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Published by Ronald Caplan on 1977/12/1

Making Bricks at George's River Harry Carmichael, George's River I was born February 30, 1883, at George's River. My family was there for a long time. Grandfather and Grandmother, they came out from Scotland. My grandfather was a blacksmith. He was hired on as foreman down at Sydney Mines. This farm was up for sale and Grandmother bought it. She was the farmer. He never farmed any. He couldn't farm. Grandmother was a tall woman. She was about six feet tall, strong as a horse. She done all the farming. (Did they know about the clay?) No, not in them days. Didn't know too much about it till about 1900. The clay was at the surface. We had about 14 feet of good clay and there was about 6 inches of surface on top of that, so we didn't have much stripping to do. We had it good. My father started the brick. He figured it out all by himself. He spent about a year before he did anything, planning the kind of gear that he'd want for to mix up the clay. He planned this gin to put the clay into and grind it • a big log and pins into it, and the horse would turn this round and it would cut all the clay up as fine as butter. Big round log up on end and the pins all through it, and that chops it up. You put the clay in from above, into a big frame, a big box made about 4 feet, 5 feet square. We had two vats there for mixing • have to mix in a certain amount of sand. Then you'd shovel it into the gin from there according as you'd make your brick, as it would come out an opening. One man would be cutting and molding them, and you'd be putting more clay in all the time. The horse would be turning the log • a big long sweep onto it • be about 20 feet long. It'd go right around the whole circle. The clay would go down and be mixed and come out a place about the size of a brick. We had an old molder, an expert over from Mira for two summers • a MacDonald • he'd take his hand and he'd cut off just about enough to fill the molds. He'd slap it down into the molds and cut it off quick as a shot. He'd mold about 2000 a day. I got into it pretty good. I could mold about 800 a day. I think the molds were made of pine. Father was a handyman carpenter and all • he made the molds. Then we had maybe a quarter of an acre all leveled off, with sand. Just kept perfectly level. Just dump the bricks on the ground and leave them there till they'd dry or harden up. Then you'd turn them on edge. It would depend on the weather. Good weather it'd dry up in a couple of days. Then they'd turn kind of whitish. Then we'd build them on racks. Get them dried out, till you'd have enough to fill your kiln. Kiln would take about 40,000 to 45,000. And you want them fairly well dried before you put them in the kiln. 45,000 • that's a lot of brick. All made by hand. There were 4 or 5 of us into it. My brother was 2 years younger than me • he was pretty good at it too. George, John G., and my father, Walter, and this MacDonald. Sometimes we'd hire a man. Labour was cheap then. Biggest problem was to cut wood all winter. You weren't idle, you know • you'd cut wood all winter for to burn them. Half a cord of wood for to burn a thousand brick. There were arches built in your kiln, so far apart • and you put your wood in these arches • and that's the way you burned them. The whole kiln is built of dry brick • dry as you could get them outside • and you'd have to fire them from each side. Put the wood in from each side. The whole



block was'bricks. And the arches are all open for the fire • then you'd have a solid block built on top • the whole thing a big square. I think we had about 6 arches in our kiln, lined up one a- gainst the other on the bottom, a good foot apSirt, maybe a little better • but once you get up above the arches, maybe about 3 feet or so, when you get above the arches the whole thing is all built over level. There's no opening on top. You can't see the arches, only from under. The top is flat, a solid block of brick. We'd build this out in a level big yard. And we had a house built o- ver the whole thing to protect it from the weather • a big high roof made out of wood, over it. It was high though. (You weren't a- fraid it would burn?) Oh, we had to watch it. It was put on posts • maybe 4 or 5 posts • to keep the water off the bricks, so it wouldn't melt them. We'd have to fire it for about 8 days. First 3 days you'd steam them • put low fires on through the arches. Dry them all out as dry as you could get them. Then you'd keep Cape Breton's Magazitie/29