

# TRENTON POTTERIES

Newsletter of the  
Potteries of Trenton Society

## *The American Crockery Company of Trenton* *Jacqueline Beaudry Dion and Jean-Pierre Dion*

While doing research for our book on Philip Pointon<sup>1</sup>, master potter in Trenton and elsewhere, we came upon the acts of incorporation of the *American Crockery Company* and its predecessor. Since it does provide a correction to the date of incorporation as stated by David J. Goldberg<sup>2</sup>, we would like to record here this information as well as add a few facts, gleaned mostly from newspaper accounts, about this relatively unknown

company.

The act to incorporate the East Trenton Crockery and Kaolin Company was adopted by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey on March 29, 1865. At that time, the associates were Frederick Dellicker, Imlah Moore, Daniel B. Bodine, Peter Crozer and Frederick R. Wilkinson. These men were also appointed commissioners to receive subscrip-

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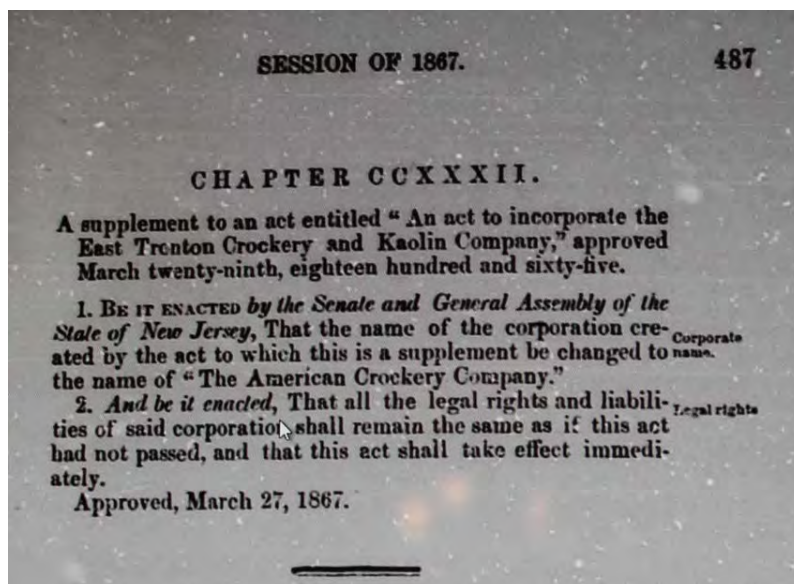
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*The Potteries of Trenton Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the study and preservation of Trenton's ceramic past. Officers: President – Patricia Madrigal; Treasurer – William Liebeknecht; Secretary – Brenda Springsted. Board: Ellen Denker, Richard Hunter, Meta Janowitz, Jay Lewis, Emma Lewis, William Liebeknecht, Brenda Springsted, Rebecca White. Newsletter Editor: Patricia Madrigal*



*Made by American Crockery Company, Trenton, New Jersey. Jug, American Victorian 1876. Granite Ware, transfer printed decoration in manganese. Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Ozeas, Ramborger, Keehmle Collection, 1921-34-36. This water jug, with transfer prints of the Horticultural Hall and the Agricultural Building of the Centennial, is referred to by Barber on p. 60.*

Acts of the ninety-first legislature of the State of New Jersey and twenty-third under the new Constitution, *Pater-son, N.J. 1867, p. 487.*



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tions for the capital stock of \$50,000 of the company, at \$50 a share. The purpose of the corporation was to excavate, manufacture and deal in kaolin and crockery ware.<sup>3</sup>

Then on March 27, 1867, (and not in 1866 as suggested by Goldberg) the name was changed to The American Crockery Company.

The American Crockery Co (ACCo) produced white ware, plain or decorated. At the 1876 Philadelphia exhibition, according to the official catalogue, the ACCo displayed chamber sets and tableware of bisque, white granite and stone china. A booklet of 16 pages, published by the company in 1878, describes Semi-porcelain or American China, Table or Dinner ware, Hotel Ware, Chamber ware, decorated, printed & plain white. Barber<sup>4</sup> (1904, p. 59-60) gives the marks used by the company but very little is known about its products or history, apart from Goldberg's two paragraphs (p. 41).

Pliny Fisk (1828-1910) was an important investor who became president of the ACCo. The *Bradstreet's*<sup>5</sup> *Reports* (July 1874) notes that Pliny

Fisk<sup>6</sup> is the President, James M. Chapman, Secretary and Cleveland Hillson, Treasurer, with a paid in capital of \$100,000.

The *New York Times* (29 March 1873, p. 3), remarks that the company, under President Fisk, goes largely into the business of making decorated ware, that

they have four large ordinary kilns, and three kilns for decorated wares, adding "The number of their employees is over 100 and their production is about \$125,000 a year". The company was looking for two good china decorators in 1876, offering steady work (*The Sun*, New York, 22 February 1876, p. 4). Only two names, Jesse Dean<sup>7</sup> and Samuel D. Hope, are recorded as china decorators in Trenton by the 1874 *Bradstreet's Reports*.

In 1877, there was a long and bitter strike<sup>8</sup> from the operatives of the Trenton Potteries, involving 2500 people. The problem was the introduction of machinery in the shops, menacing the jobs and hinting at salary reductions. During the strike, only half of the 150 workers at the ACCo, for instance, were in place. Fisk managed to hire and prepare youngsters to do the complex tasks of experienced potters. His success is told at length in the *Lawrence Daily Journal*, Lawrence, Kansas, (12 May, 1877, p.2). "...Actual test has enabled apprentices of only two weeks experience to turn out jugs...as good as those which heretofore the lads have not been allowed to touch till after three year's service". Similarly for the

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# The American Crockery Co.

Trenton, N. J.,  
MANUFACTURERS OF AMERICAN CHINA.

We call especial attention to our new chamber services—the "NEW YORK" and the "DIAMOND"—cuts of which will be mailed to dealers upon application to  
THE AMERICAN CROCKERY CO.,  
Trenton, N. J.

PLATE 35. Advertisement of American Crockery Co.; note many patterns, including "Cable," No. 102.

Advertisement from The Crockery and Glass Journal of 1881, reproduced in *Old China* by Minnie Watson Kamm, (privately printed, 1951, p. 198, plate 35), from which source this is borrowed. Note the various patterns: Rustic, Yedda, Cable, Wheat, Bullion, Rocaille, Rose, Saxon, Bamboo,...Also noteworthy is the mention, here, of American China, which appears on one of their three marks illustrated in Barber (1904, p. 60).

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managing of the kilns, "after his new hands worked three weeks, they were enabled to draw a perfect kiln, worth, in each instance, \$1500". Machinery had taken the place so long denied it.

The American Crockery Company again displayed crockery and china ware at the Boston Mechanic's Exhibition in 1878 (*Boston Post*, 2 September 1878, p.6).

*The Record-Union*, Sacramento, CA ( 22 July 1880, p.4 ) reported on the progress of china ware production in New Jersey, quoting Mr. Fisk's optimism as he estimated that the growth of the Trenton trade had reduced the importation of foreign ware from 35 to 40 per cent in the last three years. A market had grown for American fancy goods, said Mr. Fisk, adding "People were educated a great deal by the Centennial Exhibition and, more than all, Americans had ceased to copy from the English and are relying upon their own originality".

The all important question of the duties on imported products was to be discussed again in November 1881, in New York. In preparation of this tariff convention, several representatives of the pottery industries of Trenton, as well as Frederick Dellicker, then Secretary of the Manufacturing Pottery Association, were interviewed by the *New York Times* (17 October 1881, p.8). Mr. Fisk, still President of the ACCo, said that, although he was not familiar with the workings of the tariff as applied to crockery, "... he felt certain that the present tariff would be satisfactory to the owners of potteries but for the underevaluation of imported foreign goods when they passed the Custom House officers". Apparently some foreign manufacturers would try to get their goods into the country on a false evaluation and

so afford to undersell the American manufacturers. Fisk was promoting a specific duty on imports.

A long standing rule of the pottery manufactories of Trenton stated that an employee who had worked in one pottery cannot get employment in another unless he had a discharge card from his former employer. Mary Slattery was discharged from the Union Pottery Co. upon a complaint by Pliny Fisk, of the ACCo, that she had never been regularly discharged from his service. The court gave, in 1884, a verdict in favor of Slattery (*The Times-Democrat*, New Orleans, 14 March 1884, p.4). A similar situation had occurred in 1870 to a poor man named Taylor as he tried to work for J. Moses (*The New York Herald*, 18 April 1870, p. 7).

The name of the American Crockery Co. still appears in a list of consignees for 1889 (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 16 August, 1889, p.7). Yet the ACCo was bought by Clark Brothers Pottery Co. already in 1887 (Goldberg, p. 41). Clark Brothers failed two years later, with liabilities of \$25,000 (*The Bucks County Gazette*, Bristol, PA, 4 July 1889, p. 3). Clark Brothers then turned into the manufacture of lamps. Incidentally, four of their students' lamps were bought for \$20 by The Senate of New Jersey to furnish the House of Assembly (*The Daily Times*, New Brunswick, NJ, 20 June 1891, p. 3).

Few pieces made by the ACCo are known to exist, despite the fact that the company was in production for more than twenty years. Lucky is the collector or the museum who has one specimen of their production!

These small facts about the ACCo illustrate the fate of most Trenton potteries of the time: they had to produce original and high quality ceramic wares while having to cope with im-

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ported products, strikes, lawsuits, and sometimes fire or liabilities. Their achievement is all the more remarkable!

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Beaudry Dion, Jacqueline & Dion, Jean-Pierre, *Philip Pointon (1831-1881), maître potier à Baraboo, Cap-Rouge, Trenton, Baltimore, Saint-Jean*, self-published by the authors, 2013. ISBN 978-2-9812228-2-4.

<sup>2</sup>Goldberg, David J. *Potteries / The Story of Trenton's Ceramic Industry*, Trenton, NJ, Trenton Museum Society, 1983, revised 1998.

<sup>3</sup>Acts of the eighty-ninth Legislature of the State of New Jersey and twenty-first under the new Constitution, Newark, N.J. 1865, p. 648-649.

<sup>4</sup>Barber, Edwin A., *Marks of American Pottery*, Philadelphia, PA, Patterson & White, 1904.

<sup>5</sup>Bradstreet's commercial reports embracing the Bankers, Merchants, Manufacturers and others in the United States and the Dominion of Canada, NY, J. M. Bradstreet & sons 1874, vol XXXV.

<sup>6</sup>Pliny Fisk is the son of Rev. Joel Fisk and Clarinda Chapman (see *Vermont Historical Gazetteer*, January 1882, p. 790). He was probably related to the Secretary James M. Chapman.

<sup>7</sup>Jesse Dean appears in the US Census for 1870 as a china decorator, as well as his mother and his sister.

<sup>8</sup>See Stern, M. J., *The Pottery Industry of Trenton: A Skilled Trade in Transition 1850-1929*, (1994), p. 61-64.

## A Note on the Symposium

Dear Friends,

We worked on the 2016 Trenton Ceramics Symposium all during the fall of 2015. We secured a date with the New Jersey State Museum and selected a topic--Trenton ironstone--that has not been covered by a symposium previously. We thought it would be a good topic for exploration, especially because of its importance in the ceramic history of the city.

Sadly, however, we came up short in our search for a full day of speakers who can share their knowledge and insights for us. We reached out to other collector's organizations that have ironstone as an historical focus in the hope of finding new and expert speakers. We also talked with numerous historians and archaeologists and still failed to secure a program that satisfies our standards.

As time grew too short for finding available speakers and for adequate marketing of the event, we decided to cancel this year's symposium. We are as disappointed as you will be by this news, but have accepted the reality of the age-old superstition: Thirteen is an unlucky number.

We will continue to work on this topic for 2017 and hope you will lend advice and counsel as we move forward. Many thanks for your understanding.

*Patty Madrigal & Ellen Denker*



## *When is a Toby not a Toby???... When He is a German-American!*

*Bill Liebeknecht, MA, RPA*



*Figure 1. Toby Fillpot by Robert Dighton circa 1761.*

Toby is one of the most iconic figures in ceramic history. Who was Toby? Was he a real person or merely fashioned from the imagination of an artistic potter? Most researchers and collectors believe the Toby figure immortalized in pitchers and mugs originally represented Toby Fillpot, first depicted by English artist Robert Dighton circa 1761 (Figure 1). It is widely believed that Dighton's gluttonous, drunken rotund figure was derived from a popular tavern song written by Reverend Francis Fawkes entitled the Brown Jug (Greenberg 1987:1-8).

Many scholars credit Ralph Wood I with the initial production of what have become known as Toby Jugs (Figure 2). The tri-corner hats made them perfect vessels for pouring beer, but not so accommodating for

drinking beer. Pitcher forms are sometimes topped off with a domed cap (the center of the hat) to facilitate the transportation of the contents from the keg to the table. Over the years the Toby figure has taken many forms both male and female, full figured and busts, pitchers, tankards, and plates.

Around 1883 Mayer's Arsenal Pottery, looking to diversify its product line, contemplated the introduction of majolica ware. Production undoubtedly started shortly after that and ceased shortly before 1908 (Hunter 2003:1-7). Known vessels identified during archaeological monitoring along N. J. Route 29 in Trenton, New Jersey consist of pitchers, mugs, plates, shallow bowls, spittoons and tiles (Figure 3). None of these pieces unfortunately bear maker's marks and have thus been either erroneously attributed to other manufacturers or categorized as unattributed. Formal names for the shapes and decoration have therefore been left to speculation. One such piece is the so-called Toby plate, which has been interpreted as being inspired by the Toby jug (Figures 3 and 4), (Snyder and Bockol 1994:139).

At first glance it does appear to be a Toby figure. However, majolica potters were known to take artistic license when it came to accurate portrayals. Close examination of the seated figure on the so-called Toby plate shows a stronger similarity to the stout German gentleman in Figure 4



*Figure 2. An example of an English Rockingham-glazed Toby pitcher/jug with cap.*

hoisting a lager beer. Note the cap worn in both images. Although it may be a coincidence, the fluted band around the center mimics the beer mug in the postcard!

It appears the Mayer brothers may have been catering to the nearly 1.5 million German immigrants who enter the country in the 1880s.

## References

Greenberg, Marjorie  
1987 *Toby Jugs in the Old Barracks Museum Collection*. Published by the Old Barracks Association. Pages 1-8.

Hunter, Richard W.  
2003 The Pottery Decorating Shop of the Mayer Arsenal Pottery Company. *Trenton Potteries* 4(2):1-7.

Snyder, Jeffery B. and Leslie Bockol  
1994 *Majolica American & European Wares*. Schiffer Publishing Ltd, Atglen, Pennsylvania. Page 139.

Figure 4. Toby plate.



Figure 3. Toby plate waster sherds recovered during archaeological monitoring along N.J. Route 29 in Trenton, New Jersey. Inset: complete plate.

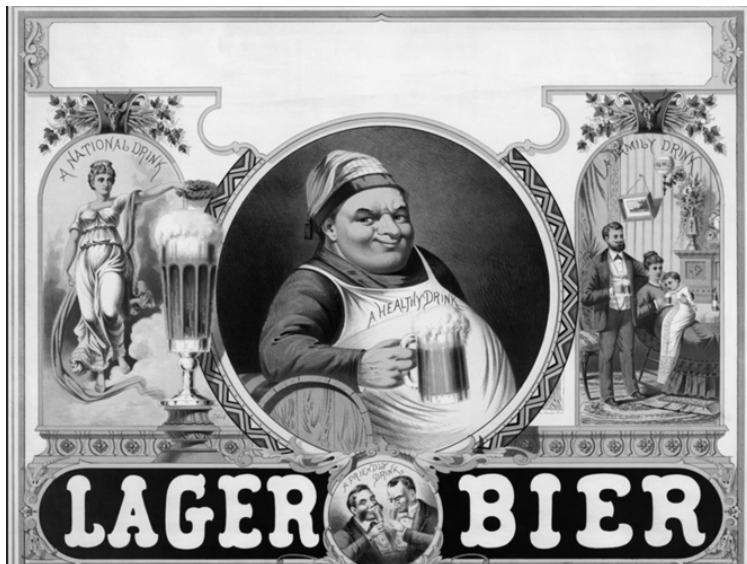


Figure 5. This 1879 postcard boasts that lager beer is a national drink, a healthy drink, a friendly drink and a family drink!

## *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 Membership \$25

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