

Mike Kaiser – Cloud Ceramics

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Let's go to the campus of Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. Here we see a beautiful new brick building under construction. Where do you suppose those bricks came from? Would you believe, they came from a plant in rural Kansas? It's today's Kansas Profile.

Mike Kaiser told me about Cloud Ceramics and Kansas Brick and Tile, two remarkable brick companies located in Kansas. They serve as the source for the bricks at Duke University and many other places across the nation.

Cloud Ceramics in Concordia opened its plant way back in 1947. In 1944, a Concordia businessman named Charles Cook had learned of some outcroppings of clay in a road ditch southeast of town. He did further testing with the state geological survey and found there was a large deposit of Dakota fire clay that was suitable for the manufacturing of quality buff colored building brick. He organized a business to manufacture those bricks, and Cloud Ceramics was born. It was named for Cloud County, the location of the plant.

Kansas Brick and Tile had a similar history. The Smith family created this business in 1954 in response to large deposits of Dakota clay near Hoisington. In 2001, the two plants came under the same ownership.

"There used to be small brick plants all over Kansas," Mike Kaiser said. Since bricks are so heavy and dense, it was impractical to move them long distances at the time. However, with the advent of modern transportation and technology and the changing economy, most brick plants closed and consolidated. Cloud Ceramics and Kansas Brick and Tile are the only two remaining in Kansas, but between the two of them, they produce more than 70 million bricks per year. Wow.

"You have to constantly modernize and upgrade your facilities," Mike said. Both plants now use a more energy-efficient tunnel kiln system with automation and robotics. New plants were built at Hoisington in 1987 and in Concordia in 2004. Each plant employs more than 70 people.

These are not your grandfather's bricks. In the old days, you could have any color brick you wanted, as long as it was plain red. Now times have changed. "We offer more than 200 styles and colors of bricks," Mike said.

For example, it is now possible to get bricks in buffs, browns, reds, pinks, ironspots, greys and more. When bricks are fired at different temperatures, they produce different results. It is also possible to use different additives and textures. Flash firing the brick or using blends will also produce different colors.

These companies emphasize quality and customer service. The result has been that these companies serve customers nationwide.

"We have sold bricks in almost every state in the continental U.S. plus Canada," Mike said. "Most of our business is from the Rocky Mountains east." Many bricks are shipped by truck, but some are shipped from Concordia directly by rail to Houston, San Antonio, and New York.

One of these companies' specialties is matching or creating brick colors and designs to match existing bricks or new construction. This is part of why the companies'

products are so popular. The companies' bricks have been used from coast to coast, and in such prominent places as Boston College, Bill Gates School of Law, Ohio State, Harvard, Duke University, and right here in Kansas at K-State's new Wefald Hall. Wow.

That's impressive for brick plants in rural communities such as Concordia, population 5,548, and Hoisington, population 2,918 people. Now, that's rural.

For more information, go to www.cloudceramics.com or www.kansasbrick.com.

It's time to leave the campus of Duke University, where bricks from Concordia, Kansas are being prominently used on new construction. We commend Mike Kaiser and all the people of Cloud Ceramics and Kansas Brick and Tile for making a difference with quality production of bricks – millions of them.

And there's more. In a remarkable act of citizenship, Cloud Ceramics donated all the bricks for an amazing civic project in its home community. That project is being viewed by visitors from around the nation and beyond. We'll learn about that next week.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.