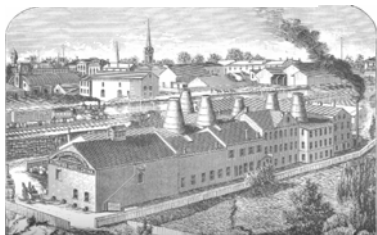


TRENTON POTTERIES

Newsletter of the
Potteries of Trenton Society



Mayer's Pottery and a Portneuf/Quebec Puzzle

Jacqueline Beaudry Dion and Jean-Pierre Dion

Spongeware sherds found in the dump site of Mayer's Arsenal Pottery in Trenton, New Jersey, revealed the use of several motifs including the chain or rope border that was used later in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. Those cut sponge wares, when found in the Quebec area, are dubbed "Portneuf" and generally attributed to the United Kingdom, in particular to Scotland. The mystery of the Portneuf chain design ironstone barrel (Finlayson, 1972:97) is no more a puzzle: a final proof of its United States origin is provided by a patent granted to J. S. Mayer in 1887.

ENT PROCESS/FEB 1st 1887" and decorated with the cut sponge chain motif so popular in England and Scotland. Many of the sponge decorated ware found in the Portneuf-Quebec area (and thus called Portneuf wares) were actually made in Scotland, especially those depicting cows and birds. Finlayson (1972:97) naturally presumed the barrel had been produced in Scotland, although his research in England and Scotland failed to show any record of such a name or such a patent. "Could this J. S. Mayer," he wrote, "have been associated with the John Thomson Annfield Pottery [Glasgow, Scotland]? Perhaps his process was used in the Thomson Pottery. It is likely that the true explanation of this perplexing puzzle will never be known!"

The small ironstone china barrel found in the Province of Quebec and illustrated here (Figure 1), is approximately 5.5 inches high. It is impressed on the base "J. S. MAYER/ PAT-

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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 – Brenda Springsted. Board: Ellen Denker, Richard Hunter, Meta Janowitz, Jay Lewis, Emma Lewis, William Liebknecht, George Miller, Brenda Springsted, Rebecca White. Newsletter Editor: Patricia Madrigal



Figure 1. Ironstone china barrel from Quebec. Decorated with cut sponge chain motif. Impressed on the base with "J. S. MAYER/PATENT PROCESS/FEB 1ST 1887."

Mayer's Pottery and Portneuf

rim or foot. Its object is, first, to produce a
 15 thoroughly practical self-clamping mold of the
 sectional type, which, by avoiding the use of
 clamping-straps, loose bottom pieces, and all
 complication of parts, can be worked with
 much greater ease and rapidity than those
 20 heretofore used in the manufacture of this class
 of ware; secondly, to construct this mold so
 that its two vertically-divided halves can, with
 incased vessels, be separated from their bottom
 parts immediately after the vessel is formed,
 25 whereby the base of the plastic vessel is ex-
 posed to the free heat of the drying room,
 greater uniformity and rapidity in the drying-
 out process is secured, and the working quota
 of molds materially reduced thereby.
 30 It consists in the combination of a clamp-
 ing-case in which a raised projection forms the
 fixed bottom for mold, and a vertically-divided
 mold properly fitted thereto.

The operation of my improved device is
 substantially as follows: A head the inner
 surface of which coincides with the external
 surface of case A is fitted to a jigger-spindle. 60
 The case A is then inserted in this jigger-head.
 The mold B, conforming in outline to the ex-
 ternal surface of the desired vessel, is next in-
 serted in case A, the projection A' snugly fit-
 ting into and forming bottom for this mold. 65
 A sweep is next prepared coinciding with the
 desired inner surface of the vessel to be made
 and is then properly fitted to the pull-down
 lever. A bat of clay is next thrust into the
 mold B, the pull-down brought into proper 70
 position, when in a few revolutions of the jig-
 ger the desired vessel is completed.

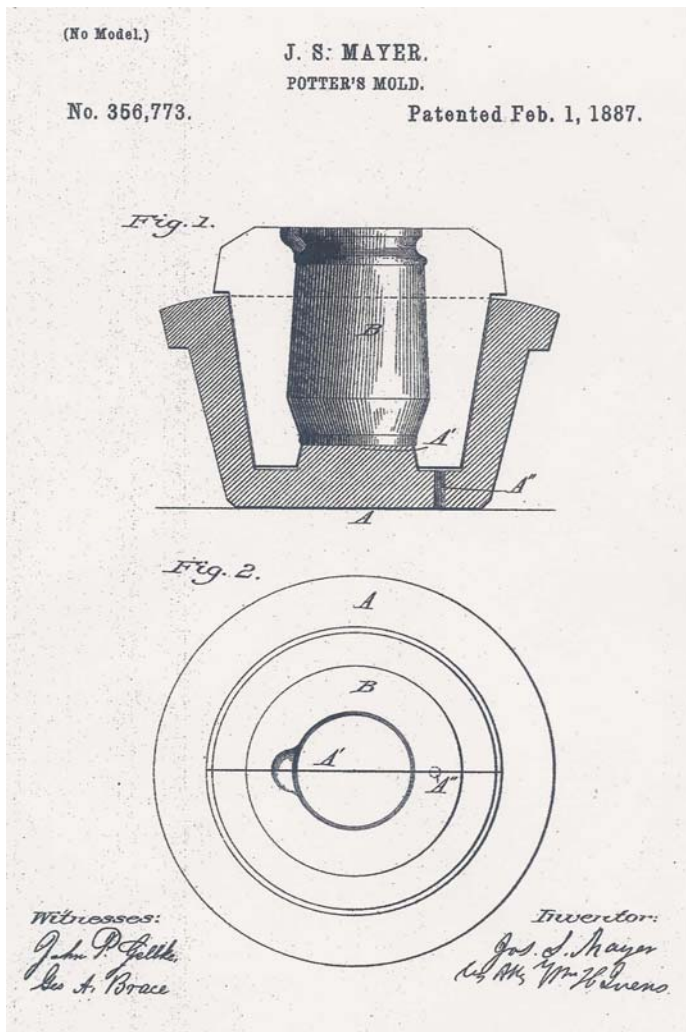


Figure 2. Patent no. 356,773, awarded to J. S. Mayer, demonstrating a jiggering process that seems to be related to the barrel in Figure 1. The text from the patent describe the objects and the operation of the device.

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But as is now ascertained, the answer lies on this side of the Atlantic. James and Joseph S. Mayer operated the Arsenal Pottery, located near the State Arsenal in Trenton, New Jersey from 1876 to 1905. They produced Rockingham and brown stoneware and majolica (Goldberg 1998:44) as well as spongeware. Mayer's Arsenal Pottery dump, situated along the banks of the Delaware River in Trenton was investigated by Hunter Research, Inc. in 1999 and thousands of cut sponge-decorated ironstone china sherds were recovered (Liebeknecht 2001: 1-4), some of them with

the chain or rope design. Liebeknecht raises the possibility that the Trenton facility "may have ceased production of spongeware after 1883," its production shifting then to the facility in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, but the chain or Portneuf decorated barrel suggest production of spongeware persisted at Trenton until 1887 and likely a short period longer.

After much trial and error, we have been able to find not one but three patents granted to Joseph Mayer of Trenton, in the county of Mercer and State of New Jersey, on February 1st

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Mayer's Pottery and Portneuf

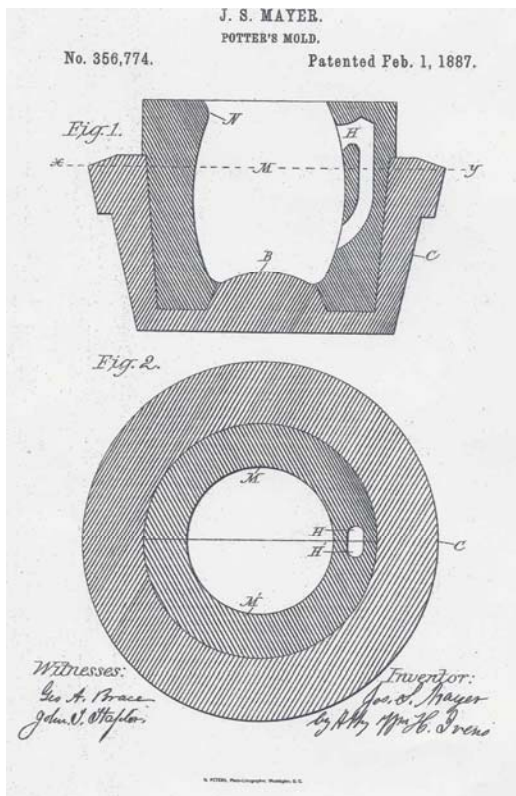


Figure 3. Patent no. 356,774, also awarded to Mayer, related to the manufacture of vessels with handles or ears.

(Continued from page 2)

1887 by the United States Patent Office (USPO). One is about improvements in pottery kilns and is concerned with an apparatus for the fusion of potters' glaze (patent no. 356,775). Another invention, protected by patent no. 356,773 (Figure 2) is about a potters' mold used in the process of "jiggering ware" and seems to be related to the above barrel. Mayer claims it is adapted to the formation of potters' vessels having "contracted necks, expanded lower part or parts, and bases recessed or having an annular base-rim or foot."

It is of interest to know that, a few years before, C. B. Ribon, in the State of Bolivar, Columbia, had tackled a similar problem and was granted a U.S. patent for a mold "for making earthenware with concavo-convex surfaces, and especially with recessed bot-

tom, where an annular rim is formed as a base of the vessel." His solution was different and maybe more cumbersome: a mold with two vertically divided parts and a third part enclosed within said parts to form a removable bottom, used with a jigger and combining an adjustable knife adapted to the desired shape (see patent no. 282,369, dated July 31, 1883, of the USPO).

Mayer obtained a third patent dated February 1, 1887, no. 356,774 (Figure 3). This relates to the manufacturing of vessels having either handles or ears. The object is to provide a means "whereby the handle or ear and the body of a potter's vessel can be formed at a simultaneous operation, and a more perfect union of the two established by mutual junction while the plastic clay is at its best working temperature and in much less time than is consumed...by the old method". It involves hand pressing, jiggering and uniting the parts in a continuous operation in the same mold.

The quest about the sponge decorated barrel pictured in Finlayson's book led us unexpectedly to three patents granted in 1887 to Joseph Mayer of Trenton, solving at the same time a so-called Portneuf ware mystery. Patents are important traces of potters' ingenuity and shed more lights on the potter's craft of the 19th century America.

References

Finlayson, R.W. : *Portneuf Pottery and Other Early Wares*. Longman Canada Ltd., Don Mills, Ont., 1972.

Goldberg, David J.: *Preliminary Notes on the Pioneer Potters and Potteries of Trenton, New Jersey*. Trenton Museum Society, Trenton, NJ, 1983, revised 1998.

Liebeknecht, William B.: "Joseph Mayer's Arsenal Pottery Dump, Part 3: Cut Sponge Decorated Ironstone China." *Trenton Potteries*, Vol.2, Issue 3 / 4, 2001.

Eastfield Village Ceramics Workshops

Eastfield Village, in Rensselaer County, New York, is offering their annual ceramics workshop. This year's topic is *British Ceramics: The Development of Technical Genius in the British Ceramic Industry 1650-1850*. The workshop runs from June 22 to June 24. For more information see www.greatamericancraftsmen.org.

Lectures and Demonstrations include:

- **Beer Shops and Bread Riots.** The changes in technology, including the (limited) introduction of steam power and the increasing mechanization of making processes, did not come about without a huge impact on the way of life of the ordinary working potters – men, women and children. This lecture looks at some of the changes in the working and home life of the Georgian and early Victorian potters including child labor, the rise of the unions and food riots. *Miranda Goodby, Keeper of Ceramics, the Potteries Museum, Stoke on Trent, UK.*
- **From Clay to Glost Oven.** This talk covers the processes involved in the many phases of pottery production from the raw state to the final glaze firing until the late 20th century. It includes a section on the process of bat and transfer printing. *Robert Cope-land, author and former historian of the Spode Factory and noted member of the family that ran Spode for over 175 years.*
- **The Development of Lathe Turning in the Potteries from the 18th Century to the mid 19th Century.** Lecture details the progression of lathe work from the simple turner's lathe to the complicated rose and crown engine lathes. Includes how these lathes actually worked and what was made on them. *Don Carpentier, practical potter and director of Eastfield Village.*
- **Josiah Wedgwood, Master Potter and Marketing Genius.** From his experiments to create new bodies and glazes, to his ability to secure royal contracts for his pottery, Josiah Wedgwood was one of England's most important and influential potters of the 18th century. *Nancy Ramage, professor of art history at Ithaca College, author and lecturer on 18th century pottery, especially Wedgwood.*
- **The Influence of Chinese Export Porcelain on British Ceramics in the 18th to early 19th Century.** Traces the use of Chinese designs after the development of porcelain in Britain (1740s), the role of the East India Company in providing Chinese Export porcelain for the upper class, factories who provided matchings and entire tea and dinner services in the Chinese style to an ever increasing public demand, with an emphasis on the prominent role played by Josiah Spode. *Connie Rogers, General Editor of the "Transferware Collector's Club Database of Transfer-printing patterns c. 1780-1900"; author and lecturer.*
- **The Rise and Fall of Slip.** Slip decoration on utilitarian earthenwares rose to extraordinary heights of inventiveness during the 1770-1840 period, then began a long, slow slide into oblivion. Rickard explores some of the more creative uses in which fluid clay was used to make everyday objects visually exciting. *Jonathan Rickard, author, collector and independent scholar specializing in 18th and 19th century mocha and diptwares.*
- **Ceramics for Hyde Hall, Coopers-town, NY 1813-1834.** Hyde Hall, one of the great country houses in America, was designed by its builder George Clarke and Philip Hooker, Albany's leading neoclassical architect, between

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Eastfield Village Ceramics Workshops

(Continued from page 4)

1817 and 1828 on a site overlooking Otsego Lake near Cooperstown. It stayed in his family until purchased by the state in 1963. A number of the original contents remain in the house. Clarke was a meticulous record keeper and many of the bills for his furnishings still survive. These document his choices of English, French and a few Chinese ceramics from retail merchants and auction in Albany, Cooperstown and New York City between 1813 and 1834. *Dr Gilbert Vincent, independent scholar and former Director of the New York State Historical Society, Cooperstown, NY.*

- **The Making of Potter's Tools by a Potter.** Demonstration of the creation of a blowing bottle for slip work and a three chamber slip pot.

Bob Nopper, practical potter, Salem, NY, manager Bear Pottery Studio, creating functional and decorative stoneware, sculpture and raku pottery.

- **The Evolution of Polychrome-Painted Pearlware from the Late 18th to the Early 19th Century.** Lecture and Demonstration. *Denise Carpentier, practical potter, specializing in polychrome pearlware reproductions and adaptations.*
- **Searching through Spode.** Detailed visual account of the search through three enormous late 18th century storage buildings at the Spode Factory site for early tools, models and master-molds in 2006 and 2007. Learn about important items that were recovered in the process. *Don Carpentier.*

"Fancy Rockingham" Pottery Exhibit

"Fancy Rockingham" Pottery: The Modeller and Ceramics in Nineteenth Century America

New Jersey State Museum Auditorium Galleries, 205 West State Street, Trenton, NJ
June 9 - September 1, 2007

"Fancy Rockingham" Pottery is an extraordinary exhibition of relief-molded ceramics largely from New Jersey, New England, Maryland and Ohio. Evolving from English roots to designs originating on American soil, Rockingham pottery became distinctly American through the creations of the ornamental designers and modelers whose works crisscrossed the country. This exhibition, curated by the well-

known independent scholar Diana Stradling, brings together a wealth of material from rarely seen private collections. The objects were selected to shed light on the creative process that resulted in these pots as well as give us a glimpse into the time when these wares were a prevalent part of everyday life.

Organized by the Lora Robins Gallery of Design from Nature, University of Richmond Museums, VA, the exhibition was exhibited at the Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, NC, before coming here to the State Museum. The installation here is the final opportunity to enjoy this remarkable collection and will continue on view through the summer.

Selected Tile & Terra Cotta Sites in Trenton

Included with this issue of *Trenton Potteries* is a copy of the terra cotta guide produced for the tile and terra cotta symposium held in April. We would appreciate your comments and feedback on the guide. Please visit our website at potteriesoftrentonsociety.org and let us know what you think.

Thank you.

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:

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