

The Brick Industry

To completely cover Scioto County's history in the brick industry, both firebrick and paving brick must be considered.

Firebrick was made from the rich deposits of clay in Scioto, and was used for lining blast furnaces, rolling mill furnaces and locomotive train engines. Firebrick was used wherever a lining was needed to endure enormous heat. It was to withstand 1,500 to 2,000 degrees without melting or crumbling.

In 1861, Thomas Reece took two barrels of the choicest clay in Scioto and experimented with much success. Gathering backers, Reese and his associates formed Taylor, McConnell and Company. In 1864-65, McConnell, Porter and Company formed a brick plant, and in 1868 a third yard was opened by Farney, Murray and Company.

In 1871, the three companies merged together and incorporated the Scioto Fire Brick Company. In 1894, the company added paving bricks to their product line. In 1902, the Scioto Fire Brick had formed the Star Yard one mile west of town.

In 1913, a devastating fire destroyed the main plant. In 1916, the Scioto Fire Brick Company sold its property to Turley & Jordan and was succeeded by Harbison-Walker Refractories of Pittsburgh.

In the Portsmouth Times, March 21, 1863, an article in the sheriff's sale mentions Samuel S. Voorheis had land that went on public auction. He was described as a brick manufacturer. There is no other mention of him until his death in Ironton.

Portsmouth Fire Brick Works began in 1870 by W. Q. Adams. Mr. Adams had worked with Scioto Brick for several years. He enlisted

associates and built Portsmouth Fire Brick on Campbell Avenue and 10th Street. By the year 1889, the company produced 28,000 bricks daily. Its location near the railroad and the river was beneficial to the company. During its time, Portsmouth Fire Brick was considered to be the largest manufacturer of its kind in the world.

In 1901, Portsmouth Fire Brick Works and Kentucky Fire Brick Company merged and incorporated. In July, 1901, deeds for South Webster Fire Brick Works and the blast furnace were transferred to Portsmouth-Kentucky Fire Brick. In 1902, this company was absorbed into the Harbison-Walker Refractories. Their plant in Sciotoville was destroyed by fire in 1930. The Harbison-Walker closed its Portsmouth plant in 1983.

In 1907, William Hitchcock began his career with a newly organized Portsmouth Refractories Company. During his 60 years in the industry, he became known as an authority on firebrick. He was a pioneer of Silica-quartz brick which was principally used in the steel industry.

The Kaps Brothers Brick Plant was formed in 1866. Located at 10th & Court, the brothers were considered pioneers in the paving brick industry. Their work is still visible in the Biggs House, Elk Building (Boneyfiddle Art) and many other buildings in the Boneyfiddle area.

The hills of this area were rich in clay and shale, so the Kentucky Fire Brick opened a paving brick business in Portsmouth in 1892 and thus called its name Portsmouth Paving Brick aka Portsmouth Fire Brick at Gallia & Campbell Streets.

In 1898, the plant formerly the Portsmouth Paving Brick was purchased through receivership. The newly organized Portsmouth Pressed Brick (paving) was located in its place on Chillicothe St. west of 17th.

Portsmouth Pressed Brick began producing bricks in March of 1898. In August 1898, the city decided to have the streets paved with 3 types of brick. This included Portsmouth Pressed Brick and Sciotoville Paving Brick. In 1899, they received the contract to pave the streets of Evanston, Indiana.

On August 16, 1902, the Peebles Paving Brick began production on Gallia at Norfolk Street. The clay and shale was brought down from the northern hills of Portsmouth and made into bricks. The plant location near the railroad made for better delivery of the one-million-bricks-per-month goal.

Carlyle Paving Brick Company, or Carlyle-Labold, was organized in 1905 and employed 100 men. In 1918, the plant was converted to firebrick. In 1930, the company reported a deficit and thus sold its plants and holdings in 1931 to a New York firm. Mr. Carlyle noted that new plants in Ironton had started a larger concentration of the industry in that area.

Portsmouth Red Brick was incorporated in 1892 and had the capacity of producing 20,000 bricks daily and employed 30 people. The brickyard was located on Kendall Avenue. This particular brick was used for building purposes.

Scioto County has an extensive brick manufacturing history. Further information can be found in the Local History Department.