



Don Sanderson photographs

The kiln, showing three of the 12 fire boxes which were hand-fed 24 hours a day during firing.

brought to the building by cars automatically run on an elevated tramway from opposite banks, the one clay and the other sand."

Leary's house was still under construction and the writer predicted it would be a "handsome and comfortable home." There were enough people working for Leary that every fortnight the Baptist minister from Carman conducted a service of worship at the boarding house.

Boyer Brick Works enjoyed brief prosperity but due to crop failures, a slowing of migration to the West and a tendency to build frame homes, George Leary and his directors were forced to sell. The new company became known as the Dominion Press Brick Company. One of its owners was R. P. Roblin, premier of the province.

Leary, upset that others were running his brain child, managed to regain control in 1910. With the help of his sons, under the trade name Leary Brick Works, he was successful until 1917 when again the doors of the factory closed. His sons had enlisted and it had become impossible to maintain production.

At the end of the First World War Leary's son, William, returned to the valley. Although he farmed, did construction work and operated a lumber mill, his thoughts were never far from the idle brick factory. His finances improved year by year and in the late 1930s he decided to re-open it.

The Second World War intervened. For a second time he enlisted and left for overseas to serve his country. Following his discharge five years later, he returned to Learys. This time the brick factory had top priority. A 1949 issue of Carman's Dufferin Leader explained the progress of the preceding year.

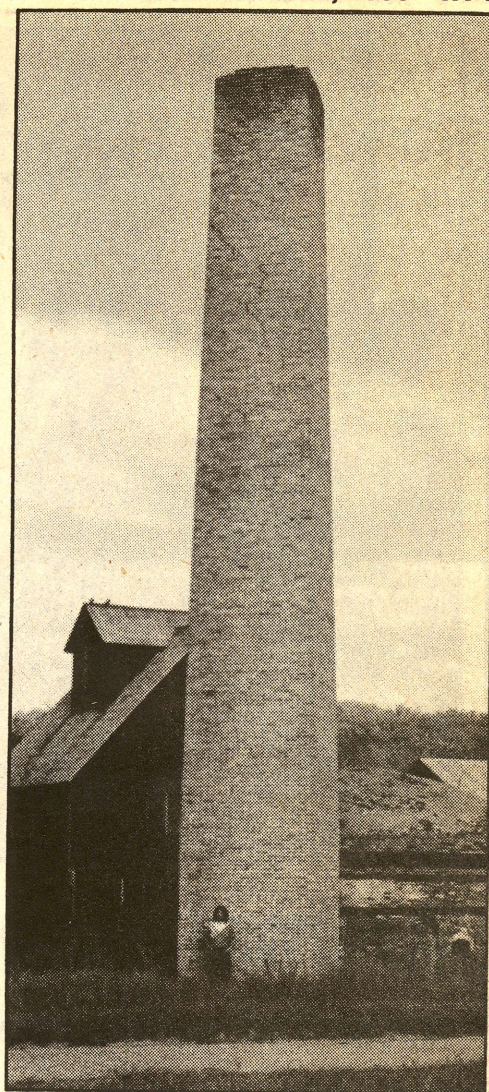
"All summer he (William Leary) and Rod Ager, his right hand man, had worked to put the plant in operating condition. They had done everything humanly possible to make sure all would be well. They had

repaired and refurbished the old machinery after it had been idle for 30 years; they had inspected and repaired the kiln. And most encouraging of all, they had discovered an almost inexhaustible supply of pure shale, free of limestone, right at their own back door — only one of two such deposits known by Mr. Leary in all of North America." Limestone had caused the bricks made by Leary's father to slake and crack when rained upon.

"It was a pair of very anxious men who stood their watches night and day for 16 days last November (1948) over the kiln keeping the fires going on the first burning of Leary's brick for over 30 years," the reporter wrote. Samples chosen from the resulting 80,000 bricks were sent to Ottawa for testing at the Dominion Laboratories. "Three pressure-testing machines broke before a brick did!" Leary was quoted as saying.

As William Leary started his second batch the reporter explained that in the sealed kiln "the fires had been going under the green bricks for three days and the brick which Mr. Leary pulled out of the kiln was just nicely warmed." As the temperatures rose the bricks turned black, the result of carbon. The process of burning off the carbon took two or three days. After this stage the temperature built to 1800°F, the fusing point of shale. Following two or three days of fusing the red hot bricks were allowed to cool. Vents in the kiln, closed for the firing, were opened. Don Leary remembers the skill necessary to grab a sample brick at 1800°F. Any hesitation meant melted tons.

His father had made improvements to the factory. A tractor replaced the old steam engine which once operated the press. A hydraulic lift replaced the men with wheelbarrows who for years had pushed the dry shale to the crusher. However, the domed kiln with its capacity of 80,000 bricks was not large enough to keep up with the press,



Sharon Leary at the base of the brick factory's chimney.

which could produce 12,000 bricks a day. The press subjected clay to a pressure of six tons per square inch. Even before firing the bricks were so hard they could be used to drive nails.

In 1951, at the age of 58, William Leary died. With the children still of school age, Leary's widow, Edith, moved to Altamont. The brick factory was sold to Erven Talman on the condition that should he not wish to continue making brick, the Leary family would have the option to buy back the plant. Talman soon took advantage of that clause. After one disastrous batch, he sold and left.

Although it has remained closed ever since, Leary Brick Works is still part of the family heritage. Edith Leary returned to the valley and lived in a home overlooking the plant until her death in January, 1986. Sharon Leary, daughter of Don and Elsie, has a vision of the plant being preserved as a heritage site.

In the meantime the tall smokestack, struck by lightning a week after it was completed, speaks eloquently of the durability of Leary brick and stands as a sentinel guarding the family's dreams. ■