

PRESERVATION SNAPSHOT

This monthly feature highlights recent and fascinating National Register listings and eligible properties, tax act projects, compliance review success stories, as well as outstanding local efforts in New Jersey's historic preservation.

Trenton's Pottery Industry

Trenton, New Jersey



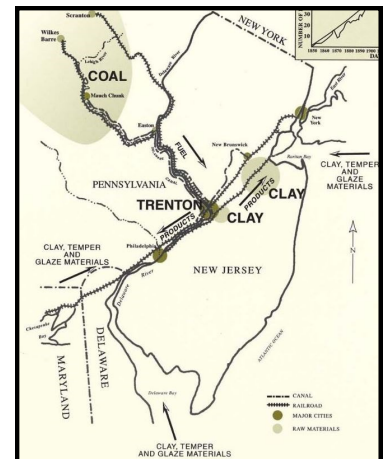
Trenton Pottery Credit: Pinterest

For more than a century during America's Industrial Revolution, Trenton, New Jersey was one of the two major pottery centers in America. What began in the Colonial era with local artisan, handcrafted potteries eventually developed into a major ceramics industry located here on the Delaware River. In 1924, 52 potteries were functioning in the city. From the 1850s to mid-20th century, more than 150 pottery companies had operated in Trenton!

Trenton ceramic products were sold across the continent and overseas. The list was lengthy – table wares, bathroom fixtures, electrical porcelain, tiles and exquisite art pieces.

Good transportation was critical in the development of the pottery industry, and Trenton sat at the confluence of access to raw materials and consumer markets.

Railroads and two major canals straddling the Delaware River carried coal from northeastern Pennsylvania to feed the kilns. Pure clay from central New Jersey clay beds was excavated and shipped by rail and canal to Trenton. The finished ceramic products were then sent to global markets beginning their journeys on the regional railway network.



Credit: "From Teacups to Toilets"

Colonial Trenton

The earliest known Trenton potteries began in the Colonial era. A stoneware potter by the name of James Rhodes, worked at his craft for ten years between 1774-1784. No doubt witnessing the battles of the American Revolution in and around Trenton, he operated a waterfront kiln for a prominent Philadelphia merchant from 1774-1777 along the Delaware River just south of town. In 1778, until his death in 1784, he ran his own pottery business adjacent to the current day Eagle Tavern “in town” (which was the site of much Revolutionary War activity).



James Rhodes Pottery Shards, Trenton, NJ 1774-1784 Credit: Hunter Research

Both of the kiln sites where James Rhodes worked have been excavated by archaeologists, and revealed thousands of shards and pieces of kiln furniture.

The waterfront kiln remains intact (shown right), and is now buried beneath the NJ Route 29 tunnel.



Waterfront kiln excavation in Trenton, NJ Credit: Hunter Research

Rhodes created an extraordinary variety of grey salt-glazed stoneware products, thought to be distributed up and down the east coast, as well as in the Caribbean. His distinguishable motifs included floral designs; rough geometric patterns painted in cobalt blue; and, the most quirky – the application of molded faces on the shoulders of jugs and pitchers!

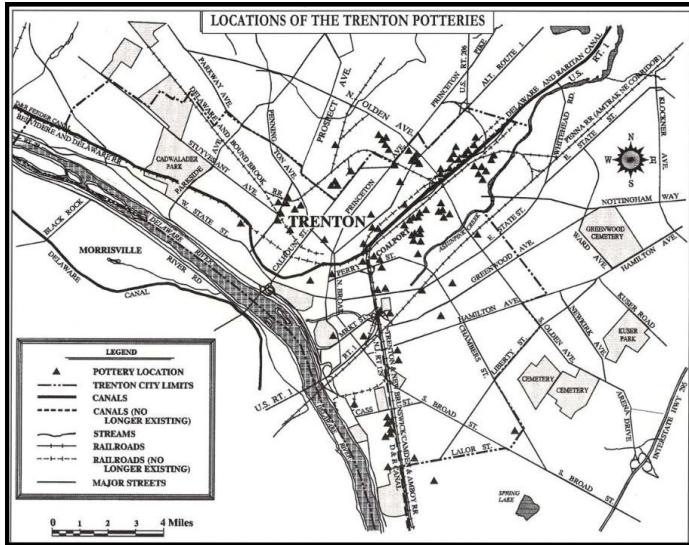
The McCully family also ran a very successful Trenton pottery business, beginning as early as the 1780s. They produced their redware ceramics until approximately 1860, just as the industrialized Trenton pottery industry took hold.



James Rhodes Pottery Shard Credit: Hunter Research

Industrial Trenton

It was in the mid-1850s that the first true industrial potteries in Trenton make their appearance. These operations, located in the city along the Delaware & Raritan Canal produced utilitarian yellow and white wares. Within 25 years, the most notable potteries grew, and the industry expanded north and south of town along the canal and rail corridors.



Surrounding areas also underwent tremendous residential development for pottery workers' housing, as well as those employed in Trenton's booming iron, steel, textile and rubber plants.

Trenton Potteries Locations Credit: "From Teacups to Toilets"

The diversification of product lines in the last part of the 19th century facilitated an explosion of growth. Most notable of these were sanitary wares, electrical porcelain and decorative tile. Art ceramics also began to emerge as an important specialty following the Centennial Exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia. Soon after, it was Trenton artisans that pioneered development of art porcelain through the introduction of Belleek china.



L to R:

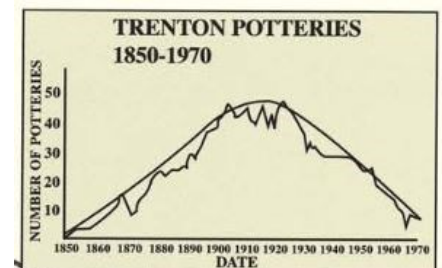
Trenton Pottery Pedestal Sink Credit: liveauctioneers.com

Providential Tile Works, Trenton c.1890 Credit: stylecourt.blogspot.com

Belleek Porcelain Dish Credit: ellarslie.org

The mid-1920s saw the highest number of Trenton potteries operating in town. The Depression, however, contributed to the industry's decline, and by the end of World War II, only 18 pottery businesses remained in operation.

Labor disputes, resistance to modern technology, and the increased use of plastics in the home also contributed to the waning of the industry.



Credit: "From Teacups to Toilets"

Notable Trenton Potteries

The first businessman to realize the potential of the ceramics industry in Trenton was Charles Hattersley. In 1852, he lured a number of master potters away from rival locale, East Liverpool, Ohio, and established **City Pottery** in Trenton specializing in ceramic hardware.

Two other formative leaders in the industry were Joseph Ott and his nephew, John Brewer. They founded **Etruria Pottery** in 1863. This was one of the few potteries to employ an in-house decorator, and consequently, they moved from producing cream and white granitewares to fine art pottery. Several of their notable pieces were displayed at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

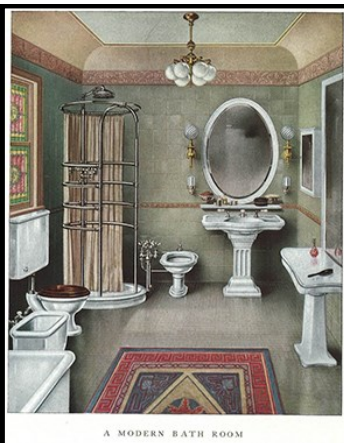
Enter entrepreneur, Thomas Maddock. An English pottery apprentice, he emigrated to the U.S. and operated the **Carroll Street Pottery** with two business partners. These buildings are a few that still remain in Trenton from the ceramics industry, and are located nearby the NJ Historic Preservation Office.

While Carroll Street produced dinnerware, Maddock was more interested in manufacturing quality sanitary earthenware (bathroom fixtures). And, this is why we are all indebted to Mr. Maddock!



Thomas Maddock

Credit: *The Polished Earth*



Trenton Pottery
Bathroom Advertisement
Credit: NJ State Museum

He is largely credited with creating the flushing mechanism in today's toilets. It was in 1880 that Maddock received a patent for connecting a toilet to a flushing water supply. By 1891, the majority of sanitary ware sold in the U.S. was made in Trenton.

Maddock's business grew to include three large pottery complexes:

- ◆ Carroll Street Pottery – producing sanitary earthenware
- ◆ Lamberton Works – producing hotel & restaurant china
- ◆ John Maddock's Coalport Works – producing both sanitary & table wares.

In 1929, his sons sold the sanitary earthenware component of the company to what would eventually become, American Standard, Inc. which continued to manufacture until late in the 20th century. Located in Hamilton, NJ, the complex retains several line kiln segments and manufacturing mechanisms in its buildings, although it underwent adaptive reuse as a Federal Tax Act Project in 2003.



American Standard Line Kilns, 2003
Credit: NJ SHPO





Early Lenox Plate

Credit: what-when-how.com

Trenton native, Walter Lenox's career in pottery decoration apprenticed him in several local potteries until he and a business partner founded the **Ceramic Art Company** in 1889. By 1906, he had introduced his now famous tableware and renamed the company, **Lenox China**. Walter Lenox also was a founder of the Trenton School of Industrial Arts, now Thomas Edison State University, where many skilled laborers were trained.

Lenox China was one of the first manufacturers to sell pieces individually, rather than only in sets. Still produced today, the china's notoriety came from its reputation as one of the finest table wares in the U.S. It is used in the White House, and many other prominent residences throughout the world.



Lenox, Franklin Delano Roosevelt State Dinner Bouillon Cup, 1934

Credit: Philadelphia Art Museum

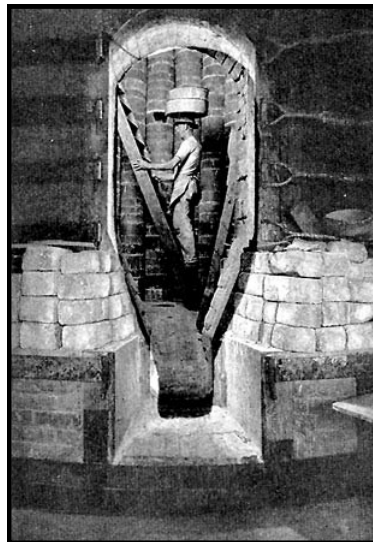


L to R:

Lenox China Factory Worker c.1920 Credit: Lenox China Archive

Lenox China Coal Burning Kiln Credit: lostlabor.com

Ceramic Art Co/Lenox Belleek Porcelain Vase Credit: Pinterest



Pottery Labor

The 19th century labor force in Trenton potteries was predominantly young males, and comprised of many children – at times 25% of the wage earners! Many countries were represented by the thousands of workers.

By the early 20th century, approximately 20% were young, unmarried females, who typically left between the ages of 20-30. Women were barred from all skilled positions except decorating. Both the women and children laborers were low-paid positions.

Pottery Labor Positions

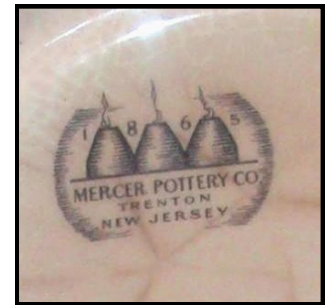
Journeyman (fully trained; supervisor):

- Slipmaker – mixed clay ingredients
- Thrower & Jiggerman – created clay pieces
- Green Room Inspector – determined quality for bisque firing
- Saggermaker – made saggars for kiln stacking
- Kilnman – loaded & fired kilns
- Glazemaker – mixed glazes
- Dipper – glazed bisque pieces
- Gilder & Printer – artisan decorators
- Packer – prepared ware for shipping

Apprentice (training to become a Journeyman)

Unskilled workers (hired directly by Journeymen, not the company; paid on a piece-work basis):

- Runner – carried clay from storage to clay room
- Moldrunner – carried newly formed pieces from clay room to drying room
- Dipper Assistant – removed dipped wares after draining; wiped bases clean
- Finisher – removed defects from completed ware

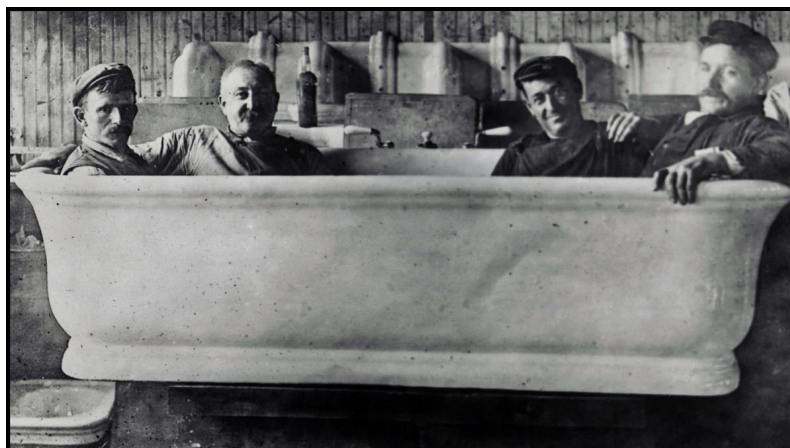


*Top: Firing Tableware,
Trenton, NJ*

*Credit: allposters.com
Bottom: Mercer Pottery
Mark (image of 3 kilns)*

Fun Facts!

- ◆ In 1902, the first presidential bathtub was installed in the White House for President Taft – who was a very large man. It was created by JL Mott Company of Trenton, and could hold four men.
- ◆ In the early 1920s, at the height of Trenton's pottery industry, as many as 7,000 cheesesteaks were sold daily to the pottery workers on their lunch hours.



President Taft's White House Bathtub, Trenton, NJ, 1902

Credit: triviahappy.com

Additional Sources: "From Teacups to Toilets, A Century of Industrial Pottery in Trenton, circa 1850-1940," 2001, NJ Department of Transportation; Trenton City Museum at Ellarslie, Exhibits history; Potteries of Trenton Society; US Department of the Interior, National Register of Historic Places Nomination, "Thomas Maddock's Sons Company."



"Trenton Makes" Bridge Credit: nj.com

PRESERVATION SNAPSHOT ARCHIVES

2016

- Trenton's Pottery Industry, Trenton, NJ February 2016
- Art Deco & Art Moderne Architecture in NJ January 2016

2015

- Buildings in the Battles of Trenton, Trenton, NJ December 2015
- Hinchliffe Stadium in The Silk City, Paterson, NJ November 2015
- Harleigh Cemetery and its Famous "Residents," Camden, NJ October 2015
- School's Out at the Boylan Street School, Newark, NJ September 2015
- Catboats ... Jersey Cats ... A-Cats, Barnegat Bay, NJ August 2015
- Lucy, the Elephant, Margate, NJ July 2015
- Mount Tabor Historic District, Parsippany-Troy Hills, NJ June 2015

If you enjoy Preservation Snapshot, you may also enjoy:
New Jersey 350 Archives

