# Stoneware of the Eastern United States

*By Mark Zipp*

**Introduction**

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 and cake crocks (shallow, cylindrical forms), milk pans (shallow, tapering crocks with spouts), and spittoons. Salt-glazed stoneware potteries existed from Maine to Virginia, extending as far west as Ohio and Minnesota. Other potteries operating in North Carolina, Georgia and other Southern states, produced alkaline and some salt-glazed ware. Stoneware reached its maximum production among the Eastern potteries circa 1880.

The early years of American stoneware, circa 1750 to 1810, will not be discussed in this article. Though several pieces of this period, particularly by the Crolius and Remmey families of Manhattan, represent some of the most important examples of American folk art, this article will primarily focus on the years when stoneware potting was a successful enterprise throughout much of the East. The potteries referred to in this article roughly pertain to the time period 1850 to 1880.

**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 by 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.

**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. Some of these schools of style, which will be discussed, are New York and New England, Central Pennsylvania, Western Pennsylvania, Baltimore, and Strasburg, Virginia.

**New York and New England**

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. Generally, Northern stoneware contains less imperfections and firing flaws than that produced in the South. The clean, light color of the clay and vibrant blue on many of these pieces makes them seem, at least to the untrained eye, nearly indistinguishable from modern reproductions. This resemblance is partly due to the industrialization of such businesses. Many of the Northern stoneware operations were quite large, with numerous workers and high quality clay and equipment, which translated into massive outputs. They should be viewed more as factories, which had become more standardized in their production than potteries in the South.

Most Northern pieces, besides being glazed on the exterior with cobalt and salt, were also glazed on the interior with a dark brown "Albany slip." This thick coating kept food products from soaking into the body of the vessel. Most common among stoneware forms thrown by Northern potters are semi-ovoid cream jars, straight-sided jugs with thick, round spouts and straight-sided crocks, of similarly proportioned heights and widths.

Northern potters, particularly those from Upstate New York, produced stoneware with perhaps the greatest variety of decorations among all makers operating in nineteenth century America. Besides standard flower and bird decorations, they also made pieces with hand-painted animals, such as dogs, cats, fish, and horses, as well as people, faces, houses, ships, flags, and numerous others. Northern makers utilized slip-trailing techniques on many of their pieces, which allowed for greater detail, and an overall more artistic rendering.

Although nearly all New York potters from about 1850 to 1890 produced stoneware with similar cobalt motifs, many makers are known for certain unique decorations that they solely developed and which they are now known for among collectors. Potter Thompson Harrington of Lyons is admired for his "star face" decoration, which consists of a small, slip-trailed face surrounded by several jagged rays of cobalt. Havana potter A.O. Whittemore, perhaps more than any American maker, produced crocks decorated with slip-trailed houses, underlined with waves, and occasionally flanked by palm trees. John Burger of Rochester made pieces decorated with game birds, detailed on the breast, head and back, with numerous dots of cobalt. Noah White of Utica commonly decorated his pots with "paddle-tailed birds," song birds with long, rounded tails heavily filled with cobalt.

In such cases, the decorations are so distinctive an expert can identify the maker of a piece without reading the maker's mark. In other cases, decorations are more characteristic of the style of the region, rather than a specific maker. The similarities between stoneware pieces produced in various towns, extending from New York City to Portland, Maine, suggest that many potters traveled from company to company throughout the states of the Northeast.

There were several major potteries active in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont during the nineteenth century. These include F.T. Wright of Taunton, Mass., F.B. Norton of Worcester, Mass., J.S. Taft of Keene, New Hampshire, and A.K. Ballard of Burlington, Vermont. Like examples from New York, New England stoneware is generally light-clayed, and features bright cobalt floral or bird decorations. Though nearly identical in quality to the work of many New York makers, most collectors are uninterested in New England stoneware. However, there is one exception. 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 pheasants, dogs, lions and deer. Norton animals are often depicted in a landscape scene surrounded by pine trees, fences and a house; the lavish detail of such scenes has made them some of the most beloved and sought after of all stoneware decorations.

**Central Pennsylvania**

To the east, potteries in Central Pennsylvania, such as Cowden & Wilcox of Harrisburg, M & T Miller of Newport, Evan R. Jones of Pittston, and Sipe and Son of Williamsport, produced light-colored, brightly-decorated ware similar to that of potters in the North. Makers of this region most often produced jug and cream jar forms, usually in the one to three gallon size. In addition, Central Pennsylvania potters produced a form known as the batter pail, an ovoid vessel with a tubular spout in the front and a wire handle over the top. This form is also found, on occasion, in the work of Northern potters with sparse cobalt decoration. Those from Central Pennsylvania are usually heavily decorated, attractive examples of stoneware and are very desirable.

Most common among Central Pennsylvania stoneware motifs are brush-decorated representations of flowers and leaves, though local potters occasionally decorated pieces with grapes, birds, animals and people. Central Pennsylvania potters rarely slip-trailed the cobalt onto their vessels. Pieces with such a treatment are considered rare and desirable. One motif 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. Currently, among the Central Pennsylvania marks, pieces marked "COWDEN & WILCOX" remain the most collectible. This is probably due to the sheer variety and high quality of the decorations of this partnership's ware. Some superior examples of Cowden and Wilcox stoneware include those decorated with a Union soldier's bust, a cow, a horse head, as well as a variety of bird decorations.

**Western Pennsylvania**

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 &

**Top row, from left:** Bean pot, Georgia, alkaline glaze, early 20th century; churn, Albany slip, Georgia, early 20th century; whiskey jug, salt-glazed, Ottman Bros., Fort Edward, N.Y., late 19th century. Bottom row, from left: milk or mixing bowl, alkaline glaze, Timmerman Pottery, Stockton, Ga., late 19th century; pitcher, alkaline glaze, Washington County, Ga., late 19th century; cream riser, alkaline glaze, Crawford County, Ga., late 19th century. *(Bea Baab photo)*

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 & CO./ DEALERS IN CHINA AND QUEENSWARE/ 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.

**Baltimore**

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

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 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 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, Herrmann was not the only significant potter in Baltimore and the clover not the only motif used.

Other stoneware producers, such as the Parr and Perine 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. The Parr family, beginning circa 1815 with David Parr Sr., operated in Baltimore into the 1850s. Stoneware produced by the Parrs represents some of the most lavishly decorated examples made in nineteenth century America. Their most popular motif was a horizontal garland of leafy stems and flowers, running the circumference of a vessel below its collar. Many pieces are decorated with several rows of this design.

The Perine family, beginning in the late eighteenth century with Peter Perine, maintained a redware and stoneware operation in Baltimore into the 1940s. The family ended its production of cobalt-decorated ware around 1900. From 1840 to 1885, the Perine family decorated their pottery with fan-shaped flowers or hanging swags, applied by brush. Their early work was quite attractive, with garland-like decorations that spread from handle to handle, bright blue against light gray. Perhaps most intriguing about this family was its ability to survive so long, and to evolve into a large-scale, industrialized operation, advancing far beyond its local competitors. By 1890, the Perines had patented the first stoneware drain pipe, and were producing pottery for a variety of chemical and household needs, all fired inside efficient, gas-powered kilns. In many ways, they had become much like the factories of the North.

Examples of Baltimore stoneware signed by the partnership of Morgan and Amoss from the 1820s reveal a past to the craft in this city, which differs quite strikingly from the simple, clover jars made by Herrmann. 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.

**Strasburg**

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, potters decorated with representations of 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. 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 Bells marks include "S. BELL," "SOLOMON BELL/ STRASBURG/ Va," and "S. BELL & SON/ STRASBURG." 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,

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**Footnotes:**

[1] John P. McMaster, *Manufactures of Pennsylvania* Galaxy Publishing, Philadelphia, 1875.

[2] Although virtually all secondary sources, including both grandsons agree with the 1866 date, the Pittsburgh city directories place William Frank & Co. from 1866 to 1869, and William Frank & Sons from 1870 to 1876 (Hawkins 2006). We have not reached a satisfactory explanation for this discrepancy.

[3] Actually, this 1872 patent (No. 134,370) was for an improvement in furnace valves (U.S. Patent Office 1872c).

[4] The article in the *Crockery and Glass Journal* still listed the plant as William Frank & Sons, 92 First Ave. in August 1876.

[5] Some of these marks had a smaller capital "M" in "WM"; some had an underlined, superscript "M" in "WM"; and one flask had two dots under the "M" in "WM."

[6] Currently, we do not know how many of these actually have the superscripted "WM" instead of "WM."

[7] Although Toulouse showed this mark with a lower-case "m" in "Wm," the "M" was probably a smaller-sized capital.

[8] This is the only use of "SON" (singular) that we have encountered. This may have been an error in the drawing or an error by the engraver.

[9] Another indicator is the plural of "SONS." All Franzen ads and discussions call the company "William Franzen & *Son*" (note singular).

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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."

Both the Bells and Eberlys were unusual among nineteenth century potters in that they produced pottery both in the form of stoneware and redware. Though potters elsewhere sometimes produced ware in both mediums, no other families made redware to such an extent of ornamentation. When their fellow potters in Strasburg and elsewhere began to fade away, these two families made "fancy ware," which is now termed among collectors "multi-glaze," or "polychrome." When cheaper but less decorative types of containers emerged, these potteries began to produce redware much in the style that earlier makers produced utilitarian pottery: as something that was useful, but also attractive. Thus, they glazed their vessels with lead, manganese and copper, creating colorful swirled surfaces of green, cream and brown. Using these vibrant colors on utilitarian objects like pitchers and spittoons, as well as ornamental objects like vases and hand-sculpted dogs, kept these businesses alive into the twentieth century. Spurred by the success of their polychrome redware, these families continued to produce wood-fired stoneware, the way they had learned to make it, along with their more ornamental redware pieces, later than any other potteries in America. Ashby Bell, the last of the Bell potters, revived old styles, producing ovoid, lavishly decorated jars as late as 1915.

**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.