

# Salt-Glazed Stoneware of the Eastern U.S.

By Mark Zipp

Gaining popularity in the late eighteenth century and rapidly declining in production by 1900, salt-glazed stoneware was one of America's great containers of common household goods. Whether it be a pitcher for cream, a crock for lard, a jug for whiskey, or a chamberpot for the bedroom, a single household could require many pieces for daily life. Today, what was once respected for its utilitarian function has now become admired among collectors for its decorative appeal and historical significance.

Stoneware is a term used to describe pottery, which has been fired in a kiln at a high temperature, approximately 2,300 degrees Fahrenheit, and which has hardened to a stone-like body. The resultant clay color can be anywhere from nearly white to dark brown or dark olive. Stoneware, even when fired to a reddish hue, is not to be confused with "redware," which has a porous, softer body, and which is fired at a lower temperature.

Most pieces of stoneware, after being thrown on a wheel, were stamped with a maker's mark, as well as a capacity mark to indicate gallonage, such as 1, 1 1/2, 2, or 3. They were then allowed to air dry and harden as "greenware." After drying, each piece would be decorated with cobalt oxide, a compound which, when fired with salt, produced a bright blue coloration. [Some potters, such as Henry Glazier of Huntingdon, PA, and George N. Fulton of Allegheny County, VA, used manganese for their decorations, which, when fired, produced a rusty brown color. Most manganese-decorated stoneware is considered rare.] Brushes or occasionally slip cups, funnel-like instruments that poured the cobalt in fine, raised trails, were used to decorate the exterior of the vessels. Decorating through the use of a slip cup is known as slip-trailing. The load of ware would then be stacked in a kiln to be fired, with each piece separated by crude or molded kiln furniture. When the kiln reached the desired temperature, a kilnman would shovel salt inside. The salt would vaporize and fuse to the surfaces of the vessels, resulting in an impenetrable, glass-like coating over a blue decoration. Commonly produced stoneware forms of the nineteenth century include jars, crocks, jugs, pitchers, butter crocks (shallow, cylindrical forms), milk pans (shallow, tapering crocks with pouring spouts), and spittoons. Salt-glazed stoneware



Salt-glazed Stoneware Group: [Top row, left to right] New York Stoneware Jar with Cherry Decoration, signed "LIBERTY WORKS," and made by Wm. MacQuoid, circa 1863-79; Central PA Stoneware Jar stamped "M. & T. MILLER/NEWPORT, PA," circa 1865; Stoneware crock with Clover Decoration, Baltimore, circa 1860. [Bottom row, left to right] Stoneware Wax Sealer, stenciled "A.P. Donaghho/ Parkersburg WVa," circa 1880; Stoneware Milk Pan signed "W.H. LEHEW & CO./ STRASBURG, VA," circa 1860-74.

potteries existed from Maine to Virginia, with other potteries from North Carolina, Georgia, and farther west, producing alkaline and some salt-glazed ware. Stoneware reached its maximum production among the eastern potteries circa 1880.

## Areas of Collecting

Most stoneware enthusiasts collect by region, seeking pieces of a certain style made in a certain geographic region. The vast number of potteries of the Eastern U.S. can be divided into various subgroups based on their stylistic differences, such as clay color, and decoration used, and how the vessel was thrown. Much like the different schools of painting and furniture-making in America, there were, in a sense, different schools of potting. A few which will be discussed are New York and New England, Central Pennsylvania, Western Pennsylvania, Baltimore, and Strasburg, Virginia.

The Northern potteries of New York state and New England produced highly refined stoneware with a whitish clay, glossy salt glaze, and bright cobalt blue. Most were also glazed on the interior with a dark brown Albany slip, which kept food products from soaking into the body of the vessel. The similarities between potteries in New York and New England suggest that many potters may have

traveled from company to company among these states. The potters of New York State produced perhaps the greatest variety of decorations among all those operating in nineteenth century America. Besides standard flower and bird decorations, they also made pieces with brush-painted animals, such as dogs, cats, fish, and horses, as well as people, faces, houses, ships, flags, and numerous others. Noted New York makers include Thompson Harrington of Lyons, John Burger of Rochester, and Noah White of Utica. To the North, the Julius Norton pottery of Bennington, Vermont, which operated from 1839 until 1894, was one of the country's major factories, producing, among florals and birds, pieces decorated with slip-trailed deer and lions. The Norton deer is often depicted in a landscape scene surrounded by pine trees, fences, and a house; the lavish detail of these deer scenes has made them some of the most beloved of all stoneware decorations.

To the south, potteries in Central Pennsylvania, such as Cowden & Wilcox of Harrisburg, M & T Miller of Newport, and Sipe and Son of Williamsport, produced light-colored, brightly-decorated ware similar to that of the potters of New York and New England. However, while northern potters often utilized slip-trailing techniques, those in Central Pennsylvania preferred brushes to decorate the majority of their pots. Most common among their work are flower and leaf decorations, though they occasionally made pieces with grapes, birds, animals, and people. One decoration prized by collectors is the so-called "man-in-the-moon," which depicts the profile of a long-nosed face, flanked on the edge by leaves.

Potters in Western Pennsylvania typically made vessels in the form of small canning jars up to lug-handled, twenty-gallon crocks. The clay they used, when fired, was usually darker and denser than that of the Northern factories, ranging from a medium gray to a dark brown. Unlike makers in surrounding areas, Western Pennsylvania potters used metal stencils, punched with the name of their company and town of origin, to decorate the front of their ware. Their companies' names would be accented with brush-decorated flourishes and other stenciled designs, from simple swags and geometric patterns to detailed fruit, eagles, and, in very rare cases, tavern scenes. Pottery names found on examples from this region include "HAMILTON & JONES/ GREENSBORO PA," "A. CONRAD/ NEW GENEVA PA," and "ISAAC HEWITT JR./ RICE'S LANDING," all circa 1870. Potter Alexander P. Donaghho, who made freehand and stencil decorated stoneware in Fredericktown, PA, circa 1870, later

moved to Parkersburg, West Virginia, where he potted from 1874 to 1900. His Fredericktown products are considered rare and desirable, while his Parkersburg products are very common.

Western Pennsylvania potters gained much of their success selling pottery to various merchants from Ohio down to Virginia, with each piece emblazoned with the name of a business across the front. Examples of these advertising pieces include "E.J. MILLER & SON/ DEALERS IN CHINA AND/ GLASS WARE/ ALEXANDRIA, VA," which were made by James Hamilton or T.F. Reppert of Greensboro, and "CHAS. TORSCH & CO./ BALTIMORE MD," which were made by A.P. Donaghho during his Parkersburg years.

To most collectors, the stoneware of Baltimore, MD, is defined by its clover decoration and local potter, Peter Herrmann. The brush-applied clover decoration, usually set against a gray or tannish background, was undoubtedly the most popular motif used by Baltimore potters, particularly after 1850. Interestingly, clovers are rarely seen elsewhere in neighboring potting areas.

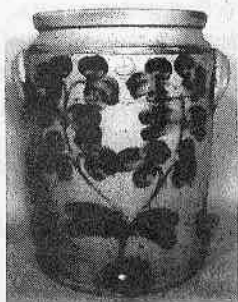
Peter Herrmann, who potted in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, is one of the few Baltimore makers to have signed his work, incorporating his name, "P. HERRMANN," into the capacity marks he stamped upon his ware. Herrmann produced a large amount of stoneware, some decorated with clovers, others with swags, vertical claw-shaped flowers, or hanging flowers. His decorative motifs were some of the most varied among the Baltimore potters. Besides his standard production items, he made advertising crocks and jugs for merchants from Western Maryland to South Carolina. Many are stamped with the merchant's name as well as Peter Herrmann's maker's mark. The abundance of his name found on clover-decorated pieces has led many to assume that all clover-decorated pieces were made by Peter Herrmann. Some even go so far as to believe that he was the only major potter in Baltimore and that clovers were the only decoration. However, Peter Herrmann was not the only significant potter in Baltimore, and the clover not the only motif used.

Other stoneware producers, such as the Perine and Parr families, contributed much to Baltimore's potting heritage, but a lack of signed examples of their work has made them virtually unknown to historians and collectors. Examples signed by the partnership of Morgan and Amoss from the 1820's reveal a finer past to Baltimore stoneware than many would like to give it credit. Morgan and Amoss produced evenly fired ware with light gray bodies and exacting, slip-trailed designs, unreminiscent of



the later clover motifs. The pair most often signed their pottery on the underside, in an elegant script, "Morgan & Amoss/ Makers/ Pitt Street/ Baltimore," followed by a date.

In a sense, Baltimore served as a boundary line between styles in stoneware. Its gray-fired clays, vessel forms, and cobalt motifs are more like those to the South, in Virginia. Representations of fruit, animals, and people, are nearly non-existent south of the state of Pennsylvania. Baltimore and its neighboring pottery towns in Virginia were more concerned with floral designs, whether elaborate, fine and elegant, or naive.



4-Gallon Stoneware Water Cooler—Baltimore, c. 1860

Major potting towns in Virginia included Alexandria, Richmond, Harrisonburg in the Upper Shenandoah Valley, and Strasburg in the Middle Shenandoah Valley. For the sake of brevity, the most productive of Virginia's pottery towns, Strasburg, nicknamed "Pot Town," will be discussed. Potters in Strasburg, used unrefined, local clay to make their stoneware, resulting in dense, dark-colored pots. Much of the stoneware produced in Strasburg is flawed, with bloated or collapsed walls, heavily burnt areas, and crazing, all related to poor clay or firing problems. After 1850, during the town's glory years of pottery production, most potters preferred to make straight-sided vessels decorated with a simple swag motif. This easily-applied decoration consisted of a series of comma-like dashes hanging from the rim of the vessel; in more elaborate examples, the swags are accompanied by flowers. In very rare cases, Strasburg potters decorated their wares with people, birds, or animals. Strasburg stoneware, though lacking in quality when compared to the factories of the North, is admired for its folksy charm, and the Southern heritage that bore it. Of the many Strasburg maker's marks found today, the most common include "W.H. LEHEW & CO.," "J.M. HICKERSON," and "S.H. SONNER." Some rare, short-lived partnership marks exist, including "MILLER & FLEET" and "KENNER, DAVIDSON, & MILLER." But perhaps most well

known among Strasburg potters are the Bells and Eberlys. The brothers Samuel and Solomon Bell, along with Samuel's sons, potted in the town for over half a century, producing stoneware as well as redware. A few redware lions, for which the Bell family has become famous, were produced in Strasburg. Samuel and Solomon Bell's marks include "S. BELL," "SOLOMON BELL/ STRASBURG/ Va.," and "S. BELL & SON/ STRASBURG." The brothers, Jacob and Joseph Eberly, along with Jacob's son, Daniel, also produced both redware and stoneware. The Eberlys, like the Bells, are admired for having created some of the most important redware pieces in American history, including a log cabin commemorating the Civil War battle of Fisher's Hill, which was fought near Strasburg. The Eberlys' marks include, "J. EBERLY & BRO./ STRASBURG VA.," within a shield, and "J. EBERLY & CO. / STRASBURG, VA."

### Values

Value in stoneware is based on three major criteria: the decoration, maker, and form of the vessel. As with any collectible, condition also plays a major role, with cracks, chips, and broken parts, decreasing the value of a quality example several hundred, perhaps several thousand, dollars. Above all, decoration is the most defining factor in a piece of stoneware's worth, with rare decorations, like people and animals, making a piece most desirable. The value of a piece also fluctuates based on whether or not it is signed. Signatures always increase the value of a piece. Even attributing an unsigned piece to a given maker based on its style can make it worth more. The form of the vessel also plays a role in value and desirability, with less commonly produced items, like banks, water coolers, and inkwells, being some of the most sought after.

### Conclusion

The mass production of glass and various other, more efficient types of containers ultimately led to the end of salt-glazed stoneware and the potteries that created it. In response to a waning demand, crocks became less and less decorative and more and more utilitarian. Cobalt was used sparingly or not at all, giving rise to white, Bristol slip glazed stoneware, and then brown and white crocks and jugs. Today, cobalt-decorated stoneware has gone from the storehouse shelves to the shelves of collectors' cupboards. And despite the humble purposes they were endowed with by the hands that formed them, they now sit quietly, behind glass, admired and unused.