

Trenton's Exotic Clay Building: The Great Mosque of the Crescent Temple

Ellen Paul Denker

The Crescent Temple Mosque on North Clinton and Wall Streets (Figure 1) presents a truly awesome exotic façade to all who seek it out. Although it is no longer associated with the Shriners who built it in 1929, the building has long been cherished by Trentonians as an example of early twentieth-century fraternal architecture showcasing the work of the city's clay industry.

The Crescent Temple was organized in 1904 by Trenton members of the Lu Lu Temple of Philadelphia and Newark's Salaam Temple. These were local chapters for a national fraternal organization, The Shrine or Order of the Mystic Shrine, which was founded in Manhattan in 1872 by a group of Masons who claimed to be a cell of a worldwide secret order of assassins instituted by Mohammedan

Kalif Alu as a vigilance committee "to dispense justice and execute punishment upon criminals who escape their just deserts through the tardiness of the courts." The group also hoped to promote religious tolerance among cultured men of all nations. Applicants were required to hold membership in either the Knights Templar or the thirty-second degree of the Scottish Rite.

Because of its claimed history, Shriners appropriated symbols, names, and motifs from Islamic nations and the Middle East to define their identity. The elaborate Arabic imagery of The Shrine helped the organization to quickly develop its own regalia and ceremonies with attendant material culture. The Shrine grew slowly at first, but by 1905 the Impe-

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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 Liebeknecht, George Miller, Brenda Springsted, Rebecca White. Newsletter Editor: Patricia Madrigal



Figure 1. The façade of Crescent Temple's Great Mosque on North Clinton is a colorful combination of yellow-ochre brick and brilliant polychrome terracotta ornament.

The Great Mosque of the Crescent Temple



Figure 2. The partial dome over the front entrance to the Great Mosque is covered with colorful terra cotta by a maker that has yet to be identified.

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rial Council, which oversees the national organization, claimed nearly 100,000 members organized into temples in ninety-seven cities in forty-six states.

New Shrine temples shared meeting space with other Masonic groups until their mem-

berships were large enough to fund their own buildings. Philadelphia's Lu Lu Temple was the first to build its own edifice. Erected in 1904, the building set the style for all subsequent Shrine mosques, including their neo-Islamic architectural style, floor plans with large meeting spaces (banquet hall, auditorium with stage) and secondary service spaces, and design by architects who were fraternally affiliated with the temple.

Trenton's new Crescent Temple met in several existing buildings in the city until 1916 when the organization occupied the former home of potter James Moses, including an addition, in partnership with Trenton's Scottish Rite Masons. This building is still extant and is actually across the street from the present-day Mosque. In 1927, the Masons bought the Moses building outright,

trading lots it owned across the street for the Crescent Temple's interest. These lots formed the core of the property on which the Mosque was later built.

The Mosque was frequently referred to in its heyday as the "million-dollar Mosque," but that designation included the cost of the structure, about half a million dollars, as well as the cost of purchasing adjacent properties and demolishing the buildings standing on them (equaling another half million dollars). The principal architect was Temple Noble Walter Hankin in association with J. Osborne Hunt. Ground was broken May 23rd, 1928. Though modeled after Moorish buildings in Spain and North Africa, the size and configuration of the Mosque related directly to the activities of the Crescent Temple and the projected size of the membership. For example, the auditorium holds nearly twenty-three hundred seats.

Seemingly little expense was spared in designing and building the structure. Expected to hold 4,000 Shriners, the building was richly constructed with Italian Travertine marble for the lobby floors, Wurtemberg limestone from Elwood City, Ohio,

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Figures 3 and 4 Details of terra cotta ornament from the front and side of the Great Mosque.

The Great Mosque of the Crescent Temple

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and American walnut paneling. The terra cotta program for the exterior, which was described by the Trenton Times as "one of the outstanding terra cotta jobs of the country," is extensive. However, the maker remains unidentified to this day; while makers of other clay installations in the building were carefully named in the publicity surrounding its dedication in September 1929. These included the Crescent Tile Company of Trenton, who made the vitreous floor tile; New Jersey Brick and Supply Company, who furnished the face and common brick used throughout the building; and Maddock, who supplied the Durock brand sanitary wares for the building. Mueller Mosaic Company's faience installations for the building, both inside and outside, were colorful and extraordinary.

In 1929, the Mueller Mosaic Company was hitting its stride as Trenton's premier tile manufacturer. Founded in 1908 by Herman Carl Mueller, the plant was located in the old Artistic Porcelain Company facilities on Chambers Street and Cedar Lane (the site is now a vacant lot). Mueller was born in 1854 in Saxecoburg, Germany. His father, a master gunsmith, insured that Herman had an artistic education, including the Nuremberg School of Industrial Arts and the Munich Academy of Fine Arts.

Mueller immigrated to the United States in 1878, settling first in Cincinnati, where he worked as a sculptor. In 1885, he was commissioned to model nine statuary figures for the south portico of the Indiana State House in Indianapolis. From 1887 to 1894, Mueller was a modeler

for the American Encaustic Tiling Company in Zanesville, Ohio. In the latter year he founded the Mosaic Tile Company in Zanesville and, in 1895, patented an apparatus for manufacturing mosaics. Mueller continued operating the Mosaic Tile Company until 1903, when he moved to Morrisville, Pennsylvania, to become superintendent of its National Tile Company plant.

Not long after his arrival in Trenton in 1908, he was appointed by the governor of New Jersey to the board of Trenton's School of Industrial Arts, where many of the artists and technicians of Trenton's important clay industry were educated. In 1929, the same year that the Mosque was completed, Mueller assumed the presidency of the school. Mueller died in 1941 at the age of 87 and production ceased at Mueller Mosaic Company.

The Crescent Temple Mosque and several other extant Mueller Mosaic Company installations are included in the POTS brochure, *Selected Tile & Terra Cotta Sites in Trenton*, which was developed for our 2007 symposium. A facsimile of the brochure may be downloaded and printed from the POTS website, www.PotteriesofTrentonSociety.org

For general historical information on the Shriners and their mosques, see William D. Moore, *Masonic Temples: Freemasonry, Ritual Architecture, and Masculine Archetypes*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006.

Additional information on Mueller is available in Lisa Taft, *Herman Carl Mueller: Architectural Ceramics and the Arts and Crafts Movement*. Trenton: New Jersey State Museum, 1979.



Figure 5. Mueller tiles installed on the side walls of the entrance porch show exotic flowers in yellow, green and red-orange semi-matt glazes on a blue ground.

The Dish On Trenton: China Exhibit Comes To Ellarlsie

There was a time, not that long ago, when a traveler could cross America by rail, stay in the finest hotels, and never once eat off a dish that wasn't made in Trenton, New Jersey.

Don't believe it? Starting this August, Ellarlsie, the Trenton City Museum, is celebrating one of Trenton's most elegant legacies with an unprecedented display of commercial and fine china made at the city's Lamberton Works. Many dozens of vividly decorated service plates from restaurants, clubs, railroads and hotels will be on display, along with cups, saucers and other table accoutrements spanning more than a century in the history of Trenton's service to America. The exhibition, titled *THE WORLD DINES OUT: 100 Years at Trenton's Lamberton Works*, opened August 4 and runs to Summer 2008.

The Lamberton Works exhibit also heralds the Museum's recent acquisition of the Larry Paul Collection, a 950 piece cross-section of Lamberton products gathered and documented

by Mr. Paul, a native of Maryland and a recognized authority and author on the topics of restaurant china and the Lamberton companies. This collection was first offered to the Trenton Museum Society last summer and we immediately recognized its home was meant to be in Trenton, right where it was created.

The Lamberton Works first opened in 1869 by three local Quaker businessmen. The pottery was located along Third Street between Landing St. and Lalor St., in the Lamberton section of Trenton. In 1888, Thomas Maddock purchased the pottery, renamed it the Lamberton Works, to continue production while his main plant (a portion of which is now the Rescue Mission building at Perry and Carroll Sts.) was rebuilt after a devastating fire. Then, in 1923, one-time Maddock office boy D. William Scammell purchased, along with his five brothers, the plant and the ongoing china business from the Maddocks, which the Scammells ran successfully until D. William passed on in 1952. Largely abandoned after the Scammell China Company closed in 1954, what remained of the old factory was burnt down by vandals in 1972. The Lamberton name lived on well into the 1990s through a line of china manufactured by the Sterling China Company of Wellsville, Ohio which purchased the equipment and ongoing contracts of the Lamberton Works in 1954.

While owned by the Maddocks, the Lamberton Works output of domestic and commercial china was top-quality, though still a secondary pursuit to that firm's primary interests in sanitary wares. Under the Scammells, the client list and variety of wares and

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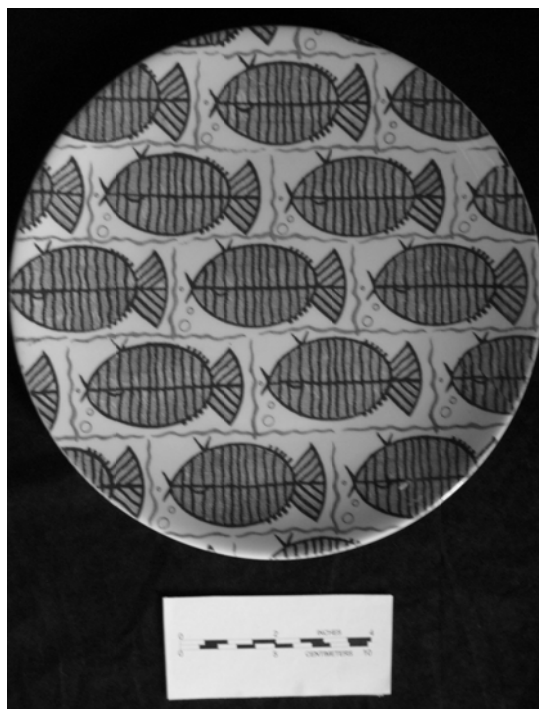


Figure 1. A plate with a fish motif from the new exhibit at the Trenton City Museum.

The Dish On Trenton: China Exhibit Comes To Ellarslie

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decorations grew rapidly. Prominent hotel and restaurant customers included the Waldorf-Astoria, United Hotels Corp, William Penn Hotel, Chalfonte Hotel, Miami Hotel, La Salle, President, Wanamakers, Strawbridge & Clothier, Macy's, Gimbels, Bullocks, Bickfords, Fosters, Davenports, Horn & Hardart, and many, many more. Railroad customers included the Pennsylvania, the New Jersey Central, the Union Pacific, the New York Central, the Southern Pacific, and the Baltimore & Ohio. Known ship line users were Holland-America, the Norfolk and Washington Steamboat Co., Norwich Line, Panama Pacific Steamship, United States Lines and others. You could, indeed, travel America — and much of the world — and never eat off any but a dish made in Trenton.

Scammell also made special occasion pieces such as commemorative and college alumni lamp bases, Art Deco accent pieces, and many beautiful fine china dinnerware lines. Scammell's decoration styles included hand painting, solid glaze, decal and transfer prints, lines and bands, acid etched gold, overall luster and occasional embossed customer logos. Lambertson Works pieces from both the Maddock and Scammell eras are much sought after by many collectors today.

The Trenton City Museum is located in Ellarslie Mansion in Cadwalader Park, Parkside Entrance, Trenton, New Jersey. Museum hours are Tuesday-Saturday: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Sunday from 1 to 4 p.m. The Museum is closed Monday and on municipal holidays. For more information, please call (609) 989-3632 or



Figure 2. One of the many display cases showcasing the Trenton City Museum's china exhibit.

visit www.Ellarslie.org.

The Trenton City Museum at Ellarslie Mansion is owned by the City of Trenton, Douglas H. Palmer, Mayor, maintained and operated by the Department of Recreation, Natural Resources & Culture, Division of Culture. This program is made possible in part by the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission through funding from the Mercer County Board of Chosen Freeholders, and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/ Department of State, A Partner Agency of the National Endowment of the Arts, with additional support from the Trenton Museum Society.

Rockingham Exhibit Extended

The exhibit "Fancy Rockingham" Pottery: The Modeller and Ceramics in Nineteenth-Century America, currently on display at the New Jersey State Museum galleries in Trenton, has been extended until May 31, 2008. Don't miss this opportunity to see a wonderful exhibit on Rockingham ceramics.

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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