



West Lake Brick Factory 1921-1927

John A. Brebner, December 2015

One of the first 20th century non-agricultural businesses on West Lake was the *West Lake Brick and Products Company*.

Producing bricks for some of the areas homes and businesses in the second decade of the 20th century, one can still find remnants of that enterprise in the Park today.

The genesis of the operation came from Buffalo , New York entrepreneur L.V. Stevens, who, in 1914, saw the dunes of sand as a resource that was just waiting to be exploited. He encouraged a group of investors from around Lake Ontario, both in Canada and the United States, and began production on the sandy shores of West Lake in 1921.

While local lore suggests that the reason the company went bankrupt was because its primary asset smothered the kilns, a fact that is suggested in archival images of the site, the poor quality of the sand as a brick-making material was the real reason the plant ceased operation in 1926, after only five years of production.

(Archival images c 1925, all courtesy of [PEC Archives](#))



Image 12-1934; Works, looking south west, PEC Archives



Image 12-1941; Sand encroaches on the business, looking north-east; PEC Archives



Image 12-1942; The factory chimney behind the advancing sands; PEC Archives



Twisted rail; Image 13-6849; John A. Brebner



Among the visible remains of that failed enterprise, the twisted rail in the pannes as the visitor walks to Dunes Beach is most evident.

(previous page , above, and left)

But hidden just south of the trail, the well-preserved remains of an almost-buried rail cart can be found.

(below)

(Please watch out for poison ivy around this location!)

Close up of old rail; Image 15-9710; John A. Brebner



Abandoned rail cart at former brick factory site; Image 15-9723; John A. Brebner



Rail cart detail; Image 15-9721; John A. Brebner

The poor quality of the sand-lime process for making these bricks was revealed when inside walls became damp, and a fine white, lime powder effloresced from the bricks.

Some local structures constructed with that brick include the Regent Theatre fly tower in Picton. *(right)*

Other West Lake Brick constructed buildings appear below... there are several more throughout Picton and the nearby area.

I'd be curious to know if there were other houses further afield, perhaps in Belleville, Trenton, Cobourg, Deseronto, Napanee...

And the fact that these almost 100 year-old structures are still here today suggests that those bricks weren't all that bad after all!



Regent Theatre fly tower; Image 15-9743; John A. Brebner



Cherry Valley, Image 15-9751; John A. Brebner



Cherry Valley School, Image 15-9772; John A. Brebner



Picton; Image 13-6743; John A. Brebner



Opposite Canadian Tire, Picton; Image 15-1577; John A. Brebner

Sources and Acknowledgements:

Archival images: [Prince Edward County Archives](#)

Current Images: © 2015, [John A. Brebner](#) Please ask before re-using my images!

Textual material: *Sandbanks Provincial Park, A Cultural Resource Study, 1991*; [Friends of Sandbanks](#), and thanks to Terry Sprague who let me know of some of these extant structures in 2015.