

industrial heritage tour



Photos (L-R): Bernice Gardner, Nikkol Rot, Nicole Czorny, Tom Arban, Nikkol Rot, Phil Brown.

Introduction

Between 1889 and the 1980s, this site was home to the Don Valley Brick Works—a thriving facility that formed the bricks that built the City of Toronto. This tour will take you through the industrial past—from digging up the clay to firing bricks in 1000-degree kilns.

A. The Quarry

Brothers John, William and George Taylor bought this property in the 1830s and established a paper mill. In 1889, they discovered high-quality clay while digging holes for a fence—it was perfect for making bricks. At first, it was dug out by hand, but steam shovels, conveyor belts and blasting were all used over the years to extract clay and shale from the quarry.

B. Archival Brick Works Images

By the 1920s, the Don Valley Brick Works was the only plant in Toronto producing three types of clay brick, as well as sand-lime bricks. The bricks from this site were used to rebuild the city after the Great Fire of 1904.

C. Skyline Advertisement

Taken from a 1930s catalogue for the Don Valley Brick Works, this image shows some of the many public buildings in downtown Toronto that were built with bricks from this site. The list includes Casa Loma, old City Hall and Queen’s Park.

D. Chimney Court

Four separate chimneys once stood on this site, each decorated with a word to spell out the Don Valley Brick Works name. The chimneys were originally connected to downdraft kilns, which required a steady breeze across the top to keep the fires going. This “Valley” chimney is the only one remaining of the four and is now a play space for children.

E. Archaeological Foundations

Below your feet are the remains of building foundations from the kilns that were used from 1889 to the 1950s. The central parking lot was constructed so it would preserve the archaeological resources for future generations.

F. Brick Press

There were three main types of brick made at the Don Valley Brick Works: dry press, stiff mud and soft mud. This press came from the nearby John Price Brickyard when it closed in the 1960s, and was used to form soft mud bricks in moulds. The renowned name “John Price bricks” is still used generically in Ontario for this type of brick, which is often used in residential construction.

G. Kilns Building

Built in 1957, this building housed three state-of-the-art tunnel kilns. Formed bricks were warmed in the dryers using waste heat from the main kilns. Once dry, the bricks were heated and cooled once again as they passed through the tunnel kiln. Each cart took about two days to move from the north to the south end of the building.

The building was hot, dusty and loud. The workers, captured in six large-scale portraits by artist Dan Bergeron, were proud of their role in building Toronto.

H. Storage and Retail

Before being shipped out across the province, the finished bricks were stored here, in a covered yard that has since been removed. Horse-drawn carts, trains and trucks were all used to distribute the bricks over the years.

Evergreen Brick Works is a community environmental centre that inspires and equips visitors to live, work and play more sustainably. Get involved or donate today.

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