
Handbook of Tea Leaf Body Styles



American Tea Leaf

Compiled by Julie Rich

A Project of the Education Committee
of Tea Leaf Club International

American Tea Leaf

In 1981 when Annise Heavilin published *Grandma's Tea Leaf Ironstone*, she gave us the names and histories of 16 American potters of Tea Leaf. This *Tea Leaf Handbook* addition lists 42 American potters of Tea Leaf plus three decorating entities who decorated with the Tea Leaf motif. There are many pieces of Tea Leaf decorated white ironstone waiting to be found and listed.

Annise was a speaker at the 2nd Tea Leaf Convention in Rockford, Illinois, and she introduced many members to the subject of American Tea Leaf. It was there that I first became aware of the fact that not all the Tea Leaf that had been accumulating in my collection of Tea Leaf came from those great potters in Staffordshire, England. It was the beginning of my research into who made Tea Leaf in America, where the American potters were found, and why.

So now comes an *American Tea Leaf Handbook* to share information about the American potters of Tea Leaf.

English potters came to America as early as the 1700s. James Bennett arrived in East Liverpool, Ohio in 1839. Finding clay that was ideal for making yellowware or c.c., he began the first pottery in that city. In 1844, James and three of his brothers moved the pottery to Pittsburgh, PA. Brother, Edwin, moved on to Baltimore, MD, and established a pottery there that existed many years with three generations of Bennetts at its head.

In East Liverpool, others followed in James Bennett's footsteps and every year from the 1840's through the 1900's and beyond, East Liverpool became known as "Crockery City." By 1853, ELO could boast of 16 potteries, employing 387 people. Their product was still earthenware but whiteware or ironstone was soon to come.

For Trenton, the potteries came a short time later. Goldberg credits an Englishman named Charles Hattersly with the beginning of the potting industry in Trenton. Not a potter but a keen businessman, Hattersly had visited ELO and tried to solicit some of the established potters there into coming East to expand their business to that area.

The potters were James Taylor, Henry Speeler and William Bloor. Not only did they agree that Trenton was an ideal place, located between Philadelphia and New York, having the advantage of good transportation for goods, but they proceeded to move to Trenton. Indeed, they even bought the property that Hattersly had selected as the area on which to establish his operation. They began their pottery there.

With the success of the Taylor and Speeler pottery, others quickly

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Knowles, Taylor Knowles

East Liverpool, Ohio



Dates

1870-1929
1890-1920 (Tea Leaf)

Treatment

Gold lustre

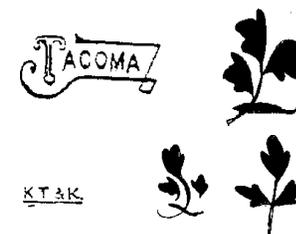
Services

Tableware, toilet ware

Body Styles

Tacoma

Founders Isaac Knowles, his son Homer S. Knowles, son-in-law John N. Taylor, began a pottery that became the largest pottery in the United States, selling to every state in the union. Isaac was the originator of many improvements in the pottery industry. K.T.K. was the first pottery in the U.S. to use natural gas to fire the kilns. By 1887, K.T.K. operated 16 kilns, 12 decorating kilns, and employed six hundred workers. The company produced a finished cask of product every ten minutes of working time. Ironstone was produced in five shapes, "Tacoma" being the name given to Tea Leaf pieces.



American Tea Leaf (Continued)

joined them and Trenton earned the nickname of the American Staffordshire. Hattersly later did start his business in Trenton but Taylor, Speeler and Bloor were given the credit for being the first potters to come to Trenton.

What were the requirements for building a pottery in any given place, and why were ELO and Trenton such successful areas for the operation? First, there was the need for supplies such as clay and coal (the first potteries fired their kilns with coal). Second was the need for transportation to send the product to potential buyers.

ELO had the clay and it was located right on the river. Trenton depended on clays from nearby Delaware, and they too had canal and railroad transportation. When Steubenville Pottery was established, it was because shrewd businessmen recognized the potential of the city as a pottery center because of the clay and coal deposits located within the city limits. Railroad transportation was also available. They persuaded competent potters to establish the Steubenville Pottery.

An interesting aside on clay deposits. Staffordshire was, of course, established as a pottery area because of the large amounts of clay found there. Have you ever wondered why those devastating holes in roads are called "pot holes"? The old English potters could sometimes not be bothered with going into fields to dig clay when established roads were there, and so they dug clay from the roads. Hence, the connotation "pot holes."

Although ELO and Trenton were the recognized centers of the potting industry, potteries were established in areas close to these centers: Newell, WVA; Steubenville, OH; and Wheeling, WVA. Pennsylvania also contained a number of potteries, the most successful being J.&E. Mayer. That pottery was established because of the Beaver Falls waterfalls which supplied the pottery with power and which had been the site of the old Harmonists pottery.

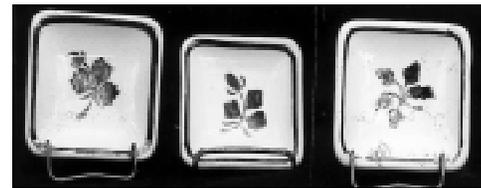
The potting of ironstone was largely confined to the areas mentioned above, but there were potteries in Cincinnati, probably because of the Ohio River. ELO shipped pottery down the river to areas needing tableware, etc. Tempest Brockman is credited by Ramsay as being the first pottery in the West to produce ironstone.

Another requirement for building successful potteries in the United States was the need for competent workers. Some chores could be easily taught but successful potters, modelers, and decorators were the result of many years of experience. Fortunately, at the time the

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J. & E. Mayer

Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania



Dates
1881-present
1881-1900's

Right, Simple
Square

Below,
Embossed

Treatment
Copper lustre

Services
Tableware, toilet ware, hotel
and restaurant china

Body Styles
Plain Round, Simple Square,
Embossed



The brothers, Joseph and Ernest Mayer, were British potters from a long line of Staffordshire potters. They knew Tea Leaf and produced it in large quantities with copper lustre covering the brown underglaze motif, a rarity in American Tea Leaf. Their Tea Leaf was called "Luster Band and Sprig" as they had known it in England. Tea Leaf or Luster Band and Sprig was discontinued and the company was bought by Shenango Pottery who retained the name of Mayer Pottery and is, today, the largest producer of restaurant china in the U.S.

American potteries were coming into existence, England was experiencing great financial difficulties. The potteries were closing or curtailing production, and potters were finding it hard to find work.

And there was this great new area, the U.S., with wonderful opportunities for people who wanted to work. There were subscription services set up so that potters could contribute to them and then emigrate to America. After the first had come, they wrote home about the opportunities here and more and more followed. So, although they are known as American potters, they were born and trained in their trade in England, in Staffordshire, the center of the English speaking potters of white ironstone.

One question that has long puzzled collectors of Tea Leaf is why so many of the American potteries used gold lustre rather than copper, and why so few used an under-glaze motif? Annise answers one of these questions. She writes that two American companies, Hanovia and DuPont, manufactured a "liquid gold" for decoration that could be fired. The two companies refused to disclose their secret formula so pottery decorators were forced to purchase the product from them.

There is also the fact that when much of the whiteware or ironstone was being decorated with lustre, the Civil War was causing the ingredients of copper lustre to be used for other purposes. East End Pottery, Mayer, and Steubenville all used the copper lustre decoration, and all three were established by English potters who may have brought the secret of the lustre with them. But neither Mayer or Steubenville used an under-glaze motif. East End did as evidenced by the faint lavender shadow that remains when the lustre is gone.

Why did some of the American pottery decorators digress so drastically from the accepted Tea Leaf motif? Some of the English potters did the same. Could it be that these new Americans felt a freedom to express their individuality through the creation of a different form of an old theme? It's a question to be pondered by researchers into American Tea Leaf in the years to come.

This handbook is an attempt to answer some of your questions about American Tea Leaf. It is also hoped that you will learn to appreciate the product of these American potters. That they found a new site to practice an old art is an exciting prospect for those of us who have come to appreciate the American Tea Leaf as much as we appreciate the English pieces.

East Liverpool, Ohio



Dates

1869-1892

1880s (Tea Leaf)

Treatment

Gold lustre

Services

Tableware, toilet ware

Founders were Adolph Fritz, William McClure, John McNicol, Patrick McNicol, William Burton, Sr., William Burton, Jr., and John Dover. Within 6 months, Fritz and McClure withdrew. Later John Dover retired and John McNicol sold his interest to his two sons, D.E. and H.A. The company was a very successful pottery, expanding to the point where it employed 40 workers. The company ceased to exist as McNicol, Burton & Co. on the death of Burton, Sr. and retirement of Burton, Jr. In 1892, it became the D. E. McNicol Pottery Co.

Some words from the author

I would like to thank Annise Heavilin for first introducing me to the joys of American Tea Leaf and the study of it. We all have much to thank Annise for with the 1981 publication of her book, still the only acknowledged reference on Tea Leaf Ironstone.

Personally, I would like to thank all of the members who have brought pieces of American Tea Leaf or suspected Tea Leaf to my attention so that I could study and learn about it.

I want to particularly thank Jim and Nancy Gaines who supplied me with so many pictures and so much information.

All of us owe much thanks to Nancy Upchurch for her unending search for education about Tea Leaf and her conception of a *Handbook*, making it easy for us to know so much about our collections.

Thank you, too, to those many people who have encouraged me to gather my notes and share my knowledge about American potters and American Tea Leaf. Particular thanks go to Dale Abrams, to Chris Weinbrenner, to Dick Brackin, for their encouragement and support.

And thanks to all of you I hope will read and enjoy what I have written and learned about American Tea Leaf all these long years.

Sincerely,

Julie Rich, Editor Emeritus

D. E. McNicol Pottery Company

East Liverpool, Ohio



Dates

1892-1954

1892-1925 (Tea Leaf)

Treatment

Gold lustre

Services

Tableware, toilet ware, hotel and restaurant ware

The company followed McNicol, Burton & Co. and continued to prosper under the leadership of Daniel Edward McNicol. By 1919, there were four potteries operated by D. E. McNicol, three in East Liverpool and one in Clarksburg, WVA. One plant in ELO and the Clarksburg plant produced white ware. This company was still producing cream ware long after other plants had abandoned its production. Its ironstone was called "semi-vitreous" and was lighter weight than the ironstone. It was one of the last potteries in ELO.

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Onondaga Pottery

Syracuse, New York



Dates

1871-1966

1874-1893 (Tea Leaf)

Treatment

Gold lustre

Services

Tableware, hotel ware

Organized by a group of businessmen who bought the Empire pottery works for the production of white ware. The production of ironstone was discontinued in 1893.

In 1966, the pottery was sold to Syracuse China Co. which is still in business, specializing in kitchen, hotel and restaurant ware. Only piece to be brought to my attention as of this date is a 9" plate in the collection of Elaine Nelson of WI who brought a copy of the backmark to the 1991 convention to study. The backmark is the New York state coat-of-arms.

American Crockery Co.

Trenton, NJ



Dates

1866-1887

1870-1880+ (Tea Leaf)

Treatment

Gold lustre

Service

Tableware

Unable to find names of owners, potters or anyone having to do with production of Tea Leaf. Greenberg does mention that Pliny Fisk was the principal investor. They made very well-potted Tea Leaf.

Ott & Brewer

Trenton, New Jersey



Dates

1871-1893

-?- (Tea Leaf)

Treatment

Gold lustre

Services

Tableware

Founders were Joseph Ott and his nephew, John Hart Brewer, who took over a pottery facility of Bloor, Ott and Brewer when William Bloor returned to ELO, changing the name to Ott & Brewer. The pottery was known as the Eturia facility. Ott was a well-known businessman of Trenton, Brewer was a potter. The company was recognized as outstanding makers of ironstone as well as developers of American Belleek, winning prizes in the 1876 Centennial Exposition.

John Hart Brewer helped to organize the United States Potters' Association, serving as Secretary and later as President of the organization.

Anchor Pottery

Trenton, New Jersey



Dates

1884-1894

1894-1926

Treatment

Gold

Service

Tableware, toilet ware, decorative items (Goldberg)

Body Styles

Plain Round

First owner was Israel Lacey - died in 1894.

Next owner was James E. Norris, Cyril & Frank Norris, who built the business into 14 kilns and 250 employees. Some of the pottery buildings still exist on New York Avenue in Trenton. (Goldberg)

Pioneer Pottery Co.

Wheeling, West Virginia



Gates and Ormerod believed Pioneer was inactive between c. 1891 and 1895.

The ribbon at the bottom of the above mark may have the Latin LABOR OMNIA VINCIT instead of STONE CHINA.

Dates

1884-1900

1890-1900 (Tea Leaf)

Treatment

Gold lustre

Services

Tableware, toilet ware

Founders Hamer Michaels, I.B. Clark, and George Morley operated a two kiln pottery in Wellsville, WVA as Morley & Co. Morley withdrew in 1884 and the pottery continued under the name Pioneer Pottery until 1890 when the pottery closed. This site became the Wellsville China Co.

As of this publication, Riene Wells owns the only piece(s) of Pioneer Pottery that has been reported. Riene and her husband operate a Bed and Breakfast in Eagle Center, WI. Her collection is on display for her guests to enjoy and all meals are served on Tea Leaf.

Bahl China

Carrolton, Ohio



Dates

1940-1941

Treatment

Gold

Service

Only pieces found have been small bowls

Body Style

Cameo Rose identified as the only body style produced by this short-lived company. Owner was John Bahl, who had been a designer for Edwin M. Knowles Co. in 1910. He was also a partner in an ELO decorating firm.

The Potters Cooperative

East Liverpool, Ohio

T. P. & C. Co.
E. L. Co.



Dates

1882-1925

1890-1900

Treatment
Gold lustre



Services

Tableware, toilet ware, hotel ware

Body Styles

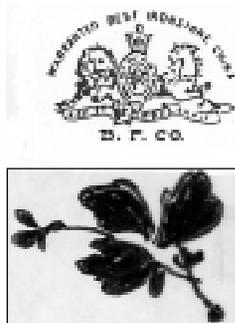
American Favorite (my name for it) - domed lid, stepped finial, oval shaped base, uplift handles

Established in 1882 by a group of disgruntled potters who had been locked out of their potteries after trying to form a Pottery Workers Union. The facility was at the Dresden Works (which accounts for the number of pieces marked with Dresden backmark) and H.A. McNicol (see McNicol, Burton and D.E. McNicol) became President when the other potters returned to their original works. They employed an interesting variant Tea Leaf which is sometimes called the "Tea Plum," but they also used the traditional Tea Leaf.

Comments: The covered vegetable shown here is one of my favorite pieces of American Tea Leaf. It is, in my opinion, a graceful piece, the motif closely resembling Shaw's. The stepped finial and lug handles have an impressed flower shape embossed on them. The piece is in mint condition, appearing to have never been used, with no crazing.

Brockman Pottery Co.

Cincinnati, Ohio



Dates

1887-1912

Treatment

Copper lustre, no underpattern

Service

Tableware

Body Style

Cable and Ring

Founder was C.E. Brockman; the company closed on his death.

Comment: Very little has been done to research the history of the Cincinnati potters of Tea Leaf although they (Brockman; Tempest, Brockman & Co.; George Scott) preceded East Liverpool and Trenton in the production of whiteware.

Red Cliff Ironstone (Hall China)

East Liverpool, Ohio



Dates

1903-present

1957-1977 (Tea Leaf)

Treatment

Copper - Hall calls it Bronze

Services

Tableware

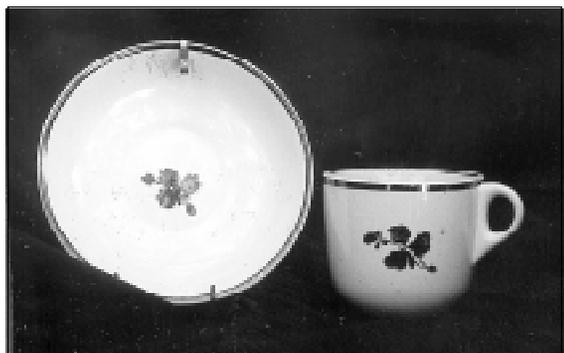
Body Styles

Chinese Shape, Wedgwood Ribbed, Gothic

Red Cliff Tea Leaf is actually a reproduction. Fred Clifford of Red Cliff Co. purchased old pieces of English Tea Leaf and had it reproduced by Hall China Co. of ELO. Hall is a very old company and continues making ironstone and china to this date. Red Cliff Tea Leaf was discontinued because Hall could not produce a lustre that would not wash off in the dish washer. This Tea Leaf must be washed by hand as you would old Tea Leaf. Note: Hall incorrectly called it Sydenham.

Tempest, Brockman & Co.

Cincinnati, Ohio



Dates

1862-1887

Treatment

Copper, no underpattern

Service

Tableware

Body Style

Only pieces found are cups/saucers

Owners were M. & N. Tempest, C.E. Brockman. Later became Tempest, Brockman and Sampson Pottery Co., and then became Brockman Pottery Co.

From Nancy & Jim Gaines comes this photo of their cup/saucer. I have four cups/saucers in my collection.



George Scott

Cincinnati, Ohio



Dates

1846-1902

- ? - 1888 (Tea Leaf)

Treatment

Gold lustre

Services

Tableware

Body Styles

Circle and Dot (my name for the pattern)

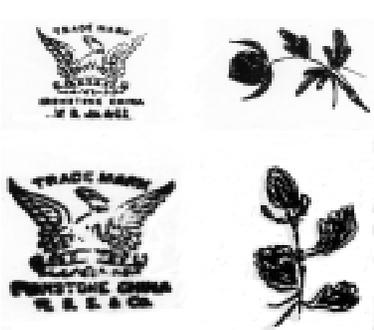
Handles are twisted rope, the shape is hexagonal spheroid with recessed base, the lids are plateau with horizontal arch finial.

George and Rachel Scott emigrated to Cincinnati from Staffordshire where both came from families long associated with the ironstone potteries. Their factory was a converted tavern and sat on the land now occupied by the Cincinnati ball park. The pottery was very successful, making much undecorated white-ware, easier to find than Tea Leaf pattern. George Scott was a very successful potter and his products were widely distributed. When he died, his daughter, Sarah, inherited the business and ran it with her husband who was also a potter.

Wm. Brunt, Jr. & Co. (1)

Wm. Brunt, Son & Co. (2)

East Liverpool, Ohio



Dates

1865-1878 (1) - 1878-1911 (2)

Treatment

Gold

Service

Tableware, toilet ware, spittoons, mustache cups, toy tea sets

Body Style

Plain Round, Simple Square

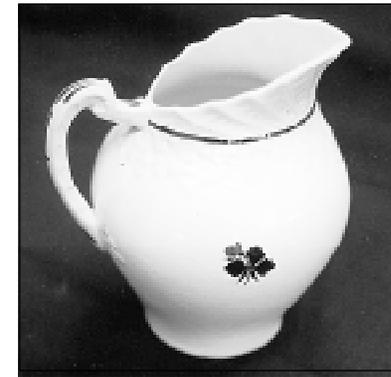
Embossing

Bracket handles, finials have raised dots following the shape around the edges.

Founder Wm. Brunt, Jr. began making whiteware at the East Liverpool pottery in 1877. Son, William, and son-in-law, Brad Louthan, joined him and the company became Wm. Brunt, Son & Co. From Nancy & Jim Gaines comes this photo of a covered syrup pitcher by Wm. Brunt, Son & Co.

Sebring Pottery Co.

East Liverpool, Ohio



Dates

1887-1940
1888-1900 (Tea Leaf)

Treatment

Gold

Services

Tableware, toilet ware, accessories

Body Style

Golden Drape (my name)

The five Sebring brothers founded Sebring Pottery in 1887 and began making whiteware. The five kiln pottery was successful enough to add a second plant of six kilns built in the East End of ELO and called the Klondike facility because of its distance from the center of town. Sebring Pottery was so successful that the brothers bought land in Ohio in 1898 and built their own city, christened Sebring, which became the site of their potteries. Tea Leaf was made in ELO, not at the Ohio potteries.

