

# TRENTON POTTERIES

Newsletter of the  
Potteries of Trenton Society



## *The Manufacture of Ceramic Tiles in Trenton-Part 1*

by Susan I. and Michael Padwee

*This is the first in a series of articles about the tile industry in Trenton from end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth centuries. This first article describes the growth of the decorative "art" tile industry in the United States after the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876. Future articles will discuss individual Trenton tile manufacturers, a number of which were important to the development of the American decorative tile industry.*

tiles, but many were new, established specifically in response to the growing demand.

Due to its abundant clay deposits and natural waterways that facilitated movement of raw and finished materials, New Jersey became one of the primary centers of early tile manufacturing. From the Raritan estuary on the east to the Delaware River on the west, companies such as the J.L. Rue Pottery, the Raritan Art Tile Works, Volkmar Pottery, the Old Bridge Tile Co., C. Pardee Tile Works, Matawan Tile Co., Maywood Art Tile Co., Perth Amboy Tile Works, American Encaustic Tiling Co., and the Trenton companies--Burroughs & Mountford, Ott & Brewer, Trent Tile Co., Providential Tile Works, J Mayer & Co., and the Mueller Mosaic Co., flourished. Many of these companies imported and used European skilled labor and technology, primarily from England.<sup>2</sup>

Before 1900 only three American tile manufacturers were known to produce transfer tiles<sup>3</sup>, a mainstay of English tilemaking. Most of the newly organized, American tile companies produced wet process or dust-pressed molded relief designs, which were less labor intensive than transfer printed tiles, and thus less expensive to manufacture. Some molded intaglio and photographic process designs were also produced. (Figures 2, 3 and 4)

Economic, sanitary, and social issues defined the context for the development of the American tile industry.

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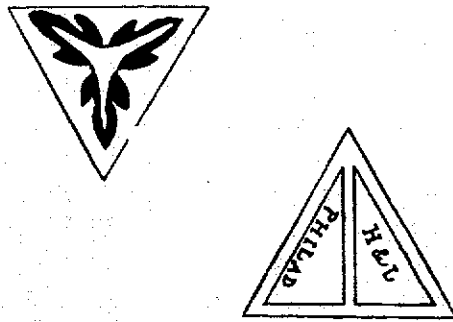
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*The Potteries of Trenton Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the study and preservation of Trenton's ceramic past. Officers: President—Patricia Madrigal; Treasurer—Amy Earls; Secretary—Christy Morganstein. Board: Ellen Denker, Barbara Goldberg, Richard Hunter, Jay Lewis, Emma Lewis, William Liebeknecht, Molly Merlino, George Miller, Brenda Springsted, Rebecca White. Newsletter Editor: Patricia Madrigal*

Prior to the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition the majority of decorative tiles used in the United States--encaustic floor tiles and transfer-printed and relief wall and fireplace tiles--were imported from Europe, mainly from England.<sup>1</sup> Americans, anxious to demonstrate their aesthetic sophistication, eagerly emulated the fashion for tiles that were lavishly displayed at the exhibition by English companies such as Minton, Maw, Doulton, and Craven Dunnill, all of which hoped to multiply their American sales. Ironically, these exhibits, coupled with multiple American printings of Charles L. Eastlake's *Hints on Household Taste*, not only increased American demand for decorated tiles, but inspired American potters to establish their own tile manufacturing companies. In the decade following the centennial exhibition at least two dozen American companies began to manufacture decorated tiles. Some were already producing tableware or roof and drainage

## Manufacture of Ceramic Tiles

Figure 1. Drawings of the front and back of a 3"H x 3 1/2"L Hyzer & Lewellen, triangular, encaustic tile. The markings on the back are raised within two recessed areas. (This tile is in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the information about the tile was sent to me by Ms. Martha Halpern, Assistant Curator, American Art Department in 1999).



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Economic concerns, particularly the protective tariff and comparative working conditions on either side of the Atlantic, were the constant preoccupations of late nineteenth-century trade journals. Increasing concern about the causes of disease and the development of sanitary science generated enormous debates about the dangers of technological developments such as central heating and domestic plumbing. Tiles were an integral component of sanitary reform and in the renaissance of the fireplace. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, home decorating literature eulogized the tiled hearth and mantle that had come to embody the paradoxical American longing for pre-industrial simplicity and desire to be recognized as sophisticated consumers of international high-style fashion.

In 1883, the United States increased existing and instituted new protective tariffs on many items that were imported for domestic use, especially those that American companies were manufacturing in competition with foreign goods. Various classes of tiles--such as decorated and paving tiles--were subject to these protective tariffs. Ignorance about the nature and use of decorated tiles led to inconsistent application of the tariffs on decorated tiles by customs officials, initially giving



Figure 2. A 6 1/4" square J. & J.G. Low & Co., Chelsea, MA, molded relief, commemorative tile. This tile was designed by Elihu Vedder of the Tile Club for the actress Anne Russell's 150th performance as "Esmeralda" in the play at the Madison Square Theatre in New York City in 1882.

American manufacturers an advantage over imported tiles. Although in 1886 it was ultimately decided to tax decorated tiles at a lower rate, protective tariffs had helped in the development of the American industry.<sup>4</sup>

Discoveries in bacteriology in Europe and the United States during the last quarter of the nineteenth century focused scientists and architects on sanitary reforms. Wall and floor tiles were considered the epitome of interior sanitary construction in kitchens, laundries, and in bathrooms as privies gave way to indoor plumbing. Architect Robert W. Eddis, in his 1884 handbook, *Healthy Furniture and Decoration*, recommended glazed tiles as a non-absorbent, reflective and easily cleaned, healthy surface. Other architects, builders and sanitary reformers supported this view.

A renewed interest in fireplaces in

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## Manufacture of Ceramic Tiles

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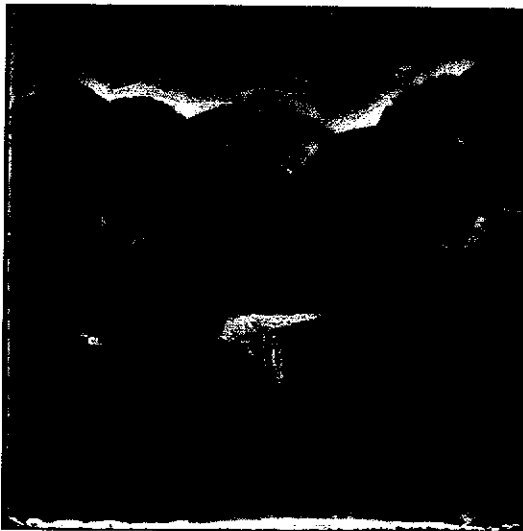
the last quarter of the nineteenth century led to an increased use of decorative tiles as fireplace surrounds. By the 1890s the fireplace had been an anachronism for a half-century: the fireplace had been replaced in rapid progression by the cast iron stove and then the furnace as the preferred method to heat a house. By the 1860s and 1870s many houses were built without fireplaces, or with one, non-functional fireplace. The fireplace lost its utilitarian value, but in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it became a metaphor for myriad political, religious and social values.<sup>5</sup>

Many publications of the day pointed to a tiled mantle as the focal point of the parlor, which was the showpiece room of the house. Trade journals such as *Carpentry and Building* and *Crockery and Glass Journal*, home decoration periodicals such as *The Decorator and Furnisher* and *The Art*

*Journal*, and home decoration books such as Clarence Cook's *House Beautiful* (1878), and Henry Hudson Holly's *Modern Dwellings in Town and Country* (1878) also helped establish the fashion for the fireplace, and thus for decorative tiles, in America.<sup>6</sup>

With an already flourishing, well established pottery industry and abundant natural resources, the choice of New Jersey by tile manufacturers was logical and allowed them to capitalize on the new fashion for decorative tiles. Trenton, long considered a leading center of the American pottery industry with 57 kilns in 1879<sup>7</sup>, had a "central location, superior railway, canal, and river transportation facilities, and close contiguity to the clay deposits of New Jersey,"<sup>8</sup> From large tile companies such as Trent and Providential to the smaller tile producers like Burroughs & Mountford, Mueller Mosaic and J. Mayer & Co., the growth of the tile industry in Trenton was rapid in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, making decorative tiles available at a lower cost to a broader spectrum of American homeowners.

Figure 3. A 3" square, intaglio process scenic tile manufactured by the American Encaustic Tiling Co. The tile is signed on the front with an "F" for Franz J. Frenzel, Jr., the inventor of the process [Patent # 332,389 dated Dec. 15, 1885], and the designer of the tile.



### Notes



Figure 4. A 3" square International Tile Co. tile featuring a photographic representation of the abolitionist, Henry Ward Beecher, the pastor of the Pilgrim Congregational Church in Brooklyn, NY. This tile was manufactured in 1886 as a memorial for the recently deceased pastor. The tile was probably produced by a photoceramic process invented by Denis Lawless, a principal of the company, and patented in Britain in 1886.

## Manufacture of Ceramic Tiles

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<sup>1</sup>Only a few potteries, such as Ott & Brewer in Trenton; Park Pottery and Hyzer & Lewellen in Philadelphia (see Figure 1); and Samuel Keyes' Pittsburgh Encaustic Tile Co. in Pittsburgh, were making, or experimenting with decorative tiles. Edwin Atlee Barber states (*Pottery and Porcelain of the United States*, Reprint of the 1893 original: Century House Americana, Watkins Glen, NY, 1971, pp. 343-345) that "The first wall and paving tiles produced in the United States were probably made at the factory of Abraham Miller in Philadelphia...About 1845... [And.]...previous to 1872, Messrs. Hyzer & Lewellen of Philadelphia, were experimenting in floor tiles." Also, Ulysses G. Dietz (*The Newark Museum Collection of American Art Pottery*, Salt Lake City, UT, 1984, p. 88) illustrates an Ott & Brewer, white earthenware tile of Admiral Perry, made with a gelatin photographic plate. Experimental tiles such as this were not made for the commercial market.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Sims, "Gilbert Elliott and the Muskingum County (Ohio) Courthouse Floors: A Case Study of England's Role in the Genesis of America's Tile Industry," *Journal of the Tile & Architectural Ceramics Society* 9, 2003, p. 35. Mr. Sims notes that "Two ventures that managed to meet with success in the 1870s, the American Encaustic Tiling Company...., and the United States Encaustic Tile Company...did so by enlisting...English tile operatives. Most of those workers were skilled encaustic tile makers who decided to emigrate to America to work for higher wages and

the opportunity for advancement." These were not the only American companies to take advantage of the English labor pool.

<sup>3</sup>These were the International Tile Co. of Brooklyn, NY, which was organized by British principals; the American Encaustic Tiling Co. of Zanesville, OH; and Burroughs & Mountford of Trenton, NJ.

<sup>4</sup>Susan Ingham Padwee, *The International Tile Company and the Economic, Sanitary, Social, and Aesthetic Context for the Development of the American Tile Industry*. An unpublished thesis submitted to the Master of Arts Program in the History of the Decorative Arts, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum and Parsons School of Design, 1998, pp. 30-35.

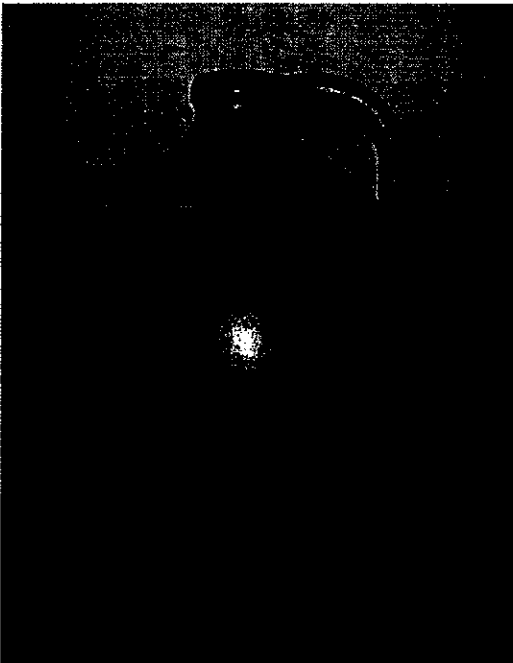
<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 62-67.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 68-75.

<sup>7</sup>Jennie J. Young, *The Ceramic Art: A Compendium of the History and Manufacture of Pottery and Porcelain*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1879, p. 463.

<sup>8</sup>Edwin Atlee Barber, *Pottery and Porcelain of the United States*, Century House Americana, Watkins Glen, NY, 1971 reprint of the 1893 original, pp. 211-212.

## *First POTS Symposium Announced for March 6, 2004*



### *Early Stoneware in New Jersey and New York: Origins of an American Industry*

The New Jersey/New York region was critical in the development of the stoneware industry in the United States during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Raw materials, skills, transportation and investment were combined from the early 1700s to transform an Anglo-Saxon tradition to an American enterprise. The Potteries of Trenton Society and The New Jersey Historical Society will collaborate in bringing key scholars and collectors of this material together for the first time in many years.

Mark your calendars now to be in Newark, New Jersey, on Saturday, March 6, 2004, for a day-long symposium of lectures and a panel discussion that will explore the genesis and early growth of the American stoneware industry in the northeast. Speakers will include William Liebeknecht, Principal Investigator at Hunter Research, Inc., who will provide an over-

view of 18<sup>th</sup> century New Jersey stoneware production (with special emphasis on Cheesequake); Brenda Springsted, a local historic archaeologist, will review her work on the Kempel potters of Ringoes; Richard Hunter, President and principal archaeologist of Hunter Research, Inc., will discuss the eighteenth-century Richards stoneware pottery in Trenton; and Meta Janowitz, Material Specialist with URS, will discuss the information gleaned from archaeological excavations on the stoneware potteries that dotted lower Manhattan. Ulysses Dietz, curator of decorative arts at the Newark Museum, will lead a panel of curators and collectors exploring how public and private collecting can lead to new appreciation of the forces that nurtured this early industry. There will be plenty of time for audience questions and discussion throughout the day.

For more information, contact Patricia Madrigal, President, Potteries of Trenton Society at *president@potteriesoftrenton.org* or 609-695-0122 (M-Th, 8:30-4:00). In January 2004 our web site, *www.PotteriesofTrenton.org*, will have a registration form to download and send in with your modest registration fee, which will include a continental breakfast and closing reception. Lunch will be on your own in nearby restaurants.

The conference will be held at The New Jersey Historical Society, 52 Park Place, in downtown Newark, just one block from the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and easily accessible from Newark's Pennsylvania Railroad and Bus Station, the New Jersey Turnpike, or the Garden State Parkway. See the NJHS website for more information on traveling by public or private transportation: *www.JerseyHistory.org*.

## Makers Marks From The Assunpink Pottery Works

William B. Liebeknecht

**D**uring a recent archaeological survey of the Assunpink Creek in Trenton, a waster dump from Henry Speeler & Sons' Assunpink Pottery Works (1860-1871) was encountered by staff from Hunter Research, Inc. The dump also contains waster materials from successor companies, the Speeler Pottery Company (1871-1879) and the International Pottery Company (1879-1936). Waster material from Henry Speeler & Sons and Speeler Pottery Company is presumed to be limited to

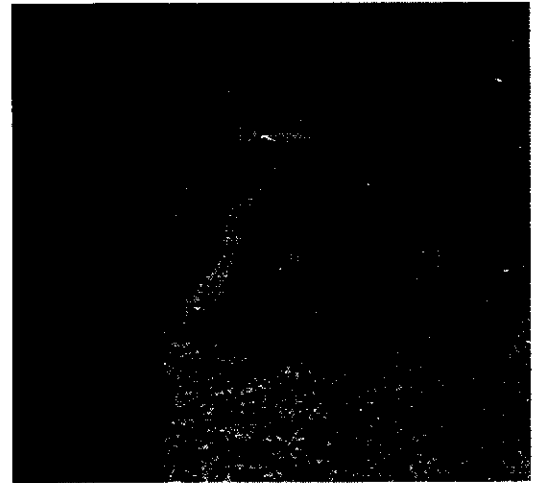
yellow ware, cane ware, Rockingham ware and flint enameled ware.

Waster materials from the International Pottery Company (Burgess & Campbell) appears only to be represented by white bodied ironstone china. A number of maker's marks were recovered from the dump, including a partial maker's mark from a pottery works located across the Assunpink Creek, Taylor & Davis (1871-1875).



*Plate 1: (The Speeler Pottery Company) FIREPROOF (arched over) S.P.C<sup>o</sup> with two vertical hatch marks under the "O". This impressed mark has been debated for years as whether it is the Speeler Pottery Company or the Southern Porcelain Company (c.1856-1864) (J. Garrison Stradling 1996 *The Southern Porcelain Company of Kaolin, South Carolina: A Reassessment*. Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts, XXII (2):1-39). Recovery of bisque sherds with this mark 300-feet away from the Speeler Pottery lends support to the former theory.*

*Plate 2: A previously unrecorded mark from Taylor & Davis (1871-1875).*



*Plate 3: (The Henry Speeler & Sons Assunpink Pottery Works) An impressed "A" is within a circle with the crossbar of the "A" pointing down like a "V" so that when it is turned upside down it combines with the legs of the "A" form a "W".*

*Presumably the "A" stands for Assunpink and the "W" for Works = Assunpink Works.*

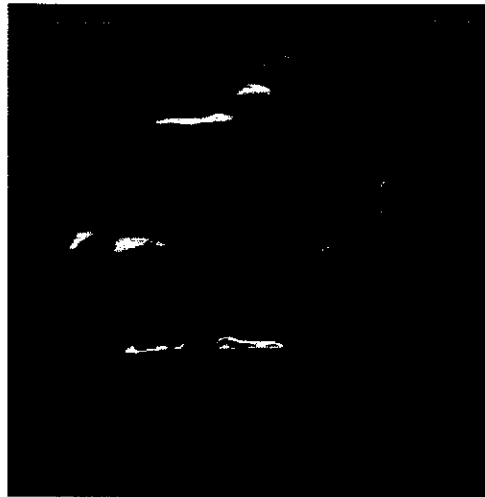


## Tile Exhibit and Reception, November 7

Please join Artifacts Gallery as we present an exhibit of new tiles made in Trenton: "Trenton Makes Again - Introducing Prestige Art Tile by General Porcelain".

Meet artist/designer Linda Williams and view the tiles at an opening reception on Friday, November 7, from 7-9 PM at Artifacts Gallery, 1025 S. Broad St, Trenton, N.J. 08611 (609) 599-9081.

Open Tuesday-Friday 9-6; Saturday 10-4.



One of the many tiles designed by Linda Williams. Visit the General Porcelain web site at [www.generalporcelain.com](http://www.generalporcelain.com) to see more of the tiles available.

## A Mark from the Union Pottery Company

The New Jersey Pottery Co. factory in Trenton used this distinctive Japanese style mark on their whitewares from 1878 until 1882, when the company went out of business. The new Union Pottery Co. took over the factory but also was short-lived, going out of business in 1889 (David J. Goldberg, *Potteries: The Story of Trenton's Ceramic Industry*, 1998, pp. 46-7). The combination of the basic N. J. Pottery Co. mark with Union Pottery Co.'s name indicates an 1883 transitional date for the 9-inch scalloped white granite bowl found by Abe Adonizio in Mizpah, N. J.



## Ceramics in America

*Ceramics in America 2003* is now available. The journal, which examines the role of historical ceramics in America, has articles by noted American and British ceramic scholars as well as sections on New Discoveries and Book Reviews.

Two articles in the New Discoveries section might be of particular interest to POTS members: *A Coxon Waster Deposit of the Mid-1860s Sampled in Trenton, New Jersey* (William B. Liebeknecht, Rebecca White and Richard W. Hunter) and *The Richards Face -- Shades of an Eighteenth-Century American Bellarmine* (William B. Liebeknecht and Richard W. Hunter).

For more information, visit the Chipstone Foundation at [www.chipstone.org](http://www.chipstone.org) or the University Press of New England at [www.dartmouth.edu/~upne/](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~upne/).

We're on the web! Check us out at  
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Potteries of Trenton Society

## *POTS Membership*

Membership in the Potteries of Trenton Society is open to all interested in Trenton's pottery industry and the ceramic products manufactured here. We welcome pottery workers, historians, archaeologists and collectors. Your contribution is used to support newsletter, lecture, meeting, and conference costs.

Annual Memberships:

\_\_\_ Regular (\$20) \_\_\_ Couples (\$25) \_\_\_ Students (\$15, with ID) \_\_\_ Seniors (\$15)

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