

COLUMBIA BRICK WORKS (face and common brick, tile) Multnomah County

Operator: Mr. Franze Olbrich, president, Gresham.

Location: The plant is located on the Portland Electric Power Company Railroad, $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles southeast of Gresham at Hogan station, in the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ sec. 14, T. 1 S., R. 3 E., Multnomah County, just north of Johnson Creek at about 350 feet in elevation. The pit lies 2000 feet to the east, where it is excavated in the 400-ft. terrace to a depth of about 30 feet.

Area and development: ~~The~~ 50 acres, of which 20 acres has been mined and 20 acres of clay ground remains. Recent work has been done on a lower terrace at plant level, with about 1 acre stripped. The clay here is reportedly of lower grade than the upper level. Thirty men are employed.

History and production: The Columbia Brick Works was founded in 1905, incorporated in 1909, and remained under the same ownership until August 1948. The plant originally consisted of scove kilns; at present there is a bank of 22 Hoffman semi-continuous kilns. Production of tile was almost discontinued during the war years; later the following quantities

of brick were produced:

Brick

1945 3,800,000

1946 3,500,000

Geology: The pit is cut in the 400-foot or highest terrace stage of Pleistocene alluviation. The present pit face consists of 1 to 2 feet of soil, 10 feet of silty yellow clay, 10 feet of gray clay, and 20 feet of yellow sandy clay. The various grades of clay at the face are mixed in mining. The clay is of transported origin. It was probably deposited in a stagnant backwater which had been ponded during the ice-age flooding and valley-filling stage of the Columbia drainage. Bedrock across Johnson Creek to the southwest consists of Boring lava, and the terrace levels to the southeast at higher elevations consist of glacio-fluvial outwash deposits from the Sandy River drainage.

Equipment and processing: The clay is dug with a $\frac{1}{4}$ -yard dipper electric shovel, which dumps into a 4-yard bottom-dump narrow gauge car, hauled by a small gasoline locomotive over 1500 feet of track to the dry storage shed. Shovel and car are operated by one man, who makes about 30 trips a day delivering an average of 120 cubic yards of clay.

The dry storage shed was completed in 1946, and is 80 by 125 feet in size. The pit car pumps directly into bins from an overhead trestle. A scoopmobile and bulldozer transfer stored clay into bins.

A 300-foot conveyor belt transports the raw clay to the main plant, where it passes through rolls and pug mill driven by a 150-hp. electric motor. The semi-automatic, rotary wire brick-cutter delivers the brick onto a loading belt. Green brick are stacked on steel drying cars, which are then placed in a tunnel dry shed 93 feet long containing 18 tracks, and heated by hog fuel firing together with waste heat from the kilns.

The kilns are the coal-fired, continuous Hoffman type. There are 22 chambers 10 by 25 feet in size, arranged in a single row about 270 feet long. They are fired progressively by coal fed through openings in the top of the chambers. The heat from the chambers being fired is carried into the next kilns to perform the preliminary drying and heating. Wyoming coal is used. Two blowers supply sufficient draft. Each chamber contains 24,000 brick, and there are about 9 kilns fired per week, giving an average monthly production of about 800,000 brick. The long storage shed parallels the railroad track, and is supplied with two sunken roadways for truck loading.

Fired brick are crushed and sacked for "Mortar-Mix." There are a number of car sheds, a change room, oil storage, tool, and smithy sheds, and a small office building.

Reference: Treasurer, 42

Brick plant fired up over contract

*Gresham masonry
factory reopens
after shutdown*

By Shannon O. Wells
staff writer

A lucrative contract to supply building materials to a state project in Salem is giving a long-running brick plant in Gresham a new lease on life.

In what company officials hope is a harbinger of an economic uptick, the state of Oregon chose Mutual Materials of Bellevue, Wash., to supply bricks for a new 620-bed Oregon State Hospital in Salem.

The company's Columbia Clay Brick Manufacturing plant on Southeast Hogan Road is producing bricks for the build-

More inside

Columbia Clay Brick Manufacturing has played a long and important role in Gresham's economy. See the story on Page 2A

ing. A slump in the construction industry forced the plant's closure in October. Formerly known as Columbia Brickworks, the plant and its adjacent facilities along Johnson Creek employ up to 25 workers.

It was just weeks after the shutdown that Mutual Materials secured the contract, negotiated by Hoffman Construction of Portland, for the replacement hospital. Now the plant's equipment and giant kiln are up and running at full capacity, said company President Joe Bowen.

About half of the previously idled 15 employees have been called back to

work. Others were transferred from other Mutual Materials sites, while the rest of the 25 workers were freshly hired.

Bowen is optimistic the project carries enough momentum to keep the plant going well beyond spring 2010, when the brick veneer for the new state hospital building should be completed.

"We have every belief that the location there is viable for us," he said of the Gresham plant. "It's very beneficial to us. We have every hope and expectation we will be manufacturing brick there for a long



staff photo by JIM CLARK

Jim Stokes, extrusion operator, watches as brick logs are formed at Columbia Clay Brick Manufacturing plant.

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Contract: Recession hurt construction industry

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time to come.”

He calls this project a “catalyst” to re-energize the facility, one of three brick plants Mutual Materials operates in the Pacific Northwest.

“The key benefit is it’s a large enough project that it lets us restart the facility,” he said. “Hopefully it will let us add other orders and put us in a position to (manufacture) some stock. This job was the catalyst or key thing we needed to restart.”

Launched in 1906 as one of Gresham’s earliest industries, Columbia Brickworks in its heyday made 9 to 10 million bricks a year and employed 45 to 50 workers. The family sold the business to an employee in 1973. After his death in the late 1980s, Mutual Materials took over the plant.

Founded in 1900, Mutual Materials employs about 550 full-time employees at facilities in the Northwest and British Columbia, Canada. In addition to the brick plant, Mutual operates concrete pavers and retaining wall slab plants at the 80-acre, clay-rich

Hogan Road site.

Bowen said the global recession made a significant negative impact on the Northwest’s construction industry.

“Economically, it’s one of the most difficult environments I’ve been through, and the company’s been through, in 15 to 20 years or so,” he said.

Although last fall marks the second time the Columbia brick plant was shut down this year, Bowen emphasizes how rare an occasion it is. Brick kilns, he noted, just aren’t designed for start-and-stop operation.

“You have a very large kiln you have to heat continuously,” he said. “When you shut down and start up, there’s a significant process to do that right. It’s best to run those plants continuously.”

According to the Oregon Department of Human Services, the agency that runs the hospital, the project is scheduled for completion in late 2011.

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ROGER JENSEN/The Oregonian

Lance Jackson looks over rows of bricks and a long furnace at Columbia Brick Works in Southeast Gresham. Jackson works for Mutual Materials Co. of Bellevue, Wash., which has purchased the operation for \$2.07 million.

The Oregonian, Aug. 6, 1993

Columbia Brick Works buyer optimistic

■ After remodeling, Mutual Materials President Dick Houlihan expects an annual production of 40,000 tons

By ERIC GORANSON
of The Oregonian staff

GRESHAM — Columbia Brick Works at 2300 S.E. Hogan Road has been sold by owner Ed Jarrett to Mutual Materials Co. of Bellevue, Wash.

The sale price for the 100-acre site and plant was \$2.07 million, according to Multnomah County records.

Columbia once was the largest brick producer in Oregon but has seen output dip in recent years. Mutual is the largest brick manufacturer in the Northwest with plants in Newcastle, Mica and Clay City, Wash.

Besides brick, Mutual produces paving tile, load-bearing wall tile and swimming pool edges.

Dick Houlihan, Mutual president, said Mutual intended to put Columbia back into full production, hopefully beginning in September after completion of renovations and other remodeling work.

Houlihan said the minimum annual target production for the Gresham plant was 20 million bricks, or 40,000 tons. Mutual's three plants produce 150,000 tons of building products annually.

At peak output, Columbia had about 40 employees producing 15 million bricks a year.

Houlihan said Mutual's marketing success would determine how many bricks would be produced and the number of workers hired.

Mutual, he added, is extremely strong in marketing, selling its bricks throughout the West and its pool tiles as far away as Florida. In Oregon it has retail yards in Clackamas, Hillsboro, Durham and Salem. It also has a retail yard in Vancouver, Wash.

Columbia did very little marketing, having basically one major customer for most of its recent years.

Both companies have been around a long time.

Mutual was founded by Houlihan's grandfather, Daniel H. Houlihan, in 1890 after a June 6, 1898, fire destroyed downtown Seattle and city fathers mandated that new construction be more fire resistant.

Columbia was founded in 1906 by Albert O. Jarrett and sold to Jarrett in 1973 by Franz O. Jarrett.

Jarrett moved to Oregon in 1968 from Pittsburgh where he helped construct brick work throughout the world for Pullman Inc. In 1981 he used a state-backed \$7.5 million revenue bond to modernize the plant.

Unlike other brick producers, Columbia's 100-acre tract has its own clay mining operation.

Houlihan said that brick manufacturing operations have changed drastically in the last two or three decades.

Once, he said, it was a neighborhood enterprise with more than 300 producers operating in Seattle alone.

But with the construction of new highways, larger trucks and deregulation of the trucking industry in 1976, shipping costs dropped and the small neighborhood producer vanished.

Today, Houlihan said, there are only three brick producers in Oregon — Columbia, Klammath Falls Brick & Tile and Monroe Brick Co. in Monroe, which just reopened.