

# HUNTINGTON POTTERY: THE BROWN BROTHER YEARS

*By Mark R. Smith*

The Pottery at Huntington, Long Island has a very long and colorful history, spanning over one hundred years of stone and earthenware production. A span of time that few other potteries can come close to, let alone surpass.

The first known mention of the Pottery is from the year 1805, in a document titled "Timothy Williams: Deed for the Pottery" dated May 8th, 1805. This document records the sale of a one-quarter share in the Pottery. This is at present the earliest date that can be assigned to the Pottery.

The Pottery changed hands many times over the years. By 1825, Moses Scudder controlled the Pottery, and sold it to Benjamin Keeler in 1826. Mr. Keeler improved the property and in turn sold the Pottery to the partnership of Matthew H. Gardiner and Henry Lewis in 1827, for double what he paid Moses Scudder. In 1829, Mr. Gardiner left the firm, and full control passed to Mr. Lewis. The Pottery operated for 25 years under his hand, and was purchased by Isaac Scudder Ketcham and Francis S. Hoyt in 1854. Mr. Hoyt dropped out of the partnership, and in 1863, Mr. Ketcham sold the Pottery to three brothers, George, Stephen and



Left to Right: Epitaphs: "Mother Loves You"; "The Best We Have" (center, rear); "Let Us Goe" (center, front); "Bridget Old Girl"

all are marked: BROWN BROTHER/ HUNTINGTON/ L.I.

Perhaps the most sought after of all the stoneware produced at Huntington, are the few pieces that bear epitaphs. Currently we know of about 20 different epitaphs, all are unique. I have 6 in my collection. My favorite? Why, "Mother Loves You" of course! Who doesn't love their mother? The others are "I Will Stop Home", and "Look Within".

Thomas Brown, known to us as the Brown Brothers.

Hailing from the city of Poughkeepsie, a potting center in its own right, the brothers made the move to Huntington in 1863. However, family harmony did not prevail for very long. The first makers mark employed "Brown & Bros. / Huntington L.I." quickly changed to "Brown Brothers / Huntington L.I." which represents all brothers equally,

rather than one over the rest. Still, by 1868, Stephen temporarily left the firm. He would return in 1873 however. At this point, 1868, a new mark is adopted reading "Brown Brother / Huntington L.I." Note that there is no "s" but there is a space for one!

This brings us to the time period 1870-1879, when Stephen returned to the firm. This could be called Huntington's finest hour. They experimented with stencils, and with slip trailing, producing some of their most unique pottery. Pots bearing sayings, or epitaphs such as "Look Within", "I Will Stop Home", "The Best We Have" and "Mother Loves You". However, it did not last. In 1879, Stephen quit, and began his own pottery. Located about one mile south, and on the west side of present New York Ave, he used the mark "S.C. Brown / Huntington L.I." He closed in 1881, and left the potting trade.

At this time, c.1880-81, only one brother remained in the firm, George Brown. At this time, a new makers mark was developed which read "Brown Brothers / Huntington, L.I.". It is interesting to note that although only one brother remains, the maker's mark indicates two or more. At approximately this time, George brought his son into the company, and by 1898 had transferred full ownership to him. Things were not easy for him, as by now, mass production of glass jars for home canning, and the rising



Left to Right: stenciled pitcher "BROWN BROTHER/HUNTINGTON/L.I."

Butter pot and crock: "BROWN BROTHERS/HUNTINGTON L.I."

Here we have two rarely seen forms by any of the Huntington potteries, a butter, which is sometimes called a cake pot, and a pitcher. The butter pot is unique in that the hearts appear to have been done with a cookie cutter or similar device, dipped into the blue slip, and pressed onto the pot. The pitcher is also unique, bearing the distinctive stencil of a cluster of grapes used by the Brown Brothers in the 1870's.

availability of canned foods, coupled with advances in refrigeration, spelled doom for the entire potting industry. Stoneware had become obsolete. The year 1905 saw the fires put out forever at Huntington, and the Pottery closed. Over 100 years of industry had come to an end. One by one the structures fell to the wreckers ball, the last falling in 1918.

The potter's products were indispensable in the early homestead. Churns were required for the production of butter, and butter pots for its safe storage. Also available were batter pails and pitchers for quick breads, and the serving of drinks. Perhaps the most useful of the potter's wares were the open pots. They held eggs, fresh for the winter months in water glass, a preserving solution. Salted and pickled foods, safe from mice and other pests, were put away under the sturdy stone covers, as was lard, for soap making, cooking, greasing and candles, to name but a few uses. Jugs contained all manors of liquids, safe inside the heavy cool walls.

The potter's wares were not inexpensive! You could earn perhaps 2 or 3 dollars a day, yet one dozen pots (it was not uncommon to have 20-30 in a homestead) would cost you between 4 and 10 dollars, without covers. Yes, covers cost extra then, some things never change.

In addition to household pottery, potters also supplied materials for stove linings, flue pipe for chimneys, drain tiles for both sewers and fields, roof tiles, fire



Left to Right: Beehive jug and pitcher by BROWN BROTHERS/HUNTINGTON LI.

Center is a crock by BROWN BROTHERS/HUNTINGTON/LI.

The pitcher on the right is an unmarked BROWN BROTHERS.

Perhaps the rarest of all the forms made at Huntington are the pitchers. I consider myself to be quite lucky to have three examples. While not known for fine decorations, the Browns could do a nice decoration, such as seen here on the jug and crock if the mood hit them.

brick for furnaces and stoves, and crucibles for the glass and metal working trades.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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THE POTTERY AT HUNTINGTON, L.I. By I.S. Sammis. Found in the April, 1923 issue of the magazine Antiques.

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NEWSDAY. See the May 4th, 1981 issue for the closing of the last L.I. brickyard.



Left to Right: Eagle and Rose stencil by BROWN BROTHER/HUNTINGTON/LI. Center front and rear: T. HEMPSTEAD/ GREENPORT LI

The Browns used five different stencils in their operation. Here are two more, the Eagle and the Rose, both are from the 1870's. The "T. Hempstead" examples are quite uncommon. While there was an active pottery in Greenport for many years, stoneware was only produced for less than two years in the early 1870's, just prior to the closing of the kiln.



Left to Right: (front pair) BROWN BROTHER/HUNTINGTON/ LI (book matched waves); (rear) BROWN BROTHERS/HUNTINGTON/LI (flower)

One of the wave crocks has a great story. A friend told me he knew a dealer in PA, who knew a dealer in VA, who knew a picker, who knew a dealer, who had one in the back of their shop. So, I said, "OK". It took about 6 weeks, for every one to pack and ship it to the next person in the chain, but it made it to me intact. Was buying it for resale, but when I saw they made a pair, I could not break them up. The flower is the strangest flower I have seen on a Huntington pot, no idea what kind it is trying to be, and I am in the flower business!

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