

TRENTON POTTERIES

Newsletter of the
Potteries of Trenton Society

Joseph Mayer's Arsenal Pottery Dump Part 1: Yellow ware

William B. Liebeknecht

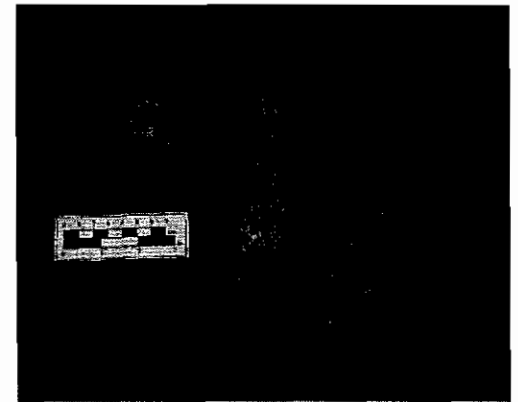
Editor's Note: Pottery waster dumps associated with the Arsenal pottery were examined as part of the archaeological research along the new alignment for N.J. Route 29 in Trenton. This is the first of three articles, by archaeologist William B. Liebeknecht, that will describe some of the ceramic finds made at these dumps.

The Arsenal Pottery was owned by James and Joseph Mayer from 1876 to 1905 (Goldberg 1998; Hunter 1999). In the late 1870s the plant manufactured "Majolica and Barbotine Ware vases, jardiniers, jugs and flat ware" (Wall n.d.:6) as well as "Rockingham and brown stoneware, fancy flower pots, hanging baskets, hanging logs, stumps and pedestals..." (Mains & Fitzgerald 1877). A brief article on the pottery industry from the 1877 Trenton city directory stated that "Mr Mayer is the only potter in the city of Trenton who is manufacturing Rockingham ware" (Mains & Fitzgerald 1877). Since other potters in the city were listed as manufacturing Rockingham wares in the late 1870s, this claim may not be entirely accurate. Nevertheless, the manufacture of Rockingham had decreased in the city with the rise in production of white granite wares; at most only a handful of potteries were producing Rockingham ware.

Some of the yellow ware wasters recovered from the Arsenal Pottery dump are particularly interesting and might shed light on relationships among pottery manufacturing firms at the end of the 19th century. The yellow ware wasters were from both bisque

(fired but unglazed) and finished (glazed) pieces. All of the bisque sherds are from "Rebekah at the Well" teapots. The finished sherds came from a variety of vessels (such as pitchers, a spittoon, and a chamber pot) as well as Rockingham glazed Rebekah at the Well teapots.

There are a variety of Rebekah teapots in the dump. The bisque pieces all have a remnant red/brown slip,



Examples of bisque "Rebekah at the Well" sherds recovered from the Arsenal Pottery dump in Trenton.

dipped glaze on the interior and exterior surfaces. Most of the teapots are 10-sided vessels with sides that expand gradually from the shoulder to the base. A few have smooth bodies. Some are marked "FIRE PROOF" on the base, and others are un-marked (known examples of Rebekah at the Well teapots manufactured by the Mayer Arsenal pottery are marked "FIRE-PROOF / J. MAYER / TRENTON" [Stradling 1996:26]).

The teapots could claim to be fire-

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Attention POTS Members!

Trenton Potteries is looking for announcements, brief articles and other submissions. If you have something you would like to see in an upcoming newsletter, please send it to: Patricia Madrigal, Potteries of Trenton Society, 120 W. State Street, Trenton NJ 08608, email to madrigal@hunterresearch.com.

Joseph Mayer's Arsenal Dump



Base of Meyer "Rebekah at the Well" teapot marked FIREPROOF. Note pads designed to disperse heat and prevent cracking.

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proof because of the presence of grooves or pads that were designed to release the heat created by direct contact on cast iron stoves. The grooves prevented the vessels from cracking. Two types of grooved bases were found at the Mayer dump: two u-shaped grooves or channels spaced 180 degrees apart along the footring and six small flattened drop-shaped pads spaced evenly around the footring.

Lids from the teapots come in two diameters, 3 1/4 inches and 4 inches, and they have a single locking-notch. The finial or knob is conical-shaped and divided by five incised lines filled with dots, crosses and horizontal lines. The body has a plant emanating from a single stem with four simple toothed leaves and terminating in three branches containing one berry each.

Rebekah at the Well teapots were not produced exclusively by the Arsenal Pottery. According to an 1876 *Crockery and Glass Journal* article, the Speeler Pottery Company of Trenton

was manufacturing "the 'Rebecca,' 'Chinese,' 'Medallion,' 'Pineapple,' and 'Vine,' [teapots] all in new shape." Stradling's 1996 article on the Southern Porcelain Company has a photograph of a Speeler Pottery Company Rebekah teapot. This teapot (clearly marked with the Speeler Pottery Company mark "SPCo") looks remarkably like the examples recovered from the Mayer Pottery dump site, right down to the location of the mold seam, which runs vertically to the side of the spout and handle (more commonly, mold seams were horizontal and located beneath the spout and handle). The Rebekah teapots from the Arsenal and Speeler potteries also display similar handles, lids and spouts, the three main elements of the Rebekah teapots which were subject to stylistic change among potteries.

It therefore appears likely that Rebekah at the Well teapots manufactured by the Mayer Arsenal Pottery were produced using either former Speeler Pottery Company molds or very good copies of those molds. How they would have obtained these molds is open to speculation. The Speeler Pottery Company changed

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Rebekah at the Well teapot lid recovered from the Arsenal pottery dump.

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Profiles in Pottery: the W. H. Tatler Decorating Company

Patricia Madrigal

When the pottery industry in Trenton was at its peak in the 1920s, Trenton was home to nearly 50 active ceramic manufacturing plants. Many of these businesses did not have in-house decorators, and others occasionally needed help filling orders. To solve these problems, they sent their wares to the numerous decorating establishments operating throughout the city. One such decorating business was the W. H. Tatler Decorating Company.

The Tatler Decorating Company was founded in 1874 by Elijah Tatler, who emigrated from England with his wife and son. A couple of years later, in 1876, Elijah Tatler died and the business was carried on by his wife and, later, his son, Edgar Elijah Tatler. Over the years the firm decorated wares made by such manufacturers as Ott & Brewer, Alpaugh and Magowan, Lenox, Inc. and Scammell, to name a few.

One of Edgar Elijah Tatler's sons, Nick Tatler, still lives in the Trenton area and recalls the days when he worked for the family business. "As a teenager I worked at gold printing. I would make the decals using gold dust and paper." The decoration would then be transferred to the object being decorated, be it a plate or a vase or a lamp. Gold decoration was generally the last stage in the firing process because it fired at a low temperature. "It came out of the kiln an ugly brown," recalls Tatler. "The gold decoration had to be polished with fiberglass brushes."

When Nick worked for the firm in the 1940s, the company was decorating pieces for Scammell, Lenox and

Cook China Company. Much of the dinnerware they decorated came from the Syracuse China Company in New York, NY. The firm also decorated lamp bases. "We would get blank lamp bases from department stores. The decorators would come up with a number of ways to decorate the bases and then send them back to the store." The store would choose the style they liked best and place their order. Nick recalls another common decorating task for the firm: applying HOT and COLD decals on spigots from American Standard and Wenzel. "We did a ton of those!"

The firm had about 50 employees. According to Nick, most of the decorators were young women from England. Much of the work they did was transfer print, but the firm did do hand gilding and some hand painting. In the early 1930s the company was commissioned to paint the service plates (fancy plates used for a table setting but not actually used for eating) for use in the movie *Gone with the Wind*. The plates were painted with a magnolia or orchid that covered the whole plate, including the rim. Nick recalls these with pride. "They were painted by Bill Tunney and used in the movie. They were beautiful."

Nick's brother Wayne took over the business in 1949 when their father, Edgar Elijah, passed away. After World War II it became increasingly difficult to compete against imported ceramics. In 1953 the business was sold to Nelson Lebo, lamp manufacturers in Trenton, ending 79 years of family ownership of the W. H. Tatler Decorating Company.

In the early 1930s the [Tatler Decorating] company was commissioned to paint the service plates for use in the movie *Gone with the Wind*.

New Exhibit — From Tabletop to TV Tray: China and Glass in America, 1880-1980



Chocolate pot, c. 1889-1896, Ceramic Art Company, Trenton, belleek porcelain. Collection of the Dallas Museum of Art. Chocolate pot, c. 1880-1890, Willets Manufacturing Company, Trenton, porcelain. Collection of the Newark Museum. Cup and saucer, 1889-1896, Willets Manufacturing Company, Trenton, porcelain. Collection of the Dallas Museum of Art.

From fine porcelain and crystal to functional pottery and pressed glass, a groundbreaking exhibition premiering at the Newark Museum surveys 100 years of artifacts that touch all our lives — dishes. *Tabletop to TV Tray: China and Glass in America, 1880-1980*, on view March 17 through June 18, 2000, features more than 500 objects from the collections of the Dallas Museum of Art and the Newark Museum plus scores of historical photographs and advertising images that together chronicle America's love affair with tableware

The show tells the fascinating story of American production and use of china and glass — including the rise of women designers, the changes in etiquette and social conventions, the international competition to capture the American market and the origin of the bridal registry. The display juxtaposes the critically acclaimed avant-garde objects coveted by museums with more artistically conservative, but commercially successful, objects loved by American consumers.

Tabletop to TV Tray was organized by the Dallas Museum of Art to premiere at the Newark Museum, in the state that was a center of America's glass and ceramics industries during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In studying and presenting such objects, this exhibition offers a new perspective on the history of American decorative arts in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Among the international manufacturers represented are such household names as Wedgwood, Lenox, Nori-

take, Orrefors, Waterford, Steuben, Fiesta, Melmac and others.

Following its Newark run, *Tabletop to TV Tray* will be on view at the Dallas Museum of Art, Texas, from July 23, 2000 through January 7, 2001. A 400-page, fully illustrated book published by the Dallas Museum of Art and distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc. accompanies the exhibition.

Admission is free at The Newark Museum, located at 49 Washington Street in the Downtown/ Arts District of Newark, New Jersey. Public hours are Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 12:00 noon — 5:00 p.m., and Thursdays from 12:00 noon — 8:30 p.m. Attended parking is available for a nominal fee in the adjacent lot. For information or directions, call 1-800-7-MUSEUM or 973-596-6355 (text-telephone service) or visit their web site at www.newarkmuseum.org.

Arsenal Dump

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hands in 1878 (acquired by Carr and Clark and renamed the Lincoln Pottery) and again in 1879 (purchased by Burgess and Campbell and renamed the International Pottery Company). After purchasing the pottery, Burgess and Campbell reportedly switched from manufacturing Rockingham and yellow ware to white granite and related products (Goldberg 1998:22). Although there is no direct evidence, it is possible that the Arsenal acquired the Speeler molds at that time. Perhaps further research can shed some light on the relationship between the Arsenal and Speeler potteries.

POTS Update

Figurine Workshop

On April 16, 2000 POTS and the Trenton City Museum sponsored a workshop on ceramic figurine manufacture. Current and former pottery workers discussed and demonstrated modeling, dissecting, slip-casting, stick-up and painting. The workshop was taped (audio and video) and will be included in POTS oral history project.

Trenton Potteries Database

POTS is working with the N.J. Department of Transportation to be named steward of the Trenton Potteries Database. The database, compiled by Hunter Research for the NJDOT, contains information on Trenton's industrial potteries from 1850 to 1940. POTS is planning to update and distribute the database.

POTS has received permission from the Department of Transportation to reprint the teacher's guide *From Teacups to Toilets: A Century of Industrial Pottery In Trenton, Circa 1850 to 1940*. The guide was written and produced by Hunter Research and Wilson Creative Marketing for the Department of Transportation. Plans are currently underway to print and distribute a second edition.

Ask the Experts: What is It?

Bring in your mystery ceramics and ask our panel of experts, "What is it?" The panel will include POTS members who are curators, collectors, and archaeologists. Pottery and china only. No appraisals. This event is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be served. See next newsletter for more details.

Call for Papers

The Chipstone Foundation requests submissions for the New Discoveries column in a new interdisciplinary journal, *Ceramics in America*, scheduled for publication in May 2001. The journal will emphasize studies of ceramics used in America from the period of European contact to the present. To promote current research and exchange ideas, the New Discoveries column will showcase recently identified or rediscovered ceramic objects or groups of objects. The column will also feature documents such as newspaper articles and advertisements, accounts and ledgers, and historic photographs. Published items will contribute to our understanding of ceramic history by identifying previously unrecognized artisans, craftsmen, and

tradesmen, technologies, distribution and consumption patterns, ware types, and vessel forms, functions, or decorations.

Submissions must include a 3" x 4" black and white or color print, or transparency, with a brief physical description, statement of significance, date and provenance. If selected, a 500-word essay prepared in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style will be required, for which an honorarium will be provided.

Please forward submissions by July 1, 2000 to: Merry A. Outlaw, New Discoveries Editor, *Ceramics in America*, The Chipstone Foundation, 109 Crown Point Road, Williamsburg, Virginia 23185.

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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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Please make your check payable to the Potteries of Trenton Society and mail to:

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