



AN EDUCATIONAL SUPPLEMENT OF
THE TEA LEAF CLUB INTERNATIONAL



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When asked to do research on Tea Leaf relish dishes, my thoughts went immediately to our own small collection of seven. "What could possibly be said about relish dishes?" I thought. True, they are lovely. Many have unusual shapes. They don't take up a lot of room. The copper lustre trim on them can be dazzling. But, what else?

A total of 98 relish dishes (more appropriately termed pickle dishes) were identified during the research for this article. Represented were 26 potters, 71 body styles, and 20 decorative forms of Tea Leaf and variants. Through the generosity of TLCI members, 90 of these dishes were displayed on Saturday, September 19, 1998, during the TLCI National Convention in Columbus, Ohio. Julie Rich, John Meneghini, and the Armbruster family coordinated the spectacular parade of relishes which were arranged in chronological order.

This visual study provided members with the opportunity to view the evolution of the pickle dish from predominantly single-handled shell and leaf forms during the third quarter of the 19th century to double-handled rectangular and oval forms during the fourth quarter.

There is indeed a lot to learn about this subject. So let's begin exploring the fascinating world of "The Cherished Relish."

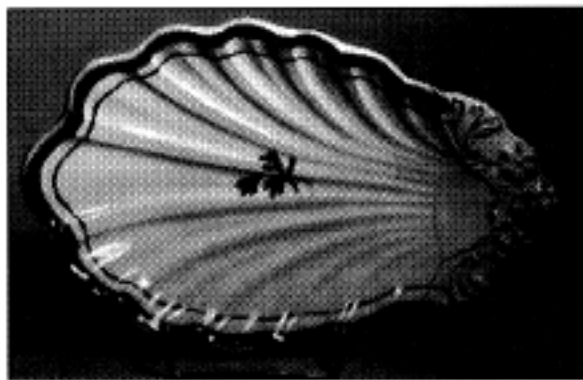
What is a relish dish?

Searching for the answer to this question led to two Smithsonian Institution Libraries—the Cooper Hewitt Museum in New York and the Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. as well as the Winterthur Museum in Wilmington, Delaware, and the Henry Ford Museum Research Library in Dearborn, Michigan. None of these sources could provide materials which defined the "relish dish." In fact, the phrase "relish dish" did not exist. There were, however, descriptions and definitions for "leaf dishes" and "pickle trays."

The Illustrated Dictionary of Pottery Form contains the following information on leaf dishes: "Dishes in the form of leaves were made in the 18th century and onwards for sauces, pickles, etc. on the table."¹ *An Illustrated Dictionary of Ceramics* defines a leaf dish as "A dish naturalistically modelled in leaf form, or as a series of overlapping leaves,...."² The same reference identifies a pickle tray as "A small dish, often of leaf shape or in the form of a scallop or pecten shell, and generally with three small feet or a slight foot ring. They were popular soon after 1750...."³

John Cushion in *Pottery and Porcelain Tablewares* reported that many English factories of the late 18th century were producing leaf dishes or pickle trays. His illustrations identified many leaf and shell shapes used during this period. If dates had not been assigned to the outlines of the various shapes, it would be very easy to mistake some of them for the Tea Leaf and variant-decorated shapes potted by Anthony Shaw, Edward Walley, Jacob Furnival, Davenport, Livesley Powell, and Elmsore & Forster nearly one hundred years later in the mid 19th century.

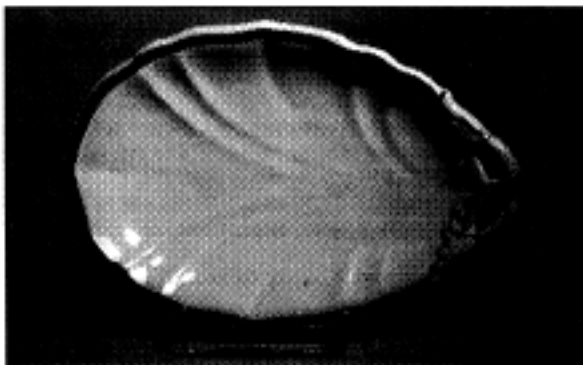
Photos 1 through 43 identify many of the early body styles for those wonderful dishes which may be more appropriately termed "pickle trays" or "pickles."



Davenport Tea Leaf Early Cameo; Registered: 1848



Jacob Furnival & Co. (Attributed) Teaberry Berry Cluster Est. Registry: 1850-1859



J. Clementson Dangling Tulip; Est. Registry: 1850-1859