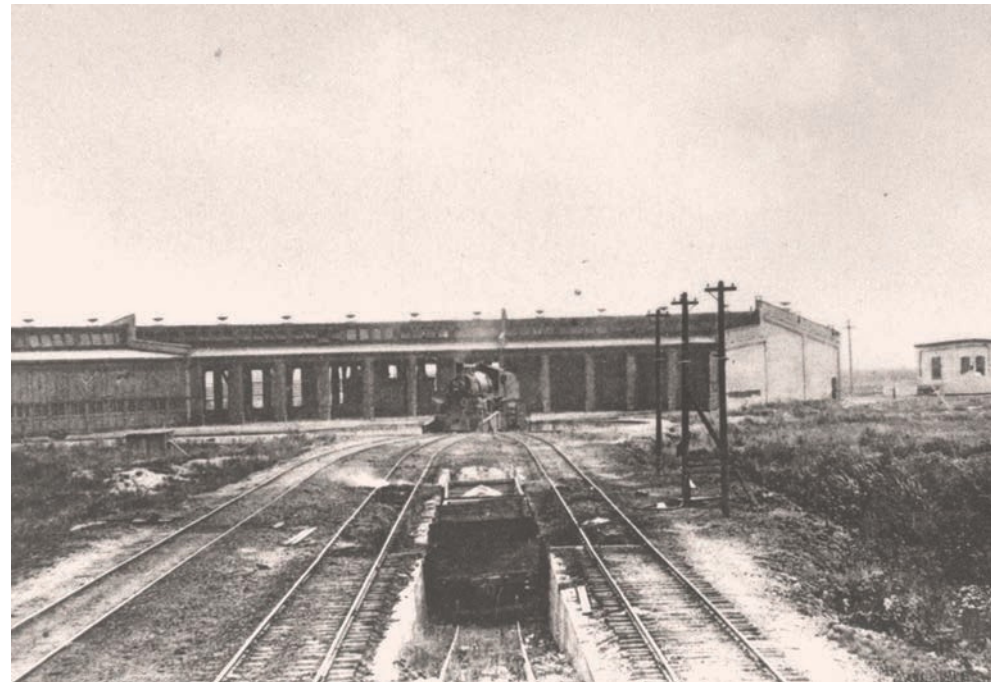


# The brick barons of Sandpoint



Left: LaFond brickyards circa 1910, photo courtesy of Dan Evans. : The 22-stall Great Northern railroad roundhouse in Kootenai, circa 1910, donor unknown.

By Hannah Combs  
Reader Contributor

Peter LaFond had been playing the real estate market, carefully buying properties and trading up for more valuable investments. With a house in town and a 20-acre lot on Bottle Bay in his back pocket, in 1906, he saw the opportunity he had been waiting for.

The brick business had boomed in Sandpoint only four years earlier, when the Sandpoint Brick Company discovered a shelf of clay on the fringes of town that averaged 40 feet in depth. Two years later, W.G. Hunt set up the Hunt Brickyard near the intersection of Great Northern and Gooby roads. The huge brick farmhouse (later the County Poor Farm) and hotel he'd built nearby were a testament to the prosperity of his venture. If LaFond didn't break into the market this summer, he was going to miss his chance.

He bought property just to the east of Hunt's brickyard and hired men and a team of horses to start clearing the land. But the following spring, he couldn't resist buying a 40-acre lot closer to Sand Creek. The prospect of rich clay soil beckoned.

LaFond's first big break came that summer when a Spokane

contractor ordered 300,000 bricks incredibly competitive bid. to build schoolhouses in Rath-The LaFond Brick Company drum and Athol. In another savvy was one of the first to submit real estate transaction, LaFond a bid, but it ultimately faced traded the Catholic Church 42 other brick companies from \$1,200 and 100,000 bricks for Duluth, Minn., to the West Coast three prime business lots on — including the Hunt Brickyard. Cedar Street and Fourth Avenue. After waiting in suspense for The old Catholic church (now two months, the bid was awarded the Heartwood Center) was built ed to W.G. Hunt. from the bricks he traded. Busi-As crushing a blow as this ness was booming with the brick might have been to LaFond's plant churning out 1,500 bricks pride, it was considered good per hour and more than 100 days' business for Sandpoint in general. worth of labor booked out. This contract solidified Sand-

A huge opportunity arrived point's reputation as a prominent in 1908 with a proposed contract brick supplier in the country. for 1.4 million bricks. Half would And LaFond was by no means be used to construct a Northern hurting for business. He had Pacific roundhouse in Kootenai, acquired contracts to supply brick and the other half would build a for all of the Spokane Interna-similar project in Paradise, Mont. tional train depots and associated A roundhouse was a "stable for shops throughout the Northwest. iron horses" used to store and Another Sandpoint-based brick service locomotives in individual manufacturer, the Dry Press Brick stalls. A rotating turntable outside Company, was contracted to build the roundhouse could easily all of the Catholic schools and swivel an uncoupled engine or hospitals in Spokane. other railroad car and hook it up Managing a brickyard was to a new load. not all about negotiating con-Roundhouses were hubs for tracts and winning bids. The railroad activity, and an assort-daily operations were strenuous, ment of smaller outbuildings involved, and occasionally gris-often accompanied them to store ly. From quarrying clay, to pack-equipment. With one contract, the ing it into molds and firing it in awarded brickyard would be guar-a kiln, it involved hard physical anteed almost half a year's worth labor and careful attention. One of work for their employees. The article from the *Pend Oreille Re-*only trouble was, it became an *view* related an incident in which

a "mud mixer" was caught in an Right auger in the factory, losing an arm and his life.

Despite this tragedy and other day-to-day challenges, LaFond's the sheriff posted a notice that the business flourished during the W.G. Hunt Brick Yards were fac-next few years. He traveled to ing foreclosure. With outstanding other brickyards in the regions, debts to Citizens State Bank picking up a few new ideas here amounting to \$7,686.50 (equiv-and there, but mostly assuring alent to more than \$200,000), himself that he was already Hunt was forced to sell his doing everything better than company and all effects, down to everyone else. Investing in a the last brick and wheelbarrow, to new machine that cut bricks satisfy his debts.

with wires instead of by hand In 1911, LaFond also faced increased his production capac-foreclosure, though for a much ity to 50,000 bricks per day. In smaller debt. He sold the factory, 1910, he changed the company and he and his wife Amelia name from LaFond Brickyards packed up and moved to Spo-to Bonner County Brick Com-kane, where they enjoyed a pany and hired additional men, comfortable retirement. confident he could keep a crew Oscar Anderson bought the of 25 employed year-round. remnants of Hunt's brickyard in

1910 was not so kind to 1913 and established the fifth LaFond's competitor W.G. Hunt. and final brickyard, Anderson In February, he struck a deal with Brick, which operated until 1918. the Spokane Brick and Lime Despite the relatively short period Company to buy his business for in which Sandpoint produced \$20,000, not including an inven-bricks, the legacy of the industry tory of 15,000 bricks, which he lives on today. Drive by any large would have the opportunity to sell brick building from Sandpoint separately. Hunt planned to move to Spokane, and it's likely that to Conrad, Montana to set up the bricks were cut right here in another brick company. The deal Bonner County. was expected to "put Mr. Hunt in fine condition financially." *Research provided by the*

Whether the deal fell through *Bonner County History Museum*, or there were other undisclosed *Maggie Mjelde, Will Valentine*, circumstances, merely days later, *and Dan Evans*.

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