



TRENTON POTTERIES

Newsletter of the
Potteries of Trenton Society



Pottery Manufacture in Trenton Today

In the latter half of the 19th century Trenton was one of the main pottery production sites in the country, rivaled only by East Liverpool, Ohio. At its peak in the mid-1920s Trenton was home to over 50 potteries, which made a variety of products such as china, art pottery, bathtubs, sinks, toilets and electrical porcelain. The industry went into decline after World War II, and today only a handful of industrial potteries remain.

The Star Porcelain Company on Muirhead Avenue was founded in 1899. Production was limited to electrical porcelain specialties such as sockets and insulators. Today the company specializes in electrical porcelain and produces a variety of custom porcelain insulators and specialty items such as extruded porcelain tubing.

Also on Muirhead Avenue, not far from Star Porcelain, is the Bartley Crucible and Refractories Company. The firm was established in 1908 on Oxford Street. In 1930 the company moved to its current location, the former John Maddock & Sons Coalport Works where they produce crucibles and refractories.

National Ceramic Company is located on Southard Street in Trenton. The company produces custom ceramic insulators. It was founded in 1919 and occupies the site of the Willets Manufacturing Company.

Stephen Wenczel founded New Jersey Porcelain in 1920. The firm produced bathroom accessories and electrical porcelain. Still operating out of their original plant on Plum Street, New Jersey Porcelain focuses on porcelain bath accessories, switchplates and cabinet hardware.

General Porcelain Manufacturing Company was founded in 1939 and occupies the old Trenton Stilt, Spur and Pin Works site on the corner of Mulberry and Pennsylvania Avenues. The firm produces laboratory and industrial pottery and miscellaneous home furnishings.

Cybis was founded in 1939 by Boleslaw Cybis in New York City. Two years later he moved to a carriage house on Church Street in Trenton and began producing fine porcelain sculptures. The firm remained there for about 30 years before moving to its current location on Norman Avenue. The company continues to manufacture quality porcelain figurines.

Boehm Porcelain was founded in 1950 by Edward and Helen Boehm in a studio in Trenton. The firm quickly gained a reputation for producing high quality figurines. Increased production resulted in their relocation to a larger facility. The plant, located on Princess Diana Drive (formerly Fairfax Street), continues to produce highly collectable figurines.

Lenox and American Standard, which can trace their origins to late 19th-century Trenton, no longer operate within the city. The seven firms of Star Porcelain, Bartley Crucible, National Ceramic, New Jersey Porcelain, General Porcelain, Cybis and Boehm are all that remain of Trenton's thriving ceramic industry.

Attention POTS Members!

Do you have stories or odd little facts about the potteries that you are willing to share? The next issue of *Trenton Potteries* will feature stories and anecdotes about the industry. They can be your own experiences or stories you heard from family members.

Please send your stories to Patricia Madrigal, Potteries of Trenton Society, 120 W. State Street, Trenton NJ 08608, email to madrigal@hunterresearch.com, or call at 609-695-0122



Visitors examine the display of ceramic artifacts recovered during archaeological excavation in Trenton.

POTS Makes Debut at Trenton City Museum

The Potteries of Trenton Society made its public debut on October 3, 1999, at the Trenton City Museum at Ellarslie. William Liebeknecht, an archaeologist and founding POTS member, gave a lecture on the archaeology of Trenton's pottery industry. Mr. Liebeknecht discussed some of the potteries

and the wares that he has encountered during his decade of work in Trenton.

The lecture was very well received. Attendees showed great interest in the topic and were very interested in the ceramic artifacts that Mr. Liebeknecht displayed. POTS members met many people interested in Trenton's pottery industry.

POTS considers the event to be a success and is looking forward to our upcoming lecture in April.

How it was Done: Figurine Workshop

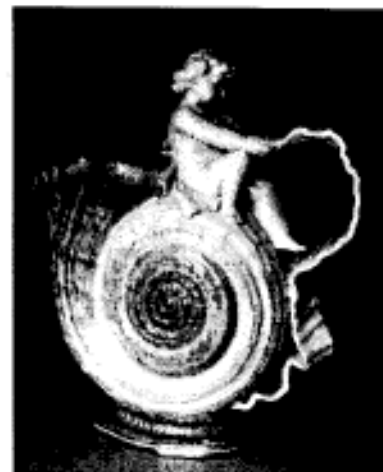
What do baseball players, southern belles, exotic birds and Polish brides all have in common? They are all figures made in Trenton, modelled by some of the leading figure sculptors in the United States and finished by the finest artisans in the pottery business. On the afternoon of April 16, 2000, the Potteries of Trenton Society will sponsor a workshop at the Trenton City Museum in which the arts and mysteries of figurine modeling, making and finishing will be revealed.

Presenters at the workshop include Roy Harbert, who recently retired after 25 years as modeler at Lenox China; Dory Menzel, now at Lenox Collections, who has worked for Goebel and Boehm as well; Evelyn Moore, who worked in the clay finishing department at Lenox China during the 1930s and 1940s; and Molly Merlino, who painted Pat Eakin's figurines at Lenox in the 1940s and early 1950s.

Mr. Harbert will discuss creating a model. Mrs. Menzel will describe the process of dissecting the model into the many parts that will be molded individually in order to build a figurine.

The fine art of sticking up the parts of a figure into the whole will be explained by Mrs. Moore. Mrs. Merlino will tell about adding the finishing touches of color. And all of them will share the insights they have gained through many lifetimes of clay in and around Trenton.

Molds made for Lenox's recent reproduction of the "Cupid Jug" designed by Walter Scott Lenox and modeled by William Bromley in 1887 for the Willets Manufacturing Company will be used to demonstrate the art of slip-casting clay.



The Willets Cupid Jug. Private Collection.

The workshop will run from 1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. and include light refreshments. Join us on Sunday, April 16 for a visit to a fascinating world in miniature through figurines.

Book Review

Potteries: The Story of Trenton's Ceramic Industry. By David Goldberg. Published by the Trenton Museum Society, 1998.

David Goldberg, an avocational historian and expert on the Trenton ceramic industry, wrote the *Potteries* monograph in 1983. It has been revised and re-released in 1998. Subtitled *Preliminary Notes on the Pioneer Potters and Potteries of Trenton, New Jersey, The First Thirty Years 1852-1882 (And Beyond)*, it is indeed that and much more.

The pottery industry is examined in roughly chronological order with an emphasis placed on the people who established and ran the potteries. One of the fascinating aspects of the early potteries is the movement of managers, owners, designers, and decorators from firm to firm. This gave the budding industry much vitality but left the historical record a bit complicated. Often early information published about pioneering efforts is false or misleading and Mr. Goldberg seeks to untangle the confusion.

One example of the confusion concerns the "Colonel Ellsworth Pitcher," an early white earthenware piece. The pitcher was made by Millington, Astbury & Poulson in 1861 in commemoration of the shooting death of Colonel Ellsworth, a young protege of Abraham Lincoln. Examples of this piece are marked and highly collectable. The designer of this notable pitcher has been dispute for a century. Edwin Atlee Barber, an important writer on early American potteries, attributed it to Josiah Jones, a designer who moved from New York to Trenton in the late 1850's.

However, in 1915 Miss Minnie Coxon claimed that her grandfather, Charles Coxon, designed the pitcher during his brief stint at the firm. The issue of who designed this pitcher has yet to be fully resolved.

Mr. Goldberg's discussion of each enterprise includes detailed information on location, ownership, dates of operation, wares produced, maker's marks and number of kilns. Mr. Goldberg also describes how the industry became established in Trenton and illustrates the connections between the industry here and in other locations, such as Bennington, Vermont. I would have appreciated a map to orient myself, as I am relatively unfamiliar with Trenton, but this does not detract from the monograph, which contains a wealth of information. Although the book focuses on the first thirty years it does take care to bring the potteries up to the present in terms of final closing and the disposition of buildings and kilns.

The book is available from the gift shop at the Trenton City Museum for \$10.50. It can be ordered for \$11.50 (the extra \$1.00 covers postage) from Molly Merlino, The Trenton Museum Foundation, P.O. Box 1034, Trenton, NJ 08606.

Reviewed by Brenda Springsted.



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