

# TRENTON POTTERIES

Newsletter of the  
Potteries of Trenton Society



## *William Richards' Stoneware Pottery Discovered!*

Richard W. Hunter

Back in the fall of 1998, as one of the pre-conditions of the Route 29 reconstruction project in South Trenton, Hunter Research, Inc., engaged as archaeological consultants to the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT), were excavating the Rosey Hill Mansion Site located in the front yard of the Katmandu Restaurant. From the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century fill of a cellar in the earliest house on the site, were pulled several stoneware wasters, among them pieces of a large grey saucer with a distinctive incised multi-lobed floral design emphasized in cobalt blue. Our tentative conclusion . . . Rosey Hill must lie close to an

18<sup>th</sup>-century stoneware manufacturing site, possibly the pottery referenced in historical documents as being operated by the Philadelphia merchant, William Richards, in the 1770s.

A newspaper advertisement of 1774 reveals that Richards had just recently built "a manufactory at Lambertton, about a half mile below Trenton, for making the useful Dutch stoneware, and sand crucibles . . ." He had also bought a new boat to service his Lambertton business ventures and presumably used this vessel in support of the pottery operations. Four years later, Richards was advertising for a

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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, David Goldberg, Richard Hunter, William Liebeknecht, Molly Merlino, George Miller, Brenda Springsted. Newsletter Editor: Patricia Madrigal*



Dawn Turner

Archaeologists from Hunter Research excavating and recording the Richards stoneware kiln.

## *Stoneware Pottery Kiln*

*(Continued from page 1)*

stoneware potter, which implies that he was hiring craftsmen to fashion the wares and work the kiln.

From the mid-1760s until his death in 1787, Richards was a prominent figure in the commerce of the Lambertton waterfront and Lower Delaware Valley, involved in fishing and the trading of a wide range of import and export goods, in addition to pottery manufacturing. He also served as "Ship's Husband" to the small Pennsylvania navy during the Revolutionary War, and in this capacity was responsible for supplying the fleet with "all stores and necessaries." Lambertton, however, represented just one hub in Richards' trading network, an enterprise that was also focused on a store he maintained in Philadelphia and commercial links in the West Indies.

As the archaeological work on the Route 29 project continued, other ceramic tidbits were found possibly relating to William Richards. Highway construction soon began in full force, but a Memorandum of Agreement between the NJDOT, the Federal Highway Administration, the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation made provision for archaeological monitoring of contractor excavations in certain key areas where it was felt that there was strong chance that important remains might still survive. Lambertton's colonial waterfront, buried beneath thick deposits of industrial fill, was one such area. Lo and behold, in May of this year, near the foot of Landing Street, grading for the tunnel that will carry Route 29 along the river bank exposed the remains of a well-preserved stoneware

kiln surrounded by ceramic waste. Documentary data and the evidence of the kiln and its products left us in no doubt that we had found William Richards' stoneware pottery. The archaeological work notched up a gear and an emergency ten-day excavation was undertaken. The kiln was thoroughly examined and documented, and a large sample of wares and kiln furniture was recovered.

Situated roughly 50 feet from the 18<sup>th</sup>-century shoreline, the kiln was set within a complex of other buildings, most of which appear to have been warehouses and workshops used by Richards and others involved in shipping goods on the river. The kiln was of simple updraft type, rectangular in plan (14.5 by 8.5 feet) with a firebox at each end, constructed largely in brick, and survived to a height of around four feet. Most of the floor of the upper chamber survived intact; beneath the floor circled a single ring-like, vented flue system, linked to the fireboxes. Each firebox sat over an ash and lime-filled, brick-lined trough straddled by iron pigs, which served both as a grate and as integral supporting elements within the kiln structure.

Masses of grey salt-glazed wasters and kiln-related debris were gathered from around the kiln. These will, when fully analyzed, go a long way toward characterizing the Richards products and the operation of the kiln. The pottery was manufacturing milk pans, plates, bottles, jugs, tankards, porringers, bowls, crocks, pipkins and chamber pots, as well as some more unusual items, such as ink wells, candlestick holders and a press-molded teapot with lion paw feet. Several dif-

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"The pottery was manufacturing milk pans, plates, bottles, jugs, tankards, porringers, bowls, crocks, pipkins and chamber pots, as well as some more unusual items, such as ink wells, candlestick holders and a press-molded teapot with lion paw feet."

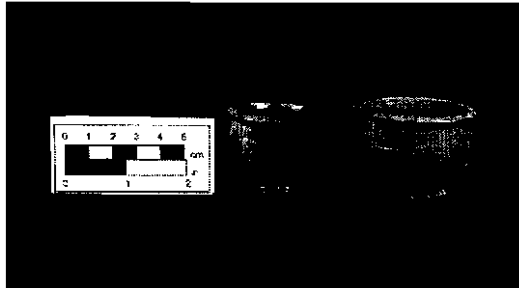
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ferent base and handle styles are evident, but the most distinctive feature of the kiln's output was the use of certain decorations: incised multi-lobed flowers, fish scale triangles and checkboards; molded or sprigged designs of floral reliefs and bellarmine-like faces; rouletted "penny" medallions; and fleur-de-lis and watch spring motifs painted in cobalt blue. One sherd was found bearing the impressed type-set initials "W R", presumably reflecting the pottery's ownership. Both formal and makeshift kiln furniture items were recovered. Props, shelves and cylindrical saggars with cut holes fall within the former category; wads, pads, pillows and crescents are abundant among the latter.

The discovery of the Richards pottery is of great historical and archaeological importance in the regional context of colonial stoneware production in the Middle Colonies. The site is one of only three archaeologically documented 18<sup>th</sup>-century stoneware kilns on the eastern seaboard (the other two being in Yorktown, Virginia and Cheesequake, New Jersey). Its products are in many respects quite distinctive and should often be recognizable in other archaeological assemblages and ceramic collections. Of profound interest are Richards' Caribbean links and one may speculate that his Lambertson stoneware products may well show up on colonial sites in the West Indies and perhaps even further afield in the New World.

In the meantime, analysis of this find is ongoing. An estimated 14,000 sherds and other items recovered from the site are now in the process of being sorted and cataloged. Technical reports should be completed over the

*Two small stoneware pots recovered from the kiln. Their function is still under investigation.*



Dawn Turner

coming year and other publications will likely result. Historical research also continues and is focused on pinpointing the beginning and end dates of the pottery operation (currently viewed as running from the early 1770s to the late 1780s); establishing whether James Rhodes, a documented potter in the area around this time, was ever involved with the site; and tracing William Richards' business activities.

What was the fate of the kiln? Despite the initial attraction of digging up and exhibiting the kiln, it was judged impractical to physically remove the structure from the river bank. Doing this would likely have resulted in its collapse and created a major long-term conservation issue. More important, removal of the kiln would have severed it from its archaeological context when it is clear that the kiln itself and substantial unexamined remains in the surrounding area will still remain along the river bank even after the construction of the highway. On this basis, the kiln has been left in place, packed in sand, marked on the highway as-built drawings, and now lies sealed beneath the roadway, awaiting re-examination by future archaeologists.

## *Joseph Mayer's Arsenal Pottery Dump*

### *Part 2: Majolica*

William B. Liebeknecht

#### REFERENCES

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- Van Hoesen, W. H. (1973) *Crafts and Craftsmen of New Jersey*. Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, Rutherford, New Jersey.
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Construction of the new alignment for N.J. Route 29 along the banks of the Delaware River, in Trenton, revealed the location of an extended pottery waster tip pile. The waster dump contained hundreds of majolica sherds from the Arsenal Pottery. Owned by James and Joseph Mayer from 1876 to 1905, the Arsenal Pottery was reported to have manufactured such "majolica and barbotine ware" as vases, jardiniers, jugs and flat wares (Wall n.d.:6). The Mayer Pottery was one of only six firms in the United States to produce American majolica ware in the 1880-1890s (Van Hoesen 1973:160).

Majolica is a soft earthenware that is fired at a low temperature. It is generally molded with high or low relief decorations, coated with an opaque glaze or slip, and painted with brightly colored lead glazes. According to Snyder and Bockol, the lead glazes generally "accentuated the molded designs" (1994:7). The term majolica is a trade name introduced in England by Herbert Minton *circa* 1850. Barbotine wares are the French version of majolica.

The development of majolica has generally been attributed to Leon Arnoux, a French potter who worked for Minton. However, Edwin Bennett, a British potter working in Baltimore, developed a similar process at roughly the same time (Schneider 1999:19). The quality of American majolica varied among pottery firms and decorators, but European majolica is considered generally very well made.

Surprisingly, none of the majolica sherds that were recently recovered from the Mayer waster dump are marked with the company's name.

Two pieces, however, have impressed lettering. The first is marked "PAT APLD FOR" on the base of a toby mug (Fig. 1) and the second is marked "NEW YORK" on an unidentified piece of hollowware. Several pieces, plates and pitchers in particular, are marked with light-brown hand-painted numbers on the bottom, which appear to be decorators' numbers. The numbers on plates are usually located in a reserve created by a light-brown sponge ground (Fig. 2).

A number of vessel forms were identified, such as mugs, pitchers, plates, platters, bowls, teapots, jardiniers, and spittoons. Although majolica jugs were reported to have been manufactured by Mayer, none were observed from the waster pile.

Most vessels exhibit brightly colored polychrome glazes. The colors that appear on sherds recovered from the Mayer waster dump include brown, pink, red, aqua, yellow, grey, green, dark blue, purple, yellow-green, natural white and gold gilt. Interior surfaces of hollowware vessels and exterior under surfaces of flatwares exhibit pale washes in pink, green and cream. Some flatwares also exhibit brown sponge backgrounds.

Researchers, antique dealers and collectors commonly mistake majolica manufactured by the Mayer Manufacturing Company for pieces manufactured in England and Ohio. The discovery of this waster pile has enabled researchers to unequivocally link "unmarked" majolica vessels to the Mayer Manufacturing Company in Trenton, New Jersey. For the first time in over one hundred years Mayer's majolica can claim its rightful place in New Jersey's ceramic history.

## *A Sample of Molded Majolica Vessels and Decorations from the Dump*

### Plates

8" with hounds chasing an elk or deer through grass with a floral, scroll and geometric border. (Also manufactured in 9", 9 1/2" and 11")

10" with a raised shell and dot diaper border and a scrolling rim with a center toby scene (a man with a pitcher and mug in his hands sitting beside a keg).

10 3/4" with a sheep dog in front of a doghouse and dog bowl with a leaf and scroll border

9 1/4" with wild roses and three simple toothed leaves on a basketweave background (also manufactured in 8")

12 1/2" x 6 1/2" Fish-shaped plate with scales and fins (polychrome) \* Note: The fish plate is currently being reproduced.

7 3/4" x 5 3/4" Begonia-leaf plate

Girl and a large dog in front of a fireplace feeding a rabbit a plate of lettuce with a dot-diaper-scallop shell border

### Pitchers

7", water lily flower with overlapping lily pads (handle has a tadpole on the top)

6" with green plant (no flower) on a wooden barrel with wood hoops, rope pattern handle is flat in cross section.

9" tree with a bird's nest, eggs and bird (robin?) with branch handle

8 1/4" Bark pitcher with wild rose with a branch handle (also manufactured in 5 7/8", 7" and 9 1/2")

7" Bark pitcher with wild rose with a branch handle (also manufactured in 6")

4 3/4" Figural pitcher/mug (toby) of a man's head with a top hat (marked "PAT APLD FOR") (Figure 1)

4 3/4" Pitcher with plain wood barrel

Corn-cob shaped pitcher

Pitcher with tree bark with grape vine, leaves and grapes

Pitcher with scales and scrolls in solid colors (blue, green or yellow)

### Creamers

5 1/4" Tree bark with simple toothed leaf and ferns (also manufactured in 8") (Figure 3)

5" bamboo with daisies

4 3/4" with basket-weave background with a multi-petal flower, possibly a wild rose) (also manufactured in 8")

### Spittoons

Basket spittoon (with two varieties Bird on a branch on a basket and rose-bow on a basket)

### Jardiniers

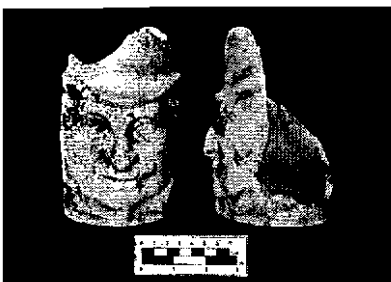
Jardinier, scales and scrolls in solid colors (blue, green or yellow)

### Bowls

8 1/4" Cabbage bordered bowl with grape leaves in the center (also manufactured in 10")

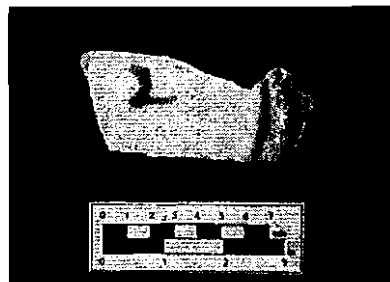
### Teapots

4" diameter basket-weave teapot lid



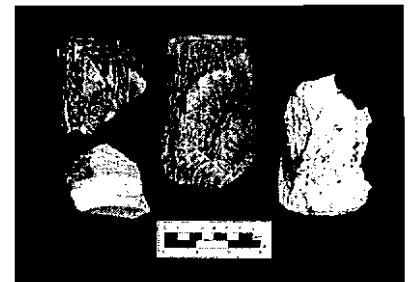
Dawn Turner

Fig. 1. Toby mug marked PAT APLD FOR.



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Fig. 2. Sherd with hand-painted number



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Fig. 3. Tree bark creamer.

## *Profiles in Pottery: the General Porcelain Manufacturing Company*

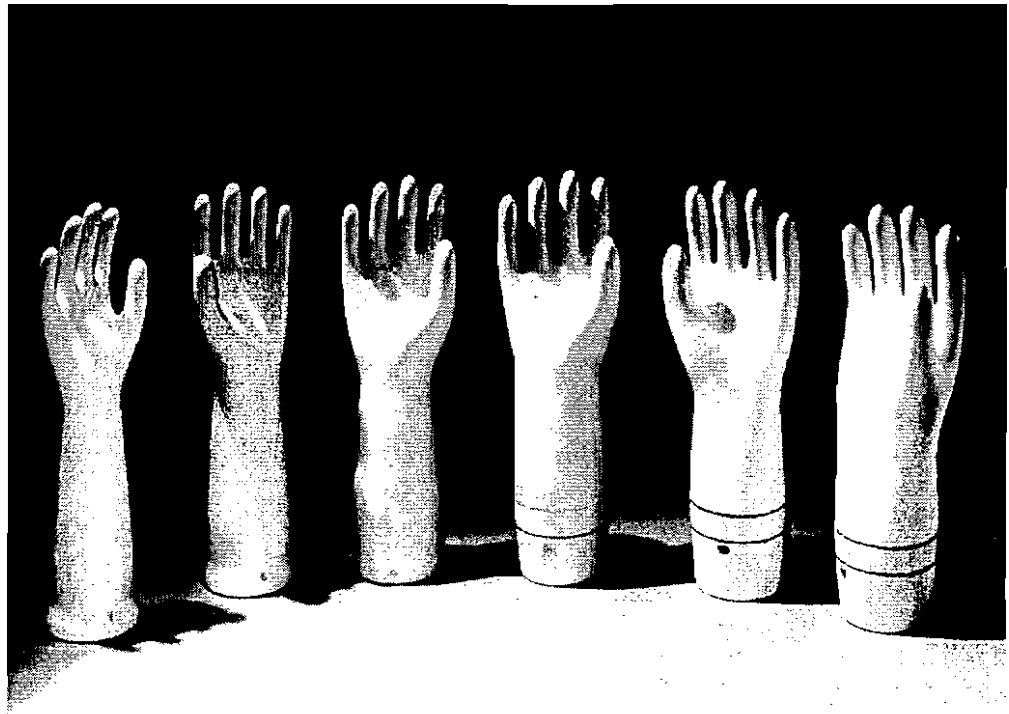
Molly Merlino

General Porcelain Manufacturing Company was incorporated in 1939 for the purpose of electrical porcelain manufacture, the company continued in that capacity until 1942 when a major product line change took place. General Porcelain Art Ware came on the market in the form of lamps, figurines and ash trays. These items were sold across the country and the company maintained showrooms in New York City and Chicago.

In 1952 the company successfully developed porcelain forms for the latex industry which carried the firm to

a position of world leadership in the production of these forms. General Porcelain continues to manufacture latex forms today. The company also makes molds for hobbyists in their Landola Molds division.

Recently, the firm's Design Cast Division has been involved in extensive recreation of the Pulaski Monument in Savannah, Georgia. The monument, dedicated to Revolutionary War hero General Casimir Pulaski (as is the Pulaski Skyway in New Jersey), will be rededicated in October by the presidents of the United States and Poland.



Photograph courtesy of Michael Olzack, General Porcelain.

*The photograph, dating to the 1950s, shows curved finger household glove forms in sizes 7 to 11. General Porcelain provided these latex forms to their customers in gloss, bisque, or "rough" finish. Dipping lines, with or without grooves, were also available.*

## Join POTS for Dish Discovery Day Sunday, October 22, 2000

Ever wonder what your grandmother had? Most people remember happy holiday meals with their families, but how many know what dishes were on the table? Did you inherit your great aunt's china and questioned the age of her favorite vase? Here is your opportunity to find out.

The Potteries of Trenton Society (POTS) is hosting "Dish Discovery Day," an afternoon of pottery and china identification, at Ellarslie on Sunday, October 22, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. 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. Please bring pottery and china only. Arrive between 1:00 and 2:00 p.m. with your mystery dish and stay for the second half of the program. From 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. there will be general discussion among the ex-

perts, who will explain the who, what, and when for the most interesting puzzles presented to them. There will be plenty of expertise, but no appraisals. This event is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be served.

Ellarslie, the Trenton City Museum, is located in Cadwalader Park, Trenton. The event will take place on the second floor in the galleries dedicated to the history of Trenton's ceramics.

The Potteries of Trenton Society was founded in 1999 to promote the study and appreciation of Trenton's ceramic industry. Membership is open to all interested in Trenton's pottery industry and its products. Members include pottery workers, historians, archaeologists, and collectors. For more information, call Patricia Madrigal at 609-695-0122 or email [pmadrigal67@yahoo.com](mailto:pmadrigal67@yahoo.com).

### 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 [pmadrigal67@yahoo.com](mailto:pmadrigal67@yahoo.com).

## POTS Update

### Lectures

Ellen Denker lectured for the Victorian Society, Metropolitan Chapter (NYC) on "From Artware to Tableware: Walter Scott Lenox, Frank Holmes, and American Fine China." The lecture was held Tuesday, September 12.

Patricia Madrigal will speak at the Contemporary Club, 176 W. State Street, Trenton, on Tuesday, November 14 at 7:30 p.m. Ms. Madrigal will speak about the Potteries of Trenton Society, the Trenton Potteries Database, and POTS efforts to study and preserve Trenton's ceramic history.

The event is open to the public.

### Teacups to Toilets

The Potteries of Trenton Society is planning on reprinting *Teacups to Toilets: A Century of Ceramic Manufacture in Trenton, Circa 1850-1940*. A teacher's guide prepared by Hunter Research for the New Jersey Department of Transportation, the guide introduces teachers and students to the history of Trenton's ceramic industry. POTS is working with the New Jersey Department of Transportation to bring about a second edition of the guide.

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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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