

TRENTON POTTERIES

Newsletter of the
Potteries of Trenton Society



Rebekah at the Marriott:

*Marriott Site Yellow Ware Waster Dump, Circa 1863-1868, Trenton, New Jersey
Rebecca White and William B. Liebeknecht*

Editor's Note: This is the first of a two-part article on a ceramic dump in Trenton. Part 1 discusses the wasters and identifies the maker; Part 2 will describe the different vessel types and decorations recovered from the dump.

Archaeological monitoring by Hunter Research, Inc. in the summer of 2000 at the Marriott Hotel site in Trenton, New Jersey revealed a dump or deposit of yellow ware/Rockingham ware sherds and related kiln furniture. The deposit, observed in the side of a construction trench, was approximately 20 feet long and between 0.5 feet to 2.5 feet thick. It contained thousands of sherds from a variety of vessel forms but was dominated by shallow undecorated pie plates and nappies of various sizes. Most of the sherds were undecorated yellow ware, but some were decorated using relief-molds. Approximately 40% of the sherds have a clear alkaline glaze; half of these also display a streaked or mottled brown manganese glaze known as Rockingham.

Sixty percent of the sherds were bisque fired and reflect variations in the clay body which may be due to multiple clay sources or imperfections and impurities in the clay. None of the thousands of sherds examined have a maker's mark, not too surprising since it has been estimated "that some 90% of all yellow ware is unmarked" (Leibowitz 1985:9). Even without marks, however, it is possible

to date the deposit before 1868. The dump was located approximately one foot below a layer of flint nodules and chunks of quartz and feldspar that were deposited by the Golding & Company Flint and Spar Mill which operated in this location from 1868 to c.1927.

In the 1850s and 1860s Trenton was home to five manufacturers of yellow and Rockingham wares: Taylor & Speeler's Trenton Pottery Works (1852 - 1856 [maybe as late as 1871]); William H. Young's City Pottery or Excelsior Pottery (1853 - 1857 [maybe as late as 1879]); Henry Speeler & Sons' Assanpink Pottery Works (1860 - 1882); Captain Ira W. Cory's Mill Street Pottery (1863 - 1870); and Charles Coxon's Clinton Street Pottery (1863-1868).

The sherds were compared to yellow ware pieces of known manufacture in the collection of the New Jersey State Museum and the private collections of respected yellow ware enthusiasts Jay Lewis and the late David Goldberg as well as photos of pieces from published sources. The closest match was to pieces manufactured by Charles Coxon, who was also the only potter listed above not known to have a yellow ware maker's mark.

Charles Coxon's Clinton Street Pottery

Charles Coxon was born on April 1, 1805 in Longton, Staffordshire, England to a family of potters. He served apprenticeships in pressing and mold-

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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, William Liebeknecht, Molly Merlino, George Miller, Brenda Springsted. Newsletter Editor: Patricia Madrigal

Marriot Site Yellow Ware



Figure 1: Author William Liebeknecht examines the yellow ware waster deposit in the side of a construction trench.

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making in the Staffordshire district. His younger brother, William, immigrated to the U.S. and worked in potteries in Jersey City; Bennington, Vermont; and Baltimore. Three years later, in 1849, Charles and his family moved to the U.S. He located his brother in Baltimore and secured work there in the pottery business. (Goldberg 1994:32, Lee 1907:333-335).

While working for the Bennett Pottery in Baltimore Charles, a senior modeler, was credited with creating a number of important pieces. In 1858 he left the Bennett Pottery to operate the Swan Hill Pottery in South Amboy, New Jersey where he produced Rockingham-glazed Bennett-like pieces until 1860. These pieces are identified by an unmarked raised rectangular pad with clipped corners on the base, similar to the one used by the Bennett Pottery, where a maker's

mark would normally have been placed (Goldberg 1994:60). Goldberg believed the pad was scraped off or filled in and may have been a mold designed by Charles Coxon for Bennett and later used at Swan Hill.

In 1861 Charles moved to Trenton and worked for Millington & Astbury and William Young & Sons (both manufacturers of Rockingham/yellow ware) until the spring of 1863 (Goldberg 1993: 36-37). That year he opened a two-kiln pottery in Trenton called the Clinton Street Pottery, located on Clinton Street and Muirhead Street (the corner of North Clinton Avenue and Ott Street) (Woodward and Hageman 1883; Hunter Research Inc. 1999). A year later John S. Thompson became his partner and the company was renamed Coxon & Thompson. Their company reportedly concentrated on the production of "creamware and white graniteware"; given that Charles established his reputation in modeling yellow and Rockingham wares, it is conceivable that his pottery would have produced these wares during the company's early years of production (Barber 1903).

In July 1868, Charles Coxon fell victim to sunstroke and died. The pottery, re-named Coxon and Company, continued on under the direction of his wife, Mary and their sons John, Charles, Frank and Jonathan with various partners (M.M. Bateman, James E. Darrah, J.G. Foreman and S. M. Alpaugh) until it was sold in 1883 to Alpaugh and F.A. McGowan (Goldberg 1994:43). The pottery was eventually named the Empire Pottery and became part of the Trenton Potteries Company in 1900.

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Marriot Site Yellow Ware

Who made the wares in the waster dump?

Charles was not the only Coxon in the pottery business. John, his eldest son, came to the United States with his parents in 1849. In 1850 he was employed as a presser (along with his father) by the Bennett Pottery in Baltimore Maryland. In 1858 he joined members of his family at the Swan Hill Pottery in South Amboy. In 1860 he returned to Baltimore for a short time before arriving in Trenton to work for Richard Millington and later for James Tams, Sr. as a molder. In 1863 he joined his father's new company where he remained until the pottery was sold in 1883 (Lee 1907:335).

Charles' nephew, Jonathan, joined his uncle's new company in 1863 as a foreman and remained for three years before moving on to the Mercer Pottery Company. Like other members of the family, Jonathan was a well-trained potter who mastered all of the details of the business (Lee 1907: 334). Charles' brother William, who came to the U.S. in 1846, also ended up in Trenton, where he lived for many years. William's connection with the Coxon Pottery is unknown.

After careful comparison and consultation with Jay Lewis and the late David Goldberg, it is the opinion of the authors that this assemblage belongs to the Coxon Pottery c. 1863-1868, and the vessels were designed by either Charles or his son John. The styles suggest strong links to Charles but the lack of sharpness and attention to detail suggest that perhaps his son John was the artisan responsible for making the molds.

While it is possible that the wasters could have come from the potteries where Charles and John worked be-

fore opening the Coxon Pottery, it is unlikely. Millington & Astbury, where both Charles and John worked, ceased manufacturing yellow ware the year before the Coxons were employed. William Young & Sons, where Charles worked, marked its yellow-ware pieces; none of the wasters from the Marriot dump have a mark. Stephens & Tams Company, which employed John for a time, is not known for manufacturing yellow ware. Therefore, if the Coxons are responsible for this yellow ware, it most likely came from their plant on Clinton Avenue.

Coxon-like parallels from the Marriott dump include the Cherub pitcher, the Cavalier creamer, a toby creamer, the Rebekah at the Well teapot and the women having tea teapot. The spout of Rebekah teapots with trailing bell flowers or lily of the valley and side portrait are remarkably similar to pieces made by the Edwin Bennett Pottery in Baltimore, MD (c.1846-1865). There is less detail on the Trenton pieces but the position and composition of elements are the same. It appears that the designer (presumably Coxon) may have made a cast of a finished Bennett piece or owned a worn mold. (See Denker and Denker 1985 page 125, plate 22 and Goldberg 1994:31). Coxon was also reported to have manufactured a number of pitchers with hound or branch handles, styles which were also recovered from the waster dump (Goldberg 1994:33, Barber 1903:52). Hound handles from the Marriot dump are rather simple with few details present. The hound's nose rests on or close to the rim of the vessel, unlike those of other manufac-

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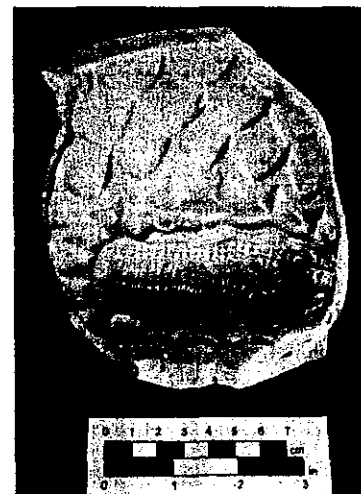


Figure 1: A yellow ware food mold with corn motif.

Marriot Site Yellow Ware

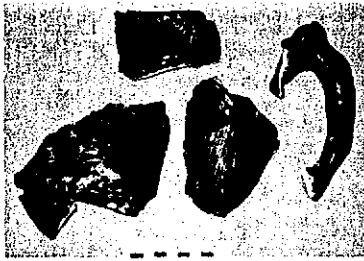


Figure 3: Remains of a pitcher with a hunting motif.

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turers where the nose extends into the vessel. Details that are clear are all four legs, the tail and the ears.

Many researchers classify makers by the different glazes they used or the overall color of the vessel. However, the bisque sherds from the Marriott dump exhibit a wide variety of yellow ware body types, suggesting that color and body type alone not be relied on for identifying potters. Body shades from the dump range from a very pale to dark yellow and some appear orange. Several bisque examples are cane colored. The term "yellow ware", as defined by this collection, is therefore a broad category. Ramsay (1939:49) refers to William Young's introduction of yellow ware as "cream-colored earthenware". In his definition of cream-colored ware, he states it was known commercially as "C. C. Ware". He defines the ware as having "a coarse body, cream or pale buff in tint, usually with a hard alkaline glaze, very close to yellow-ware in composition and appearance, and used as an improvement on it for the same undecorated kitchen and service ware." (Ramsay 1939:152).

In 1926 Spargo wrote: "...it is impossible for any human being, no matter how expert, to tell with certainty whether an unmarked piece of yellow ware was made at South Amboy or elsewhere. Knowledge of the simple facts already set forth, that these potteries existed at the times indicated and made wares of the type described, may be helpful to the collector. Beyond that it is romance, not history." (Spargo 1926:196-197). Careful analysis of sherds such as the ones from the Coxon waster dump can change the romance back into history!

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Join POTS for Dish Discovery Day Sunday, May 5, 2002

The Potteries of Trenton Society is hosting our second "Dish Discovery Day," an afternoon of pottery and china identification, at Ellarslie on Sunday, May 5, from 1:30 to 3:30 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. There will be plenty of expertise, but no appraisals. The 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 year's Dish Discovery Day is one of the many events being held to celebrate Cadwalader Park's May Day.

We are also looking for volunteers to help with this event. If you can offer pottery identification expertise, or would like to help make the event run smoothly, please contact Patricia Madrigal at 609-695-0122 or email pmadrigal67@yahoo.com.

Call for Papers

Submissions are requested for the New Discoveries column that will appear in the fourth issue *Ceramics in America*, scheduled for publication in 2004.

The column provides an exciting opportunity for researchers to showcase recently identified or rediscovered objects, sites, people and/or documents relating to ceramics used, made, collected, and/or discarded in North America from the first European settlement to the present.

Sample authors and articles from the first issue are: Margaret K. Hofer on a recently recognized seventeenth-century figural Delft salt in the collection of the New-York Historical Society; Taft Kiser on seventeenth-century pottery in the Chesapeake recently recognized as from the Donyatt potting region near Taunton, England; and Richard Hunter on the discovery and excavation of the eighteenth-

century William Richards stoneware kiln in Trenton, New Jersey. Other New Discoveries authors in the first issue include: Charlotte Wilcoxon, Jacqueline Pearce, Bly Straube, Carl Steen, Mark B. Newell, Catherine Banks, Joyce Geary Volk, Louise Richardson, Rob Hunter, and George L. Miller.

Prospective authors are encouraged to submit a brief description of the discovery describing its significance, date, provenience, and up to 5 images. If your topic is 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 for consideration to: Merry A. Outlaw, New Discoveries Editor, *Ceramics in America*, 109 Crown Point Road, Williamsburg, VA 23185, or email to: xkv8rs@aol.com.

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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.

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