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Industrial Pottery of the United States

James R. Mitchell

The development of an industrial pottery and porcelain industry in the colonies and the United States began at an early date. It can almost be characterized as a quest for American-made white ceramics. Sometimes this whiteware takes the form of porcelain while at other times the potter is satisfied with fine, and not so fine, white, gray, and yellow earthenware. Even after various fine white potterys and porcelains were developed, some Americans were still content with yellow earthenware and mottled brown glazed yellowware.

The oft mentioned Daniel Coxe pottery at Burlington, New Jersey, in the 1680s is the first example of this quest (Barber n.d.:54-58). Coxe was attempting to manufacture tin-glazed redware to compete with English and Dutch delft factories rather than to simply supply local demand for utilitarian redware.

Gousse Bonnin & George Anthony Morris made porcelain in the Southwark district of Philadelphia between 1770 and 1774. The ware looks like English porcelain of the late 18th century. It is decorated with cobalt blue and some applied flowers. There are about a dozen pieces known and some shards (Hood 1972).

The next attempt to make porcelain was performed by Dr. Henry Mead of New York City about 1818 (Tracy & Gerdtz 1963:127). The single surviving example of his work is a vase with a square base and caryatid handles in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The third attempt was by the Jersey Porcelain and Earthenware Company of Jersey City, New Jersey, between 1825 and 1828. They sold out to D & J Henderson in 1829 (Young 1878:455). The single surviving bowl made by them belongs to the Princeton University Art Museum (Figure 1).

The fourth attempt was also the first to be successful, commercially. Between 1828 and 1838, William Ellis Tucker and a succession of backers made porcelain in Philadelphia. The bod-

ies and decoration look like they could have been made by the old Paris Factory. When supposed Tucker porcelain is exposed to short wave length ultraviolet light, true Tucker reacts differently from Old Paris (Curtis 1972). A wide variety of decorative and utilitarian forms were made by them, including not only the famous vasiform pitchers but also teasetts, dinner ware, and decorative vases (Figure 2).

One of the earliest dated pieces of American yellowware was probably made by Vodrey and Frost of Pittsburgh in 1828 and was a present to William Price of the Fort Pitt Glass Works (Innes 1976:19). It is decorated in an unusual way, employing hand painted cobalt blue on yellowware.

The quest for earthenware which was competitive with European imports was begun in earnest by D & J Henderson of Jersey City in 1829 when they purchased the Jersey Porcelain and Earthenware Company (Barber n.d.:119). They are credited with being the first American firm to make earthenware pressed in molds. The firm operated until 1845 when David Henderson was killed in a



Figure 1. Porcelain bowl, New Jersey Porcelain and Earthenware Company, Jersey City, New Jersey 1823-1825. (Princeton University Art Museum Collection, Princeton, New Jersey)



Figure 2. Porcelain sugar bowl made for the Phoenix Hose Company of Philadelphia, Tucker Factory, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 1828-1838. (Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, William Penn Memorial Museum Collection, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania)

hunting accident in the Adirondacks. They made yellow and brown glazed earthenware as well as a gray and white bodied product. Included in their production was the Canova pattern of so-called blue Staffordshire. Among the forms made by them were hound handled pitchers, bowls, plates and toby pitchers. The factory style was "Henderson's Flint Stoneware Manufactory" and the "American Pottery Company."

Between 1836 and 1842 Michel LeFoulon and Henri de Casse operated the Salamander Works at Woodbridge, New Jersey, and New York City. While the Hendersons made a variety of English-derived earthenware the Salamander Works made French-derived ware. Seven shapes are known today to have survived from the factory's production: hound handle pitchers, "Antique" pattern pitchers, "Sirius" steamboat pitchers, fireman pitchers, toby pitchers, a water cooler and a punch bowl.

By the 1840s the industry was spreading to the West just as was settlement; in the East the growing population became more concentrated, and the market for pottery grew. In the region surrounding East Liverpool, Ohio, on the banks of the Ohio River and adjacent to the West boundary of Pennsylvania, potters settled in an area near good clay beds.

John Goodwin worked between 1844 and 1853, making yellowware and white or pearlware. In the collection of the East Liverpool Historical Society is a small pearlware custard cup which would normally be taken to be of English manufacture except that it is signed and dated 1846.

The principal well known ware was yellowware

with clear and brown or Rockingham glaze. It was made by a number of different potteries. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the surviving wares are unmarked and virtually unattributable to any pottery. This situation was different for objects made at the Etruria Works between 1846 and 1851 by Harker Taylor & Co. and by Harker Thompson & Co. between 1851 and 1854; their wares were marked. They are also known because they won a silver medal for their ware in 1850 from the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanical Association (Anonymous n.d.a).

In 1845 Christopher Webber Fenton of Dorset, Vermont, went into business with his brother-in-law, Julius Norton, as Norton and Fenton (Spargo 1972:68). They made salt-glazed stoneware and some molded wares, such as hexagonal pitchers (Figure 3). In 1847 the partnership split up. Norton continued to make stoneware while Fenton solicited support from others including Alanson P. Lyman and Calvin Park to form the United States Pottery Co. In 1849 he patented his method for applying flint enamel and Rockingham glazes. The effort lasted until 1858. During their brief tenure they experimented with various bodies, produced many shapes and exhibited at the 1853 New York Crystal Palace Exhibition. A sample of their bodies includes: parian porcelain (Figure 4), glazed porcelain, white graniteware, blue & white bisque porcelain (Figure 5), glazed solid agate ware, majolica, iridescent glazed or



Figure 3. Dark luster glazed earthenware pitcher, Norton and Fenton, East Bennington, Vermont, 1845-1847. (Collection of the National Museum of History and Technology, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.)



Figure 4. Parian porcelain trinket box, United States Pottery Company, Bennington, Vermont, 1849-1858. (Private Collection)

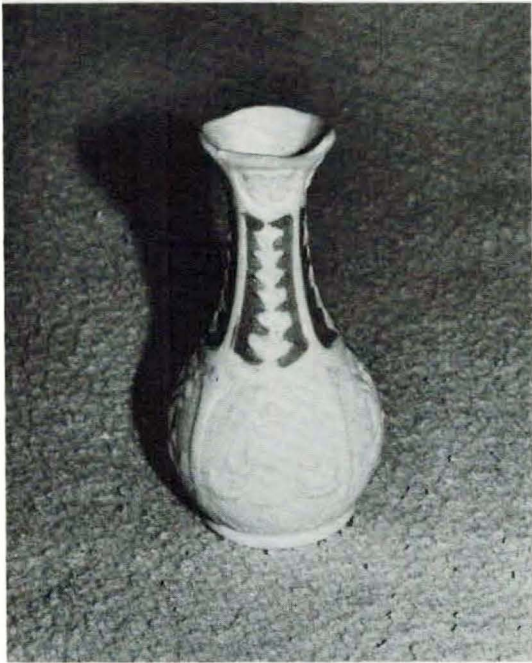


Figure 5. Blue and white porcelain vase, United States Pottery Company, Bennington, Vermont, 1849-1858. (Private Collection)

"Belleek" porcelain (Figure 6), yellowware, dark lustre glazed yellowware, Rockingham glazed yellowware, blue earthenware, green earthenware, flint enamel glazed yellowware, tan & white bisque porcelain, salmon colored ware, blue & salmon ware, and bisque solid agate ware (Barret 1964:4).

In New England at least 3 other potteries made molded wares: New England Pottery of Boston, John T. Winslow of Portland, Maine (Figure 7) and Barnabas Edmonds & Co. of Charlestown, Massachusetts (Figure 8).

As the 1850s progressed South Amboy, New Jersey, was the home of the Congress Pottery owned by Abraham Cadmus and the Swan Hill Pottery owned by a succession of people until

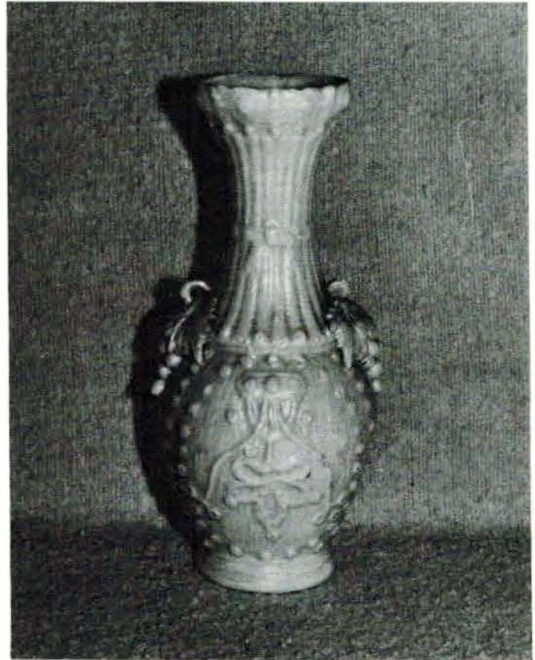


Figure 6. Belleek porcelain vase, United States Pottery Company, Bennington, Vermont, about 1853. (Collection of the Bennington Museum, Bennington, Vermont)



Figure 7. Albany slip covered stoneware cuspidor, John T. Winslow Pottery, Portland, Maine, about 1868. (Private Collection)



Figure 8. Albany slip covered stoneware jar, Edmands and Company, Charlestown, Massachusetts, 1850-1868. (Private Collection)

John L. Rue bought it in 1860 and moved it to Matawan in 1880 (Barber n.d.:179).

The decade of the 1850s was the beginning of the great potting center in Trenton, New Jersey. Several redware potters had operated there in the early days with one, John McCully, lasting until 1852 when the first yellowware or whiteware pottery began (Podmore 1948:332).

Two potteries dated from 1853, Taylor & Speeler and William Young. Young claimed to have made the first whiteware in Trenton and the supposed piece survives in the Brewer Collection at the New Jersey State Museum. Young, and then his sons as well, worked until 1879 when they sold out to the Willets Brothers (Anonymous 1956:44). James Taylor & Henry Speeler worked until 1856 when they took William Bloor into the partnership (Maddock 1962:49). The only surviving ware is mottled brown glazed yellowware and includes 2 pitchers and 2 cuspidors.

William Bloor must have had an interesting life. He was born and learned his trade in the Staffordshire potteries. He came to America in 1842 and settled in East Liverpool, Ohio, where he was in business with the Brunts. In 1849 Bloor and Wm. Brunt, Jr. went to California with the gold rush. When he came back he settled in Trenton, working for Speeler and Taylor. In 1859

he returned to East Liverpool where he went into business with the Brunts again. In 1863 he left and returned to Trenton where he entered business with Joseph Ott, livery stable owner, and Thomas Booth, stationer (Maddock 1962:49). With their financial backing, the partnership built the Etruria Works in 1863 on Clinton Avenue at the stone bridge. The Etruria Works seems to be a talisman for ceramic success. Although there was a factory known in Trenton by this name and also one in East Liverpool, they were not related. They were also not related to Wedgwood's original Etruria Works in Staffordshire, England (Barber n.d.:214). Bloor was the practical potter who not only knew how to make yellowware but also was capable of making glazed and parian porcelain (Figure 9). Although there is no whiteware or porcelain known by Speeler Taylor & Bloor, other business combinations including Bloor produced whiteware of one type or another.

Another early pottery in Trenton was Millington & Astbury. No ware has survived from them although it is known that they began in 1859. In 1863 a Mr. Poulson joined the firm. One form of whiteware is known with their mark on it, the famous Ellsworth pitcher (Figure 10), commemorating the killing of Colonel Elmer Ellsworth in Alexandria in 1861 (Barber n.d.:452). Poulson



Figure 9. Parian porcelain bust of General Ulysses Simpson Grant; Bloor, Ott and Booth, Burroughs or Brewer; Trenton, New Jersey, 1863-1871. (Brewer Collection, New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, New Jersey)



Figure 10. Glazed porcelain pitcher, Millington, Astbury and Poulson, Trenton, New Jersey, 1863. (Private Collection)

left the firm shortly and Colclough joined it. He was replaced by Thomas Maddock. Eventually Millington retired, then Astbury, leaving Maddock & his sons who continued until 1929 when they sold out to American Standard. Throughout their history they were makers of various forms of whiteware, but their principal product was sanitary-ware (Figure 11).

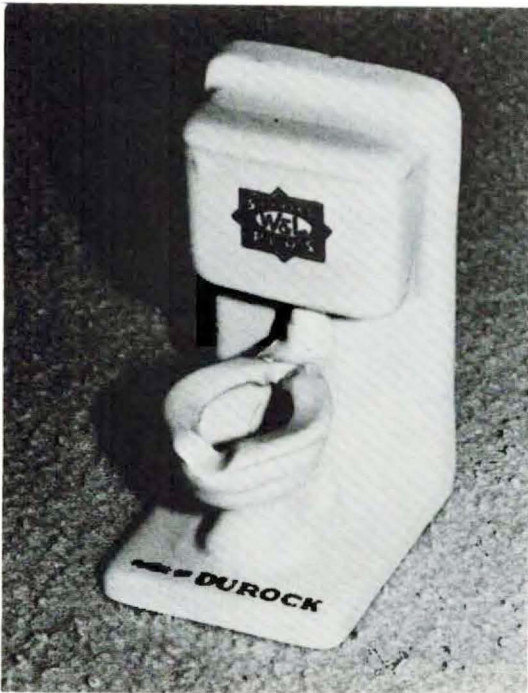


Figure 11. Miniature porcelain water closet, Thomas Maddock's Son's Company, Trenton, New Jersey, 1891-1892. (Private Collection)

Bloor, Ott & Booth also made more than one kind of ware. Both white pottery and parian porcelain are known with their mark (Mitchell 1972: 219). In 1864 Booth sold his share to G. S. Burroughs who in turn sold to John Hart Brewer in 1865. In 1871 William Bloor sold out to Ott and Brewer who continued until the potters' strike and crash of 1892 (Maddock 1962:54).

The firm of Ott & Brewer located at the Etruria Works on Clinton Avenue in Trenton, New Jersey, may be construed as the ancestor for every fine china maker in America. In 1876 the firm engaged the services of the artist Isaac Broome to produce sculptures which the pottery produced in biscuit porcelain. They were left white or colored green or blue. Broome produced a wide variety of subjects including the candidates for president and vice president in 1876, Benjamin Franklin, William Shakespeare, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Pope Pius IX, and his tour de force, Cleopatra (Figure 12). Cleopatra was made life size in dark blue bisque porcelain decorated in silver and gold. The sculpture won medals in Philadelphia in 1876 and in Paris in 1878 (Mitchell 1972:222).

Ott & Brewer created a new white body, ivory porcelain, in honor of the centennial (Anonymous n.d.b). They decorated it in several ways including an approximation of Belleek porcelain. In



Figure 12. Bisque blue porcelain bust of Cleopatra, sculpted by Isaac Broome, made by Ott and Brewer, Trenton, New Jersey, 1876. (Brewer Collection, New Jersey State Museum, Trenton, New Jersey)

1883 the Bromleys came to Trenton from Belleek, County Fermanagh, Ireland. They worked with Ott & Brewer first to make Belleek but then went on to work for other factories. In 1879 the Willets brothers purchased the Excelsior Pottery in Trenton from William Young's sons (Anonymous n.d.c.). One of the Bromleys worked for them after 1883 to make Belleek. They also manufactured ironstone china as did Young, Ott & Brewer and Maddock.

Ott & Brewer employed an apprentice named Walter Scott Lenox who went on to work for Willets in 1888. In 1889 Lenox and Jonathan Coxon built a new pottery at Prince & Meade Streets in Trenton and produced Belleek Porcelain. Their firm was named the Ceramic Art Company. In 1896 Lenox bought out Coxon and in 1906 he incorporated. The building that they built was made with a front to look like row-houses. The bank required this, so that when they failed, doors could be cut in the fronts, walls bricked up and the building could be rented as tenements. The bank's trust of Lenox is remembered because the firm he founded is in business today.

The 1870s and 1880s saw the burgeoning of the ceramic industry in Trenton. In the 1860s there were 10 potteries, but by the 1880s there were 38 in the State of New Jersey, with 35 of them in Trenton. Some of the potteries which started in the 1870s, 80s, and 90s included James Moses' Glasgow Pottery, Isaac Davis' Prospect Hill Pottery, Burroughs & Mountford, East Trenton Pottery Company, The Cook Pottery which succeeded Ott & Brewer, Alpaugh & Magowan's Empire Pottery, Cook & Hancock's Pottery, Crescent Pottery, Delaware Pottery, and Enterprise Pottery. All of the above made ironstone china, white graniteware, and cream colored ware. In 1881 there was a study done to determine the best location in which to operate a pottery. It was concluded that Trenton was the best place for 4 reasons: it was between and close to 2 good markets, New York and Philadelphia; it was on every form of transportation route: road, railroad, and canal; within 50 miles one could acquire the necessary raw materials; and there were people who could make pottery, and if you needed more, immigrants from Europe came regularly.

There were also potteries in other cities such as J. E. Jeffords in Philadelphia; Bennett in Baltimore, and Union Porcelain Works in New York.

The last 3 decades of the 19th century were also productive in East Liverpool. The same type of development took place there as in Trenton. Several of the potteries grew large including Knowles, Taylor & Knowles whose best known

contribution was a fine, thin glazed porcelain which they named Lotusware and manufactured between 1890 and 1896.

Lotusware and Belleek serve as the 2 ultimates in American white ceramic developments. If the various wares were ranked in order of prestige, they ought to be on top. Just below them would be found the opaque white wares such as ironstone china. Even though many of the potteries which produced the wares are gone, their surviving objects bear witness to the durability of essentially fragile objects and to the firms which made them. White ceramics are so well accepted today that modern consumers usually take them for granted without realizing that they were not always readily available in the past.

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