sumas Mountain. The juxtaposition of house against the mountain produced the image of a gradual incline rising from west to east. Samuel Maclure's style can be seen in this use of vista, as it can in the details of the individual brick houses.

The largest house in the village, the Plant Manager's, was built to be imposing. Being on slightly higher ground than the others, as well as being on a double lot, it was the focal point for any viewer looking eastward through the village towards Sumas Mountain. It was one and a half stories tall and was constructed of brick veneer over wood. There was an air space underneath, but no basement, and the foundations consisted of brick walls set directly into the ground. As originally situated it was the last, or easternmost brick house in the pre-1909 row of dwellings.<sup>2</sup> The floor plan was a rectangle measuring approximately fifty-four feet by thirty-four feet at its base. A simple gable roof ran from front to back with dormers on each side. A front verandah, reached by seven steps, ran the entire width of the house. The first floor exterior finish was of brick while the upper storey exterior was of wooden shingles. Many details bore the characteristics of the Arts and Crafts Movement. (Fig. 10).

The front and rear gable ends and the roof of the Plant Manager's House were covered with dark stained, square-cut shingles, except for a single row of lighter coloured, triangularly cut ones which spanned

ed the front gable over the windows. An impression of continuity with the shingles was achieved by the use of small, diamond-shaped panes in the top sashes of the two upper front bedroom windows and in the entire full-length door between them which provided access to the deck over the verandah. Encircling the deck was a low, wooden balustrade consisting of square spindles with a wide, flat top railing. The lower five rows of shingles on the roof extended forward from the front gable to create a shingled skirt around the second floor deck, or a cap for the verandah. The verandah was further enclosed at the top by means of a hanging grille of plain wooden square members, and at the bottom by a matching grille and railing. The front and sides below the verandah were also covered with an open trellis work.

The brick of the Plant Manager's House was smooth and hard-pressed. The main colour was speckled buff and the trim was of flashed (darker) brick, resulting in a pronounced contrast of smooth expanses of buff set against the darker border and cedar shingled roof. This gave a varied look to the otherwise plain first storey which was further accentuated by three stringer courses of flashed brick that encircled the house at regular intervals.

Samuel Maclure's inspiration in the original interior of the Plant Manager's House is suggested by three features: the floor to ceiling parlour fireplace, the spacious central main hall and the hanging brass Arts and Crafts lighting fixtures. Their design and detailing were not standard in typical homes of the same period in the Fraser Valley. Besides the Plant Manager's House six other brick residences of varying sizes were constructed in Clayburn Village before 1909. None were as large as the Manager's however they are interesting when studied alone and in combination because they show evidence of having been designed by the same architect. A detailed study of these structures follows.

The Accountant's House, situated to the west of the Plant Manager's between it and the five Foremen's Cottages, was the second largest pre-1909 brick dwelling in Clayburn. Similar to the Manager's, it features several characteristics of the Arts and Crafts Movement. In plan it was "tee" shaped, with the top cross bar running north and south, and the stem east and west (parallel to the road). It was constructed of brick veneer over a wooden frame of two by six inch boards. It had no basement, the walls being set directly into the ground with an airspace under the main floor. (Fig. 11).

The exterior appearance of the Accountant's House was eclectic, comprising two completely different house styles joined together. As viewed from the front, the stem of the "tee" took the form of an Anglo-Indian bungalow with a high, broad sweeping roof covering the verandah. A dormer window on the west side of this wing provided light to an upstairs bedroom. The crossbar of the "tee" was a cross-gable. The roof of this wing did not sweep down as low as that of the adjoining one and as a result its eaves were approximately three feet above the others. The vertical gap between the eaves of the east-west wing and those of the cross-gable wing was handled in a typical Shingle Style manner. The architect, instead of extending the brick of the first storey to fill the gap and cover the face of the gable end, applied a flared shingle skirting to these areas, giving the illusion that the second floor flowed downwards over the first.

The positioning of the gabled wing at the easterly side of the Accountant's House enhanced the visual impression that the buildings of the village ascended towards Sumas Mountain. The broad bungalow style roof on the west side of the house swept upwards at the end of the row of Foremen's Cottages, forming a focal point at the apex of the front gable. A reversed positioning of the wings would have created a visual break in the view from the west.

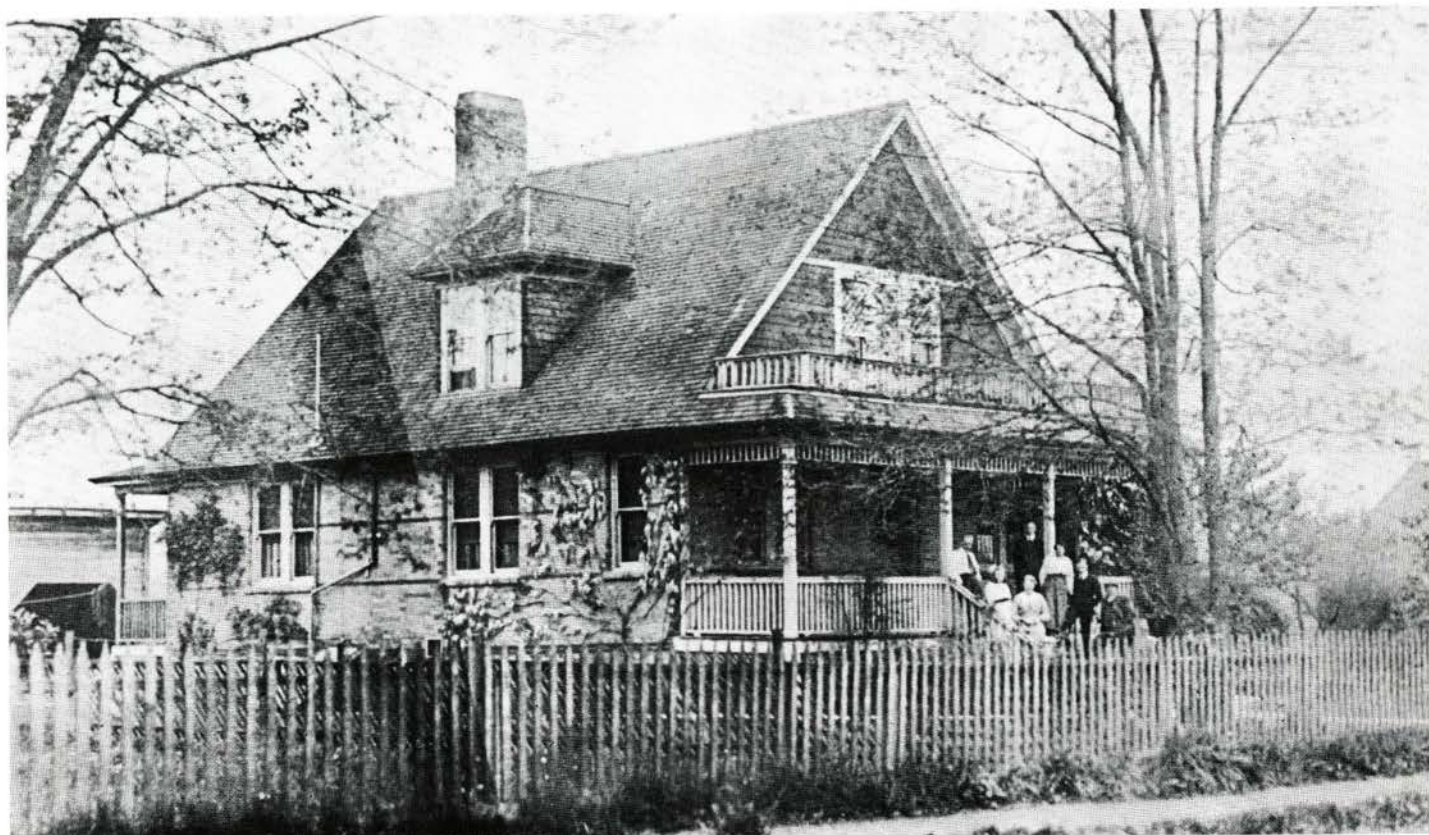


Figure 10. The Plant Manager's House, circa 1918.



Figure 11. The Accountant's House, circa 1918.

In contrast to the textured shingled upper storey, the first storey of the Accountant's House was composed of salmon-buff coloured pressed bricks, with half flashed brick around the windows, front doorways and corners. The smooth bricks contrasted sharply with the cedar shingles, creating a juxtaposition of the two materials which emphasized the intrinsic properties of both in the best Arts and Crafts tradition.

In the Accountant's, as with the Plant Manager's House, a sense of visual continuity was achieved. Diamond-shaped panes in the upper storey windows produced a unifying effect within the textured shingles surfaces of the top floor. However, in the smaller of the two houses the diamond-shaped panes were also included in the windows of the brick first storey, suggesting a decided concern for detail and finished appearance. Also, the front and rear windows of the gable ends were surmounted by a single row of triangularly-cut shingles which complemented the diamond-shaped panes and the cedar shingles of the gable ends.

The interior of the Accountant's House was not as grand as that of the Plant Manager's, yet two features were noteworthy. First, unlike the larger house, the Accountant's had no central, square hall. Instead, it had a more traditional narrow hallway running from the front door to a rear room, with stairs to the upper floor rising directly ahead of the main entrance. Second, the Accountant's House had a floor-to-ceiling fireplace of shiny dark brown bricks on the east wall of the parlour. Not as elaborate as the one in the Manager's House, the Accountant's fireplace was an impressive piece of masonry and a showpiece in the village. The fireplace and the parlour's three front windows containing diamond-shaped panes in the upper sashes, exemplified the Rudor Revival style. The parlour was the only room in the house where this style was prominent, although other rooms on both the ground and upper floors boasted the diamond-shaped panes.

In the context of the other pre-1909 brick houses in Clayburn Village, the Accountant's was intermediate in most respects. It acted as an intermediate visual feature in the row of brick houses. It was, furthermore, not as lavish as the Plant Manager's, but neither was it as spartan as the Foremen's Cottages. The size fitted into the overall village plan and it contained sufficient architectural features to indicate strongly that the house was designed by the same person who designed the Plant Manager's and the smaller residences. (Fig. 12).

The five pre-1909 brick Foremen's Cottages were almost identical to each other in floor plan and exterior appearance. Like the two larger houses, they were constructed of brick veneer over a wooden frame. Although the houses were small and lacked the decorative Arts and Crafts Movement detailing of the larger houses they, too, bore the characteristics which suggest Samuel Maclure influenced their design. Each of the so-called Foremen's Cottages contained certain features similar to those of a house type devised by Samuel Maclure and known in the Victoria area as a "Maclure bungalow". As Martin Segger has noted, Maclure bungalows were an adaptation of the locally popular colonial bungalow house type to the least expensive and most readily available material in Victoria: Shingles.<sup>3</sup> In Clayburn the Foremen's Cottages used the cheapest building material there: bricks.

A sketch plan for a bungalow of the Maclure variety for T. S. Hussey in Victoria shows a side extension encompassing a verandah which, if viewed in isolation from the rest of the house, would have closely resembled any one of the Clayburn Foremen's Cottages. The Hussey plan shows a bell-cast hipped roof supported by four square wooden pillars across the front of a verandah extending the full width of the wing. Two sets of side-by-side double sash windows were positioned symmetrically in the rear wall of the verandah. The mere addition of a door midway between the two sets of windows would have transformed the Hussey House wing into a frontal view of a Foreman's Cottage.

In comparison to the larger brick dwellings in Clayburn, the Foremen's Cottages did not incorporate large expanses of shingles, except on the roofs. Nor was any major contrast provided in the colour or texture of brick surfaces. On the contrary, the five small houses incorporated buff shades of brick overall which were only randomly interspersed with darker shades. The front door of each cottage was surmounted by a single-light transom window topped by a shallow

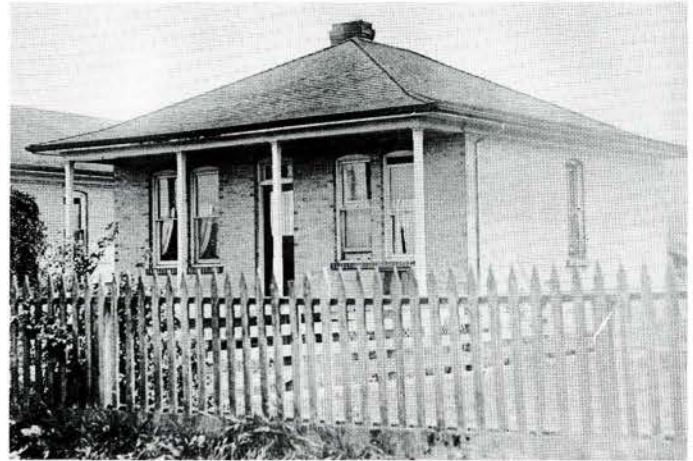


Figure 12. Typical Foreman's Cottage.

brick arch. The two sets of front windows were also each capped with a shallow brick arch.

The Foremen's Cottages, when viewed individually, had similar features to some of Samuel Maclure's bungalows, but were not outstanding examples of this house type. Maclure's bungalows, as the Hussey House showed, were much larger structures and were more complex in exterior appearance and in interior appointments. The small Clayburn houses were simple in plan, each containing five small rooms. They were devoid of many of the Maclure trademarks associated with the two larger brick houses in the village. Only when the five brick cottages are considered together, in conjunction with the larger two, does their architectural importance become evident.

The pre-1909 row of brick houses in Clayburn Village achieved a unity of appearance which was unique in British Columbia's rural Lower Mainland region and which was rarely seen even in the larger urban centres of the coast. The use of brick and shingles, the fenestration and certain interior features of Arts and Crafts Movement inspiration, coupled with the use of other architectural styles such as the bungalow roof and verandah, suggests that the houses were the product of an experienced architect. This theory is corroborated by the ideal positioning of the houses in relation to each other to take best advantage of the natural vista to the east. Samuel Maclure's architectural style is evidence by many of these details. It is likely that he was the one responsible for their design, although whether Maclure himself executed individual designs for each house is not known. Likely he may have been assisted by someone else. Nevertheless, because of Samuel's close ties with his brother Charles, it seems probable that he would have wanted to approve and influence whatever form Clayburn's employee housing would take.

Connie Cruikshank, the local historian, did not provide a reference for her statement that "Sam designed homes for the office staff". Nevertheless, the houses themselves and their context supply the most concrete proof that this was the case.

## ENDNOTES:

1. Connie Cruikshank, handwritten unpublished article in Cruikshank Files, MSA Museum, Abbotsford, no date.
2. As of 1984, the Plant Manager's House still stands in Clayburn Village. While changes to its interior and exterior have been sympathetic the house has undergone many alterations, some dating back to the period before 1918. It is only the original form of the house which this paper will consider. Details of the original have been reconstructed from photographs and from interviews with the daughters of two former Plant Managers, Mrs. Margaret Millar Cooper and Mrs. Lillian Ball Wilkinson.
3. Martin Segger, "In Search of Appropriate Form, The Architecture of Samuel Maclure and Francis Mawson Rattenbury", in *Canadian Collector*, vol. 11, no. 3 (May-June, 1976), pp. 51-55 *passim*.