“AN ANCIENT INDUSTRY IN A MODERN AGE”:
THE GROWTH AND STRUGGLES OF THE AMERICAN
POTTERY INDUSTRY, 1870-2015

A dissertation submitted
to Kent State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctorate of Philosophy

by

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May, 2016

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"If dinnerware were entirely a function of eating, namely, as a receptacle for food, then plastic dinnerware should be the best selling, functional dinnerware on the market. Sociological and psychological findings, however, reveal that dinnerware serves a much deeper and more basic function than merely something from which to eat."

The Institute for Motivational Research’s study of the public perceptions of plastic dinnerware reveals a deep personal connection between Americans and their dishes. Much more than containers for food, pottery or china sets can tell a family’s history as they are passed down or invoke fond memories of holidays or the simpler moments in life. Indeed, I can trace some of my own earliest memories to the pottery industry. As a very young girl, I remember car trips with my grandfather singing as we headed down State Street hill to pick up my grandmother from Shenango China. Although I was only four years old when Shenango closed, the pain was perceptible even to me and went even beyond the family members and friends who lost their jobs. “The pottery” was a way of life and the pride of thousands of men and women were evident in the numerous sets owned in my and countless other New Castle-area families and even twenty-five years after the doors closed for good, Shenango’s influence remains in those whose lives it touched.

Perhaps this is why when thinking about a Master’s thesis back in 2008, my thoughts quickly returned to Shenango, knowing that no one ever attempted to write its full story, both its rise and the bitter years in which it seemed to fight a slow death. As I embarked on that project, it became quickly apparent that Shenango’s story could not be fully understood without grounding it within the rest of the industry, not only Syracuse China, who purchased and ultimately shut it
down, but also in the hundreds of potteries large and small that experienced (and often lost) similar battles to survive. This project, then, talks not only about Shenango and Syracuse, but also of the other major industry leader, the Homer Laughlin China Company, and briefly glimpses some of the many other American potteries as they fought against the onslaught of low-cost imported china, the ever-lowering tariff rates on their product, and the natural competition of the industry.

Just as a jiggerman did not form his pottery alone, this project would not have happened without the support and assistance of many colleagues, mentors, and friends. Know that any errors present are mine alone, and do not reflect on any of them. First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor throughout all phases of this project, Dr. Ken Bindas. He has provided unconditional support from the earliest stages of my Master’s thesis and has helped guide my writing while still letting the project naturally grow and develop. With his support I have certainly become a better writer and better scholar. My dissertation would not be complete without the support and acceptance of my committee members: Dr. Clarence Wunderlin, Dr. Jennifer Wiggins Johnson, and Dr. Janis Crowther at Kent State and Dr. Gregory Wilson at the University of Akron. I also owe many thanks to the staff at Kent, including Graduate Coordinator Timothy Scarnecchia and our amazing secretaries, Kay Dennis and Carla Weber, for making sure I stay on track with everything. I also want to thank my many friends, faculty, and colleagues at Kent State for their years of encouragement, suggestions, and for listening to me vent whenever I felt frustrated at the process.

The process of research and writing is a long one, and again, many have helped me make this a greater project. I would like to thank the Kent State Department of History and the Department of Graduate Studies (specifically former Dean Mary Ann Stephens and the
committee for the University Fellowship) for providing the funds necessary to both travel and write. In New York, Holly Sammons and the staff at the Onondaga Public Library provided a helpful first stop for a nervous graduate student who was new to town (they also have one of the most awesome book scanners I have ever used). At the Onondaga Historical Association, Sarah Kozma went above and beyond in getting me a tremendous amount of archival material in the short amount of time I had and was gracious enough to let me scan it all. In New Castle, Anna Mary Mooney along with Sue Linville and Betty Hoover DiRisio were extremely welcoming in once again letting me dig through the filing cabinets and boxes of Shenango China materials at the Lawrence County Historical Society. And at the Homer Laughlin China Company, I am extraordinarily grateful to so many of the highest-ranking members of management who truly went above and beyond for me. Thank you first to Marketing Manager Dan Williams for arranging all of the logistics of my trip, and many thanks to President Liz McIlvain, Vice President Pete Wicks, Operations Manager Ken McElhaney, Manager of New Business Development Joseph Brice, Director of Retail Sales and Marketing Dave Conley, and Maggie McIlvain for showing me around all parts of the factory, taking time for interviews, providing me with research materials, and giving wonderful perspective on the state of the pottery industry (also thanks to Liz McIlvain for the discount at the Outlet Store, I bought WAY too much Fiesta that day!).

Many others provided materials to make this dissertation the best it could be. Thanks to Amanda Faehnel, Cara Gilgenbach, and the entire staff at the Kent State University Special Collections and Archives for putting up with me digging through labor union records for months; Tutti Jackson and the staff at the Ohio Historic Connection; Fernanda Helen Perrone, David Kuzma, and Catheing Saucedo at Rutgers University Special Collections and Archives; and
Bonnie Coles at the Library of Congress. If I have left anyone out, I am extremely sorry and it is not intentional.

And finally, I could not be more grateful to my family for believing in me for all of these years. My parents, Mark and Carole, helped transcribe notes, accompanied me on research trips, asked questions, discussed ideas, and generally kept me going when I wanted to quit. And finally, many thanks to my grandmother Shirley who helped provide perspective and patiently put up with my constant nagging for questions about Shenango China. I would be truly lost without all of you.

I want to dedicate this work to all of the men and women who worked in the American pottery industry, but especially to the memory of my grandfather Angelo Cozza who I hoped would have loved reading this.
INTRODUCTION:

“To Write Oneself Down on China is One of the Surest Roads to Immortality”

The American commercial pottery industry has been in operation since before the founding of the nation. Starting as small-scale productions of ware often for personal or artistic usage, the industry matured with the advent of modern industrialization and by the late nineteenth century two major production centers in Trenton, New Jersey and East Liverpool, Ohio as well and smaller sites in places like New Castle, Pennsylvania and Syracuse, New York flourished, aided by a perfect storm of local raw materials (clay or coal), easy access to water and rail transportation, and proximity to major markets. For the next several decades, these four areas found success producing commercial ware for the home as well as for businesses, hotels, and schools that earned them national and international acclaim. Yet for the economic and historic significance of American commercial potteries, the industry itself receives very little scholarly attention in comparison to other extraction-based manufacturing. This dissertation looks to remedy this oversight and fill in significant historical gaps by tracing the growth and development of the modern commercial pottery industry as well as the decline and continued struggle of remaining American manufacturers. I argue that the pottery industry took a unique position due to the influence of foreign imported china, American tariff policy, and government indifference to a small business sector. In the face of these outside threats, American producers occasionally discarded their competitive instincts and instead sought cooperation with one another to ensure the survival of the industry as a whole. Trade associations for various branches of the industry pooled resources and ideas while strategies of marketing and public relations were often repeated among manufacturers who saw success. Additionally, I will analyze the meanings of pottery work to employees of these plants, paying special attention across race and
gendered lines and how unionization shaped the strengths and weaknesses of china firms as they declined.

American pottery manufacture began as an offshoot of the English system located around the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent vicinities. In fact, most early American producers either came from England or imported British techniques, designs, and even employees. But by the mid-1800s, producers in the United States felt comfortable enough to grow their own industries with more American designs suited to the less ornate styles of dining being rapidly adopted by the middle class as a means of differentiation. Taking one final cue from dinnerware magnate Josiah Wedgwood, American companies looked to consumer taste when developing their designs and soon made an industry fully embracing of the modernist American ethos.\(^1\) While still small compared with the proliferation of foreign goods, pottery in the United States grew steadily over the course of the early twentieth century, aided by the curtailment of a European supply in the wake of two world wars. At the height of production immediately after World War II, the American pottery industry manufactured two million dozens of pieces for commercial consumption each year.\(^2\)

Despite the increased production capacity, the American commercial china industry fell on hard times and ultimately into a period of decline. The demands of labor unions for wage protection as well as pressure to compete with low-priced china dinnerware manufactured abroad drove down prices while tariffs gradually eliminated most of the protection the industry relied on and led to a cycle of consolidation, mergers, buyouts, and ultimately for most firms, shutdowns.


\(^{2}\) Mary Roche, “American Potters Increasing Output,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1946. The commercial output of the potteries was measured in dozens of pieces, the standard amount unit that could be ordered by large-scale customers such as hotels or restaurants. China for the home often was measured in terms of a 5-piece place setting (dinner plate, salad plate, soup bowl, cup and saucer).
The first area of major decline was Trenton, New Jersey, which fell on hard times as early as the 1920s when the local plants could not keep up with advances in mechanization occurring in East Liverpool and elsewhere and largely shuttered their doors or turned to producing sanitary ware.³ In East Liverpool, Ohio, the leading manufacturer, Homer Laughlin, left the city in 1905 and moved production to nearby Newell, West Virginia and in time the more than 100 small potteries closed one by one, leaving only a scant handful by the mid-twentieth century.⁴ Shenango China in New Castle, Pennsylvania went through a cycle of corporate buyouts after 1959 until landing under the ownership of Syracuse China, who closed it down in 1991. Syracuse themselves also fell under conglomerate control and saw their remaining production moved to China in 2009.⁵ By the present day, Homer Laughlin remains as the only large-scale American commercial pottery in existence while Trenton-originated Lenox China and York, Pennsylvania-based Pfaltzgraff produce high-end specialty items. This remarkable spiral of deindustrialization shares many similarities and symptoms with other earth-based extraction industries such as steel and oil, yet remains elusive in the eyes of historical scholarly treatment.

**Historiography**

Tracing a historical view of the American pottery industry requires stepping back and looking at the rise and decline of industrial manufacturing in the United States. Other grounding is also needed in the areas of marketing and public relations to understand better why and how pottery companies created their strategies to grow and survive. Finally, exploration of the lives of

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pottery workers must connect to greater historical understandings of labor and unionism as well as the special challenges faced by female and African American workers.

Following the American Civil War, the United States underwent a surge in new ideas and means of production that ushered in the modern era. Old ideas and ways of life were contested and modified under the embrace of pragmatism, progress, and technology. A key component to the rise and acceptance of this modernism was the growth and expansion of industrial production. However, historians tended to focus their attention on the corporation itself as well as the new breed of industrial manager who guided its operation. Like the early public responses to the arrival of big business, the scholarly treatment of corporate America focused on the problems and unease created by these new and unfamiliar enterprises. Peter Drucker’s *Concept of the Corporation* opens the door to look at these businesses as social institutions, created by humans and subject to the flaws and agendas of those human executives. Drucker argues that America’s political tradition led us to value the free-enterprise system (in which government frames rather than directly manages the economy) despite the inherent problems and inequalities such a system possesses. Therefore, Drucker calls for a deeper investigation of the corporation to see how and why free it operates both within and outside the factory walls.

The historical model worked out by Drucker, in which the corporate executive’s decisions reflected the success and trajectory of a business influenced some of the major works

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6 One of the first academics to recognize the growing importance of industrialization as a historical subject was Lewis Mumford whose *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1934) celebrated the place of technology as a means to improve the quality of life. Mumford saw the machine as an extension of society and envisioned a future where the machine and human integrated together as one component of culture. Peter Drucker, *Concept of the Corporation* (New York: John Day Company, 1946). Alfred Chandler’s early work *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of American Industrial Enterprise* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1962) also investigates the ways in which corporations change strategy in order to remain competitive in a still-uncertain business environment. Instead of a large-scale overview of corporate behavior, Chandler takes a comparative approach in looking at General Motors, DuPont, Standard Oil, and Sears and how their CEOs navigated the changing world around them. More recently, David O. Whitten and Bessie E. Whitten have provided another comparative view of the rise of corporations with an emphasis on how the post-Civil War desire for expansion led to the growth and social acceptance of corporations. See Whitten and Whitten, *The Birth of Big Business in the United States, 1860-1914* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006).
written on the growth of American industry. Daniel Nelson’s *Managers and Workers* focuses on the wave of decentralization in industry, the moment where businesses changed from small, intimate relationships to a system in which the worker and management grew distant and unconnected. This process in conjunction with the maturation of the machine modernized industry into a formal yet impersonal structure designed to control labor. David Noble also sees modern capitalism as a marriage of culture and technology engineered by the corporate manager in order to provide a social reform rooted in rationality and control. The greatest challenge of the corporate leader was not the changing market, volatile economy, or adjustment to new technology, but getting a workforce of humans to adapt and accept this new way of life.7

Out of this same frame of reference, Alfred D. Chandler produced the landmark work on industrial management, 1977’s *The Visible Hand*. Chandler kept his focus on the role of the manager and how he shepherded a revolution in the American economy. In the late nineteenth century, the nation shifted away from the old processes of production and distribution, replacing them with a new system in which the “visible hand” of management guided the allocation of resources, means and technologies of production, and the operations of the market itself in order to create more profits. Additionally, the presence of a managerial hierarchy divided tasks previously controlled by the business owner into an elaborate bureaucracy divided down to the bottommost worker. The result by the 1920s was a modern economy where a professional,

managerial capitalism took on enormous significance that eventually spread beyond the economy into society, politics, and the culture of everyday life.8

Chandler’s emphasis on how the managerial revolution affected all factors of life and society resonates in works by later historians such as Alan Trachtenberg, who argues that the process of “incorporation” spread far beyond the factory and in fact guided the organizational structure of Gilded Age life by bringing people together under unfamiliar circumstances, sparking social and personal change. Martin Sklar argues that the period of industrialization is a watershed due to the intersection of the managerial ethos with government policy. As corporations grew in power and influence, Progressives turned to the same pattern of organization to make their reform efforts reach wide audiences. In time, many Progressive calls for control did in fact become law as the methodology for economic change adapted itself to social change as well. Others, such as Lindy Biggs and Terry Smith, argue that the ethos of both the machine and the modernizing tendency of corporate management played a significant role in the flourishing of art and design at the beginning of the twentieth century.9

While understanding the growth and development of American industry in general is vital to understanding how and why the pottery industry took hold in the United States, it is equally important to think about the contours of deindustrialization to realize how and why pottery, along with many other earth extraction-based industries declined so rapidly in the latter half of

the twentieth century. For context as to why economic decline occurred, the work done on the intellectual fragmentation of modernity is helpful. Robert Genter’s *Late Modernism* describes the cleft between the followers of high modernism (who rejected science in the atomic age in favor of aesthetics) and those of romantic modernism (who rejected their own ego in order to seek a closer connection between man and nature), with another group of “late modernists” stuck in the middle and left to try and refashion their own understandings. While Genter’s discussion of the fragmentation of intellectuals and artists may not connect to economics on the surface, the tensions he outlines soon spread beyond a small group of thinkers into society at large. Daniel Bell’s *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* commented on the changes he saw around him as the nation shifted from a production-based economy to a service-based one. Bell argues that the coming of this new society would again bring much of the upheaval that the initial wave of industrialization did one hundred years before. Changes in economic structure brought about new ways of operating in public policy, gender, and social relations and Bell is not entirely convinced that these would necessarily be for the better, making him among the first scholars to postulate on the effects that a decline in industrialization would bring.¹⁰

In fact, Bell’s dire predictions about a post-industrial economy were unfolding even as he wrote in 1973. The promise of industrial society gave way to a decline in manufacturing as jobs moved overseas or were replaced by technology. This phenomenon, dubbed deindustrialization by scholars, marked the decade of the 1970s onward as a period of instability, economic unrest, and social upheaval. Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison were among the first to examine the industrial decline in their 1982 work, *The Deindustrialization of America* where they define

deindustrialization as “a widespread, systematic disinvestment in the nation’s basic productive capacity.” This disinvestment could range from neglect of local industries in exchange for overseas assets, to investment in non-productive sectors such as oil or raw materials, or the extreme decision to move a manufacturing plant either to another part of the country (such as a right-to-work state) or out of the country altogether. Following Bluestone and Harrison’s study, the field of deindustrialization expanded with works first written by social scientists then by historians. Paul Staudoher and Holly Brown’s Deindustrialization and Plant Closure argues that plant closures are inevitable in a changing economy. Unlike most of the other works on the subject, they present a series of interdisciplinary essays that both decry and support deindustrialization as an overall part of the industrial process.11

Scholarship on deindustrialization continues to expand beyond simply looking at how and why factories shut down to looking at the political, economic, and especially social aspects this large-scale job loss has on individual workers and communities. Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott’s Beyond the Ruins presents a series of essays with a far more sympathetic tone than that of Staudoher and Brown. The works collected focus instead on the human cost of deindustrialization by looking at how individuals, families, and communities deal with job loss and the collapse of long-standing economic institutions. Dale Hathaway’s Can Workers Have a Voice? focuses specifically on workers and their efforts to resist job loss. Hathaway argues that this battle is nearly impossible due to the balance of power falling so strongly in favor of corporate leaders that dominance becomes entrenched and extremely difficult to break. Despite

ending on a pessimistic note, Hathaway’s study is significant in being one of the earliest scholarly arguments to give workers any agency at all, be it positive or negative. Subsequent works that emphasize the centrality of the worker often make use of oral history methodology, photography, and a narrative that can range from lamentation to anger to attempts to memorialize and move on.\(^\text{12}\)

Finally, scholars of deindustrialization have also created several works that focus on a specific industry or locale. Recently, two monographs on the textile industry, Timothy J. Minchin’s *Empty Mills* and David Koistinen’s *Confronting Decline* both look specifically at efforts to prevent and slow the collapse of the American textile industry. Both Minchin and Koistinen argue that much like pottery, textiles experienced deindustrialization long before the rest of the United States industrial sector, as they confronted cheap imports from Japan and Europe as early as the 1930s. Studies which devote their attention to a specific site of deindustrialization often grapple with how the loss of industry has changed local identity. John Cumbler’s *A Social History of Economic Decline*, which focuses on the deindustrialization of Trenton, New Jersey, points to Trenton as a special case as it actually experienced economic decline long before the “rusting” of the remainder of the northeastern industrial belt. Besides Cumbler, a large portion of the scholarship that focuses specifically on deindustrialized cities

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often centers on Pittsburgh and Detroit, which both experienced the loss of their identifying industries, and Youngstown, Ohio, whose economic and social devastation was particularly intense. Looking at these cities, many of which are quite close to the potteries of my study, provide a grounding of how industrial decline affects all aspects of living, not just economic comfort. They also grapple with the idea of how to remember the industrial past, a task that becomes more urgent and poignant in light of recent economic instability.

Complimentary to understanding the place of business in American life is to look at the practice of public relations. Public relations developed in tandem with the rise of industry at the end of the nineteenth century, first as a Progressive reaction to the power of corporations then as a tool used by big business itself to control and maintain its image in the face of public opinion. Because public relations itself only gradually became part of accepted business practice, historical treatments of the subject took until the second half of the twentieth century to first appear. The first of these generally were written by practitioners in the field, most notably public relations luminary Edward L. Bernays whose *Crystallizing Public Opinion* is generally regarded

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as the first scholarly treatment of the subject. Much of this early work, such as Scott Cutlip and Allen Center’s *Effective Public Relations* (1952 and frequently revised over the years) took the form of textbooks for those working in PR, and so focused more on concepts and practices rather than a critical treatment of the industry.14

The first analytical treatment of public relations is Alan Raucher’s *Public Relations and Business, 1900-1929* which takes a critical view of the industry in relation to its place in a liberal society. Raucher articulates for the first time that the study of public relations must take into account both idea and practice. In this sense, he concludes by being critical of PR as failing to show any demonstrative shift in public opinion through its practices. The next major scholarly work, Richard Tedlow’s *Keeping the Corporate Image* brings Raucher to task for his overly-harsh assessment of the industry. Tedlow argues that with PR, the image matters more than the reality. While it is incredibly difficult to empirically measure the impact of public relations on actual public opinion, it nevertheless has had a definite impact on American culture by creating a state of “public relations-mindedness” that has changed uses of language to suit the producer’s perception of the truth and to being order to the social relationships between producer and public. Subsequent historical treatments (including those by Stuart Ewen and Scott Cutlip’s two-volume industry history) grapple with the role of PR in a democratic society. While the industry itself claims that the information presented through public relations contributes to democracy by

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equalizing the informational playing field, reality demonstrates that the messages of PR groups often serve their own interests and no one else’s. Ewen goes as far as arguing that public relations at its heart is vitally connected to “the motives, the assumptions, and the history of power” as the powerful (often corporations) and the people vie for control through the spread of information. In the case of business, PR then serves to justify their existence and to prevent the “chaos” of an uncontrolled public.\(^\text{15}\)

Because public relations deals in the manipulation and control of information, it has gained a poor reputation with critics accusing it of being little more than “spin” or propaganda. The most recent scholarship grapples with this criticism and suggests ways in which the industry can repair its image and improve its effectiveness. Kevin Moloney, a British scholar and former PR practitioner, has debated why public relations receives such a bad rap in his two volumes of *Rethinking Public Relations* (2000 and 2006). Moloney agrees that public relations amounts to little more than “weak propaganda” yet he also recognizes that it plays an important role in modern society as evidenced by its growth in employees and revenue each year. He concludes that PR can overcome its negative images just as advertising did by being more open about its motives and aims and by allowing for the equal distribution of information from all interested parties.

\(^{15}\) Alan R. Raucher, *Public Relations and Business, 1900-1929* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968); Richard H. Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image: Public Relations and Business, 1900-1950* (Greenwich, CT: Jai Press, Inc., 1979); Scott M. Cutlip, *The Unseen Power: Public Relations. A History* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers, 1994); Ibid., *Public Relations History: From the 17th to the 20th Century* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers, 1995); and Stuart Ewen, *PR! A Social History of Spin* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 33 (quote)-36. Also see Elspeth H. Brown, Catherine Gudis, and Marina Moskowitz, eds., *Cultures of Commerce: Representation and Business Culture, 1877-1960* for a similar group of essays guided by the argument that businesses looked to culture to boost awareness of not only their own products but the concept of the market as a whole. Marketers Al Reis and Jack Trout take a different approach in *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981). They argue that old-fashioned PR did not work in a world where humans are constantly inundated with information. They instead call for the practice of “positioning,” making sure that a company’s product is at the forefront of a potential consumer’s consciousness. Among the strategies for this is discrediting a competitor, and here Reis and Trout use pottery as one of their examples: Royal Doulton promoted themselves as the high-class china of England while noting the similar Lenox China’s product comes from lowly Pomona, New Jersey. This repositions Lenox in the consumer’s mind as an inferior product lacking the prestige of imports (this association of American-made pottery with inferiority will be discussed further in chapter 1).
parties. PR and democracy can co-exist and even benefit one another so long as it agrees to reform its dubious reputation. Donald Miller and William Dinan are not so sure. They argue that PR will always operate to undermine democracy and instead impose the will of corporations on public policy. Most recently, a collection of essays overseen by Damon Waymer argues that public relations needs to move beyond its comfort zone and more directly engage with issues of culture, social class, and race in order not only to reach these important groups as consumers but to help maintain the image of the socially responsible corporation that had been a driving force of public relations since the Progressive Era.\textsuperscript{16}

In addition to using public relations as a way to control the channels of information, many industries used it to market themselves by creating a favorable public image to counter the criticism about their power and influence. Susan Strasser’s \textit{Satisfaction Guaranteed} traces how a mass market developed in America. To overcome the strong ties between local grocers and dry goods merchants and their customers, big businesses used incentives and giveaways, advertising, samples, and uniform packaging and prices to create the concept of the “brand.” A brand then served as a type of contract between producer and consumer that guaranteed a uniformity of quality neighborhood markets could not. This bond was critical for mass consumption to succeed, as Americans had to be trained to not only want but \textit{need} these mass-produced industrial goods that they had lived without for so long. David Nye and Roland Marchand focus on the imagery component of public relations and argue for the usage of visual representation of the corporation to build that foundation of trust. Marchand goes as far as saying that public

imagery gave corporations a “soul” that legitimated their existence and excused their sometimes uncouth behavior. The buildup of public trust will be important for the pottery industry as well as these manufacturers sought to come into the heart of the American home through their products.17

Also critical to understanding the history of business and the manufacturing industry and vital to this dissertation is an understanding of laborers themselves as well as the structures of organization they created. Several historical overviews of American labor exist, but it was not until the wake of the 1960s that scholarship developed which strove to give workers themselves agency and a voice. One of the first to hone in on the formation of worker identity was David Montgomery in both Workers’ Control in America and The Fall of the House of Labor. Montgomery argues that in fact workers always had a certain measure of control over their environments despite the best efforts of managers to control all aspects of production. This could range from the ideological, such as pride in skill, to disruptions of time studies and eventually unionization. These actions contributed to the formation of a working class identity which gave workers the common ground to begin to articulate their demands and rights. Another key work produced at this time is David Brody’s Workers in Industrial America, a collection of essays that situates the place of the worker within a larger historical framework of power and control. Like Montgomery, Brody acknowledges the ongoing negotiation between workers and management to leave their mark on industrializing America.18

While Montgomery and Brody have created excellent overviews of the creation of worker consciousness, many others have chosen to specialize in a specific time period and thus create a richer narrative of labor from the beginning of industrialization to the present day. Melvyn Dubofsky and Daniel T. Rogers look at the moment of industrial development to see where worker identity first formed. Dubofsky’s *Industrialism and the American Worker* emerges amongst the interest in social history to take a look at actual workers as the key to understanding industrialism in the United States. He highlights the changes, including wage work, urbanization, and deskilling which ordinary people experienced in order to become working class. Dubofsky also notes that these changes created a working class, but not one that was homogenous. Differences of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion continued to divide workers and keep them from completing their cultural transformation (a problem especially seen in pottery where skill and gender gaps prevented homogenous unionization). Rogers’s *The Work Ethic in Industrial America* looks less at the daily experiences of workers and more at the ideological ideas surrounding work itself. He argues that a key to legitimizing blue collar industrialism was centering work as the core of a moral life. By infusing wage labor with Protestant ideas of proper behavior, both workers and the general public became more accepting of the radical new way of life.  

As industrial labor grew in acceptance, the number of those engaged in factory work expanded rapidly. With the expansion of work came a greater dedication to the managerial style described by Drucker, Chandler, and others. This inevitably caused a clash between the wants of

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labor and management, and as workers sought to organize in order to articulate their wants, they often met with stiff resistance or even violence. A recent excellent study by Thomas Andrews, *Killing for Coal*, combines the inherently related fields of environmentalism, consumer demand, industrial operation, and worker protest into one of the most complete pictures of labor unrest in the 1910s and the vital question of how and why such events occur. Andrews argues that the Ludlow Massacre of 1914 occurred in the context of an increasing demand for coal, a dangerous work environment that miners resented, and the influence of unionization that mine managers detested. The violence that ensued showed that the original model of managerial control would no longer work as the industrialization of the nation progressed and the working class further solidified their identity into a strong enough force to demand fair treatment.20

Andrews’ study excellently highlights the connection between consumer and worker demand. In fact, as the twentieth century progressed, employees used the need for consumer products to argue for their rights as workers. Historians studying the labor movement in the 1920s and 1930s note the creation of identities which combined working class consciousness with the flourishing consumer movement, fostering identity among blue-collar workers and give them a sense of pride in their labor as well as a cultural bargaining chip to legitimize their demands (something evident in groups like the Made in America Club which potters used to elevate American-made and union-made products). Cohen’s *Making a New Deal* looks at the changing lives of Chicago’s working class in response to a new consumer society. She argues that the opportunity to consume gave workers a common identity transcending race and ethnicity. On the factory floor, mass culture also forced employers’ hands to provide welfare capitalism, a series of benefits designed to endear management to workers and prevent

unionization. But the Great Depression collapsed this model of benevolence and workers turned as a unified whole to a new all-inclusive form of unionization which they used to better their situation. Lawrence Glickman goes beyond Chicago in *A Living Wage* to show the transformation of wage labor from a type of slavery into a means to get ahead. The concept of a living wage not only ensured workers’ basic survival but built in the provision that workers and their families would be able to partake in consumer society, thus becoming truly “American.”  

While nearly all studies of labor history have to engage with unionization, several historians put unions as their primary focus. Bruce Laurie and Daniel Nelson both trace the rise in unionization from the end of the nineteenth century, when those on the factory floor started to recognize their common bond as workers. Craft and industrial unions, such as the AFL and the CIO swelled in numbers during the 1930s and transformed the role of unions from protecting the skilled few to defending all. Others have focused on specific unions and their histories, for the pottery industry studies of the Knights of Labor, the AFL and the CIO are especially relevant as different branches of pottery unionization grew out of these organizations. Kim Voss’s *The Making of American Exceptionalism* focuses on the role of the Knights of Labor in creating class solidarity and bringing together workers of different skill levels (such as potters) into a powerful whole. He argues that this widespread worker acceptance (in the model of English and French organizations) make the Knights unique to America and despite their short tenure, the Knights set the stage for the later successes of the AFL and CIO. Robert Zieger and Nelson Lichtenstein focus on the role played by the CIO as a force of labor solidarity. Zieger provides a history of the early days of the CIO, arguing its initial success provided the basis for modern collective

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bargaining, interracial unionism, and lifted the standards of labor for all workers, not only those affiliated with the organization. Yet at the same time, Zieger emphasized the fragility of the CIO and the uncertainly that a mass union movement would succeed in the face of a hostile managerial environment. Lichtenstein focuses more narrowly, looking at the operation of the CIO during World War II and as a product of New Deal liberalism. More so than others, Lichtenstein remains critical of the CIO’s position during the war and argues that the repressive environment of the war fostered conservatism within the union that took the meaning away from organization. This weakness would later doom the union in the face of hostile management (that had to accept organization during the conflict via the terms of the New Deal).  

In fact, this decline in unionism has been a focus of more recent work on labor history as scholars look at the economic decline of the past forty years and continue to offer explanations as to why the economic backbone of both labor and industry collapsed. Lichtenstein’s later work, *State of the Union*, focuses on the collapse of worker rights and collectivization. He points to a fundamental dichotomy between worker rights and democracy as the source of the problem, noting that the success of the 1930s and 1940s did not produce long-term security for workers and at the same time stirred the wrath of conservatives who argued such benefits were anathema to the democracy of a free market. This clash has brought labor to a stalemate where no one actually benefits despite continued agitation on both sides. This echoes the situation evident in

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pottery, where the overall decline of the industry served to exaggerate labor disputes as the Brotherhood of Operative Potters continued to demand increases even as their employers failed to turn a profit. Lichtenstein’s view of this dichotomy also recalls earlier sentiments by Kim Moody, who also argues that the tensions between individualism and collectivism weakened union strength in the 1950s as well as Michael Goldfield, who points to changing social characteristics as the reason for a loss of interest in unionization.23

While an understanding of labor and unionization (both in ascendency and decline) in general is vital to studying pottery laborers, it is not the complete picture. The pottery industry in particular had a high percentage of female workers, and their contributions force a strong consideration of the place of women in blue collar industry. James R. Green’s *The World of the Worker*, primarily a work on rank-and-file workers, takes a detailed look at the place of females and African Americans within this industrial world. Green argues that the everyday experiences of women both in the home and on the factory floor was just as significant to the crafting of a working class identity as the activism of their male counterparts.24

The earliest histories of female workers begin with their involvement in the proto-corporate textile mills in the northeast. Thomas Dublin’s *Women and Work*, one of the earliest works in not only women’s labor history but women’s history in general, looks at the lives of Lowell mill girls to see the transformation wrought by capitalism. Dublin does not see his

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workers as merely passive, he gives them agency by noting the numerous disruptions and strikes at Lowell in the 1850s despite prevailing notions of a paternalistic benevolence. Other early scholars note the tensions wage work brought to women. Both Leslie Woodcock Tentler and Jeanne Boydston look at early industrial America and the place of women within. While wage work may be seen as a means to independence, both argue that in fact industrial labor reinforced gender norms and stuck women with the “double burden” of having to take care of family and the home while still working the same hours as a man.25

More recent scholars have debated women’s work in the context of gender history, looking at the traditional relations between men and women to explain why women’s work has been consistently devalued. This point is especially critical to the pottery industry, where mandated job segregation by sex persisted into the 1960s. Maureen Honey, in *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, argues that even in the patriotic fervor of World War II, women’s roles as laborers only developed in the context of a male ideal. The propaganda campaign designed to make wartime factory work appeal to women came about solely because of the lack of available men to fill the increased need. The Rosie the Riveter campaign never intended to keep women in the workforce permanently, a tactic that would lead to resentment when many women did not wish to give up their positions after the end of the war. Ruth Milkman, in her edited volume *Women, Work, and Protest* as well as in her own *Gender at Work*, looks at the moment when these women fought to keep their industrial roles. While studies such as Tentler and Boydston note that working class

women have always had a place in industry, Milkman notes the controversy once more middle class and married women sought to remain permanently in the workforce. The industrial world continued to resist a female presence and tactics such as sex segregation (quite common in the pottery industry), discrimination in pay and seniority, and harassment continued as a way to establish and maintain male control. Claudia Goldin expands on the idea of pay discrepancy in *Understanding the Gender Gap*, where she argues that despite the economic progress made by women in the past generations, gender norms that stipulate their place in the home continue to keep them from full economic equality.\(^\text{26}\)

Women’s and gender historians also have commented specifically on the place of women in labor unions and the struggles they encountered when trying to organize themselves in a male-dominated structure. Annelise Orlek’s *Common Sense and a Little Fire* explores the lives of female union organizers in twentieth century New York. She argues that these women engaged in an alternative type of feminism by trying to establish equality not socially or legally, but on the workplace floor. Unlike many middle class feminists, this group realized that a large number of women either needed to work to survive or relished the independence work and wages brought them. But like the organizing of male workers, female unionization was full of challenges from management, the public, families, and the law. Additionally, women in unions

faced the consternation of their male counterparts who would gladly bridge ethnic or religious lines to organize but refused to have a woman in their union branch (a problem the Brotherhood of Operative Potters struggled with in particular until the Second World War).27

Nan Enstad looks the outcome of women’s strike activity and found that the same gender inequalities prevailed even after women organized themselves. In Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure, Enstad argues for understanding working class women’s demands in terms of their leisure goods and activities. Female workers often articulated their demands in terms of “bread and roses,” the ability to earn enough pay to survive yet also enjoy the fruits of their labor through the purchase of consumer goods. Critics of their activity tried to paint female strikers as frivolous and only concerned with luxuries that would corrupt their feminine purity, but Enstad argues that these strikers were not only rationally making the same demand for a living wage that their male counterparts did, they set about articulating an early version of feminism. Women strikers went beyond the traditional male narrative and fought for a better life on their own terms, not terms imposed upon them. Demands that male unionists ignored gave women an agency to argue for their specific needs and make the industrial system work for them as well.28

The best recent scholarship on women in the industrial workforce has come from Dorothy Sue Cobble. She argues that class shapes women’s lives just as much as it does men’s and that working class women over the years have forged their own brand of “industrial


feminism* that accounts for their unique needs and demands as workers. Women often did not hold positions of direct leadership in unions, especially mixed-sex unions such as the CIO but they still made valuable behind-the-scenes contributions in influencing views on job equality and equal rights. These women continued to agitate their male peers for a transformation of work politics to consider ideas not picked up on by feminists until several years later.29

While not nearly as prevalent as women in the pottery industry, many African American workers still made their living through industrial work in the twentieth century and faced the same discrimination in job availability, pay, seniority, and security.30 One of the most debated components of black labor history is the place of African Americans in the unionization movement, especially the more open industrial unions such as the Knights of Labor and the CIO. Earlier historians have been critical of labor unions in their treatment of African American workers. William Gould’s *Black Workers in White Unions* argues that despite the passage of fair-employment laws, employers with the consent and assistance of labor unions, have violated hiring practices in order to limit the number of African American workers in their workplaces. Dennis Dickerson’s study of black steelworkers finds that they too suffered persistent discrimination at the hands of both management and the United Steelworkers of America to keep them constantly underemployed and underpaid.31

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Beyond noting the presence of racism in the labor movement, some historians have worked to unearth why this attitude persists even as unions claim a common goal for all workers. David Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness* argues that white workers long turned to racism as a social advantage that counteracted their lower class status as workers. Once blacks began to take industrial jobs in the North, the already-embedded racism made full integration difficult, if not impossible. Bruce Nelson’s *Divided We Stand* examines how unions, especially the CIO, shaped views of race to include and exclude certain groups over time. The presence of black workers forced a refiguring of the meanings of race both for native whites as well as immigrants who used models of blackness to determine how they should shape their own behavior. Paul Moreno is even more direct in his assessment that in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, unions emerged looking extremely discriminatory in a way that scholars cannot ignore. He argues that, contrary to economic benefit and their own admission to represent the best interest of workers, labor unions deliberately controlled the available labor supply through racism in order to protect the jobs and job prospects of white workers.32

Like scholarship on women, more recent works on African Americans and labor gives them a greater agency in fighting for equality on the job. An early example is Michael Honey’s *Black Workers Remember* which utilizes oral history to legitimize the work of African American men and women. By getting the opportunity to tell their own story, Honey argues that black workers can illuminate their struggle and give a fuller picture of the labor movement in the United States. Ruth Needleman’s *Black Freedom Fighters in Steel* also looks at the steel

industry, but unlike Dennis Dickerson’s account, she relates the success some black workers found through the CIO in Midwestern steel communities. Here, African American men convinced each other that organization could be beneficial and built coalitions with radicals, immigrants, and other devoted unionists to not only demand fair treatment but to lay the foundations of industrial equality in a difficult and racially-charged environment.33

Like Needleman, Nancy MacLean shows how African American workers did make use of unionism to improve their treatment and to assert their place as part of the American working class. *Freedom is not Enough* makes the argument that citizenship does not come from birth but from labor. The greatest success of the Civil Rights Movement, then, is the fair employment provision of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which forbade discrimination in the workplace. Once African Americans achieved the opportunity for equal employment, they received a better chance at combating the prejudices which had kept them from full citizenship. Robert Zieger’s *For Jobs and Freedom* also argues that neither emancipation nor the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed freedom; true freedom was only possible through the right to hold the job of their choice. For black workers, the guarantee of fair treatment in the workplace and the ability to participate in labor unionism represented an essential part of American democracy and for unions themselves, grappling with the presence of black workers represented an essential step towards fulfilling their goals of worker’s rights.34

While undoubtedly connected to and dependent on the history of American business and laborers of all races and genders, the scholarship on the pottery industry still lacks a great deal of

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historical analysis. The one major exception to this unfortunate trend is the work of Regina Blaszczyk. In several articles and her monograph, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgewood to Corning*, Blaszczyk explores the production of American china in relation to consumer demand and technological innovation. Outside of Blaszczyk, most studies of the pottery industry come in three forms: institutional or institution-supported historical overviews, museum exhibitions or collector guides that feature mostly photo identification and pricing information, and unpublished dissertations and theses examining specific operations or experiences. Some of these works stand out more than others: for example, Marc Jeffrey Stern gives a concise overview of the variety of manufacturers in the Trenton area, Cleota Reed and Stan Skoczen’s *Syracuse China* provides a company history that while laudatory, does stay away from the hagiographical approach that others take. Also of great value is William C. Gates’s history of East Liverpool, *The City of Hills and Kilns*, which prominently discusses that city’s many potteries including the Homer Laughlin China Company. While technically the companion publication to an exhibition at the Dallas Museum of Art, Charles L. Venable’s *China and Glass in America, 1880-1980: From Tabletop to TV Tray* remains an invaluable resource in looking at the commercial pottery industry as a whole from the nineteenth century while also focusing on marketing strategies and how various companies dealt with competition from foreign ware and the wave of plastic products and TV dinners that sought to erode the traditional mealtime rituals.35

On pottery workers, even less scholarship exists for American companies. Fortunately, a number of studies of British workers provide an excellent comparative base to build upon in my investigation of American employees. Richard Whipp’s *Patterns of Labour: Work and Social Change in the Pottery Industry* traces the potteries of Great Britain from the 1890s in several aspects, including relations between workers and management, the role of unionism, and the impact of pottery work on communities and individual families. Whipp concludes with a short comparative look at the United States that begs for a more thorough treatment. British historians also have made valuable inroads in looking at the lives of female pottery workers and the unique set of challenges and prejudices they faced in their daily work. Jacqueline Sarsby’s *Missus and Mouldrunners* and Cheryl Buckley’s *Potters and Paintresses* both examine the world of the female pottery worker as a struggle against a patriarchal system where a woman would one minute be expected to handle heavy physical tasks yet the next minute be denied equal pay or skilled status on account of female weakness.36

**Methodology**

My dissertation will follow a mixed narrative and thematic approach in looking at the three major china companies in the eastern United States over a period of approximately 140 years. I plan to focus on companies in the eastern half of the United States that produced large amounts of commercial ware for foodservice as well as home markets. The East Coast, due to an abundance of natural resources (clay, coal) and transportation centers (railroads, waterways) has

traditionally had a large advantage in the manufacture of commercial-level pottery products. The four-state area of New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio/West Virginia which encompasses my research clearly holds a distinct size advantage in the number of companies compared with the rest of the United States. Naturally, the greater number of potteries manufactured a far greater percent of the nation’s china both numerically and economically. In fact, these four states alone routinely contributed over two-thirds of the entire china industry in terms of the value of their product.37

The china production of the California and southwestern United States, the second largest area of production in the country, will not be a major component of this study. Here, the end product often varies in terms of style and production priorities, with some plants undertaking commercial output and others focusing on specialty items. The other major reason for omitting the West Coast is that pottery owners themselves saw California as intrinsically different. The United States Potters Association, the major trade association for the industry, largely overlooked the prospect of admitting West Coast manufacturers as members and in turn these companies showed little interest in the USPA. Their reasoning came from both the physical distance that prohibited Western management from the close collaboration enjoyed by the USPA as well as the previously mentioned difference in goals and products. West Coast potteries also had little in terms of labor unification: while some belonged to the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters, others sought out different representation or none at all.38

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37 U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Manufactures*, 1890-2007. The Census of Manufactures was taken alongside the overall census every ten years until 1900. From there, it switched to every five years from 1905-1919, then biennially from 1921 to 1939. The Census of Manufactures was not taken during the war years and in fact did not resume until 1947 when it again was taken every five years (in years ending in 2 and 7) up to the present day.

38 United States Potters Association, 72nd *Proceedings of the Annual Convention*, New York City, December 12-13, 1950 (East Liverpool, OH: J.H. Simms Book and Job Printer, 1950), Ohio Historic Connection, Columbus, Ohio. The USPA did contain some Western membership in the early 20th century, as a number of California potteries joined, but none of these stayed past the Great Depression. The Executive Board made a second
Additionally, the dozens, if not hundreds, of small-output art potteries in the United States will not be a significant factor as their output was never meant to be on a large, industrial scale. Art potteries such as Rookwood in Cincinnati were also founded in the late 1800s but their focus was on craftsmanship rather than high production numbers. At Rookwood, pieces were designed and crafted by hand, with intricate decoration painted underneath the glaze that often won the company international honors for design. But these pieces, due to the intensive labor required to make them, were never meant for commercial use, and in fact the high costs of production bankrupted Rookwood in the 1960s. Other art potteries, such as the Zanesville, Ohio-based Roseville Pottery, made only small amounts of dinnerware pieces and instead crafted objects such as flower vases and bookends for the collector’s market.39

Therefore, I will center much of my analysis on the largest commercial factories across New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio/West Virginia. In New York, Syracuse China (formerly the Onondaga Pottery) continued to be one of the largest producers of commercial china until its closure in 2009. Pennsylvania’s Shenango China shared the title of one of the leading manufacturers of hotel and restaurant ware until its purchase by Syracuse and closure in 1991. Ohio proves the most vexing area as it was home to dozens of major players in the mid-century china industry. But I will mainly focus on the Homer Laughlin China Company (which began in East Liverpool but now operates just over the Ohio River in Newell, West Virginia) as it, along with the high-end dinnerware and porcelain figurine producers Lenox and Pfaltzgraff, remain as the only large-scale American china manufacturers still in operation.

I will begin by tracing the creation and early production of my three companies from their founding in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to the brink of their greatest success on the eve of World War II. In 1871, both the Homer Laughlin Company and the Onondaga Pottery (which would be renamed Syracuse China in 1966) began operations. They were followed by Shenango China in 1901. The first chapter will address the rise of each pottery in a narrative fashion while considering their various business strategies and innovations, ending in the late 1930s as the industry hit its peak. What conditions allowed for the development of an American pottery industry? How did these plants each thrive and grow? What strategies and techniques did they employ that helped contribute to their individual unique success? This chapter also will consider the rise of the first of several trade associations in the pottery industry, the United States Potters Association. How did this organization help foster the growth of the industry? What advantages could be had from competitors joining one another in a friendly meeting?

The second chapter will explore the critical entrance of imported china into the American market. Unlike other earth-based or commodity manufacturing industries, pottery faced a severe threat from imported product early on. This china, at first coming from Japan and later Eastern Europe and China, began to damage sales as early as the 1930s. How did American manufacturers respond to this growing threat? What organizations and tactics did they employ and were all pottery manufacturers on the same page in regards to strategy? This chapter also looks at the entry of non-ceramic ware into the American market. Did potters respond differently to this new type of ware or did they even see it as a threat at this time? How do responses to both imported and non-ceramic products differ between those potteries who primarily manufactured dinnerware and those who produced vitrified hotel or industrial ware?
Chapter three looks at the role of American tariff policy in shaping the success and
decline of the pottery industry. Potters enjoyed a relatively stable tariff policy in the early years
of the industry, culminating in the Hawley-Smoot Tariff giving them the most generous
protection yet in 1931. But the advent of presidential influence on trade relations starting with
the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act in 1934 and worsening under GATT in 1947 crippled
pottery’s ability to compete with inexpensive foreign china. How did the changes in tariff policy
hurt American potters? What were the actions they attempted to take in order to restore more
favorable conditions? Did the United States government actually respond to these pleas and what
shaped their attitude as the twentieth century progressed?

The fourth chapter looks at the role of marketing in the pottery industry as the companies
tried a number of diverse strategies to win over home and institutional clients. Despite the fact
that potters often banded together in the face of foreign china or difficult tariff policies, at the
end of the day they remained competitors and worked feverishly to gain any small advantage in a
shrinking market for their product. How did the marketing strategies that came to define the
pottery industry develop? What were these strategies that companies relied on the most and did
these potters employ any tactics unique to their plants? How did manufacturers rely on and
reward their sales force? Finally, what role did advertising play in the pottery industry and how
did approaches shift between everyday consumers and corporate dealer accounts?

Next, I shift to an analysis of pottery workers, a group who in the American
historiography are nearly nonexistent. Chapter five focuses on the role of unionization within the
potteries. In this regard, a comparison of the three major companies shows great divergence in
the origins and methods of organization. Homer Laughlin and the other East Liverpool potteries
were among the earliest to organize under the National/International Brotherhood of Operative
Potters, spun-off from the Knights of Labor in 1890. The Brotherhood soon represented most of the potteries in East Liverpool. Shenango and Syracuse did not follow the pattern set forth in East Liverpool: Shenango belonged to the Brotherhood until 1928 and later organized as a branch of the United Steelworkers of America in the 1943 while Syracuse refused organization entirely until 1971 under their new corporate ownership led by Robert J. Theis. How successful was unionization in the pottery industry? Did the timing of unionization (almost immediate with Homer Laughlin much later with Syracuse, broken into two distinct periods with Shenango) affect the success or output of each respective company? How did organization affect or change the relationship between management and labor? How did employees feel about their representation (or lack thereof)? This chapter also grapples with issues of race and gender among pottery workers. Gender in particular provides an interesting opportunity for inquiry since unlike many other extraction industries the pottery industry employed women from the start, although they tended to be restricted to certain positions until well into the 1950s and 1960s. Did race and gender or the segregation of jobs by race and gender affect relations among employees or between labor and management? Did the various labor unions who represented the pottery workers consider race or gender when fighting for employee rights?

The sixth and final chapter will return to the role of management in their quest for support in a declining market. Through the lenses of public relations and corporate social responsibility, potteries hoped to win the loyalty of their communities and their workers through local charitable and promotional work, favorable press coverage of plant operations, and welfare capitalism amongst employees. Additionally, potters kept close eyes on one another through product testing, plant visits (sometimes sanctioned by the competition, sometimes not), and

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40 Kent State University Special Collections and Archives, “International Brotherhood of Pottery and Allied Workers records, 1889-1971,” finding aid, (Kent, OH: Kent State University, 1980, revised 1998) and Reed and Skoczen, Syracuse China, 162.
observations of storefronts and trade displays. Besides fostering goodwill, how did these actions seek to improve the state of the American pottery industry? Were they successful in building local appreciation? How do tactics of spying complicate the previous efforts of pottery leaders to band together in the face of a common threat?

An epilogue outlines the decline of the pottery industry. In 1991, Shenango China closed after a buyout by Syracuse China, who itself was shut down in 2009. Today, Homer Laughlin remains as the only exclusive large-scale commercial manufacturer of china in the United States. I will trace how and why these three companies as well as many others met their end starting in the early 1950s. Was foreign and domestic competition the main culprit of decline or did other factors play a major role? How much did lax tariff laws contribute to the decrease in sales? Were equipment or labor strategies outdated and did companies put forth enough of a conscious effort to stave off decline? To what extent did china companies try and prevent failure and how much success did they see? Could the china industry have been saved either by local or federal action? Finally, I turn the focus back onto the Homer Laughlin China Company. Why were they the only one of the three major potteries (and indeed one of the only American potteries) to survive? Can their strategies revive the industry or is pottery doomed to never survive in large scale in the United States?

Not coincidentally, the four states that make up this study are a part of the American Rust Belt, where the mass collapse of manufacturing devastated the economic and social stability of entire communities. Worth noting is the extent to which the loss of china manufacturing contributed to the economic downturn and subsequent decline of these locales. How is the decline of the china industry a precursor to the collapse of other earth-based industries? Most
interesting, why is the collapse of the china industry not treated with the same gravity and lamentation that the loss of other American industries experienced?

**Conclusion**

As a part of the traditional dining experience, the presence of china is often taken for granted. As a scholarly field of discussion, the absence is even more notable. This dissertation seeks to fill a surprising and unfortunate gap in the history of American manufacturing by tracing the rise, operation, and decline of industrial pottery manufacturing in the United States. These three companies give a well-rounded view of how commercial potteries operated, interacted with their labor force, and navigated the complicated world of foreign and domestic competition. The fact that most of these plants are no longer operational also illuminates the dynamic of failure and the struggle to survive in the modern era and what happens when efforts to stave off decline no longer work. Looking at the lifespan of only the three largest factories in the country is a starting point, but also opens the door for seeing the importance of the industry as a whole and for elevating a tragically ignored sector of manufacturing to historiographical light.
Reflecting on his time as a pottery manufacturer, the retired Homer Laughlin recalled a meeting between his younger brother Shakespeare and a British manufacturer at the 1876 Centennial Exposition. At the display tables, the Englishman approached Shakespeare and noted that the Laughlin china was good quality for inexperienced Americans, but could never hold a candle to the British. Infuriated, Shakespeare challenged him to bring his best pieces to the judges’ booth to compare with the American product. After looking at random samples from both potteries, the judges declared that the Laughlins’ china was of better color and clarity than that of the English. When the Englishman smirked that the brothers would still have to use a British-looking backstamp to sell it in the states, Homer would instead design a new trademark for their pottery, that of an American eagle tearing apart a defeated British lion. Within the next twenty-five years, the Homer Laughlin China Company’s advertising would brag that now “England will have to get her
lesson in producing china in the largest quantities and the highest quality from America.”¹

The American pottery industry long predates the plants of Homer Laughlin, Onondaga, and Shenango. In fact, it draws from a tradition that Floyd McKee called the world’s “second oldest profession.”² But while the art of pottery making existed from ancient times, it was not until the seventeenth century that this craft could be considered an industry in our modern understanding of the term. The potters of England would provide both the tradition and manpower that enabled the establishment of the trade in the United States. From this early start, potters in America would find a unique combination of favorable circumstances that fostered not only subsistence but the eventual blossoming of a vibrant industry. It is from these roots that the Homer Laughlin China Company, the Onondaga Pottery, and the Shenango Pottery would emerge as three of the largest producers in the country by the 1930s. A fledgling industry also faced the difficulties of growing pains in the form of labor unionization, tariff negligence, and the ever-present specter of those potteries across both oceans. For this purpose, trade associations were established at many critical points in the industry’s history and served the purpose of presenting a united front in the face of threats bigger than the individual firms. It is through this that the American china industry began a pattern of balancing rivalry and cooperation in their struggle for survival, an association that while seemingly detrimental on the surface, actually helped the industry overcome factors that should have caused its downfall far sooner.

The Establishment of an Industry

Pottery manufacture as Americans know it has its roots in the storied kilns of England. The British pottery industry dates to the late seventeenth century when the discovery of high quality clay and coal in the region of North Staffordshire provided the basis for ware that could rival the best porcelain of China and France. As British potters honed their skills in the ensuing decades they developed several hallmarks of production that would eventually carry over across the Atlantic, including improvements in tools and molds, advancements in decoration, and perhaps most importantly, the addition of lead to glazes. Lead-based glaze produced a smooth finish and was easier to handle compared with the previously used salt-based glazes. This technique then heralded the introduction of earthenware, pottery that had the appealing feel of porcelain but without the fragility and price of Chinese or French imports. Earthenware would place the British potter at the forefront of his trade as the demand for china that could withstand daily use exploded. By 1800, English pottery rivaled and even exceeded the best in the world.\(^3\)

As Great Britain grew as a pottery producer, it also flourished as an imperial power. Colonies provided ideal markets for industrial output and America proved no exception: much of the dinnerware used daily in the colonies came from England, with wealthier families augmenting their homes with ware made in France and eventually shipped from China. It is not to say that pottery production did not exist in America, in fact a good deal of articles were made on American soil. Many households had two distinct types of ceramics, those that were for dinners and other important gatherings and articles such as mugs, jugs, bowls, and crocks that

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\(^3\) Richard Whipp, *Patterns of Labour: Work and Social Change in the Pottery Industry* (London and New York: Routledge Books, 1990), 17-19. A note on terminology: the word “china” technically refers to a high-grade product such as porcelain, which is completely vitrified (not allowing any moisture to absorb into the body) through an extremely high temperature firing. True china is extremely hard, yet thin enough that it is transparent when held up to a strong light source. Despite this definition, it was common from the earliest days of the industry to use the term “china” to refer to any clay-molded product which has been fired in a kiln, including semi-vitreous earthenware. In this way I have followed the example of the industry leaders themselves and use “china” as a catch-all term but will note when referring specifically to vitrified or porcelain products.
were handled several times a day. This second group was often produced within a community, as their high rate of breakage from frequent use would make constant importation cost-prohibitive. Pottery production tended to fall to farmers who built small kilns on their property and made crude items out of local clay. The resulting product, called red ware in the industry, was considered the lowest quality and thus good for daily abuse. Local potters also often forged a community’s bricks and ceramic tiles, as these items were too heavy to import from England.4

The production of finer grades of china held little priority in the colonies while England continued to provide product. A small firm in New York opened in 1735 producing stoneware but was short-lived, as was a cream-colored earthenware works in North Carolina which lasted for only a few years prior to the Revolution. With the best pottery in the world easily had from their colonial masters, Americans had little interest or experience in producing their own. Yet a small number continued to experiment with the local clays and gradually improved upon their rudimentary products into more commercially-inclined endeavors. In 1770 the first attempts at fine china began at the American China Manufactory of Gousse Bonnin and George Morris located in Southern Philadelphia near a deposit of kaolin clay. The pottery folded after Morris’s death in 1772 but the product was evidently successful enough for a second attempt in the same area and under the same name by William Tucker in 1826. Tucker’s pottery lasted six years but he could not make a profit from the ware which cost more to produce than that which continued to come from England. In fact, despite some English pottery heads (even as famous as Josiah Wedgewood) fearing that the United States’ supply of high-grade clay and improving skill could

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4 Charles L. Venable, et al., China and Glass in America: From Tabletop to TV Tray (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2000), 104-05. Red ware was the lowest grade of pottery, followed by yellow ware, Rockingham ware (a brownish-tan colored product), C.C. (cream-colored or common-colored) ware, white granite (also called ironstone or white stoneware), white semi-vitreous ware, and finally vitrified china (fine china, porcelain, and eventually American hotel china).
threaten their hold on the market, issues of cost would keep American china from being a viable industry until almost the mid-nineteenth century.\(^5\)

One thing these early American potteries had in common was that their principal labor was not native-born. The development of the industry in the colonies (and later the United States) could not be possible without the knowledge of British potters who brought their craft across the Atlantic and started many of the earliest firms. Staffordshire, the center of British pottery, experienced a period of turbulence in the 1830s. Potters had always been keenly aware of their unique skill in shaping and firing ware and often clashed with the demands of their employers. By the 1830s a wave of labor unrest swept the Staffordshire potteries resulting in a number of layoffs as plants switched to unskilled labor whenever possible. The result was a high number of unemployed skilled potters. In 1843, one William Evans decided to make the most of the situation and started a fund to pay for potters’ passage to America. At this time the United States still possessed huge tracts of unoccupied land and encouraged both native-born Americans as well as immigrants to move westward and start new lives on the frontier. Evans hoped that his countrymen could take advantage and begin new lives as American farmers.\(^6\)

With the looming unemployment in Staffordshire (and perhaps helped by Evans’s fund), hundreds of British potters came to the United States by the end of the nineteenth century. And while some did take up Evans’s suggestion and become farmers on the American Great Plains, many felt that they were not cut out for such work and instead fell back on their old trade. While travelling through Pittsburgh and along the Ohio River, these men noted that the local clays


could potentially be used to make china. Instead of heading further west, many settled along the Upper Ohio Valley and set up early potteries, firing yellow ware and Rockingham ware (a brown ware named for the Rockingham region of England that produced similar results) crafted in the manner of their familiar British goods. These men would eventually be joined by German potters as well, lending another layer of experience they would pass on to the local population in the years to come.7

Of all the communities along the Ohio River, the village of East Liverpool (settled in 1798 but not incorporated until 1834) would rise as the premier capital of the American pottery industry. Like the other small towns at this time, East Liverpool was no stranger to small-scale production of local ceramics and in 1839 would see its first commercially-viable ceramic enterprise courtesy of Englishman James Bennett. Bennett travelled to the United States a few years prior and after a time searching for steady work, he arrived in East Liverpool. There he recognized clay that could be fired into yellow ware suitable for sale along the river. Bennett convinced local businessmen Anthony Kearns and Benjamin Harker to back his endeavor and in 1840 East Liverpool’s first industrial pottery opened for business, mainly manufacturing yellow ware mugs. Another local businessman, Issac Knowles, took Bennett’s first kiln of finished ware and sold it along the Ohio River, collecting an impressive profit of $250. Bennett would continue his East Liverpool pottery with the help of his brothers, whom he fetched from England, until 1845 when the venture moved to Pittsburgh to take advantage of better transportation systems.8

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7 Gates, Hills and Kilns, 35; Jo Cunningham and Darlene Nossaman, “The Homer Laughlin China Company,” The Dish Patch Newsletter (January 2002), http://www.robbinsnest.com/the-dish-patch/Jan2002.html; and Arthur Wells, interview by Thomas Hess, October 21, 1976, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, O.H. 380, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio, 4. By 1850, 274 of East Liverpool’s population was from Great Britain, a figure representing nearly 30% of the town’s population. Many of these immigrants worked in the dozens of local potteries.

Bennett’s pottery may have been first, but his success started a wave of kilns that sprang up through the hills of East Liverpool. Harker, Bennett’s benefactor, opened his own businesses in 1842 and the Harker Pottery would go on to be one of the longest-lasting in the city. The proximity of clay, coal, and water fueled the industry until at its peak in the 1920s; the “Crockery City” was home to nearly 100 potteries with over 600 periodic kilns making wares that ranged from yellow and Rockingham to the eventual adoption of cream-colored (C.C.) ware. Two more important developments would ensure the continued growth of the industry throughout the 1850s: the first was the completion of the Cleveland and Pittsburgh Railroad through the city in 1855. Now instead of only having the Ohio River as a sales route, East Liverpool pottery could travel as far west as Chicago and southward to New Orleans at an affordable rate. The second development was the opening of William Bloor’s plant in 1859. Bloor worked in the pottery industry for over ten years but with the help of William Brunt and Jobez Vodrey, Bloor started up his own kilns where he developed the first white ware manufactured in East Liverpool. This would prove to be a vital event, even though Bloor’s plant only lasted three years. The shift to white ware was vital in keeping the industry going, as even by the 1870s it was apparent that yellow and Rockingham ware would not satisfy American customers longing for dinner services in the style of British manufacture. Bloor’s work would be credited by the later giants of Liverpool (including Homer Laughlin) as key for the development of Ohio’s white ware and would himself gain international recognition with his second plant, the Dresden Works, which won medals at the Centennial Exposition in 1876.9

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As East Liverpool grew in prominence, the infant pottery industry spread across the country. The first growth occurred along the Ohio River in communities such as Steubenville, Zanesville, and Cincinnati that could access the labor and resources of East Liverpool. From there, the industry moved east to take advantage of the large markets in New York City. The pottery center of Trenton, New Jersey formed a few years after that of East Liverpool, but for roughly the next thirty years it would dwarf Ohio in prestige and production. Like in Ohio, a few small plants came and went in the 1820s but the first industrial Trenton pottery did not open for business until 1852, mainly operated by Ohio potters who moved east to take advantage of the New York market.\(^\text{10}\)

Trenton jumped ahead of East Liverpool because they skipped the initial developmental stage of pottery production. The commercial plants of Trenton never produced yellow or Rockingham but immediately started to manufacture white ware and white granite to keep in line with modern demands. Trenton also enjoyed proximity to both railroads and canals which allowed for speedy distribution to major markets as well as being closer to the waves of immigrants arriving in the United States to work. These factors as well as the addition of the nation’s first protective tariff on pottery in 1864 bolstered Trenton into the new capital of the industry throughout the 1870s and 1880s. Despite this, Trenton’s decline came nearly as quickly as its rise. While New Jersey undoubtedly produced higher quality ware and possessed stronger leadership into the 1870s (even the formation of the United States Potters Association would begin in Trenton), it began to fall behind East Liverpool whose potteries (such as Laughlin’s) were making rapid strides and investing in new technologies and decorations. In contrast, Trenton’s potteries were closely tied to the old English traditions and its labor force strongly

resisted the introduction of labor-saving devices such as improved kiln furniture, decal decorating, and conveyor systems.\textsuperscript{11}

By the 1890s, Liverpool and western\textsuperscript{12} potteries’ use of mass production techniques enabled them to produce huge amounts of ware in a variety of decorations just as American retailers intensified demand for such goods. Trenton found itself lagging behind with smaller batch sizes and limited decoration and by the turn of the century New Jersey could no longer keep up with Ohio as smaller plants began to fail at a rapid rate. Not all was lost for the area, however, as the Trenton potteries found their market niche in the production of sanitary ware for the increasing number of American homes with indoor plumbing. While the sanitary industry thrived well into the late twentieth century, the manufacture of dinnerware would effectively end for most of Trenton’s potteries by the 1920s.\textsuperscript{13}

As Trenton faded, East Liverpool continued to grow and by 1878 boasted more than two dozen industrial potteries which employed more than 700 persons. And while a number of these continued to produce lower grade china, more converted to white granite and C.C. ware with each passing year, cementing their place in future production.\textsuperscript{14} Why were East Liverpool and its surrounds able to thrive while Trenton declined? Several factors play into the early success of the American pottery industry, both those that the plants created themselves and factors coming from


\textsuperscript{12} “Western” here refers to New York-based trade publications and early United States Potters Association records considering the center of the industry in Trenton and all points beyond as the west. This practice is dropped after the turn of the century when Trenton faded from prominence.

\textsuperscript{13} Regina Lee Blaszczyk, \textit{Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgewood to Corning} (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 85-87 and Stern, \textit{The Pottery Industry of Trenton}, 23-25. The one major exception of a successful Trenton pottery was of course Lenox China who specialized in the manufacture of high-grade fine china there from 1896 until 2005 when all production was moved to North Carolina. Lenox is still operational today, specializing in very fine china and porcelain figurines. It is the only large-output, independently-owned pottery besides the Homer Laughlin China Company to survive (as Pfaltzgraff is under the ownership of Lifetime Brands, Inc.).

outside Ohio that buoyed the potters along with many other manufacturers on a rising tide of industrialization.

The first factors embraced by Ohio potters were the improvement of their raw materials as well as their plants. While the clay of East Liverpool may have jump started the industry, the yellow and Rockingham ware it produced would not satisfy the American consumer who wanted china in the model of that which was imported from Europe and the Orient. By the end of the nineteenth century, Ohio clay no longer played a large role in the production of pottery in its own state. Instead, potters turned to the clays of the Carolinas whose high kaolin content fired into a white ware. The firing of ware improved due to the ample supply of coal and natural gas in the Ohio River valley. In his dissertation on the factors of industrial growth, Herman Stratton argued that the proximity of a fuel supply may be the single most important element of pottery success, even more than proximity to clay (as demonstrated in the importation of clay from Carolina and later England and France by the 1880s). While both East Liverpool and Trenton were close to coal deposits (as was Western Pennsylvania, which would later allow the Shenango Pottery to develop), Liverpool had the additional advantage of being close to a ready supply of natural gas in West Virginia. As early as the 1870s, natural gas powered the kilns of Liverpool as potters considered it more efficient in high temperature firing as well as being more cost effective than coal. By 1885 nearly every major pottery plant in the Liverpool area fired ware via natural gas kilns.15

As the pottery industry worked on improvements in materials and production techniques, it enjoyed as well the improvements being made nationwide to facilitate the rise of industrialization on a large scale. One of the most critical developments to aiding manufacture

and distribution came from the railroad. For pottery, the rail system allowed for greater expansion beyond the confines of the finicky Ohio River and into the national market. Railways would become so important to Liverpool’s potteries that many of the larger plants contracted for private rail sidings so that raw materials and finished product could be loaded and unloaded directly at the plant. Besides providing the structure of railways, the United States government also aided industries with the expansion of protective tariffs that artificially inflated the price of imported goods in order to make them competitive with American-made products. The first tariff on pottery passed in 1864 and by the 1880s raised enough for consumers to take greater notice of American china goods. The protection afforded by the tariff combined with the growing skill of America’s potters succeeded in taking away England’s market share of lower grade ware by the end of the century and making serious inroads towards middle grade ware such as C. C. and white stoneware. As long as tariff protection gave American potters a fair shake in the market, the most ambitious felt American fine china would not be a distant dream.16

A final factor aiding the growth of pottery in the United States came in the form of consumers. By the end of the nineteenth century, an American middle class gained not only economic power but also began to set the tempo of cultural and social life in the nation. The Victorian period at the close of the century featured moneyed families eager to showcase their wealth through what Thorstein Veblen dubbed “conspicuous consumption,” much of which became displayed in the home. With the expansion of home beautification came increased

16 McKee, “The Second Oldest Profession,” 11; Gates, Hills and Kilns, 76-77; Gosser, “Made in the USA,” 55; and Smith, “Pottery Manufacture in America,” 20. While Richard White’s Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011) argues that the transcontinental railroad was a venture undertaken before its necessary time and that more viable options still existed, many potters may have argued differently. The Ohio River, transportation basis for many of the earliest potteries in the East Liverpool area, was notoriously prone to disastrous flooding, resulting in the loss or partial loss of more than one company. When given the opportunity, many potteries eagerly moved more inland away from the river, a move accelerated with the construction of rail lines through the city. Onondaga Pottery and Shenango Pottery’s locations would also rely heavily on their proximities to rail lines.
attention to mealtimes. Art historian Charles Venable noted food and dining were part of a “social performance” in the Victorian era with dining rooms a visible marker of status. The preoccupation with dining led to more elaborate and complicated meals as well as the introduction of new gatherings such as women’s luncheons, all of which required a growing amount of specialized dinnerware to achieve the proper social expectations of these events.¹⁷

Despite the increasing need for ceramic dinnerware, perhaps the largest barrier to US potters gaining their market was the reluctance of consumers to trust or desire American-made china. Since the colonial period, consumers equated quality china with Europe and felt that only imported ware was good enough for their tables. Kristin Hoganson notes that the Victorian home functioned as a site of foreign treasures meant to demonstrate the cosmopolitanism of the family and their connections to the greatness of the empires they emulated. By the display of imported items, Americans became part of a larger tradition of European fashion and showed that they were able to afford unique items in an age of mass-production. This emulation of Europe continued in upper-middle class Americans’ dining habits as well. Elite diners demanded French cuisine that was as authentic as possible, even going as far as butchering the French language in order to re-create the entire experience.¹⁸

With such strong predisposition towards European furnishings and behaviors, American china continued to be seen as cheap and of poor quality until the end of the nineteenth century. Even Homer Laughlin noted that for years American producers used backstamps that were either direct copies of those used in England or that included common British insignia such as the lion

¹⁷ Venable, China and Glass, 21-25, 39-41.
or the unicorn, reasoning that American consumers would assume any other marked ware to be of inferior quality. But as the Victorian period came to an end, the constant barrage of advertising began changing Americans’ attitudes about the goods they made. As the United States gained political and economic influence in the world, its citizens took more pride in their own nation and the goods that made it stand not only with Europe but above it. Onondaga Pottery’s most influential leader, James Pass, speculated five reasons that improved the status of American china. He cited growing education that increased Americans’ appreciation of their own culture, a lessening of equating quality with foreign manufacture, a rising standard of living that in turn bettered the goods produced in the United States, the ability of American ceramics to reflect these higher standards of taste, and finally, the industry’s efforts to promote the quality of their ware more aggressively and to a wider audience. Pass and his fellow potters now styled not for an audience hoping to copy the appearance and mannerisms of Europe but for a truly American market and took advantage by designing newer shapes, decorations, and bodies that spoke to a modern and national taste.\(^\text{19}\)

As the twentieth century began, American potters were making steady but slow progress in becoming a long-term, viable industry. Their ware improved from rough yellow and Rockingham to white and decorated china that could hold its own against the output of Europe. And as before, circumstances from within and without would help give the final push for the industry to stand firm once and for all. The continued experimentation and improvement in the makeup of the clay body led producers to develop a fully vitrified product (one that was real

china, not earthenware) at the close of the century. This china did not absorb liquid or residue like earthenware was prone to do, and was potted thick-walled and heavy, a product durable enough to endure constant handling without breakage or chipping but that still had a delicate and appealing design. Hospitals, schools, and especially the booming hotel industry quickly adopted the new “hotel china” as it could withstand the abuses of customers and clients. While the prestige goal of many potteries remained dinnerware, “hotel china” would give them a market all to themselves without any European competition.²⁰

While companies like Onondaga Pottery would continue to improve on hotel china with roll-edge ware that resisted chipping and thinner more appealing bodies, the largest boost for American pottery at this time came from forces beyond their control. The devastation of the Great War shocked the world, but beyond the obvious destruction of human life was the decimation of many of Europe’s industries, including pottery. With the kilns of England, Germany, and France either destroyed or shut down for the duration of the war, families and businesses had little choice but to purchase American-made ceramics. By the end of the war, as many as 90% of US hotels used china made in the States but as an issue of the *Syracuse China News* published by Onondaga noted, the important goal now was to keep these new customers even in the coming years when European goods would return to the market. American potteries would take advantage of the war years and lack of competition to make many overdue investments in their plants, introducing greater levels of automation, new shapes and decorations, and perhaps most importantly, greater efficiency in production. Through the 1920s, the tunnel kiln would be by far the singular most important development in the pottery industry. Taking a design idea from Germany, the tunnel kiln would fire ware placed on moving carts in a

continuous manner as opposed to the periodic “beehive” kilns that needed loaded, unloaded, re-lit, and warmed up after each use. A continuous heat source cut the firing time of ceramics from weeks to days while improving breakage rates since the ware remained on carts, less subject to handling. Tunnel kiln adoption would largely determine which potteries would survive the forthcoming Great Depression and which would fall by the wayside.²¹

By the end of the 1930s, the American pottery industry improved to the point that it could thrive on its own merits. In particular, three major companies would set the tempo in terms of technology, design, and output as the three of them together produced the great majority of the nation’s personal and institutional dinnerware throughout the early twentieth century.

The Homer Laughlin China Company

While Homer Laughlin grew up in the area surrounding East Liverpool, his family initially had nothing to do with their community’s biggest employer. Homer was born in 1843, the second of Matthew and Maria Laughlin’s four children, and grew up in Little Beaver, just outside of Liverpool along the Ohio River. Like many young men his age, Homer served his country in the Union Army during the Civil War, reaching the rank of sergeant before the war’s end. It was not until Homer returned from the war that he got involved in the pottery industry. In 1868 he invested in the plant of one Nathaniel Simms in East Liverpool, selling the pottery’s yellow ware along with his younger brother Shakespeare. But the venture would not prove successful and the brothers decided to move to New York City and work as china importers in 1871.²²

²² Cunningham, A Giant Among Dishes, 16-17 and Cunningham, “The Homer Laughlin China Company.”
The Laughlin brothers ran their importation business in New York for the next two years but circumstances turned their minds back towards home. Noting the success that Trenton enjoyed by the exclusive production of white ware china, the city leaders and prominent citizens of East Liverpool hoped to encourage more of their own potters to do the same. In 1873, they announced a contest soliciting bids for a 4-kiln pottery that would produce white ware only. The prize would be $5,000 (nearly $100,000 in today’s dollars) that could be used for startup costs. While several local established plants put in bids, the winning proposal belonged to Homer and Shakespeare. The brothers purchased a plot of land from George Harker along the Ohio River and began construction, opening for business in October 1874. Almost immediately, the Ohio Valley Pottery found itself in trouble. For starters, the original plant contained only two kilns, not the four stipulated in the contest. Second, of the 125 workers employed, many had little to no knowledge about the actual production of china, a troublesome trait also shared by the Laughlin brothers themselves. Thus, when several leading city members arrived to inspect the first kiln of ware, they were horrified and angered at shoddy product including cups whose handles had fallen off in the kiln. Knowing the scorn that East Liverpool now regarded them with, the Laughlins threw themselves into improving their product into one that could be respectable and profitable. Homer handled the business side of the operation while Shakespeare fixed the problems with the clay body and
designed new artistic shapes and decoration. Within a year after their disastrous start, the Ohio Valley Pottery finally produced a product that the city could take pride in.23

The achievement of the Laughlin Brothers would be seen publicly during the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. The Exposition served as both a world’s fair and as a birthday party for the United States where leading industries were eager to show off the latest technologies to an audience of millions. Amidst the five gigantic pavilions was the home goods display where potteries from around the world brought out their best ware, including the Laughlin brothers who designed a new shape (appropriately called “Centennial”) just for the occasion. And even with their product being displayed alongside the greatest that the nations of Europe and Asia had to offer, the judges awarded the Laughlins a special diploma and medal for their white granite (the same china that the Englishman told Shakespeare was not good enough to compete). Less than two years after East Liverpool’s residents wondered if they should give up on the Laughlin brothers, they brought home one of the highest awards their industry could offer.24


24 Regina Lee Blaszczyk, American Consumer Society, 1865-2005: From Hearth to HDTV (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2009), 14-15; Charles W. Elliot, “Pottery at the Centennial,” Atlantic Monthly, November 1876, reprinted in Crockery and Glass Journal, November 9, 1876, 17-18; and Cunningham, A Giant Among Dishes, 33 (also includes a photo of the diploma award). The “Lion over Eagle” backstamp that Homer Laughlin designed after their victory at the Centennial would be used until around 1910.
With their ceramic product now good enough to win international acclaim, the Laughlin brothers and their Ohio Valley Pottery seemed primed for a stable existence. But only months after the Exposition, changes were underway that would fundamentally alter the small pottery’s future. On June 21, 1877 Shakespeare Laughlin withdrew from the business and the brothers’ partnership dissolved. Shakespeare, with his flair for artistic design, accepted a position to start up his own factory in Philadelphia with financing from none other than rail magnate Jay Gould. However, this would not come to pass as Shakespeare’s untimely death in 1881 would halt the proposed venture.25

The editors of the leading trade publication *Crockery and Glass Journal* noted that the loss of Shakespeare would be significant for the Ohio Valley Pottery but expressed confidence that Homer had the drive and good business sense to carry on at his current level of success. And indeed the pottery (renamed Homer Laughlin’s Ohio Valley Pottery) thrived throughout the 1880s. In 1886, Homer introduced Eat Liverpool’s first vitrified porcelain, “Chelsea,” leading the excited editor of the *East Liverpool Review* to announce that it would rival the best England and France had to offer. And the pottery again found success at the World’s Fair, displaying at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago as one of 65,000 exhibitors and 24 American potters to bring their ware to the White City. The china display was part of the women’s section in the Manufacturing and Liberal Arts Building and Laughlin paid a premium to place his display in one of the largest spaces near the front entrance. Over 120 pieces of the company’s finest dinnerware, ironstone, and toilet sets were prominently showcased and like the fair seventeen years earlier, the Laughlin china again won recognition. This time, the “Danube” shape won ribbons for both undecorated and decorated white granite dinnerware. While Homer modestly

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25 Cunningham, “The Laughlin Brothers.”
celebrated by ordering new company stationary and seals, his laborers hung a large banner on the side of the factory, proclaiming their ware to be the best in the nation. 

Homer Laughlin’s pottery continued to bring him success but as time went on, he longed to spend his remaining years dedicated to his family and love of travel. By the late 1880s he began the process of stepping back from the daily operations of his plant. This was possible due to the arrival in 1889 of William Edwin Wells. Wells was born in 1863 in Brooke County, West Virginia and after some years of working as a bookkeeper in various businesses he took an office position at Laughlin’s plant. The young man’s work ethic impressed Homer who soon began leaving him in charge of plant management while he conducted business and personal trips. On December 16, 1896 Laughlin took steps to incorporate his pottery, renaming it the Homer Laughlin China Company with a capital stock of $150,000. More importantly, he made Wells the permanent plant manager, responsible for the entire daily operation of the pottery and its workers. The year following the incorporation, Laughlin sold off the company and retired to Los Angeles, where he dabbled in real estate and travelled the world until his death in 1913. He chose to sell to the Aaron family, prominent merchants from Pittsburgh who were willing to invest extensively in the plant. Louis Aaron negotiated the sale along with his sons Marcus and Charles and became the president of the company, where he

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26 “East Liverpool,” special correspondence, *Crockery and Glass Journal*, July 5, 1877, 15; “Pottery Notes – East Liverpool,” *Crockery and Glass Journal*, March 25, 1886, 26; and Darlene Nossaman, “The Homer Laughlin China Company’s Exhibit at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago,” *The DISH*, vol. 10, no. 4 (summer 2008), 4-6. The Chelsea porcelain, despite its prominence as the first of its kind in Ohio, would only be produced until 1889 as Homer Laughlin felt it was not profitable enough to dedicate the production time and kiln space.
served from 1898 to 1910 until replaced by Marcus. Wells also purchased a share of the pottery and the Aarons kept him on as secretary and general manager as they had little interest in taking part in the daily operations of the plant.\textsuperscript{27}

True to their word, the Aaron family began immediate investments in the Homer Laughlin China Company. The first priority was expansion of the facilities, as the current East Liverpool location could not keep up with increasing orders. In 1899, they built a second plant next to the original pottery that doubled its output. Two years later, a third plant joined the works but still could not meet growing demand. The prospect of adding a fourth plant would prove more difficult: due to the booming popularity of the pottery industry, no more land was available for the Aarons and Welles to develop in East Liverpool. Instead, they turned their sight to the other side of the Ohio River, specifically the Newell family farm property located in West Virginia. Wells, the Aarons, and other interested businessmen formed the North American Manufacturing Company as a holding company charged with purchasing the farm property, developing roads and utilities, and incorporating a town where a new Laughlin plant could take shape. The Company went about developing the land, laying water and electric utilities, and most importantly, building a large suspension bridge that would connect the new town (named Newell in honor of the farm) with East Liverpool. In 1904 the Newell Bridge crossed the river, connecting the two cities at a site just near where the Aarons broke ground on a fourth plant. Laughlin Plant #4 was the largest of its kind in the American pottery, a mammoth structure covering ten acres and containing thirty kilns (a far cry from the original Ohio Valley Pottery’s

\textsuperscript{27} Cunningham, \textit{A Giant Among Dishes}, 18, 22-23; \textit{The History of West Virginia, Old and New}, volume III (Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1923), 584-85, courtesy of Homer Laughlin China; and McKee, “The Second Oldest Profession,” 22. Marcus Aaron served as company president from 1910-1940 when he was replaced by his son Marcus Lester who served until 1989. His son Marcus Aaron II served as president from 1989 until the Aarons divested their share of the company and sold it back to the Wells family in 2002.
two). When the kilns of all four plants ran at full capacity, the company produced 300,000 pieces of china per day, nearly ten percent of the entire china output in the United States.\(^{28}\)

And the company needed the massive output: by 1901, Homer Laughlin China produced a large variety of white granite, white earthenware, toilet sets, and hotel china in a dizzying array of decorations. In 1902 they augmented their existing lines with an art china department that produced highly decorated specialty items such as vases and statuettes. A final major contribution to the pottery’s production lines came from the manufacture of premium ware which was given away to customers through movie theaters, stores, or packaged with foodstuffs such as rolled oats. While this ware cost very little to the customer, the tremendous size of the orders turned a respectable enough profit for the company to invest in an entire new plant (Plant #5) in 1914 with an additional sixteen kilns. By 1916, Homer Laughlin’s contract with Woolworth stores alone amounted to the first million-dollar order from a single customer to any pottery in the United States, totaling over 16.7 million items.\(^{29}\)

With five plants running, the company again looked to expand in the early 1920s. Plans began on a sixth plant but this one would be radically different than the rest. The technology developed in Germany for a continuous fire tunnel kiln appealed greatly to Wells and the newly-hired ceramicist Alfred Bleininger. They announced that Plant #6 would be built with tunnel kilns despite the risk and the $1.25 million price tag. Wells noted that in over thirty years in the pottery industry, he saw little improvement in American production methods before the tunnel kiln, a fact that worried him when he knew European potteries rebuilt after the war were investing in new technology. Wells reasoned that the tunnel kiln was a necessary risk to keep the


company relevant in the face of renewed competition. At its completion in 1923 Plant #6 was the largest of its kind in the world at 290 feet wide and 800 feet long (to accommodate the tunnel kiln). Plant #6 also saw improvements in mechanization at both the kiln and transportation levels. Wells noted the fears associated with automation but reasoned that making ware more efficiently actually allowed the company to produce more at a lower cost, thus avoiding the feared loss of human labor to machines.30

The risk of investing in tunnel kilns paid off greatly for Homer Laughlin as the company secured ever-larger orders and more importantly, filled them in a more timely matter than other potteries. In 1927, Plant #7 added to the company’s fleet and Plants #4 and #5 saw their periodic kilns torn down and replaced by more tunnels. By this time, the three original buildings in East Liverpool seemed hopelessly out of date and the small amount of land available meant that they did not have the space to be upgraded with tunnel kilns. In 1929 Wells and the Aarons made the decision to shut down the Liverpool locations and focus all production in Newell. To replace them, construction began on Plant #8 which opened for business in December 1929. Initially this site employed 800 workers on its own and produced only premium pieces for Woolworth’s. The plant connected with Plants #6 and #7 to make a combined 1 million square feet of factory floor and the three boasted a total of eleven tunnel kilns as well as mechanized transportation systems and energy saving measures that used residual kiln heat to warm the factories and offices.31


31 “A Giant Among Dishes: Homer Laughlin China Co,” *Ceramic Industry*, April 1930, 408-17, courtesy of Homer Laughlin China and Cunningham, *A Giant Among Dishes*, 104. Today, Homer Laughlin uses Plants 6 through 8 to manufacture china. Plant #5 was razed and only part of Plant #4 remains housing the corporate offices, the city of Newell’s water company office, and the extravagant company showroom that will be discussed further in chapter 4. After briefly leasing Plant #1 to another pottery, all of the East Liverpool buildings were razed in the 1930s.
The Great Depression crippled many industries across the United States. In particular the pottery industry saw a great many of the smaller plants close down, even in the 1920s before the real economic disaster hit. Like Wells predicted, the only way that the industry could keep up with a rejuvenated Europe was though innovation, improvement, and large scale orders, all of which were nearly impossible for small plants using only a few periodic kilns. Homer Laughlin China would emerge from the Depression in relatively good shape, owing to a number of factors that helped it adapt to changing tastes and shrinking pocketbooks.

The hire of excellent personnel and stability in the top offices proved vital to the continued success of the company. When William Edwin Wells retired in 1930 as secretary and general manager, he was seamlessly replaced by his son Joseph. Towards the end of his time in charge, William made two critical hires that would ensure the company’s future. The first of these was Bleininger, hired as a chemist in 1920 and put in charge of the construction of the first tunnel kiln in Plant #6. Following this, he worked mainly in the glaze department, developing compositions that would reduce crazing (the crackling effect produced when a glaze did not properly adhere to the clay body) and authoring more than eighty articles and two books on the chemical side of the ceramic manufacture.\(^{32}\)

The second critical hire came on the artistic side of the industry. Frederick Rhead came from a family of potters in England and worked in various plants throughout the United States. In 1927, Homer Laughlin China developed an in-house art department in hopes of improving their product through design. To head this research venture (the first of its kind in an American pottery), Wells hired Rhead away from his current position at the American Encaustic Tile company in Zanesville. Rhead took on the position of art director with enthusiasm and in

particular struck up a friendship with Bleininger who designed glazes for Rhead’s new shapes and bodies. In 1935 they began working on a new shape/glaze combination with little fanfare, but this combination would serve to revolutionize the industry.33

In 1925, the Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes introduced Americans to modern design in the home. In addition to popularizing the art deco style, the exposition emphasized kitchen decoration in bright colors. American department stores such as Macy’s picked up on the trend set by the French and offered housewives colorful appliances, curtains, and table décor, all while encouraging them to make the kitchen a vibrant space all their own. The trend towards color spread to pottery as well. California potteries had been experimenting with bright dishes but their appeal had still been largely limited to the West Coast. In 1930, Homer Laughlin decided to try their hand at colored ware and introduced Wells Art China. Bleininger designed glazes that fired into shades of rust orange, peach, moss green, and yellow but the muted palette only had marginal success and ceased production by 1935. That same year, work began on another china line in which Rhead’s art-deco inspired shapes would be glazed in bright primary colors more in tune with modern taste.34

At the Pittsburgh Pottery and Glass Show on January 6, 1936, the Homer Laughlin China Company introduced its newest line, as it did every year. But few could anticipate just what a hit Fiesta would become. The new line was the result of collaboration between Rhead’s modern shapes with concentric circles and glazes designed by Bleininger and Harry Themicke in bright bold primary colors. When trying to decide on a name, Rhead added a figurine of a dancing girl

to a trial tablescape that echoed the same bright colors. The figurine, labeled “Fiesta Lady,” inspired the group and the name stuck as it evoked celebration, warmth, and excitement, all traits that could help chase away the gloom of the Great Depression. Rhead designed the shapes to be modern, but not too modern, as experiments already showed customers tended to shy away from overly avant-garde designs and decorations. He settled on a smooth, curving shape with only a simple ring accent that put the colors front and center. The solid colors echoed consumer preference for a less formal service that could be mixed and matched and even used with existing dinnerware services.35

Rhead and the art department conducted extensive research into consumer color preference based on surveys and other purchases such as automobiles, clothes, and appliances. The first obvious choice was red, which with existing glaze technology came out as a reddish-orange. To compliment the red, Rhead suggested a deep cobalt blue. The next color decided upon was green, done in a lighter shade so as not to overwhelm the other colors. The fourth logical choice was a golden-yellow chosen to hold its own with the other bright primary shades. The final color proved the most difficult for Rhead to pin down. Turquoise and rose along with shades of purple were among the final contenders but none seemed to harmonize properly. Black was then suggested but it seemed to dampen the arrangement. Finally, he selected a deep ivory to be a “quieting influence” on the line without overpowering the four main colors.36

The original Fiesta lineup, consisting of coffeepots (regular and demitasse), a teapot, carafe, ice pitcher, sugar/creamer set, bud vase, chop plates, compartment plates, four sizes of

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Figure 5: The first advertisement for Fiesta. *Crockery and Glass Journal*, February 1936, page 8.
dinner plates, tea and coffee cups with saucers, a footed salad bowl, mixing bowls, cream and onion soup cups, a relish tray, two styles of compotes, large and small bowls, salt and pepper shakers, an ashtray, and two styles of candleholders, proved immediately popular from the outset. Rhead continued to monitor the sales of the new line, adding and deleting items based on their popularity. He noted that one year after introduction the four bright colors were selling about evenly despite the red color’s higher expense to the consumer from the uranium in its glaze. He chalked this up to the color predictions made by fellow art designer Victor Shreckengost that consumers preferred to mix and match rather than buying a complete set in one color. Around fifteen months after the line made its debut, turquoise (proposed as part of the original five) joined to make a six-color collection.37

Fiesta struck a chord with consumers who enjoyed the bright colors, the mixing ability, and the reasonable price during tough economic times. By 1939, all of Laughlin’s Plant #4 had been converted to producing Fiesta alone. With its enduring popularity throughout the rest of the 1930s, Homer Laughlin China decided to experiment with other lines of colored dinnerware. They introduced Harlequin in 1938 as an exclusive to Woolworth’s. Rhead took the basic design of Fiesta and altered it slightly, moving the concentric rings from the outside to the inside of the design and altering the handles of hollowware to be more angular. The colors of Harlequin were unique at first, consisting of maroon, mauve blue, spruce green, and a brighter yellow but eventually expanded to include many of the popular Fiesta colors as well (as did Tango, another solid color line introduced in the late 1930s). Harlequin pieces sold for even less than Fiesta, allowing cash-strapped Americans a chance at the same vibrancy they saw in magazines. That

37 Huxford and Huxford, *Collector’s Encyclopedia*, 9-10 and Frederick H. Rhead, “Color—A Designer Speaks,” *Crockery and Glass Journal*, May 1937, 13, 46. After Rhead’s death in 1943, Shreckengost’s son Don Shreckengost became the Art Director at Homer Laughlin China, designing many of the company’s shapes in the 1950s, including the solid color lines Jubilee, Epicure, Rhythm, Skytone, and others.
same year the Riviera line debuted as a Murphy Company Stores exclusive. This line took the existing Century shape and applied the same Harlequin and Fiesta colors, a technique the company would later use for pieces in its Nautilus and Jubilee shapes.\textsuperscript{38} By the 1940s, the Homer Laughlin China Company completed over sixty years of excellence. With the overwhelming popularity of Fiesta and other colored glazes as well as the booming premiums market, the company produced nearly one third of the entire US dinnerware output, numbers that seemed impossible only a few decades earlier. And the continued investment in technologies such as the tunnel kiln helped it be one of only a scant few of East Liverpool’s potteries to emerge relatively unscathed at the end of the Great Depression.

The Onondaga Pottery

While much of Homer Laughlin’s early ability to thrive came from its location in the Crockery City at the heart of the industry, the success of the Onondaga Pottery,\textsuperscript{39} founded at nearly the same time, showed that quality pottery could come from less expected geographic locations. The industry publication, \textit{Ceramic Industry} noted that the Onondaga Pottery went through three major periods of growth and development in the period up to the end of World War II. These periods (which the journal pinned at approximately 1871-1900, 1900-1921, and


\textsuperscript{39} A note on terminology: the Onondaga Pottery even in its early years would become synonymous with its most famous product, Syracuse China. By the middle of the century the two names were interchangeable to the point that the company formally changed its name from the Onondaga Pottery to Syracuse China in 1966. The company noted that the names had been confused for a long time and cited the difficulty the public had in spelling and pronouncing “Onondaga” as well as the tendency by mid-century to associate the word “pottery” with terra cotta and other lower grade wares. See “Our Official Corporate Name,” \textit{Syracuse China News}, January/February 1966, pg 17. For the purposes of this study, I will use the name Onondaga Pottery when referring to the plant until 1966 when the name formally changed and use Syracuse China thereafter.
1921-1947) would correspond roughly to the tenure of the pottery’s most notable and innovative leader, James Pass.\textsuperscript{40}

The first period of the Onondaga Pottery’s development actually predated the plant itself. In 1841 William Farrar arrived from Vermont and settled in the small Syracuse suburb of Geddes, New York. That year he purchased a plot of land and opened his own pottery producing yellow ware urns, crocks, mugs, bowls, and jugs for sale in town and on the Erie Canal. When the Genesee Turnpike came through, Farrar sold that plot and moved to a new location on Furnace (later West Fayette) Street. There he continued production on his Rockingham goods and began to make glazed earthenware as well. After ten years of small-scale production, Farrar sold his pottery to Peter Coykendall who hoped to enlarge into a mass-production plant. The newly rechristened Empire Pottery continued Rockingham production but increasingly dedicated attention to making C.C. ware in the style of the successful potteries of Trenton.\textsuperscript{41}

Empire Pottery enjoyed modest success, enough so that the facilities required an expansion to keep up with orders. But Coykendall lacked sufficient funds for such an undertaking and instead sold off the company to a group of thirteen local investors who pledged $50,000 to the young pottery. On July 8, 1871 they renamed the plant the Onondaga Pottery, a tribute to local heritage and the county in which they operated. The group of investors named Lyman Clark as the superintendent, keeping the position he held at Empire and immediately authorized the construction of a second kiln. Two years later, the plant augmented its C.C. production with white granite ware but problems with crazing delayed the popular success of this ware. In fact, Onondaga would not turn a profit for the investors until 1875, at which time improvements and expansions were made to the existing building. Expansion continued in 1880

\textsuperscript{40} “Onondaga’s 75th Anniversary,” 91.
when the investors authorized the $7,500 purchase of a second building housing two more kilns, a workshop, and a boiler room.\textsuperscript{42}

Just as it seemed the Onondaga Pottery had gotten squarely on its feet, tragedy struck in 1883 when a fire destroyed the entirety of the original building (the Empire Pottery property) and badly damaged the two kilns in the addition. But the investors chose to try and rebuild the damage and they had the benefit that arguably the man most important to Onondaga’s success was about to take over. James Pass, in the opinion of Syracuse China historians Cleota Reed and Stan Skoczen, “did more than any other person to achieve national leadership for the company and to place it in the first rank of American fine china manufacturing.” Pass was not a stranger to the Onondaga Pottery: his father Richard Pass took over the superintendent’s job from Lyman Clark in 1875 and young James worked under him while taking ceramic chemistry classes at Syracuse University. Upon Richard’s death in 1884 the superintendent’s job passed to James, where his first duties consisted of repairing the fire-damaged kilns and creating a better body/glaze combination that would alleviate the continued crazing problems.\textsuperscript{43}

Pass’s skill with the chemical side of pottery allowed him the knowledge to improve the faulty ware and to make even better products that came closer to what Trenton and Liverpool could produce. In his first year, Pass bettered the glaze to the point the company felt confident to issue a guarantee against crazing, the first ever issued by an American pottery. He also improved the quality of the clay body, introducing a semi-vitreous white ware that same year with quality fine enough that it was marked “china” despite not being fully vitrified. Even with this high caliber product, Pass still wanted to produce a true china product for the market that American families could use as an everyday service. In 1888 he found a suitable kaolin clay in the Carolinas (quite possibly the same clay that Homer Laughlin used for the short-lived Chelsea porcelain line) and began work on a vitrified body. The first fruits of this venture were named “Imperial Geddo,” a translucent, thin, and very fragile porcelain. But Imperial Geddo proved to be too fragile for the everyday china that Pass envisioned and its production was limited to art china while Pass continued to experiment. In 1891 the first true American china for daily use hit the market, named Syracuse China for the city in which the pottery now resided (the suburb of Geddes being annexed by the city). Syracuse China would be a hit right away, earning the company special recognition at the Columbian Exposition in 1893. The success of the china allowed Onondaga to drop production of earthenware in 1892 and semi-vitreous ware four years later.44

With Syracuse China bringing both acclaim and sales, the investors of Onondaga Pottery authorized continued plant expansion, bringing the total capacity to six periodic kilns and adding a separate decorating shop in 1898. China decoration up to this point consisted of a laborious process where many of the intricate designs were painted on by hand by skilled decorators who

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44 Reed and Skoczen, *Syracuse China*, 51, 55, 61; “Onondaga’s 75th Anniversary,” 92; and Onondaga, “Seventy-Five Years,” 42.
endured extensive training, making it both expensive and time-consuming to get a new
decoration on the market. James Pass travelled to Europe on three separate occasions between
1894 and 1897 to inspect the operations of potteries in England, France, and Germany. While in
France, Pass closely studied the relatively new process of decalcomania. The French potteries
developed this process in the late 1870s to save time on decoration while producing more
uniform results. The decalcomania process used lithography printing to create an image on a
special transfer paper. The paper decal could be then placed on a piece of ceramic ware, leaving
the image on the china while the paper residue dissolved during the cleaning and firing process.
A design that would have taken considerable effort could now be quickly and identically
reproduced for any number of pieces. Pass brought back a lithographic decal machine in 1897
and set it up at Onondaga in the new decorating building where two dozen women could
decorate ware in a fraction of the previous time. Onondaga’s use of decalcomania was the first of
its kind in any American pottery but Pass kept on improving the process through the coming
years. Early decals could only produce a design in one color, but after continued experimentation
the first multi-color decal prints transferred successfully in 1908.45

Syracuse China proved successful enough that the Onondaga Pottery could easily have
focused on that alone. But in 1896 Pass adapted yet another French innovation and introduced
the roll-edge technique. Instead of the mold for flatware coming to a tapered edge, it rolled over.
This edge resisted chipping better than conventionally-made plates, which Pass realized as a
benefit perfect for American hotel china. Onondaga soon produced all of their hotel china as roll-
edge, which once demonstrated for clients, took off immediately. Traditional hotel china had to
be made extremely thick so as to stand up to heavy use, with the results useful but not always

45 “Addition to the Onondaga Pottery,” Syracuse Evening Herald, September 28, 1898, 6; Reed and
Skoczen, Syracuse China, 47, 69-71; and “Onondaga’s 75th Anniversary,” 92-93. Decoration (both hand-painted and
decal) was almost exclusively done by women, see chapter 5.
very attractive. A rolled edge allowed for hotel ware to be made much thinner than before and allowed it look more like the china found in American homes. Onondaga’s technique became the industry standard within a few years, as all the other potteries producing vitrified ware adopted a roll edge or similar style.46

The Onondaga Pottery kept growing as the twentieth century dawned. In 1900 yet another expansion occurred, adding a fourth building and two more kilns (bringing the total to eight). This was followed by construction of a new $15,000 warehouse in 1902 and another addition in 1906 that doubled the plant’s current output and added a personal railroad switch to simplify the loading and unloading of product. The pottery’s board rewarded James Pass for his constant dedication to the company by naming him vice president in 1905 and president of the entire company in 1910.47

James Pass personified the second period in the Onondaga Pottery’s development and his intense work ethic reflected the industry he loved. But tragedy struck in 1913 when Pass died at the age of 56. Pass had always suffered from asthma, likely a side effect of the long hours that he spent in at both the Onondaga plant and at his other business, Pass & Seymour which manufactured porcelain insulators. In the early decades of the pottery industry, poor ventilation in the plants often led to silicosis, a coating of the lungs with silica dust from the pottery clay. The combination of silicosis irritation and Pass’s preexisting asthma struck him with a severe bout of pneumonia from which he did not recover. As a testament to his dedication, Pass was

46 “Onondaga’s 75th Anniversary,” 92 and Reed and Skoczen, Syracuse China, 72-73.
47 Reed and Skoczen, Syracuse China, 76, 90; “To Build Warehouse,” Syracuse Post-Standard, September 21, 1902, 7; “Pottery Plant to be Enlarged,” Syracuse Post-Standard, September 28, 1906, 9; and “James Pass Named as Vice President,” Syracuse Post-Standard, July 13, 1905, 7.
still working full time ten days before his death. In his wake he left a pottery that now boasted 700 workers and held the position of the largest producer of vitrified china in the United States.48

The death of James Pass signaled the transition to the third period of the Onondaga Pottery’s early development. Because Pass’s sons Richard H. and James S. were still young, leadership of the plant passed to his brother-in-law Bert E. Salisbury. Under Salisbury the pottery continued to progress, adding yet another expansion in 1917. But as the years rolled on the difficulty of producing both fine china and sturdy hotelware in the same plant became apparent. The vastly different needs in body makeup, molds, firing temperatures, and decorations led Salisbury to conclude that the hotel arm of the businesses needed a separate space. But the question was where? The Fayette Street plant had expanded as far as it could as space ran out on the property. Additionally, the reason that site had been chosen by the Empire Pottery in the first place, the Erie Canal, had not been operational since 1905. An entirely new site was chosen on 300 acres in the suburb of Salina and on July 17, 1921, the month of the pottery’s fiftieth anniversary, ground broke on a new state-of-the-art plant. Modern design defined the new plant, which sported a one-story structure that made transportation far easier and ample space for expansion of the hotelware facilities. On June 7, 1922 the Court Street plant opened for business and by the end of that year had increased Onondaga’s overall production by 25%, numbers that further increased in 1937 with the installation of the first tunnel kiln at the plant.49

With space no longer an issue, Onondaga could continue with the tradition of innovation championed by James Pass. In the 1920s an ivory body was developed for both the hotelware and Syracuse China, giving a whole new set of decorative options for homes and businesses.

48 “Pass Funeral to be Held Sunday,” Syracuse Herald-Journal, October 31, 1913, 1 and Reed and Skoczen, Syracuse China, 90-91.
With the Great Depression making many long for simpler times, Onondaga also saw success with its Adobe Ware line, a deep ivory body that in many ways resembled the rustic Rockingham ware that launched the American industry. Coupled with bold color contrast, Adobe Ware enjoyed popularity in restaurants especially on the West Coast. The hotel line further improved with the 1933 introduction of the Econo-Rim, a reinforcing structure built into dishes to reduce breakage from drops and other accidents. By 1940, Salisbury declared that the pottery’s business “had reached an all-time peak” and the outlook appeared very positive despite the looming crisis in Europe.50

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50 “Onondaga’s 75th Anniversary,” 42; “New ‘Adobe Ware’ China on Display in Bank Lobby,” Syracuse Herald-Journal, November 30, 1932, 44; and “Pottery Business at All Time Peak, Salisbury Declares,” Syracuse Herald American, December 15, 1940, 37. Shenango China enjoyed success with a line similar to the Adobe Ware called Inca Ware during this same time period.
The Shenango Pottery

The final of the three major plants of this study came along later than the others but quickly made up the difference in time and emerged as one of the premier manufacturers of vitrified hotel china by the 1930s as well as carving out a place of prominence in the fine china market. The Shenango Pottery had a rough beginning, going bankrupt and closing down twice before businessman James M. Smith Sr. turned the pottery into a successful venture.

Shenango actually has roots in two separate potteries in New Castle, Pennsylvania. In December 1900, a new business venture called the New Castle Pottery got approval to open a three-building plant on the property of an abandoned shovel works on Grant Street. The pottery opened the following September with six kilns and a staff of 400 (many of whom came to work from the East Liverpool area) to manufacture hotelware and vitrified dinnerware. Before the New Castle Pottery even had a chance to open its doors, plans were already underway for a second plant located only a short distance north from the first on Emery Street. This plant, to be called Shenango China, was also a six-kiln structure staffed largely by skilled men from East Liverpool and

Figure 8: An early advertisement for Shenango China. Crockery and Glass Journal, October 6, 1904, page 33.
unskilled women and boys from New Castle. Shenango specialized in producing semi-vitreous earthenware in the style of many of Ohio’s potteries.\(^{51}\)

While the city enthused about its two potteries, they both would soon fall on hard times. By 1905 both the New Castle Pottery and Shenango China were bankrupt and in the hands of receivers. The industry publication *Crockery and Glass Journal* lamented that both plants made decent quality ware but opened for business at a time when the market was already saturated with potteries. In addition, while locating the plants in New Castle had the advantage of a plentiful supply of cheap coal for the kilns, they were just far away enough from East Liverpool to not be able to take part in their market share and therefore could not keep up with the competition. The New Castle Pottery building was sold to Iron City Manufacturing which turned it into a gas lamp plant that also shut down in a relatively short amount of time. Receiver Eugene Baer sold the Shenango China plant to a group of investors for $42,000 and the plant (now renamed the Shenango Pottery) reopened in September 1905 with a focus on manufacturing hotelware. The pottery seemed to do well for a few years, as the *Crockery and Glass Journal* noted its large prestigious orders. But by 1908 it was once again bankrupt.\(^{52}\)


Like William E. Wells at Homer Laughlin and James Pass at Onondaga, Shenango too had a visionary whose efforts saved the plant at a critical moment. James M. Smith had absolutely no experience in the pottery industry—he was a hardware merchant who nonetheless took an interest in the foundering plant and led a new group of investors to bail out and reorganize the company once again in 1909 with the focus continued on vitrified hotel ware only. Smith became the new president of the Shenango Pottery, a position he would hold for the next forty years. Smith had plans to improve the pottery both internally and externally in order to prevent another bankruptcy, but his lack of industry knowledge caused him to struggle mightily at first. In fact, it took three attempts before Smith could formulate a glaze that would adhere to the clay body and not craze and only because his close friend Ernest Mayer (of the Mayer Pottery located about 30 miles south in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania), divulged that pottery’s glaze formula to him to help get him on his feet. He also desperately needed to expand the company’s staff. When Smith took over, the pottery only had a bookkeeper, plant manager, and a few foremen, barely enough to operate efficiently and not nearly sufficient to expand and innovate. Smith knew that he could not handle every small job in the plant, both from his inexperience and because he knew he needed to keep the company financially sound. As one of his early tasks, he hired Charles
Read as a merchandising manager to handle the sale of the product. This was followed by creating several divisions each with a head man best suited for that job alone. Shenango would even become the first pottery in the United States to hire a full-time ceramic engineer in 1919 (assuring that Smith would not have to try and develop any more glazes himself).53

With the staff and daily operations of the Shenango Pottery settled, Smith turned his attention to expanding and improving his plant. The Emery Street facility was not large enough to satisfy the current demand and the location did not provide enough space for expansion. In July 1912 Smith purchased the now-abandoned New Castle Pottery building and moved all of the existing machinery and equipment to the Grant Street location in addition to adding two new periodic kilns to the existing six. Despite a setback in the form of a massive flood that buried much of New Castle under water in March 1913 (the newly renovated plant fell under three feet of water itself), the Shenango Pottery’s new location was open for production by the summer.54

After getting his plant established on Grant Street, Smith continued to improve and expand his pottery. In July 1923 the investment group increased the capital stock of the company from $250,000 to $750,000 in respect to both steady sales and Smith’s sound leadership and expansion plans. In the next two years, the plant grew from its current thirteen kilns to twenty as orders steadily increased, especially orders from the American government for china used in military mess halls. Smith knew that he needed to keep up with technology to

53 “Smith Pioneer in China Ware Manufacture,” *New Castle News*, June 7, 1955, page unknown; “History of Shenango China,” 1; “Shenango Pottery—Makers of Fine China and Refractories,” *Ceramic Industry*, April 1949, pages unknown, Lawrence County Historical Society, New Castle, Pennsylvania (hereafter referred to as LCHS); and G. B. Zahniser, “Development of Service Divisions in the Shenango Pottery,” memo to division men and foremen, March 13, 1948, LCHS. Like the Onondaga Pottery with Syracuse China, the Shenango Pottery would often be referred to by the name of its product, Shenango China. The name would formally change to this in 1954, then change to Shenango Ceramics in 1959 before changing back to Shenango China in 1968. For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to the plant as the Shenango Pottery prior to 1954 and Shenango China after (as the Shenango Ceramics name was rarely used outside of corporate management).

secure Shenango at the forefront of the industry, and by the mid-1920s that future was in tunnel kilns. Smith would announce a massive expansion plan in 1927 that among other things would add not one but three tunnel kilns to the Shenango facilities, making them among the technology’s earliest adopters (considering their largest rival, the Onondaga Pottery, would take nearly another nine years before adding a tunnel kiln to their plant). Shenango lit their first tunnel kiln in March 1928 with the other two operational by the following year and the remaining periodic kilns torn down. As the nation readied for war, Smith undertook one final massive expansion in 1940. This time he added two circular tunnel kilns, having the same continuous capacity but taking up far less space as they coiled in a circle rather than a long straight path. Shenango was again among the first potteries in the nation to invest in the unique new structure, and added a third one following World War II.55

The Shenango Pottery thrived on the production of vitrified hotel china, but much like James Pass before him, James M. Smith dreamed of perfecting fine china to sell as well. For years he dabbled with various clay and glaze compositions but none quite worked, and the Great Depression years put such experimentation on the back burner. Shenango would get into porcelain production in 1936 but not through their own product. The Haviland China Company of Limoges, France held an undisputed position as one of the premier producers of fine porcelain in the entire world. Ironically, this French china dynasty came from an American, David Haviland, who sold imported china in his New York store. In 1841 Haviland moved to Limoges

55 “What the Potteries are Doing,” *Crockery and Glass Journal*, July 26, 1923, 19; “Employee Handbook,” 5; “Shenango Pottery – Makers of Fine China;” “To Enlarge Shenango Pottery to Double Capacity of Plant,” *New Castle News*, May 10, 1927, page unknown; “Mammoth New Kiln at Pottery Lighted,” *New Castle News*, March 21, 1928, 1; and “Will Expand Capacity of Pottery Here,” *New Castle News*, November 9, 1940, 1-2. The capacity of potteries was always measured in the number of kilns a plant possessed, first by the number of periodic kilns and later by tunnel kilns (which were equal to approximately 20 periodic kilns). These measurements were only for the kilns used to fire bisque ware (raw clay undergoing the first fire) and glost ware (ware that was glazed and may have line work or other painted-on decoration). Decal decorations required yet another firing but those kilns were never counted when determining a plant’s productive capacity.
to set up his own pottery mixing American management with French craftsmanship. Haviland and Co. gained prestige throughout the 1850s and 1860s with the aid of David’s two sons Charles and Theodore. After David’s death in 1879 the brothers had a falling out. Charles stayed on to run Haviland and Co. while Theodore went on to run his own pottery called Theodore Haviland, Limoges until his death in 1919.56

In the mid-1930s, Theodore’s son William and grandson Theodore were looking for an American producer for their shapes and decorations. They wanted to take advantage of the biggest market by making ware in the United States, thus eliminating the hassle and expense of importation. After touring several potteries, the Havilands chose the Shenango Pottery as the site of their new production venture and a “hand-shake agreement” with Smith sealed the partnership. The first Shenango-made Haviland china debuted in the summer of 1936 at the Chicago Gift Show, using the Haviland molds, shapes, and decorations. Shenango’s agreement with the Havilands would last for the next twenty-two years until the company decided to downsize their production facilities.57

Producing French porcelain in Pennsylvania was certainly an honor but Smith nevertheless still wanted a fine china line of his own. By 1939 he finally had a suitable body and glaze combination. That same year, Louis Hellmann of Germany’s Rosenthal China came to the United States looking to form a new business partnership for American china. Hellmann knew that Europe would soon be at war and wished to start up a pottery in the United States that would produce ware in the Rosenthal tradition. Smith agreed to invest $25,000 in the new production,

57 “History of Shenango China,” 1-2; “Famous as a ‘Frenchman’ – Really a Pioneer American,” Crockery and Glass Journal, September 1936, 16; and Replacements, Ltd., “Haviland China.” While the Haviland China was always made at Shenango in New Castle, it was backstamped “Theodore Haviland New York,” as this was the location of the pottery’s American offices.
named Castleton China. Under the agreement, Hellmann handled the design process, marketing, and financial operations of the venture while Smith oversaw the actual production at Shenango. Castleton China’s first ware was ready in 1941 and would quickly turn heads as a major player in the American fine china market. The following year Castleton launched a series of dinnerware featuring the work of contemporary artists, as Hellmann reached out to Thomas Hart Benton, Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí and others to create art used for the porcelain and later sent on a national tour. After World War II the association would continue in Castleton’s “Museum,” a unique shape designed by the acclaimed Eva Zeisel.58

Establishing Trade Associations in the Pottery Industry

The Homer Laughlin China Company, the Onondaga Pottery, and the Shenango Pottery were among the three top producers of American dinner and hotel ware in the United States. But they were only three of the hundreds of potteries across the nation, ranging from small one-or-two kiln operations to mammoth plants. As the industry took off at the end of the nineteenth century, a number of the leading manufacturers joined together in the first of several trade associations that linked these otherwise diverse producers into a unified front to exchange information, tackle common problems, and stand together in the face of threats to their industry and livelihoods.

Trade associations were not unique to potters. As business historian Louis Galambos points out, they were common across modern industries although their function was more in line with the traditions of a pre-industrial economy in wanting to achieve stability rather than change. The associations were rooted in the European guild tradition where the masters of a trade formed

bonds to keep their crafts pure. But the United States’ culture largely drew from that of England, which had no strong guild system. Therefore, when industrialization got underway, it tied to the more British tradition of individualism and growth rather than the guilds’ history of stability. Despite an atmosphere that would seem to reject the formation of trade associations, experiments of loose organizations began by the latter half of the nineteenth century. As these groupings strengthened, they turned their attention to working together to stabilize prices, put controls on production, and to regulate the economic situation of their trade in an age of competition. As time went on, trade associations were also formed to deal with the external problems facing small industries such as labor unions and unfavorable governmental policies.59 These would both certainly apply to the pottery industry, whose trade associations would dedicate much of their time to collective bargaining and in persuading the US government to extend favorable tariff conditions to the industry.

The first trade association to form for the industry was the United States Potters Association. In December 1874 pottery manufacturers in Trenton decided to call a convention of all white and yellow ware manufacturers in the United States to consider an association “for the purpose of promoting their general interest and welfare.” Forty-one firms responded to the call and met in Philadelphia’s Merchants Hotel on January 13, 1875. Those present elected John Moses as their president and named their group the United States Potters Association. At their first meeting, the potters laid out the basic purpose of the group, that of encouraging and promoting the industry as a whole against foreign products. To do so, the initial members

pledged to work together to secure a favorable tariff policy, to create a display of national work at the 1876 Centennial Exposition, and to stop the copying of European designs in favor of developing their own shapes and decorations. Finally, the organization created committees on statistics, labor, art and design, and materials and fuel usage to provide information that all members could use to their benefit.60

But why would men who were otherwise each other’s competitors offer to work together, even as far as sharing their sales figures and struggles? J. Hart Brewer, secretary of the association during its formative years offered the following:

The feeling of a common interest in each other is of a great value. Instead of the angry hatred of strangers, in a commercial fight, we have the common rivalry of friends. Instead of the ignorant, idle, and suicidal policy of a disunited interest, we have the strong influence of union of interests; hence union of hearts and union of hands. In this union is our strength.61

Even in the nineteenth century, Hart and others knew that the pottery industry remained fragile and dependent on getting the American public to accept its wares. If no one was willing to buy American-made pottery, rivalry would not matter as all would be out of business. While the members of the USPA remained business competitors, they also understood that the industry as a whole would not survive and grow without the proper support, which could only be gained by working together on the larger issues plaguing them. This pattern of putting aside rivalry for a common purpose will remain in the industry throughout the rest of its existence.

60 United States Potters’ Association, 1st Proceedings of the Annual Convention, Philadelphia, PA, January 13-14, 1875 (Trenton, NJ: Murphy & Bechtel, 1875), OHC, 2, 7, 11-13. In terms of the three major potteries of this study, the Onondaga Pottery was the only one to be a charter member of the USPA, staying until 1959. The Homer Laughlin China Company joined the association in its second year (1876) and remained until the organization dissolved in 1977 (in fact they and the Hall China Company were the only two members left at the association’s dissolution). Shenango China’s time in the association is more spotty: they joined in 1901 (as Shenango China), dropped out in 1905, rejoined (as the Shenango Pottery) in 1909, dropped out in 1911, and joined a final time in 1915, staying until 1949.

61 United States Potters Association, 2nd Proceedings of the Annual Convention, Pittsburg [sic], PA, January 5-6, 1876 (Trenton, NJ: Murphy & Bechtel, 1876), OHC, 7.
Hart went on to clarify the purposes of the USPA a few years later, arguing that “there is a kind of patriotism, national pride, if you please, which we all have. We are potters not only by profession but by fascination [...] We come together to learn, and as we learn, to raise the standard of American wares.” Clearly then, the USPA functioned initially as a place to exchange ideas for the betterment of the industry as a whole. As time went on, other members and functions emerged. While the association initially developed for earthenware producers mostly centered in the Trenton area, it soon grew to embrace sanitary, earthenware, and china producers from the entire East Coast. In 1893 an associate membership category was added for the inclusion of supporting industries such as refractories, decorators, and raw materials suppliers. In addition, honorary membership extended to many of the industry’s trade journals who eagerly covered conference proceedings in their pages.62

Within a few years the aims of the association also expanded beyond the simple exchange of ideas. Galambos notes that trade associations often sought to stabilize their industries by setting standards on prices, establishing a united front against organized labor, and by influencing public policy. The USPA followed these same traits: by the 5th Convention in 1878 the organization decided that they should overturn their previous aversion to fixing prices and at least come with some standard baseline. After a few more years of debate, the USPA did roll out a list of recommendations of standard prices and sizes for member organizations to follow. In 1905 the organization took on yet another role, one that would come to largely define it in later years. In response to the growing power of the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters, the

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62 United States Potters Association, 5th Proceedings of the Annual Convention, Trenton, NJ, December 3-5, 1878 (Trenton, NJ: Murphy & Bechtel, 1878), OHC, 18 (quote) and Robert E. Boyce, “The History of the United States Potters Association,” unpublished, September 1949, 1. The exclusion of California and other West Coast potteries was not intentional, as several attempts to include them over the years were met with apathy. In 1951 the USPA did manage to get ten California-area potteries to join but within ten years all had dropped out again, citing a fundamental difference in their business goals as well as the prohibitive expense travelling to the East Coast to attend committee meetings and the annual convention.
USPA decided to adopt a policy of voluntary collective bargaining (nearly thirty years before the National Labor Relations Board). The collective bargaining tradition between the USPA and NBOP was credited by both groups as a reason why serious work stoppages were rare among potters compared with other manufacturing industries.63

While the United States Potters Association was the first, several other trade organizations formed within the pottery industry, each one tailored to a specific type of producer and their needs. The second to form was the Vitrified China Association, founded in 1917 with eight manufacturers of dinner and hotel ware (including Onondaga Pottery and Shenango Pottery). The Vitrified China Association wished to handle the special concerns of their product, including securing better domestic shipping rates for hotelware since as Onondaga Vice President E. L. Torbert put it, “it is cheaper to ship to Liverpool, England than to East Liverpool, Ohio.” The association also sought to promote the special place of American Vitrified China to the public. This group would eventually be succeeded by the American Fine China Guild in the 1950s and joined by other organizations such as the Americans Restaurant China Manufacturers Association.64

Trade association helped bring together otherwise dedicated competitors into a temporary common cause. As J. Hart Brewer said at the early United States Potters Association meeting, the unity of brotherhood was necessary in order to make all producers better and to protect their industry as a whole. Potters knew that they lacked the experience, long tradition, and public appreciation of Asian and European craft. Many of the early potteries did not have extensive kiln capacity (at the 1903 USPA meeting the average number of kilns was eight) and could afford to

63 United States Potters Association, 5th Annual Convention, 8 and Boyce, “History of the USPA,” 2.
64 Reed and Skoczen, Syracuse China, 93. These other organizations will be discussed further in later chapters as their functions shifted from collaborative learning and promotion towards defense of the industry as it was harassed by foreign imports and lax tariff protection.
undertake extensive research on their own. The USPA stepped in, providing a variety of committees to tackle the many facets of pottery production. At the annual convention, members could discuss improvements in fuel and machinery, art design and decorative innovations, transportation issues, and strides against health concerns like silicosis. The USPA also gave members a community to turn to when their plants encountered labor troubles or when their products suffered from poor sales. The belief in a brotherhood of potters enabled members to share ideas in a friendly setting, perhaps leading to innovations that improved the welfare of all.

As the pottery industry reached its peak of strength in the time around World War II, many factors contributed to its longevity and success. External conditions such as natural resources and opening of markets played a role, but the industry would not have achieved what it did without the benefit of strong, stable leadership. At a time when the corporation introduced the idea of the individual magnate, even the little pottery industry relied on men such as William Wells, James, Pass, and James Smith to take them to new heights. All three men drew on a mixture of hard work and ambition to take their companies to the next level. Wells oversaw the expansion of Homer Laughlin China from a one-plant operation to a mammoth industrial complex with some of the most popular lines in home china. Onondaga literally rose from the ashes under Pass, producing vitrified hotelware and the lauded Syracuse China for the home. Under Smith, the Shenango Pottery overcame two bankruptcies to grow into a major hotel china supplier as well as gaining contracts to make some of the world’s finest china. By the dawn of WWII, Homer Laughlin produced nearly one-third of the nation’s everyday dinnerware, and the combination of Onondaga and Shenango manufactured nearly all of the vitrified hotel china in the United States.
World War II and the approximately five years following represented the peak of the American china industry. As the nation moved through the twentieth century, the problems facing not only the companies of Homer Laughlin, Onondaga, and Shenango but the entire industry would become greater. By and large the worst threat came from abroad as china imported from Europe and increasingly from Asia arrived at prices so low no American company could properly compete. Manufacturers would devise a number of ways to curb the import problem, but it seemed as if every new strategy met another obstacle. The potteries also would face the pressure of dealing with a Congress and executive branch that had little interest in doing much to save a small industry and would thus fight increasingly unfavorable tariffs and trade agreements. Throughout these battles, the three companies would alternate joining together in the face of a common enemy and taking positions that angered the others, a pattern of cooperation and rivalry that would ultimately prove unsatisfactory for both Shenango and Onondaga.
CHAPTER 2

“A Bull in Our China Shop:” The Threat of Foreign and Non-Ceramic Dinnerware to the American Pottery Industry

In the fall of 1987, Pennsylvania State Legislator Thomas Fee travelled to Washington for a meeting between Pennsylvania’s General Assembly and Congressional delegates. He noted that the meeting between the state and federal representatives sparked lively discussion about issues vital to the country and fostered a deep sense of national pride. But when the speeches, panels, and discussions ended and dinner served, Fee could not contain his disappointment. After eating, Fee flipped over his plate to see who manufactured his dinnerware, a habit common among many men and women who grew up in a town with a pottery. To his great disappointment, he found the plate marked “made in Japan.” Being from New Castle, Fee knew that Shenango China and other American potteries suffered for years due to the constant onslaught of foreign china manufacturers, whose workers made low wages compared to their American counterparts. He chastised the House Administration Committee for not supporting its own struggling industries while instead turning toward the cheaper option. “If officials of the government of the United States of America cannot be relied upon to support American industry,” Fee questioned, “what hope remains for establishments like Western Pennsylvania’s Shenango Pottery? Unprotected from foreign competition, their future is bleak.”

Fee admitted that to a member of Congress in the late 1980s, the plight of Shenango and other potteries may have seemed trivial in comparison to bigger issues such as the waning Cold War or the situation in the Middle East, but the battle against foreign and other competition in the pottery industry spotlights larger trends concerning American trade, the delicate economic relationship with nations such as Great Britain and Japan, and the grassroots efforts of American management workers to protect their livelihood against situations bigger than themselves. For Homer Laughlin China, the Onondaga Pottery, and Shenango China, their relationship with foreign imports provides an interesting commentary on how a small business deals with its place in the American economy. The responses of the three companies ranged from open protest, caution, acceptance, and finally even co-option of Japan to produce their own product. The crisis of foreign china as well as non-porcelain dinnerware would divide American potteries against themselves, eliminating the possibility of a unified front to deal with the industry’s greatest challenge.

The Pottery Industry and Imports

Because the American pottery industry developed as a result of men and technology from England, it initially struggled to keep up with its big brother across the Atlantic. Since American consumers had a tendency to equate European with quality well into the early twentieth century, the first competition to the potters of the United States remained that of Europe. The display put on by the United States Potters Association during the Columbian Exposition in 1893 greatly increased consumers’ knowledge of American pottery, yet it did not translate to an increase in sales. Neither did the 1890 McKinley tariff, despite the fact that it greatly increased the duties on foreign-made china. USPA secretary Alfred Day complained that the tariff increase should
curtail British sales to the point that the home-grown producers could take over a significant
share of the market, yet they could still not convince buyers that American pottery could match
Europe in quality.\(^2\)

Indeed, as Regina Blaszczyk notes, foreign china held a tremendous amount of sway on
the American market at the end of the nineteenth century. The china import industry consisted of
a network of middleman buyers (called “jobbers” by the trade) who travelled through the pottery
districts of England, France, and elsewhere. When they saw a product they felt would sell in the
United States, they placed an order and paid for it to be shipped across the Atlantic. Upon arrival,
they either peddled the ware themselves in their importation office or sold it to specialty and
department stores. The china and glass district in New York City stretched across several city
blocks in the vicinity of Broadway and Chambers Street where dozens of jobbers displayed the
finest European porcelain for their out of town buyers. Importers themselves undertook
aggressive marketing campaigns to promote foreign china as better quality, more luxurious, and
a way for American homes to emulate the tradition of European elites.\(^3\)

American producers resented the large portion of the china market enjoyed by importers
and made their displeasure known to the members of Congress who controlled international
commerce. In January 1913 the Attorney General’s office served search warrants for several of
the leading importers of French porcelain on suspicion that they declared prices of their goods
far below the actual value (a move that would allow the importers to pay significantly less in
tariff duties). The next month, a resolution in the House by Representative Edwin Webb of North

15-16, 1895 (East Liverpool, OH: J.H. Simms Book and Job Printer, 1895), Ohio Historic Connection, Columbus,
Ohio (hereafter referred to as OHC), 13.

\(^3\) Regina Lee Blaszczyk, \textit{Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgewood to Corning}
(Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 80-82. American producers would themselves begin setting
up office space in New York to compete with importers on their own territory, see chapter 4.
Carolina called for the Attorney General’s office to turn over all relevant information on the importers and to report whether criminal proceedings had begun against them. Not surprisingly, the accused jobbers did not react favorably but instead of blaming congress, they turned their wrath towards American potters. A representative for the committee of importers attacked the USPA and its president William Burgess, accusing the trade association of perpetuating years of lies and slander about foreign china and Burgess himself of getting his own influential friends from the Tariff Commission to remove certain government appraisers from office and replacing them with ones that over-inflated the value of imported goods. Burgess fought back, noting that he had little influence in Washington and that neither he nor the USPA would ever engage in illegal activity to harm the import market. He concluded by openly stating that the importers should complain of their situation to Washington officials rather than attacking American businessmen. The Attorney General’s office dropped all charges against the fourteen importers accused of underreporting values by the end of 1914, a time when the foreign producers and their importers would soon have far greater problems in the coming of the Great War.4

A New Competitor Emerges: Japan

European fine china always remained a constant presence to American producers but once World War I broke out, potters in this country finally felt they had the market share to co-exist successfully. But at the same time, the war would bring a new competitor into the American market, one that would prove to be a headache for the rest of the American pottery industry’s existence. As early as 1905, the USPA reported that English ware was losing its share of the

4 “Sequel to Bloch Case,” Pottery Glass and Brass Salesman, February 27, 1913, 23; “Burgess Replies to Importer’s Committee,” Pottery Glass and Brass Salesman, March 27, 1913, 10-14; and “China Suits Dropped,” Pottery Glass and Brass Salesman, December 3, 1914, 7. Interestingly, despite Burgess claiming he had few connections in Washington, he himself would be named to the Tariff Commission in 1921, where he undoubtedly aided in the passage of the 1922 Fordney-McCumber Tariff which was a great aid to the pottery industry.
import market from china coming in from other nations. They singled out Germany in particular as its value had doubled in the previous years and now actually surpassed England in numbers. Buried elsewhere in that report, the USPA noted that china from Japan started entering the U.S. in rapidly rising numbers during this time as well. These two countries posed a special threat to American manufacturers because the wages they paid their workers fell well below the standards established in more industrialized nations so that even the tariff could not make up for the large difference in price. While American potteries produced more products with each passing year, the cost of skilled labor led to a low profit margin on the final sale. If their prices could be undercut by Japanese and German workers earning a fraction of the wages, the entire American market would suffer.5

World War I, with its devastation to the potteries of Europe, opened the door not only for the increased output of American manufacturers but also to imports from Japan. The Japanese economy had been in poor shape since their 1905 war with Russia but WWI helped turn the tide: by 1915 exports totaled ¥130 million over the previous year and more than all of the trade excess for the past fifty years. As German factories shut down or were destroyed, Japan filled the void for cheap pottery, getting so many orders that not all could be filled in a timely manner. While Japan’s market share increased, as of 1916 their product quality lagged far behind that of American potters. Japan’s specialty came from cheap, white, undecorated ware but the body of the product looked and felt inferior to American earthenware and suffered from problems such as crazing (a web-like pattern of cracks resulting from glaze adhering improperly).6

The editor of the trade journal *Crockery and Glass Journal* who wrote the report on Japan noted that while the product still lacked a level of craftsmanship now, the potteries were improving and would continue to improve after the end of the war. This concern also preoccupied the USPA, who sent William Burgess to inspect the Japanese potteries in 1920 and report back at the annual convention. Burgess described an industry on the precipice of transitioning to a modern manufacture. Many of Japan’s potteries centered in the area of Nagoya and like the early American industry, production depended on the local clays. While many of the smaller plants still relied on old-fashioned methods, others were fast becoming some of the most modern potteries in the world with technology that even many American plants did not possess. Most telling, the workers in Japanese potteries earned on average 60-85 cents per day (at a time many American potters earned that per hour) with unionization strictly forbidden.7

These advantages meant that Japan could produce china for a fraction of the cost to American producers, many of whom still hesitated to absorb the costs of new technologies such as the tunnel kiln. By 1925 the situation started to take a turn for the worse: the USPA reported that sales plummeted that year despite much of the rest of the American economy booming. The reasons given varied from poor tariff enforcement to a lack of adequate investment by pottery heads. But the main thread running through both was the presence of cheaper foreign product against which several potters could not compete. As the Great Depression gripped the nation, the situation further deteriorated as USPA statistician John Dowsing reported imports from Japan rose 69% from the previous year in 1933. The country now exported eleven times as much as Britain or Germany, a staggering 519,501 dozen items per month and growing. To make matters worse, the Japanese gave misleading price lists to the customs office which underestimated the

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value of their goods and allowed them to pay a lower tariff rate. While the USPA applied for emergency relief from Japanese goods through the National Industrial Recovery Administration, Dowsing doubted the government would do much to assist America’s potters.8

Officials knew then that they could not rely on the American government to help their small industry in the fight against imported china. Instead, they looked to one another as well as their employees. As far back as 1914 the USPA considered a “Made in America” ideal as a way to strengthen their industry against European ware. By the time Japan emerged as a threat in the 1920s and 1930s, USPA president Thomas Anderson further reasoned that “by presenting a united front we might accomplish a lot in our fight to hold, in part at least, the home market for home workmen and manufacturer.” Their joint response would take on two forms firmly rooted in the tradition of buying American. Historian Dana Frank traces the buy American tradition all the way back to the Boston Tea Party and relies on grassroots support to foster patriotism in the economy. Frank goes on to identify several key periods of buy American sentiment, often corresponding with larger global issues. In this way, those who bought goods from their home nation rejected the globalized nature of the economy in favor of a centric approach that participants hoped would alleviate the greater problems. The second major wave of buy Americanism broke out just as the Great Depression exacerbated unemployment in the United States. News magnate William Randolph Hearst led a new movement to buy American-made goods in the hope of creating jobs during the Depression, even going as far as getting Congress to pass a Buy American Act in 1933. Hearst’s movement also possessed a darker side: intertwined with the patriotism of buying American was an undeniable racism against the

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producers of imported goods, specifically the Japanese and later Chinese. This not-too-subtle racism would persist in many of the campaigns launched by the pottery industry as well.9

The first attempt at a Buy American campaign on the part of manufacturers took place in 1933 under the leadership of USPA (and Homer Laughlin China) president Joseph Wells Sr., who put together a public relations committee within the USPA to solve the industry’s lack of a public presence. As part of publicizing American-made china, the committee sponsored a “Buy American” display which ran in nine major department stores throughout the country in February and March. The National Brotherhood of Operative Potters also contributed to the display by providing staffing and covering a portion of the costs. The store displays drew attention in their respective cities but the cause needed a larger presence in order to sway public opinion. Around the same time, former tariff consultant Captain F. X. A. Elbe grew frustrated with the influx of imports and the lack of action at the government level. Drawing on the success of a similar movement in Great Britain, in 1935 he and a group of like-minded businessmen (including Wells) formed the Made in America Club, a nonprofit volunteer organization designed to convince consumers to buy goods produced in their own country in respect for the American democratic way of life. The Made in America Club looked for support from a variety of sources, including Congress, raw materials suppliers, and as many different business leaders as possible. But at its heart the club sought to reach consumers directly. To do this, they printed up stickers and brochures, distributed buttons and license plates, circulated a monthly newsletter, and put on displays in major department stores showcasing the quality and variety of American-made goods. Any consumer could belong to the club by agreeing to sign the following: “I hereby

pledge myself to buy, so far as it is practicable, only products made or grown in America, by American labor and thereby give work to my fellow Americans, and maintain the American standard of wages.”

Potters held a prominent place among the diverse industries represented in the Made in America Club. Representatives from Scammell China, Sebring Potteries, and Hall China sat on the advisory council and in 1939 Joseph Wells took over the role of president for the entire organization (Elbe served as the founder and Managing Director). As president, Wells felt the need to get all of the country’s potteries on board in support against imports. As a member of the USPA’s executive committee for much of the 1930s Wells also got the trade association to pledge a yearly stipend of $3,600 for the club. In 1936 and again in 1939 he organized

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membership drives, first for the potteries themselves, and then in conjunction with NBOP for all of the unionized pottery workers. By the end of the drive, the majority of the leading plants in the East Liverpool area, the East Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, and upwards of 95% of union members belonged to the club and openly expressed their commitment to buying American in protection of their livelihoods.11

Under Wells the Made in America Club continued its outreach efforts to spread the message of supporting American business. Many of the members shared the common trait of being small-scale industries in the United States. While their trades (pottery, lace and other textiles, specialty foodstuffs) appeared insignificant compared to steel or automotives, they nevertheless filled a vital need for the market while being constantly at risk for replacement by foreign-made products. The club worked to publicize their contributions through continuing the “Buy American” displays that started among pottery and spread to a variety of items. The club also found success petitioning at the state level. In July 1938, Ohio Governor Martin L. Davey proclaimed that September 3-10 would be “Buy American Goods Week” throughout the state of Ohio. Other local-level proclamations would be made in cities such as East Liverpool and Lima, Ohio, Trenton, New Jersey, Westerly, Rhode Island, and Cascade, Montana. That November, the club co-sponsored a CBS radio broadcast on the history of the American pottery industry. Listeners around the United States heard the stories of Lenox and Homer Laughlin China narrated by Arthur Wells (brother of Joseph and himself Vice President of the plant) and NBOP

president James M. Duffy. The broadcast ended with a personal plea from Duffy to support America’s working men and women by avoiding buying imports made with slave wages.\textsuperscript{12}

One of the more remarkable things about the Made in America Club was the level of cooperation between labor and management in order to protect their industry against imports. Besides Wells acting as president, union head James Duffy also became heavily involved with the group, as both a recruiter and as the voice for the employees whose jobs depended on buying American. Duffy made regular appearances at the club’s annual meeting in New York City, where he gave speeches outlining the importance of the movement from the perspective of workers. He cited the remarkable record of peaceful negotiations between the union and the USPA as all the more reason for them to band together against imports. Duffy’s efforts paid off in May 1940 when the group (renamed the Made in America Foundation to cement their nonprofit status) named him as a Vice President. Unfortunately, by the time Duffy came on board in an official capacity, the organization already entered its final decline. Wells noted years later that the club continuously struggled to survive financially despite the yearly contribution from the USPA and others. Distributing free premiums, printing a free newsletter, and other promotional activities strained a nearly nonexistent budget and despite thousands of pledge cards, the membership of the club did not actually do anything to further the made in America cause. If Elbe’s presence held the struggling organization together, then the final blow came when the captain got his orders to report for active duty in November 1942. With Elbe gone, the club slowly faded away and did not survive past the end of World War II.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{13}“Potters Figure Prominently in Made-in-America Club Convention,” \textit{Crockery and Glass Journal}, December 1938, 29; Emil Kekich to James M. Duffy, May 28, 1940, KSU Special Collections; and W. A. Betz, to
Even as the manufacturers took part in the Made in America Club, the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters sought to create their own grassroots movement to protest against Japanese pottery. The genesis of the idea stretched back to 1911 when East Liverpool kilnmen in NBOP Local 9 decided that after constantly receiving notices to support other buy American drives, they would hold one of their own to get members of other unions to commit to American-made pottery. While the Local 9 effort never gained any large-scale attention, Duffy would use the same prototype of action twenty-six years later. At the 1937 national AFL convention in Denver, Duffy (there as a representative for the AFL-affiliated NBOP) introduced a resolution that called for a boycott of all Japanese-made goods. The resolution passed with favor, as all AFL unions agreed to participate and to support the pottery workers.¹⁴

Another important source of support came from management. During the AFL convention, the USPA wired Duffy encouraging his proposal and promising their full cooperation in a boycott. A few weeks later, the association released a statement to the press, outlining once again the relationship between the USPA and NBOP going back to 1899 (longer than any other trade association-union agreement), their record of generally peaceful labor negotiations, the high cost of American labor as compared to Japan, the rise in Japanese-made goods in the United States over the past ten years, and the inability of the current tariff to alleviate the problem. In closing, the USPA remarked that the union had successfully secured a

resolution calling for an all-union boycott of Japanese goods and publicly announced their full support of it.\textsuperscript{15}

Within weeks of the passage of the resolution, the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters began plans for putting the boycott into action. The first step took NBOP members door to door throughout the East Liverpool district explaining the boycott and obtaining signed pledges from locals to buy only American-made goods. The second step involved visiting local shops and checking for any Japanese-made merchandise. If NBOP members found foreign product for sale, they either convinced the retailer to cease carrying the merchandise or in some cases bought out the stock to be destroyed. Complying retailers received a window sign showing that they supported both the boycott and American jobs. The culmination of the boycott drive came in plans for a massive rally set for December 13, 1937 in East Liverpool in which organizers anticipated a parade, bonfire, and a slate of speakers. Even AFL president William Green adjusted his schedule to come to Ohio for the big event.\textsuperscript{16}

The boycott rally kicked off on a cold night with a massive parade through the streets of East Liverpool at 7:30. As many as 2,500 men, women, and children marched in the parade as part of the dozens of floats, marching bands, and decorated cars. Pottery executives walked the route alongside their employees and several of the plants sponsored their own floats. In addition to the Brotherhood, representatives from other labor unions (including brewers, painters, and

\textsuperscript{15} A. A. Wells telegram to James M. Duffy, October 7, 1937, KSU Special Collections and USPA, 59th Proceedings, 14-16.

\textsuperscript{16} USPA, 59th Proceedings and “Boycott Plans Begin,” East Liverpool Review, December 8, 1937, 1. The USPA wrote to Henry Luce of \textit{LIFE} magazine to notify them of the boycott, the Made in America Club, and hoped to get some coverage of the rally to support the Buy American issue. Indeed, the December 27\textsuperscript{th} edition of \textit{LIFE} did include a photo from the Liverpool rally as well as other anti-Japanese protests around the country.
Figure 11: Japanese-made goods burn at a boycott led by the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters on December 13, 1937. Associated Press photo.
truck drivers) also showed up in a gesture of solidarity. The floats and cars all contained some variation of the “Buy American” theme, both serious calls and more humorous messages. One car decorated as a coffin, proclaiming the death and burial of Japan in the States. Another portrayed a highly stereotypical Japanese rickshaw with the slogan “The Mikado’s Last Ride Though This Town” emblazoned on the side. For many, the highlight of the evening surely arrived with the massive bonfire at the top of Deidrich Hill, the highest point in the city. NBOP members collected merchandise from more than one hundred local stores and set the pile ablaze at the conclusion of the parade, destroying $20,000 worth of foreign-made products. 17

Once the fire reduced to embers, the crowd moved to the Ceramic Theater for the final portion of the rally, the keynote speeches by Elbe, Duffy, Wells, and Green. Elbe introduced the Buy America idea as a concept which began in England where Lord Beaverbrook organized a movement to buy British goods to help that nation’s unemployment in the Depression. Duffy called the buy American movement “the essence of patriotism” as it perfectly adhered to the Constitution’s promise that the power of the nation rested with the will of the people. Duffy also compared the standard of living of the United States with Europe and Asia, noting that American workers not only supported their families but also enjoyed a high enough wage to purchase luxury items. But if foreign goods continued to chip away at the home market, American producers would have no choice but to lower the standard of living in order to compete, erasing decades of workers’ progress. In closing, Duffy made a veiled attack at John Lewis and the CIO for splitting the labor movement and allowing foreign manufacturers to make further inroads in the U.S. In his keynote, William Green also described the poor working and living conditions of Japan as well as criticizing Japan’s attack on a Chinese ship just days before. In closing, Green

promised the continued support of more than four million AFL members and twenty million other supporters to drive all foreign products from American stores.\textsuperscript{18}

The boycott rally gained national attention, even if the \textit{Crockery and Glass Journal} called it “a gesture of violence.” But in the wake of a week or two of publicity, the question quickly turned towards how to keep that momentum going into 1938 and beyond. The trade journals suggested either agitating for tariff reform or an embargo on Japan (as public opinion seemed to favor in light of increasing Japanese aggression). The USPA continued to support the boycott as Arthur Wells continued his brother’s efforts at a stronger public relations campaign for the American pottery industry. Meanwhile, Joseph Wells noted the boycott had at least a hand in getting several major discount retailers to stop the sale of Japanese products. Duffy and the Brotherhood decided to take their show on the road and hold boycott rallies in other struggling pottery towns. On April 1, Joseph Wells spoke at a parade and bonfire which commenced in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania followed the next evening by a parade and rally in Paden City, West Virginia attended by both Duffy and Senator Rush Holt and even marked by the burning of a Japanese potter in effigy.\textsuperscript{19}


World War II and its Aftermath

While the boycott rallies and buy American drives brought publicity to America’s potters, their actual value is up for debate. Dana Frank notes that buy American movements often fall short for one very basic reason: consumers want to buy the least expensive product regardless of where it came from. At the January Pittsburgh China and Glass Show, less than one month after the initial Liverpool rally, Homer Laughlin Art Director Frederick Rhead dismissed the boycott as largely a failure. He felt that most chain stores, even those that pledged not to purchase Japanese goods, still had enough remaining inventory to keep selling foreign product for weeks or even months to come. He also reasoned that even if they kept their pledge not to sell Japanese, cheaply made pottery and other products from countries such as Czechoslovakia still remained on the shelves to attract bargain-minded consumers. Rhead concluded that innovation in shape and design, not boycotts, held the key to getting the public to purchase American-made china.20

As it turned out, American potters would get a boost, not from boycotts or even from better design, but again from another world war. The mass mobilization of troops required a large amount of supplies for daily living, including dinnerware. Many American potteries produced ware for the U.S. military, especially vitrified china. Shenango China served as a major supplier for the American Navy, securing over $2 million in contracts for Navy mess halls and VA Hospitals by 1942. Homer Laughlin began their war effort by making semi-vitreous ware for Great Britain as part of the lend-lease program. By early 1942 they adapted their kilns from earthenware to vitreous production and started making ware for both the Army and Navy, even receiving a certificate of appreciation from the Assistant Secretary of the Navy. The Onondaga

Pottery served as the Army’s largest supplier, receiving their first contract before American involvement in April 1940. Through the duration of the conflict, Onondaga supplied more than 60 million pieces of china for the Army Quartermaster, Army Medical Corps, and Naval and Marine Corps bases.\(^{21}\)

Perhaps more significant than tableware to the war effort were the non-metallic ceramic landmines used by Allied forces. In March 1942 the Army Ordinance Department approached the Onondaga Pottery requesting their help in developing a non-metallic fuse and mine body that could function anywhere and not be picked up by enemy detectors. Richard Pass (son of the famous James Pass) accepted the challenge and began experimentation in the company’s research lab. By November the fuses tested successfully and production commenced in earnest a few months later. Production of the mines and fuses took place at the Court Street plant, mainly carried on by female employees as many of the males left for service. A kind of patriotic fervor swept the production floor and workers filled the government quota of fuses significantly ahead of schedule in October 1944. Besides the fuses and traditional mine body, Pass also developed a smaller portable landmine that could be used as a hand grenade by soldiers. In all, Onondaga produced four million non-metallic fuses and 1.3 million ceramic mine bodies for the government, work that earned them the Army-Navy E Award as well as a special citation from leading military officials.\(^{22}\)


\(^{22}\)Hunter, “Syracuse Manufacturers Mobilize,” and “Onondaga Developed Non-Metallic and Metallic Mines and Chemical Fuses,” periodical and date unknown (c. 1945), Onondaga Historical Association, Syracuse, New York (hereafter referred to as OHA).
Government officials kept the land mine project secret from the American public until the summer of 1944 but made the information for the manufacture of the mine bodies available to other approved producers in order to fill the quota more quickly. Shenango China served as the other major supplier of land mine bodies, but their undertaking of the project would prove a fatal blow to their traditional operations. In the early 1940s, James M. Smith Sr., the head of Shenango since its reorganization, stepped down as president in order to turn operations over to
his son James M. Smith, Jr. In 1944 the Army offered a contract to Shenango for the production of the mine body developed by Onondaga. Smith turned down the offer for Shenango, but in secret he and several close associates formed a subsidiary company called Castle Engineering which in turn accepted the contract. They produced the mine bodies after hours using Shenango’s equipment and assembled the pieces off-site, pocketing the contract money for themselves while going over the heads of Shenango’s shareholders. While the contract proved personally successful for Smith and his Castle Engineering associates, the discovery of the land mine manufacture by the minority stockholders would lead to a series of lawsuits in the years after the war.23

The war greatly increased American pottery production: many plants worked three shifts not only fulfilling government contracts but manufacturing for the domestic market. Like in the first war, the potteries of Britain, France, Germany, and Japan either shut down entirely or curtailed their exports to the United States. A study by the Vitrified China Association found that at the war’s end, pottery production increased tenfold to make up for the lack of an import market. And as before, the prosperity from this market increase allowed for American companies to experiment further with their design. New shapes designed by artists such as Russell Wright and Eva Zeisel tapped into trends of modern design and technical skill allowed for thinner and more durable earthenware and hotel ware.24

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23 “Onondaga Developed;” “Porcelain Used in Land Mines,” New Castle News, September 16, 1944, 8; and Stephanie Vincent, “Flipping the Plate: Changing Perceptions of the Shenango China Company, 1945-1991,” master’s thesis, Kent State University, 2010, 33-37. The discovery of the landmine contract came courtesy of Smith Jr.’s sister Alice Higgins who sued the members of Castle Engineering for the undeclared profits from the project. After two appeals, a judge ruled that Castle Engineering acted against the best interest of Shenango China and its shareholders and ordered restitution. Smith Jr. had since passed away and the suit was settled by selling his estate’s majority share of the company to an outside investor, the first time since 1909 that Shenango China was not in the hands of the Smith family.

Homer Laughlin China, Shenango China, and Onondaga Pottery all enjoyed their own personal successes in the postwar period as well. Don Schreckengost joined Homer Laughlin as Art Director in 1945, replacing the deceased Frederick Rhead. Like his predecessor, Schreckengost valued a truly American style of design and worked to move his shapes and styles as far from the tradition of Europe as possible. Noting the continued success of Fiesta, Schreckengost developed several of his own colored china lines, including Rhythm, Epicure, and Jubilee, a shape designed in commemoration of the company’s 75th anniversary in 1948. Fiesta itself underwent changes in its color scheme, both in reflection of necessity and to adapt to changing fashion and consumer tastes. During the war, the government claimed all available uranium oxide in anticipation for conflict. This compound formed the main component in the red Fiesta glaze, so the red “went to war” until the late 1950s. To keep up with current color trends, the original light green, cobalt blue, and ivory ceased production in favor of forest green, chartreuse, pearl gray, and rose pink. At Shenango, manufacture of dinnerware and hotelware continued to the tune of 10,000 dozen pieces per day in 4,000 shapes and 7,000 decorations. By 1949 the company produced one-third of the entire nation’s hotelware and over half of the fine china between the Castleton and Haviland lines. The company also added a refractory plant in 1946 to produce their own kiln components as well as contracting out production for other potteries. The Onondaga Pottery celebrated its 75th anniversary in 1946. Ten years prior, the plant perfected the shadowtone decoration process which used sprayed color in layers to produce a three-dimensional effect. In 1945 Onondaga introduced their revolutionary Airlite China, the first successful thin china made with a high concentration of alumina that kept vitrified china’s durability but at a fraction of the weight. The name came from the adoption of Airlite as the first china used on commercial passenger airlines.25

25 Jo Cunningham, Homer Laughlin China 1940s & 1950s (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Books, 2000), 12-13, 55;
American potteries enjoyed success not only from the lack of competition but from the booming postwar American economy. Historian Lizabeth Cohen argues the ideal of a citizen consumer first embraced by the New Deal grew into a full-fledged “consumers’ republic” where the defense of capitalism began in the purchases of the home. A coalition of government, business, and labor urged consumption as a type of civic responsibility and a way to restore employment while furthering the standard of living. As hoped, the American postwar economy enjoyed steady growth for the most part and with the exception of a few brief downturns, managed to erase the memories of the Great Depression and the scarcity of war. From 1946 to the early 1970s, the United States enjoyed a doubled family income, exponential growth of production, and low levels of unemployment.26

While the United States emphasized consumption at home as a patriotic duty, the government also looked to secure democracy by promoting capitalism abroad. Especially vulnerable were the defeated nations of Germany and Japan who the U.S. feared could fall to communist sway without proper support. The United States also feared a “dollar gap” between the booming American economy and that of other nations who could not afford to purchase American-made goods. Overcoming the gap rose to a top priority of American foreign policy in fear that the lack of purchasing power would lure these nations to a communist economic structure. To close the gap, the United States pumped large amounts of money into foreign economies. Japan in particular remained critical and following the Occupation Period in 1947, American policy shifted towards rebuilding the Japanese economy on the American model. Over

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the next eight years the U.S. gave $2 billion in aid to Japan while sending advisors and technology to restore industrial production.27

As part of rebuilding Japan’s economic infrastructure, the United States pledged to bolster the economy by ordering large amounts of Japanese-made goods. By 1955 government orders alone topped $4 billion. American businesses welcomed the strengthening of the Japanese economy as large corporations called for freer trade in order to grow their own presence abroad. With the opening of the world market, policymakers encouraged Japan to resume their exportation of goods. Indeed, with improving technology and lax tariff policy, Japanese imports doubled in the period of 1955-1960. At the surface, encouraging Japan to flood the American market with imports seems counterproductive. Economist William Borden explained this paradox as follows, “The United States and other capitalist industrial powers were both competitors and economic allies. Whereas some economic groups within each nation would lose from foreign competition, other groups, usually more powerful, would gain.”28

The pottery industry clearly fell into the realm of groups set to lose from foreign competition and the gains made in the immediate postwar years quickly dissipated in the 1950s, by which time America’s potters entered into a struggle for their very lives. Even during the war, Joseph Wells expressed concern for the return of foreign imports and the USPA stated hope that Japan would never be allowed to recover their manufacturing plants, as “the members of our organization know from their business experiences with the Japs that they never could be trusted


to do business in an honorable manner.” But this hope proved very short lived. In 1943 James Duffy received word that the American government considered a project to teach pottery skills to the interned Japanese in the western United States. While Duffy vigorously protested, another blow came with word that the State Department planned to send AFL delegates to Japan to determine which goods could be exported to the United States with little impact on American employment. Indeed, semi-vitreous pottery fell into the group Japan got permission to export in greater numbers and by 1948 the amount of imported china surpassed American-made goods for the first time since the war.29

The threat of foreign china went beyond just Japan. Germany’s potteries recovered to their pre-war levels following a $7.5 million loan from the United States and Czechoslovakia made their own inroads to the domestic market. But one of the most serious incursions came from within the American sphere of influence itself. In 1947, Earl Crane, a majority stockholder of the Iroquois China Company in Syracuse, opened a pottery plant in Puerto Rico called Crane China. The U.S. government provided Crane with a twelve-year tax abatement and funding to make the new plant modern while Iroquois provided a ready network of dealers to distribute the new ware. Most distressing of all to other potteries, Crane could take advantage of Puerto Rico’s low wages and pay his workers thirty-eight cents per hour for the same job American workers did for nearly four times as much and not have to pay Social Security taxes. As a final blow, the plant’s location in Puerto Rico excused them from tariffs since they operated in an American

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protectorate. In short, Crane could produce china at import prices without the penalties paid by those foreign companies.30

American manufacturers saw Crane China as a threat from the start as they could not keep up with the wages that a Buffalo China executive dubbed “slave labor.” Orders dropped as dealers in need of white undecorated china turned to Crane’s exceptionally low prices. In a pattern reminiscent of the 1930s, management and labor united in an effort either to close Crane or force them to pay American wages to their employees. Throughout 1949 and 1950, Duffy made several appearances in Washington along with representatives of the Vitrified China Association arguing for a higher minimum wage in Puerto Rico. The efforts to raise the minimum wage stalled and meanwhile the Crane situation caused a larger rift among American potters. Because Iroquois belonged to the Vitrified China Association, its ownership of Crane caused friction among members who accused them of damaging the industry as whole. The hard feelings eventually led Iroquois to leave the VCA but the tension remained. Crane complained that despite the low wages, his company continued to struggle and he wanted to sell in the fall of 1950. Sterling China of Wellsville emerged as a buyer and took over operations the following year, renaming the business Caribe China. Because Sterling not only belonged but held leadership positions within the VCA, the trade association dropped the push for a higher minimum wage in Puerto Rico and the remaining members settled into an uneasy acceptance of the plant.31

Why Was Foreign China a Problem?

As the situation of imported dinnerware grew worse, American manufacturers made their concerns more public. Imports presented a problem for several reasons, but worst by far was the wages sometimes as low as one tenth of those in the United States. Both the USPA and Brotherhood complained of Japan’s cheap labor costs as far back as the 1930s but after World War II they connected this issue to the costs of their own production. Joseph Wells noted that of every dollar made by Homer Laughlin, sixty-five cents went directly to the wages of factory laborers, office workers, and foremen. Another half of one cent went to executive salaries, and two and one half cents to stockholders. The remaining thirty-three cents paid for insurance on workers and the plant, equipment maintenance, social security and health benefits, taxes, and the purchase of raw materials. While sales at Laughlin remained steady, the plant in reality veered close to losing money each year from the high cost of labor. Other potteries experienced similar conditions. Pottery, even in an age of mechanization, retained much of the handicraft tradition in its manufacture and certain parts of the manufacturing process simply could not be easily replicated by machine.32

With direct public appeals like the Made in America Club falling largely short of helping American potters battle imports, they took their case to Washington when the House Committee on Education and Labor set up a special set of hearings on the effect that imports had on domestic employment. At the first hearing in 1950, representatives of the Vitrified China Association, USPA, and the Brotherhood all testified on the detrimental effects of Japanese

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32 Joseph M. Wells, Sr. to James M. Duffy, January 11, 1944, KSU Special Collections and House Committee on Education and Labor, *The Effects of Imports on Employment*, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., May 2, 6, 15, 16 and June 1, 2, 12, 26, 27, 1950, 397.
pottery. All pointed out that Japan’s labor force benefitted from American dollars and machinery, yet continued to underpay workers and employ women and children to drive wages even lower. With imports again taking up thirty-five percent of the American dinnerware market and Japan not even back up to full strength yet, the results would continue to cripple potteries in the States. Sales of USPA members fell $13.5 million since 1948 as import sales rose 24%. At Homer Laughlin, Joseph Wells pointed out that sales dropped by one-fourth in the first three months of 1950 alone, necessitating a dramatic increase in unemployment and cuts in hours for those still on the job. He continued to note that for many small communities such as the
Newell/East Liverpool district, the local pottery accounted for a large percentage of employment and income. Many workers in pottery held the same position their entire lives and felt too old to start over if faced with layoffs due to imports. Even worse, America’s potteries could not try to sell their own product abroad as the higher cost from American labor combined with predatory tariffs in other nations made the ware too expensive to appeal to foreign markets. While a free market helped large multinational corporations, small industries like pottery suffered. Both Wells and Duffy pleaded with the committee to consider a quota on imported dinnerware to make up for the inadequate tariff, pointing out that even though the State Department generally considered quotas a restriction of trade, they did make exceptions in the past for other industries such as sugar and cotton. A quota of even 25% could provide thousands of jobs for American pottery workers.33

The House Committee did not consider the passage of a dinnerware quota and for America’s potters the situation continued to deteriorate. By 1951 the USPA proclaimed “a depression in the midst of a booming economy” as many plants operated at half-capacity or less. Wells noted that in 1951 sales at Homer Laughlin dropped by another $3 million with four hundred laid off. Imports from Japan jumped from 2 million dozen in 1947 to 4 million in 1948, 8.5 million in 1954, and more than 16 million dozen by 1961. In 1958, Homer Laughlin lost money for the first time in its 85-year existence and could not pay dividends for the first time since 1905. Employment at the Newell plants dropped from a peak of 4,200 in 1948 to 1,450 in 1960 with many of those working less than 31 hours per week, conditions that mimicked many other large plants such as Onondaga and Shenango. And those were the lucky ones: since 1953,

fifteen major plants closed their doors forever, devastating local communities with hundreds of jobs lost in plants that had operated since the previous century.\textsuperscript{34}

The low wages of Japanese pottery workers in comparison to American remained the most significant threat posed by their industry but not the only one. Japanese china often reflected its cheapness in its poor quality, yet stores continued to sell it for the high profit margin. As far back as 1936 Frederick Rhead observed that much of the dinnerware coming from Japan “would not be accepted by any American dealer if it was shipped from any American factory.”\textsuperscript{35} Even after the infusion of U.S. dollars and equipment following World War II, Japanese ware varied greatly in quality, with some pieces nearly indistinguishable from the American product but others exhibiting poor craftsmanship and prone to breakage and crazing. This unevenness spoke badly not just of the imported ware itself but brought down the industry as a whole. Consumers often did not realize where the china they purchased came from and inferior product from foreign nations cheapened all ware domestic and imported, opening the market for non-ceramic and disposable ware.

Japanese china not only suffered from lower quality manufacture but it injured American producers by often blatantly copying designs, shapes, and patterns. This practice, too, went back to the earliest arrival of Japan on the market. Even a display of Japanese china at the 1893 World’s Fair meant to alert domestic dealers to its ability used designs copied directly from American plants to drive up interest. Over the years, companies such as Homer Laughlin (for

\textsuperscript{34} Roy Kohler, “Dinnerware Grief: Pottery Makers Suffer From Inroads of Plastic and Imports from Japan,” \textit{Wall Street Journal}, October 1, 1951, 1, 6; “Imports of Foreign Made Dinnerware Threatens Jobs of American Potters,” \textit{Potters Herald}, June 10, 1954, 1, 3; and House Committee on Education and Labor, \textit{The Effects of Imports and Exports on American Employment}, 87\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 1\textsuperscript{st} sess., July 12, 1961, 126-134. This second House hearing also produced no visible results, an outcome frustratingly familiar to pottery leaders who testified in Washington. See chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{35} Frederick H. Rhead, “Imported Japanese Ware Poor Imitations of China Produced in American Factories,” \textit{East Liverpool Review}, June 5, 1936, 9. Rhead continued this demonstration at the 1940 meeting of the USPA, showing several photographs of American products next to their Japanese knock-offs. Many of the products were visibly cheaper in appearance when directly compared.
Figure 13: Comparison of American and European china with their Japanese knockoffs. From the 62nd Annual United States Potters Association Meeting, 1940. Courtesy of the Ohio Historic Connection.
their “Coronet” shape), Edwin M. Knowles, and Salem China battled against copies of their products, even reaching out to the Japanese government for assistance. For their part, Japan happily complied and halted production on designs found to be copies, noting that the uniqueness of design played a vital role in the industry. In 1958 the Japan Pottery Design Center organized among the major manufacturers and exporters in that nation with a goal of keeping a record of all designs trademarked in the United States and thus prohibited from copying. Within two years, the file grew to encompass 12,000 designs with even more submitted by the American Fine China Guild waiting for approval. The center also mediated disputes over copies, settling fifty-one cases in the previous two years.36

Despite the work of the Design Center, issues regarding design plagiarism continued. In October 1959, an Onondaga Pottery executive discovered that the grocery chain Giant Foods began offering a premium china set with pieces that directly copied the Onondaga patterns “Blue Mist” and “Bridal Rose” and sold under the similar name “Colleen Rose.” Further inspection found the china came from the Stanley Roberts Company who imported it from a Japanese manufacturer. Onondaga filed a lawsuit against Roberts and Giant Foods for copyright infringement that December. A judge eventually awarded Onondaga $8,000 in damages from Stanley Roberts (though allowing the importer to sell off the remaining sets) as well as $1,000 in damages from Giant Foods. But before that case even closed, even more Onondaga copies surfaced, this time in the patterns “Meadow Breeze” and “Celeste” sold at the Continental Trading Company in Norfolk, West Virginia in September 1960. New Onondaga president

William Salisbury (son of Bert and cousin to the Passes) fired off an angry letter to J. T. Midzuno at the Japanese Pottery Design Center and wondered if the center even bothered living up to its purpose since copies continued to run rampant in the States despite patents and copyrights. Midzuno responded with an apology that the latest cases resulted from a misunderstanding and consisted of a one-time shipment with no further inventory in existence. He also acknowledged the widespread copying problem and assured Salisbury that the center issued a stern warning to the local factories not to copy American patterns. Nevertheless, one more instance of plagiarism occurred just months later when Salisbury opened a newspaper and found an advertisement for a copy of his “Woodbine” pattern for sale. He advised his salesmen to reassure Onondaga’s dealers that the copy would be dealt with and asked them to keep an eye out for a physical set of dinnerware that could be used to file another lawsuit, even offering a $10 reward for the first salesmen to bring a plate in.37

**Competition in Other Forms: Plastics, Non-Ceramic, and Disposable Dinnerware**

Imported Japanese china hurt American producers by operating at pay rates that could not be matched, by creating inferior product, and by copying the patterns and designs of American manufacturers. But they were not the only threat to the industry at this time. In the years following World War II, competition from non-ceramic sources also looked to carve an inroad into the dinnerware industry by introducing their own products and taking advantage of a turbulent market.

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Plastic molded tableware first appeared in the United States in the form of picnic sets in the 1930s. The popularity of these sets lay in their light weight, convenient form to take outdoors, but their tendency to stain and scratch made them unsuitable for in-home dining. A major breakthrough in plastics came in 1935 when German engineers perfected a melamine formaldehyde compound. Melamine, a carbon, nitrogen, and hydrogen compound blended with urea and oxygen, reacted in the presence of formaldehyde to create a resin which when mixed with paper and ground into pellets could be molded into a variety of shapes and colors. Following the war, the DuPont and American Cynamid companies got exclusive rights to supply melamine pellets in the United States. American Cynamid (a division of Monsanto) trademarked their pellets as Melmac and undertook their own national advertising campaign for the manufacturers they supplied. This allowed small producers to benefit from a national, highly financed ad campaign and by 1950 as many as fifty different companies manufactured plastic.
tableware in a variety of shapes and colors and gaining endorsement from designers as prominent as Russell Wright.38

The combination of improved process and national advertising made plastic tableware a discernible threat to American potters. In 1951 the USPA noted that 30 million dozens of plastic tableware entered the market the year prior, enough that “the plastics industry has appeared, in the post-war era, as the vitrified china industry’s most formidable competitor.” The threat of plastics became especially painful to hotelware manufacturers. Hotelware companies such as Onondaga and Shenango largely escaped the damages caused by foreign imports as a longstanding agreement between the United States and Japan forbade the exportation of hotelware into the country. But plastics targeted these producers right in one of their most vulnerable niches, government orders. Since World War I, potters could rely on the American government to order large quantities of vitrified china but in 1951, the Army instead ordered $1.25 million worth of dinnerware from a plastics manufacturer. With the Korean War in full swing, a loss of government contracts crippled producers. Shenango alone saw employment drop from 2,500 to 1,900 over the course of six months in 1951.39


39 United States Potters Association, 73rd Proceedings of the Annual Convention, New York, December 11-12, 1951 (East Liverpool, OH: J.H. Simms Book and Job Printer, 1951), OHC, 26 and Kohler, “Dinnerware Grief,” 1,6. The companies supplied by American Cynamid were not the only ones producing plastics. Once the exclusive rights to supply melamine expired others began production including potteries. Royal China leased a plant to produce plastic ware in 1957 and Lenox China introduced their plastic Lenoxware in 1958 which they produced in the U.S. until 1973 and continue to manufacture in Mexico and Central America today.
To combat the incursion of plastics, the pottery industry again turned towards its trade associations. During the 1955 annual January China and Glass Show in Pittsburgh representatives from Flintridge, Gladding McBean, Haviland, Lenox, Onondaga, Shenango, and Pickard met to discuss forming a “Fine China Guild.” They limited membership to American vitrified producers and encouraged open communication (including sales figures) between members. The Guild set two meetings per year, at the January Pittsburgh show and the August Home Goods Fair in Chicago and appointed a representative to lobby on their behalf in Washington. The Guild elected John Tassie of Lenox China as its first president and further clarified the purpose of the group as educating the American public about fine china while “promoting business ethics among members.”

The Fine China Guild would serve as a voice for American dinnerware, defending their goods against foreign competition as well as being the main voice to fight the incursion of plastic dinnerware entering the market after World War II. In 1951 the Guild issued a report on plastics, highlighting their questionable sanitary properties. While plastic had a reputation for scratching, the Guild claimed this inhibited their ability to be cleaned properly. They also argued that melamine’s chemical structure naturally repelled water, prohibiting proper sanitation and allowing for bacteria to grow in the surface scratches. Furthermore, the chemicals in plastic ware (especially formaldehyde which the Guild pointed out made up the main component in embalming fluid) supposedly could leech into hot water and cause illness for customers. Besides issuing concerns about plastics as a health risk, the Guild went after melamine producers directly when they tried to claim any similarities between their product and china. Guild lawyer Lynne A.

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40 George B. Zahniser to John M. Tassie, January 11, 1955, Lenox, Incorporated Records, Rutgers University Special Collections and University Archives, New Brunswick, New Jersey (hereafter referred to as RU Special Collections) and “Elected Head of New Guild,” Retailing Daily, May 2, 1955, page unknown, RU Special Collections.
Warren kept busy sending cease and desist letters to a number of manufacturers, mainly chastising their use of “unbreakable” and “china-like” in product advertising.\textsuperscript{41}

However, the damage plastics inflicted proved to be less than potters feared. Despite a far-reaching advertising campaign, American Cynamid noted that by 1955 the public still had not embraced plastics for everyday use and launched a series of motivational studies to see why, concluding that “if dinnerware were entirely a function of eating, namely, as receptacle for food, then plastic dinnerware should be the best selling, functional dinnerware on the market. Sociological and psychological findings, however, reveal that dinnerware serves a much deeper and more basic function than merely something from which to eat.” The study showed Americans enjoyed the tradition of eating on china and saw plastic as too artificial in its color, texture, and weight. And despite the improvements melamine made over older plastics, staining and scratches continued to plague newer plastic ware. Finally, the overwhelming number of companies producing melamine products drove the price down to the point that eventually none turned a profit. By the 1960s, consumers dismissed plastic dinnerware as a fad and it largely faded from prominence.\textsuperscript{42}

While plastic dinnerware proved short-lived, other non-ceramic competition held more staying power and proved a longer-term threat. In 1947 the Corning company adapted the glass dishes they developed during the war for commercial use as serving ware. A few years later they further adapted their product into Corningware, glass tableware that could be used for everyday

\textsuperscript{41} Jeffrey L. Meikle, \textit{American Plastic: A Cultural History} (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 171. The plastics industry hotly contested the Guild’s findings, even mocking their concerns by joking that the Guild felt customers would poison themselves with melamine but would at least be already embalmed for their own funerals. For fighting the claims of melamine producers, see S. J. Shaffer to Lynne A. Warren, May 2, 1958; Richard J. Dorger to Lynne A. Warren, May 21, 1958; Lynne A. Warren to The Akron Store Legal Department, May 28, 1958; and Lynne A. Warren to Pro-phy-lac-tic Brush Company, August 18, 1958, all in the RU Special Collections.

dining. They followed this with the introduction of Pyroceram in 1962 (specifically designed to mimic china in look and feel) and Corelle in 1970 (which consisted of three layers of laminated glass to improve durability). At the same time, the Pyrex company also introduced a glass tableware which they boasted as ovenproof, craze-free, and chip and scratch-proof. Potters looked with suspicion on glass tableware, especially once they, like plastics, secured a lucrative government contract. After the Army chose plastic tableware during the Korean War, members of both the trade associations and the Brotherhood petitioned Congress and other government officials to reconsider their decision. But while potters thought that the announcement to abandon plastics would bring back their business, they instead received the blow that the government chose tempered glass tableware instead of china.43

Individual potteries tried to fight back against the growing popularity of non-ceramic products by testing them side-by-side with vitrified dinnerware. Onondaga’s research lab conducted chipping, impact, and drop tests on one dozen Corning plates. While the Corning product improved over time, it still had significant rates of scratching and breakage. Most disturbing, Onondaga’s tests as well as ones conducted at Shenango found that the Corning products broke violently due to their glass composition. One Shenango executive even described the plate as “literally exploding at the point of failure.” But even the results from individual plants could not stem glassware’s popularity and the industry again banded together, hoping strength in numbers would convince the public that china remained the better product.44

43 Venable, China and Glass, 179-80; USPA, 75th Proceedings, 28; E. K. Koos to Senator Stephen Young, May 6, 1963, KSU Special Collections; Paul H. Riley to Senator Stephen Young, August 6, 1963, KSU Special Collections; Stephen Young to E. K. Koos, August 6, 1963, KSU Special Collections; and Frank J. Lausche to E. L. Wheatley, August 28, 1963, KSU Special Collections.

Despite their prominent role in protesting against foreign imports, the Vitrified China Association dissolved around 1954 in the wake of the Crane/Caribe China controversy. In June 1957, the manufacturers of restaurant and hotel china regrouped to form a new association, the American Restaurant China Manufacturers Association. ARCMA included ten vitrified producers (among them Onondaga and Shenango) with Buffalo China’s Robert Gould as president. Their purpose, according to their incorporation certificate, was to “educate the public with the advantages and superiority of American-manufactured restaurant china; to promote high standards of business and to encourage research in the manufacture and use of restaurant china.” In fulfilling the educational goal, ARCMA took on an aggressive marketing campaign compared with the other trade associations in the industry. They launched a series of advertisements in the leading restaurant trade publications promoting American china as more modern in its design.

Figure 15: Advertisement from the American Restaurant China Manufacturers Association. American Restaurant Hospitality, March 1963, page 29.
and manufacture, less prone to breakage and chipping, and more resistant to scratches and stains. These ads, often appearing close to those from plastics and disposables manufacturers, sought to remind restaurant and institutional owners that china “makes [their] good food look and taste better and invites guests to return.”

The ARCMA also served as a plaintiff representing the member companies in a suit against Corning Glass Works in 1961. The association alleged that Corning’s advertisements for their Pyroceram, which appeared in all of the leading restaurant and hospitality trade magazines and often right alongside china advertisements and used misleading claims to question the sanitary quality of china. Pyroceram advertising claimed that china could scratch over time and harbor bacteria (ironically the same claim that the Fine China Guild levied against plastics). ARCMA sued Corning for $1 million in damages from false advertising, arguing Corning knew that they used incorrect information to come to the conclusions in their advertising and “willingly, maliciously, falsely, and fraudulently” published them anyways to prove their own product’s supremacy. However, an Erie County (NY) judge threw out the lawsuit on the grounds that a trade association could not sue for the personal damages of its members.

The final player in the non-ceramic market, disposable paper products, also emerged in large quantities in the years following World War II. By 1950, an estimated 360 million paper products ranging from plates to cups to single-serving condiment and side dish bowls. In time they accounted for as much as one-quarter to one-third of the institutional market with sales topping $100 million. Restaurants adopted disposables in varying amounts: while some embraced an entirely disposable service as it cut down on sanitation and replacement costs,

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46 ARCMA vs. Corning, 633-636.
others only selectively used paper products (for example, for keeping messy side dishes such as coleslaw or sauces separate from the entrée). More alarming from the USPA’s point of view, disposables continued gaining in popularity from a younger generation of consumers who enjoyed the quickness and convenience of food served in disposable ware.47

Pottery manufacturers were not the only ones concerned about disposable products. In 1968 a group of manufacturers, distributors, and others in the dining and related industries formed the Permanent Ware Institute to “promote the use of permanent ware in food and allied industries.” As part of their lobbying, the institute ran a series of surveys to gauge public interest in disposables and to determine their true cost of use. They found in 1970 only 53% of those polled preferred disposable ware, a number that dropped to 23% in a 1974 follow-up. The institute also found that disposables cost more than china (33.92 cents versus 12.08 cents per meal) even with the cost of sanitation and that a majority of restaurant owners found china easier to store and more visually appealing to customers. Finally, the institute concluded that when properly stored and cared for, a piece of china could withstand 6,900 uses, rendering the final cost of a $4.25 dinner plate to be $0.00062 over its lifespan, something disposables could never achieve. China companies remained mindful of disposable ware but customer preference rendered paper products largely to the domain of the growing fast food industry whose need for quickness, convenience, and single usage suited disposables quite well.48


48 “Heads Institute,” Syracuse Post-Standard, January 4, 1975, 23; Robert Carpenter, “New Study Reveals—Disposables Cost is 3 Times Permanent Ware,” Table Top-ics, Shenango China company newsletter, February 1970, LCHS, 1; “Permanent Ware: Clearly a Winner,” Restaurant Hospitality, November 1974, 80; “Why is this Plate Being Honored?” Restaurants and Institutions, February 15, 1981, 22; and “On the Other Hand, Disposables,” Restaurant Hospitality, November 1976, 120-23. Even with the disposable market turning toward fast food, companies still remained on alert. At Shenango China, General Manager Bob Carpenter warned salesmen that they needed to keep up with all studies from the Permanent Ware Institute and be ready to recite figures to clients to
The Pottery Industry Responds to Imports in the 1960s

While a number of non-ceramic competitors emerged after the war, foreign china still posed by far the largest threat to American pottery manufacturers. And the ways in which the industry responded hinted at the forming of a rift between companies that would prove to damage their chances of successfully battling imports.

At first, American producers hoped to carry on the tradition of the past and curb imports by demonstrating the superiority of their own manufacturers compared to foreign companies. The USPA took out ad space in the *Pittsburgh Sun-Times* and ran a three-page special feature tracing the history of the pottery industry and the danger it faced from foreign product. The association hoped that the more than three million readers who potentially saw the feature would consider the plight of American companies and workers when making china purchases. In 1946 the Vitrified China Association issued a pamphlet on “American Vitrified China,” explaining the history of fine china, its manufacture, and the uniquely American character of hotel china. It also listed tips for caring for vitrified china as well as a list of the current member and their trademarks. It noted that as of 1946, seventeen companies manufactured vitrified china in the United States, employing 8,260 men and women but cautioned that these workers earned far more than china workers in other nations of the world. The American Restaurant China Manufacturers Association changed its name in 1964 to the American Restaurant China Council and continued with its own aggressive education campaign, issuing a new pamphlet, “10 Points of Superiority in China,” to hotel and restaurant owners reminding them that china was not only

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keep them on china. See Carpenter, “Permanent Ware vs. Disposables: The Market is One and the Same,” *Table Top-ics*, Shenango China company newsletter, April 1970, LCHS, 2.
an industry but a craft practiced by thousands and American workers and that with proper care
the cost benefits of American-made china far outweigh any other options.49

American manufacturers also proved the superiority of their product by engaging in
direct comparison tests with foreign china. These tests occurred both at the individual plants and
in large-scale testing sponsored by the USPA through its fellowship in ceramics at the Ohio State
University. Dinnerware selected for testing went through all of the normal trials of use to prove it
could withstand the rough handling typical of restaurants or cafeterias. Besides daily wear and
tear, they tested for impact resistance, done by dropping steel balls on a plate’s surface and for
chip resistance tested by repeated drops on a plate’s edge. At the most extreme, laboratory trials
scratched glazes with diamond cutters, sandblasted surfaces to check for crazing, and put plates
through the equivalent of five years of continuous washing at a high temperature and pressure.
At the individual plants, Shenango China often ran head-to-head tests with their product and
foreign china obtained by their salesmen from Germany, Brazil, Puerto Rico, and Japan. The
testing often showed the varied quality in these imports. For example, German Rosenthal China
compared quite favorably with the Shenango product, while Noritake from Japan tested four
times worse in chip resistance and three times worse in impact tests. Puerto Rico’s Caribe China
fared worst of all as most pieces did not even pass the specifications for testing, with bubbles in
the glaze, crooked and uneven surfaces, and plates that chipped even before the heavy testing
began. For Caribe, the engineers concluded that “Shenango throws better ware in the dump.”50

49 “Giant Potters’ Ad Promotes Use of Domestic Ware,” Ceramic Industry, May 1938, 23-24; Helen F.
Graley, American Vitrified China (Syracuse, NY: Vitrified China Association, Inc., 1946),
<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo.31924014574572;view=1up;seq=1> accessed April 25, 2014, 9; United
States Potters Association, 72nd Proceedings of the Annual Convention, New York, December 12-13, 1950 (East
Liverpool, OH: J.H. Simms Book and Job Printer, 1950) OHC, 76; and “Restaurant China Council Issues Pamphlet
on Ware,” East Liverpool Review, February 26, 1964, 15.
50 “They Give China an Awfully Tough Time!” American Restaurant, November 1947, 102-04; Shenango
China Company, “Comparison Tests,” 1967, 1969, 1971, LCHS; Robert Carpenter to Tom Mizutani, April 23,
1974, LCHS; and W. Leischman to D. E. Jackson, “Caribe China Versus Shenango,” June 15, 1972, LCHS.
While plant tests often remained confidential within the company, they made other comparisons public in the best interest of consumer health and safety. Over the Christmas 1968 holiday, several people in Cincinnati and parts of Kentucky fell ill. When lead poisoning emerged as the reason, the USPA sponsored a study and found those affected that purchased Christmas plates from Japan found to have dangerously high amounts of lead in the glaze. While the press instructed consumers to return the plates, the USPA went a step further and undertook a campaign to reduce lead from American-made china glazes. In 1971 the USPA created a new lead-free seal for those products that met safety standards, putting it both on cartons carrying approved ware and applying a backstamp to the items made by approved producers. Eventually, American potters eliminated lead altogether from their products, assuring the greatest measure of safety for their consumers.\footnote{\textit{Imported Ware from Japan found to be Dangerous}, \textit{Potters Herald}, January 9, 1969, 1 and \textit{Potters Seal Offers Protection}, \textit{Piqua (OH) Daily Call}, November 4, 1971, 5.}

As a final public movement, the International Brotherhood of Operative Potters (having undergone a name change in 1951), sponsored one more major boycott in 1966. That September, the president of Salem China Harrison Keller alerted IBOP President Edwin L. Wheatley that the Sohio chain of gas stations began a promotion selling a four-piece place setting of Japanese-manufactured china for only 99 cents, a price that could not be matched by semi-vitreous producers let alone American china factories. Keller suggested IBOP organize a boycott of the china promotion, even going as far as donating windshield stickers for the cause. Wheatley decided to go even further and called on IBOP members to boycott Sohio gas stations altogether and to bombard their corporate offices with letters of protest. The boycott grew when members discovered that at the same time Kroger stores ran a promotion furnishing Japanese china with the purchase of fuel in one of their gas stations (owned like Sohio by Standard Oil). The agitation
of IBOP members did get some stores and gas stations to halt their china sales while others ran
the promotion until its end.52

When the industry as a whole got a largely tepid response from the public outside of their
districts, the individual firms formed their own answer to foreign competition. These strategies,
particularly the actions taken by Shenango China, would fracture the solidarity of American
manufacturers and prevent them from a truly effective response. As mentioned earlier, the
hotelware industry avoided the brunt of damage from imports due to a gentlemen’s agreement
between the Japanese Pottery Exporters Association and a number of American manufacturers
which stated Japan would prohibit the export of hotel china if American firms toned down their
criticism of exports of semi-vitreous and vitreous china for the home.53

This agreement worked for a number of years but interestingly, an American firm, not a
Japanese one, looked to break the contract and import Japanese-made hotelware into the United
States. At the August 1960 meeting of the American Restaurant China Manufacturers
Association, President George Zahniser of Shenango China proposed a plan for American firms
to contract with Japanese companies to import hotelware into the States. Zahniser expressed
concern that domestic manufacturers could never keep up with the low wages of Japan. To him,
the only way to beat Japan was to join them at their own game and import ware to sell in the
States. Needless to say, many other manufacturers strongly opposed Zahniser’s plan. Weeks
later, Foster T. Rhodes, Vice President at Onondaga and the company’s ARCMA representative,
fired off a harsh letter to Zahniser, pointing out that by not paying IBOP wages, Shenango

52 Harrison Keller to E. L. Wheatley, September 23, 1966, KSU Special Collections; E. L. Wheatley to
Harrison Keller, September 27, 1966, KSU Special Collections; “IBOP Learns Kroger Also Engaged in Sales of
Imported Dinnerware,” Potters Herald, October 6, 1966, 1-2; and “Brotherhood Protest to Imported Ware Gimmick
He was initially replaced by Frank Hull but poor health led him to resign shortly after, leading to Edwin Wheatley
assuming the office.

53 Venable, China and Glass, 254 and William Pomeroy to the Employees of Sterling China, November 16,
1960, KSU Special Collections.
actually held the advantage in the hotelware industry and could not possibly be doing as poorly as he claimed. Furthermore, Rhodes warned that giving Japan a foot in the door of the hotel market would devastate the industry (for his part, he promised Onondaga would continue to compete fairly no matter the circumstances). Nevertheless, Zahniser continued with his plan and signed an agreement with Nippon Kohitsu Toki for the manufacture of hotel china to be sold in the U.S. The planned 25,000 dozen would be marketed under the Shenango name through their authorized salesmen. Like Onondaga, Buffalo China head Robert Gould tried to dissuade Zahniser from the contract, assuring that he overestimated his own company’s struggles and in fact carried on better business than most other plants. He closed by condemning importation as “a terrible idea which is liable to wreck everything and everybody, yourself included.”

While Onondaga and Buffalo headed up the opposition through ARCMA, the controversy deepened in October when Iroquois China not only shared Zahniser’s idea but already entered negotiations with a Japanese firm, Narumi Seito. While Rhodes previously accused them of worsening a dire situation, Iroquois president S. F. Cohen instead defended the plan as “an up-to-date merchandising idea.” He blamed ARCMA members of spending too much time whining and not enough time building up their own product. Rather than the dire situation Rhodes warned, Cohen instead argued he and Shenango’s approach would secure the future of their firms. But ARCMA continued their protest by going straight to the Exporter’s Association. Sterling China President William Pomeroy wrote to association head Shizuo Dohke in protest of the claim in *Home Furnishings Daily* that they had received no protest to opening the market for Japanese china. Pomeroy assured Dohke that many pottery firms remained opposed to any

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54 Foster T. Rhodes to George B. Zahniser, September 29, 1960, OHA; “Hear Shenango, Jackson Seek Hotelware,” *Home Furnishings Daily*, October 24, 1960, 25; and Robert E. Gould to George B. Zahniser, November 11, 1960, OHA. Adding to the frustration of Onondaga and others, Jackson China also was considering an import plan as well. The ARCMA feared that if half the members agreed to imports, the other half would be forced to accept them as well.
importation and promised to involve the Department of Commerce and State Department to prohibit the importation. Finally, ARCMA threatened a boycott of all Japanese imports if hotel china entered the United States.55

In response to the pressure, the two contracted firms decided to abandon Iroquois and Shenango’s agreements in January 1961. Dohke of the Exporters Association had travelled to the States the previous November to gauge interest in exports and found the ARCMA hopelessly split with Shenango and Jackson China in favor and Rhodes of Onondaga leading a strong current of opposition (Iroquois China, the other concerned party in importing restaurant ware, never belonged to ARCMA, choosing to distance themselves from trade associations following the Caribe China controversy). With the association split, Dohke agreed reluctantly to uphold the ban for the time being. For Rhodes and Ray Cobourn at Onondaga, the disunity in the ranks of American producers signaled trouble. To them, hotel manufacturers dodged a bullet with the decision to continue the ban but Cobourn worried that Shenango’s continued insistence on a quota of imports would lead Japan to feel the ban was no longer necessary. Onondaga’s official position remained that even a small allowance of imports would displace an equal amount of American-made product and that a quota would soon spiral out of control until the situation for hotelware equaled that of semi-vitreous in gravity.56

Meanwhile at Shenango, W.P.C. Adams took over the Castleton division in January 1961. Castleton’s dropping sales signaled a need for revitalization and in addition to retiring patterns and shapes to streamline production, Adams called for a new low-cost line. Director of

55 “Restaurant Men Oppose Import Ease,” Home Furnishings Daily, October 10, 1960, 29; “OK Expected for Iroquois Deal,” Home Furnishings Daily, October 3, 1960, 20; S. F. Cohen, “Iroquois China Welcomes Competition,” Home Furnishings Daily, October 24, 1960, 25; Pomeroy to Employees of Sterling China; and Kiyoshi Naito, “2 Japan Firms to Abandon U. S. Exports,” Home Furnishings Daily, January 23, 1961, 31. Ironically, Iroquois’s claim that the importation of Japanese ware would put them on more secure footing than other potteries was probably true. When the import plan fell through, the pottery closed permanently a few months later.

56 Naito, “2 Japan Firms,” and R. C. Cobourn to Foster T. Rhodes, January 9, 1961, OHA.
Design William Craig McBurney designed a new shape called Independence Ironstone which took advantage of a renewed interest in American colonial decor with octagonal shapes and bold patterns and a selling price of only $9.95 per place setting. But despite the Americana influence, Independence Ironstone would not be made in the United States. To keep costs down, Adams contracted production to Nippon Toki Kaisha of Nagoya, Japan. While Shenango could not import hotelware, they successfully imported the Castleton line starting in the summer of 1961. Even with Independence Ironstone, Shenango did not give up on getting an additional contract for hotelware. In the fall, Zahniser again brought up the plan to ARCMA, promising that imports would be kept to a quota (which he estimated at 700,000 dozen) which could be split amongst all interested companies. Rhodes again blasted Zahniser in a statement to the group, questioning whether Japan would actually agree to a quota and when (not if) they would demand more. To him, any quota opened the door to unlimited imports which would displace more and more American production. In time, American potters would fight amongst themselves for a shrinking market, eventually destroying one another with only Japan benefitting. Rhodes closed his statement by insisting that all manufacturers needed to stand together and persuade Japan to keep the ban in place.57

On November 14th, the industry rocked with the news that Shenango again secured a contract (this time with Nippon Koski Tsua) to produce 200,000 dozens of china for importation to the United States. Sterling China president E. K. Koos sent IBOP President Edwin Wheatley a panicked letter that afternoon, alerting him that the Exporters Association not only would approve the importation this time but would look to other potteries to take on an additional

300,000 dozens. The news set in place two frantic weeks of industry-wide protest with management and labor again coming together to stop Shenango. Wheatley rapidly fired off letters to the Department of Commerce and other Washington officials in vehement protest and asking Washington to stop the deal or run the risk of destroying the industry. The Brotherhood also put all of their affiliated potteries, ARCMA, and the USPA on notice concerning the remaining 300,000 dozen of the quota. They warned if any other manufacturer agreed to accept foreign goods, IBOP would strike as well as sue.58

Both the union and ARCMA also wrote in protest to Dohke and the Exporters Association. They noted that more than ninety percent of American potters objected to Shenango’s import plan and that dinnerware imports had already cost fifteen potteries and 10,000 jobs in the past ten years. Both groups continued to plea on a practical level as well, noting that hotelware production involved an entirely different process which Americans uniquely excelled in and in which Japan had no experience. In closing, ARCMA suggested that the Exporters Association reconsider in light of the waves of negative publicity they would surely receive by continuing with the plan and contributing to further American job losses. The Brotherhood closed with a stern warning that they faced the wrath of an angry AFL-CIO whose millions of members would vigorously protest up to the highest levels of government.59

58 E. K. Koos to E. L. Wheatley, November 14, 1961, United States Potters Association Records, MSS 855, OHC; E. L. Wheatley to Luther H. Hodges, November 22, 1961, USPA Records, MSS 855, OHC; E. L. Wheatley to Buffalo China, et al., November 21, 1961, USPA Records, MSS 855, OHC; and E. L. Wheatley telegram to Local Union 24, et al., November 21, 1961, USPA Records, MSS 855, OHC. Joseph Wells responded to the telegram three days later, assuring him that Homer Laughlin never considered and never will consider entering into any contract with a foreign manufacturer. He empathized with the struggle against both imports and against non-IBOP plants like Shenango but warned that the union needed to be more accepting of plant modernization so they would not have to resort to foreign contracts to cut costs. See Joseph M. Wells, Jr. to E. L. Wheatley, November 24, 1961, KSU Special Collections.

Despite protest, pleas, and threats, the opponents to opening up the hotelware market could not stop the inevitable. The United States government sought to further their trade relations with Japan as a bulwark against communism in Southeast Asia and when presented with the protests of American potters, largely ignored their concerns. Even when Foster Rhodes travelled to Washington to meet with the Department of Commerce and State Department on behalf of ACRMA, he received little support. The American government wished to keep friendly trade relations with Japan and viewed any barrier as overly restrictive as well as a condition that could send Japan into the arms of communism. Washington ultimately would not prohibit imports with anything other than a tariff (which itself would be drastically cut the following year), leaving hotel china manufacturers to deal with the import problem that destroyed many of their dinnerware counterparts.⁶⁰

As Shenango and Onondaga battled over the fate of hotel china, Homer Laughlin continued to take steps to secure their own future. In the postwar period, the company underwent extensive renovations to its four-plant system, mainly introducing greater automation. Because the bulk of a pottery’s costs always came from the extensive hand-work to manufacture the finished product, Homer Laughlin sought to replace as much manpower as possible with machinery. In 1948 the first in a series of automatic jiggering machines arrived at the plant, followed by machines for spraying and other forming procedures. While the Brotherhood put up a protest at the labor-saving devices, the alternative of HLC ending up like so many of its neighbors eventually settled the issue. In 1960, Homer Laughlin announced the introduction of a

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⁶⁰“Chinaware Curb Try Falls Flat for Producer,” Syracuse Post-Standard, December 20, 1961, 6; “Chinaware Threat,” editorial, Syracuse Post-Standard, December 21, 1961, 4; and “The Issue is Survival,” Steubenville Herald-Star, December 5, 1961, 6. The latter also ran in the East Liverpool Review, Salisbury Times, Hanover Evening Sun, Marion Star, Salem News, Canton Repository, and Portsmouth Times in the week of December 1-5. Interestingly, while Shenango China’s actions set in motion the eventual dropping of the hotelware ban, there is no record if they actually went through with the import plan. Manufacture of the Japanese-produced Independence Ironstone continued until about 1974 when Shenango’s new owner the INTERPACE Corporation began phasing out all of Castleton in favor of their Franciscan China.
new line of “Best China” vitrified hotelware and converted all of Plant #6 to its production. While venturing into the hotel market at just the moment that Japan threatened to ship to the United States may seem counterintuitive, in reality it is a step that helped Laughlin survive when so many others failed.

The Fate of American Potters in the Face of Competition

Homer Laughlin’s branching into the hotel and institutional market corresponded with the worsening situation for home dinnerware manufacturers. Japanese imports continued to rise yearly until they held more than eighty percent of the American market by 1960. Soon, the situation grew worse as other foreign producers joined the Japanese. During the 1967 contract negotiations between the USPA and IBOP, the trade association noted with alarm the entrance of Brazil, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong into the pottery import business. Hong Kong especially alarmed USPA officials because it allowed a portal for the importation of pottery made in Communist China. Everson Hall of the USPA noted that “if Japan’s wages are 46 cents per hour, China’s must be next to nothing.” That same year the trade paper Home Furnishings Daily mused that China’s impact on the pottery market could prove to be worse than Japan’s in time, a concern that would turn out to be true by the end of the century.

With the market for American dinnerware eroding, the trade associations of the industry also began to decline. The United States Potters Association experienced a steady downsizing in the years following World War II. Part of this came as member firms went out of business when

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they could no longer compete with foreign imports. But the slowdown also stemmed from the fact that the USPA could no longer fulfill many of the needs of the surviving potteries in the United States. At its heart, the USPA was an association created by earthenware producers for earthenware producers. And while sanitary and vitrified china plants joined over the years, they began to feel that their needs could be better met in other organizations such as ARCMA (later ARCC). By the end of the 1970s, with only Homer Laughlin and the Hall China Company as remaining members, the organization quietly dissolved.63

Trade associations were not the only thing to fold in the face of the import problem. With Japan alone holding more than three-quarters of all production and countries such as China entering the trade, dinnerware in the United States simply could not survive in large scale. While Lenox China in New Jersey thrived due to its hold on the very high-end of the market, the makers of everyday china rapidly shut their doors from the 1950s onward and those that survived turned their focus away from both semi-vitreous pottery and fine china home ware. For the three principal companies of this study, Syracuse China’s product became the first casualty. James Pass dreamed of a marquee line of fine china and in time it became synonymous with the company identity itself. Yet by the 1960s, Syracuse China the company simply could not justify Syracuse China the product. Fine china had been in decline at the plant for years until by 1969 it accounted for less than 20% of sales and actually lost money. On June 11, 1970 President William Salisbury called together the employees of the Fayette Street facility and announced its closure and the discontinuation of all fine china production. Onwards, Syracuse China dedicated all of its resources to hotelware (increasingly called foodservice china) at the Court Street location. Salisbury initially estimated only about 270 employees, most with less than three years

seniority, would lose their jobs but the numbers eventually passed 300 as the Court Street plant simply could not absorb so many layoffs.  

Homer Laughlin became the next home china line to go. The company dedicated increasing attention to its Best China hotel line throughout the 1960s as dinnerware sales lagged. Fiesta, the hallmark of the company, simply did not hold customers’ attention the way it did in the 1930s and 1940s despite the introduction of new colors more in line with contemporary taste. As a last ditch effort, Laughlin restyled the entire Fiesta line in 1969, dubbing it “Fiesta Ironstone” and introducing the new colors turf (an avocado-like green) and antique gold to go along with the reintroduced original red (now called mango). The colors appealed more to 1960s design and saved the company money as they could all fire at the same temperature rather than the variety of fires needed for original Fiesta. The number of pieces also shrank and serving containers such as casseroles, salt and pepper, and bowls, only appeared in gold. But even the restyling of the line could not spark interest in the now-woefully outdated art deco shapes. In 1973 the company ceased production on all Fiesta and other remaining home lines, choosing to focus solely on their institutional production.

The final line to go was Castleton China, Shenango’s fine china. Years of declining sales as well as the decision to produce Independence Ironstone abroad made Castleton unprofitable by the late 1960s. In 1967 the first major scaling back occurred when the company drastically cut back on the number of available shapes, eliminating nearly all serving pieces and specialty items such as cream soup bowls. Many of the patterns shifted away from open stock as well, though the company promised to provide continued support of their retired patterns by producing three

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64 “Farewell to Fayette,” *Syracuse China News*, company newsletter, fall 1970, 2-3 and “Syracuse China Discontinues Output of its Fine China Line,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 1970, 8. The Fayette Street plant, home to Onondaga for 99 years, would be torn down the following year. After the discontinuation of the fine china line, the institutional ware also became known as “Syracuse China” despite being a foodservice product.

or four on-demand runs per year of pieces and patterns specifically ordered by consumers as replacements. After the INTERPACE Corporation purchased Shenango China in 1968, they lost interest in supporting the Castleton line, instead choosing to focus their efforts on the Franciscan China line they owned made by Gladding-McBean in California. In 1974, INTERPACE announced the cessation of Castleton China for the home and following a set of commemorative presidential china plates in 1976, all fine china operations ceased at Shenango.66

Between 1950 and 1990, Japan’s productivity increased at twice the rate of the United States. Historian David Nye notes that U.S. manufacturers tended to fall behind due to a lack of innovation, either by having no desire to do so or because labor, suppliers, and other factors resist change. Over the years, the cycle of stagnation becomes so difficult to break that companies fall too behind to catch up and often wind up closing or shifting production elsewhere. In the case of Japan, Nye also observes that decades of anti-Japanese sentiment prevented American companies from wanting to adopt the practices of a competitor even if it would help their own cause. By the late 1960s, more than five thousand Japanese potteries vied for a share of the American dinnerware market and imports continued to increase at the rate of ten percent per year.67

The presence of Japanese potters cannot be solely blamed for dooming American dinnerware, the lack of a strong industrial response either to prevent imports or to adapt properly to their presence also played a critical role. While the buy American campaigns in the 1930s stirred up patriotic fervor, they never properly addressed the real reasons as to why imports sold

66 W. J. Rech to W. W. Pfeiffer, November 23, 1966, LCHS and Vincent, 42. Shenango’s contract with Haviland China ended in the late 1940s.
in the first place. Instead of lowering their own production costs, manufacturers and especially labor simply complained of the lower wages. By the 1960s, they lost nearly the entire dinnerware market and instead of learning from the example, hotelware manufacturers went to war with one
another over their responses to imports. While Onondaga, Shenango, and others involved with
ARCMA all felt they held the industry’s best interest at heart, their failure to agree on a strategy
wound up being exploited by exporters. Finally, the hope that the American government would
step in to help the cause of the pottery industry proved unwise as their response largely
mimicked the disinterest showed in the fights over American tariff policy.
CHAPTER 3:

“It is Virtually a Breach of Faith for the United States Government to Throw Such an Industry to the Dogs”: Potters Deal with Tariffs and Trade Adjustment

When Wisconsin junior Senator Joseph McCarthy accused the Army Signal Corps of harboring communists and other subversives, the senate launched a hearing into the matter in April 1954. McCarthy’s popular reputation as a communist hunter combined with the enormity of his accusation drew enough curiosity for the hearing to degenerate into what one news reporter dubbed “the feverish goings-on of a circus.” On April 22, 1954, the first day of the hearings, room 318 of the senate office filled to the brim with hundreds of congressmen, media members, and spectators. But before the hearings could begin, capitol policemen had one matter to tend to: Lyle Jones, a representative from the United States Potters Association, had been passing out ashtrays to all in attendance. The previous year the Tariff Commission rejected a plea from American potters for relief under the “escape clause” to raise the tariff on imports entering the United States. With shipments of foreign china (especially from Japan where low wages still managed to undercut American prices even with the current tariff) on the rise each year and the next round of negotiations for the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act which previously slashed pottery tariff rates just around the corner, America’s potters desperately wished to get word out to the media on their plight. However, the ashtrays, reading “American Chinaware Industry of
50,000 Workers” and “If it’s American, it’s worth protecting,” were confiscated by police for being in violation of a senate rule against advertising.\textsuperscript{1}

While hijacking attention and breaking congressional rules at one of the most anticipated media events of the year may seem foolhardy, American potters justified the bold move through their desperation. Over the years government officials whittled away at the protective duty on pottery (both earthenware and vitrified china as well as hotelware), dropping it from a peak rate of 70% ad valorem plus a 10-cent per dozen additional duty to a current low of less than ten percent for earthenware and less than thirty percent for china and hotelware. As the rates fell over the past eighty years, pottery officials and labor leaders made continuous efforts to stave off the cuts. They joined protectionist lobby groups and sponsored letter writing campaigns to their congressmen and even the president. But their most frequent form of protest saw them journeying to Washington every few years to voice vigorous protest at the laws which allowed the president to negotiate lower and lower tariff rates through multilateral trade agreements. They also chose to go through the official channels to apply for industry-wide relief when available, though these efforts largely failed them on numerous occasions.

The best attempts for potters fell on largely uninterested ears for a very good reason. Congress viewed the tariff in increasingly international terms throughout the twentieth century as calls for free trade between nations gained credence in the aftermath of World War I. Forty years later, the Cold War pitted the American capitalist system against Soviet-style communism. The United States deemed itself the central figure in negotiating trade in a way which benefitted

\textsuperscript{1} Arthur Edson, “Even Top of Phone Booth Becomes a Spot for Photographer in Scramble at McCarthy Probe,” \textit{Kansas City (MO) Star}, April 22, 1954, 12 and United States Potters Association, \textit{76th Proceedings of the Annual Convention}, New York, December 14-15, 1954 (East Liverpool, OH: J.H. Simms Book and Job Printer, 1954), Ohio Historic Connection, Columbus, Ohio (hereafter referred to as OHC), 50, 68. The ashtrays were made at Harker China, then the oldest pottery in operation in the United States and home base of USPA Vice-President Robert E. Boyce. In the coming years, Harker would itself be a casualty of the low tariff, closing for good in 1972.
capitalist nations and reintroduced Germany and Japan to the global community through agreements which sought to lower duties between favored nations until they approached total free trade. Historian Fred Block calls these international monetary agreements “social creations that tend to reflect and maintain the distribution of power among nations.” Indeed, the United States sought to wield power through lower rates which not only aided conquered nations trying to get back on their feet but benefitted the largest American corporations poised to make large sums of money through exporting goods to all the corners of the world. Yet even while trade agreements based on free trade helped big American business, they proved devastating to small industries, especially those who created handicraft goods. Not only potters but textile, glass, shoe, and other craftsmen protested policies they knew would throw their industries at the mercy of cheap imported goods. In the end, the dogma of free trade continues to dictate American economic policy and potters as well as others have to face the reality of selling their product in a market where they are unprotected.

The Years of Protection, 1864-1934

Even before independence, America’s founding fathers disagreed on the economic path the emerging nation should take. Benjamin Franklin articulated a call for free and open trade between all nations even before the American Revolution, a policy that hearkened to the Enlightenment tradition and which clashed with the British mercantile system. Thomas Paine,

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2 Fred L. Block, The Origins of International Economic Disorder: A Study of United States International Monetary Policy from World War II to the Present (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1977), ix, 2-4. Block admits to drawing heavily from the influence of William Appleman Williams, whose Tragedy of American Diplomacy (New York: W. W. Norton, 1959) remains a touchstone of the New Left’s interpretation of economic foreign policy. Williams argues that from the time of Jackson, democracy and capitalism have been inseparable to the American vision of foreign policy. While the United States seeks to help those in other nations become self-sufficient, they only will tolerate the nation in question adhering exactly to the American system. Thus when it comes to trade, policy dictates other nations change their own economic systems to meet the needs of an ever-expanding American economy, even if doing so contradicts the humanitarian impulse.
Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams all publicly endorsed an economic policy free from mercantile restriction and discrimination, though privately they worried about such a policy in the face of a hostile world. The Articles of Confederation made no provisions for a strong government to regulate trade and thus each individual state levied its own tariff against goods imported from overseas and in some cases, even coming from other states. Like many other weaknesses in the Articles, the Constitutional Convention corrected this by allotting congress the full power to control trade and levy tariffs. The desire versus the reality of free trade continued to haunt the fledgling nation, as George Washington, Jefferson, and others wanted trade between nations which was both equal and reciprocal. Thus Washington signed the first national tariff into law on July 4, 1789 for revenue only since the rates of 5-15% offered no protection to American producers.\(^3\)

But soon after this the United States began to move away from a free trade ideal for a few reasons. The first came in December 1791 when Alexander Hamilton gave a report of the state of American manufactures. He argued that the government needed to be involved in fostering the growth of industry through higher tariffs that could protect American-made goods from the lower prices of imports. Despite their championing of an agrarian culture, many Jeffersonians also eventually came to embrace the protectionism idea as well as a way to strengthen the nation. But the major catalyst for abandoning free came through the War of 1812. The conflict with Great Britain occurred in large part due to the British abuse of American commercial rights in the Atlantic along with their continued discrimination against U.S. trade. To pay for the cost of the conflict as well as to reduce dependence on British-made goods, Henry Clay persuaded Congress to pass the first protective tariff in 1816, raising rates on goods such as cotton and iron

to levels twice their previous amount. For the next one hundred years, tariffs remained a key
source of revenue for the American government and the extent of protection would define both
congressional and presidential battles.4

For the pottery industry, their tariff made a significant impact on their level of early
success. The first duties on ceramic articles including red and yellow ware, stoneware, and
porcelain hovered at around 20% ad valorem (based on value), as merely for revenue, there
being no real American industry to safeguard. The first protective pottery tariff originated as part
of the Morrill Tariff during the Civil War. This increased duties to 40% for earthenware and 45-
50% for china depending on whether it had decoration. Pottery centers such as the predominantly
Republican East Liverpool celebrated the increased protection as necessary for their infant
industry.5

The tariff formed the central concern of the industry when it came time for pottery
manufacturers to create their first trade association. The United States Potters Association saw
the tariff as one of the main reasons for competitors to join in a common cause and early USPA
meetings based their timing and location on the current tariff situation while keeping close
friendships with a number of influential congressmen, even inviting them to the annual banquets
as honored guests. The executive committee felt that protective rates kept American
manufacturers afloat by loosening the grip England and France held on the market and advocated
for continued high rates (which had been cut in 1872 to 30% and 35-40% for earthenware and

4 Eckes, 16-18; Clyde Prestowitz and Kate Heidinger, “The Evolution of U.S. Trade Policy,” in
American Manufacturing, 2009), 72-73; and J. Bradford De Long, “Trade Policy and America’s Standard of Living:
A Historical Perspective,” in Imports, Exports, and the American Worker, edited by Susan M. Collins (Washington:
5 Harry Bernarr Crewson, Jr., “The Pottery Dinnerware Industry of the United States and the Tariff—1860-
and Work in East Liverpool, Ohio (East Liverpool, OH: The East Liverpool Historical Society, 1982), 78; and
Charles L. Venable, et al., China and Glass in America: From Tabletop to TV Tray (New York: Harry N. Abrams,
Inc., 2000), 199.
china, respectively). In 1878, with debates over cuts looming, USPA President Thomas Smith suggested that the organization needed to go beyond keeping tabs on the tariff and instead take direct action. Later that year, the USPA made its first of many appearances before the House Ways and Means Committee. Homer Laughlin and T. R. Hill gave testimony protesting the Wood Tariff, a proposed Democratic bill which would further cut existing rates. To their relief, the Wood bill suffered defeat in the House, but the concept of testifying before Congress would continue for more than a century.  

In 1882 USPA President J. Hart Brewer returned to Washington in response to a petition from the importing firm Pierce & Robertson who asked for the earthenware tariff to be reduced to twenty-five percent. Brewer accused importers of skirting the existing laws, bringing in decorated china and claiming them as works of art, which only paid ten rather than a forty percent rate. In addition, Brewer argued that American pottery wages remained twice those of England as the industry did not yet have sufficient time to perfect its production. In closing, he not only rejected the call for the cuts but presented a letter signed by nearly every major producer demanding an increase to a 60% duty ad valorem. The potters did get the increase they hoped for in the form of the Mills Act in 1883 which bumped up rates to 40% for undecorated earthenware, 50% for decorated, 55% for undecorated china and the desired 60% for decorated china. According to historian Harry Crewson, the Mills Act served as the first truly protective rate in the industry’s history as a noticeable drop in imports occurred following its passage. The situation for American potters remained generally calm for the next ten years. The tariff took center stage in the presidential election of 1888. Democrats ran on a campaign of lowering rates

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while Republicans, promising to raise protection, saw victory in the Electoral College and the elevation of Benjamin Harrison to the office. In 1890 the McKinley Tariff passed the congress, keeping high protection in place (for potteries, the rates remained the same though foreign china now had to be clearly marked with its country of origin to prevent sneaking unmarked ware through customs).  

But the period of stability for potters came crashing down when Democrats reclaimed the presidency in 1892 and Grover Cleveland promised a quick reduction of tariff rates. The planned bill, sponsored by William Wilson and Arthur Gorman, promised not only to erase the gains of 1890 but cut even further. For American potters, the situation appeared dire: despite the increased protection of the McKinley Tariff, imports continued to rise, nearly doubling from 1886 to 1892. Additionally, the Panic of 1893 already caused production in most factories to drop by a third and launched five into receivership, causing USPA secretary Alfred Day to quip that “more money had been lost than made” in their trade lately. The Association called their annual meeting earlier than normal in 1894 to address the “immediate peril” facing them in the Wilson-Gorman bill. Pleas to congress to spare pottery from cuts seemed to be falling on deaf ears as the tariff in its proposed state threatened to cost an additional $2 million in revenue to an already struggling industry.  

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At the USPA meeting, potters developed a contingency plan in case the final version of the Wilson-Gorman Tariff made good on the threatened cuts. With plant investment halted during this period due to the Panic, primary reaction would come through cutting the wages of workers. Management hoped to pare down pay scales to better match those of English potters and proposed a series of reductions in proportion to those in the tariff, cuts that would reach 30-70% of daily wages depending on the skill level of the job. At Homer Laughlin’s plant, he proposed withholding half of each employee’s wages until he knew the full the extent of the tariff cuts, then adjusting accordingly. Not surprisingly, both wage reductions plans met with hostile opposition from employees and the fledgling National Brotherhood of Operative Potters. The union rejected the cuts and on January 22, 1894, announced the first national strike in the industry’s history. The stoppage dragged on...
for six months, effectively shutting down the production centers in Trenton and East Liverpool but unlike labor disturbances in many other industries, the strikers and management carried on their positions free of any major violence. The dispute ended when the Brotherhood agreed to a 12½% cut in pay for all skilled workers and no cuts for the unskilled female employees (who typically earned between one-third and one-fourth of the skilled men). The pottery workers returned to their jobs on July 22nd but their situation degraded again once the Wilson-Gorman bill became law in August. The instant slowdown in demand meant that even when employees returned to work, they had no work to do.⁹

The Wilson-Gorman Tariff caused significant damage to the young pottery industry. Under the reduced rates (now 30% for undecorated earthenware and china, 35% for decorated earthenware and china), import sales jumped from $7.1 million to $10.4 million, a 47% increase while American output dropped by half. A number of smaller plants continued to shut down or fall into receivership while the rest fought daily for their survival. Yet the USPA remained hopeful in the sense that American dealers and consumers often complained about the poor quality of low-cost imported pottery and other goods. They hoped that this public discontent would persuade the government to grant some leniency. And in fact, when William McKinley won both the presidency and a Republican congress in 1896, he promised to restore protection and banish the Wilson-Gorman Tariff to the dustbin. The 1897 Dingley Tariff bumped rates for pottery back up to 55% for undecorated earthenware and china and 60% for decorated and successfully defeated a movement from importers to keep the rates at their previous low levels. The USPA celebrated the new tariff, noting that the value of their output more than doubled from

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⁹ Shotliff, “The 1894 Tariff,” 315-316, 323 and Gates, City of Hills and Kilns, 153-55. The strike, one of only two industry-wide stoppages in pottery history, did serve to elevate the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters as the major union of the profession, defeating the smaller Potters National Union, a branch of the Knights of Labor based in Trenton and further cementing the East Liverpool area as the heart of the industry.
$9 million in 1897 to over $20 million by 1902 and the increased production allowed management to restore the wages to their pre-1894 levels, thereby quelling labor unrest. More importantly, for the first time they observed American consumers considering domestic product over imports and recognizing the value of American-made china.\textsuperscript{10}

The tariff situation would remain quiet for the next fifteen years. During that time, William Burgess, owner of the International Pottery in Trenton, sold his business in 1904 to dedicate himself fully to tariff matters through sitting on the Executive Board of the USPA as well as serving as its main Washington lobbyist. For his first duty in that position, Burgess travelled to Washington with William E. Wells to make a case for continued protection. When Woodrow Wilson took office as president, he like many Democrats before him promised to reduce the tariff. The 1913 Underwood Tariff would ultimately drop rates once again as well as more clearly delineating between cheaper earthenware and vitrified china. The rate for earthenware lowered to 35 and 40 percent while china dropped to 50 and 55. Wells and Burgess protested that since wages made up nearly two-thirds of production costs, American producers operated at a disadvantage compared to the lower-paid European potters and the emerging threat of Japan, where female unskilled labor made only three cents per hour. Despite their testimony, the lower rates remained, threatening the industry with further losses and potential wage cuts.\textsuperscript{11}


Figure 19: Protectionists feared the 1913 Underwood Tariff would devastate industries. *American Economist*, February 13, 1913, page 89. Note the fourth figure (far left) to be hanged is labeled “Pottery.”
World War I prevented American potters from feeling too much the ill effects of the Underwood Tariff, as the European market disappeared during the conflict and in the immediate years following. But even within a favorable market, debate still raged over protection upon the election of Republican Warren G. Harding and his promise to again revise the tariff. Once again, china importers complained of the increasing rates especially considering the fact that import amounts fell during the war and even went as far as accusing the USPA of concealing profits (a claim later thrown out by the Supreme Court upon inspection of member companies’ books). Domestic producers, including Onondaga President Bert Salisbury, pushed for the adoption of a valuation plan, which based duties on the value of American-made goods rather than the cheaper prices of imports. At the time, $1 million’s worth of foreign china cost $2.5 million to manufacture in the States, so the tariff still amounted to far less than the American cost of production, thus undercutting the prices of domestic potters. He argued that American valuation would not increase the price of foreign china to consumers but would rein in the immense profits made by jobbers and importers and give Americans a more level playing field.12

The new agreement, Fordney-McCumber Act, became law on September 21, 1922 and set the highest rates to that point in time. For potters, this meant in increase to 45 and 50 percent for earthenware and 60 to 70 percent for china, rates that far surpassed those in the 1898 Dingley Tariff. However, the desire for American valuation remained unfulfilled as congress dismissed the plan as too complicated. Instead, the bill contained within Section 315 an allowance for “flexible provisions.” The flexible provision gave the president power to change the duty rate if an investigation found it too low or too high based on foreign wages. However, the provision did

not provide for any accurate method to determine foreign wages as international producers had no requirement to disclose their finances. Thus, of the 400 applications for investigation made to congress between 1922 and 1927, only twenty-five ever made it to the president for consideration. One of those denied petitions belonged to American potters. In July 1927 USPA and the Brotherhood petitioned for relief and called for a reconsideration of the American valuation plan. They asserted that the re-emergence of European goods as well as the ascendancy of Japan put domestic producers at a disadvantage once again based on wages which drove down the price of their product.13 Even amidst a booming economy, the potters experienced slowdowns and shutdowns and congress’s rejection of relief actually led the pottery industry to experience the Great Depression a full two years before the rest of their fellow businessmen.

In the 1928 presidential race Republicans promised further increases on agricultural goods to placate farmers feeling the beginnings of an economic downturn. But House Ways and Means chair Willis Hawley went far beyond the original vision of just adding agricultural goods to Fordney-McCumber and proposed an entirely new tariff with increased rates on a number of industrial goods as well. Despite the misgivings of Democrats and even President Herbert Hoover, the bill passed the House in a rushed session in July 1929 and fell to Senate Finance Committee Chair Reed Smoot. Smoot and his committee worked to smooth over some of the more controversial elements of the bill, amending the proposal some 1,253 times. The final

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Hawley-Smoot Tariff passed the Senate in March 1930 after the longest debate period of any tariff bill in history and with many products protected by the highest rates ever.\textsuperscript{14}

American potters kept abreast of the Hawley-Smoot proceedings and once again made their case for increases. Onondaga Pottery Vice President E. L. Torbert appeared before the House Ways and Means Committee to ask for greater protection in the early stages of the bill, noting that even with a 70\% duty on decorated china, Japan flooded the American market because their wages lowered production costs to the point it made little difference. On behalf of the USPA, Torbert requested the House (and six months later the Senate) to consider in addition to the current rates a duty specifically levied on every piece of china that arrived on American shores. The USPA hoped to gain an additional rate of 15 cents per dozen on earthenware and 25 cents per dozen on china in order to hinder the vast shipments of cheap foreign goods. The final version of Hawley-Smoot would include this additional per-piece fee but it would only be ten-cents on both earthenware and china. While not what they initially hoped, both management and the Brotherhood expressed optimism that the new ten-cent duty would help cut down on cheap imports and restore full production to plants idle for the past several months.\textsuperscript{15}

The American pottery industry got the highest tariff rates in its existence under the Hawley-Smoot bill. And yet, the flood of imports continued and manufacturers still found

\textsuperscript{14} Kaplan, \textit{American Trade Policy}, 17, 22-32. Alfred Eckes in \textit{Opening America’s Market} notes that the final bill is often referred to popularly as the Smoot-Hawley Tariff and even uses that term himself. However, he also notes that it is typical practice to name a tariff bill first in the name of the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee followed by the name of the chair of the Senate Finance Committee since that is the order in which the bill progresses into law. Because of this, I have elected to refer to the bill as “Hawley-Smoot” to keep with the proper rather than popular terminology. Additionally, sources at the time tend to use “Hawley-Smoot” rather than “Smoot-Hawley.”

themselves in a precarious position. Both scholars and government investigations argued that in the time between the increased rates of the Dingley Tariff and the peak of protection under Hawley-Smoot, the industry as a whole did little to improve its own position, instead relying on the hope that the government would bail them out. A 1915 Department of Commerce investigation of the industry found that American potteries in general had poor organization, inefficient production methods, and used obsolete equipment and outdated price lists. Dismissing potters’ claims that the Underwood Tariff hurt their business, government officials instead blamed the loss of profit on their own inability to modernize. Likewise, looking back at the era historians Herman Stratton and Harry Crewson agreed that potters of the early 20th century operated in ways that hurt their chances to be competitive. Stratton argued the USPA poured far too much energy into protest rather than researching and bettering their product and used the tariff as a crutch while failing to build up their industry (a criticism also echoed by Homer Laughlin Art Director Frederick Rhead). Crewson gave an even harsher assessment: other industries successfully used their period of protection to mechanize, innovate, and otherwise improve to the point they could hold their own against imports. Potters on the other hand viewed the tariff as a given and used it as a type of security blanket while not bothering to upgrade their means of production. When they did make improvements in the 1930s, they did so largely as a reaction to both the Depression and to their situation hitting a critical period of foreign competition. And improvement only came to plants with visionary leaders (such as Wells, Salisbury, and Smith) or to plants who shut down and reopened under newer, younger management willing to experiment.16 In short, pottery as an industry often suffered from old leadership dedicated to outdated practices and who expected that the tariff always would protect

them. But by the 1930s, the outlook for trade and economic policy in the United States began to undergo a radical change.

**The Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act and Potters’ Responses**

Tariff agreements in the United States did not occur in a global vacuum, yet the Republican leadership of the interwar period often overlooked the importance of trade to international economic affairs. Through the late 1920s and early 1930s, the United States refused to send delegates to conferences designed to begin a global free trade movement, preferring instead the continued protectionism of Fordney-McCumber and Hawley-Smoot. Both Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover viewed the tariff as a purely domestic issue despite the turmoil brewing in Europe over the combination of high war debts and reparations owed to the U.S.17

But the tide of high protection began to ebb in the 1930s. The man most critical to this shift was Cordell Hull, a Tennessee congressman whom Franklin Roosevelt named Secretary of State in 1932. Hull grew up a true Southern Democrat, strongly opposed to restrictive tariff agreements, but more than that, he viewed trade in an international framework and argued that restrictive practices actually hurt the United States politically. He felt World War I occurred in large part due to the economic struggle of nations and as far back as 1916 he proposed an international conference to call for free trade among nations as a condition of the peace (something Republicans Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover all rejected). Hull’s knowledge of trade matters as well as his popularity among the Southern wing of the party drew Roosevelt to him and he offered the Tennessean the Secretary of State position despite the misgivings of his Brain Trust. Roosevelt did not have a clear international economic or foreign policy at his election as his main concern stayed with untangling the Depression. As Hull successfully navigated trade

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agreements in Latin America, he worked hard to convince Roosevelt that reciprocity would increase prosperity at home. Additionally, Hull continued to view the tariff in internationalist terms and argued that trade with less restrictions would placate much of the European anger over Hawley-Smoot.  

After months of Hull’s calling for reciprocity, Roosevelt finally agreed to examine the issue in the summer of 1933. Following Hull’s success in Latin America that November, the president sent emergency legislation to the House on March 2, 1934 requesting the power to establish trade agreements with foreign countries. As the bill made its way through congress, support split strongly along party lines with Republicans questioning not only the need for such authority but whether the Constitution even allowed the president to regulate trade and for how long (a matter complicated further by Hull’s insistence that congressional hearings on the tariff should be discontinued under the new agreement). Yet as historian Michael Butler points out the bill which would become the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act at its heart followed the pattern of other New Deal programs, designed to expand the power of the executive in order to solve the pressing problems of the nation.  

The Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act (RTAA) officially became law on June 6, 1934. The act gave the president unprecedented control over international trade by bestowing on him the authority to enter into all negotiations with foreign countries and to raise or lower tariff rates up to fifty percent of their current rates without the approval of congress. In its first years, the RTAA negotiated agreements with sixteen nations and saw the number of exports to these countries greatly increase despite the lingering Depression. But a provision Republicans insisted


19 Butler, Cautious Visionary, ix, 93-93.
stay in the bill required the RTAA be put up for renewal every three years. Through this non-guarantee of permanence, potters and other industries hurt by the provisions of the act viciously fought for its termination at each renewal hearing but with little success. The RTAA passed renewal comfortably in 1937 and 1940 but gained only a two-year renewal in 1943 owing to the war and the growing backlash among Republicans tired of New Deal programs.20

By the time World War II drew to a close, the RTAA held far less appeal than in the previous decade. Another two-year extension passed in 1945, likely out of respect for the deceased Roosevelt who made one of his final actions as president a request to continue and expand the act. The 1945 version gave the chief executive the power to reduce the existing fifty percent cutbacks an additional fifty percent, bringing the total allowable reductions to 75% of their Hawley-Smoot rates. To placate Republican opposition, the 1947 extension contained a clause called the “peril point.” The president now had to furnish a list of all proposed items for which he intended to lower the tariff rates to the Tariff Commission. They then conducted investigations to find the point at which the duty could not be lowered further without serious injury to the industry, below which the president legally could not cut. Republicans again threatened to dismantle the RTAA in 1951 until a new amendment joined the peril point provision, the escape clause. The escape clause allowed a semi-restoration of congress’s role in the tariff decision making process. Industries who felt they suffered significant harm could apply for a hearing conducted by the Tariff Commission. Upon weighing collected data, sales figures, and testimony, the Commission could recommend to the president that the industry in question indeed suffered and needed a lowering of rates. Congress did pass the RTAA in 1951 followed

20 Aaronson, Trade and the American Dream, 19-21, 36, 47; Kaplan, American Trade Policy, 48-51; “Reciprocal Trade Pact Act Extension Voted by the House, 216 to 168, Last Week,” Potters Herald, February 29, 1940, 1-2; and “Senate Votes to Continue Reciprocal Trade Agreement Act Three Additional Years,” Potters Herald, April 11, 1940, 1-2.
by one-year renewals in 1953 and 1954 and a three-year extension in 1955. By 1958 President Eisenhower called for greater power to slash rates further in response to the new parameters set by the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade. The final four-year renewal of RTAA provided the authority to reduce rates an additional twenty-five percent from the previous baseline but also gave congress the ability to override any tariff decision with a 2/3 majority vote. This compromise lasted until the act expired for good in 1961.21

The first deal under the RTAA to affect pottery came in 1939. The trade agreement with Great Britain reduced the tariff on decorated earthenware to 30% plus the ten-cent-per-dozen rate. It also created a new category for bone china, porcelain whose content included more than one-quarter of bone ash to give a whiter and brighter appearance. Bone china represented the majority of British pottery exports, and the rate of 40-45% (as opposed to the 60-70% rate for non-bone chinaware) aided their shipments to the United States. Domestic pottery managers, however, decried the agreement even though only one producer (Lenox) actually made bone china in the States. They reasoned the lower rate would flood the market with cheaper English bone china which would displace American dinnerware in sales. The agreement made with Czechoslovakia in 1945 further cut the earthenware rates from 30 to 25% while maintaining the Hawley-Smoot rates for both decorated and undecorated vitrified china.22

Even before it became law, the pottery industry viewed the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act with suspicion and unease. John Dowsing, the new USPA tariff lobbyist following William Burgess’s death, wasted little time in opposing the major power grab by the executive,

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complaining to the trade publication *Crockery and Glass Journal* in April 1934. While he maintained that potters did not want to undermine the president’s authority, USPA nevertheless felt that the RTAA gave one man far too much power in allowing him to negotiate tariff changes without notifying congress or even the affected industry. He also worried that RTAA would eliminate the opportunity for management and workers to argue their case before Washington as they had in the past (although Hull’s push for the complete elimination of all congressional hearings on the tariff did not survive the final version of the bill). Without any means to plea for the high tariffs the USPA maintained as necessary, Dowsing warned the entire industry faced real danger under the new act.  

American pottery management and workers would demonstrate their opposition to the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act in a number of ways during its twenty-eight year existence. One of their earliest means of voicing displeasure came from membership in protectionist-oriented organizations. The first such group congregated in New York City following the election of James A. Garfield but fell apart soon after. Another group formed in 1884 led by officials of the Eastern Pig Iron Association of Pennsylvania along with other prominent men from the iron, steel, and rail industries. By January of the following year, they dubbed themselves the American Protective Tariff League, fighting for “the protection of American Labor and Industry” through opposing any reduction in tariff duties. To spread their message, in 1887 they produced their first monthly magazine *The Tariff League Bulletin* (changed to *The American Economist* two years later), issued numerous pamphlets on tariff policy over the years, and even sponsored a college scholarship program to young men studying economics. Following a period of membership decline, the group re-envisioned itself as the American Tariff League in

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1925 under the leadership of William Warren Barbour, president of the Linen Thread Company and son of Colonel William Barbour, one of the early League members. Among the thirty industries that helped to re-organize the American Tariff League, potters played a prominent part. William Burgess arranged for the association to be a founding member of the new group and to contribute monetarily to its existence for a number of years.24

In addition to keeping up a monthly journal, the League also kept up its publication of anti-free trade and anti-reciprocity pamphlets. One of the best known, “How High are United States Tariffs?” arrived in anticipation of the 1943 renewal of the RTAA. While the study claimed to be an objective investigation of American rates in relation to other nations the results nevertheless found the U.S. had a lower tariff than twelve of the eighteen other nations in the study. In fact, taking into consideration various non-tariff restrictions and allowances, American rates closely approached free trade levels in some instances. The League used its study as well as a second one undertaken in 1945 as proof that any further duty reductions under the RTAA would be detrimental. Incidentally, the Senate Finance Committee dismissed both League studies as “farcical pseudo-statistics” but the League did not waiver. In addition to the pamphlets, they put on regular conferences of industry leaders to discuss the current tariff situations as well as strategies to restore protection. At the 1944 conference, NBOP president James Duffy appeared as a featured speaker.25

Another major protectionist organization came not from the managers but from the workers in industries harmed by low tariffs. O. R. Strackbein, a Texan labor lobbyist who

belonged to the American Wage Earners Protective Conference along with James Duffy, set out to establish his own lobby group on behalf of labor endangered due to America’s reckless trade policy. In 1953 he gathered members of ten AFL-affiliated unions (including the International Brotherhood of Operative Potters) to form the Nationwide Committee of Industry, Agriculture, and Labor on Import-Export Policy. Strackbein lamented that the American people seemed woefully uninformed on matters of trade policy and sought to publicize facts on imports and how the current tariff policy with its focus on free trade hurt workers. In addition to aggressive lobbying and testimony before congress, the Nationwide Committee also sponsored numerous rallies, conferences, and meetings between workers, many attended by Brotherhood members and featuring speeches from Duffy and his successors.26

While membership in protectionist organizations put potters in touch with like-minded supporters, it did little to help them at a fundamental level. To preserve and restore their rates of duty, they often went directly to the source and maintained constant contact with their congressmen, especially Republicans whose longstanding support of protective tariffs connected with a desire to protect the jobs of their constituents from free trade policies. Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio openly criticized Roosevelt’s trade program, arguing reciprocity would impede American production if left unchecked in the manner of the RTAA. When invited to the annual USPA banquet, Taft promised to take up the potters’ cause and fight for a policy fair to American producers, not to foreign nations. Representative Earl Lewis, also of Ohio, allied with NBOP and repeatedly introduced legislation abolishing the RTAA on the basis that it caused work stoppages in industries such as pottery where cheap imported goods devastated prices. Some years later, Representative Robert Ramsay tried to curb the ongoing cuts in the tariff rate

by paying potters a pro-rata share of fifty-percent of all duties collected on imported ceramics. He reasoned that since the industry slowed to part-time work due to imports, the money generated by those foreign goods should be reinvested to help American producers get back on their feet. Five other congressmen from Ohio and West Virginia supported the bill but the proposal never made it off of the House floor.27

While influential members of management and union leadership held close connections with members of congress, the rank and file workers in the pottery industry expressed their frustration through letter-writing campaigns. Some, like Syracuse’s Adam Schylinski penned an open letter to President Harry Truman in protest of how the government treated American potters, who at the time only operated at about 2/3 capacity. He blasted policies that allowed floods of cheap ware into the States, the support of the Crane China company in Puerto Rico, and the recent decision by the State Department to use German-made china in U.S. embassies rather than providing work for their own citizens. The Onondaga Pottery actively encouraged their stockholders and members of management to write or telegram Congress on behalf of the company to cement the plant’s official opposition to the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act in all its forms and to request instead an import quota on foreign china. Onondaga’s workers also set up their own protest during one of the hearings on extending the RTAA, wiring both their local representative and the Senate Finance Committee a petition signed by all 1,645 workers protesting legislation detrimental to their livelihoods. Finally, the Brotherhood sponsored several letter-writing campaigns throughout the various extensions of the RTAA. During one of his

many trips to testify against the Act, a member of the House Ways and Means Committee tried to discredit NBOP President James Duffy by claiming that his words held little value because they did not necessarily represent the actual workers in the industry. After this, the Brotherhood passionately urged all pottery laborers to write to their local congressmen and the president constantly to show them just how many Americans opposed the loss of their jobs.28

While all of these measures did gain the pottery industry a small bit of recognition, far and away the most popular method of showing their displeasure came from making frequent trips to Washington to testify before Congress. Representatives from the USPA, the Vitrified China Association, the Brotherhood, and the individual plants all appeared on several occasions to argue their case to the Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee at each and every single renewal hearing for the RTAA. Testimony often followed a

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familiar pattern and covered topics such as business loss, unemployment, and the flaws of the RTAA itself as well as its questionable constitutionality.29

From the moment that the RTAA first went up for renewal in 1937, potters attacked it for the perceived and real threat to their livelihood. As discussed previously, wages posed the biggest disadvantage for potters in the United States. Typically between 55% and 65% of a company’s profits directly went into payroll for employees due to the labor-intensive nature of manufacture. American potters earned on average four times as much as British workers, six times as much as other Europeans, and ten times or more the wages of Japanese workers. With such a severe wage gap, producers often complained that the free trade spirit of RTAA unfairly expected them to compete with foreign china which already came into the States made for far less and then made even cheaper with a lower tariff. Shenango China’s James K. Love protested that American workers should not be punished for attaining a higher standard of living. Onondaga’s E. L. Torbert echoed the sentiment years later when he argued that potters and other handicraft industries deserved special protection from tariff reductions on account of their higher wages if only to give them the fair opportunity to compete in the global marketplace that Washington officials envisioned. Onondaga President Richard Pass summed up the wage problem of the RTAA when he observed that while supporters of free trade claimed that it raised

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wage standards for all in reality it dragged down prosperous nations to the level of the cheap goods they now competed with.\textsuperscript{30}

Japan in particular posed the greatest threat to American earthenware and china and a constant theme of fear ran through the RTAA testimony as potters feared a trade agreement with the country which would further drop rates which already did not keep the flood of Japanese wares at bay. When the British agreement took effect in 1945, Joseph Wells Jr. warned that Japan may take up production of bone china due to the halving of the duty rate. While they ultimately did not, Homer Laughlin China officials noted that postwar American financial support to Japanese industry paved the way for a new crop of imports with prices so low that even the old Hawley-Smoot rate of 70\% plus ten cents would not make a difference. Torbert pointed out that the Tariff Commission itself figured out that the equivalent of a 284\% rate plus another fifteen cents per dozen would be needed to bring the price of Japanese ware up to that of the United States. Nevertheless, in 1955 the feared trade agreement with the Japanese came to pass, reducing tariffs on china that already undercut American prices by a significant amount and that blatantly ignored copyright law by plagiarizing patterns and shapes.\textsuperscript{31}

Through the years, the testimony of labor and management painted a picture of an industry in constant decline despite their best efforts to improve. Brotherhood president James Duffy pointed out in 1940 that a recent Tariff Commission study of the pottery industry found it making little to no profit following passage of the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act. Torbert


continued that despite the increasing cost of wages, potters did not raise their prices for consumers during World War II, instead choosing to operate at a loss. During the postwar period, USPA member production suffered double digit losses on a regular basis and by 1955 only four of the twenty-three members actually turned a profit. Non-USPA firms suffered the same as Shenango’s George Zahniser pointed out sales of their Castleton fine china line dropped by half from 1949 to 1952, corresponding with china cuts. When the RTAA came up for its final renewal in 1958, all American potteries operated at some level of profit loss and many of the largest and most storied firms of the industry shuttered their doors forever when they could not compete with cheap ware and a government determined to let it come in even cheaper.32

As the potters suffered, so too did its employees as well as the cities plants called home. NBOP leaders argued that the RTAA prevented American workers from securing an improved standard of living. Many employees wondered why their government, supposedly the greatest in the world, openly let them down by caring more about the economies of other nations while factories in the States either closed completely or ran on only partial shifts in the face of competition. At one point, NBOP’s Edwin Wheatley cautioned that while no current members held communist sympathies and worked hard to increase production, the continued negligence of the American government could have disastrous ramifications. Management too defended their workers: Zahniser noted that in 1955 Shenango China employed over ten percent of New Castle’s labor force, yet their numbers dropped by nearly half since the end of the war, endangering the community. Torbert warned the continued presence of RTAA could cost tens of

WHY EMPLOYMENT HAS DROPPED AT THE SHENANGO POTTERY

“16c an hour” —

There are some of the facts discovered by the Greater New Castle Association when they inspected the reason why so many of Shenango Pottery’s employees — 1,740 of them — lost their jobs between January of 1940 and January of 1952.

Because this condition is affecting the welfare of our community, we are presenting the most important facts of the situation together with an indication of measures that are being taken to improve it.

WAGES

Wage rates are of unusual importance in the pottery industry because in the manufacture of china, labor cost is considerably higher than it is in most other industries.

Because of the hand work required in the production of china, every ten cents of every sales dollar is paid out in wages, whereas in the manufacture of steel, wages account for from thirty-five to forty cents of the sales dollar.

Japanese, Ralph and German patterns supply 85% of the china dinner-ware imported into the United States. Their plants are as highly mechanized as any American plant. Thus the British or Japanese potter can produce as much ware per hour as the American potter. This means that the chief difference in the cost of producing ware is to be found in the wages paid in foreign and American china plants. The chart at the upper right shows this difference.

INCREASE IN THE VOLUME OF IMPORTS

The steady increase in the volume of imported china, and the decline in United States production is shown in the chart at the lower right. American china manufacturers and their employees do not want to eliminate foreign competition. On the other hand, they do not want foreign competition to eliminate their business.

They believe that quotas should be imposed on imports of china dinner-ware, limiting foreign producers to approximately the same volume of business as American firms are getting.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE

Two separate actions have been taken to help Shenango Pottery and its employees maintain their place in the economic life of our community.

1. A resolution has been adopted by the Senate directing the Tariff Commission to investigate the competitive cost of producing china tableware in the United States and Japan.

2. On June 20 in Washington, D. C., a hearing will be held before the Tariff Commission. The purpose of this hearing is to determine the extent to which injury has been caused to U. S. china manufacturers and their employees by imports from countries with which the U. S. has reciprocal trade agreements.

The GNDCA has worked closely with Shenango Pottery in preparing materials and securing support for both these measures. It is hoped that our government will then act to prevent further damage to the economic life of our community by restoring the china tariff rates and imposing quotas on china imports.

Published As Information For Our Citizens by the GREATER NEW CASTLE ASSOCIATION and the NEW CASTLE NEWS

Figure 21: One reason cited by pottery officials as to why the RTAA damaged the industry was the potential job loss for communities. A citizen's group in New Castle outlines foreign imports and low tariffs as the reason why job losses have occurred at Shenango China. New Castle News, June 18, 1952, page 17
thousands of jobs throughout the nation, as Onondaga already cut their payroll by twenty-eight percent since 1951. The handicraft industries in particular felt the impact of job loss harder than others according to Torbert. Potters tend to follow parents and grandparents into the field, creating a multigenerational workforce that suffered exponentially from job loss. Additionally, these workers made a living on skills that do not easily translate into other jobs, making finding another job after a pottery closes all the more difficult.33

Other reasons for rejecting the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act also abounded. In the 1945 hearings before the House, Torbert cited Onondaga’s war service in the manufacture of ceramic land mines and argued that the government should protect companies that served their nation. He also frequently referenced the American pottery industry’s record of artistic merit. Beyond the sales and employment figures, pottery served a vital purpose to the nation by giving artistic citizens an outlet for creating something beautiful that the whole country can enjoy. Perhaps the most unconventional protest came from Wells. At the height of the Cold War, he argued that Karl Marx favored free trade as an essential part of communism (countering a speech made by the Secretary of State claiming protectionism favored communists). He later noted that even though the government promoted the purpose of both the RTAA and GATT as preventing the spread of communism through free trade policies, Japan (the U.S.’s key to a capitalist Asia) openly commenced trading with both the Soviet Union and China while at the same time taking advantage of a low American export rate.34

Wells’s claim that the RTAA did not really prevent the spread of global communism speaks to a trend among testimony to discredit the act and question whether it ever fulfilled the lofty goals proposed by Secretary of State Hull and his followers. From the time of the first renewal, USPA tariff counsel John Dowsing argued the RTAA never achieved the status of a true reciprocity bill as agreements made between two nations could spread to others, allowing certain countries to get benefits without actually giving up their own protection, harming American producers. Wells also argued that basing trade on sales rather than man hours of labor gave nations with cheap wages an unfair advantage (for example, $1,000 worth of imported china would cost $1,500 or more to produce domestically). In this sense, no new American jobs developed in industries like pottery as RTAA supporters claimed, but instead employment continuously dropped, especially during the 1950s. And unlike the promise of free traders who saw the benefit of RTAA in increased exports, small industries like pottery could not export due to lower foreign wages and other forms of protection used to get around duties. For an example, Torbert cited the case of England who benefitted from the lowered American tariff rates but at the same time made sure that controls in their country prevented imports from entering the market, directly violating the spirit of the RTAA.35

Even beyond not fulfilling its purpose, potters continued to maintain the position they took even before the RTAA became law that its tenets were unconstitutional. The official USPA view remained that only Congress had the legal power to create trade treaties, not the president and that the RTAA gave one man far too much power. The Brotherhood agreed, maintaining that only Congress could enter treaties and that the secretive nature of the trade agreements rendered

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them undemocratic. They also protested extensions which stripped the Tariff Commission of their power to oversee matters of trade. By the time that the act expired in 1961, the Tariff Commission could only recommend changes in rates to the president, and even those legally did not need consideration if the executive felt differently about a particular trade agreement.36

While potters always agreed that the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act needed to go, the means of doing so shifted over time and represent an adaptation of their situation. Early on, management demanded a return to the Hawley-Smoot rates of 1930. Wells noted that the old duties did not give them tremendous profits, just the protection they desperately needed. In addition, management called for reinstatement of trade control to the legislative branch and more concrete limits on the level of authority the act gave the president. But as congress made clear Hawley-Smoot would never return, after 1951 potters instead turned their focus to strengthening and improving the escape clause, the provision to allow relief for industries determined to be in danger from imports. Torbert suggested a six-month limit on decisions, since the china industry’s petition took nearly a year. The Brotherhood suggested adding a seventh member to the six-man Tariff Commission who ruled on clause petitions to prevent a deadlock. The USPA recommended changing its provisions so that congress approved or denied the findings of the commission in escape clause decisions, not the president (NBOP alternatively suggested making all Tariff Commission rulings final without allowing the president an override). By the mid-1950s, pottery manufacturers and workers decided previous actions all failed and went to the extreme by demanding a quota on imported china, especially coming from Japan. With tariff

36 Senate Finance Committee, *Extending RTAA*, 370-74; Duffy Testimony (KSU Special Collections); “Brotherhood Chief Asks for Competitive Tariff to Protect Potters’ Jobs,” *Potters Herald*, February 3, 1949, 1-2; and “Brotherhood Chief Urges Senate Unit to Adopt Amendment to Tariff Bill,” *Potters Herald*, July 1, 1958, 1, 3.
rates falling continuously (and even 1930 rates not enough to counter cheap wages), only restricting the flow of foreign ware would save American producers.37

American manufacturers asked for quotas as a potential form of assistance, but knew the near impossible chances of such a restriction passing. So to them, the escape clause represented the only viable means for relief. The Vitrified China Association and the Brotherhood filed a joint application for their first escape clause investigation on February 11, 1952, less than one year after the provision became law. Onondaga’s E. L. Torbert, representing the VCA, felt that the vitrified pottery industry qualified for all criteria set forth in the RTAA: a decline in sales going hand in hand with an increase in comparable imports, a backlog of unsold inventory, and a decline in share of the domestic market. However, after nearly a year’s delay, on February 6, 1953 the Tariff Commission rejected providing relief by a vote of 4-0 with two members abstaining from the final vote. They ruled that even though imports increased in the ensuing years, so too did domestic production. This decision is hardly surprising in light of a grievance filed following the 1939 UK Agreement that found despite potters’ complaints their domestic production increased to 1929 levels and even surpassed them. The Commission argued through Section 336 of the RTAA that the difference in cost between the American and Japanese products proved against injury. Because Japanese china prices fell so far below domestic (the example they used compared a place setting made in the States costing $3.69 versus a Japanese place setting of similar appearance for $1.30) they were technically not a similar item to American fine china and thus not competing for the same customer base. Finally, a number of

domestic fine china producers did not provide the Commission with adequate financial information to determine whether or not they truly struggled in the previous decade. In short, no concrete evidence pointed to an industry in as grave of danger as VCA and IBOP claimed. Torbert left Washington unhappy but not entirely surprised, later noting that of the fifty-three escape clause applications filed between 1951 and 1955, congress only sent five to the president for consideration and no one in the executive office really seemed to care that so many industries met with outright rejection.\textsuperscript{38}

**Congressional Response and the Role of the Cold War**

Despite their frequent appearances before congress, American potters had little luck in either getting the relief they wanted or in persuading members to reject the idea of free trade. Even when giving testimony, hard-line free traders often accused potters of exaggerating their plight, asked leading and confusing questions, or interrupted them when speaking to try and prove them wrong. But why did congress seem so intent on keeping an act which stripped them of power and potentially hurt American industry? The American public never fully embraced the RTAA as they either did not understand its purpose or care for the attention it lavished on other nations rather than problems at home. By the end of World War II, many Congressional Republicans desired to get rid of this remnant of the New Deal and focus instead on enhancing the booming American economy.\textsuperscript{39}


\textsuperscript{39} House Committee on Ways and Means, *1945 Extension of RTAA*, 1530-47, 1781-1809 and Aaronson, *Trade and the American Dream*, 36, 47. As a union leader, James Duffy seemed to be given an especially hard time,
But even as some congressmen looked back at protectionism, the events of the day would push the United States closer to global free trade than ever before. After the war, Great Britain needed massive loans from the United States. Unlike the interwar period where the U.S. demanded both repayment and protection, official government policy now dictated American trade with its closest ally be freer and more open to help them rebuild. This played into a foreign policy that shaped the entire American worldview during the Cold War. The United States wanted to remain the dominant force in the global economy and to make sure that the devastated nations of Europe and Asia did not fall prey to communist influence, especially rehabilitating Germany and Japan. Trade policy, then, consisted of the promotion of multilateral agreements (made with several nations simultaneously and for a multitude of goods at once rather than the old item-by-item system), aggressive exporting and importing of product on the global market, and the prerequisite lowering of tariff rates to levels that approached total free trade. The United States used trade as a type of barrier against communism and for the first time, Cordell Hull’s equating of free trade with national security materialized as Cold War ideology shaped politics more so than actual trade conditions.40

An example of how the Cold War transformed economic policy can be seen in the plans for an International Trade Organization (ITO) and how they evolved into the General Agreements on Tariff and Trade (GATT). The RTAA set the spiritual precedent for multilateral trade by shifting the power to levy tariffs from Congress to the president but it did not provide the actual framework for doing so. Global leaders included an ITO in the plans for the postwar

world, with invitations extended to the U.S., the Soviet Union, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, France, Holland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Cuba, China, and Brazil. But by the time the group met in London in October 1946, the USSR refused to participate and condemned the meeting as a conspiracy against communism. Delegates drafted a charter but friction remained on how much protection could be allowed, with Britain and Australia especially concerned about their well being. At home, the new Republican
majority in congress also disliked the ITO charter and its ability to strip them of all power by membership. When the U.S. refused to approve the ITO charter, the remainder of the delegates also let it die. But out of the rejected ITO, one provision remained, that of establishing a General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Rather than a concrete organization, GATT operated as a “contracting party” to set parameters of world trade, negotiate duties, and most importantly check the actions of other nations and provide a grievance site. As Thomas Zeiler notes, GATT’s purpose to the United States put ideology before economics “to ensure American values and security, not just profits.” Free trade through GATT members (all of whom possessed capitalist-leaning economies) became a means through which to secure peace and international stability while blocking Soviet influence. But as a tool of the Cold War, GATT often reflected the aspirations of the most powerful members rather than true free trade. For example, the U.S. believed in the intertwining of politics and economics and pursued policies that strengthened their place in the world (thus their refusal to allow communist nations to join). Britain and France, on the other hand, still sought a certain measure of protection which they saw as separate from their political policy and advocated universal membership.41

The first meeting of the nine charter members of GATT (the United States, Great Britain, France, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Luxembourg, Cuba and the Netherlands) commenced at Geneva, Switzerland in April 1947. At the initial gathering, the parameters of negotiation materialized as did the main way to remove trade barriers, the Most Favored Nation clause. This came from the spirit of RTAA and stated that a GATT member enjoyed the benefits of all trade agreements whether they negotiated them or not (for example, following a tariff reduction between the U.S. and Britain, all members would pay the same reduced rate). This gave smaller

countries the advantage of benefitting from the actions of their larger neighbors without having to give anything up themselves, endearing them to the capitalists system. The GATT members achieved successful trade talks (dubbed “rounds”) at Geneva in 1947, Annecy in 1949, and Torquay in 1950-51. By the time a fourth round commenced again in Geneva, GATT boasted thirty-four members representing 80% of global trade. The United States continued to dictate much of the trajectory of these talks by offering the biggest cuts in their rates, much to the chagrin of small industries like pottery.42

For chinaware, GATT’s reconfiguring of tariff rates introduced a system of “value brackets.” Under this schedule, the duty rate on vitrified china now depended on the cost of the set in which the china came to market and eliminated the distinction between decorated and undecorated ware. The 1948 GATT agreement placed a lower duty on high-priced sets (those which mainly came from England and France) while keeping higher tariffs on low cost sets primarily from Czechoslovakia and especially Japan. This schedule also began the practice of separating hotelware into its own category rather than lumping it in with fine china. The hotelware rate initially remained at the old Hawley-Smoot duty of 70% plus ten-cents per dozen since so little came into the States as exports but in the 1955 agreement with Japan, it too fell by fifty percent. Within the first eight years of GATT, the USPA complained that imports increased at a significant rate while domestic production stagnated.43

By 1961, both the bilateral agreements of the RTAA and the multilateral GATT schedules reduced the tariff on earthenware and home china by nearly fifty percent and congress

43 Bidwell, What the Tariff Means, 54 and United States Potters Association, 78th Proceedings of the Annual Convention, New York, December 11-12, 1956 (East Liverpool, OH: J.H. Simms Book and Job Printer, 1956), OHC, 16-17. During this time the USPA continued to encourage members to join protest organizations such as the Trade Relations Council and the Nationwide Committee on Import-Export Policy along with notifying Ways and Means Committee members of their support of bills that limited the power of GATT. See Everson Hall to USPA Members, May 10, 1960, USPA Records, MSS 855, OHC.
largely turned a blind eye while instead supporting Cold War ideology. Traditionally, tariff policies tended to shift towards a stronger free trade stance when a Democrat held the presidency and the election of John F. Kennedy proved more of the same. But Kennedy had ambitions to drop the outdated and unpopular RTAA in favor of a new trade act that provided the United States more leverage in GATT and gave greater benefits to emerging Third World nations. The five-year Trade Expansion Act of 1962 (TEA) restored tariff cutting power back to the fifty-percent levels which had been eliminated in the last RTAA renewal. It also gave the power to eliminate tariffs below five percent as well as eliminate those on goods mainly produced in the United States and Europe, and eased restrictions on certain products from developing nations to help them reach economic independence. It also changed the escape clause provision of the RTAA, requiring definite proof that imports alone caused injury to an industry and making the initial application far more demanding.44

Despite their previous failure, pottery officials again applied for escape clause relief in April 1962 in a joint brief filed by the USPA and Fine China Guild and supported in testimony by the Brotherhood. The petition and hearings originally began under the old RTAA but once the TEA took effect in October, the investigation continued under the new act’s harsher stipulations. After hearings in July and August, the Tariff Commission conducted another eight months of investigative work including studying the financial records of potteries, fieldwork at plants, and questionnaires to both domestic producers and importers. Nearly nine months after the

investigation began the commission presented their findings to the president, noting once again that the pottery industry did not suffer enough concrete damage from imports to prove definitively their misfortunes came from either the RTAA or the TEA. The commission did note that imported china from Japan continued to arrive in growing numbers to the United States but reasoned that the low-priced sets held a market unto themselves since no American product made similar low-cost vitrified ware. Additionally, while American manufacturers did lose sales, they continued to operate at a reasonable profit, thus not demonstrating concrete proof of damage from trade agreements. The USPA vigorously protested the findings, arguing that the commission used statistics from plants no longer operational due to imports (while ignoring that those plants closed at all). Under the old RTAA, the rise in imports alone would be criteria for relief, but the new TEA guidelines of provable distress even the closing of sixteen of the twenty-four major earthenware producers would not bring assistance.45

The 1970s and 1980s: Relief, Then Retrenchment

The late 1960s and early 1970s looked bleak for the pottery industry: among the leaders of the industry, Homer Laughlin, Syracuse China, and Shenango China all had to abandon their home china lines and focus on foodservice. Dozens of other plants from small firms to some of the fathers of the profession had to shut down forever when they could not compete with foreign imports. Syracuse China’s employees tried to petition the government for assistance when the

Fayette Street plant closed, claiming that their job loss came directly as a result of trade policies allowing greater numbers of imported china. The Tariff Commission conducted a study and once again ruled that duty rates did not cause the shutdown. They determined the Fayette plant to be outdated and inefficient, Syracuse’s marketing plan (which switched from targeting medium-grade to high-end fine china customers) a foolish move doomed to failure, and the actual product as inferior in quality compared to companies like Lenox, Flintridge China, and Castleton China which had always specialized in the highest grade of ware. In short, Syracuse China’s own unprofitable decisions, not imported china, destroyed their home china business and the commission ruled that no assistance be given.46

The old trade associations of the industry also did not fare well in this period. The USPA, the leader of pottery men for nearly one hundred years found itself with only six remaining members by 1966. The year before, Sterling China president William Pomeroy noted that the USPA no longer fell in line with the needs of restaurant ware manufacturers and that all had decided to drop from the ranks in favor of the American Restaurant China Council. The USPA decided that it needed a branch organization that could more actively fight for a better government policy. Responding to pressure from the Brotherhood, a group of thirteen potteries formed the American Dinnerware Emergency Committee (ADEC) with the explicit goal of fighting against unfavorable tariff and trade agreements. The ADEC placed a permanent office in Washington with an on-staff legal counsel to go before the Tariff Commission to fight for import quotas and other measures that would lessen the damage caused by foreign imported china. The diversity of the Committee’s membership also assured that it would be fighting not only for semi-vitreous home goods or restaurant china but for all ceramic articles produced in the United

States. While initiated by USPA members, the Committee sought to have little to do with the actual association and in doing so attracted a number of manufacturers no longer in the USPA or some like Pfaltzgraff and Scio Ohio Pottery who had never been members of the association at all.47

On June 1, 1971, the ADEC decided to file a petition for relief to the Tariff Commission one more time, joined by the three remaining members of the Fine China Guild. This time, the request came in a very different political environment. Years of making concessions at GATT rounds left the United States with a trade deficit of its own. And the rhetoric of using the Cold War to justify economic concessions waned as the countries of Germany and Japan, rebuilt with American dollars, came to dictate global trade more than the U.S. Richard Nixon felt that the time had come for the United States to put economic priorities back ahead of political interests and to strive for a policy of equal trade rather than the constant concessions of Kennedy and Johnson. While this could push the U.S. back to prominence in GATT, it also benefitted the domestic industries such as pottery which felt the brunt of the cuts. Nixon eased the restrictions on the escape clause and liberalized the process as well as the relief, granting assistance to more than two-thirds of applications. But this did not mean that Hawley-Smoot had returned: this expanded escape clause provided American producers a temporary period of tariff breaks so that they could focus on improving their industries to be more competitive in the global marketplace.48

48 Zeiler, American Trade and Power in the 1960s, 252-60 and Eckes, Opening America’s Market, 211-13, 243-44.
The Tariff Commission’s investigation of the pottery industry found that while American high-end china suffered only negligible damage, middle priced semi-vitreous ware continued to arrive in numbers so as to cause serious injury to domestic producers and render them unprofitable. The damage indeed accelerated with the GATT Kennedy Round which slashed earthenware tariffs up to half of their previous levels in 1967. In a 4-2 ruling, the commission recommended that President Nixon raise the earthenware duty back to its pre-Kennedy Round level. While the ADEC had hoped for a quota on imported ware, they nevertheless supported the recommendation as “a step in the right direction.” Nixon would agree with the findings of the commission that earthenware required adjustment in order to regain competitiveness and on May 1, 1972 officially raised the duty back up to 21% plus ten-cents per dozen from its previous level of 10.5% and five-cents. He also approved permission for displaced potters to seek government trade adjustment assistance for retraining (something denied the Syracuse workers the year before).49

As part of the approval of escape clause cuts, the Tariff Commission conducted yearly investigations of the pottery industry to see if it used the period of relief to improve its production methods in order to become more competitive. In 1973 the commission determined that while imports continued to rise, domestic production also increased fourteen percent over the previous two years and employment remained steady. The following year’s report noted that domestic shipments dropped due to the recession, however imports also fell at an even greater

rate. The Tariff Commission painted a picture of an industry benefitting from the lower rates, but were potters trying to improve their competitive edge? Even in 1973 Richard Reese of the ADEC continued to cry for import quotas as a permanent solution while also advocating for an even more lax escape clause that only required a loss in sales due to imports (not necessarily caused by international trade agreements) and greater funds for displaced workers. The Brotherhood testified in 1975 when the International Trade Commission (the new name of the Tariff Commission) began hearings to consider restoring the Kennedy Round cuts. Brotherhood President Lester Null argued that going back to the pre-assistance levels would “allow foreign manufacturers to take over completely” and campaigned to make the relief permanent.\textsuperscript{50}

With the Nixon relief package set to expire on April 30, 1976, both labor and management still seemed preoccupied with getting even more assistance while not doing enough with the relief they had. The recession in 1974 decreased consumption greatly and delayed the recovery of the industry, though the ITC noted that American plants continued to improve their productivity and invest in more mechanized equipment. Given the current situation, the commission recommended a temporary extension of the 1972 relief in order to allow the market to stabilize without worsening the import situation. President Ford reluctantly went with the commission’s recommendation though he noted that the potters needed to return to the Kennedy Round duty levels so as to not have an unfair advantage over other industries. He extended relief

for one year only, putting forth a plan of gradual rate reductions that would ease earthenware to its proper GATT level over the next three years.\textsuperscript{51}

As a concession, the ITC did begin hearings to reclassify hotelware, as a loophole allowed bone china and stoneware (both with a far lower duty rate) to be imported as hotel china at the lower price. As usual, vitrified manufacturers begged for clearer language and an increased rate as Japanese imports began entering the foodservice market in greater numbers. The 1979 Trade Agreements Act did close the loophole to classify stoneware and bone china as hotelware and subject them to the appropriate rate, but at the same time the new law only raised the rate to 48.7% from 45% while eliminating the extra per-dozen charge. Additionally, President Jimmy Carter halted the gradual rollback of earthenware rates and immediately restored the Kennedy Round duty while making new cuts on china, dropping them to a range of 18.4-39.6% with no extra duty per dozen. Accordingly, imports rose steadily in the period of 1976-1980 and now accounted for a majority of the American dinnerware market.\textsuperscript{52}

In large part the import problem worsened due to the 1979 decision to allow the People’s Republic of China to gain the benefit of Most Favored Nation status despite not belonging to GATT. Nixon’s 1972 trip to the country ignited the possibility for an open trade policy and

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American corporate leaders keenly welcomed China as a Most Favored Nation to expand their export business like never before. But for small industries like pottery, Chinese products signified the greatest threat in their history. Before 1979, China had begun importing low-grade pottery to the United States in alarming numbers as even the 70% non-GATT rate could not hold a candle to the low wages of Chinese workers. The ADEC immediately protested giving the MFN to China on account of the disastrous ramifications of their earthenware entering the market in large numbers. They asked for rejection of the MFN or if China must be admitted to consider a quota or other protection for earthenware. Like many other protests, the ADEC’s pleas fell largely on deaf ears. By 1982 Chinese pottery made up fifteen percent of all imports while rapidly taking over the traditional market share of low-cost producers such as Japan. A second protest filed by the ADEC in May 1982 argued that China caused a significant “market disruption” with all American potteries operating at a loss since 1979. But the ITC again disagreed, claiming that like Japan in the past, the low-cost vitrified dinnerware from China had no comparable American product that it displaced, thus not making it the cause of injury. In a hard blow to American manufacturers, the ITC concluded that the pottery industry existed in a state of perpetual decline since the 1950s, not only from China but from many nations as well as non-ceramic sources. And instead of rising to meet that competition, domestic plants largely failed to modernize and aggressively market their product. Not even a restriction on Chinese imports could solve the problem that potters either did not or could not keep up with the global market.53

While plants in the United States did not always match the state-of-the-art setup of
government-funded foreign factories, potters argued that the ITC blatantly ignored their attempts
to improve their industry. Homer Laughlin completely rebuilt several of their kilns throughout
the 1970s in order to conserve energy and to fire ware more efficiently and added new equipment
in their slip houses to increase their production capacity. In 1979 Syracuse China began a
previously-delayed plant expansion, adding new training space and a new company outlet store.
They also diversified their production with the purchase of the Country Ware metal buffet
furnishing plant and the Will & Baumer candle company. Shenango China increased their
efficiency in the early 1980s with the installation of computerized systems to control clay
mixing, production speed, and inventory control. Joseph M. Wells, Jr. later quipped that his own
company would have invested far more profits in plant improvement if they actually could make
a profit in the face of imports. To Wells and others, the ITC ignored the basic fact that potteries
wanted badly to improve and the seemingly slow pace of their doing so came not by choice but
by the fact that they could not receive a break from foreign competition long enough to make the
money needed to invest in their plants, a situation exacerbated by the current tariff policy.54

54 “Pottery Pushes Major Projects,” East Liverpool Review, March 21, 1975, 26; “Laughlin Adds Kiln
Burners,” East Liverpool Review, February 27, 1976, 21; “Firm Expands Plant, Introduces Product,” Syracuse Post-
Hocking Corporation, 1982), 4-5; Samuel D. Magavern (Counsel for American Restaurant China Council) to
Collections, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA; and U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation, Competitiveness in the Glassware and Commercial Chinaware Industry, 101st Cong.,
1st sess., October 1989, 26-27. For more on how the potteries strove to market their products in unique and
innovative ways, see Chapter 4.
A Comparative Industry: Textiles and Trade Policy

The pottery industry suffered greatly from trade policies made before and after the Second World War, but they were not the only ones. A number of handicraft industries felt the sting of foreign trade agreements and like potters, many protested in vain as their factories shuttered their doors. The textile industry experienced a very similar pattern of decline to pottery as both industries dealt with low-cost competition long before the standard deindustrialization narrative begins. Much of the decline came from cheaper goods and the inability of domestic producers to export their product due to the higher wages paid to unionized American workers in the Northeast. Like potteries, textile mills often grew up in small towns as the dominant business. Thus when a plant shut down, the entire community suffered devastation. And when their outlook grew more desperate in the Cold War years, both groups took to protesting a trade policy designed to run them out of business.55

While pottery’s competition always came from overseas, New England textile mills suffered from the relocation of factories to the American South in the years following World War I. Here, a lack of unionization and a lower standard of living reduced wages for workers and increased profits for manufacturers. As early as 1918 the industry’s main trade association, the National Association of Cotton Manufacturers, demanded that the government do a better job of protecting producers from the threat of their countrymen and from the growing imports coming out of Japan. Like potters, labor and management often worked together to call for lower tariff duties and quotas on imported yarn and cloth and both groups appeared often at protest hearings for the many extensions of the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act. After World War II, much of the American economy boomed, but for handicraft industries like pottery and textiles, the

prognosis was grim. These groups lost jobs amidst the prosperity as Japanese products entered the country in greater numbers. From 1947 to 1957, a staggering 717 textile mills closed in the United States, laying off nearly a quarter of the entire industry’s workforce. Pleas to President Eisenhower went largely ignored as the executive proclaimed that international trade took precedence over an outdated and inefficient domestic concern.  

But the textile industry had one important feature that pottery largely lacked: considerable political clout. By the postwar period most of the remaining large mills operated in the South. Southern politicians’ votes often could make or break an issue or candidate and these congressmen fiercely defended their ailing industry. Aggression from a coalition of labor, management, and several governors succeeded in getting Japan to agree to a voluntary quota in 1937 but enforcement often lapsed and in the 1950s more products from South Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan arrived without any restrictions. Southern politicians lobbied hard for new import protection but under Eisenhower only succeeded in getting escape clause applications on a fast track (with no guarantee of their approval). From 1958 to 1960, imports rose an additional 76%, another 278 Northern and 128 Southern mills closed and the lobby for textiles grew louder and angrier.

Democrat John F. Kennedy knew he needed the support of the party’s southern wing to win election and he campaigned in that area on a promise to alleviate the suffering of the textile mills. When he won the presidency and hesitated on his word, thirty-four senators (many from the South) wrote to him demanding immediate relief and warning him that including textiles in the Trade Expansion Act cuts would cost him votes for other desired programs. In 1961 Kennedy

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bowed to the pressure and advocated an aid package for cotton manufacturers that included funds for plant modernization, a new GATT schedule that included no additional textile cuts and a limited trade agreement. While the limited agreement helped domestic producers, it raised the ire of GATT members such as India, Pakistan, and South Korea who accused the United States of hypocrisy in its trade policy. As the Kennedy Round of GATT began, Lyndon Johnson found himself torn between the anger of international trade partners and the anger of a powerful lobby whose votes he needed for his Great Society reforms. In the end, he restored tariff cuts (though at a far lower percentage than other goods faced) but allowed the limited agreement to continue on a voluntary basis while acknowledging the many escape clause petitions filed by domestic producers.58

Despite still having the import restrictions in place, the situation worsened for textile producers in the 1970s and 1980s. The voluntary nature of the quotas led many producers to disregard them, while a full forty percent of cotton and wool importers came out of non-GATT nations and did not have to adhere to the agreement at all. In the early 1980s China emerged as a major textile producer and flooded the United States with its products. When the industry pressured Jimmy Carter to place a quota on China, the nation threatened to withdraw millions of dollars in other purchases from the United States. Carter dropped the quota issue and instead vetoed a bill to prevent any further tariff cuts for textiles in 1978. From 1980 to 1985 imports grew another 86%, contributing to an American trade deficit of $21 billion by 1986. Influential GOP donors and Southern congressmen complained that the current quota situation did nothing to help the industry. In 1985 they put together a bill to limit all Asian textile imports which quickly gained support from numerous congressmen North and South, union leaders, industrial

leaders, and the public communities throughout many industrial regions across the United States. President Reagan knew that the American textile industry reached a breaking point, yet like his predecessors he put the desires of international trading partners first and vetoed the bill. Later attempts to resurrect the bill also met with defeat in 1987 and 1990.59

In recent years the textile industry continues its steady decline. By the 1990s the considerable political support that at least slowed the march of foreign product waned: most of the congressmen who threw their weight behind the industry had retired or lost their seats to the rising wave of conservatism sweeping the South. Textiles lost over a half million jobs in the years 1970-1990 and the situation worsened with the passage of the Uruguay Round of GATT cuts and the NAFTA agreement when another 1.4 million jobs disappeared. In 2005 the proverbial nail in the coffin of domestic textile production came with the elimination of all global quotas. Since that time, employment in the industry continues to fall each year.60

The State of Pottery and Trade Policy Since 1988

Even with the Cold War coming to an end, American trade policy still favored international partners over domestic handicraft industries. Americans themselves remained torn on the idea of free trade: on the one hand many saw firsthand the job losses caused by outsourcing and imports. Conversely, consumers desired the ability to choose between domestic and the often cheaper foreign products when making purchases. Free trade ideology won the day throughout the 1970s and 1980s especially as the nation grew more conservative and the last vestiges of the New Deal coalition fell by the wayside. The escape clause, long a source of hope for potters and other small businesses declined rapidly following Nixon’s reforms. Under


60 Minchin, *Empty Mills*, 185-86, 197-98, 211.
presidents Ford and Carter, the number of applications dropped steadily as those who did apply often faced blanket rejection even before the ITC launched an investigation. In the years between 1975 and 1992, industries filed only sixty-three petitions for escape clause relief. Of these, the ITC only investigated half and the president applied relief only ten times (and these only to large industries such as steel and automotive, not to small producers). By the time Ronald Reagan took office, the escape clause was as Alfred Eckes put it, a “dead statue,” rejected by Reagan’s ITC appointees who all supported free trade.61

Congress passed the omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act in 1988 in preparation for the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations. This expanded the president’s power to cut rates up to half of current levels and eliminate any tariffs below five percent. Panic swept the remnants of the pottery industry as the lowest earthenware rates fell to 4.5%, low enough for elimination and hotelware fell to 35% while the Chinese imported more each day. The American Restaurant China Council again protested in Washington, though only five major producers remained (Homer Laughlin China, Hall China, Buffalo China, Sterling China, and Syracuse China along with their subsidiaries of Mayer and Shenango). ARCC head Irving Mills argued that since 1979 (when China gained MFN status), imports of hotel china surged to over one third and rising in a market that for decades remained exclusively American. The union (now renamed the Glass, Molders, Plastics, Pottery, and Allied Workers since it had to merge multiple times to survive) noted that employees gave up incentives and took pay cuts to keep their plants afloat. Further cuts would destroy these workers’ lives since they did not have the skills or youth to compete in the modern workforce. In closing, Joseph Wells III pointed out that Homer Laughlin undertook an $8.8 million investment in order to remain competitive with imports but such spending would cease upon any further cuts in tariff rates as the machinery needed to modernize often cost over

61 Aaronson, Trade and the American Dream, 134-35 and Eckes, Opening America’s Market, 254-55
$1 million per piece. Potters demonstrated that they finally took the advice given nearly twenty years before and strove to be competitive, but any Uruguay Round cuts would make such activity a moot point.\textsuperscript{62}

Pottery rates did remain the same throughout the start of the Uruguay Round, but during these negotiations economic policy continued to shift more towards free trade abroad and at home. At the conclusion of the Uruguay Round, many GATT members felt hampered by a lack of formal structure within the organization as well as the tendency for certain members (especially Japan) to break the rules and get around tariff cuts through other means of restricting trade. In December 1993 the 117 members agreed to a new structure called the World Trade Organization which contained more formal leadership and a grievance committee to settle disputes. With the Cold War no longer a unifying factor among members, the WTO strove to include all nations of the world, both developed and developing in a unified movement towards complete freedom of trade.\textsuperscript{63}

While the United States participated in opening trade abroad, it also looked to eliminate tariffs in its own backyard. The idea of a free trade agreement between the U.S. and Canada first gestated in late 1985 but had to wait until 1989 to gain approval from Canadian politicians. The agreement cancelled all remaining tariffs between the neighbors and encouraged the open flow of goods and dollars. Seeing the success, Mexican president Carlos Salinas de Gortori issued a plea in February 1990 for a similar deal with Latin America. He feared that the WTO’s focus on developing the third world in Asia and Africa would leave much of the Latin world at risk. The following year the Senate began hearings on a proposed North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). American politicians saw NAFTA as a way to correct the many trade imbalances

built up from GATT negotiations by providing North America as an ideal location for foreign investment. For Americans and Canadians, Mexico also provided a place to invest in cheaper land and labor, lowering production costs and hopefully stemming the influx of Mexican laborers coming illegally into the States. Finally, NAFTA gave North Americans a chance to emulate the European Union which emerged strong in the wake of GATT agreements with the United States. Despite the touted advantages, NAFTA faced a vicious battle to pass public scrutiny. The three nations signed the agreement on December 17, 1992 but the U.S. had to wait until the following summer to legalize its operation in congress. Many opponents argued it opened the door for businesses to relocate factories to Mexico, replacing American jobs with cheap labor.64

Among those voicing displeasure with NAFTA were pottery workers, especially those at Homer Laughlin China. Joseph Wells III went on record strongly opposing NAFTA, worrying of the adverse effect on his 900 workers. He adamantly refused to consider ever moving the HLC plant to Mexico as he invested more than $12 million in the plants to make Laughlin the most modern pottery in the world. Besides that, the Wells family resided in the East Liverpool area and worked with the pottery for one hundred years, a connection far too strong to abandon in favor of relocation. A local community action group, Save West Virginia Jobs Inc., held a series of anti-NAFTA rallies to educate the public about the risk of the trade plan. The first rally commenced at Homer Laughlin with Wells, State Senator Joe Martin, and Congressman Jay Rockefeller as keynote speakers. They reaffirmed to the crowd of more than 500 their overwhelming opposition to NAFTA and pledged to create a coalition of labor and management to demonstrate their opposition by flooding congress with letters and telephone calls.65

Despite the intense opposition, congress passed NAFTA in November 1993. While pottery products experienced less cuts than in previous trade agreements, the pressure remained on the handful of American producers. When President George W. Bush again brought up a free trade initiative in 2002, Wells III followed in the tradition of his father and grandfather and travelled to Washington to voice his dissent. He noted that Laughlin and Hall China remained the only major producers in an area where more than one hundred potteries once flourished, and his own company continued actively to resist takeover attempts due to loyalty to the community. He also reminded the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative that Laughlin and Hall together employed more than 1500 persons in an area of devastating unemployment rates and that Buffalo and Syracuse China did the same in depressed regions of New York. He also recalled that plants remaining in operation undertook extensive renovations and modernization in the past years to keep up with foreign imports but only the government had the power to save American jobs by keeping a tariff that could help adjust for the vast difference in wages between the U.S. and China (who now took the lead in imports). If that tariff would be allowed to drop to zero as Bush proposed, the company would be forced to sell out or close forever. Even as recently as 2008, Rockefeller led a coalition of congressmen to demand that chinaware be removed from the start of Doha Round talks as the devastation would be too much for the remaining producers (which at this point only included Laughlin and Hall) when China already controlled more than three-quarters of the global ceramics market itself. Today, tariff rates on ceramics largely have held steady since 1988. Vitrified ware remains at a range of 8-26% based on value while earthenware (which is no longer produced by Laughlin or Hall) stands at 4.5-9.8%. Hotelware makes up the primary concern as its rate slowly but steadily has dropped from 48.7% at the start of the Tokyo

Round in 1979 to 25% in the 2016 tariff schedule. With Laughlin left as the only major American producer, the struggle to keep up will continue but the question remains as to whether one small business is worth reconsidering international economics.66

From the time that Cordell Hull equated free trade with national security the United States pursued a policy of opening its doors to all trade partners and lowering all restrictions to commerce. The start of the Cold War accelerated this process as liberal capitalism appeared to be the antidote to communist influence in the developing world. In the time between the first Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act in 1934 and the end of the GATT Kennedy Round in 1973, the average tariff duty in the U.S. dropped from 45% to 8.5%. Yet the lofty dreams of Hull and the free traders have often fallen short of their goals as true free trade and reciprocity remain elusive. As the United States continued to put ideology and foreign policy ahead of their economic needs they continuously entered into unbalanced trade agreements and imported far more than they exported for decades, leaving them with the largest trade deficit of any nation in the world. And while GATT promised a unified bloc of nations devoted to open trade, America’s closest allies often clung to backdoor protectionism and violated the spirit of the agreement. With the Cold War on the wane, a revitalized Europe and Asia had little reason to allow the U.S. to call all of the shots at GATT and soon flexed their growing muscles and negotiated agreements more in tune with their needs.67


67 Eckes, Opening America’s Market, 282-84; Zeiler, American Trade and Power in the 1960s, 255; and Kunz, Butter and Guns, 324-34.
In part, the American decline in their global trade position came from their own hand, as is evidenced in how they treated the pottery industry. Decades of unbalanced trade agreements put smaller industries at a severe disadvantage as they could not export in large numbers due to higher American wages and soon could no longer hold the domestic market when products from Japan or China showed up on store shelves at half the cost or less.\textsuperscript{68} But the U.S. policy on enforcing these trade agreements showed favoritism towards large corporations or those who held considerable political clout. Potters tried in vain for decades to reverse the unending duty cuts on their product, by grassroots letter campaigns, membership in protectionist organizations, and by the dozens of appearances from management and labor in Washington. Each time they attempted to save their business, the government sternly reminded the pottery industry that it could not interfere with international order and that profit loss came from their own inability to compete, not from low-cost imports. Yet as is seen in the example with the textile industry, and in later deals with steel manufacturers, Washington agreed at least temporarily to bend their own rules and provide relief when needed votes were at stake.

Evaluating the experience of the pottery industry with American tariff and trade policy is difficult. To a certain extent, it is true that many potters did not take advantage of the glory days under Hawley-Smoot or even in the immediate postwar period and invest their profits into plant improvements and modernization. At the same time, the government clearly demonstrated that the needs of a small handicraft industry and its workers amounted to little more than collateral damage when compared with taking leadership in the global economic community. With rates dropping steadily since 1939, potters had no choice but to learn to deal with the flood of imports resulting from lower duties. To do so, they learned to hone their skills in marketing their product

to the needs of the home and foodservice markets and create publicity which could draw consumers to an American product.
CHAPTER 4:
“Here’s a New Way to Give Drama to the Idea”: Marketing the Pottery Industry

In 1958, a television viewer or home economics student in the United States very well may have come across a twenty-seven minute film entitled “Choice in China.” The color film, starring Peter Bocco, Frances Mercer, Nancy Kilges, and Melina Markey, told the story of a young bride-to-be struggling to decide on a set of fine china for her bridal registry. As she leans towards choosing a British-made service, the ghost of her potter ancestor arrives to escort his naïve descendant on a tour of china manufacture in the United States. The pair visit the Lenox and Gladding-McBean plants to see the entire process of production and the superiority of American-made china. Following the tour, he takes her to a china shop where a friendly saleswoman touts the virtues of the domestic product as more durable, more affordable, and of better design and decoration than foreign counterparts. Adding to the scene, a bumbling British couple in the shop convinces her that a culture of such incompetence could not possibly produce a product worthy of her future home. Encouraged by the time with her relative and her newfound knowledge, she eagerly places an American china set on her registry, confident she will enjoy it for years to come. The film ends with a display of several U.S.-produced china sets now available to consumers at their local fine goods stores.1

“Choice in China” came about as a result of members in the American Fine China Guild looking for a new way to bring their product to a public that increasingly looked to cheaper foreign china in the years after the Second World War. Members approved the concept of a short film (initially five minutes then expanded to the half-hour slot for better exposure) at their January 1957 meeting, hoping the potential of television could reach a vaster audience than normal print advertising. By the spring of 1958 members approved a script and producer, the Frederick K. Rockett Company, with filming set to start in June. By August 10th, they completed the $23,000 picture and after clearing the rights to the cast, the Guild eagerly readied to show it on television and to lease prints for schools, libraries, and other educational facilities.2

Creating a film to promote their product was just one of the many ways that potteries sought to market American-made china. As early as 1925, the United States Potters Association formed a Trade Expansion Committee which found that the average American home only spent $1.53 per year on china and the traditional 100-plus piece sets steadily fell after the war to 48, 32, and even 18 pieces.3 In short, consumers bought less china and never had been given any reason to do otherwise. Faced with this and the additional threats of foreign china, cheaper or

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3 United States Potters Association, 47th Proceedings of the Annual Convention, New York City, December 8-9, 1925 (East Liverpool, OH: J.H. Simms Book and Job Printer, 1925), OHC, 24-25. As Hartmut Berghoff, Philip Scranton, and Uwe Spiekerman argue, it is extremely difficult to give a master narrative on the history of marketing because its development and trajectory vary wildly depending on the country and time period being investigated. In their opinion, marketing deals with three complexes: information (the values and intent of the party doing the marketing as well as the classification of the product), institutions (the physical practices of promotion), and the market itself (the customers of the product and their cultural norms). Understanding the interplay of these complexes connected to greater goals is critical to understanding the rise of marketing. For more information on the general history of marketing, Richard S. Tedlow’s work is critical, see footnote 6 below. For information on the discussion between practicing marketing professionals, the archives of their three major journals, the Journal of Marketing, the Journal of Market Research, and the Journal of Consumer Research are useful.
disposable tabletop options, and a largely indifferent national trade policy, company leaders knew they needed to make their product special in order to win over customers. China marketing went beyond simple print advertising in the years following World War I. Pottery appeared at fairs and on museum walls, packed with favorite brands of soap and cereal, and even arrived at a customer’s front door. Marketing also targeted the dealers and salesmen who pushed the product, as potters offered educational courses, incentives, and giveaways for successful sales. Finally, traditional advertising to both the public and foodservice consumer remained a strong component of promotion as china ads continued to appear both in publications for mass audiences and in trade journals.

The Emergence of Pottery Marketing

Pottery marketing would not be possible without an audience to buy or a visionary to sell. The first of these came in the form of a porcelain craze which swept through France in the mid-eighteenth century. French royalty and nobility so craved their fine china that Louis XV sponsored his own kiln at Sevres and acted as a spokesman for the ware. The popularity of porcelain among the French spread westward just as a middle class began to emerge in England. As this growing population gained more disposable income, they longed to emulate the high class style of the French elite. This atmosphere provided the perfect opportunity for a creative entrepreneur to move into the market in a big way. Josiah Wedgewood was born into a family of poor potters in 1730, yet less than forty years later he publicly celebrated his commission to the royal family and his notoriety as the most famous English potter of all time. The means in which Wedgewood achieved his fame speak directly to his astute ability to tap into the emergence of
marketing and fashion, making his product not a frivolity but a necessity to the influential upper classes and thus spreading the popularity downward.4

Wedgewood’s pottery was not cheap: in fact, he often charged as much as three times the price for his porcelain compared to other English potteries. But his ware still sold due to his ability to manipulate the interests of his audience and make them want to pay his prices. The first way Wedgewood marketed his china came through his association with the rich and famous. Wedgewood sought out royal and noble patrons for his ware and created custom patterns which he then advertised publicly, knowing that the lower classes would eagerly seek out the products nobility enjoyed. He also commissioned a special London showroom open to nobles only and the epitome of luxuriousness, a space that middle classes whispered about while longing to visit. Second, Wedgewood kept a close eye on fashion and made sure his product reflected the same. A close relationship with the nobility gave him the information on the fickle changes in popular taste. When a certain motif fell out of favor, he quickly pulled it from the line at least in the wares for the upper classes, as he also kept separate inventories for the different social groups. He reserved the finest porcelain, used mainly as decoration, for the nobility while simultaneously manufacturing a line of cream-colored earthenware for the middle class, one more functional than decorative but maintaining the high quality of the pieces bought by nobles. Lastly, Wedgewood tightly controlled his product’s availability and reputation. With his business partner Thomas Bentley, Wedgewood carefully maintained his inventory to keep an artificial scarcity for certain items to ensure high demand. He also became the first English potter to mark his ware prominently with his personal backstamp, creating an early brand loyalty as customers

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demanded the Wedgewood name on their china. Josiah Wedgwood left a lasting impression on the entire pottery industry and on the emergence of modern entrepreneurship and marketing as a whole. His talent for gauging customer desire and creating demand for high-end products still resonate in the business strategies of today as do his talents for celebrity endorsement and artificial scarcity.⁵

By the end of the nineteenth century, as the middle class started to emerge in American urban areas, they looked to reflect their social standing in the goods they purchased. Home decoration reflected both individual taste and participation in a mass consumer society and pottery provided a tangible piece of beauty at a cost more affordable than fine art or furniture. Since the earliest American potters came directly from Great Britain, they carried with them the legacy of Wedgewood and his marketing tactics. Pottery decorations reflected the fads and fashions of the day, and because much of the earliest ware had to be fired in small batches due to the periodic beehive-style kilns, decoration and shape could readily change to meet the ebb and flow of popular taste. As the plants grew bigger and more industrialized, this small batch production fell by the wayside in favor of more standardized design. The trade journal Pottery, Glass, and Brass Salesmen lamented this decision as “it is detrimental not only to the manufacturer, but to the retailer as well, to have so much sameness about dinnerware” and argued that the blatant copying of designs kept American ware from achieving the high prices it could command.⁶

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⁶ Regina Lee Blaszczyk, Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgewood to Corning (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 53-59, 64-67 and “Keep Away from the Other Fellow,” editorial, Pottery Glass and Brass Salesman, February 23, 1910, 27. For more on the emergence of marketing as a whole in the United States, see Richard Tedlow’s New and Improved: The Story of Mass Marketing in America
As manufacturers slowly gave up the copying of designs, they began to create a more uniquely American style of pottery. In the same issue of *Pottery, Glass, and Brass Salesman* that contained the critical editorial, columnist Irene Sophie Loeb spoke for consumers who wanted original pieces and would not give into the same old china no matter how savvy the salesman. “This is the age of ‘the best man wins,’” she invoked, “and only the best wins.” As the years went on, the trade journals continued to push potters to work with fashion to develop their own style better suited for modern American audiences. By the 1930s, plants opened their own art and research departments to translate consumer desire into improved design. Arguably the most significantly and uniquely American contribution to pottery would be the use of vivid hues in the glaze to satisfy the increased demand for color. This type of ware first emerged in the small art establishments of California as early as 1915 and even at Homer Laughlin the use of color glazes predates the more famous Fiesta and instead goes back to the Wells Art Glaze line introduced in the early 1930s. After the California potteries displayed colored ware at the Pittsburgh Glass & Pottery Show in 1935, the race began to introduce this trend to the northeast. Homer Laughlin Art Director Frederick Rhead thought the California glazes too gaudy and instead had chemist Alfred Bleininger work on tones more suited to east coast interiors. They gave the resulting...

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product the name “Fiesta,” an invocation of celebration as well as the modern fascination with all things south of the border.7

It is not surprising that Fiesta would come from the Homer Laughlin China Company, as the plant nearly set the tempo when it came to design. As early as 1877, Laughlin himself bragged that his plant did not copy existing patterns or shapes but instead created their own as a sign of victory over the English potters (one reflected in the company’s “Eagle over Lion” backstamp). This tendency towards innovation continued when William E. Wells brought in Frederick Rhead as the company’s Art Director. After stints in numerous other plants, Rhead appreciated the visionary leadership of the Wells family and relished a place where he could design unique pieces without hindrance. Over the years, Rhead had blasted American pottery for fearing change and not blazing new trails in shape and decoration, even going as far as blaming sagging sales not on the foreign threat but on lazy companies that continued to copy one another rather than making a product to get consumers excited about American ware. In his own work, he embraced the trend towards modernism but at the same time kept it somewhat restrained. For example, he stuck with art deco in the Fiesta line after studying the purchasing habits of pottery consumers in a sort of proto-market research. He found that shoppers gravitated towards certain colors and shapes when decorating the home, and that the average consumer would shy away from designs that were too avant-garde. This put Rhead at odds with the other major designer of the time, Russell Wright, who felt that the artist should dictate taste and that consumers needed

an all-American style that would improve the country as a whole. Rhead argued the value of American society came in its diversity and willingness to embrace multiple styles and instead followed the industrial arts tradition of mixing beauty with utility while keeping in mind consumer preference (a position supported by his employers as Wells actively sought consumer input in product design). ⁸

Creating a Public Presence

By the 1930s, potters began to recognize that their industry needed the benefit of not only a unique design but also the means to promote this truly American style. Even trade publications such as the Crockery and Glass Journal argued in an editorial that American pottery finally caught up technically to that of Europe but the average customer still did not buy it because they knew nothing about it and continued to assume the imported product to be better. Potters did not help their cause either, being so concerned with dealers and jobbers that they neglected the end customer in many instances. The editorial’s author, Grace Ely, went on to wonder why potteries acted with such modesty that they refused to put their names out in public or advertise their superiority compared to imported goods. Without a proper publicity campaign, she concluded

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⁸ “East Liverpool Potteries,” Crockery and Glass Journal, December 20, 1877, 12; Blaszczyk, Imagining Consumers, 131-38, 157-60; United States Potters Association, 57th Proceedings of the Annual Convention, Cleveland, Ohio, December 3-4, 1935 (East Liverpool, OH: J.H. Simms Book and Job Printer, 1935), Ohio Historic Connection, Columbus, Ohio (hereafter referred to as OHC), 35; and William C. Gates, Jr., The City of Hills and Kilns: Life and Work in East Liverpool, Ohio (East Liverpool, OH: East Liverpool Historical Society, 1982), 318-19. Even though Rhead detested the practice of American potters copying one another’s designs, it probably comes as no surprise that once Fiesta took off in popularity, many other potteries around the East Liverpool area and elsewhere quickly released their own lines of brightly colored, art-deco inspired ware, some even going as far as making molds from Fiesta pieces to create blatant copies. For comparison, see Richard Tedlow’s study of automobile branding in New and Improved. He notes that General Motors broke the Ford market domination by offering a variety of vehicles “for every purse and purpose,” much like Rhead hoped to do for American pottery.
that American consumers (herself included) would continue to use European china in their homes.9

Despite Ely’s claims, some potteries did promote their product in public places. To drum up publicity for Syracuse China, Onondaga Pottery Vice President E. L. Torbert organized a promotional tour in the summer of 1915. A team of three employees travelled to major department stores in twenty-five cities over a six-month span to set up displays of Syracuse China. In addition, they brought along a small kiln and held production demonstrations firing and decorating small creamers and plates. To stir up more excitement for the tour, the company encouraged store owners to hold their own promotions to coincide with the appearance of the Onondaga workers, such as giveaways, costumes contests, and crowning a Miss or Mrs. Syracuse China in the store. The tour met with success as the Crockery and Glass Journal reported nonstop crowds for the entire duration of the stop at Wanamaker’s in Philadelphia and Torbert repeated the promotion ten years later in 1925.10

Over the years, the United States Potters Association’s Art and Design Committee stood at the forefront of calling for greater publicity for the industry as a whole, arguing as far back as 1906 that potters lost sales because they called no public attention to their product. They reasoned “it would be a suicidal policy for us not to avail ourselves of this opportunity to enter upon a campaign of publicity for our industry” and called for the USPA to sponsor a presence at department stores, museums and trade fairs. To cite the possibilities of this venture, the committee invoked the example of USPA success at various World’s Fairs during the previous

10 Cleota Reed and Stan Skoczen, Syracuse China (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 95 and “Making Pottery at Wanamaker’s,” Crockery and Glass Journal, August 31, 1916, 15. Also see “China Making at Dulin-Martin Co.,” Washington Herald, October 14, 1915, 6 and “How Would You Make a China Plate?” Syracuse Herald-Journal, April 19, 1916, 30 for descriptions of other stops along the tour. These type of public events can also fall under the realm of public relations, see chapter 6.
decades. Pottery had been represented at the World’s Fair since 1876 when Homer Laughlin won a medal at the Centennial Exposition. In 1933, Shenango China became a primary supplier of china to the Chicago Fair, providing a set of Mother Goose children’s ware to the Enchanted Isle restaurant on Lake Michigan, casual service to the Stewart & Ashley Coffee Restaurant, and a Blue Willow service to the B & G Sandwich Shop, one of the largest concession areas at the fair.¹¹

The World’s Fair for 1939 was to be held in New York City. Planners hoped that the fair would be a celebration of both modernity creating a “usable future” and of the triumph of the New Deal in pulling the United States out of the Great Depression. The theme, “Building the World of Tomorrow,” encouraged a wide variety of industries to showcase their latest technologies to an eager public who could be part of the experience like never before. In this light, it is surprising that a trade as ancient as pottery would latch onto the modernity-themed display, but the USPA hoped that a celebration of American-made china on the greatest stage would stem the alarming surge of imports. In the summer of 1938, officials from the USPA and the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters met to plan an exhibit for the fair. While all USPA members were invited to participate, in the end five firms agreed to finance part of a display: Cronin China, Hall China, Edwin Knowles China, Paden City Pottery, and the Homer Laughlin China Company. The five combined firms and the union each put forth $30,000 to create an exhibit that would include a fully operational pottery complete with a pug mill, casters,

throwers, jiggers, finishers, dippers, decorators, and a twenty-foot circular kiln to fire more than 100 dozen pieces of ware on site each day.¹²

The potters’ 2,230 square-foot display located in the Home Furnishings Building celebrated not only one hundred years of American commercial potting but also the nearing of fifty years of successful labor negotiations between the USPA and NBOP (in the ensuing period the industry suffered only two major strikes, neither of which ended in violence or animosity). To promote their harmonious relationship, Charles Murphy, one of Rhead’s assistants at Homer Laughlin, painted a fourteen-by-forty-three foot mural, Capital and Labor, to hang in the center of the display. The mural depicts several of the leaders of labor and industry including William E. Wells, NBOP President James Duffy, Alfred Bleininger, and Frederick Rhead beneath two goddess-like figures in a tableau reminiscent of classical art. While the five companies provided the machinery to create a working pottery, NBOP provided a crew of a dozen workers in two-week shifts to man the display and sell the finished product as souvenirs, the sale of which would cover the costs of the exhibit. Items available included a pair of 7-inch plates depicting the potter at work on his wheel and an artist painting a vase, large and small creamers in the shape of a bust of George Washington (as the 150th anniversary of his inauguration appeared as a minor theme during the fair) and vases in a variety of sizes formed and fired in front of the eyes of the crowd.

“The American Potter” exhibit completed construction in late April 1939, just in time for the fair’s grand opening in May. To encourage workers who did not travel up to work the display to attend, Homer Laughlin sponsored a chartered train trip the weekend of August 23-26. For

Figure 23: *Capital and Labor* by Charles Murphy. New York Public Library.
$16.50 each, employees and family received travel from East Liverpool to New York, tickets to the fair, and lunches for the long weekend. Around one hundred employees took advantage of the trip.13

The six Liverpool-area potteries did not make up the only presence of American china manufacturers at the fair. While opting out of “The American Potter,” the Onondaga Pottery sent their own large display of china to the New York Pavilion at the fair with an adjoining advertising campaign stressing the high quality of their true china. At the fair and at subsequent in-store displays, Onondaga gave demonstrations with a china bell to show their product as “true to its tone” and offered dinner bells as a giveaway with coupons in leading bridal and women’s magazines. Shenango China too had a major presence at the fair, but rather than set up a booth, they preferred to showcase their china in its natural setting on the dinner table. In all, eighty-nine restaurants and concession stands used Shenango products, including Child’s Restaurant and their seventy-nine kiosks scattered across the fairgrounds, the Consolidated Glass Building, three stands for the Doughnut Corporation of America, the Dutch Village Restaurant, the Schaefer Brewing Company, the YMCA Building, and the George Washington Coffee Company. But their greatest honor came in providing the china for American and visiting dignitaries at Federal Building through their production agreement with Theodore Haviland of New York.14

The combination of a steep admission price (seventy-five cents, far more than any previous fairs) and a public reluctance to embrace modernity led the 1939 World’s Fair to not quite live up to its expectations. In fact, the spectacle lost money and had to run for a second year with lowered admission fees and a new slogan, “For Peace and Freedom” to try and break even. The USPA and Brotherhood, however, felt pleased with their display, noting that it attracted audiences of up to four million people. They agreed to run “The American Potter” again for the 1940 fair with an even greater focus on the cooperation and peace between labor and management. To keep interested customers buying, they added new souvenirs to be made onsite, including a Martha Washington creamer to match the previous year’s George, a cup and saucer decorated with the signs of the zodiac, and a set of ashtrays depicting the four seasons in corresponding colors. In the end, both parties agreed the World’s Fair display greatly helped spread awareness of the quality of American-made pottery and encouraged consumer loyalty as European and Japanese competition began to disappear from the market due to the war.15

The success of the World’s Fair displays convinced potters that putting their products forth on a big stage not necessarily connected directly to the retail store could work to their advantage. In the coming years, American-made pottery would show up in previously unheard-of venues, including the world of fine art. In 1932 Syracuse Museum of Fine Art director Anna Olmstead arranged for an exhibition of ceramics to showcase the work of up and coming American sculptors. No other museum in the United States provided a venue for a modern ceramic exhibit and Olmstead knew such a show could help launch the careers of these emerging

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15 Smith, Making the Modern, 420-21; United States Potters Association, 61st Proceedings of the Annual Convention, Washington, DC, January 23-24, 1940 (East Liverpool, OH: J.H. Simms Book and Job Printer, 1940), OHC, 33-35; and “Miniature Pottery is Again Expected to be the Feature of World’s Biggest Show,” Potters Herald, May 9, 1940, 1-2. The 1939 Fair was not the last time that American potteries put their goods on global display. Shenango China was used by the 1958 Brussels World’s Fair restaurants and Syracuse China also had a recurring presence. See “You’ll Find Syracuse China at the World’s Fair,” Syracuse China News, Mar-Apr 1964, 2-3, Onondaga Historical Association, Syracuse, New York (hereafter referred to as OHA).
artists. At the Onondaga Pottery, executive R. Guy Cowan took an interest in Olmstead’s project, knowing such a show could help the pottery locate future talent. With the approval of Richard Pass, Onondaga provided funding for prizes while Cowan served as a judge for the juried show. The Syracuse National Ceramic Exhibition proved so popular that it would continue on a yearly basis until 1972 then intermittently until 1987. The exhibitions drew international acclaim and the museum often sent winning entries out on loan across the United States and Europe. The Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts (now known as the Everson Museum) kept the more than three thousand entries as part of a permanent display that since 1986 has been known as the Syracuse China Center for the Study of American Ceramics and is still open for viewing today.\(^\text{16}\)

While Onondaga involved itself with ceramic art in museums, Shenango’s Castleton China division also sought out the possibility of artistic display. In 1940 the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City established its Department of Industrial Design, headed by a young architecture student named Eliot Noyes who took an interest in showcasing objects both useful and beautiful. After visiting *Organic Design*, one of Noyes’s shows on modern home furnishings in 1941, Castleton head Louis Hellman pondered the possibility of creating a modern-shaped dinnerware to be displayed at the Museum which Shenango could later produce for sale. The next year Hellman approached Noyes about a commission. Noyes recommended the china be crafted by Eva Zeisel, a Hungarian designer who recently arrived in the United States after fleeing Soviet imprisonment. Zeisel accepted the commission and set to work, completing twenty-five pieces which satisfied both MoMA’s design guidelines as well as

Hellman’s estimations on what the buying public would accept. Zeisel based her designs on circles, rounded squares, and squared ovals, seeking an overall organic ware that would appear “to be growing up from the table.”\(^\text{17}\)

Zeisel completed the commission in 1943 but World War II prevented the exhibition from opening until April 17, 1946. The show, the first ever at MoMA primarily by a female designer and the first ever free-form modern shape in fine china, appeared on the museum’s first floor overlooking the outdoor garden. Zeisel’s china, named “Museum” by Castleton, proved extremely popular at the show and she later looked back fondly on the shape as one of her favorites since its success helped launch her long and successful career in industrial design. With demand high, Castleton began production of Museum for sale to the general public in 1949. Castleton made Museum available both in the undecorated form created by the artist as well as in a number of decal and hand-painted decorations. The plant needed to alter some pieces from the original display to make them both more functional and easier for Shenango’s workers to produce. Still, the intricacies of the delicate forms meant that labor remained intensive and rejection rates high and as a result Museum remained quite expensive for its time, with a service for twelve costing $300 (equivalent to nearly $3000 today).\(^\text{18}\)

In the ensuing period between initially contacting MoMA and readying Museum for mass production, Hellman commissioned a number of other prominent artists to create works which he could reproduce on Castleton China in the Museum and their standard coupe shapes. The first finished set with works from Thomas Hart Benton, Ludwig Bernrlmans, Salvador Dali, Raphael Ellender, Ernest Fiene, Roberta Montenegro, Thomas W. Nason, Allen Saalburg, Paul Sample,


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<td>First display</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marshall Field’s</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>April 5-?, 1943</td>
<td>Accompanied by Elsie Shaver, Ching Chih Yee, Marcel Vertes, &amp; Lee Townsend</td>
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<td>Horne’s</td>
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<td>Watt’s</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>April 18-30, 1949</td>
<td>Accompanied by a company representative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Galleries of the Associated American Artists</td>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>September 15-23, 1949</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marshall Field’s</td>
<td>Chicago</td>
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<td>A. Harris &amp; Co.</td>
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<td>J. L. Hudson Company</td>
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<td>The Grace Lloyd Collins Shop</td>
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<td>October 11, 1950</td>
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<td>Woodrum’s</td>
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<td>Accompanied by Hazel M. Ervin</td>
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<td>Kaufman’s</td>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>April 11-?, 1951</td>
<td>Half-sized show (18 paintings), accompanied by Hazel M. Ervin</td>
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<td>The Crescent</td>
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<td>Salt Lake City</td>
<td>Early June, 1952</td>
<td>Half-sized show (18 paintings)</td>
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Table 1: A list of the locations and dates of the Castleton China Contemporary Artists Collection exhibit put on by Shenango China

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Georges Schrieber, Elsie Shaver, Lee Townsend, Marcel Vertes, and Ching Chih Yee displayed in November 1942 at B. Altman’s in New York City to the excitement of the media and patrons. Another New York exhibition followed in 1949 at the Galleries of the Associated American Artists with new works added from the likes of Modigliani and Picasso, bringing the total number of works to thirty-six paintings and etchings from twenty-eight artists. Coming off the success of the show, Hellman made the decision to take the china pieces and corresponding artwork on a tour of the United States, stopping at high-end department stores for periods ranging from four days to two weeks.19

Figure 24: The Castleton China Contemporary Artists display at Wanamaker's, c. 1950. Lawrence County Historical Society.

The travelling exhibit, which Hellman dubbed the “Castleton China Contemporary Artists Collection,” covered a wide swath of the United States, moving on from New York to Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia and then continuing on to St. Louis, Dallas, Charleston, Detroit, Buffalo, Denver, and Salt Lake City. In smaller venues, a partial show with only half of the exhibited works could be displayed so that the collection reached as large an audience as possible. On some stops, Hazel M. Ervin, a Castleton official, accompanied the artwork to give demonstrations on china etiquette and table setting while answering questions about the production of the pieces. At the end of the tour in 1952, the commissioned artwork remained at the Shenango plant until the dissolution of the Castleton subsidiary. From there, Shenango donated the entire collection of commissioned works, valued at more than $75,000, to the Hoyt Institute of Fine Arts in New Castle, where it initially went up for display in May 1971 and remains viewable to this day in periodic exhibitions.20

While association with museums brought a certain level of prestige, nothing could compare to the honor and publicity that came with being selected to provide dinnerware for the president of the United States. The president had an official china service dating all the way back to 1789 when Congress authorized public funds for a small set of breakfast dishes at George Washington’s New York residence. Over the years many subsequent administrations purchased

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their own china, either to replace broken sets, to expand the current holdings, or to match the current First Lady’s personal tastes. For more than one hundred years, this china always came from Europe, usually France. It was not until 1918 that the Wilson administration commissioned the first White House china made in the United States from the Lenox plant in New Jersey, as Mrs. Wilson felt it should be a point of national pride to have an American-made service at the White House. All presidential ware since that point has been manufactured in the United States.\textsuperscript{21}

Lenox China handled the next presidential order as well, a 1933 commission for the Roosevelt administration consisting of navy decoration on a cream border. In 1940 the set needed expansion due to the increasing number of official dinner and dignitaries entertained throughout the year. To save on costs, the administration brought over the china used at the Federal Building once the World’s Fair completed its second season. This china, cream with gold bands and the seal of the United States had been manufactured by Shenango China for Theodore Haviland, making them the second American pottery to enter the White House. Fifteen years later, First Lady Mamie Eisenhower decided to augment the existing Roosevelt and Truman sets with gold service plates to match the flatware in the dining room. Having seen a Castleton China pattern called “Royal Medallion” with a raised gold dot design hand painted onto a black rim, Mrs. Eisenhower contacted the plant to inquire about creating a similar plate all in gold. Eisenhower worked with Shenango’s Director of Design Bill McBurney to create a gold-on-gold design that worked in the candlelight of the dining room. The final service plates featured the seal of the United States surrounded by a thick gold border and layers of raised gold dots in a

\textsuperscript{21} Margaret Brown Klapthor, \textit{Official White House China: 1789 to the Present}, second edition, (New York: The Barra Foundations, Inc. for Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1999), 21-22, 155. Not every administration orders china, a set usually lasts 10-15 years depending on breakage and the need to expand the set into more place settings. Lenox China would make the china for the Roosevelt, Truman, and Reagan administrations as well as adding to the Roosevelt and Wilson sets for the Clinton administration. A completely new set has not been ordered since the Reagan administration in the early 1980s.
medallion-like pattern. The artists of the Castleton Studio branch of the company hand painted all 125 plates, each taking seven separate firings and three days to complete at a cost of $3,606 each.²²

First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy began negotiations with Castleton to produce a new set of White House china in the summer of 1963. When her husband campaigned for the presidency in 1960, he stopped in New Castle where Shenango China sales manager Harold Audino presented him with a Castleton set in the gold “Laurel” pattern and a hint to remember the company upon his likely election. The design process went as far as Mrs. Kennedy submitting samples of her ideas to Castleton but the negotiation halted with the assassination of John F. Kennedy that November. The existing china service would remain in place or another five years when Claudia “Lady Bird” Johnson contacted Tiffany’s for a new set. State dinners under the Johnson administration used a mixture of the Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower services but the First Lady preferred a matched set extensive enough to accommodate the larger-than-ever number of White House guests. While Tiffany’s handled the design, consisting of many wildflowers of the United States surrounding an eagle taken from the James Monroe service, they outsourced the actual production. The prestigious design house

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²² Klapthor, *Official White House China*, 161, 169 and “Castleton Makes the White House,” *Shenanigan* (Shenango China company newsletter), November 1955, 1-3, LCHS. The Castleton Studios was started by Hellman as a prestige line for Castleton featuring all hand-painted designs and heavy use of gold and platinum decoration. They also made china for the Strategic Air Command, plates for an Eisenhower birthday fundraiser, and personal china for use on Eisenhower’s airplane, *Columbine*. 

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Figure 25: John F. Kennedy hold up a Castleton plate in New Castle in October 1960. Lawrence County Historical Society.
chose Castleton once again to make the dinner service of 216 place settings. Castleton completed
the new Johnson china in May 1968 and Shenango officials even got to enjoy the first official
usage of the dinnerware at a White House luncheon. While the Eisenhower and Roosevelt orders
raised the prestige level of Shenango’s subsidiaries, the Johnson china received tremendous
amounts of national press, all of which Shenango encouraged its salesmen to play up when

Despite the acclaim the White House China brought to commercial foodservice orders,
Shenango’s home lines began to struggle after World War II due to cheaper imported options.
Shenango management remained firmly committed to the home market and to augment
Castleton, which retailed for higher prices in fine department stores, the company released
several lines of value-priced ware. Peter Terris china appeared on the market in 1955 as a
durable, low cost option for everyday dining, with a starter service for four available for only
$12.95 (at a time when many single place settings of Castleton cost $14.95 or more). For other
lines, Shenango resorted back to an old standby: the door-to-door salesman. Around 1962
Shenango designed a service called Nancy Prentiss for ALCOA Kensington. While Shenango
provided the pieces, ALCOA representatives sold them door-to-door along with matching
aluminum kitchen accessories. To save the cost of developing new shapes or decorations for
low-end lines, both Nancy Prentiss and a subsequent product, American Manor China, used
unfired blanks from Castleton and sometimes even finished Castleton pieces themselves with the
backstamps ground off. Shenango sold American Manor for a short time around 1968 with primary clients being either individual homes or small institutions such as sorority houses.  

**Informational Campaigns and Premiums**

With proof from the achievements of individual firms and the World’s Fair, the USPA surmised that public relations in the pottery industry could be realized with desirable results. The USPA’s Trade Expansion Committee ultimately recommended that the association look into national advertising that promoted the superiority of American pottery and encouraged the purchase of full sets of member-manufactured china. But short of one major advertising spread confined to the *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph* and tying into the Buy American campaign, nothing came of this initial attempt. The problem lay in the fact that the USPA welcomed all different branches of ceramic production, and the individual needs of chinaware, earthenware, and sanitary manufacturers complicated any hope of a unified national advertising achieving success.  

The USPA tried again in 1946, securing the services of Sills Incorporated to create a public relations campaign for the association. Some members chafed at the $35,000 per year cost to retain Sills but as others pointed out, the pottery industry fell severely behind when it came to nurturing a public image (a notable example cited by Sills pointed out that the peanut industry
spent more than one million dollars each year on their publicity) and the growing import threat necessitated a strong brand association. Sills agreed, as a representative claimed that American pottery needed PR help more than any industry he had ever seen. The campaign began March 1, 1947 with extensive promotional materials given to magazines and radio stations as well as a guided publicity tour of the Onondaga Pottery plant. As a result, twenty-five articles on pottery appeared in sixteen different magazines reaching an estimated 71 million readers. Six other articles appeared in industry trade journals and Sills-penned editorials showed up in countless newspapers across the country. With the tariff rate on pottery cut that year as a consequence of the Geneva GATT agreement, Sills argued that reaching the public remained of utmost importance and the USPA agreed to retain their services for the next three years.26

Another trade association, the American Fine China Guild, also considered ways to get their name out to the public in the years following World War II. At its January 1957 meeting that ultimately approved the film “Choice in China,” the Guild considered several other means of publicity and information, setting aside $15,000 for promotions. Suggestions included an essay contest for young women stating why they would purchase American china for their homes with a set of member china as first prize, a manual for home economics teachers on the manufacture and quality of American-made china, an advertising campaign in bridal magazines, and a newsletter for retailers that would include updates on member firms and ideas for merchandising.27

26 United States Potters Association, 68th Proceedings of the Annual Convention, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, December 16-17, 1946 (East Liverpool, OH: J.H. Simms Book and Job Printer, 1946), OHC, 78-87 and United States Potters Association, 69th Proceedings of the Annual Convention, New York, December 9-10, 1947 (East Liverpool, OH: J.H. Simms Book and Job Printer, 1947), OHC, 37-61, 89. As USPA membership steadily dropped during the 1950s, the organization’s remaining members turned the bulk of their attention towards trying to change the tariff and trade agreement laws and worried less about publicity. By 1951 Sills’s efforts were considered too expensive to retain further.

27 American Fine China Guild minutes January 10, 1957, 1-4. Other than the film which did go into production, it is not known if any of the other publicity measures actually were undertaken. As competition
While the trade associations of the industry took large-scale measures to create publicity, the individual firms also continued to promote their products. One of the more popular ways of doing so was through creating informational booklets that potential customers could send for usually for free or a small shipping charge. This idea originated with food manufacturers who encouraged customers to send for booklets of recipes utilizing the advertised product. Homer Laughlin again stood at the forefront of the trend by being among the first to hire advertising managers to generate catalogs and booklets for interested patrons. The first, *The China Book*, came out around 1911 as a combination catalog/informational brochure that discussed the history of the company, particulars of china production, and tips on how to select and care for china while displaying some of Laughlin’s most popular shapes and patterns that could be ordered through local dealers.  

Just a few years following *The China Book*, the Onondaga Pottery introduced the first of its several informational publications, *Little Romances of China*. This gave the reader an illustrated history of pottery production all over the world, ending of course with the triumph of American pottery as exemplified by Syracuse China. In the ensuing years, other booklets followed such as *The Potter and His Art* which again gave a history of the industry and an overview of production and *You and Your China* which gave tips on selection and care of fine ceramics with popular Syracuse China items scattered throughout. A final booklet, *Look What You Can Do with Syracuse China*, released in the waning years of the line, showcased twenty-eight entertaining ideas and tablescapes incorporating various Syracuse patterns. Shenango China also released two booklets through the Castleton line, *Things You Should Know about* 

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China, another of the histories of manufacture, and Bridal Etiquette, meant for an engaged woman planning her wedding. This gave tips on announcements, invitations, ceremony setup, and proper timeliness of thanks. And of course, it featured several Castleton patterns for a bride to choose from when starting her own home.29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Audience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>The China Book</td>
<td>Homer Laughlin</td>
<td>Public/Dealers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Little Romances of China</td>
<td>Onondaga</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>The Potter and His Art</td>
<td>Onondaga</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>A Day at Onondaga Pottery</td>
<td>Onondaga</td>
<td>Dealers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Chinaware—Its Selection and Maintenance</td>
<td>Onondaga</td>
<td>Dealers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>What to Say to Sell Syracuse China</td>
<td>Onondaga</td>
<td>Dealers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Things You Should Know About China</td>
<td>Shenango</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>The Secret of Famous Chefs</td>
<td>Shenango</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>You and Your China</td>
<td>Onondaga</td>
<td>Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Wedding Etiquette</td>
<td>Shenango</td>
<td>Public</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Look What You Can Do with Syracuse</td>
<td>Syracuse</td>
<td>Public</td>
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Table 2: List of informational booklets put out by Shenango, Onondaga, and Homer Laughlin

Another major means to spread awareness about American pottery products came from simply giving them away. During the early twentieth century, many of the East Liverpool area potteries did the vast majority of their business through the production of premiums, pieces of ware packaged in consumer goods, given away in theaters or public spaces, or redeemed via coupons, stamps, and punch cards at local supermarkets. The use of premiums dates back to the rise of the chain store in the late 1800s. The Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company first gave away small items such as flatware, glass, and pottery to repeat customers to encourage them to shop at the chain rather than local neighborhood markets. They advertised giveaways through lavishly

29 The Onondaga Pottery, Little Romances of China (Syracuse, NY: Onondaga Pottery Company, 1919); Ibid., The Potter and His Art (Syracuse, NY: Onondaga Pottery, 1923); Ibid., You and Your China (Syracuse, NY: Onondaga Pottery, 1952); Syracuse China Company, Look What You Can do with Syracuse China (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse China Company, 1965); Castleton China, Inc., Things You Should Know About China (New York: Castleton China, Inc., 1946); and Ibid., Bridal Etiquette (New York: Castleton China, Inc., 1954). Other industries, especially those connected to food, also utilized informational booklets. See Strasser, Satisfaction Guaranteed.
illustrated trading cards that women were encouraged to collect in albums and scrapbooks. By
the beginning of the twentieth century, premium distribution spread from the A&P to
manufacturers of soap, cigars, and cereal; theaters, bookstores, and concert halls; and newspaper
and magazine publishers, all of whom wished to gain and keep customer loyalty. Pottery
remained a popular choice among premium distributors because of its small size and relatively
cheap price. For the potteries themselves, premium manufacture offered the guarantee of large
orders that could keep a plant busy most of the year, but at the same time offered little profit
margin since distributors demanded an ever-cheaper product. Still, the promise of steady work
kept the competition for these accounts fierce in the Liverpool area. In 1887 the Sebring Pottery
opened with a specific emphasis on making only premium china. Their dedication to bulk orders
drove out all but the strongest competitors and in the first half of the century only Homer
Laughlin would produce as much premium ware as Sebring.30

Homer Laughlin’s first premium order came from the Quaker Oats Company in
September 1900, a request for 7,500 dozen small cereal bowls to be packed in boxes of their
Mother’s Oats cereal. The initial request soon turned into an order of four thousand dozen per
week for a total of 2.4 million pieces over the next fourteen months, a commission that the plant
could not successfully fulfill without the construction of more kilns. After a five-year hiatus,
Quaker returned to Laughlin for more premiums and for the next fifty years the two companies

30 Gates, The City of Hills and Kilns, 267-68; Blaszczyk, Imagining Consumers, 96-99; and Floyd W.
For more on the use of premiums to create brand loyalty, see Strasser, Satisfaction Guaranteed; Eugene R. Beem,
information on trading cards as premium advertisements, see Ellen Gruber Garvey, The Adman in the Parlor:
Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s (New York and Oxford, Oxford University
Press, 1996), chapter 1. For information on the rise of chain stores such as A & P that won customers through
premium use, see Strasser, Satisfaction Guaranteed, Tedlow, New and Improved and Lizabeth Cohen, Making a
New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press,
1990).
would continue their relationship. Premium china came from a mixture of new and existing shapes and decorations depending on what would be cheapest for the company to produce at the time but even the newly-created patterns would be sold by Laughlin after the giveaway period ended. Decorations tended towards a simple decal or border for quick production. While premium pieces usually consisted of small items such as a teacup, saucer, small bowl, and bread and butter plates, larger items such as dinner plates or platters could often be ordered from Quaker by sending in box tops to complete the set. Because the production schedule remained hectic, orders for Quaker could often not be filled by Laughlin alone and other local potteries such as Sebring, Taylor Smith Taylor, Royal China, French-Saxon China, Scio Pottery and Stetson Pottery chipped in to satisfy the demand.31

Patterns made for Quaker include Barbara Jane, Chateau Buffet, Chelsea, Doric, Fortune, Harvest, Ivory, Modern Star, Orleans, Pastoral, Peachtree,

Figure 26: A package of Mother's Oats with Laughlin's "Carnival" china. Photo by Candy Fagerlin at “The Pottery Papers,” <http://thepotterypapers.blogspot.com/2010/02/mothers-oats.html>

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Ravenna, Roman, Tea Rose, Trellis, and Tudor Rose. But the most popular and most memorable of the Quaker Oats premiums were the colorful pieces of Carnival. Laughlin designed Carnival in 1938 specifically to tie into the immense popularity of Fiesta. The Carnival pieces looked similar to their famous cousin, with a basic ring design and used several of the same colored glazes (green, yellow, cobalt blue, turquoise, and ivory). Five pieces in all could be found in boxes of Mother’s Oats (occasionally renamed Carnival Oats to tie into the promotion) which together formed a breakfast china set of a fruit bowl, toast plate, oatmeal/cereal bowl, tea cup, and saucer. Carnival remained by far the most popular of the Laughlin premium sets and production continued into the 1950s when colors matching the Harlequin line replaced many of the Fiesta hues. Carnival production ended in 1956 and Homer Laughlin’s premium contract wrapped up in the next year or so when the cost of production simply no longer meant that china could be offered for free. In fact, even the final promotions required mailing in a payment with box tops rather than packaging the china directly with the oats.32

Homer Laughlin premiums appeared in many other venues besides cereal boxes. In the mid-1930s, neighborhood movie theaters gave away premiums at mid-week showings in order to lure in customers during a traditionally slow part of the week. Homer Laughlin designed a special decoration on their Century shape specifically for theaters, the Medallion pattern. The Medallion collection consisted of eleven different items to make a fifty-two piece set. Theaters gave away one piece per week so that after one year a housewife could obtain eight six-piece place settings plus a platter, serving bowl, creamer, and sugar for no additional cost beyond her movie tickets. Additionally, soaps and detergents remained popular for giveaways: in the 1930s Colgate-Palmolive-Peet approached Laughlin about a variety of items and their Octagon soap

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over the years gave away pieces in the Blue Willow, Empress, Maytime, Pennsylvania Dutch, Yellowstone, Kwaker, Melon, Virginia Rose, and Ribbon patterns and even included ashtrays to match Fiesta. But like Mother’s Oats, Octagon Soap also got an exclusive decoration which became synonymous with its brand. Colgate-Palmolive-Peet first ordered the Rose & Poppy pattern in the fall of 1930 and in time it became so popular that it adorned several shapes and pieces of premium ware for the next twenty years. Orders in 1931 alone totaled more than $1 million per year, making them Laughlin’s second million-dollar account after Woolworth’s. DUZ Detergent also included china as Laughlin manufactured the “Golden Wheat” pattern for them in the 1940s.33

Because of its widespread popularity, Fiesta became the center of a number of promotions over the years. In 1938 the Kraft Company approved the design of a leaf-shaped coaster invoking the flower-decorated glass containers of its cheese spreads. Because the jars doubled as drinking glasses once emptied, offering a coaster in Fiesta red and green made an attractive matching drink set. The following year they offered the coaster for two cheese spread labels and twenty-five cents for shipping. For years, dealers had been offered a Fiesta juice set with a yellow pitcher and six tumblers in the original colors, but in the early 1940s the Reliable Tea Company got a special offer with the ordinary yellow pitcher swapped out for brilliant red. Laughlin also contracted directly with other companies to offer Fiesta in tandem with related accessories, such as the Tricolator Company’s chrome bases and a special casserole made specifically for Betty Crocker and fit with their metal base in 1946. Finally, Laughlin themselves lent out Fiesta at the end of its lifespan for use as grocery store and trading stamp redemptions.

While the hollowware remained untouched, plates, platters, and saucers gained decal and stamp decoration in the late 1960s and early 1970s to reflect more current trends in decorating.34

Fiesta’s enduring popularity inspired a number of items over the years which sought to tie into the marketing of the famous china. Collectors use the phrase “go-alongs” to describe the non-china items that complimented existing pieces or that invoked the spirit of the Fiesta line. The earliest go-alongs came out a short time following the introduction of Fiesta and included wooden and metal salad bowls, condiment holders, toasters, egg cookers, coffee pots, and wall art. A few years after Homer Laughlin reintroduced Fiesta in 1986, they looked to the go-along as an opportunity to enhance the popularity of the line further. In 1999 Laughlin licensed fifteen different companies to produce official go-along items, now called “Genuine Fiesta Accessories” to ensure consumers of quality. These products, including linens, cutting and cheese boards, cup holders, glassware, magnets, kitchen timers, flatware, lamps, ice crushers, juicers, photo frames, and candles, incorporated the popular Fiesta name to spread brand awareness to all areas of kitchen and home decoration.35

By the twenty-first century, the concept of official go-alongs became an established facet of the Fiesta brand. In 2011 Homer Laughlin unveiled a new wave of accessories, but this time

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34 Sandra Bond, “The Kraft Leaf Saucer,” *The DISH*, vol. 9, no. 3 (spring 2007), 12-13; Becky Turner, “Homer and Betty…A Longstanding Relationship,” *The DISH*, vol. 5, no. 2 (winter 2002), 4-6; and Bob Huxford and Sharon Huxford, *Collector’s Encyclopedia of Fiesta Plus Harlequin, Rivera, and Kitchen Kraft*, ninth edition (Paducah, KY: Collector Books (A Division of Schiffer Books), 2001), 11, 23, 44-47. A final word on premiums: unlike Homer Laughlin whose target audience remained the everyday consumer, Shenango and Syracuse manufactured for foodservice and a very high end of the home market. To that end, they did not participate in the large-quantity production of cheap premium pieces. However, Shenango at least once did manufacture china for a giveaway. Around the late 1960s they introduced a line called Gateway China (again using Castleton blanks with simplified designs) for use as a premium for a local bank. Customers were given a piece for free when opening the account then received coupons for reduced price purchase with subsequent deposits. See the *New Castle News*, November 30, 1968, 7.

working in direct collaboration with the manufacturer rather than just licensing the names, shapes, and colors. The first new items appeared that at the New York Tabletop Show, stainless steel utensils fitted at the Newell plant with ceramic handles in all the colors of Fiesta. The next year the company released Fiesta cookware, skillets and cooking pans matching the most popular colors of the china. Going along with these items were matching knife blocks, cutting boards, pot holders, kitchen towels, and measuring spoons. Recently, accessories have ventured beyond the kitchen into other areas of the home. After nearly eight years of planning, Homer Laughlin partnered with Ellison and Town & Country Living to branch the Fiesta name into bedding and bath. After a successful test run in late 2013, the line went national in April 2014, bringing to the market comforters, sheets, curtains, pillows, throws, towels, shower curtains, and bath mats in the recognizable bright colors of Fiesta. To compliment the bath line, Homer Laughlin began producing soap dishes, toothbrush holders, and pump soap dispensers, the first non-tableware manufactured by the company for decades.36

Marketing through Advertising

Pottery companies achieved periods of notoriety through public displays or events, but as with any industry, the most consistent form of marketing came through advertising. Advertising developed alongside corporate industry in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century and over time shifted from factual descriptions of a product into vehicles to create a need  

for products not previously necessary. Ads used color, persuasive language, and appeals to consumer aspirations not to simply reflect the world, but as historian Roland Marchand reasoned, to hold up a type of “funhouse mirror” to society. In this way, consumers saw a life that could be with the use of advertised products, thus driving their desire.\(^37\) The pottery industry began at a disadvantage in this mindset, as customers of the nineteenth century saw china as a necessity not a luxury and quality only mattered to those with the highest incomes. In order to survive the lean years, potteries needed to learn techniques to make customers want to buy more china more often. Laughlin’s Frederick Rhead pushed for direct customer sales at a time most manufacturers only bothered to advertise to dealers in the trade journals. He figured if dinnerware could be advertised convincingly and frequently, the public would learn to desire changing it constantly the way they did with clothing, furniture, and even automobiles.\(^38\)

\(^37\) The historiography of advertising began around the 1920s, just as the medium itself reached maturity. Early works such as Frank Presbry’s *The History and Development of Advertising* (New York: Doubleday, 1929) and Vance Packard’s *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: Random House, 1957) did little more than give a basic overview of the development of the medium and its leaders. One of the first real crucial analyses of advertising and its social effects was Stuart Ewen’s *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), followed a few years later by Daniel Pope’s *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). They both argue that industry used advertising as a means of training Americans in the ways of a mass consumer society by creating a need for the new industrial goods (a view also echoed in William Leach’s *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994). At this early juncture, advertisements merely provided information on a product and its benefits (the ad functioning as a “window” of society). Roland Marchand’s groundbreaking work, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1985), presents the idea of the “funhouse mirror,” arguing instead that advertisements by the turn of the century did not merely reflect society as a window but presented instead a distorted view of the world, rendering it a fantasy which could be made real by the purchase of goods. The connection of consumer goods with deep desire also runs prevalent in the work of T. J. Jackson Lears’s *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994) and Pamela Laird’s, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). Ellen Gruber Garvey’s *The Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s to 1910s* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996) argues for this practice of creating desire as one specifically tailored to females. She views advertising as an interactive exchange between female magazine readers and ad executives to create pleasure which was both enjoyable and socially acceptable for women. An entirely different and far more critical view of advertising is seen in Michael Shudson’s *Advertising: The Uneasy Persuasion* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). He argues that advertising is little more than propaganda which is not even usually believed by the audience (who in his opinion are not engaged with the marketer). To him, advertising has little value to marketing as it not persuasive enough to sell an actual product yet companies still rely heavily on it to promote a culture and lifestyle that encourages buying consumer goods.

The earliest public advertising for American-made pottery came from Homer Laughlin in 1891. The location by today’s standards seems a bit odd: while home furnishings such as pottery have nearly always been thought of as a woman’s domain, Laughlin’s first ads appeared in high-end publications meant for a mixed audience at best and in likelihood a more male than female readership. In 1881 the popular magazine Scribner’s Weekly ended upon the death of its creator J. G. Holland but investors bought and renamed it Century Illustrated Monthly, keeping the focus on American stories and historical sketches lavishly illustrated with woodcuts and engravings. By 1885 circulation reached 250,000 readers monthly, a healthy number for advertisements to reach. The first Laughlin ads appeared in the spring of 1891 for their toilet combinet sets, running off and on until around 1900. Like most advertisements of their time, the early Laughlin pieces did little more than describe the product, but noted that the combination chamber pot and slop jar would ease the work of a housewife or servant while remaining more sanitary and attractive in the home. Laughlin’s launched a major new advertising campaign in spring of 1912, the first of such magnitude from any

Figure 27: An early Homer Laughlin advertisement. Good Housekeeping, May 1912, page 45.
East Liverpool pottery. While high-end publications continued to feature, including *National Geographic*, *Cosmopolitan* (still a literary monthly at this time), and *The FRA* (a philosophical publication), the campaign now more specifically targeted female readers as well, with ads also appearing in *The Garden Magazine* and *Good Housekeeping*. In a statement to the trade journal *Pottery, Glass, and Brass Salesmen*, Laughlin noted that the campaign cost quite a bit of money but reaching more than four million readers per month made it worth the cost.39

One year after the new Laughlin ads appeared, the Onondaga Pottery launched its first national advertising campaign in 1913. Unlike the former company’s mixed audience, Onondaga sought to target women specifically from the start. The first Onondaga ads appeared in publications such as *Country Life, The Garden Magazine, Ladies Home Journal*, and *Good Housekeeping*. Following a short break during the First World War, Onondaga’s campaign continued until around 1924. In 1919 the company explained its strategy its workers in the company newsletter, *Syracuse China News* after pointing out that three million homes recently viewed ads for their product. They note that their company fulfilled a basic need for dishes but advertising created enthusiasm for the product and tuned the consumer into a secondary salesman once family and friends saw the advertised ware in their homes. Keeping their name in the press also helped create buying habits which in turn encouraged repeat business to change china sets constantly to keep up with fashion. On the other hand, the newsletter warned employees that advertising fostered a certain amount of responsibility for the company and its

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workers. Once they put their name out in public, they needed to back up their claims with the best china in the world.\footnote{40 “Advertising Syracuse China,” Syracuse China News, company newsletter, June 1919, 1-2, Onondaga Public Library, Syracuse, New York.}

The Great Depression years kept American potteries away from the magazine pages. Around 1940 Onondaga started up another advertising campaign for its Syracuse China, targeting higher-end women’s magazine such as House Beautiful, Ladies Home Journal, and later Mademoiselle. That year also saw Shenango undertake its first public advertising effort to mark the launch of the Castleton China line. Castleton targeted the same audience as Syracuse China and thus repeated the same publications (especially the high-end publication House Beautiful where ads ran into the mid-1950s and again in 1962-69 for the Independence Ironstone line) but also heavily went after the bridal and engagement markets, putting ads in Bride’s Magazine, Modern Bride, and Seventeen. Far more than the other potteries, Castleton also reached its advertising down to the local level by putting heavy emphasis on newspaper ads. The company provided copy complete with illustrations and text that a dealer could then insert their name and address to make the ad their own. These appeared in newspapers across the country for the entire 1940-1974 lifespan of Castleton China. As a producer of mainly hotelware, Shenango itself rarely ran advertising in public spaces with two exceptions: a 1950 experiment with home crockery called “Epicure Ceramic Cook Ware” and a 1956 campaign in LIFE for the new Peter Terris home china. Homer Laughlin largely abandoned public advertising after the 1920s, with Joseph Wells arguing that these efforts did not produce significant results. But the company made one more attempt in 1955 with the introduction of their new shape, also called Epicure,
designed by Don Shreckengost. The series of ads only ran in *House Beautiful* throughout 1955 but stopped once the company realized the Epicure shape did not take off with the public.41

As far as the messages themselves, they tended to follow the history of advertising and became more persuasive in the years following World War I. Potteries would create advertising that promised a better life through the use of American-made china, from beauty to usefulness, from traditional durability to modern design, and from the ability to use the same china as the famous and respected. Certainly the earliest appeal used in ads was the promise of finer living through china. Onondaga’s early ads showed Syracuse China in homes with tables set and tended by maids and servants. But even with the finery of the background, the copy reminds readers that while Syracuse China only looks like a family’s best china normally kept locked away for special occasions, it remained affordable enough to be used every day, making each meal a special occasion. Castleton China also frequently invoked elegance and sophistication while maintaining a reasonable price. Ads run in a 1950 series entitled “When Smart Women Entertain” showed homemakers dressed in elegant evening gowns (with the designers even credited in the copy) setting their fancy tables with Castleton China. Like Syracuse, Castleton could give the appearance of costly imported porcelain but at a price allowing such finery to be used on a daily basis. By 1956, Castleton’s ads suggested using their china as a means to brag to friends and family in a way that did not break a budget.42

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41 “More Stark Figures on the Pottery Industry,” *East Liverpool Review*, April 19, 1954, 4 and Mary K. McCaffery, “Dinnerware Makers Battle Foreign Competition without Price Cutting,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 14, 1955, 16. By the mid-1950s, Laughlin’s advertising budget only averaged around $23,000 per year. In comparison, California’s Gladding-McBean which manufactured Franciscan China spent more than $800,000 each year in advertising. It is unknown whether Shenango and Laughlin knew that they each came out with a line called Epicure within five years of one another. One reason may be the association of the term “epicurean” with the growing appreciation of fine dining in the United States. For more information, see David Strauss, *Setting the Table for Julia Child: Gourmet Dining in America, 1934-1961* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

Because the American pottery industry struggled its entire existence against imported china, playing up the nationalism of their product also prominently featured in advertising. Homer Laughlin especially used ads to make the case for American superiority over English china around the turn of the century. Following their medal at the 1896 Centennial Exposition, Laughlin publicly introduced the eagle-over-lion backstamp in the pages of Century Illustrated Monthly, proclaiming their product more affordable than imported china but with the same quality of body, glaze, and decoration. A few years later, they went beyond putting American china on equal footing with quality imported ware by arguing that the “Greatest China Factory in the World” made its home not in Europe but in Newell, West Virginia. By 1912 they boasted an output of forty-five million pieces per year created by 1,800 workers in a fifteen-acre factory. Another ad took a direct shot at supposed British superiority, joking that England first had to get their lessons in civilization and pottery from the Dutch and (barring Wedgewood), “England will now have to get her lesson in producing china in the largest quantities and the highest quality from America.” Homer Laughlin’s plants made more china than any other in the world because their appearance and beauty ranked far superior. Instead of following the example of the British as potters had done for so many years, the United States stood ready to lead the way into the twentieth century.43

With imports arriving in growing numbers and the nation seemingly on the brink of war, advertisements around 1940 once again relied heavily on themes of patriotism. Castleton China’s first public advertisement, “If Beauty Tempts You,” emphasized their china as “the supreme

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ceramic achievement of America—made of all-American materials by American potters.” An ad from Onondaga from that same year ties their china to the traditions of the nation, “solidly grounded in American standards of taste, quality, and workmanship” while still adhering to good old Yankee thrift in its reasonable price and promised durability. An entry from the next year claims Syracuse China blends the strength of New England with the graciousness of the Old South and the beauty of the West, the same unique spirit that makes up the young women of the United States. Throughout the war itself, Syracuse made clear that they continued to develop exciting new designs but refused to manufacture them until after the conflict’s end, a reward to enjoy the victory of democracy. Despite the ongoing Cold War, potteries largely dropped the nationalistic language throughout the 1950s, emphasizing instead their beauty and durability of design. One final use of Americanism came with Castleton’s Independence Ironstone line. As the name suggests, the shape and decoration of the china invoked the colonial period and advertisements made use of Revolutionary themes such as Independence Hall and the Declaration of Independence to “reflect the honored traditions of our rich American heritage.”

From its advent in the 1930s, potters tied their products into modernism as a way of keeping up with a specifically American style. As noted earlier, Frederick Rhead wanted to capture modern design with Fiesta but in a way consumers would embrace. He settled on art deco as a design which invited modernism without coming across as too threatening or extreme. In addition, the simple design of the pieces kept prices low and the bright colors evoked the casualness taking over modern American dining. In the postwar era, modernism became

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associated with the atomic age and many shapes and decorations of china evoked this association. Nearly every pottery had a decoration reminiscent of an atom and the primary colors of the 1930s gave way to shades of pink, turquoise, chartreuse, and gray. A 1947 ad for the “Corabel” decoration on Syracuse China announced it as a “restrained modern,” presenting a bold floral design in pink, purple, and gray with centers that emitted rays almost as if glowing. When Castleton’s Museum finally hit the market in 1950, Shenango touted it as “the fashion of the future” with its free form shapes and stark white appearance void of decoration, meant “to adorn contemporary tables.”

While tying china to modern living drummed up a sense of excitement, companies also used a classic appeal to celebrity culture to sell their goods to the public. Like many other innovations, this practice goes back to Josiah Wedgewood. Wedgewood worked to get the royal family as patrons and when he succeeded in 1768 he ran an advertisement in the Saint James Chronicle proclaiming himself the Royal Potter. Securing royal patronage attracted other nobles to the Wedgewood pottery and he often flattered them by designing custom china sets named for them and even commissioning artists to paint portraits of nobility which included his china in the background. He then advertised these sets to the public to create a desire for the same porcelain used by the rich and famous. The American fascination with celebrity culture lent itself to this same technique for selling pottery in the twentieth century. By its nature, Castleton’s Museum service benefitted from the growing popularity of Zeisel and its display at MoMA. Subsequent advertisements also looked to play up the decorations from the Contemporary Artists Collection, especially the Dalí and Picasso plates. In 1953 Castleton commissioned four noted fashion

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designers to create dresses based on their four new china patterns, Lace, Thistle, Turquoise, and Snowflake. Oleg Cassini, Vera Maxwell, Mollie Parnis, and Adele Sampson obliged and the china and dresses got a feature spread in Harper’s Bazaar that April. Onondaga looked not to art or fashion for its appeal but to political figures. In a series of ads running in 1966-67, they promoted the presence of Syracuse China in the mansions of governors and the tables of American embassies, telling readers to “just ask any ambassador’s wife” about the quality of the product.46

A final popular appeal in pottery advertisements touted the convenience and durability that complimented the beauty of the design. Even in the earliest ads, those of Homer Laughlin in Century Illustrated Monthly, celebrate the convenience of the product. One image has a group of women admiring the new

The copy notes that great inventors of the past often overlooked the practical needs of women when designing products. At Homer Laughlin, the combinet came about as a way to save a housewife’s drudgery by combining the slop jar and chamber pot into a single item easier to use and empty. Along with the attractiveness of the design, the product promised “to turn drudgery into a pleasure.” Onondaga also played up the utility of their product in their earliest advertisements. While they noted Syracuse China’s beauty rivaled the appearance of the finest imported dishes, it also stood up better than any other “good” china as the company put it through numerous chip tests, vitrified it to stay free of germs and appear more white, and placed decorations underneath the glaze to prevent chipping or fading. In closing, Onondaga even offered a free sample piece of china for the price of shipping if the customer had no nearby dealer.47

Durability and multi-use proved a popular defense in the battle against imports. When Homer Laughlin released the Epicure shape, its first publicly promoted line in many years, the advertising enthused over the multi-use value of the new shapes. Not only did Epicure pieces go directly from the oven to the table, the individual shapes could double for various jobs (a sauce boat could be a cheese server or candy dish, a soup bowl also served cereal or grapefruit), thus saving the cost of buying multiple pieces. Shenango’s Peter Terris home line, introduced the next year, also promoted its versatility of going from oven to table, indoors or outside. Advertisements called Peter Terris “----- proof” (kiddie, dishwasher, oven) as well as “real china for everyday use” that offered a one-year breakage warranty with free replacement.48

The three potteries of this study dropped their public advertising by the end of the 1960s, coinciding with the gradual abandonment of their home dinnerware lines due to foreign competition. After the failure of the Epicure line, Homer Laughlin never advertised publicly in print again. Shenango advertised Castleton China in magazines until the end of the 1950s and the Independence Ironstone line sporadically throughout the next decade until the final ad appeared in *House Beautiful* in 1969. The company did continue to provide copy for newspaper dealer ads until dropping the line in 1974. After changing the corporate name to match the product, Syracuse China advertised its fine china all the way up until making the decision to shut down the Fayette Street facilities in 1970. As producers of both hotelware and home china, the companies split their energies for years until it was apparent that the foodservice industry provided the key to survival.49

**Potters’ Relationship with their Merchants**

For much of the industry’s existence, potters did not sell their goods directly to the customer. Instead, they relied on a network of jobbers, dealers, and salesmen to arrange purchases, answer questions, and create excitement about their product. The earliest selling arrangement involved the use of jobbers, a type of middleman who travelled to each pottery, bought the shapes and decorations which appealed to him, and in turn sold that inventory in sets to stores in communities across the country. But by the end of the nineteenth century, most factories began to replace jobbers with their own sales force who could sell directly to stores and retain a higher cut of the profit. Additionally, the rise of the department and chain store rendered jobbing largely obsolete as these clients bought tremendous quantities of ware and sold them by

49 While Homer Laughlin does not advertise in print today, they have embraced the modern means of marketing and maintain active and regularly updated accounts on Facebook and Pinterest as well as their own blog, *Always Festive.*
the piece rather than in predetermined sets. The most successful company salesmen, such as Homer Laughlin’s George Washington Clarke, held positions of high esteem in their plants and management often sought their advice when it came to determining the wants and needs of clients.50

Establishing their reputations with their dealers remained a high priority among potteries and they took several steps to impress current and potential clients. Since showcasing the best and newest products led to the highest sales, companies emphasized public display from the start of the industry. After all, the 1876 Centennial Exhibition first won Homer Laughlin recognition as a product on par with the pottery of Europe. The Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia was the first World’s Fair to welcome a more middle- and working-class audience and with the lower admission fee, more than ten million visited the exhibits. The Laughlin display made up only one part of a larger USPA presentation to demonstrate the superiority of American pottery compared to that of Europe. Besides Laughlin’s medal, the Etruria Pottery of USPA President J. Hart Brewer also won several prizes. Laughlin again won a gold medal at the 1879 Cincinnati Exposition for best decorated white ware, the only American pottery to do so. To celebrate, Laughlin completely redesigned the weekly advertisements he placed in the Crockery and Glass Journal to announce the awards prominently to all of his customers. At the 1893 World’s Fair, the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Onondaga took home the best decorated china for their Imperial Geddo set. Even a British newspaper admitted the Onondaga product at least fell on par

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50 “Dinnerware Sales Increased through New Channels,” Crockery and Glass Journal, December 1928, 135; L. G. Rudesill to G. H. Artman, December 10, 1942, collection of the author; and Blaszczyk, Imagining Consumers, 91-96. For a good history on the development of modern salesmanship, see Walter A. Friedman’s Birth of a Salesman: The Transforming of Selling in America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). He outlines how mass producers at the turn of the twentieth century created a standardized means of selling by using the basics of Taylor’s scientific management to efficiently manufacture not only concrete products but also desire. Salesmen not only had give a persuasive sales pitch but also follow the corporate drive for rationality and order while balancing the need for face-to-face interaction.
with the china of Europe. The local Syracuse papers took a less modest approach and announced that Imperial Geddo surpassed even France’s Haviland China in translucency and beauty.\(^{51}\)

As the World’s Fair slowly faded as a venue to showcase new products, the industry and its clients formed more specific shows to demonstrate innovations in ceramics. Trade shows such as these helped the distribution of pottery as it gave all of the salesmen and store buyers a singular space in which to view and order all of the major companies’ lines. Marketing researchers note that trade shows represent a significant part of business activity, with tens of thousands of firms exhibiting in thousands of shows and reaching millions of buyers. In fact, the sales generated at these venues come only second to advertising in contributing to a company's overall profits. Trade shows also provide a different opportunity than advertising alone and can offer both selling and non-selling function for a corporation. The one-on-one interaction between buyer and seller gives a venue for other objectives such as promoting the company's identity, testing reception towards new or planned products, gauging the market (and its competitors), and conducting research on current trends.\(^{52}\)

One of the earliest and in time the most important of these trade shows was the Pittsburgh Glass and Pottery Show, begun in 1880. Pittsburgh provided an ideal location, less than thirty miles from the Liverpool potteries and about fifty miles from the Shenango plant in New Castle as well as the large glassmaking centers in the city itself. Pittsburgh also served as a rough middle point between New York and Chicago, the two largest markets and home to the most prominent dealers and store buyers. The Pittsburgh Show took place at the end of January each year, after store inventory cleaned out from Christmas and factories first displayed the new

\(^{51}\) Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers*, 60; “Cincinnati Exposition,” *Crockery and Glass Journal*, October 16, 1879, 10; and Reed and Skoczen, *Syracuse China*, 63-64.

shapes and decorations they planned to mass produce throughout the coming year. Other large shows would form in the model of Pittsburgh and held at different times of the year, including venues in New York, Atlantic City, and the Chicago Winter Gift Show. When attending these shows, companies needed to create eye-catching attractions to entice clients. For years creating a display consisted of lining up a plate, cup, and saucer on a rack. Sometime in the late 1940s, Shenango’s Director of Design Bill McBurney decided the china would better be suited in its natural state. He gathered flatware, napery, tablecloths, and accessories and set up a number of small tables to show what the china actually looked like while in use. The gimmick greatly boosted Shenango’s sales and soon nearly all potteries set up “rooms of tomorrow” to give a real-life demonstration of their ware.53

The Pittsburgh China and Glass Show continued annually until 1958. Like much of the industry, the show became a casualty of imported china (due to USPA protests, the show did not invite foreign manufacturers after the late 1930s, leading many importers to set up a rival show across from the venue). But the surviving potteries that focused their attention on foodservice had a number of their own trade shows where they could show their products in the context of institutional dining. The first opened in 1915 through the efforts of the Hotel Association of New York City. That show, then called the National Hotel Exposition grew to dominate the hospitality industry and now in its 99th year (as the International Hotel, Motel, and Restaurant Show) still remains a major exhibition site for all components of the hotel and foodservice industry each November. Four years after the founding of the Hotel Exposition, the other major branch of the foodservice industry launched its own organization, the National Restaurant Association. In 1919 frustrated egg farmers in Kansas City founded a national association to bring together restaurant

buyers and food and equipment merchants, holding the first of their annual meetings in Chicago. While the Hotel Exposition takes place each November, the NRA shows are held in May. This gives distributors (such as potteries) two opportunities to promote their wares and introduce new products per year. All of the major potteries have had displays at both shows over the years, relishing their opportunity to bring new shapes and decorations to tens of thousands of potential buyers.  

But while travelling to shows and fairs had a tremendous benefit, it remained an expensive and time consuming process. Potters preferred the ease of a permanent display that brought buyers to the product. Once again, this practice traces its roots back to Wedgewood: he placed a showroom in London where only the elite could gain entry to the lavishly decorated space. American potters more than one hundred years later also realized the importance of operating a permanent display that catered to the desires of clients while persuading them to buy. At first, New York remained the preferred location, being close to the prominent jobbers in the city. In January 1916 Onondaga opened a new showroom in Room 1007 of the Fifth Avenue Building, the foremost structure for many of the largest china and glass buyers and sellers in the city. Laughlin followed suit three years later, contracting Cox & Co. to open an official east coast showroom at 1140 Broadway where buyers could personally inspect shapes such as Empress, Hudson, and Republic.

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While display spaces in New York pleased the dealers and jobbers, they nevertheless took the opportunity to taunt American manufacturers about the fabled showrooms of European potteries where buyers visiting a factory received top treatment and viewed the wares while in the lap of luxury. Laughlin’s William E. Wells, insulted at the snide remarks and fearing a greater loss of business to imports, decided he would build his own showroom to blow away the Europhilic buyers. Lenox China had recently completed a lavish showroom of its own, an impressive Tudor-style space housed right in the Trenton plant. Wells contacted the designer, Vaughn Bilven and builders James C. Hoe’s Sons and commissioned a showroom of his own to be located in a 50x150-foot space in the upper level of Plant #4. To open up the space, Bilven broke it into three separate rooms divided by curtains and crowned with a magnificent grandfather clock at the far end. He also raised the ceiling and installed a golden dome that cleverly rendered the lighting, ventilation, and sprinkler systems invisible to the naked eye. The windows of the space were replaced with green stained glass so as not to overlook the rail tracks or trash from the plant. Rather than the Tudor revival at Lenox, Wells chose a Renaissance decoration for the interior. The rooms received oak panels, burnished gold, velour curtains, plush chairs, and deeply piled oriental rugs. Along the broad center aisle, oak tables set with the newest and best ware stood out prominently while the rest of the stock remained visible along the several side counters. Directly in the center of the showroom, a large oil painting of Wells greeted buyers, much to the surprise of the subject! While Wells left on business, Marcus Aaron procured a photograph which he then commissioned to a portrait artist. This way, Wells’s

*Salesman*, January 2, 1916, 15; “The Man Who Saw,” *Pottery Glass and Brass Salesman*, June 26, 1919, 13; and “Pointers for Buyers,” *Crockery and Glass Journal*, July 3, 1919, 13. The Wedgewood plant eventually built up the space around their plant as the showcase for their ware, adding a park, museum, visitor’s center, model plant, and outlet store on the property. Other British potteries soon followed suit and offered museums, tours, and discount stores in addition to showrooms. The Homer Laughlin Company today offers much of the same, with factory tours daily, a small museum, and the factory outlet store, see chapter 6.
presence would always be in the room even if he physically could not be in the office that day. The Laughlin showroom met with tremendous success. With a space that rivaled the luxury of Europe, store clients welcomed the trip into Newell and by 1924 the company no longer needed to employ travelling salesmen. Following the trend, Onondaga moved their showroom to the Fayette Plant in the winter of 1926. The new space, decorated in a mixture of styles, meant not only to impress buyers but also to give the public and the company’s workers a space to admire the fruit of their labor.56

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56 Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers*, 119-20; Darlene Nossaman, “The Showroom in 1922: Producing Sales without Salesmen,” *The DISH*, vol. 17, no. 2 (winter 2014), 10-11; “The Splendor of Medieval Venice the Background for Exhibiting American Pottery,” *Pottery Glass and Brass Salesman*, February 16, 1922, 42-45; and “Syracuse China Co. Opens New Showroom,” *Crockery and Glass Journal*, December 16, 1926, 134-35. Also see “The Manufacture of Dinnerware,” *The Clay Worker*, April 1924, 451-55 and Homer Laughlin’s advertisement in *Pottery, Glass, and Brass Salesman*, February 9, 1922, 18. Homer Laughlin continues to use the showroom, as the remainder of Plant #4 today forms the corporate office space for the company. It remains just as impressive as it did in 1922. Shenango China also had a showroom on the second floor of the factory but it closed around the late 1960s and was converted into office space. Shirley Cozza, phone interview with the author, April 28, 2015.
Shenango China relied less on showrooms than the other two companies, instead focusing its energy on a travelling sales force. By the mid-1960s, Shenango’s network numbered seventeen district sales managers overseeing more than three hundred dealers stationed all across the country, so that just about any customer would have someone at their door within 24-48 hours. To sell in the far corners of the country, Shenango salesmen relied on physical samples of ware they could provide to clients. But even before that, the sales force made heavy use of full-color catalogs. Like the trade show displays, catalogs for years simply showed a small sample of decoration and the silhouette of a shape. Shenango changed the game in 1965 with the introduction of their Stylebook 70, a full-color catalog of more than one hundred photos showing the dinnerware in use, set on tables with food and accessories. Executive Vice President Robert Carpenter promised Stylebook 70 “is going to change a lot of things in this industry” and other executives hoped the catalog would function like another member of the sales force, especially when dealing with tougher accounts dedicated to using a competitor’s ware. Stylebook 70 did perform as admirably as officials hoped: the catalog received universal praise from Shenango’s dealers and customers and won an award for the printing job of the year from the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company and first place in the geographic arts category from the Printing Institute of America. But most importantly, Stylebook helped Shenango capture an additional $500,000 in sales in its first year of use alone.57

Having a sales force on staff meant that potteries needed to keep these managers as well as their network of dealers constantly informed on the workings of the company and the best ways to sell the product. Already issuing informational booklets to the public to build up interest, companies took the next step and created booklets to inform their dealers and sales staff as well.

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In the late 1930s, Onondaga issued an informational booklet specifically for its fine china salesmen called *Chinaware—Its Selection and Maintenance* written by Dr. E. S. Schramm of the company’s research lab. The booklet served as a guide on how to instruct customers to select china based on its durability and usefulness as well as how to properly care for a service to minimize breakage. Another booklet from the 1940s, *What to Say to Sell Syracuse China*, repeated and expanded on these points. Onondaga distributed the booklet “to increase their [salesmen’s] knowledge of fine china” in order to be more effective at making customer sales. The book covered the basics of china manufacture, terminology, decoration, and care as well as giving instruction on how to demonstrate the true china quality of Syracuse and provided suggested answers for a list of frequently asked questions that a customer could pose.58

Companies like Onondaga and Shenango, who distributed both home and foodservice lines for much of their existence, maintained two separate sets of salesmen for each product line. Accordingly, the institutional accounts received their own informational campaigns in order to target their audience. In the early 1920s, Onondaga invited the editors of *Hotel Monthly*, a major trade publication, on a tour of the plant to see the creation of the product they sold. One of these editors named John Willy, wrote and illustrated a booklet about the tour, *A Day at the Onondaga Pottery*, and offered it to readers of the magazine as a lesson to hotel managers on where their china came from. In the 1970s the company began providing a series of booklets on the theme of “tabletop architecture,” the creation of a complete tablescape where china, food, and atmosphere all worked in tandem for a greater overall experience. One of these, *Tabletop the Right Way*, commissioned etiquette expert Edith Gilbert to advise foodservice vendors on display and

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appearance. The 54-page book suggested a wealth of table setting examples for restaurants, hospitals, or schools to try for all mealtimes and price ranges.\textsuperscript{59}

Shenango also provided information for its dealers and salesmen in the foodservice branch of the company. In 1966 the company issued a pamphlet, “How to Enjoy More Mileage from Your China” that outlined basics of care to prevent breakage. What made this publication unique, however, was that Shenango published it in multiple languages including Spanish and Greek to help their salesmen gain new accounts from foreign-language restaurants. In 1967 Shenango decided that issuing booklets did not stir up enough excitement, they instead debuted two new full-color movies for their salesmen at their September sales meeting. The first film gave a history on the importance of the tabletop in foodservice merchandising and how Shenango could boost sales and profits. The second film trained salesmen on how to sell china to a customer, noting the importance of evaluating and complementing existing décor and fitting a pattern to a client’s needs. All district sales managers received film projectors and encouragement to begin showings to their dealers at once. The first two films went over well enough that Shenango pulled out all the stops the following spring with a new movie, “Top of the Table.” This twenty-minute full-color film covered many of the same topics but aimed directly at foodservice clients though a large-scale promotional campaign in all of the leading trade journals.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{59}John Willy, \textit{A Day at the Onondaga Pottery} (Syracuse, NY: Onondaga Pottery Company, 1926) and Reed and Skoczen, \textit{Syracuse China}, 164-65.

\textsuperscript{60}Robert Carpenter, “How to Care for China in Any Language,” \textit{Table Top-ics}, Shenango China company newsletter, August 22, 1966, 1, LCHS; Ibid., “Two New Tabletop Movies Premiere at Sales Seminar,” \textit{Table Top-ics}, Shenango China company newsletter, October 1967, 1, LCHS; and Ibid., “Moving Movie to Move Shenango,” \textit{Table Top-ics}, Shenango China company newsletter, March 1968, 1, LCHS. The movie was a unique venture for Shenango and for potteries in general. With the exception of the “Choice in China” film by the Fine China Guild, none of the potteries ever advertised on television. Shenango Director of Design Bill McBurney did make one brief appearance on a television program, “The Home Show with Arlene Francis” around 1951-2 to promote Castleton China. See Bill McBurney, interview #2 by Beverly Zona, c. July 1991, LCHS.
Besides printed material or videos, potteries also encouraged their salesmen to be active students of the industry by providing training courses on the manufacture and sale of china. Onondaga set up the first of these in 1954 as a correspondence course open to sales representatives from leading department stores. Every two months enrollees received lessons on selling such as how to deal with customer questions. With each packet came a quiz which the enrollee took and sent back to the plant. Upon the successful completion of the course, students received a diploma and a coupon for 50% off a set of Syracuse China. In only a few months, Onondaga boasted more than 3,300 enrollees in the course from 700 different stores and hoped to surpass 5,000 by the end of the year. The sales managers for Onondaga obtained a more hands-on education, having to go through a regimen of factory work as part of their training. Salesmen took part in all the steps of production at the plant (molding, jiggering, casting, decorating, inspecting, etc.) to gain a thorough understanding of all the components of a piece of china. At the same time, Shenango China offered a “China Appreciation Course” starting around 1964. This two-day course on the history and manufacture of china also took its students through the plant where they viewed all levels of production. Shenango offered the course several times per year to any interested dealers willing to travel to

Figure 30: A “diploma” from Shenango's Tabletop Sales Training seminar given while it was under Syracuse China's ownership in 1988. In the collection of the author.
New Castle. The company continued to offer the course (eventually renamed the Tabletop Sales Training Seminar) up until just before its shutdown in 1991.61

While the companies provided training as benefit, they also hoped it would spark an uptick in sales at a time when the home and increasingly the foodservice markets came under assault for foreign and non-ceramic competition. To drive this point further, both Onondaga/Syracuse and Shenango offered incentives to salesmen and dealers who successfully pushed certain items or sold beyond a minimum. Under Vice President of Sales Bob Carpenter, Shenango ran several incentive programs to increase orders for their new shapes, to sell stock patterns in a slow sales period, or to utilize resources such as Stylebook 70. Prizes ranged from bonus checks corresponding to the amounts sold to personalized china and even vacations for those who moved the most product. While the programs tapered off after Carpenter’s death in April 1976, at least one more promotion took place in 1982. This one tied both into the new Stackables shape as well as the current craze for a certain video game. The Stac-Man promotion rewarded the salesmen who demonstrated the product with bonus checks and provided a ten-percent discount for dealers who ordered in a certain window of time.62

Syracuse moved into the incentive game in the mid-1970s with at least two major contests. Unlike Shenango, these rewarded the customers for ordering rather than the salesman for selling. The first, the Open House Sweepstakes, promoted new patterns in the Hospitality Group including King’s Inn and The Greenery as well as the new Great Plate platter. Any client who viewed the new pieces at an authorized dealer could fill in an entry blank to win one of

61 McCaffery, Dinnerware Makers Battle;” Syracuse China Company, “Before Our Salesmen can Sell Our China, They’ve Got to Make Our China,” advertisement, Institutions, March 1969, 211; Robert Carpenter, “More and More Take ‘China Appreciation Course,’” Table Top-ics, Shenango China company newsletter, December 1969, 2, LCHS; and Robert Carpenter, “Shenango’s China Appreciation Course—It’s More than a Tour, It’s an Education,” Table Top-ics, Shenango China company newsletter, June 1974, 1, LCHS. The author possesses a plate which served as a diploma for completing the Seminar which bears the signature of Robert Bean, the Syracuse executive appointed General Manager of Shenango in the spring of 1988.

three vacations to
Bermuda, Acapulco, or
Hawaii or one of twenty-
seven cash prizes.
Another contest two
years later offered
customers the chance to
win accessories for a
buffet set, including
salad bowls, trays, and
lamps from their
subsidiary companies
Country Ware and Will
& Baumer Candles.63

In addition to
educating and providing
monetary incentives to
their dealers and
customers, potteries also
at times created special
exclusive products to secure a client’s loyalty. All three companies did this nearly from the
outset, constantly manufacturing customized patterns and decorations for restaurants, hotels, and

railroads. But while creating custom work could be expected to please foodservice clients, Homer Laughlin demonstrated that exclusives could also work in the department store arena. The relationship between Laughlin’s and Woolworth’s dated back to the early twentieth century. By 1916, the pottery shipped $1,054,111 in goods to the store making them Laughlin’s first ever million dollar client. To compliment this relationship, the company even ran advertising for their Yellowstone ware that specifically directed customers to purchase it at Woolworth’s. But this partnership threatened to strain with the introduction of Fiesta. The store badly wanted to purchase and sell Fiesta due to its popularity, but the cost of the individual items went above their five and ten-cent limits. While this could have ended the agreement between the two parties, Frederick Rhead stepped in and offered to design a new shape similar to Fiesta but at a price Woolworth’s could carry. In 1938 he introduced Harlequin, a more affordable alternative to Fiesta but still boasting the bright colors and unique shapes that made the other line so famous. Harlequin went on to become one of the best selling lines Woolworth’s ever carried until its discontinuation in 1964. Even then, the store commissioned Homer Laughlin to reintroduce Harlequin for a limited run in 1979 to celebrate the store’s one hundredth anniversary.\footnote{Cunningham, \textit{A Giant Among Dishes}, 96, 117; Dave Conley, e-mail interview by the author, August 18, 2014; and Huxford and Huxford, \textit{Collector’s Encyclopedia}, 74-75. Rhead would repeat this process for The Murphy Company in 1938 as well, creating the Riviera line which used the existing Century shapes and Fiesta glazes.}

When Homer Laughlin reintroduced Fiesta in 1986, they knew a certain amount of risk came with reentering a market so saturated with imported china. To gain the affection of retailers, the company made several colors, items, and decorations as exclusives to their stores. The company shared an especially close relationship with the Bloomingdale’s chain of department stores. It was them who suggested the company market a line of china that would speak to the growing trend of nostalgia in decorating, leading to the reintroduction of Fiesta in 1986. As a thank you, Laughlin gave Bloomingdale’s a six-month window of exclusivity in
selling the product. In 1997 Laughlin manufactured a special limited-run Fiesta shade, Sapphire, for the store to sell for 180 days. A few years later they also had the opportunity to sell the new Sunflower color before any other retailers.  

Other stores received unique decorations in Fiesta including the striped Quatra pattern for Macy’s, Looney Tunes decals for the Warner Brothers Studio Store, an assortment of decals for Betty Crocker, and holiday patterns for Belk Stores, Macy’s, and Dillard’s. Finally, store-specific items drummed excitement for Fiesta at a particular location. J.C. Penny’s received one of the first exclusive items, a Fiesta lamp they sold from 1993-97 and a clock from 1996-2001. Betty Crocker offered several pieces such as small and medium pie pans, a tool crock, and the reintroduction of the casserole given as a premium in the 1940s. To celebrate the new millennium, Homer Laughlin released a series of vases. Of these, the Millennium I featured as a Bloomingdale’s exclusive limited to only 1,000 made in each color (they also sold their own pitcher and tumbler set with a year 2000 decal) while the Millennium II belonged solely to Federated Stores (as did a luncheon plate showing the famous “dancing girl” in a party dress toasting the new year). More recently, Laughlin continues to provide store-exclusive items including a chip bowl set and a pasta dinner set for Macy’s and a dip set for Kohl’s as well as continuing exclusive decals.  

Advertising to Institutional Accounts

Advertising played a role in the relationship potteries had with their dealers and foodservice clients just as it did in their communication to the public. However, the ads placed in

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trade journals often needed to send different messages than those that communicated directly with the (assumed to be mostly female) home customers. Targeting specific branches of industry also could help potters tailor their appeals to a specific clientele. The oldest trade publication in the pottery industry was *The Crockery and Glass Journal*, starting in 1874 and running first weekly until 1928 then monthly until 1953. For much of the *Journal’s* nearly eighty-year existence, Homer Laughlin advertised in its pages. Onondaga too remained a presence on and off for the lifespan of the publication.

Because the publication mainly catered to wholesale pottery distributors, importers, jobbers, and department store representatives, Shenango never advertised itself in the *Journal* after 1904 but did occasionally run Castleton China ads from 1940 onward. Shenango focused its energies effort on the hotel and restaurant industries, advertising in these publications at least as early as the 1940s. A typical advertising agreement from 1982 shows Shenango’s budget for promotion at $116,171 for the year. That year the company placed ads in seven of the major publications for the foodservice industry (*Restaurants & Institutions, Restaurant Business, Food Management, Western Foodservice, Restaurant Design, Nation’s Restaurant News*, and *Restaurant Hospitality*), throughout the year but especially in the month before the National Restaurant Association Show and for *Restaurants & Institutions’* annual Top 400 issue in July.67

The messages potteries sent to their institutional accounts differed from those given to the public in several ways. Not only did they try and convince a customer to buy, they often had to convince a dealer to take up valuable shelf space for their product as compared to others. And unlike a home customer who purchased only a few place settings, foodservice orders could number in the hundreds of dozens per account reordered on a regular basis, so these buyers

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needed assurance they were not making a costly mistake. China manufacturers used ads then to promote themselves and show off their achievements, to make clients aware of new products, to demonstrate how their product would lead to greater success, and sometimes to flatter their current customers while using a celebrity appeal to attract new ones.\footnote{Additionally, advertising helped a non-human corporation develop a personality to make them familiar to clients. Roland Marchand goes as far as calling this a “corporate soul. See Marchand, \textit{Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business} (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: The University of California Press, 1998) for a number of specific examples (including an entire chapter on the work done at AT&T) as well as David Nye, \textit{Image Worlds: Corporate Identities at General Electric, 1890-1930} for more on that corporation’s efforts.}

Trade journals provided an ideal space when a manufacturer wanted to brag about its latest award or achievement to those likely to buy. This practice goes all the way back to Homer Laughlin (then still known as the Laughlin Brothers) announcing the medal from the Cincinnati Exposition in the pages of \textit{The Crockery and Glass Journal}. When Homer won another award in 1879, he modified the existing ad, bumping it up from a 1/8 page ad to a full half-page illustrated ad that mentioned both the Cincinnati and Chicago awards as well as a testimonial from a Doctor W. O. Prima, an “authority on pottery” who backed up the winnings with his own praise. Decades later, the company heralded the start of their second century in operation by becoming the first pottery to eliminate all lead from their glazes, promising their customers not only beauty but safety as well. And one hundred and twenty years after winning the award at the Centennial Exposition, the company celebrated the introduction of its Ameriwhite Collection by referring back to their previous claim of introducing the whitest china in made in the United States and noting they have done it again.\footnote{Homer Laughlin China Works, “Homer Laughlin (Successor to Laughlin Brothers), Manufacturers of White Granite Ware,” advertisement, \textit{Crockery and Glass Journal}, November 13, 1879, 29; The Homer Laughlin China Company, “Lead Free,” advertisement, \textit{Restaurants & Institutions}, September 1991, 60; and Ibid., “Ameriwhite Collection,” advertisement, \textit{Hotel Design}, March 1996, 14.}

Besides celebrating their achievements, potteries often celebrated their clientele, especially Shenango and Onondaga. Shenango ran a series of ads in 1947-49 showing off the
many prestigious hotels using their china, including the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, the Parker House in Boston, the Palm Beach Biltmore in Florida, the Roosevelt in New Orleans, the Hotel Ambassador in New York, and the entire Hilton chain among others. In 1958 they touted the use of Shenango products at the Brussels World’s Fair, being the official china of the American Restaurant serving more than 20,000 per day in an early example of fast food service. Besides hotels and restaurants, Shenango could also boast an impressive list of personal clients such as President Dwight Eisenhower (who used a set of Shenango on his personal plane, the Columbine) and the Emperor of Ethiopia Haile Selassie who ordered a $10,000 set of Castleton China monogrammed with his Lion of Judah crest and trimmed in gold.70

Syracuse played up its presence as a china service preferred by the transportation industry, especially railroads and American Airlines, the first customer for the new Airlite china in 1944. One advertisement commented that customers recognize Syracuse China from their own fine china and will immediately connect it with elegance and quality, reassuring them they made the proper choice where to travel. Other times, Onondaga used their ad space to thank prominent restaurants personally for their choice of Syracuse China. Many of the establishments name-checked in the ads had been using Syracuse for decades, with the oldest, Scrafft’s Restaurants, being a customer since 1906. Fifty years later, Homer Laughlin also ran a series of testimonial advertisements with the owners of Ruth’s Chris Steakhouse and The Biltmore Estate praising Laughlin’s Best China on its durability and ease of custom design.71

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Other times, companies focused less on awards or endorsements and more on their own breakthroughs in product development. Shenango ran a series of advertisements in 1945-46 announcing “better china through research.” Each one outlined the recent technological developments (including automated conveyor systems, automated sprayers, infrared heating, and improved chemical composition developed during the war) which now would help produce better quality dinnerware for less cost. Syracuse, however, took their celebration to a whole new level in an ad questioning, “What’s Wrong with Being First?” A timeline of the company’s achievements reminded readers that Syracuse/Onondaga pioneered such important industry developments as the rolled edge hotelware, underglaze decalcomania decoration, low-cost stock shapes, and Syralite, the first high-alumina china base giving previously unrealized whiteness in a thinner yet durable body.72

Pottery advertisements could be used to celebrate the achievements of the past but also to look forward to the future. Ads provided a wide audience to view the latest shapes and decorations from the plants, especially for those who could not attend the major trade shows. Homer Laughlin always made sure to unveil their newest line in Crockery and Glass Journal’s January issue published the week after the Pittsburgh Show. Over the years Coronet, Ovenserve, Fiesta, and Eggshell among others graced its pages. Shenango also used the Journal to announce their latest patterns in Castleton in 1952. The company boasted that for the first time, a pottery used modern market research methods to come up with new designs. A lineup of fifty potential decorations passed through waves of testing, first judged by design professionals then taken to eight major U.S. cities where customers narrowed down their four favorites to join the line.73

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72 Syracuse China, Inc., “What’s Wrong with Being First?” advertisement, Hospitality: Restaurant, November 1968, 118.
73 Venable, China and Glass, 371.
Figure 32: Syracuse China asks "What's Wrong with Being First?" when promoting their milestones. *Hospitality: Restaurant*, November 1968, page 86.
Since they mainly produced for the home market before the 1950s, Homer Laughlin did not advertise in foodservice trade journals until they introduced their Best China line in 1959 and immediately made its presence known with ads such as one asking “Have You Heard?” Laughlin noted when they decided to move into hotelware, they consulted the top ceramists, chemists, and operators to create a product that could only be called the “best.” Long established in the foodservice industry, Shenango and Syracuse regularly used the pages of trade journals to debut and promote their new shapes and patterns. Shenango over the years rolled out such new shapes as FôRM (advertised as a bold contemporary shape but light and easily stackable) and Citation (the thinnest, whitest china available and worth the slight extra cost). Syracuse normally used advertising to promote new patterns but made an exception in 1975 when it rolled out their new Great Plate, touted as “the first totally new idea in dinnerware in a dozen years.” The hybrid shape could hold more food than a traditional plate yet stacked and stored more efficiently than a platter.74

At the heart of the Great Plate ad and nearly all of these various advertisements, was the pledge that use of a particular pottery’s products would lead to greater success for the customer. Both Homer Laughlin and Onondaga Pottery referenced their public campaigns in their trade journal advertising as a means of reminding dealers of the support the potteries offered them. With ads reaching millions of homes each month, customers would be better conditioned to buy American-made dinnerware (Onondaga even cautions dealers that they had better prepare for an influx of calls once the new ads ran in Better Homes and Gardens, Good Housekeeping, and House and Garden in 1940). In 1959, Onondaga announced the first ever advertising campaign

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by a commercial china company targeted at the diner rather than the owner. The ads starred six humorous characters who all loved food and dining out. Onondaga informed their foodservice accounts that the ads, run in The Saturday Evening Post, would encourage the magazine’s 5.8 million readers to eat out more and specifically seek out restaurants carrying Syracuse China.75

Other advertisements, especially those from Shenango, encouraged foodservice clients to consider their customer’s point of view when ordering and maintaining china. In 1959 Shenango’s Director of Design Bill McBurney wrote an article for Institutions magazine on the importance of color to enhancing a meal, noting it can have a psychological effect on diners by making food look more or less appetizing. Shenango experimented with a wide array of colors and decorations to find combinations which enhanced the appeal of the food, eventually settling on subtle designs in earth-tones matching the natural colors of the meal. The results of these experiments made their way into an advertising campaign claiming “food sells best when it looks its best!” comparing a meal served on mismatched dishes with one tastefully presented on a new Shenango pattern. In 1964 Shenango justified the increased cost of decorations by reminding managers and owners that “customers eat with their eyes.” This theme became even more dominant throughout the early 1970s. A number of advertisements sought to force

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75 The Homer Laughlin China Company, “Gifts of Beauty and Service,” advertisement, Crockery and Glass Journal, December 18, 1913, 82; Onondaga Pottery, “Roslyn,” advertisement, Crockery and Glass Journal, December 1919, 139; Ibid., “Advertised to 4,524,045 Families this Fall,” advertisement, Crockery and Glass Journal, September 1940, 29; Ibid., “There’s a New Sign of Quality Food Service,” advertisement, American Restaurant Magazine, April 1959, 49; and Ibid., “Meet America’s Newest Food Business Promoters,” advertisement, American Restaurant Magazine, March 1959, 29. For examples of ads from this last campaign, see The Saturday Evening Post, January 31, 1959, 91; February 21, 1959, 30; March 14, 1959, 50; April 4, 1959, 150; and April 25, 102.

Figure 33: Syracuse ad in the Saturday Evening Post. September 21, 1959, pg 30.
restaurateurs to rethink their décor and take a long look at their tables. In 1971, “You Think a Lot of Your…” noted how Shenango products could enhance an establishment’s specialties; 1972’s “Look at Your ____ the Way Your Customer Does” and 1973’s “It Takes More than a Little Parsley” encouraged management to consider the point of view of the diner and strive to impress them with an outstanding tabletop. Finally, the 1974 series of “People Don’t Eat Out Just to Eat” ads reminded clients that customers thought of dining as an experience, one that would be diminished by the use of poor china.76

Potteries, as a final way of demonstrating success for their foodservice clients, carried out promotions giving them incentives in choice or price. Syracuse China’s ads throughout the 1960s and 1970s served two purposes. The first promoted their Hospitality Group, a collection of in-stock patterns that eventually numbered over thirty choices available for immediate delivery. The Hospitality Group appealed to customers who wanted to make a change but without the long wait time or expense of a custom order. Because the company kept all patterns and pieces in open stock, a new supply or replacements would arrive in mere days (compared to the two-to-three weeks of custom orders and the months-long wait it sometimes took for imported china to arrive). On the flip side, for customers willing to wait and pay for more specialized service, Syracuse emphasized the large variety of items they carried (127 styles of plates in eleven shapes and forty different shapes of cups alone) and by 1972 promoted their computerized ordering system that sped up even custom orders to faster than ever before. Shenango also carried in-stock patterns (the Dependables line) and in the 1970s and 1980s often ran discounts for orders in these patterns aimed at restaurants trying to save costs during tight economic times (for example, the

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Figure 34: Shenango China's foodservice advertising encouraged clients to think about how customers saw meals as more than food. *Institutions/Volume Feeding*, April 15, 1973, page 74.
1975 Super Dozen sale gave a dealer the opportunity to purchase eleven dozen pieces and get the twelfth dozen for free.\textsuperscript{77}

While potters often banded together in the face of unfavorable tariff policy or foreign and non-ceramic dinnerware threats, most of the time they remained competitors. And while the rivalry was friendly at times, nevertheless a rivalry it remained. As the market for American-made china shrank from the 1930s onward, potteries needed to come up with a variety of ways to keep their customers interested. Industry-wide branding in the vein of the USPA and Fine China Guild efforts never reached the hoped-for level of success. With so many members, the organizations could not single out the achievements of one particular plant over the others. The resulting marketing did little more than present a dizzying lineup of shapes and patterns while not allowing them to stand out. To work, industry-wide marketing had to at least promote specific brands to show the quality of domestic ware. Otherwise, pleas to buy American fell on deaf ears if the china set in question cost significantly less. Ultimately, the trade organizations never fully solved the problem they tackled in the “Choice in China” program: if nothing differentiated the domestically produced sets from the imported ones, price typically won out over patriotism as a buyer did not have her ghostly ancestors telling her otherwise.

But while industry-wide branding largely failed, individual efforts from potteries saw far better results. The typical consumer may not remember the generic push to buy American made china, but she would remember the booklet she received from Onondaga, the colorful Castleton advertisement in her favorite magazine, or the Homer Laughlin fruit bowl packaged in her box of

oats. In the foodservice industry, a restaurant owner may rethink a final choice on dinnerware if Syracuse offered the chance to win a vacation. Similarly, a dealer representing multiple china accounts could look at the bonus checks available for selling Shenango and push that product a little more to clients. The potteries who engaged in selling their own brand rather than that of American-made china as a whole improved their chances to survive the perils of imports and tariffs. Whether displaying at shows or at museums, advertising to a housewife or a hotel owner, or informing a bride-to-be or a salesman, the various marketing techniques of Homer Laughlin, Onondaga/Syracuse, and Shenango helped them outlast a great many of their competitors by driving home the notion of their quality, making consumers consider more than just the price point. As their approaches to marketing at times both converged and deviated, so too would the potteries’ response to their workforce and the union which represented them.
CHAPTER 5:
“Dear Sir and Brother”: Labor as a Unifying and Dividing Force, 1882-1982

When word came of Shenango China’s impending shutdown in 1991, two members of the company’s union, United Steelworkers of America Local 3125, tried to get in touch with USWA President Lynn Williams. They previously noted that when a Pittsburgh-area steel mill faced closure, Williams and the entire International campaigned to both the company and the governor of Pennsylvania to save the plant. Yet when Anthony Conti and Ed Bistyga tried to plea for Shenango’s survival, they met with overwhelming indifference. Not only did Williams and the International offices decline to communicate with Shenango’s workers, they refused to help union members who travelled to Harrisburg to gain an audience with Governor Bob Casey. The men bitterly reasoned that the indifference of their union came in the divergence of craft. Even though the plant belonged to the USWA since 1943, when tragedy struck Shenango workers remained nothing but potters in the midst of steelworkers and their needs did not hold resonance with the agenda of the International. Conti recalled:

The people in the plant at that time felt that we belonged to the Steelworkers’ union just the same as the steelworkers that worked in the steel mills belonged even though we were in a different branch. Just because we make pottery, that doesn’t say ‘well, to heck with them, let’s take care of the steelworkers.’ We paid dues the same as they paid dues. We’re a local union, 3125, and we should be treated as such […] Because steel is always in the limelight, they got the big splash and Lynn Williams does this, and Williams does that, and Lynn Williams goes down to check on this. But a little plant down here with four or five hundred people in it, then Williams didn’t do anything.¹

¹ Edward Bistyga and Anthony Conti, interview #2 by Steve Keller, April 22, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, Lawrence County Historical Society, New Castle, Pennsylvania (hereafter referred to as LCHS), transcript by the author, 1, 2-3 (quote).
This scenario between Shenango China’s workers and the USWA hints at a larger
disconnect between workers and their labor representation in the pottery industry. Potters joined
the ranks of organized labor as early as the 1880s in order to provide their workers with a
uniform wage scale in an industry stretched across so many cities and states as well as to protect
the highly skilled laborers from the threat of pay cuts or layoffs. But the critical problem pottery
workers faced was that at no point in their history were all of the major producers under the
organization of one labor union. While the National (later International) Brotherhood of
Operative Potters claimed to speak for the majority of pottery workers, in fact it never even held
all three of the companies of this study as members at the same time. While the East Liverpool-
area potters (including Homer Laughlin) joined the Brotherhood early, the other two
manufacturers had far different paths. Shenango China joined NBOP\(^2\) early on but a disastrous
strike in 1928 led President James M. Smith Sr. to convert his plant to an open shop and ban the
union. When Shenango did organize again, they did so through the CIO and the United
Steelworkers of America rather than the AFL-affiliated Brotherhood. Syracuse China actively
refused organization of any sort during the first hundred years of its existence, not joining IBOP
until 1972. Additionally, while the Liverpool potteries all belonged to the Brotherhood, the local
unions organized by skill, not shop, leading to rivalries and inconsistencies between workers in
the same plant.

With such a jumbled collection of workers, the sway that organized labor might have
held over manufacturers always fell somewhat short. Unionization did have several benefits for

\(^2\) A note on terminology: the major labor union of the industry went through a number of name changes
over its 92-year history (this will be discussed in more detail in the body of the chapter). From its inception in 1890
to 1951 it was known as the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters (NBOP). In 1952 it changed names to
recognize its growing prominence in Canada, becoming the International Brotherhood of Operative Potters (IBOP).
In 1970 the name changed again to reflect its diversifying membership, now going by the International Brotherhood
of Pottery and Allied Workers (IBPAW). Throughout the chapter, I will use the acronym for the union which
corresponds to the time period I am currently discussing.
workers in the pottery industry, increasing their safety on the job and attempting to safeguard them from the wild fluctuations in the marketplace. It is also true that the Brotherhood (and in Shenango’s case the United Steelworkers) did secure increases in pay and benefits for their workers, they often did so at a grave cost. It is not surprising that strike activity, while always present in the industry, increased dramatically in the years following World War II when the threat of foreign china and lax tariff policies increasingly squeezed the market. Manufacturers knew that a large proportion of their expenses came from labor but when they tried to reign in wages or bring more mechanization, labor’s rank and file often responded with hostility. Within the Brotherhood itself, internal rivalries and meddling sometimes overshadowed work for the greater good. Most of all, the lack of a unified base of pottery workers across all of the major producers at the same time meant that the unions could never fully hold complete power over their employers. This lack of solidarity (including the division between the rank-and-file and minority/female workers of the industry) wound up weakening all pottery laborers and dividing them at a time when they needed unity the most.

The Early Days of Organized Pottery Labor and the Emergence of NBOP

As potteries in Europe grew from small family-operated kilns into industrial factories, the problem emerged of how to deal with a large workforce and keep them at peak production. In Josiah Wedgewood’s Etruria plant, a bell summoned employees to the factory grounds to start work at precisely 6:00am six days per week. A master at innovation, Wedgwood designed a prototype clock-in system: workers received tickets printed with their names at the end of each workday which they deposited into a bucket at the door upon arrival the following day, allowing the foreman to determine who did or did not show up. Wedgwood demanded punctuality and
discipline from his labor force, a strictness often resented by the workers who staged demonstrations in 1782 and 1789.³

In the United States, potteries remained small enough not to need the Wedgewood style of management for many years. The early yellow ware and Rockingham kilns had no set schedule of production and paid by the amount produced, so skilled workers labored as many hours as they felt fit to do each day (often this meant working to near exhaustion, which management did not discourage). But while a potter could put in days of fourteen hours or more during peak demand, he faced weeks or sometimes even months laid off in slow periods, most often in the middle of summer and the weeks following Christmas. The main skilled worker in the early pottery industry was the jiggerman, who shaped both flatware and hollowware by hand or in molds on his wheel. Management followed the British clay shop model in their employment, a system familiar to the early potters who often came from England to work in the States. The plant boss paid a jiggerman wages based on the number of pieces he completed per day (called a piecework wage). From his wages he hired a number of helpers, including a batter-out, who shaped appropriate sized balls of clay and threw them on the potter’s wheel, a moldrunner who brought empty molds to the wheel and carried full ones to the kiln, and a finisher who smoothed any rough edges on the completed pieces. If possible, he would hire relatives for these jobs to keep the wages in the family but as time went on the work went to unskilled help hired off the streets. Unskilled laborers also participated in the plant by preparing the clay, making tools and saggers (clay and plaster casings that held ware in place in the kiln),

and by loading and unloading the kilns and inspecting the finished product for imperfections. While the jiggerman and other skilled workers in the plants earned a decent wage (an average of $12.70 per week in the late 1870s), the unskilled help received little more than half that amount and women and child laborers even less.⁴

Ceramic workers in the Trenton area formed the first American labor organization for their craft, the Operative Pottery Union, in 1862 with the goal of setting their own wage rates and shop conditions. The group accumulated funds for two years in preparation of calling for a ten-percent pay increase in 1864. Management responded by threatening to replace the striking workers with machinery or children. Eventually the potters won their raise but the Union depleted its entire reserve and dissolved. This pattern of organization, strike, and dissolution repeated itself again in 1868, 1873, and 1877 as no union proved strong enough to survive past a singular stoppage. At the same time, potters in the developing East Liverpool district also dabbled in organization, forming their first groups around 1870 and even briefly striking following a wage reduction that same year. But like Trenton, the Liverpool potters’ unions did not last beyond one strike. A major walkout occurred in August 1879 when manufacturers restored the 12½% wage cuts from 1874 but ended in defeat when labor imported from England replaced the striking workers. Additionally, the anti-union mood of the nation following the General Strike of 1877 did not help the workers’ cause. The trade publication *Crockery and Glass Journal* published an editorial in January 1879 calling labor unions “a drawback to all branches of manufacture” as well as oppressive to those foolish enough to join. The author even

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went as far as comparing labor leaders to satanic evil schemers who take advantage of a stupid rank-and-file rather than bettering themselves.\(^5\)

Part of the *Crockery and Glass Journal*’s alarm may have come from the fact that in Trenton, potters had started organizing again but this time with the support of the growing Knights of Labor. The first Knights assemblies in the Trenton area appeared in 1875 and within four years included pottery workers. In July 1882 members chartered Local Assembly 2185 as the first all-pottery organization, followed soon after by the larger District Assembly 90 which included both potters and related tradesmen. The K of L promoted the idea of worker empowerment through a just system of a living wage and negotiation and arbitration to secure it. In this reasoning, striking should only be a last resort when all other options had failed. Management tolerated the Knights, feeling the orderly structure encouraged conservative behavior rather than anarchistic stoppages. The union treaded slowly at first but by 1885 they felt ready to call for a strike to protest the recent wage reductions which ranged from a 10-25% cut for Trenton workers. They successfully negotiated the cuts down to only five percent and their success encouraged District Assembly 90 to continue to grow, reaching 3,300 members by 1886. The members decided to spin off the pottery workers into their own trade district, setting up District Assembly 160 as the Operative Potter’s National Union in June 1886. By 1890 this DA boasted 2,500 laborers and even began to reach out to unskilled and female employees.\(^6\)


With the Trenton Knights enjoying early success, it is little surprise the workers in the East Liverpool area took an interest in the union as well. In June 1882 the *East Liverpool Review* reported with some alarm that the Knights of Labor had set up a presence in the Crockery City, establishing Local Assembly 1853, and already gathered more than three hundred members in only a few weeks. In response, the heads of the eight leading Liverpool plants (including Homer Laughlin) issued an ultimatum in the form of an iron-clad contract that workers had to sign attesting that they did not belong to the Knights. More than five hundred and fifty members of LA 1853 refused to yield, resulting in a lockout beginning June 17th. At first the Knights appeared to have the upper hand by keeping the potteries closed through the summer months and threatening violence if scab workers took over the daily operations of the plants. But management continued to import foreign, unskilled, and female labor and by the end of summer a slow trickle of Knights began renouncing their membership and signing the iron-clad contract. The strikers did not help themselves either. The potters had to rely on the closest K of L assembly, DA 3 based out of Pittsburgh, for funds since they did not have the money to support their walkout. But because the steelworkers in DA 3 also went on strike, the assembly helped its own members and left the Liverpool potters with very little in terms of financial assistance. Worse, the Knights went against their organization’s code and kept up a constant rowdiness, sometimes degenerating into violence against other workers. When they called for a boycott of Liverpool-made products, they lost what little support they may have had within the town. Manufacturers had back stock to last through the Christmas shopping season and by January 1883 they hired enough replacement workers to render the remaining striking Knights ineffective. Of the 150 still out, some signed the iron-clad contract, while others took jobs elsewhere. By February 17th the Knights declared the failed strike over.7

The lack of a successful strike and the continued hostility towards the Knights by East Liverpool residents largely eroded the membership of the union. A few workers remained members in secret but resented the lack of support from the Trenton DA 160 (to which they technically belonged once the Local Assembly 1853 dissolved in the wake of the strike). By 1890 those still a part of the union called for a break with the Knights in favor of forming their own labor organization. That September they petitioned to withdraw but at a joint meeting the Trenton Knights voted to table the discussion. Incensed, the western potters decided on the way home to withdraw anyway. On November 15th they declared themselves officially separate from the Knights of Labor and set a conference for December 29th to decide on the name and function of their new organization. At the convention, the Liverpool workers chose for a name the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters and opened membership to any sober, skilled male pottery worker over the age of sixteen. For a constitution, they looked not to their Trenton counterparts but to the American Flint Glassworkers Union as a model, putting in restrictions on unauthorized walkouts (called “wildcats”) and calling a strike the absolute last resort.8

This first NBOP convention elected Harry Layden as its president and established the first five locals: No. 1 at Toronto, Ohio; No. 2 at New Cumberland, West Virginia; No. 3 at Kittanning, Pennsylvania; No. 4 at East Liverpool, Ohio; and No. 5 at Findlay, Ohio. Recruitment progressed slowly at first since the iron-clad contracts still forbade unionization. Layden travelled from pottery to pottery and met privately with workers to convince them to join but he saw little success and only one new local (No. 6 in Wheeling, West Virginia) formed in


the first year of the organization. Local 7 based in Tiffin, Ohio joined in early 1892 but it and Findlay Local 5 soon lapsed for a lack of dues-paying members. The Brotherhood received another major blow in November 1891 with the death of President Layden. His replacement, A. S. Hughes, decided to turn to the craft tradition to boost the sagging membership. Rather than organizing entire plants in the expansive Liverpool area, Hughes decided to try and organize instead by job and create craft-based locals that transcended individual companies, a practice also used by the American Federation of Labor. Over the fall of 1892 he began the slow procedure of making inroads to the East Liverpool workers. Hughes reorganized Local 4 for those employed as casters (who use liquid clay to form complex pieces) and set up Local 9 for kilnmen, dippers, and saggersmakers, Local 10 for turners and handlers, Local 11 for printers, and Local 12 for jiggermen.9

Despite Hughes’s efforts, the Brotherhood continued to struggle. The four locals recently set up in East Liverpool all folded and others were dangerously close. In December 1893 members called a meeting to consider disbanding the organization. But Hughes persisted, noting that the current economic slump and the impending tariff legislation could mean a disaster to the industry, one that would require a unified labor front. Indeed, only a few weeks later manufacturers cut wages as a result of the upcoming Wilson–Gorman Tariff. The Brotherhood braced for its first true test when it called a strike in protest of the cuts on January 18th. While the concept of a strike piqued the interest of a previously apathetic rank-and-file, many still looked at organized labor with suspicion in the wake of the Knights of Labor disaster twelve years before. Hughes’s solution came from organizing the strike not through NBOP but via an advisory committee which remained publicly independent throughout the duration of the stoppage.

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9 Duffy, History of NBOP, 6, 8-11, 13-14; Shotliff, “History of the Labor Movement,” 52-53; and Arthur Wells, interview by Thomas Hess, October 21, 1976, Youngstown State University Oral History Program, O.H. 380, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio, 7.

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Remembering the animosity between worker and citizen in the previous dispute, the advisory board insisted on peaceful relations. This enabled them to win back the loyalty of East Liverpool residents who supported the strikers with money, food, and other supplies.¹⁰

The Brotherhood did manage to lessen the proposed wage cuts as a result of the strike. Perhaps more importantly, the unity and restraint shown during the stoppage legitimized NBOP in the eyes of workers, citizens, and management. A large number of employees showed interest in joining the union during the strike and by its end in July 1894 fourteen new locals emerged, growing membership from four to seven hundred especially in the vicinity of East Liverpool (though several of these again lapsed once the strike ended and dues needed to be paid). That same year the Brotherhood officially incorporated under the state of Ohio. But the union continued to have its growing pains, most notably from its eastern brothers. Trenton workers had finally splintered with the dying Knights of Labor in 1893 and formed their own independent Potters National Union (PNU). They continuously tried to persuade the western workers to join with them and their years of stability rather than belonging to the rag-tag and barely surviving NBOP. Workers in the sanitary branch of the industry did leave for the PNU, a move Hughes decried as threatening to the stability of potters as a whole. For the next few years, both sides made their case but as NBOP grew in numbers and reputation and the Trenton area began to wane in terms of its production, the western potters won out. In December 1897 Hughes spoke at the final PNU convention and convinced the majority of members to join with NBOP in


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exchange for a unified wage list that would fairly compensate both eastern and western workers. For the first time, a potters’ union could truly call itself national.\textsuperscript{11}

The year 1897 also brought the most important development in the history of the organization, the recognition of the union by manufacturers. Pottery heads had been impressed with how the Brotherhood handled the 1894 strike and as membership grew, the USPA called a special session in July 1897 to hold wage negotiations with the young union. The two sides still remained apart on how to calculate wages: NBOP argued that an immediate restoration of the 12\% cuts from 1894 would increase the production of workers while the USPA wished to base wages on the current productivity. Both groups agreed to postpone the talks until the new tariff bill passed and when the rates improved, the USPA agreed to restore workers’ wages to the pre-1894 level. Not only did NBOP win its desired goal, the Association voted to make the Brotherhood the official wage negotiator for all firms affiliated with the USPA, an agreement the two parties would carry on for the next seventy-five years. The successful negotiations also helped further boost membership in the union, growing from about 500 in 1897 to more than 1,500 by 1899. The Brotherhood capped its first decade of existence by officially affiliating with the American Federation of Labor in 1899.\textsuperscript{12}

While the NBOP headquarters remained in East Liverpool, the union strove to expand its coverage to as many of the prominent potteries around the country as possible. Local 54 formed

\textsuperscript{11} Gates, City of Hills and Kilns, 157; Duffy, History of NBOP, 18, 21, 25-27; and Shotliff, “History of the Labor Movement,” 63-4, 75, 79-80. Another reminder on terminology: “eastern” refers to potteries in the Trenton area while “western” refers to any establishments west of New Jersey, including East Liverpool. The Trenton members made up Locals 34-37 of NBOP, and like East Liverpool they too organized by craft at first. The only holdouts were the Trenton-area jiggermen who adamantly refused to join NBOP as they felt a unified wage list would cut their earnings. They continued to hold onto the PNU name for approximately another year before wage cuts left them to reluctantly join NBOP as well.

\textsuperscript{12} Duffy, History of NBOP, 25-27; United States Potters Association, Special Session and 21\textsuperscript{st} Proceedings of the Annual Convention, Cresson, PA and Pittsburgh, July 13, 1897 and January 30, 1900 (East Liverpool, OH: J.H. Simms Book and Job Printer, 1900), Ohio Historic Connection, Columbus, Ohio (hereafter referred to as OHC), 9, 30; Gates, City of Hills and Kilns, 158; and McCabe, National Collective Bargaining, 33.
in New Castle around 1902 with employees of the New Castle Pottery, Shenango China, and the New Castle Sanitary Works. With nearly three hundred members between the three plants, NBOP Local 54 boasted one of the largest union memberships in the New Castle area. While potteries generally remained open shops, the Brotherhood nevertheless managed to create a presence in most of the major plants across the United States. But one remained a glaring exception, the Onondaga Pottery. James Pass vocally opposed unionization and tried to do whatever possible to stem NBOP influence in his plant, including installing an employee clubhouse that contained a bowling alley, billiard room, card tables, and a library to keep up morale. He also utilized company “watch dogs,” a committee of loyal employees who looked for union sentiment and worked to prevent the influence from growing throughout the plant.  

This is not to say that Onondaga’s employees never went on strike. When his workers walked out in 1893 in sympathy with Trenton, Pass warned them that because of the financial panic they were lucky to be working at all and should not take the risk. Onondaga workers again walked out the next year in support of the Liverpool strike, staying out a full six months. But because the workers and Pass maintained the utmost respect for one another, Onondaga did not replace them and relations quickly returned to normal when the workers returned in the summer. One of the worst early walkouts at the plant came in 1901. Ninety-five decorators went on strike April 13th in protest of Pass eliminating “cleaners” who fixed defective decals, instead requiring the decorators to fix the ware themselves on their own time. More than four hundred male employees joined the striking decorators by the 17th, claiming that Pass cut their wages in anticipation of the 1896 presidential election with the promise to reverse the decision if

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13 “Pottery Workers Are Very Busy,” *New Castle News*, August 20, 1902, page unknown and Gates, *City of Hills and Kilns*, 158. The Sanitary Works would leave the Brotherhood in 1905 and the members of Local 54 would consolidate when the two defunct potteries were reorganized into the Shenango Pottery by James Smith Sr. in 1913. Shotliff, “History of the Labor Movement,” 138. The use of incentives and other forms of welfare capitalism at Onondaga and elsewhere will be discussed in much further detail in Chapter 6.
McKinley won. But when the favorable outcome occurred, the company never reinstated the pay as promised. To keep the peace, Pass agreed a few days later to restore wages to the pre-1896 level and to bring back the cleaners to the plant. In the years to follow, disturbances at the plant remained few and far between.14

**Union Success and Failure in the 1910s and 1920s**

The Brotherhood and the United States Potters Association agreed to be each other’s negotiating partners in 1897 but had yet to reach full collective bargaining. The first steps toward this momentous achievement came that same year when representatives from both organizations found themselves in Washington to lobby for a higher tariff and began discussions on the possibility of price stabilization and a uniform wage list. The Brotherhood followed the reasoning of AFL leader Samuel Gompers who pushed for collective bargaining as a safeguard against discriminatory wages by individual plants (the USPA favored it as well because it cut down on unfair competition between members and reduced the risk of strikes). The USPA legitimized NBOP as a negotiating partner later that year but the workers still needed to work out their own internal divisions before they could fully collectively bargain. Eastern and western potters agreed on a uniform wage list in 1900 and presented it to the USPA, marking the official start of collective bargaining between the two bodies and one of the earliest examples in American industry. The agreement called for a biennial wage conference attended by

14 “Onondaga Pottery’s 75th Anniversary Shows America Coming of Age in the Production of Fine China,” *Ceramic Industry*, March 1947, 93; Cleota Reed and Stan Skoczen, *Syracuse China* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 66-67; “Pottery Girls Strike,” *Syracuse Post-Standard*, April 14, 1901, 6; “Strike Suspends Work at Pottery,” *Syracuse Post-Standard*, April 18, 1901, 6; and “Victorious Pottery Strikers,” *Trenton Daily Times*, April 19, 1901, 7. While Onondaga refused the organization of its plant, it did not refuse known union members employment as long as they did not try to organize others. The Brotherhood did try to make inroads into the Syracuse area, organizing Local 84 with workers mainly from Iroquois China but also including some OPCo members as well. But after Iroquois workers were locked out following a 1917 strike, the management of that plant declared it a non-union shop. With a lack of a support network, the Onondaga NBOP members eventually lapsed as well. See McCabe, *National Collective Bargaining*, 44.
representatives of each party that set pay rates for each individual job as well as hours and shop conditions. It also set up parameters for the arbitration of grievances including a joint standing committee. Initially the agreement mandated a two-year period between conferences with no exceptions but during World War I this changed to a more flexible plan that allowed either party to reopen negotiations following a sixty-day notice. While achieving collective bargaining cemented the long-term stability of NBOP, it took another five years before all of the Trenton potters would actually adhere to the negotiated wage list, thanks largely to the tireless convincing of new NBOP President Thomas Duffy who took over the job from Hughes in 1903.

With the stability of uniform wages and assured bargaining, the Brotherhood could begin to expand its presence. In 1903 the union established the *Potters Herald*, a weekly eight-page newspaper sent to all NBOP members in good standing that kept readers up-to-date on business conditions as well as union activities. The Brotherhood president presided as editor and used the paper to create solidarity among a dispersed membership by giving all locals the opportunity to submit their news, meeting minutes, or social functions. The *Herald* also reprinted relevant AFL editorials and occasionally included guest columns from tariff protectionists and others friendly to labor. In terms of establishing fringe benefits, the Brotherhood of Operative Potters fared better than many other unions at this time. The organizations affiliated with the AFL generally enjoyed stability during the first decade of the 1900s. While the Federation often did not directly assist in the fight for wages or benefits on behalf of their affiliates, their influence in the upper levels of politics and their overall conservatism helped foster a positive reputation that could ease in the acceptance of proposals. NBOP members also had the tremendous advantage that pottery managers not only allowed its existence but accepted it as a legitimate bargaining partner.

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15 McCabe, *National Collective Bargaining*, 89-93, 120 and Shotliff, “History of the Labor Movement,” 91, 102-03. McCabe gives extraordinary detail on how the agreements are made, including the selection of delegates, drawing up of resolutions, meeting negotiating, etc.
Throughout the 1910s, presidents Thomas Duffy and Edward Menge succeeded in augmenting the existing strike fund with a growing benefits package for members in good standing. A death benefit began in 1910, paying families of a deceased member in good standing a small honorarium for funeral expenses. In 1913 a fund started to provide sanatorium treatment for workers suffering from Tuberculosis and the common pottery ailments of asthma and silicosis. Finally, in 1921 NBOP established temporary unemployment insurance for laid-off workers.¹⁶

When John T. Wood took over the presidency of NBOP in 1921, he inherited an organization with 9,360 members, $600,000 in the defense fund, and a legacy of very little strike activity. After production returned to normal following World War I, manufacturers sought to scale back wages to prewar levels. To make up the difference, they offered to counter the cuts with increased sick benefits but rank-and-file workers bristled at the offer. The wartime labor shortages bred an increased militancy within pottery employees who grew too used to their higher wages to accept any cuts. When the biennial wage negotiations opened in 1921, the USPA initially asked for decreases ranging from 20-25% and an increase in plant machinery to make up for the poor quality of workmanship coming out of the plants. The Brotherhood countered with a

plan to reduce wages in a two-step process, eventually totaling 17%. The manufacturers accepted the deal but both sides knew the measure was temporary at best. Only one year later, negotiations opened once more with NBOP asking for restoration of the previous year’s cuts and the USPA countering that production costs rose more than eightfold since the war. Manufacturers made a final offer to preserve the status quo but the militant rank-and-file voted instead to strike at midnight on September 30.17

Pottery bosses decided to shut down the plants in an orderly fashion rather than resist the impending strike and by October 1, 1922 nearly every pottery in the country fell silent for the first time since 1894. Manufacturers agreed not to hire replacement labor and instead relied on their existing inventory to fill what orders they could. In all, 17,000 workers stayed off the job just as the Christmas shopping season got underway with no signs of ending before the New Year. While the strike remained remarkably nonviolent, in November a mediator nevertheless tried to make peace between the two sides. Both parties had a vested interest in returning to work. Manufacturers who lost more than $2 million in business since October had little remaining inventory. With the annual Pittsburgh show approaching (where clients sometimes placed orders for the entire coming year) they desperately needed new product to secure sales. The Brotherhood had an even bigger struggle as one month into the strike, the workers of the sanitary branch decided to strike as well. Now, NBOP had an additional 2,500 workers to support on dwindling defense funds. By late November, the union found itself nearly bankrupt, having exhausted both the defense fund and the recent unemployment insurance fund and lost 3,000 members, nearly one third of their total.18

With the help of the federal mediator and East Liverpool reverend Isaac Wood the two sides met in early December to negotiate a new deal. The Brotherhood agreed to end the strike on December 6th providing the USPA promised a 4.5% wage increase, which they did on the 19th. The strike proved largely a failure for NBOP having lost a substantial amount of members and money for very little gain. In all, the walkout among the generalware potteries cost the union $400,000 and the sanitary strike an additional $500,000. The Brotherhood faced the remainder of the 1920s with widespread unemployment. The pottery industry felt the effects of an economic slowdown long before the rest of the nation experienced the Great Depression and plants remained idle for long periods the entire decade. After the strike, very few grievances crossed the desk of standing committee members as the fear of job loss cooled the militancy of rank-and-file workers. Many felt disgust towards John T. Wood for his handling of the strikes and their aftermath. The primary election for 1927 featured a record eleven candidates, narrowed down to Wood and James M. Duffy, younger brother of former president Thomas Duffy. In the May general election, Duffy beat Wood 687 votes to 562 despite having never held an elected office (a fact that worried William Wells who sat as chair of the Labor Committee of the USPA). Duffy’s immediate goal was to regain and attract new members to the Brotherhood to make up for the serious losses of the decade. He promoted Frank Hull to the position of National Organizer and dispatched him to create new locals and to smooth over relations in areas where unionism began to wane.19

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New Castle proved to be one of the most troubled areas. In the late 1920s several manufacturers, including Shenango Pottery’s James Smith Sr., tried to test the limits of a weakened NBOP. In 1927 Smith and the union clashed over the use of non-union spongers to clean up after the handlers and that December NBOP threatened a strike when Smith tried to remove bonus payments from liners (the liners themselves walked out for a week until Smith agreed to restore the bonus). The final straw came in 1928 with the installation of Shenango’s new tunnel kiln, one of the first in the industry. Because of the kiln’s newness, the Brotherhood and USPA had not yet worked out a wage scale for its operation but for the moment kept with precedent in using union kilnhands for loading and unloading the saggers full of ware. But Smith wanted to save on costs by having the top layer of non-saggered ware loaded by unskilled, non-union laborers. The workers of Local 54 immediately filed a protest with the National office and the kilnmen walked off the job October 15. 20

Smith maintained the strike’s illegality, noting that because no wage scale had been established for topping off tunnel kilns, he could use whatever labor he wished. The Brotherhood, however, refused to call back the striking kilnmen. At an October 22 meeting held at the NBOP headquarters in East Liverpool, Smith and Duffy met to discuss the situation and Smith announced that the plant would become a non-union shop if the strike did not end. Over the next two days, both Smith and Duffy met separately with Shenango’s workers. Duffy addressed the 175 members of Local 54 that evening and authorized them to join the kilnmen out on strike starting October 23rd. The next day, Smith met with more than 450 Shenango employees to announce the open shop policy. He denied NBOP charges that he had been previously plotting to disband the union and instead blamed Duffy’s ineffectual leadership for

aggravating the situation. Smith closed by encouraging all workers to stay with the company and promising no retaliation or wage reductions for anyone who returned (a pledge he reiterated in a letter to the striking employees).21

Duffy put organizer Frank Hull in charge of the strike at Local 54 with the hope of a quick and peaceful settlement. On October 26th the NBOP president addressed Shenango strikers again, dismissing Smith’s claims of his unreasonableness and urging the strikers to remain loyal to their union and to not give Smith an unfair advantage by returning to the pottery. Three days later Hull began to distribute benefits to the union members and for anyone who joined them in a sympathy strike. The first few weeks found both sides at a stalemate: Hull convinced the first batch of Polish strikebreakers hired by Smith to refuse their jobs while Smith refused strikers credit at the company-owned general store and continued preparations to restart the kilns with non-union labor. By December, Smith reopened the pottery with the remaining loyal workers, promising them they would work only eight hours per day but for nine hours’ pay but he could not rise past 25% productive capacity for the first several months.22

As 1928 drew to a close and the Shenango strike passed its second month, the tide began to turn towards Smith and away from the strikers. At the December annual convention of the United States Potters Association, the delegates heartily congratulated Smith on ridding his plant of the union and blamed NBOP for foolish and selfish behavior that cost members their jobs by

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insisting skilled pay for unskilled work. The USPA predicted that NBOP likely lost Shenango for good and praised Smith for not giving into the union’s “principles” argument. Smith responded that after six weeks as an open shop operation, Shenango made steady progress and he felt that the long-term benefit of removing the union already outweighed the current cost of the strike. For NBOP, cost again emerged as a problem. Support for the Shenango strikers totaled more than $22,000 in its first six months and another $40,000 for the next year, not counting the payment for Hull’s presence in the city and the expenditure for other executive board members travelling back and forth to check on progress in the first weeks and months. At first, the defense fund and donations from other locals covered the cost but the union found difficulty in justifying the expense as workers stayed out for one, then two, and more years. For the workers, striking at the height of the Great Depression plunged many into poverty even with the union’s relief checks. As early as summer 1929 the meeting minutes of Local 54 note that several members struggled to keep their homes and by 1931 the weekly meetings dropped to bi-monthly as not enough members showed up anymore to have a quorum vote.23

In time, the majority of the strikers found employment in other union potteries, other industries, or filed for a withdrawal card and returned to Shenango. Still, a small contingent of members remained dedicated to NBOP and not only remained on strike but tried on two separate occasions in July 1933 and May 1935 to organize the current workers at the Shenango Pottery with no success. In November 1932, four years after the start of the strike, NBOP pulled its funding for relief. By October 1933, the executive board declared the five-year-old strike a failure and recommended the remaining members of Local 54 to return to their jobs without a

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23 USPA, 50th Convention, 24-25, 33; “New Castle Strike Expenses, 1928-1930,” International Brotherhood of Operative Potters Records, Kent State University Special Collections and Archives, Kent, Ohio (hereafter referred to as KSU Special Collections); “New Castle Strike Receipts and Expenses, 1928-1933,” KSU Special Collections; and Local Union 54 Bound Records, KSU Special Collections.
union. Other locals stepped in with donations for the remaining seventy strikers but by March 1934 these too stopped. Local 54 continued to exist on paper for one more year until the remaining members could no longer come up with enough money to file a per capita tax to keep their local in good standing. However the local continued to meet with an ever-shrinking attendance for the rest of the year. Officers gathered again in October 1936 and February 1938 but by then they were the only members left. That July, Local 54 held its final meeting nearly ten years after its dismissal from Shenango to pass out withdrawal cards to the few who remained. In the end, NBOP spent $285,000 on the Shenango strike but could not break Smith’s resistance.24

The NLRB, the Emergence of the CIO, and Friction in the Ranks

During the decade of the 1920s, NBOP experienced two expensive stoppages with unfavorable results. James Duffy took over the union promising a positive change but as the country entered the Great Depression, the extent of that change remained questionable at best. Like the AFL to which it belonged, the Brotherhood always struggled with the question of whether to recruit unskilled and semi-skilled workers. With the early exception of A. S. Hughes NBOP presidents remained uncommitted to these groups, feeling they would only be fair-weather unionists and cease paying their dues the moment that hardship arose. But the continued financial trouble stemming from the aftermath of 1922, Shenango, and the Great Depression led Duffy to reconsider and reach out to the semi- and unskilled in the potteries. Additionally, he worked to organize employees in the earthenware branches of the industry and secured the return of many of the sanitary members who quit during the 1922 strike. As a result, NBOP membership grew from 5,530 to a whopping 19,000 over the next ten years. The lack of strike

activity following the Shenango debacle also recovered the ailing defense fund, which grew to $500,000 over the course of the 1930s. Despite the increases, the union still contended with life in an economic downturn. As the Depression worsened in 1931, NBOP and the USPA agreed on a plan to more evenly divide the shrinking workload so that all employees could work part time rather than face layoffs. In exchange for a wage reduction, management guaranteed all male workers three days of work per week, a stipulation NBOP reluctantly agreed to in order to keep their members employed.25

Like millions of other Americans, pottery workers looked to Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal as a source of hope to better their situation. Labor eagerly embraced the National Industrial Recovery Act as a chance to improve conditions and ease unemployment (which in the pottery industry steadily grew despite the promise of the USPA to guarantee a minimum number of hours). The Brotherhood and the USPA began the laborious process of working out their industry’s Code of Fair Competition as mandated by the National Recovery Administration. Potters had the advantage of more than thirty years of collective bargaining to draw from when making the code, something many other industries lacked. Yet the two sides still butted heads over the minimum wage and hours provisions. As the official labor advisor for the Code, Duffy recommended a 36-hour work week and a 40-cent minimum wage for male employees. The Association answered back with a 40-hour week and 32-cent minimum wage. Issues continued to arise over the final cost of finished ware and the role of women in the plants. Females too received a minimum wage and some feared the lower pay would lead manufacturers to replace

25 Shotliff, “History of the Labor Movement,” 217-20. The AFL’s struggle over the role of unskilled workers dates back to the days of its formation. Seeing how numerous other unions such as the Knights of Labor collapsed in the face of a loose organizational structure, Samuel Gompers insisted that the AFL hold up the skilled craftsman as the center of organization. See James O. Morris’s Conflict Within the AFL: A Study of Craft Versus Industrial Unionism, 1901-1938 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1958) for a discussion of the traditional versus progressive divide within that union as to whether to accept unskilled members (tensions that ultimately led to the CIO split).
traditionally male jobs with female workers, something that did not come to pass. After several rounds of debate, the USPA and NBOP agreed on their Code of Fair Competition for the earthenware, semi-vitreous, and chinaware industries on November 13, 1933 and Roosevelt signed them into law two weeks later with NRA approval coming the following March.²⁶

Almost as soon as the manufacturers and union agreed to the Code, they began to harbor misgivings about it. The Labor Committee of the USPA complained that the Code disrupted business by increasing costs while limiting the selling price of the finished product. Additionally, they noted that the guarantee of hours and wages led to a return of militancy on the part of workers. That spring moldrunners went on an unauthorized strike, leading to a time-consuming NRA hearing and by the July wage conference the list of NBOP demands grew so long that manufacturers would have to risk losing business to fulfill them all. Furthermore, union members tried to push manufacturers into making their plants a closed shop and forcing all laborers to unionize, something that the Code itself forbade. But despite the bosses’ claims that employees took advantage of the Code, in reality NBOP also grew disenchanted with it and the NRA as a whole. They felt left out for much of the creation of the Code and disappointed that it used the lower wage suggestions of the manufacturers. Also, the sanitary branch (which returned to the union but remained still largely left out of collective bargaining) complained that the Code did not push for an end to plant-by-plant negotiations in their industry.²⁷

When the Supreme Court ruled the NRA unconstitutional on May 27, 1935, American labor felt a sense of relief that they no longer had to deal with the runaround of their Codes and

an ineffective NRA. In the summer, the Wagner Act passed congress with lobbying from the AFL. The Act guaranteed the right to unionize and collectively bargain and established a National Labor Relations Board to arbitrate grievances. The Brotherhood viewed the Wagner Act with hopeful optimism while the USPA looked at it in disgust. The two sides would spar over wages for the remainder of the decade, with NBOP asking for cost-of-living increases and the manufacturers wanting to cut wages to reflect lost sales and stiff foreign competition. The two sides agreed to a gradual increase in 1937 but immediately after warehousemen walked out in a wildcat strike demanding more, joined soon after by packers. The loss of both groups meant that potteries could not fill or ship any orders until the disagreement eased. Duffy threatened to revoke the charters of Locals 86 and 25 and ordered all strikers to return to work immediately and pay restitution for the time they took off.28

An uneasy truce prevailed for the rest of the 1930s, but in the next decade even more changes would rock the union. As the United States entered into World War II a great number of workers left either for the armed services or for higher-paying defense jobs, leaving many potteries shorthanded just as their own military contracts kicked in. To make up the difference the USPA pushed for greater mechanization in the plants as well as filling more positions with female workers. The executive board of NBOP agreed to these changes as long as wages remained the same but some of the rank-and-file resisted. In June 1942 the workers of Local 9 walked out of their factories in protest of the use of apprentices to fill jobs usually held by journeymen or skilled workers. The next year kiln firemen at Homer Laughlin walked out when employees with more experience but less overall seniority filled vacancies. The men and several sympathizers stayed out for two weeks despite Duffy’s insistence of the strike’s illegality and warning that the wage agreement strictly forbade sympathy walkouts. Eventually, the War Labor

Board needed called in to force the strikers to return to their jobs. The Board also had to arbitrate a dispute between the USPA and NBOP over the use of part-time nonunion workers on the weekends, though when they refused to rule an approval for the part-time workers, USPA dropped the practice.\(^{29}\)

Throughout this time the Brotherhood continued to feel agitated by those plants which they could not organize. The loss of the Shenango Pottery still haunted Duffy and in 1931 he enlisted P. J. Fagan of the United Mine Workers to coordinate a campaign to cultivate pro-union sentiment at Shenango. When Smith got word of the campaign, he countered by offering a new incentive package to anyone that avoided the planned mass meetings. As a result, the drive failed overwhelmingly. The plant continued to provide its employees with increases at the start of the war to stave off the lure of organization. In March 1941 James Smith, Jr. promised increases of up to ten percent for piecework employees, hourly increases that bumped unskilled workers’ wages to 65-82½ cents per hour and a ten-percent increase for all skilled employees. Smith Jr. noted in the letter to employees that these increases put their earnings far above all other workers in the pottery industry, including those who worked in NBOP-organized plants. Despite management’s best efforts, workers at the plant did call on the NLRB to hold a vote to unionize in the spring of 1943. Smith Jr. sent another letter to all employees that January, reminding them that they would be treated the same regardless of the outcome of the vote and did not need to fear losing their job due to their union membership. Still, he emphasized in the letter that while

workers would have a choice of who to represent them in the coming election, voting to decline all of the organizations and remaining nonunion also would be an option on the ballot.30

Figure 35: A sample ballot sent to Shenango China workers for the upcoming NLRB election, probably by the United Mine Workers. A note on the back from Shenango management argues distributing this was illegal. Lawrence County Historical Society.

The NLRB set the union election for May 20, 1943. Competing for representation would be The National Brotherhood of Operative Potters, the United Mine Workers, and the CIO

30 Shotliff, “History of the Labor Movement,” 222; James M. Smith, Jr. to All Employees, March 6, 1941, KSU Special Collections; The Shenango China Company, “History of Shenango China,” (New Castle, PA: Shenango China Company, 1985), 2; and James M. Smith, Jr. to All Employees, January 22, 1943, LCHS.
(which some plant members already belonged to and who petitioned the NLRB for the vote). Seeing their opportunity to regain the plant, NBOP campaigned hard, sending Shenango employees complimentary copies of the *Potters Herald* in the weeks before the election with stories specifically tailored to showing them the benefits of the union. They reminded Shenango workers that only NBOP among the three choices actually represented other pottery workers and devoted all of their time and money to their cause. As an AFL-affiliated union, NBOP harbored an animosity towards the CIO which it called a radical faction concerned only with politics. Their dislike of the United Mine Workers went even further. In an advertisement which ran on May 18 and 19 in the *New Castle News*, the Brotherhood and other AFL-affiliated unions in the New Castle area spelled out the danger of joining UMW. They argued that the Mine Workers paid their members a “starvation wage,” that leadership held un-American beliefs and inefficiently ran the organization, and that the Mine Workers only wanted the dues of several hundred Shenango employees and would not actually represent them when the time came. In closing, NBOP promised Shenango the title of Local 201 and assured employees that their history of representing only pottery workers would give them wages and job security on par with the rest of the country.31

As the election date neared, Smith Jr. sent one final letter to employees, reiterating again that they had the best wages and benefits among pottery workers, even better than those in NBOP. He also reminded workers that “no union” would be an option on the ballot, that a union would take a part of their weekly paychecks as dues, and that Shenango already had a seniority policy in place that protected jobs in the case of slowdowns. Finally, he encouraged all

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employees no matter what their decision to vote on May 20 as any of the choices would need a majority vote to win and that they would be treated no different regardless of the outcome. After the NLRB counted the votes from the election, no winner could be declared as no choice received a clear majority. The CIO led with 643 votes, followed closely by the “no union” option with 597, the UMW with 493, and the Brotherhood trailing behind with only 242 votes. The NLRB set June 4 as the date for a runoff election with the “no union” option removed. Despite the small support for NBOP, Duffy promised he would continue to fight to gain back Shenango.32

In the runoff election, Shenango Pottery workers chose the CIO with 1,006 votes out of a possible 1,790. Interestingly, both UMW and NBOP’s numbers dropped in this second vote. Years later, Shenango union president Jim Viggiano explained that Shenango’s employees chose the CIO because it strove to represent all workers skilled and unskilled unlike NBOP who still segregated their locals by job. The CIO Local 1294 that won the election reorganized later that year as Local 3125 of the United Steelworkers of America and they would represent Shenango’s workers until the plant’s purchase by Syracuse China in 1988. Although the pottery won representation, it remained an open-shop establishment early on. While the USWA welcomed all employees, joining was not necessary and nonunion members still received the wages and benefits negotiated by the local. However, the union required the plant to collect a three-dollar

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32 James M. Smith, Jr. to Our Employees, May 17, 1943, LCHS; History of Shenango China, 2; and “NLRB Rules ‘No Vote’ in Shenango Pottery Election,” Potters Herald, May 27, 1943, 1. In the midst of the buildup to the union election, James M. Smith, Sr. stepped down as Shenango’s president, a position he held since reorganizing the plant in 1909. His son, James Smith, Jr., took over as president the day before the election, prompting his close following of the outcome of the vote. See “James M. Smith Jr. Named President,” New Castle News, May 20, 1943. The elder Smith would remain as Chairman of the Board until his death in 1955.
initiation fee and $1.50 in monthly dues. If a member of USWA fell out of good standing, Shenango had an obligation to fire that worker immediately.33

While the Shenango Pottery ultimately chose non-Brotherhood representation, the Onondaga Pottery still refused organization of any sort through the 1940s. In the fall of 1943 the United Mine Workers District 50 formed the Onondaga Pottery Organizing Committee to persuade workers to vote for unionization. For the next several months the committee plastered the Fayette and Court Street plants with numerous fliers not only promoting the benefits of unionization but viciously calling out Onondaga’s management. One from October 13th argued that employees of Onondaga could not afford the rising cost of living compared to members of UMW. Another specifically singled out the plight of female pottery workers, noting that they earned far less at Onondaga than at other plants. The union promised that with organization, women would receive equal pay for equal work. As the committee continued to stir up sentiment, Richard Pass called his employees together to remind them how successful the plants ran in the past without a labor union. The committee blasted these speeches, calling them not only illegal in the eyes of the NLRB but also chock full of lies. They countered Pass’s point that the company could not afford a wage increase with a claim that Onondaga currently sold its product at a 500% markup. They continued to insist that the “starvation wages” in Syracuse fell far below other pottery workers, that female workers especially suffered, that the company failed to provide basic amenities to its employees such as lockers and a lunchroom, and finally that management deliberately lied to and confused them out of fear of an organized labor force. But

despite the constant barrage of information from the Organizing Committee, the NLRB election the following April found more than sixty-three percent of workers refusing organization.34

Not organizing all of the country’s potteries remained a constant annoyance for NBOP, it faced bigger problems from within during the 1940s. James Duffy won his office in part because the rank-and-file had grown tired of the inefficiency and complacency of John T. Wood. But the loss of Shenango, the disappointment in the lack of pay raises and the uncertainty of guaranteed employment began to wear on some members. The situation deteriorated further in 1944 when delegates at the annual convention voted to increase the salaries of Duffy and Secretary-Treasurer Charles Johnson to $12,000 per year, a decision reaffirmed in 1946 and 1947. By then two NBOP members, Norman Whippler and Larry Finlay, raised an objection to the raises, claiming that executive salaries needed to be approved by a referendum vote and not made in secret at the convention. In the spring 1947 election the duo attempted to run against Duffy and claim the offices of president and first vice-president. When the *Potters Herald* refused to publish biographies of the two men for the upcoming election, Whippler and Finlay launched their own rival publication, *Potters News*, claiming that Duffy intentionally censored information in his role as editor of the *Herald* and used the presidency for personal gain at the expense of members. Duffy dismissed the campaign as “vicious propaganda” that signaled “an all-time low for the Brotherhood” and himself took out a large multi-column story in the *Herald* where he dismantled each censorship and corruption claim by Whippler and Finlay.35

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Duffy won re-election easily in 1947 despite the challenge. But Whippler and Finlay did not cease their attacks on the president. In the summer of 1948 they published another issue of Potters News announcing the launch of an investigation into the salary raises of Duffy and Jordan, still claiming the illegality of the 1944 decision. Duffy again dismissed the claims as an “eleventh-hour smear campaign” and noted that the raise put their pay more in line with other labor leaders and that he himself performed far more hands-on work than most other union heads. He also refuted the claims of censorship again, noting that Whippler and Finlay had as much right as any NBOP member to publish a story in the Herald but chose instead to create tension with a rival publication. Finally, Duffy accused the duo of lying about the high attendance at their informational meetings and refuting the extent of their support from other rank-and-file members. Whippler and Finlay took their investigation to the Columbiana Court of Common Pleas where they sought an injunction to roll back the salaries of the president and secretary-treasurer to the pre-1944 level. On June 21, 1948 Judge Joel Sharp ruled in their favor, a decision the NBOP executive board immediately appealed.36

While waiting for the appeal, Duffy took a number of steps. First, on November 29, 1948 he called a special convention for examining the internal affairs of the Brotherhood “to preserve the best interest of our union and its membership.” Following the meeting the union held the referendum vote demanded by Whippler and Finlay, the results of which showed a majority of members approving the pay raises. The insurgents disputed the vote count as rigged by Duffy, a claim that Judge Sharp also agreed with (and which too became part of the NBOP appeal). Finally, at the annual convention in July 1949, the executive board put Whippler, Finlay, and four of their associates on trial for insurgency. By taking their dispute to civilian court, the duo

violated the NBOP constitution which called for any disagreements to be arbitrated through all available union channels before going to the legal system. Separately, Whippler faced a charge of distributing inflammatory handbills attacking the executive committee and Finlay an accusation of conspiring with the CIO president at Shenango Pottery John Grittie to propose an affiliation if he won the Brotherhood presidency away from Duffy. The delegates found all six men guilty of the charges and banned all from holding elected office and participating in the wage negotiations or annual conventions for a period of ten years. Whippler also received a fine for distributing the handbills as did each signatory on the fliers. The following December, the 7th Court of Appeals sided in favor with the NBOP board and overturned the decisions on the salary rollback and the vote count. An attempt by the insurgents to appeal to the Ohio Supreme Court met with a refusal to hear the case. In reflecting on the events of the past six years, the Potters Herald celebrated the victory but lamented the negative publicity which damaged not only Duffy and the Brotherhood but organized labor as a whole.37

The Turbulent 1950s and 1960s

The Brotherhood entered the decade of the 1950s by way of a name change. Since the 1930s the union strove to make inroads organizing potteries in Canada and by 1951 boasted at least five Canadian locals. To reflect this expansion, Duffy petitioned the AFL Executive Council to change the name of the union to the International Brotherhood of Operative Potters, a change they approved in September 1952.38 While the name may have changed, in many ways the 1950s and 1960s represented the same struggles as the Brotherhood continued to grapple

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37 “Special Convention Called,” Potters Herald, November 4, 1948, 1; “Delegates in Convention Find Insurgents Guilty,” Potters Herald, July 14, 1949, 1, 2; and “Brotherhood Wins.”
with strikes, the inability to win over Shenango and Onondaga, and continued resistance to the Duffy regime.

On the ground, the number of strikes both legal and illegal increased dramatically after the end of World War II. As potteries faced the pressure from foreign and non-ceramic imports, they noted with increasing frequency the difficulty of competing when labor costs ate up nearly two-thirds of every dollar in profit. On the other side, IBOP members wished to get a piece of the booming postwar economy and consistently asked for increases in their wages and benefits as well as protection from the use of non-union or automated labor. In August 1952 the decorating kilnmen at Homer Laughlin walked out in protest of the plant using apprentices. Duffy ordered them back to work but days later the 900 decorators left as well, idling the entire 2,500 workforce. Duffy continued to insist the walkout illegal as the kilnmen never approached the International office about a grievance and called a meeting of the twenty-two Liverpool-area locals to stop the wildcat strike.39

The apprentice issue flared up again in September 1956. Laughlin wished to use apprentices as they cost the company less for the same work at a time when the amount of imported china increased daily. The kilnmen felt an apprentice took away work from the full-time (and unionized) employees. On September 10th, the kilnmen walked out and two days later set up picket lines at all the major potteries which other workers refused to cross. In all, 4,300 employees remained idle in the East Liverpool/Newell vicinity during what the Brotherhood termed a “lockout.” The disagreement ended eleven days later when the heads of Laughlin, Taylor, Smith, Taylor, and the Edwin M. Knowles China Company promised to replace the apprentices with union men. All workers returned by the 26th but not before losing $600,000 in

wages. Another disagreement flared up the following year as Homer Laughlin kilnmen walked out yet again, idling the remaining 1,400 employees who could not perform their duties without the kilns running. Both management and IBOP condemned this strike as illegal and Duffy ordered the workers back immediately and advised them to file grievances rather than walking off the job.40

A similar stoppage occurred again in February 1959 as striking gold stampers in Local 124 shut down the plant in a dispute over whether apprentices or full-time union members had the right to operate a new machine. Both their walkout and a third one by the kilnmen had been dismissed as illegal wildcats by the IBOP executive board. But the situation would change by April. The wage negotiations for that year went south quickly when the USPA refused to grant the forty-cent hourly increase demanded by the union. A federal mediator arrived to oversee the discussions but both sides remained steadfast. Joseph Wells argued the increase could not be justified in any way since the pottery industry lost more than $900,000 the year before and any stoppage would further endanger their customer contracts. IBOP bristled at what they viewed as an “ultimatum” demand by the manufacturers to include mandatory arbitration in all grievances. After six days talks between the two broke off and the Brotherhood called an industry-wide strike (only the union’s third and the first since 1922) beginning April 14th which would affect 3,500 workers in the Liverpool area and an additional 3,500 potters around the country.41


Within days, picket lines covered the twelve remaining potteries around East Liverpool and Newell and unlike the mutual respect that marked earlier walkouts the 1959 strike saw both sides resort to bitter accusations and attempts to usurp the other’s agenda. Usually less than a dozen workers would picket at once but the lines swelled on April 21\textsuperscript{st} at Homer Laughlin when word got out that management and office workers packed a load of already-finished ware for shipment. The union decried the employees as scabs and bolstered the lines to prevent them from entering the plant the next day. Laughlin executives called the sheriff’s office to move the strikers onto the street and secured a court injunction to stop mass picketing at the plant. Around the same time, the USPA sent a letter to each of the 7,000 strikers outlining their position. Management called pottery a “sick industry” where American companies held less than thirty-percent of the market and lost increasingly more money each year to imports ($341,056 in 1957 and $936,553 in 1958). The letter also reminded employees that twelve potteries closed within

Figure 36: The picket line at Homer Laughlin on April 21, 1959. East Liverpool Review.

to Forestall Ware Strike,” East Liverpool Review, April 13, 1959, 1, 6; “7000 Face Idleness in 12 Concerns,” East Liverpool Review, April 14, 1959, 1, 7; and “Wells Decries Ultimatum in Ware Walkout,” East Liverpool Review, April 14, 1959, 1, 7. Also see “Failure to Reach Settlement in Negotiating New Contract with USPA Results in Strike,” Potters Herald, April 16, 1959, 1, 3.
the past six years and a wage increase of the enormity asked by IBOP would surely cripple more. In closing, the USPA asked employees to call off the strike and offered a minor wage increase providing the companies could show a profit for the year. On April 27 a federal mediator returned as the two sides finally opened up the first negotiations in nearly two weeks. After several intense sessions, some lasting though the night, union and management agreed upon a new contract which provided for a six-cent raise, three more paid holidays, and clarification of the seniority provision. The strike officially ended on May 7 but not after the stoppage cost both plant and worker a combined $150,000 per week and untold amounts lost in production from customers who opted for the non-striking chinaware or non-union plants or worse, took their business overseas.42

The new contract lasted through December 1960. By the next round of negotiations, tensions from the strike remained. The USPA, noting the continual drop-off in sales wanted to rescind the six-cent hourly increase they gave in order to end the strike. Management noted their plant currently could not hope to compete with Japan and did not even keep up with the non-union plants in the United States due to an IBOP structure that still complicated the production process by retaining separate skilled positions (as an example, the USPA cited the non-union Scio Ohio Pottery where only six people were needed to produce a teacup from start to finish, at IBOP plants such as Homer Laughlin, a whopping forty-two people made that same teacup). Despite these dire warnings, the final contract did not cut wages. In fact, in the second year pay went up again, rising three-cents per hour for all workers. Before the end of the 1960s, IBOP

Plants experienced one more shutdown. On Friday, September 27, 1963, workers of Local 141, angry at the discharge of certain workers, placed pickets around the Homer Laughlin plant. IBOP declared the strike illegal and ordered the pickets removed on Monday, but the next day the strikers picketed again. Brotherhood officials continued to insist on the illegality of the stoppage and warned employees by telegram and radio not to honor the picket lines (which at one point attempted to block the Newell Bridge, the main roadway connecting Newell with East Liverpool). Two weeks later, IBOP officials finally convinced the strikers to return to their jobs at a mass meeting and to seek arbitration for their grievance rather than walking out.43

While not a member of IBOP, Shenango China did not escape the turmoil of strike activity during the 1950s. In October 1949, the members of USWA voted on whether to agree to the company’s offer of a profit-sharing plan that gave employees forty-eight percent of Shenango’s profits or to strike for a ten percent wage increase. The employees agreed to try the profit sharing for one year and reevaluate the contract in October 1950. But as former employee Irv Mills quipped, “in order to have a profit-sharing plan, you had to have profits,” and at the time Shenango had none. The next year the union rejected profit-sharing and demanded a 12½ percent raise. When management refused, 2,000 USWA members walked off the job. This strike lasted seventeen days until employees voted to accept a ten percent increase on wages, giving most a raise between twelve and twenty cents per hour. The contract between the USWA and Shenango lasted three years and when it expired in October 1953, tensions boiled to the surface once again. After nearly a month negotiating without a contract, workers walked off November

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Six weeks later, they returned with the promise of a four percent raise, the exact offer the company made to them in October. United Steelworkers would not strike Shenango again for twenty years, but several close calls occurred including in 1958 when the union went as far as authorizing a walkout date before a contract finalized at the eleventh hour.44

Even as Shenango negotiated through the United Steelworkers, IBOP still hoped to lure the pottery back to its ranks. In 1949 another NLRB election took place at Shenango between the USWA and IBOP. The USWA won with 1,161 votes to IBOP’s 915, despite the potters’ complaints that the CIO bribed Shenango workers with free food and spread rumors of layoffs in the event of a Brotherhood victory. To demonstrate their commitment to the United Steelworkers, Shenango employees in 1950 voted to make the plant a closed shop, requiring USWA membership for all factory floor workers. However, IBOP remained persistent and petitioned the NLRB to call for another election for July 26, 1951. This time, they put forth one of their most extensive campaigns since the attempts to organize Onondaga in the 1940s.45

The USWA prepared for the IBOP onslaught by printing up a series of fliers and distributing them to all current members at Shenango. In them, the union claimed that the Brotherhood did not negotiate the maximum increases possible for their workers and that members could not earn time and a half for weekend work. Additionally, they argued that IBOP did not provide full health insurance for the potters and lacked a coherent grievance process.


Finally, the USWA reminded Shenango’s workers that IBOP members paid higher dues and that the situation within the organization had deteriorated to the point that some locals began considering disaffiliation. The Brotherhood fought back with its own series of flyers distributed at Shenango July 23-25 in a final push before the election. IBOP emphatically refuted the CIO claims and assured employees that they always negotiated the maximum wage, paid time and a half and holidays (something they claimed the CIO union lacked), and settled grievances immediately unlike the USWA that could take months or even a year sometimes. The Brotherhood also slammed the “malicious lie” about insurance, noting that IBOP members enjoyed full benefits for hospitalization, death, and TB recovery. As a final argument before election day, IBOP reemphasized that they set the wage standard in the industry, paid more than the CIO, and that no Shenango employees would need to worry about layoffs with the Brotherhood at the helm. Nevertheless, when the 26th arrived Shenango employees voted once again to stay loyal to the steelworkers in a 1,273 to 479 vote.46

If IBOP put forth a stronger effort in the 1950s to lure back Shenango, then they pulled out all the stops in their ongoing efforts to organize the Onondaga Pottery. But first, another contender attempted unionization of the Syracuse workers. In 1950 the Federation of Glass, Ceramic, and Silica Sand Workers (a CIO-affiliated union) called on the NLRB to hold an election to choose union representation. In the buildup to the November 1 vote, the company attempted to steer through the rumors circulating the two plants: that Fayette would go union and

46 Executive Committee, USA-CIO Local 3125, “Attention Members of USA-CIO Local 3125, Shenango Pottery,” July 1951, International Brotherhood of Operative Potters Records, KSU Special Collections; Ibid., “Shenango Pottery Workers, United Steelworkers of America – CIO Local 3125,” July 1951, KSU Special Collections; Organizing Committee, National Brotherhood of Operative Potters, “Shenango Pottery Employees,” July 24, 1951, KSU Special Collections; Ibid., “Shenango Pottery Workers,” July 25, 1951, KSU Special Collections; and “Potters Pick CIO,” East Liverpool Review, July 28, 1951, 2. A note attached to the flyers of July 23-25 states that IBOP spent $70.65 in printing the handbills for the three-day period, taking out a newspaper advertisement, and in gas expenses driving from East Liverpool to New Castle for two days in two cars to distribute the handbills.
Court would not, that the CIO would give workers a pension and end mechanization in the plants, and that union organizers told workers to take notes on shop meetings to catch management in a lie. In March 1950 a worker complained to Richard Pass that the CIO called her at home and was forcing employees to sign union cards on the factory floor while holding secret meetings criticizing management. When the election did occur that November, the employees voted overwhelmingly (1,101 to 474) not to unionize. Incensed, CIO regional director John J. Maurillo warned Pass that despite the lost election the union would not go away. He accused Pass of fooling workers, of breaking the law by making employees listen to anti-union speeches on company time, and closed by challenging him to a one-on-one debate in front of all employees (a challenge Pass does not appear to have accepted).47

As Maurillo promised, the CIO did not go away. The Federation of Glass, Ceramic, and Silica Sand Workers petitioned for another election for November 27, 1951 and again wasted little time in attacking management in a series of fliers spread throughout the Court and Fayette plants throughout the month. Maurillo accused Pass of violating NLRB protocol by sending anti-union letters to workers and dismissed the company’s four-cent hourly increase offer as “an insult to their intelligence” since CIO unions in the Syracuse area recently received wage increases of thirty-five cents per hour. The CIO held up the example of Aircooled Motors, Inc. of Syracuse as an example of another plant that saw the light of unionism in the face of managerial opposition and assured Onondaga employees that they “won’t get fooled again” by Pass. On the eve of the vote, the CIO brought in a number of Shenango Pottery’s union representatives to give Onondaga workers the true story of the conditions and wages at the plant (which had recently increased due to the previous year’s strike). Management kept up optimism that employees

Figure 37: A CIO flier posted at Onondaga Pottery in 1951 criticizing Richard Pass's treatment of workers and comparing plant conditions with those at Shenango China. Onondaga Historical Association.
would again reject unionization and noted that the CIO likely used professional organizers and propaganda experts to coordinate the campaign. Vice President Ray Coburn cited the organization drive as a mess of lies and slander and expressed confidence the mutual respect between management and workers would prevail. He proved to be right: Onondaga’s workers again rejected the CIO in a 1,010 to 572 vote.48

The CIO immediately disputed the outcome of the vote, arguing to the NLRB that management interfered with the outcome by making employees listen to anti-union speeches while on the clock and prevented union representatives an equal amount of time to speak. Onondaga countered that the repeated elections violated its right to control its property. The NLRB ultimately ruled in favor of the union and authorized another election. While the CIO attempted to organize a new effort in 1953, an election would not actually take place until 1956. This time, the CIO would be joined by the Brotherhood in its first Onondaga organization attempt since 1943. Like before, the campaign focused the perceived lies of management. The CIO accused Onondaga of exaggerating the quality of working conditions as well as claims of better job security, noting that five hundred employees had been laid off in the previous five years. In closing, the union claimed that employees signed their union cards in droves despite harassment by the company and that this time they would doubtlessly win. But when the election

48 Federation of Glass, Ceramic, and Silica Sand Workers of America to All Employees of the Onondaga Pottery Company, November 5, 1951, OHA; Ibid., “Won’t be Fooled Again,” November 21, 1951, OHA; Raymond Coburn, “Introductory Statement – Alternate,” November 14, 1951, OHA; “Comparison of Voting;” and Richard H. Pass speech, November 28, 1951, OHA. Onondaga Pottery management internally passed around a long memo listing every claim made by the CIO organizers in order to be prepared to refute them if employees asked. The list includes mis-statements on wages, job security, government orders, layoffs, working conditions, stance on foreign trade, and others culled from fliers and speeches.
convened on September 27, “no union” won the day once more, capturing 905 votes compared with 476 for the CIO and only 45 for IBOP.49

After this third failed attempt, the CIO gave up on its quest to organize Onondaga. On the other hand, the Brotherhood would push even harder to win over the workers throughout the 1960s. The first renewed attempt came in August 1964. As part of their flier distribution campaign, IBOP noted that Onondaga continuously lost employees since 1957, yet the amount of total output remained the same. The Brotherhood informed them that they now performed more work for less money as time studies kept increasing expectations without the wages promised by the company. In closing IBOP printed a list of competitors’ wages for employees to keep in mind when voting on the 27th. But workers again rejected the Brotherhood in a vote of 497 for and 721 against. Another campaign kicked off on May 10, 1965 with IBOP organizer Harold Hackett again at the helm and a target election date of November 10. During the summer management promised another round of wage increases and in the weeks leading up to the election met with employees to remind them of recent IBOP strikes that did not reach the desired outcomes. Again the Brotherhood complained of the denial of equal company time to talk with employees and had to rely on handbills posted in the plants and a television appearance two nights before the election. Like before, Syracuse China’s labor force rejected the union but at 647 votes to 572 it stood as the closest defeat in any of the attempts thus far.50


50 Harold Hackett, “Attention Syracuse China Employees,” August 26, 1964, OHA; “Bid by Union Turned Down,” *Syracuse Post-Standard*, August 28, 1964, 11; and Harold Hackett, “Report to E. L. Wheatley, Onondaga Organizing Campaign,” December 2, 1965, International Brotherhood of Operative Potters Records, KSU Special Collections. Onondaga management, while accused of grossly underpaying its workers by IBOP, outlined the following increases for the first half of the decade in a company memo:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Raise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12/3/61</td>
<td>five-cent hourly raise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/4/62</td>
<td>six-cent hourly raise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/1/63</td>
<td>five-cent hourly raise, minimum wage set at $1.62 for men and women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In November 1966, IBOP lost its third election in as many years by a larger margin, 749 to 506. Two years later the gap grew larger with a 748 to 430 defeat. But the Brotherhood noticed a significant change soon after. In 1969, they responded to an employee-led request to organize, the first such time Syracuse workers took an active role in the unionization process. The campaign followed the usual process of printing up fliers noting the higher wages enjoyed by union members and the recent accomplishments of IBOP in securing wage and pension increases. And yet, when the December 3rd election arrived, the Brotherhood suffered yet another defeat by a 774 to 483 margin. In 1970, then-IBOP President Lester Null lamented that the Brotherhood had spent $150,000 trying to organize Syracuse China in the 1960s to no avail. Despite what the handbills may have noted, Null admitted that Syracuse’s average wage of $2.17 per hour beat out the IBOP average of $1.82. On top of that, they enjoyed a better insurance and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Organizing Union</th>
<th>Voted “yes” (% of total)</th>
<th>Voted “no” (% of total)</th>
<th>Voided votes or nonvoting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>United Mine Workers</td>
<td>438 (30.45%)</td>
<td>768 (53.41%)</td>
<td>232 (16.13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>CIO (Glass, Ceramic, and Sand Workers of America)</td>
<td>474 (27.38%)</td>
<td>1101 (63.60%)</td>
<td>156 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>CIO (Glass, Ceramic, and Sand Workers of America)</td>
<td>532 (31.1%)</td>
<td>1010 (59%)</td>
<td>170 (9.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>CIO (United Glass &amp; Ceramic Workers); IBOP</td>
<td>UG &amp; CW: 476 (29.64%)</td>
<td>IBOP: 45 (2.8%)</td>
<td>905 (56.35%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>IBOP</td>
<td>497 (36.76%)</td>
<td>721 (53.33%)</td>
<td>134 (9.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>IBOP</td>
<td>572 (43.93%)</td>
<td>647 (49.69%)</td>
<td>83 (6.37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>IBOP</td>
<td>506 (37.45%)</td>
<td>749 (55.44%)</td>
<td>96 (7.11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>IBOP</td>
<td>430 (31.62%)</td>
<td>748 (55%)</td>
<td>182 (13.38%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>IBOP</td>
<td>483 (34.13%)</td>
<td>774 (54.70%)</td>
<td>158 (11.17%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Summary of union voting at the Onondaga Pottery, 1944-1969. Information from the Onondaga Historical Association.

9/27/64 five-cent hourly raise
10/3/64 increase on company’s payment of health insurance
4/16/65 Good Friday added as seventh paid holiday
7/1/65 fourth week of vacation added for 30 years of service
10/17/65 eleven-cent hourly raise, minimum wage set at $1.72
benefits package. For the moment, the plant appeared likely to never join the ranks of the Brotherhood.51

During the 1950s and 1960s, the internal tensions in the Brotherhood again rose to a boiling point on several occasions. The rivalry between James M. Duffy and his executive board members grew increasingly heated during the 1940s. Both Edwin Wheatley and Frank Hull gained strong followings in their respective home bases of Trenton and the California coast and these geographic locations frequently challenged Duffy’s authority. Duffy’s First Vice-President Wheatley especially bristled at any commands given to Trenton, which he considered his personal territory. By the 1950s this resentment grew strong enough that both Wheatley and Hull announced they would run against Duffy in the IBOP election. Hull made the better showing in the primary election and Wheatley gave public support to his bid. The campaign would be marked by bitter accusations on both sides: Duffy accused Wheatley of embezzling IBOP funds for personal use while Wheatley and Hull called Duffy a dictator who favored those in the Liverpool area and his Buffalo home base and discriminated against potters on the east and west coast. Much like they rejected the tired leadership of John T. Wood in 1927, the rank-and-file demonstrated their loss of faith in Duffy and voted him out of office in 1953. That July, he formally announced his retirement from the Brotherhood after a twenty-six year presidency that saw the union grow from a small collection of apathetic workers to an international stronghold recognized by the AFL-CIO for its progressivism.52


Frank Hull took over as IBOP president on August 1, 1953. He hoped to ease into the presidency, noting that he would not change too much at first with the exception of pushing for locals to be more responsible for handling their grievances rather than taking every single complaint to the International office. In truth, he had little time to accomplish much: in March 1956, less than three years into his first term, Hull announced that he would resign the office of the president due to health reasons and complications from recent surgery. The *Potters Herald* lauded his contributions in organizing the majority of the west coast by himself and for having the original idea for a yearly picnic in 1922. Wheatley (serving as first vice-president) stepped in as interim with a special election set for June to vote on the remaining year of Hull’s current term. Wheatley won the election and resigned his current position to become the eighth official president of the Brotherhood in its sixty-six-year history.53

Edwin Wheatley inherited an organization that still grappled with a number of issues, chiefly the continued internal friction between executives and the insurgency of the rank-and-file. Only four years after his retirement, James Duffy emerged again to challenge Wheatley in his bid for a full elected term. Almost immediately the mudslinging of 1953 returned with Wheatley challenging Duffy’s eligibility since he no longer worked full time in the pottery industry and Duffy suing the IBOP executive board for defamation. While the court did side with Duffy and allowed him to run, he still lost the April election to Wheatley and stepped out of union politics for good. In a New Year’s message for 1961, President Wheatley pleaded with IBOP members for unity in the coming year. He decried the continued presence of insurgency as hurting all potters and advised anyone who had a problem with current leadership to engage in

53 “President Hull Statement of Purpose,” *Potters Herald*, August 20, 1953, 1; “President Hull Tenders Resignation,” *Potters Herald*, March 1, 1956, 1, 3; “Vice President Wheatley Assumes Duties as Acting President,” *Potters Herald*, March 8, 1956, 1, 3; and “Wheatley Elected President of IBOP,” *Potters Herald*, June 14, 1956, 1, 3.
democratic grievance procedures and protest or to run for office themselves rather than sowing chaos. Only then could the Brotherhood “rekindle the spirit of union solidarity throughout our ranks.” Despite this plea, IBOP in the coming years would still face an uprising of protest at moving the headquarters to a newly-built office space outside East Liverpool and in 1964 Second Vice-President William Rail was found guilty of embezzling more than $67,000 and sentenced to two years in prison.54

On the practical side, Wheatley faced a union in which membership dropped while costs steadily rose. The Brotherhood hit its peak in 1949 when it boasted 29,000 men and women. After that, the numbers dropped steadily. Most members left when their respective places of employment shut down, others left in frustration during the multitude of strikes, and still others gave into union raiding and joined different labor organizations. The management of a shrinking constituency began under Frank Hull who tried to emphasize local-level arbitration and to cut back on the number of conferees at the annual conventions and wage negotiations, reforms both rejected by the rank-and-file. Wheatley, too, looked to cut back on excesses and showed a keen interest in the AFL-CIO recommendations of streamlining local operations. From the time of A. S. Hughes in the 1890s, the Brotherhood organized the East Liverpool vicinity on the basis of craft, not plant. In the 1950s the area had twenty-four locals spread across only nine plants (some larger plants like Homer Laughlin had practically all two dozen locals to contend with on a regular basis, making job changes and improvements nearly impossible). On November 2, 1961, Wheatley called the leaders of all the Liverpool locals together in a mass meeting to discuss the benefits of voluntary consolidation. By merging the several small-scale locals into only a handful of larger ones, the International could run more efficiently by removing the duplication of all

communications. It also would improve the grievance process as locals often expressed similar
cconcerns but never shared these concerns with each other. Finally, consolidation would foster a
greater spirit of brotherhood as workers in the same plant would no longer be fighting against
one another’s best interests. Within weeks following Wheatley’s suggestions, the first merger
occurred when members of Locals 4, 10, 12, 22, and 29 joined into a new Local 320. Over the
next year several others followed suit until the twenty-four locals merged down to eleven by the
end of 1962. As a final cost-saving measure, Wheatley downsized the *Potters Herald* that same
year, dropping it from a weekly eight-page paper to a monthly newsletter.55

While streamlining the current membership of IBOP, Wheatley also hoped to attract new
members to the union. But as potteries across the nation shuttered their doors at a rapid rate
during the 1950s and 1960s, he needed to look elsewhere. At the 1960 convention Wheatley
announced a plan to recruit any interested worker to the Brotherhood regardless of their
employment in the pottery industry. In April, Royal China’s plastics plant in Logansport, Illinois
became the first non-ceramic plant organized, joining IBOP as Local 311. To reflect this more
diverse membership, Wheatley filed an appeal to the AFL-CIO in 1969 to change the name of
the organization. The next year they approved and the union formally became known as the
International Brotherhood of Pottery and Allied Workers (IBPAW). The change marked the final
major accomplishment of Wheatley’s career as president. In 1969 he decided against seeking a
fourth term and announced his retirement. Workers voted in Lester Null as their tenth president

Liverpool Area Discussed at Trade Rally,” *Potters Herald*, November 9, 1961, 1; “Five Local Unions Clear Merger
Plan at Meeting Held to Form Lone Unit,” *Potters Herald*, December 21, 1961, 1; and E. L. Wheatley to George
Meany, February 6, 1962, KSU Special Collections. Other mergers during the period included locals 21, 53, 131,
and 132 combining into a new Local 321; locals 17 and 18 merging into Local 9; locals 25 and 155 merging into
Local 124 and Local 138 merging into Local 141.
that July, a term Null would have to begin one month early as Wheatley suffered a stroke at the annual convention and had to resign early.56

The 1970s and 1980s: Welcomes, Walkouts, and the End of the Brotherhood

Lester Null would oversee the twilight years of the Brotherhood. On one hand, IBPAW accomplished a goal which it had sought for years in getting Syracuse China organized at last. On the other hand, strikes both sanctioned and illegal taxed the waning membership which could not rebuild to its former levels even with the addition of allied workers. The endless plant shutdowns simply proved too much and by the end of the 1970s, Null would face the grim reality that his union could no longer stand on its own.

While Wheatley encouraged merging in hopes of cutting down on instances where one local blocked all others in a dispute, illegal strikes continued to persist throughout the 1970s in the Liverpool area. On April 15, 1971, the finishers who now belonged to Local 320 walked out, halting all other work at the Homer Laughlin plant and forcing idleness for nearly 1,400. IBPAW quickly called the walkout illegal but the finishers would not give up their pickets for two more days. In November of that same year another walkout led by jiggermen in Local 320 halted operations at the plant for an entire week. Brotherhood officials also labeled this strike illegal but could not convince workers to return until Laughlin officials threatened to fire those responsible. Handle finishers in Local 321 staged their own walkout in June 1974, again idling the entire plant and setting up pickets. The union found itself in a predicament: they had not condoned or authorized the strike but 321 notified the public that Laughlin illegally fired fifteen strikers,

forcing IBPAW to side with the workers. After bitter negotiations, Laughlin management agreed to rehire the handle finishers on the condition the strike ended, a deal finalized July 5th.  

While illegal walkouts continued to plague the Brotherhood, it enjoyed a tremendous positive in the successful organization of the Syracuse China plant after more than fifteen years of constant attempts. In 1971 Syracuse China fell out of the Pass/Salisbury families and into a corporate ownership under Robert Theis, eliminating the familial connection that had hindered organization in the past. Yet ultimately, the victory for the Brotherhood came not through winning an NLRB election but through the card-check process where the number of employees signing union cards proved sufficient enough to establish a local. A formal card check occurred at Syracuse on March 2, 1972 and nearly seventy percent of workers signed a union card, a number large enough to welcome Syracuse into the Brotherhood as Local 381. In the ensuing weeks, the union swore in more than four hundred employees and preparations began to negotiate its first contract with management. After a small hiccup when a quorum vote could not be reached, the employees approved their new three-year deal in early June. They received a fifteen cent hourly raise plus additional raises for certain positions, fully paid insurance, time-and-a-half for weekend work, an eighth paid holiday, additional vacation, and the guarantee of plant-wide seniority.

But only three years after this first contract, Syracuse China employees rejected the company’s final offer of a nineteen cent hourly raise in the first year followed by twenty-one

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cents in the second and third years. IBAPW sought a fifty cent increase in each of the three years plus a cost-of-living increase and a doubling of pensions. By a vote of 495 to 70, the union sent Syracuse’s 700 workers on strike starting April 3, 1975. Initial sessions with a federal mediator yielded little progress as the Brotherhood also requested changes in plant seniority that would give workers in different departments the right to “bump” into the jobs of younger workers when layoffs occurred no matter if that senior employee had any experience in the particular task.

After several mediated negotiations, the union accepted the company’s offer that gave a twenty-eight cent hourly increase the first year, another eight cents per hour six months later, an additional twenty cents per hour in the second and third year, a boost in pension contributions, and a provision to allow the seniority “bumping.” Following a somewhat closer 320-287 employee vote, workers returned to their jobs on May 1.59

By 1976, the IBPAW contract with generalware (non-vitrified) manufacturers only covered three plants, Homer Laughlin, Hall China, and Taylor, Smith, Taylor. These three potteries were all that remained of the USPA as the others either left or closed. Despite the obvious poor state of the industry, the Brotherhood made the decision to strike November 15th following an unsuccessful attempt at a new contract with these three firms. The strike (the fourth overall by the union and the first sanctioned generalware stoppage since 1959) left 2,400 out of work in the greater East Liverpool area. Like the previous major walkout, this strike included animosity on both sides. Union members and their officials instituted a mass picket when they discovered plant management continued production while employees struck. At a protest

demonstration, IBPAW Secretary-Treasurer George Barbee and Seventh Vice-President Richard Bratt were arrested. With the situation turning dire for both sides, Taylor, Smith, Taylor withdrew from the USPA and negotiated a separate contract with IBPAW on December 3rd, sending their workers back to their jobs. Homer Laughlin and Hall finally negotiated a deal on January 8th, a full fifty-four days after the start of the strike. The final deal, covering the remaining locals of 9, 86, 94, 124, 141, 148, 172, 195, 320, and 321, called for a thirty-five cent hourly increase and additional benefits equaling another $1.08 per hour. But perhaps the most significant result of the strike came with the end of the trade association era for the potteries. The United States Potters Association once stood as the sole representatives of the industry, hitting a high of nearly eighty members at the close of the nineteenth century and controlling wages and business practices while functioning as an official lobby group for potters everywhere. Annual conventions had stopped by 1972 as the scant few members could not afford the luxury of travel with their plants in constant peril. In 1977, with only Homer Laughlin and Hall China remaining, the group dissolved quietly after just surpassing its one-hundredth anniversary. 60

The generalware strike did not affect plants under IBPAW’s chinaware contract, including Syracuse China. But in 1978 that plant would strike for the second time when workers rejected the company’s offer over the lack of a pension increase and a ten-cent cost-of-living raise. With eight hundred employees off work, management made a second offer April 12th which included a cost-of-living raise but still no pension increase. Workers rejected this second


Meanwhile, Shenango China went through its own series of bitter strikes in the 1970s and 1980s with the United Steelworkers of America. The first occurred in March 1974 when the two sides could not come to an agreement on a new contract. Shenango workers walked out, demanding a cost-of-living increase as well a greater company contributions to the pension fund. After about a month off work, the USWA agreed to a new three-year deal which provided for a thirty-cent hourly raise the first year, twenty-five cents for the next two years, increased company contributions to employee insurance and pensions, and additional vacation. When the three-year deal expired in February 1977, the company and union negotiated a new contract. However, when it went to the rank-and-file for a

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{A Syracuse China employee on strike in 1978. \textit{Syracuse Post-Standard}, April 3, 1978, page 8.}
\end{figure}
vote, they surprisingly rejected the deal negotiated by USWA and instead voted to strike effective March 2\textsuperscript{nd}. Shenango officials made a new offer three weeks after the walkout, eliminating some offensive language on job evaluation and adding additional paid vacation, but the union refused to make the deal available for a vote. The company tried again on April 6\textsuperscript{th}, the thirty-fourth day of the strike but this second offer also met with rejection. In frustration, Shenango management took out a full-page advertisement in the \textit{New Castle News} and printed a letter pleading their side of the conflict. They noted that the current strike “has become the largest, most costly, and potentially damaging strike in the history of the company. Shenango’s ability to retain its customers, assure future business, and offering continuing employment at pre-strike levels is seriously threatened […] Shenango has lost millions of dollars of sales. These orders and sales dollars are now being placed with the company’s competitors.” The officials closed by rescinding all previous contract offers and starting over to come up with a suitable agreement. Finally, the USWA voted to approve Shenango’s third post-strike offer, a deal including a forty-cent hourly raise in the first two years, thirty-five cents in the third year, increases in pension and vacation, and the elimination of the job evaluation criteria. Employees returned to their jobs on April 25\textsuperscript{th} following a stoppage of fifty-four days, the longest strike in company history.\textsuperscript{62}

The following negotiations in 1980 ran smoothly but in 1983 workers again rejected the company’s offer by a 327-168 vote and walked off the job starting March 1\textsuperscript{st}. Shenango management had switched to a new insurance provider in the previous year and the new rates caused a rise in out-of-pocket expenses for employees. To make up the difference, management

Dear Shenango Employee:

The strike at Shenango China is about to enter its seventh week. It has become the longest, most costly, and potentially damaging strike in the history of the company. Shenango's ability to retain its customers, assure future business, and offer continuing employment at pre-strike levels is seriously threatened. The future costs to the company and to you, the employees, in terms of lost customers and business can no longer be recovered during the life of any new contract.

Therefore, the company has found it necessary to withdraw all of its economic and non-economic proposals made to your union for a new three year agreement. This decision has been made only after the company has extended repeated good faith negotiating efforts to your bargaining committee to resolve the differences between the parties. For your information, I will attempt to summarize what has happened in these negotiations.

At company initiative, negotiations were started in October, 1976 in an attempt to resolve the mutual problem areas and reach a new agreement without a work stoppage. On February 28, 1977, a tentative agreement was reached and the company was assured by each individual member of your bargaining committee in good faith that the committee would unanimously recommend acceptance at a membership meeting. That proposal for a settlement was described on February 28, 1977 as a "fair and equitable" agreement.

On March 22, 1977, the company made further concessions, improving on its economic offer and deleting certain language from the original proposal, which we were told was objectionable to the membership. That offer, briefly described in my letter to you dated March 23, 1977, was not taken to the membership as we requested.

On Wednesday, April 6, 1977, the company once again made a concentrated effort to resolve the few remaining issues by making even further concessions to your bargaining committee. Once again the company's good faith efforts were rejected.

During the time that this strike has gone on, our ability to satisfy our customers has been severely affected. Since we cannot promise delivery in the near future, or even in the next few months.

Shenango has lost millions of dollars of sales. These orders and sales dollars are now being placed with the company's competitors. For this reason, the company has advised your representatives that we have withdrawn our economic offer and all non-economic proposals and concessions made to the union during many months of negotiations. With the loss of business facing us, we had no alternative.

Our best efforts have been rejected time after time. We believe your committee is hopelessly divided and cannot agree on the issues which continue this strike. The matter and all of its consequences is now in your hands!

Sincerely,

George West
Vice President and General Manager

Figure 39: Open letter to striking Shenango China employees. New Castle News, April 9, 1977, page 12.
had offered wage and pension increases but the rank-and-file wished to have the insurance fully covered instead. On the third, Shenango Vice President J. Philip Sawyer took out another full-page ad in the *New Castle News* and like in 1977, used it to point out the folly of the workers’ actions. He began by noting that the contract (which would make Shenango’s labor force the best paid potters in the world) had been accepted by the negotiating committee of the United Steelworkers, implying employees not only voted against their company, they rejected their union as well. Sawyer warned that the strike would cost the company $1 million per month, endangering their ability to survive in the current economy. Nevertheless, the workers stayed out and tensions reached a boiling point on the 25th when police needed to break up a mass picket line preventing management and office workers from entering the plant. That same day, Sawyer sent employees a letter warning that parent corporation Anchor Hocking would look into shutting down the plant permanently if employees did not approve a deal soon. Three days later, they agreed to a new contract not unlike the original pre-strike offer. The insurance premiums (the cause of the walkout in the first place) did not change, but management offered higher wages and a pension increase to make up the difference. The strike cost Shenango $1 million upfront plus as much as $2.8 million in lost sales at a time the pottery barely cleared expenses in the first place.63

In his open letter to employees, Sawyer reiterated the foolishness of striking when the pottery industry remained in such dire straits. By the late 1970s, only a scant handful of the hundreds of plants across the country remained. Of those surviving, even fewer would make it out of the 1980s or 1990s when China entered the global ceramics market with prices that no

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American companies could ever hope to match. As the overall situation in the industry declined, so too did pottery unionism. IBPAW continued to lose members with each passing year (as more than thirty potteries closed in the previous decade alone) and no longer could hold any major clout in congress when the time came to fight imports and tariff policy. By 1973 Lester Null began to pursue the idea of merging with another labor union in order to boost numbers and cut back on costs by sharing office space and conventions. He targeted the Seafarers International Union of North America, a mixed labor organization of 15,000 members in thirty-three locals with a strong presence on the west coast. Null announced the merger to his constituents in the August 1976 issue of the *Potters Herald*. He described affiliation as “essential to our survival” but promised that IBPAW would retain its autonomy and himself as president. The only caveat to the merger would be that the union would need to disaffiliate from the AFL-CIO as the Seafarers did not belong to the labor organization.64

While Null hoped that affiliation would ease the problems of the union, the association with the Seafarers proved to be short-lived. In January 1978, barely a year and a half after approving the merger, Null and SIUNA President Paul Hall announced the disaffiliation of the two labor groups. While merging seemed a good idea on paper, neither side could ever agree to a mutually beneficial plan of action. The AFL-CIO reapproved IBPAW’s charter on March 17th and Null continued to consider his options. He still believed in the idea of a merger but realized that he needed to find an organization with similar goals and membership in order for the union to be fruitful. A proposed merger with the United Brick and Clay workers in the summer of 1978 also fell through before any official agreement could be made, leaving Null to keep up the search. In the meantime, the locals of IBPAW went ahead with their own merger plan. In the

1960s the number of East Liverpool chapters downsized from a high of twenty-four, but ten still remained by 1979, serving only three plants. That August Locals 9, 86, 94, 124, 141, 148, 172, 195, 320, and 321 approved a resolution to merge down into plant-based locals for the first time. The three remaining potteries, Hall China, Taylor, Smith, Taylor, and Homer Laughlin would now only deal with only one chapter per plant. The new locals (417, 418, and 419 respectively) went into effect following the annual IBPAW convention.°

In 1982 Null finally found a union to match his merger goals. The Glass Bottle Blowers Association of the U.S. & Canada was an AFL-CIO affiliated union 80,000 members strong (compared to IBPAW which had only 11,000 and quickly dropping). Most importantly, the two groups shared the common heritage of a handicraft industry endangered by foreign imports. At the IBPAW annual convention in July, delegates approved the merger by a 159 to 17 vote. The combined organization received a new name, the Glass, Pottery, Plastic, and Allied Workers International Union (GPPAW) but kept the formers GBBA offices in Media, Pennsylvania as a home base and kept the former GBBA president, James Hatfield, as its leader (Null would serve as an assistant to the president until his retirement). After more than ninety years in operation, the former Brotherhood surrendered its autonomy with the merger and would no longer stand as an independent body.°°

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°°“Disaffiliation Announced by IBPAW and Seafarers,” Potters Herald, April 1978, 1; Lester Null, “Comments from the President,” Potters Herald, June 1978, 4; and “1 Company Local Resolution Introduced by 10 Locals,” Potters Herald, August 1979, 1-2, 4. Local 418 would not exist for long as Anchor Hocking bought out and shut down the Taylor, Smith, Taylor plant soon after the one-plant local announcement. Null would bitterly protest and fight for the plant’s survival to no avail. By 1981, Homer Laughlin and Hall China remained as the only two large-scale potteries in East Liverpool, a city that once boasted more than 100 commercial plants.

°°“Special Convention Called July 26,” Potters Herald, March 1982, 1 and “IBPAW Delegates Vote for Merger,” Potters Herald, July 1982, 1. In March 1988, GPPAW would merge with the International Molders & Allied Workers, one of the oldest labor unions in the country. The new organization is known as the Glass, Molders, Pottery, Plastics, and Allied Workers International Union (abbreviated GMPIU or simply GMP). See James E. Hatfield, “President’s Message,” Horizons, March 1988, 1. Both Homer Laughlin and Syracuse China retained their local chapter numbers (419 and 381, respectively) throughout all of the mergers. The GMP continues to represent Homer Laughlin workers in Local 419 to this day.
Drawbacks of Organization I – Immigrant and African American Workers

The National Brotherhood of Operative Potters and its leadership publicly took great pains to extend the benefits of unionism to the large portion of pottery workers. At the same time, an overview of their record on the treatment of immigrant, African American, and female workers reveals a deeper division not always shown on the pages of the *Potters Herald*.

Early in the history of the American pottery industry, racism remained an accepted practice. The Anglo roots of the industry combined with conservatism in places such as New Castle and East Liverpool (both of which maintained a significant Ku Klux Klan presence in the early part of the twentieth century) bred a hostility to any African Americans or Eastern and Southern European immigrants who tried to enter the potteries. In the early 1900s discrimination in East Liverpool grew so severe that many minorities did not even bother moving to the area. Those who did could only get work as strikebreakers, a job that further provoked the ire of other workers. While management preferred the lower wages they could pay blacks and immigrants, the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters condoned discrimination as a way to keep these men from their ranks (a 1905 *Potters Herald* article even likened immigrants to “a plague”).

More than once, strikes broke out over the presence of minority workers: in April 1914 jiggemen at the Knowles, Taylor, Knowles factory walked out when management hired an African American batter-out and the following August mold runners struck at Homer Laughlin’s Plant #5 when an Italian clay carrier joined their ranks. While management permitted the hired man to stay on, they instructed foremen from then on to keep a list of the nationalities of all job applicants and to only hire Eastern Europeans if no other help could be found (a blatant act of discrimination again endorsed by NBOP). While the prejudice surrounding European immigrants eventually faded, as late as 1930 the Brotherhood still refused membership to any African
Americans on account of custom, although they did work in the potteries in small numbers by this time.67

In many ways, the Brotherhood’s position on race developed on a parallel course with that of AFL leadership. Samuel Gompers, the Federation’s first president, cautiously embraced African Americans in the early years, admitting them as members and appointing black organizers, believing that the larger goal of labor solidarity took precedence over racial solidarity. At the same time, however, he did not argue with those locals who wished to exclude black members and organized black locals as “federal” chapters, stripping them of most power enjoyed by the regular national locals. But as the African American population in the North rapidly expanded following the Great Migration during World War I and as black labor leaders such as the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters’ A. Philip Randolph emerged as popular figures, the Federation increasingly toned down its racist elements and made more vocal calls for an end to discrimination (though often times the locals did not heed this call and the national made little effort to discipline them). The emergence of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) as a


Most of the African Americans who did work in the potteries were originally hired as strikebreakers but allowed to stay on after the quieting of protest. The refusal of NBOP membership was due both to their race and to their job, as they only were allowed to work in unskilled positions. For more on this concept, see Bernard Mandel, “Samuel Gompers and the Negro Workers, 1886-1914” in *Black Workers and Organized Labor*, edited by John H. Bracey, Jr., August Meier, and Elliot Rudwick (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1971). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, wage workers used their whiteness as a privilege to make up for their exploitation as laborers and actively cultivated a culture of racism on the job. See Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1981* (New York: International Publishers, 1974); William Hamilton Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers Since the Civil War* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London and New York: Verso Books, 1991); and David Roediger and Elizabeth Esch, *The Production of Difference: Race and the Management of Labor in U.S. History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
main rival also spurred the reluctant Federation into a more non-discriminatory policy as it risked losing potential members to whom the CIO appealed more than the conservative AFL.

While the AFL put forth the message of inclusion, it was up to the individual member unions to embrace it. For its part, the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters began reprinting AFL anti-discriminatory messages in the *Potters Herald* by 1939 including one recommending that all AFL-affiliated unions actively work to end discrimination in their ranks. In the ensuing years, the *Herald* also reprinted editorials attacking the poll tax as harmful not only to blacks but to all workers and criticizing Southern politicians who remained in support of it. By 1944, the *Potters Herald* echoed the sentiment that “intolerance and liberty cannot live side by side with any nation or within our world. They are deadly enemies.” The editorial went on to compare racism with aiding the Axis enemy and hoped that the atrocities of the Nazi regime forced Americans to open their eyes to their own hateful ideology and work to change it. Another series of editorials in 1949-51 pointed out the various harms done by discrimination

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(such as helping the boss, lowering standards for all, aiding America’s enemies, raising costs).

By ignoring African Americans, the racist worker allowed wages to fall down to non-union levels and helped the Soviet Union create propaganda against the United States. Discrimination also cost American businesses upwards of $30 billion per year in the creation and upkeep of segregated facilities, lost wage opportunities, and the crime stemming from delinquency caused by lost labor opportunities, all costs that could instead be paid out as higher wages and greater benefits. The paper especially warned workers from joining the Ku Klux Klan, as it divided labor and kept them all equally oppressed.70

Other AFL editorials reprinted by the Potters Herald had a more positive tone. The potters praised the passage of the 1957 Civil Rights Act and President Eisenhower’s sending of federal troops to desegregate Central High in Little Rock. They also encouraged the use of sit-ins (as long as they remained peaceful) and the quick enforcement of integrated facilities across the South. Because of their devotion to civil rights (the Brotherhood stepped forth as one of

Figure 40: A cartoon in the Potters Herald championing civil rights among workers. It is arguable whether these ideas were always put into practice the way union leaders hoped. Potters Herald, April 7, 1960, page 4.

the original signers of John F. Kennedy’s Civil Rights bill), IBOP even received a personal invitation from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to participate in the Selma to Montgomery march on March 21, 1965. Unfortunately, IBOP President Edwin Wheatley had to decline as the union’s executive board had been meeting in Cincinnati and did not receive the telegram in time to make travel arrangements. But on behalf of the Brotherhood, he congratulated King on the march and wished him continued success in the fight for civil rights. When King fell to an assassin’s bullet in April 1968, the Herald reflected that “out of the bitter struggle […] has come a new understanding and recognition that the coalition of labor, civil rights, and religious groups can marshal the strength to overcome the racists, the union busters, the reactionaries. The unity that was forged in that battle may be the greatest memorial that can be built to Dr. King.”

But printing articles on racial inclusiveness does not necessarily mean that all potters openly embraced their African American co-workers. In 1970, two female employees at Shenango faced disciplinary action following an argument in which the first employee used a racial slur described by management as “completely out of line” and the second retaliated with attacks on the first woman’s Italian ancestry. While the women only received a disciplinary warning for the argument, management cautioned that the next racial or ethnic-inspired outburst would be dealt with as insubordination, a serious offense at the plant.

In 1985 Homer Laughlin China dealt with a lawsuit brought by Leyman Pearson, a former security guard at the plant who sued on the grounds that he felt the company fired him in February 1980 due to his race. Pearson claimed that as the only African American guard, his doctor’s excuses for absences were ignored and when he needed to leave due to recurring illness,

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72 D. C. Myler to all Shenango employees, December 27, 1971, LCHS and R. Warner to R. D. and J. A., June 29, 1970, LCHS. In the interest of privacy, the women’s full names have been omitted.
Laughlin fired him. The company countered the suit by accusing Pearson of chronic absenteeism, not making his required nightly rounds, and of job abandonment. They continued that because of his race, Pearson actually received more lenient treatment and that white guards had been fired for less serious offenses. Furthermore, Pearson took far more sick time than his seniority provided and never made arrangements to cover his shifts as is required by company policy. The West Virginia Court of Appeals sided with Homer Laughlin, arguing that Pearson’s shaky recollection and contradictory statements about the events, his lack of witnesses who could corroborate his story, and the five-year gap in filing the suit all made his claims of race discrimination impossible to prove.\textsuperscript{73}

While instances like Peterson’s appear to be rare, the real reason for this may not be a lack of racism, but the lack of a large enough African American labor force to make a statement. The Brotherhood did not begin accepting black potters into the union until after 1930\textsuperscript{74} and even then numbers remained small. Shenango Pottery hired its first ten black workers, all semi-skilled females, in 1947 and Onondaga Pottery began hiring African Americans for the first time around World War II. Both came about due to both a manpower shortage amidst a booming economy and (at least in Shenango’s case) pressure from the local NAACP. Employees reacted to the news with trepidation but management insisted that they needed to accept their new coworkers. Like the Liverpool-area potteries, the number of African American workers stayed relatively small: even as late as 1971 Shenango only had forty-one black employees out of a total

\textsuperscript{73}Leyman Pearson v. Homer Laughlin China Company, ER-466-30 (W. V. Supreme Court of Appeals 1985), 4.

\textsuperscript{74}It is hard to pinpoint an exact date for when NBOP began to admit African Americans. A study from the National Urban League, which was undertaken in 1928 and published in 1930, notes that no black members were present in the union at that time. The change likely came under James Duffy who began his NBOP presidency in 1927. In the aftermath of the 1922 strike, NBOP’s rolls were decimated and Duffy made recruitment a top priority in the form of allowing unskilled workers to join. Since African Americans would only have been allowed unskilled positions at this time, the recruitment likely began then. The industry’s 1934 NRA Code of Fair Competition makes no mention of race when discussing wages rates, a likely sign that African American workers were union members and thus earning an equal wage by that time.
workforce of 1,150. Shenango in particular worried about the makeup of their labor force. While the actual percentage of African Americans employed (3.6%) closely reflected their percentage of New Castle’s population at the time, not a single one held a skilled or managerial position.75

**Drawbacks of Organization II – Women in the Potteries**

Unlike African Americans or immigrants, women were part of the pottery industry from its beginning but suffered years of sexism in their work options, pay, and seniority. As late as 1791 Josiah Wedgewood employed only two females in his plant, both as gilders applying gold decoration. By 1810 a few more women joined the ranks to work as painters and as polishers and cleaners for finished product. Eventually they took on unskilled positions in the clay shop helping jiggermen. In East Liverpool, only one woman worked in a pottery in 1850. That number would grow to four in 1860, thirty-one in 1870, and then ballooned to more than one hundred by 1880 and over five hundred by 1886. The shift came with the introduction of two major developments, labor-saving machinery that could be operated by unskilled workers and the perfection of white ware in need of decoration. The same pattern occurred around the country: as of 1925 East Liverpool hired fifty women for every one hundred men, outside the Liverpool area (in places such as Pennsylvania or New York) the ratio rose to 62 to 100 and in Trenton it peaked at an 84 to 100 ratio.76

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75 Dolores De Lio, interview by Steve Keller, April 23, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 28-29; Naomi Clark, interview by Steve Keller, April 22, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 1-2 (Clark’s sister was one of the first ten African Americans hired in 1947 and Clark herself started at the pottery the following year); and Myler to all Shenango employees. Again, the exact date when Onondaga began to hire African Americans is not entirely clear. The company’s Seventy-Five Years of American Craftsmanship brochure released in 1946 contains photos of all employees grouped by their seniority. Eighteen African American workers are pictured among the group (five men and thirteen women), all described with less than ten years employment at the plant.

Management clearly preferred to hire women as they could pay them salaries far lower than even an unskilled male. In slow times, a greater amount of female labor could be the difference between staying operational and shutting down. In the midst of the Great Depression, Homer Laughlin maintained a labor force made up of approximately one-third women. Others employed even more, such as Onondaga Pottery whose 1919 rolls showed 323 females out of 750 total workers. Even with a half female labor force, management hoped for even more as the women often left their jobs after marriage. As time went on, however, this trend seemed to reverse. Women who married tended to take a short hiatus to have children but then returned to their jobs and stayed until reaching retirement age. By 1954, nearly two-thirds of both Onondaga and Shenango China’s employees were women, often married and contributing to their families’ incomes.77

Although women entered the potteries in increasing numbers and stayed longer, they still faced severe restrictions on what work they could perform. Jobs in the pottery industry tended to tie skills to biology, leading to a sexual division of labor (one fully supported by unions) that for the most part held strongly until the 1950s and 1960s. In this division, men always physically

American commercial pottery industry has very little information available on its labor force, two excellent studies of British female potters are available, Sarsby’s Missuses and Mouldrunners which looks mainly at female laborers and Cheryl Buckley’s Potters and Paintresses: Women Designers in the Pottery Industry, 1870-1955 (London: The Women’s Press, 1990) which focuses on skilled female designers and studio decorators. Nancy Owen’s Rookwood and the Industry of Art: Women, Culture, and Commerce, 1880-1913 (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2001) is also a useful look at women in the highly stylized field of art pottery which placed more emphasis on artistic achievement rather than large-scale production.

created the ware, holding the job of jiggerman and caster as well as being in charge of moving biscuit ware in and out of the kilns. Women either assisted men’s jobs as finishers, selectors, cleaners, glaze sprayers, handlers/stick-ups (putting handles on cups and mugs) or they worked in jobs related to decorating. Pottery decoration went back to the Victorian notions of men’s and women’s separate spheres. Victorians considered painting an acceptable hobby for women and many amateur artists painted their own glazed whiteware as a pastime to show off their skills. A small number of these women actually sought early employment in potteries as decorators.78

Women also historically never held highly skilled or managerial positions in the pottery industry with two major exceptions. When Maria Nichols founded Rookwood Pottery in 1880 in Cincinnati, she hired female painters to decorate her art pottery. By only working part time and keeping in their appropriate sphere, these women won respect at their craft. However, when she turned over management of the plant to William Watts Taylor in 1890 he immediately worked to disassociate the company from female labor and hired male decorators to replace them. Another unusual (at the time) example is the case of Royal China’s Beatrice Miller who not only managed but founded and owned the company out of Sebring, Ohio. Miller (or “Queen Bee” as her employees called her) started the pottery in 1934 after being disgusted with the poor quality china she saw in stores. She purchased an abandoned pottery building and within four years had it up and running. Due to her commitment to innovation and product diversification (including

78 Cheryl Buckley, *Potters and Paintresses: Women Designers in the Pottery Industry, 1870-1955* (London: The Women’s Press, 1990), 4-5; Edward Bistyga and Anthony Conti, interview #1 by Steve Keller, April 1, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 15-17; Frances Via, interview by Steve Keller, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 3; and Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Design and Innovation from Wedgewood to Corning* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 68-74. Ruth Milkman’s *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987) argues that once a job became segregated by sex, those connotations stuck, prohibiting workers of the opposite sex from having the opportunity to work in that position again. She also critiques many of the traditional theoretical approaches to labor history as incapable of explaining why jobs became sex-segregated in the first place. When looking at employment, a consideration of the economic, social, and political environment is necessary to understand how jobs came to be dominated by one sex or the other.
fine china, ironstone, and even plastic ware), Royal China became one of the largest American companies, outlasting many of its competitors until its eventual purchase by the Jeanette Glass Company in 1969 when Miller decided to retire.79

In the commercial factories, women had the opportunity to work free of middle-class Victorian notions, but they still were largely kept to tasks considered appropriate for their sex, either as assistants to men or in applying various types of ornamentation. Decorating took many forms in early potteries. In addition to hand-painting (considered the most skilled task and only performed by highly trained women or men), female employees worked putting on and polishing gold overlay, working enameling stamps or silkscreens, placing decals on unglazed ware, and at some locations painting lines around the rims of plates and bowls (this last job was traditionally done by female employees at Shenango and Onondaga but always fell to men at the NBOP plants). Besides decorating-based jobs, women eventually came to work as office employees for pottery management. The office staff at Homer Laughlin’s pottery remained all-male until 1886 when Luella Cawood moved to East Liverpool in search of a job and showed up at the plant in person to apply. Laughlin would hire her as a stenographer, a position she retained until 1892 when she left to marry. Her replacement, Nora Stevenson worked at the pottery for more than forty years and served as Wells’s personal assistant, often running the plant in his absence.80


80 Bistyga and Conti interview #1, 17 and Darlene Nossaman, “Women Workers in the Homer Laughlin Pottery: ‘The Early Years,’” *The DISH*, vol. 13, no. 4 (Summer 2011), 12-13. At Onondaga, at least early on, decorating seemed more gender-balanced than at most other plants, with male decorators present. This may be a consequence of that plant not being organized under the Brotherhood of Operative Potters and subject to their norms.
Unfortunately, with sex-segregated jobs came sex-segregated pay. Women in general earned far less than men even when they performed the same work. A semi-skilled male worker in 1890s East Liverpool earned on average $500 per year, while females who performed the same job only earned $225. A female warehouse worker made seventy-five cents per day as opposed to $1.29 for men in the same warehouse. As late as 1920s, women at Homer Laughlin still only earned about half of a male’s salary for performing identical work. Women also faced the disadvantage that companies paid many of their decorating-related jobs in piecework rates, tying their wages to high production at pay scales generally far below both men’s piece rates and men’s or women’s day rates. Besides the lack of equal pay, women pottery workers also faced sex discrimination in their facilities and activities. As late at the turn of the century, some potteries did not have separate restrooms for women. Those that did often placed them outside the plant or only provided one small (and often broken) restroom for dozens of workers. Many social groups (such as the Potter’s Club at Onondaga) prohibited female membership and limited their access to recreational spaces. Even organizations such as the Made in America Club did not recruit female workers as active agents but placed them in auxiliaries, encouraging them to purchase American-made products as the primary shoppers of a home. To the Club, women were to fight for their futures as consumers, not as workers with agency.

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81 This of course was not an occurrence limited to the pottery industry or to the early twentieth century. Women in a variety of industries often found themselves limited in both pay and opportunity, and the presence of labor unions actually exaggerated rather than alleviated the problem. Male union members rejected women for the same reason they rejected African Americans: a fear that their presence would lead to lower wages, deskilling, and deteriorating standards. For their part, female workers did not stand idly by but either formed their own trade unions or fought for positions within the male-dominated AFL and CIO. For examples, see Norbert C. Seldon, ed., The World of Women's Trade Unionism: Comparative Historical Essays (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985); Anneliese Orleck, Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); and Dennis A. Deslippe, “Rights, Not Roses”: Unions and the Rise of Working Class Feminism, 1945-1980 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

With the increased presence of women in factories, the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters had to acknowledge their contributions. In the past, NBOP’s relationship with women paralleled its uneasy time dealing with minorities. The original constitution did not even allow females membership until its amending in 1901. Under the second NBOP president, A. S. Hughes, the union tentatively reached out to female workers to form locals for their respective jobs, noting the power they could wield if they went on a wildcat strike. But the few all-female locals lapsed repeatedly as their low pay made them struggle to keep up with dues. By 1930, NBOP could show only two all-women’s locals (both in East Liverpool) and overall Brotherhood membership remained barely 25% female despite these workers making up nearly half of the total pottery workforce. With little representation, women who wanted to protest their wages often had to engage in illegal wildcat strikes. Their success record from these strikes shows mixed results: plant management tended not to take them seriously (one Homer Laughlin supervisor dismissed a 1910 walkout as “the unreasonableness of femininity”) and male co-workers often refused to join them in solidarity even when they did the same for male-led wildcats.83

Mobilization for war caused a reconsideration of female workers and their roles in the potteries. Women first took over certain men’s jobs during World War I, earning the praise of the United States Potters Association. While they only filled a limited number of roles due to the shorter duration of American involvement in that war, the USPA expressed optimism that they would have continued to fill in admirably if the conflict had lasted longer. The more extensive

83 Shotliff, “History of the Labor Movement,” 129; McCabe, National Collective Bargaining, 74-78; “May Not Use Machines,” East Liverpool Review, March 15, 1910, 3; and Via interview, 9-11. Via in particular noted that when Shenango’s decorators went on wildcat strikes, they rarely gained more than a few pennies on their piecework rates as male union members refused to support them. Alice Kessler-Harris reasons this is because men were reluctant to allow any wage increases high enough to disturb the male dominant/female dependent relationship in the workplace or in the home. See her In Pursuit of Equity, chapter 1.
mobilization for the Second World War necessitated a larger number of women to replace men at the plants, especially since orders for the armed forces kept the potteries busy. The USPA and the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters came to an agreement in 1942 to allow women to take men’s jobs when a labor shortage arose (but only for the duration of the war). The agreement further provided that they would earn a journeyman’s wage while working these jobs and forbade NBOP to object to their presence as long as they could physically perform the work. By November, the Limoges China company began to hire female casters and moldrunners with others expected to do the same in a short amount of time. Women defied the odds during the war by not only taking on but excelling at work previously considered too difficult or dangerous for them to perform. At Onondaga, Clara Prouty took on the job of a straw packer in September 1942 to free a man in that department for service. While she still required some assistance in moving the fully packed barrels, Prouty performed her job admirably through the end of the war, though the Syracuse China News felt the need to add that despite the demands of the position, “she still has her fingernails.”

During the war, through a series of Potters Herald editorials, the union acknowledged that the need for military manpower left a shortage of workers in American businesses. The Herald noted that women, especially those already working, could be trained quickly and easily to perform men’s production tasks both in potteries and in other heavy industries. But these women also had a duty to join a labor union where they worked in order to keep wages high by...
refusing exploitation. In turn, the union had a duty to protect these female workers, to help them with tasks such as securing child care, and most importantly, to pay them an equal wage when they performed equal work.86

The Brotherhood may have openly advocated equal pay and job opportunity for women during the war, but it still struggled with gender rights for nearly two more decades. For years, NBOP remained an outspoken critic of an Equal Rights Amendment. A 1938 editorial in the *Potters Herald* called the ERA fight “a strategy worthy of a better cause” and noted that equal rules did not lead to equal opportunity. That is not to say that NBOP flat-out rejected better wages and labor standards for women. Their conflict came with groups like the National Women’s Party whose version of an ERA would undo decades of protective labor laws for women and children. The *Herald* blasted the Party as an organization of wealthy elites out of touch with the needs of working women. The Brotherhood concluded that results would better come by organizing women and allowing their unions to first fight for a guaranteed minimum wage then for the provision of equal pay for equal work.87

By the postwar period, NBOP leadership advocated paying women an equal wage for performing men’s work, yet continued to display reluctance in allowing women to take those jobs in the first place due to trepidation from male workers. Those who held men’s positions

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87 “Equal Rights Amendment,” *Potters Herald*, May 26, 1938, 4; “Higher Standards Needed,” *Potters Herald*, November 23, 1939, 4; “Equal Rights for Women,” *Potters Herald*, April 8, 1943, 4; and “Equal Pay for Women,” *Potters Herald*, June 23, 1955, 4. The potters’ union was far from the only labor organization to feel this way. Union women in particular had a problem with the ERA in its various incarnations. See especially Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004) for a thorough discussion on what she terms “labor feminism,” the articulation of women’s rights by working class women that often desired very different goals than the feminism of middle class women’s groups such as the National Women’s Party and the more recent National Organization of Women.
during World War II were hurried back to their own sex-specific tasks once their co-workers returned from service, usually at the insistence of current and returning male rank-and-file who did not want to share work or wages with female potters. The postwar period and emerging Cold War spurred an ideological push for a return to domesticity and family values in the United States (not surprisingly rooted in the tradition of a wife at home rather than on the factory floor). This underlying tension affected the operations of many industries, including pottery where the old notions of gender-based skill held on stubbornly in NBOP strongholds. In a 1950 letter to a new local, James Duffy warned against the language in the constitution concerning jiggermen. He advised the local to scratch the phrase “either sex” from the paragraph on hiring, warning that if the local did not specify, management may actually consider the unthinkable: the hiring of female jiggermen. Other correspondence with East Liverpool’s Local Union 4 concerned the presence of female “stick-ups” (elsewhere called handlers) working at Hall China for $1.10 per hour. The local protested this practice to Duffy, arguing sticking-up as a man’s job where the wages should be $1.31 per hour. Local 4 worried that at this rate, all male stick-ups would lose their jobs to underpaid women, starting a trend of wage erosion.88

Figure 41: As this employment ad from Shenango suggests, only certain jobs were available for women in the potteries even after World War II. New Castle News, July 24, 1946.

The divide between male and female jobs proved difficult to overcome throughout the 1950s. In 1957 the Brotherhood and the USPA cemented an agreement to pay all women an equal daily and holiday rate for performing men’s work, and on June 10, 1963 the Equal Pay Act legally forbade once and for all the discrimination in wages due to race or sex. With the precedent of women pulling down wages in men’s jobs gone, the USPA began encouraging their members to hire women in more skilled positions to make up for labor shortages. Soon, female casters, handlers, dippers, packers, and turners began to appear on the factory floor as well as existing women in certain departments taking on new positions. Some had little problem, such as Shenango China’s Frances Via who bid on and got a job as a kiln attendant in the early 1970s. Via noted her male coworkers quickly accepted her and that she actually enjoyed working with the men better as they were less petty and argumentative. Another female Shenango worker successfully took on a job as a hi-lift operator despite a small amount of harassment at first. But in other cases, old habits died with more difficulty, such as when a female employee bid on a pipefitter’s job at Shenango during the late 1960s. The foreman for that department pulled the job listing rather than having to work with a woman.89

These employees also faced difficulties in gaining the respect of their peers both as women and workers. From the start, females in potteries, no matter what the plant, skill, or time

James M. Duffy, August 25, 1951, KSU Special Collections; and Ibid, March 11, 1952, KSU Special Collections. The hard feelings over female handle placers is interesting in that like lining, this job had always been considered a male job around East Liverpool but always a female one at both Shenango and Onondaga (likely due to the lack of NBOP presence). For more discussion of the hesitation to grant women equal opportunity in the postwar era, see Kessler-Harris, In Pursuit of Equity for a general overview as well as Milkman, Gender at Work for specific examples in the automotive industry and Mary Margaret Fonow, Union Women: Forging Feminism in the United Steelworkers of America (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) for examples of women’s treatment in steel.

89 “Notice,” Potters Herald, August 20, 1967, 1; United States Potters Association, 87th Proceedings of the Annual Convention, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, December 7-8, 1965 (East Liverpool, OH: J.H. Simms Book and Job Printer, 1965), OHC, 20; Via interview, 4, 11; and Bistyga and Conti interview #1, 18. While the 1957 agreement had specifically been between the USPA and IBOP, the other potteries generally began guaranteeing equal pay for equal work around this time as well. Anthony Conti noted that while women faced restrictions, men always had the freedom to bid into female jobs if they wished but no one wanted to at the risk of being considered effeminate by their co-workers. It was not until the 1980s that men began taking on some decorating-related tasks at Shenango.
period, always were referred to as “girls” rather than women by their male coworkers, bosses, and union officials. Over the past forty years, scholars have grappled with the construction of inequality between men and women. In the late 1970s, some in the field of women’s history began utilizing the term “gender” to explain not the biological sex of men and women but the way in which the identities of male and female originated and dominated. Joan Scott, one of the most famous historians to tackle the concept, declared gender a “useful category of analysis” which forced a rethinking of traditional historical method and theory. In labor history especially, gender gave historians the opportunity to explain women’s absence from the traditional narrative and better explore how the dynamics of class created legitimacy and meaning (indeed, Scott argues class cannot be studied without some consideration of gender as males created an identity as workers that explicitly excluded their female counterparts). Gender can describe relationships of power through cultural symbolism, concepts of interpretation, and social institutions charged with maintaining the balance of power.90

One of the most significant cultural institutions imbued with gender is language. Scott and many others studying gender adopted the post-structuralism tradition as a theoretical grounding when using gender as an analytical category. While specific approaches differ, these scholars generally agree that gender is constructed, maintained, and contested by society as a means of controlling power. As Ava Baron notes, “the issue is not whether men and women are different, but who has the power to define those differences.” More recent scholarship argues that because society is patriarchal, men use language and discourse to reinforce male superiority. Although the English language does not use gendered articles for nouns, certain words nevertheless carry the connotation of male or female. In most of these cases, the male term is

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accepted as the norm while the female often requires a modifier (such as -ess or -ette) and carries meanings associated with weakness or negativity.91

Language also translated to studies of the workplace. Like society itself, scholars argue that in the workplace, the male is the norm and the female is the anomaly. As a result, women struggle to make their voices heard and face a certain level of criticism when demonstrating authority on the job. Again, language helps reinforce this created inequality. Robin Lakoff speaks specifically about calling women “girls” in the workplace, noting that in the male-dominated space, this substitution is perfectly acceptable while using “boys” to describe male workers is not. Lakoff argues that the term “girl,” while pretending to flatter a woman’s vanity by implying youth in reality carries a connotation of immaturity and the implication that females are not equipped to handle the demands of work. “In recalling youth, frivolity, and immaturity,” Lakoff concludes, “girl brings to mind irresponsibility […] A woman is a person who is both too immature and too far from real life to be entrusted with decisions of any serious nature.” While Lakoff’s argument centers on the conscious demeaning of female workers by language, a much later study from Patricia Martin puts a greater emphasis on the effects of patriarchal society in using the terms “girl” and “woman” on the job. She argues that while the workplace is indeed a male-controlled space, the norms of male-controlled society shape what happens there. Over time, the patriarchal dominance renders behavior that should be misogynistic as normal to the point that it is often unnoticed. Calling women “girls” on the job may be an intentional act to degrade female coworkers, but in a great number of cases men use the term “girl” without really

thinking about its connotations or the effects it may have on the women in that space. Martin concludes combating gender inequalities in the workplace requires a conscious effort on the part to think about words used and the meaning created by language.92

While the use of gendered language remained an issue, other changes in the potteries slowly marked a greater acceptance of women as equals. In April 1971, Shenango China sent out a memo announcing the decision to allow female office employees to wear pantsuits to work rather than skirts or dresses. While in today’s casual atmosphere such a proclamation seems silly, it marked Shenango putting its female workers on par with personnel in other major business and professional environments. And although previously women largely had to settle for unskilled or assisting jobs, by 1971, Shenango China could boast that they employed sixty-seven women in office jobs, eleven in sales, eight as plant technicians, and most importantly, three in lower management. With an Affirmative Action policy in place, the company hoped to grow those numbers even further.93

Today, perhaps the greatest accomplishment for women in the industry is the 2013 appointment of Liz McIlvain as president of the Homer Laughlin China Company. More than


one hundred years after her great-grandfather William Wells began the hiring of women at the plant, McIlvain now continues as the fourth generation of leadership.94

**Drawbacks of Organization III – Do Unions Weaken Potteries?**

Both the Brotherhood and the United Steelworkers always proclaimed that their actions best served the interest of workers in the pottery industry. But did they? While unionization did provide fairly steady wage increases and benefits, it also harbored many side effects that weakened the industry as a whole. Under the protection of their unions, workers at times fostered resentment and resistance to innovation, failed to look at the long-term state of the industry in favor of immediate gratification, and allowed for personal interests to inhibit the growth of any true unification of potters.

The pottery industry always faced a certain problem in that it derived from one of the oldest professions known to man. The romantic allure of the individual skilled craftsman at his wheel never truly left even as technology moved in. Thus, when management tried to introduce new equipment, union men either wanted nothing to do with the machines or more often, still demanded they be paid the highly skilled wages to perform what now amounted to only semi-skilled work. Regina Blaszczyk’s study of early mass production at Homer Laughlin argues that the plant experimented with Fordism in a piecemeal manner. The Aaron family and William Wells saw mass production as a flexible concept for their industry, something they could use as much or as little as they pleased. Indeed, this works to the benefit of the pottery industry where shapes and patterns needed to be changed to keep up with fashionable taste. Wells authorized the

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94 “It's a Fiesta for New President of the Homer Laughlin China Company, Liz McIlvain,” *PR Newswire*, March 27, 2013. McIlvain’s daughters also hold important positions within the company, likely ensuring a fifth generation of Wells family (and possibly a second generation of female) leadership.
installation of modern machinery in the plant as early as 1921, culminating in the addition of one of the first continuous tunnel kilns in the country in 1924.95

When bringing any new technology onto the factory floor, Homer Laughlin China had to deal with the resistance of the Brotherhood, as any operation alienating workers put the entire plant at risk of a strike. Members and leadership of NBOP firmly held onto the craft tradition of their work, preferring small batches paid at a piecework rate to the mass-production preferred by bosses. The union felt a particular unease at the tunnel kiln, especially when management tried to use non-union labor for loading and unloading (since the tunnel kilns did not require the constant monitoring of periodic kilns, this particular task became unskilled). Duffy dismissed another new technology, an automatic placing conveyor, as “an inhuman monster” upon its installation in 1935. Brotherhood officials and management disagreed on setting a wage rate for the new machine as NBOP still wanted skilled wage rates and the company looked to save money. At least one wildcat strike occurred before the sides agreed to a wage scale the following year. While not yet touched by mechanization, the jiggermen at Laughlin nevertheless bristled at the changes in their plant, especially the suggestion to pay them a day rate rather than by piecework. As Blaszczyk noted, “jiggermen preferred unemployment to compromise” in those days and engaged in multiple wildcat strikes to make their opinions known. Laughlin in the 1920s and 1930s never realized the peak of automation they could have due to the resistance of NBOP members. In the end, the company opted for labor harmony through selective rather than mass production.96

The animosity towards mechanization continued throughout the years. The introduction of automatic jigger machines in the 1940s caused an uprising of finishers threatened by the new

equipment. They warned Duffy that if wages for operating the machines (currently installed at Homer Laughlin and Edwin M. Knowles) did not equal or exceed the hand rate, they would “take the matter into our own hands.” In a 1952 letter, Duffy traced the history of new technology in the potteries and maintained the stance that workers were not under any circumstances to see a reduction in their earnings for operating the equipment and that the employee whose hand work had been replaced got the first right to operate the machine before the company hired any unskilled labor.97 Essentially, NBOP required all money-saving devices to be operated by skilled workers at the high wages that caused the need for cost savings in the first place.

_Ceramic Industry_, one of the leading trade publications for commercial ceramic producers, published an editorial in December 1956 entitled “Will Labor Wreck the Dinnerware Industry?” By interviewing several leading pottery managers anonymously, they deduced that the years of relative labor peace came at the cost of efficiency in the plants. Labor resisted automation and technological advances and still wanted the precedent of decades past when their pay could be justified by the skill required to perform it. As a result, pottery manufacture suffered from outdated methods and unnecessary expense since the work could not be turned over to machines or low-pay workers (such as women) without the wrath of the union. The division of IBOP by craft rather than plant also hampered negotiation and divided workers at the same company against one another. At a time when Japan, Czechoslovakia, and other foreign nations threatened the industry with their cheaper labor costs, the editorial concluded that the

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only way for the American industry to survive was if workers stopped making unreasonable demands and embraced labor-saving technology in their plants.98

In addition to historical opposition to modernization, unionization also bred a sense of insurgency that hindered the operation of potteries through resistance and wildcat strikes. In 1916, the USPA sued NBOP on account of a saggermaker’s strike in Trenton. The union had ordered the strikers back on the job but they refused and left the Brotherhood. Nevertheless, the USPA argued that since they illegally struck while still members, NBOP should be held responsible for their actions and compensate the manufacturers accordingly. Additionally, the bosses warned the union that they needed to keep their members in line and hold up their end of wage agreements. The next year, insurgency continued as two locals of jiggermen walked out in protest of the wage agreement. Edward Menge, NBOP president, had to hold several meetings and levy steep fines on the leaders of the illegal strike until all workers returned to their jobs.99 Over the years, insurgency continued as a constant problem, as more than half of all strikes (especially after World War II) did not have the approval of Brotherhood officials. These strikes not only cost the company in lost sales but hurt fellow workers who could not perform their own tasks when insurgents shut down the rest of the plant.

Also injurious to the entire operations of potteries were the constant increases demanded by both IBOP and USWA even in times of crisis. While plants lost money each year from competition, workers still insisted on raises and benefits that outpaced company profits. In 1955,

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98 “Will Labor Problems Wreck the Dinnerware Industry?” Ceramic Industry, November 1956. Interestingly, this editorial was reprinted in the December 13th edition of the Potters Herald. The tendency of workers to act in ways that management deemed irrational actually corresponds with the conclusion reached by Stanley Aronowitz in his False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), namely that workers will often act independent of their labor unions in order to achieve their personal goals. He argues that this selfishness is why neither socialism nor widespread unionism ever took hold in the United States, the working class remain divided through their own self-interest.

Ceramic Industry lamented the state of business following a new two-year deal with a five-cent hourly increase. The journal noted that at the moment, many potteries only operated three days per week due to a lack of business from plastics and other competition. In other industries, they observed that unions halted their demands for wages and worked to improve their products to regain lost orders. Potters on the other hand, not only refused to pick up their productivity, they asked for even more and as a result they only had three days of work per week. In some cases, even the negotiated wages did not satisfy. Only one year after gaining a five-cent raise despite the poor condition of business, Local 53 wrote to IBOP headquarters asking them to reopen the wage negotiations again and gain even more. By 1970, the contract between IBOP and the USPA increased wages and benefits so much to stave off a strike that Homer Laughlin needed to raise their product prices to cover the difference, a move that hurt both the company and its fragile customer base.100

Finally, despite the claims of brotherhood, unions for years excluded certain workers and rallied against fellow potters who did not conform to the NBOP ideal. Before the Brotherhood’s formation, the early attempts at pottery organization always favored the highly skilled craftsmen and ignored semi-skilled, unskilled, and female workers (precisely those that needed protection the most). Even NBOP took years before they would accept the employees who made up a large and growing portion of the labor force. As historian Marc Stern notes, full trade unity cannot be had without including workers of all backgrounds. In the pottery industry, this unity also was hindered by the continued presence of non-union (or non-NBOP) plants. In 1938 Duffy twice wrote to all 685 AFL locals encouraging them not to buy any product made in non-union potteries, including specifically Shenango and Onondaga. The Brotherhood renewed the call

100 “Potters Wage Increase Helps No One,” Ceramic Industry, June 1955, 31; Vesta Phillips to E. L. Wheatley, November 11, 1956, KSU Special Collections; and W. E. Picken to Brown Wright Hotel Supply Corporation, November 16, 1970, OHA.
several years later when he sent a resolution to all AFL-CIO members to boycott the Frankhoma Pottery in Oklahoma when the owner advocated for a right-to-work law in the state. At a time when the entire American industry needed all the business it could get, the outright boycotting of potteries that did not fit the IBOP mold only served to hurt all plants, union or otherwise.

Even among fellow workers unionization sometimes served to divide rather than unite. At many plants, including Homer Laughlin and Shenango China, office workers did not belong to the union. This led to increased tension when strikes would break out, as these workers still had to report to their jobs and cross angry picket lines to do so. Strikers also unleashed anger at those who did not wish to walk out. A letter sent to the editors of the *Syracuse Post-Standard* from a Syracuse China employee too afraid to sign their name lamented the 1975 walkout and blamed IBPAW for demanding outrageous benefits during a recession, noting “only idiots would [strike] at a time like this.” The anonymous employee also dismissed the union’s handling of the vote and its aftermath as disorganized and that following the strike vote they failed to provide workers with instructions on what to do about getting assistance while off work. The employee felt Syracuse management provided a fair offer and that workers had been used by IBPAW for the attention gained by a walkout (even going as far as insinuating that IBPAW paid workers at Syracuse to instigate for a strike). Another worker responded to this letter the next week, attacking the fellow employee for the implication of a coerced election, noting that the vast majority of workers democratically voted to strike, and wondering if when “you will be sharing all the benefits that your coworkers fought for will you consider them ignorant idiots then?”


In the past forty years, organized labor in the United States has steadily declined in both numbers and influence. Scholars have noted various reasons for this weakening. Some point to the Cold War and note how the Red Scare drove unions (especially the AFL and CIO) towards conservatism and alliance with the U.S. government. This closeness plus the addition of legal collective bargaining stripped unions of their power as they either had little to fight for or refused to take any drastic steps for fear of being labeled communist. Others argue for the loss of working-class identity. When employees no longer see themselves as a distinct class at odds with their employers, they tend toward apathy and show a greater reluctance to join or actively participate in labor-based activities. Still others look at the phenomenon of deindustrialization as the culprit, noting that unions can no longer wield power when members lose their jobs in droves. The most cynical argue that unions doomed themselves by asking for too much too often. When the continuing cycle of greed and excess finally started to collapse, workers rejected both the New Deal-style liberalism and the labor movement in favor of a rising New Right who welcomed the disillusioned worker into the increasingly vocal “silent majority.”

Looking at how unionization affected the pottery industry raises several other points both about the status of organization and the decline of the industry itself. The National Brotherhood of Operative Potters emerged from the fracture of the Knights of Labor to become the leading organization for pottery workers. In its ninety years of autonomous existence, NBOP succeeded in establishing one of the first collective bargaining agreements in the country and provided its

by herself and her husband (who was a factory floor employee and reluctant member of USWA) when he had to drive her to work past the pickets of his coworkers during strikes. Both disagreed with the union’s position but due to the closed shop rule, he had to belong or lose his job.

workers with a steadily increasing standard of living, often above that of many other industries. Yet at the same time, the Brotherhood struggled with a number of problems, chiefly their constant inability to be fully unified. Among the rank-and-file, the specter of insurgency haunted the executive office as they dealt with numerous wildcat walkouts that threatened their credibility and tested the patience of employers. These strikes not only generally ended in defeat, they cost the union and its members in thousands, perhaps even millions of dollars in lost wages and raised the ire of management. Many of these walkouts came as part of a larger resistance to modernization. The Brotherhood stubbornly held onto the old craft tradition of the industry to the point that they still demanded skilled wages for performing only semi-skilled labor. This hampered the potteries’ ability to compete in the global market, as their labor cost prevented them from ever reaching the price points of imported ware. As their response to the place of women and minority workers suggests, the Brotherhood leadership also struggled to get the rank-and-file on board with their views for a more equal and socially-minded organization. And internally, NBOP remained a fractured organization for much of its later years. The friction between Duffy and his executive board led to clashes that took up valuable time and damaged their outward reputation.

Most importantly, the Brotherhood failed in becoming the true representative of all potters. From the start, the union never held all of the major plants in the nation at the same time. This meant that at least one major operator could still function every time NBOP called a nationwide strike. With a lack of a fully unified labor force, neither the Brotherhood nor the United Steelworkers could gain a complete upper hand on their situation as business could always go elsewhere and other plants could profit. Because of this, none of the Brotherhood’s industry-wide strikes had the impact they could have, limiting the increases to be won. Often times, the
sanctioned strikes won little more than the initial company offers and wasted millions in lost wages to the point that the long-term results of walkouts often held far more negatives than positives. At a time when the pottery industry faced a steep uphill battle, the difficulties could have been eased by strong cooperation between labor and management. Instead, the action and inaction of the Brotherhood only further aggravated the problems at hand by creating divisions just when unity was necessary for survival.
CHAPTER 6

“Under the Glaze is Success”: Potteries’ Relations with their Communities, their Workers, and Each Other

On the first of June in 1953, a joint resolution between New York Governor Thomas Dewey and Syracuse Mayor Thomas Cochran announced to the world that the following seven days would be known as “Syracuse China Week.” In a congratulatory telegram to Richard Pass, Governor Dewey praised the company as not only one of the oldest local industries, but producers of the most beautiful china in the world, easily capable of competing with foreign factories and their lower prices. The success of the Onondaga Pottery in Dewey’s words, “reflects credit upon the state’s industry as a whole and there is cause for real pride in the fact that in its excellence and beauty, Syracuse China had overtaken the oldest and most celebrated foreign potteries.” In closing, Dewey also congratulated Pass on running his company for more than thirty-five years without a strike and on promoting a plant culture where more than one-quarter of employees currently had more than twenty years of service. The local press also took advantage of Syracuse China week and published retrospective articles and offered their own congratulations towards the pottery for decades of being “good neighbors and good friends.” Finally, Onondaga used the celebration as a promotion for their own dealers, offering giveaways and suggestions for promotions so that everyone all across the country could celebrate Syracuse
The celebration of a local industry by the city of Syracuse shows the close relationship that Onondaga, Shenango, and Homer Laughlin sought to forge with their communities. The leaders of these three plants knew that their success did not only come from the sale of a product but from the bonds forged between their neighbors and their workers. To cement these bonds, potteries actively engaged in fostering pride and loyalty at multiple levels. They encouraged their neighbors to seek out locally-produced china, welcomed locals to tour the factories and purchase second-quality ware at discounts, and engaged in community service and charity work. To harmonize labor relations, management undertook several forms of welfare capitalism, including plant beautification, financial and educational assistance, company outings, entertainment and sporting activities, and company newsletters to promote these programs. Plants also honored those with long-term service and encouraged limited amounts of participatory management.

Finally, even as plants monitored their relationships with their workers and communities, they still took the time to keep a close eye on their competitors, noting their rivals’ equipment, products, and promotions. While all of these approaches and activities may seem disparate, they all represent the diverse ways in which potteries sought to endure in a changing world. When foreign china posed an ever-present threat, any public overture to their hometown, any gesture that could bolster employee goodwill and prevent a costly strike, or any test of a competitor’s product could provide a vital advantage in the battle to survive.

Local Pride and Community Service

The emergence of large corporations in the late nineteenth century brought with them a certain amount of unease. These big businesses lacked the intimacy and familiarity of the small shop and as they grew more powerful, the public grew more leery of their presence. Middle class Americans disturbed at the practices of corporations began using the technique of publicity to bring to light the abuses of these entities. They were aided in their cause by the rapid growth of mass media in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Associated Press accelerated communication between the eastern and western halves of the nation. In addition, mass manufacturing techniques made paper and ink far less expensive, triggering a booming magazine industry. Progressive reformers then had a wide audience in which to condemn industrial abuses through publicity and to call for social order. Corporate leaders felt further pressure from the 1901 ascendency of Theodore Roosevelt to the presidency following the assassination of the business-friendly William McKinley. Roosevelt’s promise to reign-in big business combined with the provocation of muckrakers put managers on the defensive.²

To counter the accusations from reform-minded writers and politicians, corporations made use of public relations on their own terms to control the information about their products and practices, knowing that positive association could translate to greater sales. In 1900 the Publicity Bureau opened in Boston as the first office specializing in providing press agency to corporate clients. The much-maligned railroad industry adopted publicity practices early, hiring the services of Ivy Ledbetter Lee (known for helping to soften the public image of the Rockefeller family) who utilized informational brochures, public speaking engagements, and other displays to present facts to the public. But these facts carefully followed a strategic pattern:

giving the public just enough information to make them trust the company and nothing else. The railroads would be followed in the use of publicity by public utility companies, including AT&T, Standard Oil (sporadically), Bethlehem Steel, and Du Pont. By the 1920s, the term “publicity” had gotten a negative connotation, as audiences connected it with deception and propaganda. Edward Bernays, a leading practitioner in the field, suggested the new phrase “public relations” to describe a practice that not only informed but shaped public opinion.3

By packaging a friendly image and publicizing a commitment to employees and their neighbors, these companies created what Roland Marchand dubbed a “corporate soul,” bringing them closer to their target audience. Community relations in particular built the trust of employees and boost the reputation of a factory within its locality. This goodwill could be useful in times of hardship and helped to improve employees’ productivity by taking pride in their work. Creating a corporate soul also benefitted the hometown of the business by maintaining a contented labor force and by the money and time that business leaders devoted to charity or local services. By improving their communities, industrialists by extension bettered their own chances of success.4

Since success came through sales, potteries often invited locals to visit the plant and witness the production of dinnerware firsthand, hoping to convince them to make a purchase. All

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3 Alan R. Raucher, Public Relations and Business, 1900-1929 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), 11, 33-34, 61 and Richard S. Tedlow, Keeping the Corporate Image: Public Relations and Business, 1900-1950 (Greenwich, Connecticut: Jai Press Inc., 1979), 2-18. Tedlow notes that over time, corporations would use public relations to increase sales, to discredit New Dealers and labor unions, to support the war effort, and finally to demonstrate goodwill. But at the heart of all these techniques was protecting the business from public scorn.

4 Roland Marchand, Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: The University of California Press, 1998), 10 and Wayne Hodges, Company and Community: Case Studies in Industry-City Relationships (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958), 3-6, 10. Hodges’s study of industry-community relations took place in Syracuse, New York, home of the Onondaga Pottery. Hodges anonymously interviewed numerous local business leaders (possibly including Onondaga’s management) on their opinions of community service. All agreed that despite the amount of work that went into outreach, they generally enjoyed it and agreed that the prosperity of their companies could not be separated from the prosperity of the greater Syracuse area, and that improving one surely benefitted the other.
three businesses of this study regularly offered plant tours to interested locals and out-of-town visitors. Factory tours became popular in the late nineteenth century as a way for large corporations to ease public fears about their motives and practices. At the 1893 Columbian Exposition, the local Chicago plants received nearly ten thousand visitors per day and over the next ten years tourism boosted such industrial giants as Heinz, National Cash Register, and Ford. By seeing production first hand in a clean and safe factory, critics could learn to trust in big business and accept them as a part of the community. For the companies themselves, tourism served as another type of publicity, especially when visitors received souvenirs of their trip such as postcards and samples (or in the case of Shenango and Homer Laughlin at least, ceramic coasters). To encourage travelers to stop by their factory, Shenango China erected large billboards on every major highway near New Castle advertising their world famous hotel, Haviland, and Castleton ware as well as offering tours every Monday through Friday at 1:30pm. Syracuse China also encouraged visitors as well as friends and family of employees. Sometimes, even General Manager Guy Cowan led the groups through the Fayette or Court Street plants. Through both local promotion and the carrying fame of their product, Syracuse boasted a record of more than seven thousand visitors in 1966 alone, over a thousand more than in previous years. Homer Laughlin China continues to welcome guests to its plant today, offering daily morning and afternoon tours ending at the on-site plant museum.5

Taking visitors through the plant also gave potteries the opportunity to usher these guests over to nearby outlet stores where second-quality and discontinued products were sold at discounted prices. Like so many other innovations in the industry, the pottery outlet idea began with Josiah Wedgewood who sold pieces considered inferior for his high-class clientele to the general public at a reduced price outside his warehouse. The practice benefitted both parties: middle and lower-class consumers had a chance to own the prestigious Wedgewood name at a more reasonable cost, and their devotion further popularized the company across the globe. In the states, Onondaga opened one of the first outlet stores for their product. Previously, the plant stored all second-quality ware in the attic for personal use until a Buffalo-area dealer offered to buy up the entire stock to sell at the World’s Fair. Realizing that they could make money off of these pieces themselves, an outlet opened across the street from the Court Plant in 1939 selling seconds to the public.6

At first, Shenango China only sold seconds to their employees through their China Store located inside the plant. The store operated during lunch hours and gave workers a variety of not only hotelware but also some Haviland and Castleton rejects. In October 1966, Shenango opened its first outlet to the general public, the China Cupboard located not by the plant but on a

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6 Reed and Skoczen, *Syracuse China*, 85. A note on the term "seconds:" a second-quality piece (sometimes also referred to as a “re-select”) is one that passed all initial inspections during the production process but when completely finished, was found to have a slight defect, making it unsuitable for retail sale. These can range from as small as an air bubble under the glaze to imperfect applications of decal or color. Usually the defects in seconds are not very noticeable, and a second-quality piece can blend into a full-priced set quite easily. Selling seconds was not a new practice in the states: when potteries dealt exclusively with jobbers, some men in that trade specialized in buying up seconds and sometimes even thirds to sell. But the jobbers sold the inferior quality goods as first-run ware, thereby helping contribute to the poor reputation that American potteries had in much of the nineteenth century. By the 1890s, nearly all American plants stopped selling their seconds to jobbers so as to counter this perception of their product as shoddy.
developing retail strip in one of New Castle’s northern townships. The China Cupboard sold hotel seconds, discontinued Castleton patterns, and selected first-quality ware in the company’s new Castleton Independence Ironstone line. Additionally, the store offered non-Shenango gift items such as glassware and candles. In 1971, the China Cupboard took over the duty of arranging for company tours. Two tours were offered daily, starting at the store and boarding buses to the plant and back at 9:45am and 12:45pm. The success of New Castle’s China Cupboard led to parent company INTERPACE opening a second Cupboard location in Toledo, Ohio in February 1969 also selling factory seconds and assorted giftware. However, the Toledo outlet did not match the success of the original and closed down in February 1971. In September 1979 the China Cupboard closed for renovations and reopened as the Shenango/Anchor Hocking Outlet Store to match the new corporate ownership. Now in addition to the Shenango seconds, the store stocked a wide variety of Anchor Hocking glassware and other gifts. This store continued until Anchor sold the company in 1987 when it shut down for good.7

Syracuse China kept with a more strictly outlet-store approach, selling nothing but its own product (and eventually that of their candle subsidiary Will & Baumer). In 1977 the store underwent an enlargement that nearly doubled its size and three years later the company added prepackaged sets of first-quality hotel dinnerware to the inventory. With the store in Syracuse doing well, the pottery’s parent company Canadian Pacific decided to open an additional location in the city of Rochester at the Southtown Shopping Plaza. A third outlet the joined them the

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The Syracuse China Factory Store. Home of the happy bargain hunter.

Ask any veteran bargain hunter about the bargains inside our factory store, and you’ll hear a story about some of the greatest values in town.

You see, we know what it takes to make a bargain hunter happy. It takes special values like our commercial china, hand-cast metal tableware and useful accessories. Things like a complete 45-piece service for eight for less than $25.

Or a new selection of Will & Baumer candles every week ... at half price! Plus many daily unadvertised specials.

The terrific values on our durable, break-resistant commercial china and hand-cast metal tableware are the things that really matter to our bargain-hunters.

Our values made us what we are today:
The Bargain Hunters’ Paradise.

The Syracuse China Factory Store
Mastercharge and BankAmericard Welcome.
Open Weekdays 10-5, Saturdays 9-5
2900 Court Street • 1/2 mile West of the Teall Ave./Court St. Intersection

Figure 42: An advertisement for the Syracuse China outlet store. Syracuse Herald-American, August 10, 1975.
following year, opening at the Northway Shopping Center in the Albany suburb of Colonie.

Unlike the main store, the two new outlets sold a variety of giftware in addition to the discounted china. When Pfaltzgraff bought Syracuse China in 1990, they too redesigned the store, moving it approximately ½ mile away from the plant to the corner of Court Street and Teall Avenue. This new store sold a mixture of Syracuse first and second quality ware as well as firsts and seconds in Pfaltzgraff dinnerware. When Libbey Glass bought the company in 1995, their own product replaced the Pfaltzgraff china and the store continued up until the pottery’s closing in 2009.8

Today, Homer Laughlin maintains its outlet store, a building attached to Plant #8 in Newell. The store sells both first and second quality Fiesta, licensed companion accessories, and occasional pieces of the hotelware line Best China. Twice per year, in June and October, the outlet holds an annual tent sale. During the sale prices on first-quality ware are marked down as much as twenty percent off. But the main draw is a large outdoor tent housing crates of seconds. These pieces, normally as much as fifty percent off the retail price of firsts, are discounted even further, sometimes as low as seventy-five percent off the original cost. The sale attracts flocks of customers and collectors from around the country. At the June 2015 sale, the company announced that attendance broke a record with more than 1,600 showing up for the first day alone, including some who lined up in the rain the evening before to secure an early place in line (the company even extended the sale an extra day due to the overwhelming demand). Besides the

8 “Wait ‘til You See It…Bargain Hunters’ Paradise Just Got a Lot Better,” Syracuse Herald-Journal, March 20, 1977, 4; “Grand Opening Sale,” Syracuse Post-Standard, July 12, 1990, 16; and James Ehmann, “Syracuse China Automates, Opens Outlet,” Syracuse Post-Standard, February 7, 1983, P-5, P-6. It is uncertain exactly when the Rochester and Albany outlets closed. The Albany store had to close by 1998 as the Northway Mall shut down completely and was demolished that year. The Rochester store appears to have remained open longer but closed before the entire company was shut down in 2009. All three potteries’ outlets (but especially that of Syracuse) encouraged the purchase of second-quality china to be used as firsts in the home. This connects to the argument made by Marianne Conray that outlet stores highlight the tension of modern middle class identity. Conray postulates that outlets appeal to shoppers because they can keep up their middle class appearance by purchasing designer items but can do so at discounts they depend on in uncertain economies. See Conray, “Discount Dreams: Factory Outlet Malls, Consumption, and the Performance of Middle Class Identity,” Social Text, no. 54 (spring 1998), 63-83.
main factory outlet, Homer Laughlin also co-owns a second store, Everything Fiesta, located in the Flatwoods Mall in Sutton, West Virginia. Opening in December 2005, Everything Fiesta functions as an official outlet store carrying firsts and seconds as well as a number of decorated pieces exclusive to that location. Like the main store, Everything Fiesta also holds deep-discount tent sales twice yearly in April and August.9

While outlet stores and tent sales drum up business at the personal level, potteries also made use of their friends and neighbors to support foodservice and industrial sales as well. For decades, these companies encouraged employees, salesmen, and community members to check the china when they dined out and look for the local company’s backstamp on the underside. In 1946, Onondaga’s Richard Pass started the “Turner-Over Club” and passed out membership cards to interested parties. The card authorized the bearer to turn over the china at any dining establishment to check if it had been manufactured by Onondaga (the illustration on the original cards also featured a humorous sketch of a gentleman seizing the plate from the woman seated at the next table to inspect). The company made the cards available to the general public and as late as the 1990s they were available to anyone who visited or called the plant. For Syracusans, the club and the practice made them feel a larger connection to the world as even travelers abroad checked their plates and sometimes found the familiar logo. The plate inversion concept spread to the other potteries as well: by the early 1970s Shenango China handed out “Plate Flipper Club” membership cards to create brand awareness in a lighthearted way. The first batch proved

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so popular that the company immediately had to order more. Soon after, Homer Laughlin began handing out cards for their Plate Flipper’s Society as conversation starters for salesmen.10


The pride and excitement felt by locals towards their potteries naturally branched off into collecting. A large assortment of American china can be found for sale on numerous websites along with abbreviated company histories and collectors’ organizations. One of the largest of these is the Restaurant Ware Collector’s Network, founded by Jackie Tromble in 1999. The RWCN seeks to bring together the fans, collectors, buyers, and sellers of restaurant and hotel china to add to their existing collections and to gain new knowledge about pieces and manufacturers. The main feature of the Network is its extensive discussion forum where more

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than 2,800 members talk about companies and products, seek help in identification, and request wanted items. In 2008 the site also added an identification database with a list of known patterns and backstamps as well as scans of price lists and catalogs from many of the major hotelware manufacturers. Another large organization is the Homer Laughlin China Collector’s Association (HLCCA), founded in the summer of 1998. The HLCCA began as an all-volunteer educational group to put collectors in touch with one another. Since then, it has grown to over 1,100 members, publishes a quarterly magazine called *The DISH*, and holds yearly conventions where hundreds of Laughlin collectors can meet, buy, sell, and display their favorite products. Additionally, the HLCCA maintains a close relationship with the Homer Laughlin China Company, counting some management as members and contracting with the pottery for exclusive decorated items to be sold to members only. Finally, social media has added a whole new dimension to collecting by enabling china fans to connect as never before. One of the largest Facebook groups for china collectors, “Plate Turners of the World, Unite,” functions as an extension of the old turn-over clubs in the modern day. Leon Rubin of Dahlanega, Georgia (formerly of the East Liverpool area), started the group in 2012 to share memories of the local potteries. Today, more than 1,500 members regularly post photos of where they have turned over their plates and found American-made china and express pride in the products of their hometowns.\(^\text{11}\)

Encouraging visitors and collectors to increase sales made up one aspect of potteries’ commitment to their localities. Another came through participating in community service,

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charitable acts, and openly publicizing local loyalty. The practice began early on in the history of American industry with such notable examples as Andrew Carnegie’s library and museum philanthropy. With the agitation of Progressive-era muckrakers, goodwill gestures were as much a benefit to the companies themselves as to their neighborhoods, as the publicity generated by them helped to counter negative notions of corporate greed. Public perception continued to fuel these goodwill activities through the 1920s and 1930s as the Great Depression once again made the social standing of big business a precarious one. After World War II, the practice became known as “corporate social responsibility,” a humanizing endorsement of capitalism in the Cold War period. Not only did the corporation function as a member of the community, they upheld the desired middle class values of the United States by actively improving their surroundings and looking out for those in need.12

12 Marchand, Creating the Corporate Soul, 144-66; Morrell Heald, The Social Responsibilities of Business: Company and Community, 1900-1960 (Cleveland and London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970), 2-3, 21, 209-10; Louis Galambos, The Public Image of Big Business in America, 1880-1940: A Quantitative Study in Social Change (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 5-9, 222-23; Steve May, George Cheney, and Juliet Roper, eds., The Debate Over Corporate Social Responsibility (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4-5; and Josh Boyd, “The Corporation-as-Middle-Class-Person: Corporate Social Responsibility and Class,” in Damon Waymer, ed., Culture, Social Class, and Race in Public Relations: Perspectives and Applications (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 46-51. Scholarly debate on corporate social responsibility began around the 1960s, first by defining the concept and its limits. The social upheaval of the 1960s spurred a renewed interest in the topic as business faced its first real challenge since the Great Depression. These studies, including Heald’s The Social Responsibility of Business, Neil H. Jacoby’s Corporate Power and Social Responsibility (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1973), and S. Prakash Sethi’s edited collection The Unstable Ground: Corporate Social Policy in a Dynamic Society (Los Angeles: Melville Publishing Company, 1974) all defend the corporation and its actions in the face of a turbulent society while providing guidance for their past and future behavior. Both Sethi and Jacoby argue that the corporation remains a vital part of American economic and social life and thus should use their influence to repair the image of big business. The first historian to take on the concept exclusively was Galambos. His social history of public perception rejects Richard Hofstader’s argument that Americans did not accept corporations until after World War II and also rejects a Marxist analysis of class as the determinant of perception and provides data from middle and working class Americans to show opinion of corporate actions fluctuated due to prevailing economic, political, and social conditions in the United States but generally turned largely positive by the 1920s. The most recent studies of corporate social responsibility look at how the debate has changed yet again in the years since 1960. They emphasize the importance of thought and action as well as exploring new arenas for activism such as the environmental movement and looking at how responsibility has changed in the face of corporate scandals in the 1990s and 2000s. See especially two edited collections on the topic, Archie B. Carroll’s Corporate Responsibility: The American Experience (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 2012) and Steve May, George Cheney and Juliet Roper’s The Debate Over Corporate Social Responsibility (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
Roland Marchand’s description of the corporate soul includes a focus on the small town as a way for industries to associate themselves with down-home values. Businesses invoked familiarity, conservatism, family values, unity, and simplicity to distance themselves from accusations of corporate aloofness. Potteries too engaged in this association, committing themselves to their communities through charitable donations, participation in local organizations, and overtures to the local press. As Onondaga president William Salisbury noted in 1963, “industry has a responsibility in building up reputation of the area in which it is located […] through stable employment, conservative labor relations, and active corporate participating in community affairs industry can strengthen this favorable image.”

Pottery management had the ability to donate money or property to their hometowns for a variety of projects. One of the earliest of these occurred in 1905 when Homer Laughlin salesman and later Vice President George Washington Clarke oversaw the creation of a city park adjacent to the Newell plants. When Laurel Hollow Park opened it boasted flower gardens, fountains, a lake, walking trails, and a miniature zoo with a variety of animals and even a bear pit. Unfortunately the park fell into disrepair following Clarke’s death in 1913. That year the remaining animals were sent to the Pittsburgh Zoo and the park shut down. Recently, Newell residents have worked to restore the park, which reopened to the public in 2008 (minus the animal attractions). Homer Laughlin China and the Wells family have also donated money to build up the city of Newell (itself the product of the company). In 1911, Wells raised $100,000 to erect a YMCA in the city and in 1926 the company donated $30,000 towards the construction of a new elementary and secondary school as well as donating the land for the new buildings. Both Homer Laughlin and Syracuse China also took part in area Little League baseball teams, with

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Laughlin sponsoring a team for much of the 1950s and 1960s and Syracuse donating land for a new field adjacent to the plant. While Shenango China did not donate property, they made use of their own plant when sponsoring Junior Achievement, a program for business-minded high school students to practice in the creation and marketing of a product under the guidance of a local company. Shenango first took on a team in 1979 and provided mentors and advisors for the students as well as a space to sell their created products. The hard work paid off in 1981 when Shenango’s team the Placesetters won company of the year for the most sales of their merchandise, a cheese plate set manufactured at the plant.¹⁴

Management may have had greater resources available but pottery employees also frequently donated their time and energies to helping those less fortunate in their communities. Onondaga employees held a company Christmas party in 1920 where in addition to tree trimming and carols, all attendees brought gifts of candy, clothing, and toys for the needy children of Syracuse. The city’s female social group the Huntington Club (which had a large proportion of Onondaga Pottery women as members) held similar functions to spread holiday cheer to those in need. Blood donation was also a popular way to give back at all three plants. A program launched at

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Homer Laughlin in 1976 saw thirty-seven donors at its first meeting, a number successful enough to continue with the program monthly. To support the cause, International Brotherhood of Pottery and Allied Workers Vice President Richard Bratt posed for the *East Liverpool Review*, thermometer and nurse in tow as he made his donation. Shenango China frequently held fundraising campaigns for the United Way and oftentimes total donations surpassed the set goals. A rather amusing fundraiser occurred at Shenango in November 1986. Three members of lower management participated in a jail-a-thon for the American Cancer Society. The men faced arrest on humorous charges such as passing bad decal and smuggling meatballs and were “jailed” until each raised $200 in donations to make bail. All three managed release by the end of the work day, amusing their coworkers while collecting hundreds for charity.15

Dedication went beyond tangible contributions of space and money. Potteries also took the time to display their pride in their homes through public messages, a strategy popular with large corporations seeking to build local relationships and reinforce their role as legitimate members of a community. While the East Liverpool potteries made up a large part of the local economy, in Syracuse and New Castle ceramics counted for only one of many industries in the area. As a result, Syracuse and Shenango’s leadership often put advertisements in the local newspapers to tout their achievements and thank both their workers and their supporters. Onondaga’s advertising noted that its record of firsts (first mass manufacture of hotelware, first to adopt decalcomania, first to produce a rolled-edge china) “carries the name of Syracuse into the far corners of the earth as well as all parts of the United States.” A series of ads published in honor of the plant’s 75th anniversary showcased several vignettes in its history, including George

Oliver’s first profitable sale in 1871, James Pass’s perfection of hotelware, and the introduction of underglaze decoration while thanking the labor force for making such moments possible. Ten years later the pottery observed how their china appears all across the United States as a “hallmark of hospitality.” For Syracusans, the ad notes the china became a symbol of their own achievement, “hold[ing] a mirror to Syracuse, New York, uniquely reflecting the accomplished skills and industry of our community’s workers.” It continues that “Syracuse China combines the tradition of gracious dining with the spirit of a great city and thus spreads the fame of both across the nation.”

Shenango China often ran their advertising during the New Castle News’s Yearly Business Review and Forecast section which ran in January or February of each year. In this special supplement, companies could not only submit articles detailing their performance over the previous year, they also could run advertising cementing their commitment to the community. Shenango introduced their first of such ads in 1965 in celebration of their sixtieth anniversary, noting their Indian logo could be found in all corners of the nation. The ad for the next year more specifically cited the pride in their New Castle heritage, noting the success of the pottery benefitted both themselves and “our favorite hometown.” From 1968 to 1973, the pottery ran an ad asking “did you know your New Castle neighbors make the world’s finest china right here in your backyard?” As proof, it cited several of Shenango’s famous clients while inviting the public to join the Plate Flipper’s Club to find Shenango on the bottom of their favorite dining establishments all over the nation. For the next three years, the company’s yearly advertisement

noted that “it takes great people to make great china” and cited Shenango employees such as “people like you, or your neighbor, or the guy down the street” as the reason for the company’s success. Shenango participated in the Business Review for the final time in February 1979, just before their purchase by Anchor Hocking. This ad more than all others made specific reference to the connection between company success and labor force by individually listing the names of each of the more than one thousand employees of the company as the “1,000 very good reasons” the plant remained committed to the New Castle area. While the factory floor automated, “machines can never care, only people can do that,” and Shenango recognized New Castle citizens as paramount to the future of Shenango in a time of transition.17

As potteries publicly committed to their communities, the local media often returned the favor by publishing laudatory articles and company histories on occasion. While Shenango

17 “New Castle Pride,” New Castle News, January 25, 1966, 26; “Did You Know that Your New Castle Neighbors Make the World’s Finest China Right Here in Your Backyard?” New Castle News, January 30, 1968, 21 (also ran in 1969-1973); “It Takes Great People to Create Great China,” New Castle News, January 26, 1974, 49 (also ran 1975-76); and “Shenango China is Committed to New Castle for Over 1,000 Very Good Reasons,” New Castle News, February 24, 1979, 25. A note on the first Shenango ad from 1965: the advertisement commemorated the 60th year of the plant, making its beginning in 1905. The company alternatively used this date as well as 1909 and 1913 over time to mark its beginning. The first date corresponds to the defunct plant’s purchase by bondholders and subsequent reopening, the second date corresponds to Smith’s taking over of the pottery, the final date corresponds to Smith purchasing the former New Castle Pottery building and moving operations into a larger facility.
China often submitted their own articles for submission, the New Castle News did print their own tributes on occasion, such as March 1940. During the last week of that month, the News declared “pioneer week” and ran a series of stories on the industrial trailblazers of the New Castle area, including Shenango’s James M. Smith Sr. The author intoned that “Shenango Pottery is the lengthened shadow of one man, James M. Smith Sr. He it was who believed in the future of the plant back in the days when the clouds were dark. He was the impelling force that kept fighting when the odds were almost insurmountable.” The News congratulated Smith and Shenango on their twelve-acre plant and 1,200 employees who together produced 24 million pieces of china per year, a feat of pioneer ingenuity that boosted the reputation of New Castle with every sale. A similar practice also started early in Syracuse as the Herald-Journal printed an article on “pottery pride” as far back as 1888. It noted the success of the seventeen-year old business currently employing 125 and producing nearly four hundred unique articles in white granite and china. The newspaper predicted that Syracuse China would soon surpass the foreign potteries in quality and sales if they could capture the American market. Subsequent articles on the plant often focused on its long history, decades of peaceful labor relations, and innovations in product design and decoration. Even as recently as 2005 the Syracuse press lauded their favorite pottery with a retrospective tied to a series of old photographs of the original Fayette factory.18

Pottery Workers and Welfare Capitalism

If community service proved to be one useful way to humanize a corporation, utilizing welfare capitalism with employees was another. Welfare capitalism started to develop in the 1890s as yet another response to muckraking criticism of business practices. Corporations such as the National Cash Register Company led by James Patterson began to make physical and intangible improvements to their plants in order to secure employee loyalty and customer trust. Patterson added restrooms and lunch areas to his plant and provided workers with educational programming, recreational activities, suggestion boxes, and held picnics at his estate. Other large corporations soon followed the example, such as International Harvester, Ford, Heinz, and General Electric.

19 The historiography of welfare capitalism has been slow to explicitly acknowledge the contribution of Progressive thought to the development of these programs, instead arguing they developed as a reaction to labor unrest. A few notable exceptions are Clarence E. Wunderlin’s Visions of a New Industrial Order: Social Science and Labor Theory in America’s Progressive Era (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) which notes the contributions of John R. Commons, Jeremiah W. Jenks, and E. Dana Durand to labor theories which laid the groundwork for modern industrial relations. The three balanced a line between voluntarism and statism while coming to accept the corporation as a contributing part of American life. Andrea Tone’s The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997) notes the paternalistic tendencies of welfare capitalism line up with a Progressive drive for efficient management and an improvement rather than upheaval of the status quo. Rather than a strict anti-union measure, Tone calls welfare capitalism a negotiation of power between labor and management designed to regulate without state interference. Nikki Mandell’s The Corporation as Family: The Gendering of Corporate Welfare, 1890-1930 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) understands welfare capitalism as a system rather than specific strategy. In her perspective paternalism in the workplace came as a means to replicate the Victorian family on the job, with the manager serving as “father,” workers as “children,” and the welfare officer as the nurturing “mother,” offering middle class values to working class employees.

20 Marchand, Creating the Corporate Soul, 15, 17-25. While much of the scholarship on welfare capitalism focuses on case study examples at specific companies, many general studies nevertheless can be useful. Among the earliest is David Brody’s “The Rise and Decline of Welfare Capitalism,” first appearing in Change and Continuity in Twentieth Century America: The 1920s, edited by John Baeman, Robert H. Bremmer, and David Brody (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 1968) which calls it a response to public opinion and labor unrest which granted management control over all terms of employment in order to stall class consciousness, a perspective echoed in Daniel Nelson’s Managers and Workers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States, 1880-1920 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973). The first book-length treatment is Stuart Brandeis’s American Welfare Capitalism: 1880-1940 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1970), in which he calls the practice a three-way power struggle between labor, management, and government in which they tested whether democratic ideals and bureaucracy could co-exist. His also places the start point of welfare capitalism further back than any other work, arguing for its roots in the cotton mills in the 1790s. William Littman’s “Designing Obedience: The Landscape of Welfare Capitalism, 1880-1930,” International Labor and Working Class History, no. 53 (spring 1998): 88-114 looks at the physical sites where employers held welfare capitalism activities (such as recreation halls) as spaces where employer and employee could negotiate power.
After World War I, the fear of labor radicalism and communist influence led management to ramp up their welfare capitalism efforts in order to create more solidarity between employer and employee. Beautifying the factory grounds, implementing health and recreational facilities, sponsoring entertainment and social get-togethers, and taking workers suggestions all helped create the appearance of an industrial family with the corporate leader as the symbolic father figure looking after his charges. Welfare capitalism in the 1920s sought to deter the labor force from unionizing and to assimilate ethnic enclaves into American employees. While results could not be guaranteed, management hoped that welfare capitalism could bind workers to their employers more closely, eroding the influence of outside forces on employee loyalty.\(^{21}\)

Historian Lizabeth Cohen’s study of Chicago workers in the interwar period takes a close look at the role of welfare capitalism in the factories. She recognizes five distinct methods used by industrialists to consider worker demands and create an “enlightened industrial society.” The first of these restructured interpersonal relations on the factory floor. In Chicago where ethnic identity remained significant, management strove to “Americanize” their labor force and break up the strong ethnic enclaves that enjoyed a greater loyalty than employers. The second method involved rewarding workers for their service through wage incentives or other bonuses. Thirdly, bosses experimented with industrial democracy, giving workers an active voice in the operations

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of the plant. The fourth method provided welfare benefits to workers as an incentive to secure loyalty and long-term service. These included insurance, mutual benefit societies to cover cases of illness or death, and stock ownership. Finally, management sought to cement the concept of an “industrial family” by engaging in company-led social events, entertainment, sporting activities, or outings. All five of these methods hoped to erase the prevailing idea of the soulless corporate boss and replace it with a benevolent manager working for the best interest of company and employee.22

To various extents, all three potteries used combinations of these five methods to improve relations between labor and management. Americanizing employees did not concern pottery bosses as much as the industrialists in Chicago. For the most part, potters were American-born by the turn of the century and those who were not almost always came from England. In East Liverpool, a certain amount of xenophobia kept the Eastern and Southern European migrants from taking jobs in the plants. Onondaga Pottery, being further from the East Liverpool mentality, did employ foreign-born workers and offered Americanization classes around 1919-1922. Three evenings per week after the normal shifts ended at the plant, a hired teacher provided lessons in the English language and eventually added assistance in passing the American citizenship test. Despite these incentives, the *Syracuse China News* lamented that “the class is not nearly as large as we would like to see.” The pottery seemed to have better luck with other educational programs, specifically its on-site library, located in the upstairs lunchroom at the Fayette plant and established in 1918. The library offered more than one hundred books in a variety of genres in conjunction with the Syracuse Public Library. Employees could check books out free of charge for two weeks and even special request titles not immediately available.

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22 Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 162-82. Brandeis’s *American Welfare Capitalism* breaks up these categories further, offering individual treatments of housing, education, religion, recreation, profit sharing, medical care, pensions, social work, and employee representation.
Decades later, Shenango China’s owner Anchor Hocking launched an education assistance program for employees looking to better themselves. The company offered to cover up to seventy-five percent of educational expenses for full-time workers who wished to pursue higher learning related to their present position or that would allow them to move up in the Anchor hierarchy. Shenango workers got the benefit of greater knowledge and the chance of promotion while Anchor could promote from within, saving on job-search costs.23

Potteries frequently used the second method of welfare capitalism, rewarding workers through incentives or bonuses. All three plants of this study regularly offered incentives for production above a certain quota and meeting time study goals to encourage greater production (especially as the Brotherhood encouraged slow-downs). Especially popular were service awards, either recognition of service or prizes given to long-tenured workers, usually those employed for twenty years or more. The original service award at the Onondaga Pottery functioned as a prototype pension. Employees at least sixty-five years of age or with at least twenty years of service could voluntarily retire and receive monthly payments for the duration of their lives. This service ended in 1965 when the company instituted a modern pension system. Afterwards, the awards shifted to a formal recognition of employee dedication at a Service Club banquet held each year. Workers with more than ten years at the company received various honors with the longest serving (more than fifty years) being gifted diamond-studded lapel pins as a token of appreciation.24


In addition to the banquet, Onondaga/Syracuse also publicized employee service records in the pages of its newsletter, *Syracuse China News*. Shenango China for several years went even more public than this, taking out double-page ads in the *New Castle News* to print the names and addresses of its long-tenured workers while publicly congratulating them on their individual service as well as the total combined years of all those honored. Shenango honored these employees at a yearly banquet where those with twenty-five years service received a personalized plate, those with forty years received a watch, and the few who surpassed forty years received either a diamond pin (for the men) or bracelet (for the women). At the banquets management also passed out certificates for all with more than ten years experience and held raffles and giveaways with Shenango and Castleton sets as door prizes.\(^25\)

Arguably, the most famous wage incentive in the nation was the five dollar day instituted by Henry Ford. Ford not only wanted to improve the standard of living for his employees, he used the wage incentive to keep tight control over the private lives of his labor force, frequently staging check-ins in employee homes to assure their compliance with middle class values. See Stephen Meyer, *The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908-1921* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981).

While rewarding long-term service benefitted those who stayed with the company, for the immediate moment, potteries also took into consideration the work environment they created and rewarded employees with cleaner, more pleasant facilities. One aspect of welfare capitalism that Cohen does not touch on is the beautification of the factory floor in order to improve employee mood and morale. In 1925 Shenango China created a three-acre park outside the front of the plant with trees, a pond, a rose garden, and more than 6,000 tulips each spring. James Smith justified the garden with the belief that whatever added to the beauty of the plant would positively affect employee mood and by extension productivity. Onondaga also maintained a company garden for employees for several years, stopping only during the war years to switch out the flowers for vegetables in a Victory garden. And while Homer Laughlin did not have a garden onsite, Laurel Hollow Park remained across the street from the Newell Plants in the early days and does so once again today.26

Office and break-area interiors also underwent improvements to make them more suitable. In 1947 Shenango Pottery installed a new cafeteria on the second floor of the plant. While it opened with the official purpose of testing new china bodies, shapes, and decorations for durability under normal use, it also won acclaim with employees for its modern design and state-of-the-art equipment. The cafeteria even won an award from Institutions magazine in its National Food Service Contest, one of only twenty-one honorees across the United States. In 1966, Shenango collected donations for an on-site museum, the James M. Smith, Sr. Memorial Collection. The grouping of older and unusual pieces from the plant served to remind workers of the company’s legacy and their place in shaping the future. Homer Laughlin continues to maintain an on-site museum attached to its outlet store. This space collects the rarest pieces

produced over the company’s more than one hundred forty years, including a Fiesta presentation bowl glazed in raspberry to commemorate the half-billionth piece of Fiesta made by the company, pieces of the rare Laughlin Art China, one-of-a-kind sample items, and examples of vintage and contemporary Fiesta in all forty-eight glazes.27

The third method in Cohen’s list of welfare capitalism strategies, industrial democracy, also occurred in the potteries. Participatory management gave employees a voice in the daily operations of their business, curbing labor unrest and boosting morale along with overall productivity. Homer Laughlin (as early as 1930) and Syracuse China (firmly in place by the 1960s) both utilized suggestion boxes around the plant, asking for worker ideas to improve products, reduce costs, and improve safety in the plant. Both companies rewarded useful suggestions: Homer Laughlin gave away $10 each month for the best idea while Syracuse contributed $10 towards any useful suggestion and $25 for exceptional ideas immediately put into practice.28

In Shenango China’s waning years, Anchor Hocking tried a large-scale participatory management program in order to cut down on expensive labor squabbles and poor-quality output that had been plaguing the facility. The firm hired L. B. Harris and Associates, a management services firm out of Texas, to implement and direct the labor-management relations program in the summer of 1985 called Gearing Up for Tomorrow at Shenango (GUTS). The basis for GUTS came from a program called Making Things Work published by Organizational Dynamics, Inc., a firm started by George Lobovitz in 1970 to provide business consulting materials. The core of

27 Shenango Pottery, *You and Your Company* 1948 and “Old Pottery and China Sought by Local Firm,” *New Castle News*, April 21, 1966, 24. It is unknown what happened to the pieces that made up the Shenango museum. They may have transferred to either the Lawrence County Historical Society or the Hoyt Institute of Fine Art in New Castle, both of which maintain extensive Shenango collections.

Organizational Dynamics’s message was the need for management to recognize its own shortcomings and to reach out to employees for new inspiration as those closest to the work often knew the best how to improve it. Shenango officials hoped that GUTS would improve factory-floor relationships in a way that collective bargaining could not. With the previous labor agreement ending in a bitter strike, Anchor Hocking and Shenango’s management were both eager to smooth over the hard feelings and make both sides more open-minded and willing to listen. Departments across the plant divided into teams consisting of two co-captains, one from management and one from an employee of the department along with other members from both groups totaling five-to-ten persons. Teams met on a voluntary basis (usually before or after their work shifts) to discuss ideas to improve department performance, morale, and working conditions. The captains received training in problem solving skills and group dynamics in order to foster a productive conversation. All ideas were welcomed with the stipulation that suggestions could not change the language of the work contract as collectively bargained. To encourage participation, the company offered certificates to all who joined GUTS teams and printed team achievements in the company newsletter, the Shenanigan, as well as Anchor Hocking’s corporate newsletter AnchoScope.²⁹

The GUTS program did produce some tangible results for Shenango. The first, the Shenango Standard Hour Plan, restored incentive bonuses for producing above a base rate and measured them at a more equitable level than before. Now instead of a piecemeal system varying by department, new work measurement data and quality standards determined bonuses in a more

consistent manner based on regular work attendance, high quality, and adherence to safety protocols. General Manager James Waddell lauded the first major achievement of GUTS, noting “the progress we have made proves that our faith in the product of Shenango is well justified.” Other recommendations soon bore fruit as well, including means to eliminate defective ware, to boost worker pride, to repair the disconnect between employees and management, and to emphasize the customer by making a high quality product. Shenango celebrated the achievements of the eleven GUTS teams and 160 members at a banquet in November 1985. Each team made a presentation of their current objective, the problems discussed, and the solutions offered as well as their views on Shenango’s future. GUTS did solve some of the short-term problems facing the company but ultimately it could not remedy the fact that Shenango continued to lose money for its parent company. When Anchor sold Shenango, new owners Newell then Syracuse China both ultimately chose not to continue with the program.30

Cohen’s fourth method of welfare capitalism, benefits given directly to the workers by the company, held less significance in the case of the pottery industry. She notes that management explicitly used this method to undermine the influence of both ethnic associations and labor unions by replacing their financial assistance in times of hardship. Because the potteries around East Liverpool as well as Shenango in New Castle organized fairly early in their existence, management never had much of a chance to establish such welfare provisions. Shenango did have an Employee’s Benefit Association in the 1940s. Through a weekly contribution of fifty cents, the company would provide up to a $500 death benefit, a $10 per

week sick benefit for up to thirteen weeks for men (women received $7 per week), a $100 hospital credit, and the option to purchase insurance for spouses or dependents.31

Welfare benefits did go back in the history of the pottery industry as Josiah Wedgewood supplied housing for his workers and set up a “subsidized sick club” as an early type of insurance. Wedgewood viewed work as a social contract – if he provided comforts and guaranteed employment he expected his workers to show up on time, be disciplined, and keep up a high level of productivity. The Wedgewood model served to govern the operations of the Onondaga Pottery, which functioned without a labor union for nearly one hundred years. In 1888 James Pass set up a Mutual Benefit Society for his workers as a cheaper alternative to private insurance. For thirty cents each month, workers received a $5/week stipend in the case of illness or accident and a death benefit of one dollar for each member signed up for the program. Unfortunately, as of 1919 the Syracuse China News lamented that only 94 of the 750 eligible who worked at the plant actually enrolled in the program. Onondaga continued to offer company benefits through the years “as a friendly service to our fellow workers.” In addition to the previously-discussed service award payments, Onondaga also provided life insurance for any employee with the company for six months or more and a loan service for justifiable expenses. Enrollees could get either an immediate cash advance of up to $25 from their next paycheck or loans of up to $500 to cover emergency or hardship. Repayment could be taken directly out of wages with a low interest rate or none at all for small loans and those paid back in less than ten

31 Shenango Pottery, You and Your Company 1948, 16. More long-lasting at Shenango was its employee-run credit union which provided savings accounts and loans to employees and their families. Even more than twenty years after the pottery’s closure, the credit union still exists and is now open to any resident of New Castle providing savings accounts and low-interest loans.
weeks. The company noted that such practices did not occur at other potteries but came from the feelings of goodwill that management held towards their (non-union) employees.32

The final method of welfare capitalism on Lizbeth Cohen’s list, company-led social events, was by far the one the potteries utilized the most. To create a family atmosphere, management encouraged company outings such as picnics, financed on-site recreational facilities and sponsored sporting teams and entertainment for their workers. The locations of all three potteries of this study conveniently fell near many picnic grounds and amusement parks, so company and union-backed picnics were a common form of entertainment. In the early days at Homer Laughlin, individual departments or plants sponsored their own outings at nearby sites such as Mineral Springs Park which included sporting and athletic competitions. In 1922 Laughlin held the first of its company-wide picnics, often booking a train to New Castle to enjoy that city’s Cascade Park (Shenango China of course also held many picnics at Cascade until the park’s decline in the 1960s). Both Laughlin and Shenango’s picnic continued the tradition of competition, often staging baseball games, track and field-style races, and talent shows. The following year, the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters started the tradition of their annual outings. The idea began with Frank Hull (then still a vice-president) in the aftermath of the 1922 strike. The tension between members who kept up their membership in good standing and those who refused to pay dues once the strike ended left the union in a disconnected state. Hull suggested reinstating the suspended members, giving them a fresh start in dues owed, and holding a large picnic for every single union member to restore the fractured spirit of

brotherhood. The first picnic commenced that summer at Meyers Lake Park in Canton and continued for the next several decades with that location and Youngstown’s Idora Park as the usual destinations (both locations being somewhat central for Ohio Valley potters and their families). Like the company picnics, the union picnickers enjoyed rides, food, and a series of athletic contests, the highlight being the yearly baseball duels between teams from all of the major plants.33

The picnic tradition stretched back even further at the Onondaga Pottery with their annual outings dating to before World War I, often held at nearby Long Branch Park and attracting hundreds of employees and their families. Like the others, Onondaga picnics featured games, races and contests with prizes (including coal,

Figure 47: Children of Onondaga employees enjoy a company picnic at Long Branch State Park. Syracuse China News, September/October 1950. Onondaga Public Library.

lumber, candy, sports equipment, and cigars) furnished by the plant. In addition to the formal picnics, the Pass and Salisbury families also provided the space and funds for summer camping excursions. In 1950 Richard Pass purchased the Star Sapphire Forest campsite at Pine Lake and constructed seven cabins for employees to use for summer vacations over the next twenty years. In surveying the Syracuse business climate, Wayne Hodges noted that “the two plants in the city both have a strong family feeling about them, as though everyone were honestly concerned for the happiness of everyone else.”

Providing recreation to employees helped foster this family feeling and likely contributed to the fact that the plant did not unionize until after it fell out of the Pass/Salisbury family hands in 1971.

Beyond formal outings, potteries set up a wide variety of athletic and social organizations to keep their workers entertained. In addition to his involvement in the creation of Laurel Hollow Park, Homer Laughlin Vice President George Washington Clarke set up the framework for a Homer Laughlin Concert Band in November 1912 open to any interested employee providing their own instrument. Clarke selected L. K. Powell as the conductor and promised public performances by the following summer. Dances also proved extremely popular in the early days of the pottery. With themes ranging from holidays to old-fashioned masquerades, the gatherings brought together groups of employees, so large in fact that the dances needed moved from their previous location to the larger Eagles Hall when the crowd overflowed beyond capacity.

Sales from the dance tickets often went towards funding one of the company’s many sports teams. Laughlin employees had an early inclination towards team sports: as early as 1910 the

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34 Reed and Skoczen, *Syracuse China*, 100; “The Potters Picnic is a Huge Success,” *Syracuse China News*, vol. 1, no. 5 (July 1919), 1, Onondaga Public Library, Syracuse, New York; “Potters Picnic July 17th,” *Syracuse China News*, vol. 2, no. 3 (July 1920), 1, Onondaga Public Library, Syracuse, New York; OHA, “Syracuse China Archives Paper Inventory,” Box 46, 90SCA.1055; and Hodges, *Company and Community*, 311.

city of Newell petitioned to join the East Liverpool City Baseball League, a group of eight teams representing local businesses. The *East Liverpool Review* assumed that the entirety of the team would consist of Homer Laughlin employees as they comprised most of the town’s population. In 1916 the pottery finally fielded its own named team in the City League and competed regularly, even winning the title in 1946. The pottery also sponsored a soccer team which

![Figure 48: Homer Laughlin's 1946 championship baseball team. East Liverpool Review, August 31, page 9.](image)

played nearby towns on the YMCA city circuit and other potteries at the annual NBOP picnic outings. Other athletic pastimes included bowling, horseshoes, and football. In fact, in 1931 Homer Laughlin joined the semi-professional West Penn Football Conference and competed as one of the six teams on the circuit that year. Among their opponents were Art Rooney’s Majestics, the team which would become the Pittsburgh Steelers two years later.36

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Social and recreational activity at Homer Laughlin either developed through its welfare society or independently. At Onondaga and Shenango, company-sponsored clubs handled the organization and execution of all athletics and entertainment. The Potters’ Club began at Onondaga in 1901 “to provide entertainment and recreation” to any male worker interested in joining and paying the yearly dues. The Potters’ Club started the company baseball team which competed on a YMCA circuit against other local businesses and sponsored dances, plays, picnics and brought bands and boxing matches to the plant for parties. In 1918 a women’s counterpart, the Huntington Club, developed with the aid of James Pass’s widow Adelaide and opened to all women in Syracuse (though Onondaga Pottery employees made up a substantial proportion of the membership). Management aided the clubs through the construction of an on-site recreation hall which included four bowling alleys (open one night per week to female employees), a pool table, game room, and a common area in which dances and other parties could be held. Over the years male workers enjoyed horseshoes, baseball, golf, and basketball while females took part in dances, concert choirs, and softball. But the major sport uniting Onondaga men and women had to be bowling. With the convenience of an on-site alley, the men of the pottery quickly formed a league and by 1919 two four-man squads led by the clay shop and decorating shop competed against one another and other city players. The men’s numbers continued to grow with additional leagues added over time. Once the bowling alley opened to women in 1920, they too formed leagues and eventually joined in the citywide competitive circuit.

team likely only survived the 1931 season as the West Penn league on the whole was in a state of serious decline by the early 1930s and the loss of the Rooney Majestics would have been a major blow the following year. No other mentions of the team were found past 1931. The baseball squad lasted until approximately the mid-1950s when the company left the city league and instead focused its energy on the creation and maintenance of a Little League baseball team.

37 “Potters Club Membership Campaign a Great Success,” *Syracuse China Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 4 (June 1919), 1, Onondaga Public Library, Syracuse, New York; Reed and Skoczen, *Syracuse China*, 100; Onondaga Pottery Company, *Seventy-Five Years of American Craftsmanship* (Syracuse, NY: Onondaga Pottery Company, 1946), 34-35, courtesy of the Restaurant Ware Collector’s Network; “Bowling Notes,” *Syracuse China News*, vol. 1,
At Shenango China, the Shepoco Club handled the coordination of all recreational and athletic activities. Shepoco members originally paid twenty-five cents in monthly dues to participate in a variety of clubs including men’s and women’s bowling, baseball, softball, archery, basketball, and golf as well as invitational dances and picnics. Later on, Shepoco also would sponsor bingo tournaments, holiday parties for members’ children (jointly funded by the union, USWA 3125), and trips to the Ice Capades and tours of Amish country for female members. Arguably the dances proved the most popular Shepoco social events with sometimes as many as three or four per year. Shenango employees furnished the entertainment while the local Eagles Hall, the New Castle Country Club, or Cascade Park provided the venue. In sports, bowling again proved the favorite of male and female members for decades. As early as the 1940s Shenango boasted several men’s leagues in ten-pin and duck-pin bowling. Each league represented a different department with participation from the glost ware workers, laboratory technicians, finishers, casters, refractories workers, and kilnmen among others. In 1956 a women’s league consisting of eight teams joined the men in competition. Both the Shenango men and women played other New Castle-based teams along with working towards their own high scores for the year. The men also participated in the United no. 10 (December 1919), page unknown, Onondaga Public Library, Syracuse, New York; and “Girls Take Lively Interest in Bowling,” Syracuse China News, vol. 2, no. 7 (November 1920), 5, Onondaga Public Library, Syracuse, New York. Once Syracuse China was bought out by corporate interests in 1971, most of these programs and the Potters’ Club ended.
Steelworkers’ district-wide competitions against other union leagues. In 1985 Shenango China sponsored its first all-company tournament, an event so successful that it repeated until the plant’s closure six years later.38

While these three potteries covered all five of Lizabeth Cohen’s welfare capitalism strategies, they also actively published company newsletters for their employees to make them feel like part of a family. While not explicitly noted by Cohen, other scholars have noted the importance of employee magazines or newsletters to their welfare capitalism efforts. As corporations grew too large to maintain face-to-face relations with their employees, magazines could fill the void and create the semblance of a family atmosphere. Both David Nye and Jo Ann Yates also note the role magazines played in transmitting the official company vision to workers and controlling perceptions of management with a mix of lighthearted humor and preaching editorials. The earliest magazines began in the early 1910s with Western Electric and Westinghouse among the first adopters. While these were meant to boost company morale, the company newsletter took on a far more serious role following World War I. Fears of labor radicalization resulted in a boost of many welfare capitalist strategies, including magazines which nearly doubled in numbers in the period 1917-1920. Now the mixture of jokes and human interest stories became the safeguards against labor violence by making workers part of a common cause.39


The first instance of a company newsletter in the potteries began at Onondaga in 1919. The *Syracuse China Bulletin* started that March with Robert Bryant as its first editor. A few months later, Maurice Olmstead took over editorial duties and the name changed to *Syracuse China News*. From then until 1930 the *News* strove “to record items of interest to the 750 employees of the company, to develop a closer social relationship among them, and to stimulate interest in the advantages of being associated with an organization which presents opportunities for satisfactory employment second to none.” To this end, the pages of the *News* included stories on both the company and the workers, so that serious editorials were balanced with humorous anecdotes, personal achievements such as births, marriages, vacations, hunting/fishing trips, parties, and informative articles on the available activities offered by the pottery. The *Syracuse China News* ceased publication in 1930 but the company revived it in 1947 (an era marked by a revival of welfare capitalism in the wake of the Taft-Hartley Act) with a split focus on Onondaga’s employees and customers. Much of the lighthearted humor from the old series disappeared, replaced by more plainly explanatory stories on tax and insurance laws, benefits packages, and current tariff situations and how they affected the plant. Eventually, Syracuse China split the appendix listing all current employee magazines in the United States. For the pottery industry, *Syracuse China News* is the only one in existence as of 1930.

Figure 50: Onondaga's newsletter took a very personal look at the lives of employees, including poking fun at their sporting exploits (or lack thereof). *Syracuse China News*, July 1920.
company newsletter into two separate publications. The *News* continued to be printed quarterly with a focus on these corporate topics while a new quarterly called *Chips* focused on employee news. When Syracuse China passed from family ownership to a new corporate structure in 1971, many of the previous welfare capitalism activities as well as both the *News* and *Chips* ended.\(^\text{40}\)

Homer Laughlin launched its own company newsletter, *The Toby Jug*, in 1938 with assistant art director G. H. Stapleford as its editor. The *Jug* provided news on plant happenings and social and employee functions as well as giving workers some knowledge of the technical side of pottery manufacture (likely an influence from Stapleford’s boss Frederick Rhead). While it is unclear how long *The Toby Jug* lasted or whether the company had a newsletter in the interim, recently a new publication surfaced at Laughlin’s. *The Dish Rag* started a few years ago and prints on the first week of each month with complimentary copies located at the break rooms and time clocks. Like before, *Dish Rag* includes employee interests including birthdays and anniversaries, plant news and product updates, and diversions such as recipes and comics.\(^\text{41}\)

The Shenango Pottery’s company newsletters have veered back and forth between a focus on corporate and dealer interests and one on employees. The first publication, *Smoke Signals*, started in August 1951 with Bob Carpenter (then Shenango’s chief West Coast Sales Rep) as editor. This publication was clearly developed for Shenango’s network of dealers and salesmen with articles on the company’s famous clientele, new or popular products, biographies of sales representatives, and stories or selling tips. Shenango published *Smoke Signals* bi-monthly until October 1952 then in June 1954 a new newsletter appeared, *The Shenanigan*. This hearkened back to the welfare capitalism tradition by shifting the attention to Shenango’s labor force and while news of products or promotional campaigns remained, they were balanced with

\(^{40}\) Reed and Skoczen, *Syracuse China*, 98-100, 133-35, 149, 156, 162.

\(^{41}\) “Homer Laughlin Starts House Organ,” *Ceramic Industry*, January 1938, 25 and *The Dish Rag*, vol. 5, no. 3 (June/July 2014).
stories on employees including updates on the Shepoco Club and its activities. The Shenanigan ended around 1957, a few years later when Carpenter became the general sales manager yet another new publication arose, Table Top-ics. This re-shifted focus again on the salesmen and dealers with stories specifically targeted towards selling and promotion. Following Carpenter’s death in April 1976, the newsletter once again turned back to employee-centric content and another new name, The Pacesetter, chosen in a contest. This newsletter marked a dramatic change in the fact that now volunteer employees rather than members of management staffed the publication, making the stories more personal and less about new products or company promotions. While keeping the content the same, the name switched back to The Shenanigan in 1982 and remained that way until the final issue in December 1986, just before Anchor Hocking sold the company to Newell Rubbermaid then to Syracuse China.42

Eyes and Ears: Potteries Keep Track of Each Other

American potteries openly reached out to their local communities and sought to improve the experience of their workers. As the import threat grew worse with each passing year, potteries needed to do everything they could in order to retain their shrinking share of the market. This also meant that they kept very close tabs on one another as well. While participation in trade organizations and banding together to fight foreign china or tariff policy brought competitors together, companies always understood this alliance as temporary. At the end of the day, they remained rivals fighting for a small audience and were not above resorting to public and secretive observations to gain a competitive advantage. Shenango, Syracuse, and Homer Laughlin all worked to obtain samples of competitors’ ware to test for strengths and weaknesses,

42 Most of the information gathered on Shenango’s newsletters comes from the holdings of the Lawrence County Historical Society which contains a good number of issues from all the different runs and names. Other issues come from the author’s personal collection.
visited each others’ plants (sometimes invited, sometimes not) to observe new equipment and processes, and even checked on rival advertising campaigns and stores to gain any edge they could.43

In the early days of the Shenango Pottery, James M. Smith struggled mightily with his ware. A high percentage of pieces came out with crazing, a spider web-like pattern of cracks resulting from a glaze improperly adhering to the clay body. But instead of allowing the plant to collapse, Ernest Mayer (then Vice President of Mayer China in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania) gave Smith a workable glaze formula to help him get on his feet. From that time, Smith always believed that healthy plants in healthy competition best served the industry as a whole. During his time in charge of Shenango Smith kept the plant very open to visitors, even those from other potteries.44

But Smith’s old-fashioned idea of friendly competition could not last in the second half of the twentieth century when cheap imports steadily eroded sales and profits. Potteries regularly obtained samples of their competitor’s ware to test breakage, chip resistance, and durability. Syracuse China’s company records contain a copy of a letter from a woman in Syracuse writing to Shenango China to purchase some china. Shenango replied with a price list and the name of nearby dealers, noting they did not sell directly. It is not positive but possible that Syracuse China used this woman to try and get Shenango pieces for testing, as other correspondence refers to authorized dealers who would provide them with Shenango pieces. Some years later a Syracuse official ordered other members of the company to “discreetly” obtain samples of

43 Al Ries and Jack Trout’s *Marketing Warfare* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986) argues that marketing must be conducted in the manner of warfare, find a competitor’s weakness and exploit it to customers. They lay out four models of strategy for companies depending on their position in the marketplace: the market leader must hold a defensive front, the number two should attack the leader with all their resources, the “me-too” smaller competitors should focus on specialized attacks to find a niche market for themselves, and finally those too small to compete outright should launch guerilla attacks on all other competitors to shake up the market as a whole.

Shenango’s Naturals line in order to test the new matte glaze and observe their durability under wear.45

Shenango also actively acquired and tested pieces of Syracuse China. In April 1964 Shenango officials got word of a new Syracuse body called Syralite, which they guessed to be a kaolin clay body mixed with alumina to make it stronger yet more lightweight. Because Shenango had been planning their own alumina body and they already lost at least one account to the competition, they sought to obtain samples of the forthcoming Syralite for testing (something they accomplished that December through a Boston dealer). Confidential tests undertaken at two American universities showed early Syralite to have a high breakage rate, so much so that the testing site planned to drop its usage. A Shenango official also noted that a Syracuse China display at the American Ceramic Society’s annual meeting contained several warped pieces of Syralite, leading him to wonder if all pieces were coming out so poorly.46

As Shenango continued to keep an eye on the Syracuse product, the quality evidently improved. By 1966 the complaints of warping seemed to have disappeared, although concerns about the glaze scratching occasionally surfaced. Shenango’s own alumina body, Citation, debuted that year and to make sure that their new product could compete with Syracuse’s, Shenango continued to meticulously test both china bodies throughout the rest of the decade and beyond. As both plants continued to experiment they developed china bodies with even higher alumina content, the American shape at Syracuse and Omega at Shenango. In the latter plant’s studies, American’s roll-edge outperformed Omega in chip resistance but the plates did poorly in

45 Conley interview; R. E. McKibben to Dorothy Peer, June 20, 1958, OHA; and M. B. Shellenberger to C. S. Goodman, et al., “Confidential,” September 22, 1977, OHA.

46 W. D. Spore to R. G. Carpenter, “Syracuse New Syra-lyte [sic],” April 24, 1964, LCHS; J. P. Sawyer to R. G. Carpenter, “Syralite,” December 30, 1964, LCHS; C. W. Patterson to All District Sales Managers, “Chinaware vs. Pyroceram vs. Syralite,” July 1, 1966, LCHS; and J. P. Sawyer to R. G. Carpenter, “Syracuse Syralite Exhibit,” May 10, 1965, LCHS. In respect to the emphasized confidentiality of the memo on the university tests, I have omitted the names of the two institutions where the testing occurred. The original memo with the names can be found at the Lawrence County Historical Society.
impact resistance. Shenango would keep up the testing of competitor’s ware especially that of Syracuse China, to ensure that they always remained competitive all the way up to Syracuse’s purchase of the Shenango plant in 1988.

Visiting competitors’ plants had been common practice for decades. Sometimes officials from a rival pottery made arrangements for a guided tour to view all the latest equipment and processes. These walkthroughs often did not disclose every trade secret for obvious reasons, so sometimes officials made incognito visits or sent unknown underlings to take notes as though they were regular tourists. Homer Laughlin’s Dave Conley recalls that Syracuse China notoriously discouraged visits to their plant, yet Shenango China officials got through on at least two occasions in 1960 and in 1977. In April 1960 a group of Shenango officials received a guided tour of the Court and Fayette plants from President William Salisbury (who refused any discussion of sales or production numbers). The notes from that trip comment on manufacturing methods, the morale and demeanor of workers, and the overall appearance of the plant.

Shenango officials carefully noted areas where their plant performed better (bisque spray, selection, and packing) as well as areas they needed to improve to match Syracuse (clay tumbling and adoption of mechanized time clocks). The later tour also made observations on the various departments and processes, after which Shenango officials concluded that the Court Street plant operated efficiently and that Syracuse took a great deal of pride in their product as they allowed very little in terms of poor quality ware to ever leave the premises.

Not surprisingly, Syracuse also kept close tabs on the workings in the Shenango plant. They had a number of sympathetic dealers in the Syracuse area who provided the company with

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47 W. D. Spore to J. P. Sawyer, “Physical Tests of Citation vs. Syralite and Conventional Shenango Ware,” November 1, 1966, LCHS; D. C. Myler to J. P. Sawyer, “Syralite,” May 6, 1970, LCHS; and Jane Baker to Gary Barr, “Testing of Syracuse China Samples,” December 6, 1985, LCHS.

Shenango’s price lists, product samples, and dealer promotional materials, all of which Syracuse filed away for study. Actual plant visits seem rarer. In 1968 Shenango’s parent company INTERPACE issued a new policy forbidding any visitors to see the new fast-file kiln installed at the plant. Only authorized plant workers and INTERPACE officials could enter the kiln area—and then only after a security check and signing of a secrecy agreement. Under no circumstances could anyone outside the Shenango organization be authorized to go near the kiln, the first in the county to take ware from biscuit to finished greenware in just over an hour (compared to the average of 35-40 hours of other tunnel kilns). Syracuse did get their sources covertly into the plant in 1972. The source reported that Shenango currently operated at capacity but their losses were higher than in the past and the profit margin dropped slightly from previous years. It also noted that the plant would soon need expensive upgrades, and even obtained information on the type and brand of kiln Shenango considered for purchase.49

Both Shenango and Syracuse made visits to Homer Laughlin. Foster Rhodes, future Syracuse president, travelled to Newell in 1947 to compare the Laughlin plant with their own Court Street facility. Rhodes made a careful list of all equipment in use as well as sketching diagrams of the spray machine and gold lining machine. He also noted that a lab technician now employed by Laughlin’s used to work for Onondaga and expressed a wish that he still did. Rhodes closed with observations on employee demeanor, the stability of the union, and overall production numbers. Shenango did not appear to visit until after Laughlin began production of hotel china in 1959. A 1975 visit occurred to compare the losses on wax-footed flatware since Shenango recently struggled with the process. Officials noted that Homer Laughlin’s process seemed to work better and provided notes on how to copy their methods. Years later Syracuse

also expressed an interest in Laughlin’s practices when they received word that the company installed a new kiln that both finished ware in one fire and replaced the cumbersome sagger pins with a wax foot that simply melted off when complete. They also noted that the plant now used a high temperature firing to eliminate lead in their glazes (a process Syracuse would especially be concerned with since they were under EPA investigation at the time).  

Potteries also kept an eye on one another through obtaining price lists and catalogs, promotional literature, and by visiting competitors’ stores and displays. Syracuse China regularly used its dealer network to obtain price lists from both Shenango and Homer Laughlin to check on increases and decreases for regular decoration and custom priced pieces. One Shenango list from 1957 particularly incensed Foster Rhodes as the company lost a hotel order to Shenango due to their price cut, a cut that Shenango president George Zahniser claimed the company would not make as the year before he pleaded with the Vitrified China Association for increases to combat foreign china. Both Shenango and Syracuse also kept issues of each other’s company newsletters (also likely obtained through dealers) to get an unfiltered look at what each plant had in development. For example, Syracuse took extensive notes on a sales campaign designed to promote the use of crests on flatware. In addition sending out copies of the Shenango newsletter, Syracuse officials sent out memos instructing dealers to figure out why Shenango put on this particular promotion and how they could counter it. Syracuse also kept copies of other promotional flyers, magazine advertisements, and newspaper articles, often with attached notes.

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on how they should react and counter to maintain their place at the top of the commercial china industry.  

Finally, competitors looked at storefronts and physical displays to seek signs of weakness or improvement. Two Syracuse officials travelled to New Castle in 1979 to pay a visit to the China Cupboard store to see how it compared to their own outlet. They approved of the location but disagreed strongly with the layout, noting that it tried too hard to be a gift shop rather than an outlet store and kept the actual Shenango seconds in a back room while emphasizing other products. Speaking with the manager, they noted she agreed that the establishment underperformed, likely due to the confusion of its mission as stated by the company (a situation she could not control). They concluded that their own Syracuse store, run as a true outlet, saw far more success than the hybrid outlet/gift approach taken by Shenango. In 1988 Syracuse representatives noted with some concern the new Homer Laughlin “Seville” shape when alerted of its introduction by one of their multi-account dealers. Fearing its similarity to their own “Beefeater” design, they arranged to take a closer look at the National Restaurant Association Show. The visit to the Laughlin display confirmed that the Seville did not resemble Beefeater closely enough to warrant any sort of action but the Syracuse official made a snide remark on the ugliness of the Laughlin shape (though insisting no “sour grapes” contributed to his observation).


52 D. Flaherty to M. B. Shellenberger, “Shenango China Factory Store,” January 24, 1979, OHA; Dale D. Sutton to Victor A. Mancinelli, “Homer Laughlin’s ‘Seville Royale’ Shape,” June 1, 1988, OHA; and M. B. Shellenberger to Victor A. Mancinelli, “Homer Laughlin ‘Seville Royale’ Shape,” June 1, 1988, OHA.
Potteries did more than just manufacture plates, bowls, and cups. They forged relationships with their communities, their workers, and each other to navigate a complex and shrinking market. Through the creation of “corporate souls,” they built up goodwill that increased sales at the local level and created publicity for larger clients. By engaging in various welfare capitalism strategies they improved relations with their workers and tried to curb the animosity and money loss unions and strikes could bring. And the close watch on their rivals helped them keep one step ahead of competition whenever possible.

For much of the twentieth century the American china industry faced mounting competition from cheap foreign china. While marketing strategies such as advertisements or dealer promotions worked to counteract the influence of imports, they alone could not save the industry. While things like running a local outlet store or providing a game room for employees may seem insignificant compared to national advertising campaigns, they created a sense of positivity around the companies, an attitude that management hoped would translate into sales and lessen the risk of costly strikes. And though some of the methods by which potteries kept tabs on each other appear dishonest, at the end of the day they still needed any advantage they could muster in order to make their products more appealing than foreign china costing a fraction of the American price.

In assessing public relations, Richard Tedlow notes that it is nearly impossible to empirically measure success or failure. Rather early on, corporations shifted the purpose of PR from increasing sales directly to fostering a sense of public goodwill that then could indirectly improve profits. As the overall pottery market eroded further in the latter part of the twentieth

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Tedlow, Keeping the Corporate Image, 193-99. Likewise, nearly all scholars of welfare capitalism agree that its results are also difficult to measure. But the consensus seems that even if welfare tactics did not completely achieve what management desired (either by being rejected outright or co-opted into something else by the labor
century, those potteries that survived into the 1960s and beyond were the ones that managed to secure loyalty from their customers. This loyalty could not come from a magazine ad or a custom design alone. Clients ordered from potteries who had excellent reputations and whose products and practices evolved to meet changing needs (sometimes this took precedence even over price). Employee and community goodwill helped build up a positive reputation embraced by dealers and customers and keeping track of competitors’ new lines or equipment made sure that they kept up. James M. Smith once noted that the best competition came from healthy plants. As the number of potteries in the United States dwindled by the 1970s, even the largest Syracuses, Laughlins, or Shenangos felt the pressure to survive. By focusing on their relationships with their hometowns, their workforce, and with each other, they managed to outlast dozens of rivals into the uncertain 1980s and beyond.
EPILOGUE:

“Though the World May Change around Us, Our History Remains the Same:” The Pottery Industry’s Final Decline, 1978-2016

Irving J. Mills served the pottery industry for many years. He started at Shenango China in 1948 following his graduation from college. Mills worked in the industrial relations department creating job descriptions and wage scales and overseeing organizational materials. After several years Shenango’s top management promoted him to assistant sales manager and after he quit, the company invited him back to run the newly-acquired Wallace China plant in California. After Wallace shut down in 1964, Mills left for the distribution business and eventually became the executive director of the American Restaurant China Council, one of the top education and lobby groups for the vitrified china industry. Mills had the opportunity to be intimately involved with pottery during its most perilous period and witnessed a number of plants close who could not compete with imports. In reflecting on Shenango, Mills noted that “an Indian as a trademark was probably more symbolic than we had realized. Neither has survived too well in the latter part of the twentieth century.”¹

What Mills observed about Shenango held true for the pottery industry as a whole. By the 1970s, American ceramic producers were a shadow of their former selves: the illustrious days of post-WWII success now replaced with a desperate struggle to survive. The barrage of foreign

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and non-ceramic ware eroded profits since the 1930s and efforts to overcome the high costs of plant labor met with strikes and resistance from unions. The government did not help either as the increasing role of the president in tariff and trade laws encouraged a steady march towards free trade (a prospect that devastated potteries reliant on heavy protection to help close the gap between their product and foreign china). Potters over the years did try to bolster their place in the market, either through new selling or advertising techniques or specialized appeals to their communities and workforces, but none of these seemed to be enough to cope with rising costs and cheapening imported competition. Perhaps another fitting symbol of the age would be the position of the United States Potters Association, the oldest and largest of the many trade associations in the industry. Once boasting more than eighty members in all branches of pottery manufacture, The USPA folded in 1977 when Homer Laughlin and Hall China became the only two plants left.

Yet the story does not end with the collapse of an entire industry in the 1970s. Homer Laughlin made the risky decision to re-enter the highly competitive dinnerware market in 1986 by bringing back their most famous product and production of Fiesta continues to this day. The other plants were not so lucky: by 1992, Shenango China closed after its purchase by Syracuse in 1988. Syracuse in turn was purchased and later sold by the Pfaltzgraff dinnerware company. Following more than a dozen hopeful years of ownership by Libbey Glass, Syracuse, too shut down in 2009 as production of the line moved to China. Adding insult to injury, both Shenango and Syracuse’s plants have been damaged or demolished, a symbolic acknowledgement that a once-proud industry will likely never return to those areas. Homer Laughlin remains the sole survivor of the three and the strategies it employs to survive could either spell the future for a beleaguered industry or prove that pottery cannot last in large-scale in the modern United States.
Major Changes in the 1970s and 1980s

While the threat of plastic dinnerware as a major home competitor largely dissipated by the end of the 1960s, those potteries that catered to the foodservice industry still faced a challenge from disposables. Over the 1970s and 1980s, disposables went from flimsy and messy paper picnic ware to sturdier plastic and wax-infused pieces which could hold more weight without spillage. Additionally, improvements in Styrofoam manufacturing made this material acceptable for food containers. The lowered cost of purchase and the savings in dishwashing led some restaurants to substitute more and more china with disposables. Also, the booming fast food industry relied almost exclusively on disposable containers that customers could quickly use and throw away. Disposables posed a major threat to hotelware manufacturers as did the lifting of import restrictions in the late 1960s that flooded the market with Japanese product. By the 1970s, vitrified china plants began to feel the same extreme pressure that had plagued dinnerware manufacturers for years.  

Shenango China experienced the instability of the economy long before the other two potteries in this study. A combination of pressure from foreign imports and internal problems stemming from the Alice Higgins lawsuit led to the sale of the pottery to the Sobiloff Brothers of California in 1959. Very little changed at the plant changed at this time beyond the loss of family ownership and Sobiloff's expanded the pottery's customer base with the purchase of California's Wallace China in 1959 and nearby Mayer China in 1964. In 1968 the Sobiloffs sold Shenango to a new conglomerate, the International Pipe and Ceramics Corporation, commonly abbreviated INTERPACE for $5.4 million. INTERPACE already owned several ceramic pipe and tile factories and sanitary pottery plants and looked to diversify into dinnerware with their purchase

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Under INTERPACE, Shenango's fortunes largely paralleled the ups and downs of the 1970s unstable economy. The conglomerate invested more than $3 million in the plant for extensive upgrades and modernization of facilities but profit margins remained slim. Several of INTERPACE's other subsidies also did not live up to expectations and by the beginning of 1979 the heads of the organization looked to sell off as many as possible. The leading candidate interested in Shenango was the Anchor Hocking Corporation, manufacturers of commercial glassware, plastics, and foodservice supplies. INTERPACE accepted Anchor’s purchase offer and on June 2nd Shenango China officially became one of Anchor Hocking’s twenty-six subsidiaries, originally in the Household Products Group until the parent company established its Anchor Foodservice Division with Shenango as the centerpiece.

Anchor Hocking vowed to keep Shenango’s management structure in place with plant supervisors answering to the corporate office. They also pledged to invest heavily in modernizing the more than seventy-year-old plant. In May 1980 Anchor arranged for a $1 million loan to construct eight new silos and to replace the obsolete slip house. The New Castle News reported that Anchor had intended to close down the pottery permanently if the loan did not go through, a claim the corporation vehemently denied. Anchor Hocking contacted the News

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4 “Pottery Officially Changes Hands,” New Castle News, June 5, 1979, 7 and “Welcome Anchor Hocking,” Pacesetter, Shenango China company newsletter, May 1979, 1, LCHS. Anchor Hocking had previously purchased the Taylor Smith Taylor pottery in Chester, WV (just outside of Newell) to distribute dinnerware for the home. They would close that factory down in early 1981 over the vocal objections of the International Brotherhood of International Pottery and Allied Workers. Under Anchor Hocking, Shenango China’s union remained the United Steelworkers of America Local 3125.
Figure 51: An Anchor Hocking advertisement for Shenango makes reference to the constant problem of imported china. *Restaurants and Institutions*, August 15, 1984, page 58
to print a retraction of the story, adding that they had absolutely no plans to shut down Shenango and in fact planned to spend millions to make the plant up-to-date and ready to compete. But in retrospect, the warnings over Shenango’s vulnerability may not have been as incorrect as Anchor would have the News claim. By summer 1985, Anchor reported that Shenango’s profits declined in each of the previous four years and that year may not turn a profit at all. Worse, the company firmly lost its position as a leader in the foodservice china industry as complaints of poor-quality ware arrived from customers and plant productivity dropped. Not yet willing to give up on the plant, Anchor tried to implement morale changes along with monetary investment (an initiative that led to the GUTS program). But Anchor President Ray Topper warned that Shenango needed to do its part to return to success, including improving product quality and increasing plant productivity, especially since Shenango’s labor force received better wages than any other pottery workers in the United States. If Shenango continued to “drag down” Anchor’s profits then the future could not be guaranteed.5

But Shenango continued to lose money throughout 1985 and by the start of the new year Topper called the pottery “the biggest single problem” for the company. While Topper would not yet go as far as announcing the sale or closure of the plant, he maintained that if Shenango could not cut labor costs and increase productivity, they would have little choice. However, Anchor Hocking would soon have bigger issues of its own. In the summer of 1986 the Newell Corporation (parent company of Rubbermaid) began acquiring Anchor Hocking stock in anticipation of a planned buyout of the company. Stockholders rejected the initial offer made in

November and in January 1987 Newell announced a new offer of $338.2 million. By late spring, anchor advised stockholders to approve the buyout pending SEC approval. Unclear in the news of the buyout were the fates of Anchor’s many subsidiaries, including Shenango China. Plant manager Ken Moore remained hopeful that Newell would keep the pottery open but conceded that the years of absent profits could hurt those chances (as Shenango again lost money in 1986 and the first quarter of 1987) and did not fit in well with Newell’s home goods focus. For the moment, Shenango and its employees could only wait for the outcome of the stockholder vote to see if their new owners would continue operations or choose to close or sell the plant.⁶

Syracuse China overtook Shenango as the largest manufacturer of hotel china in the mid-1950s. In order to retain this title as well as ease some of the pressure from imports, the company purchased the Vandescan Pottery of Joliette, Quebec in 1959, renaming the plant Vandescan-Syracuse Canada. Because the low tariff on finished dinnerware nearly decimated the market for American-made china in Canada, Syracuse transformed the Vandescan plant into a decorating shop. The company shipped unfinished biscuit ware (which has been dried but not glazed or fired) to the Canadian plant at a more protected tariff rate to be decorated, glazed, and finished. When complete, it could be sold as manufactured in Canada, allowing it to compete with the low-cost ware imported from England.⁷

Vandescan may have given Syracuse a leg up on other potteries in the foreign market, but it could not fully save them from the pressures of the postwar economic situation. In 1967 the company faced a takeover bid from Iroquois Industries, a former brewery-turned-investment conglomerate based in Buffalo, New York. Iroquois looked to purchase 50,000 shares of

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⁷ Cleota Reed and Stan Skoczen, Syracuse China (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 148.
Syracuse stock, roughly equivalent to 44% of the total stock at a price of $60 per share. Syracuse President William R. Salisbury, already bothered that the announcement came without notification, advised current stockholders to reject the offer as the $60 price in his view undermined the true value of the company. Iroquois Industries gave a June 30 deadline for the purchase and took out a full-page advertisement in the *Syracuse Post-Standard* with praise for the conglomerate from Buffalo Mayor Frank Sedita, the CEO of Liberty National Bank, and the president of the Buffalo Chamber of Commerce. At the same time, Salisbury alerted stockholders to a company-planned merger with Towle Manufacturing in order to hinder the stock purchase. As the deadline passed with the deal blocked, Iroquois Industries filed a $4 million lawsuit against Syracuse China, Salisbury, Vice President Guy Cowan, and several others. The suit alleged that Syracuse China officials violated SEC rules in blocking the sale and knowingly interfered with the stock purchase by announcing the planned merger (which the suit also alleged to be a fabrication). The following year a judge dismissed the suit, ruling that the pottery’s actions did not violate the Securities and Exchange Commission Act. In the meantime, Iroquois continued to pursue Syracuse stock, buying up smaller amounts until they could announce in January 1968 that they now owned ten percent of the company. Through continued purchasing, they would eventually come to own nearly 23% of Syracuse stock over the next three years.8

After narrowly avoiding the Iroquois Industries takeover, Salisbury reasoned that other similar actions may soon follow. The fragile state of the pottery industry left the plant in a

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precarious position as other factories had already faced buyouts by corporate interests. Salisbury decided to be proactive and broker his own deal with New York investor Robert J. Theis in August 1971. Theis and his investors (including a New York City bank and two insurance companies) formed a holding company named Ryacuss (a partial anagram of Syracuse) and raised $7.7 million for the purchase of the pottery. The majority of Syracuse China stockholders approved the purchase in September despite the objections of Iroquois Industries and the plant reorganized as the Syracuse China Corporation. Salisbury moved into the position of Chairman of the Board while Theis took over as president. Only a few short weeks after the pottery celebrated its one-hundredth birthday, it fell out of Pass/Salisbury family ownership for the first time since the 1870s.9

Theis worked hard to keep Syracuse China profitable in a tumultuous economy. He streamlined the number of shapes and decorations produced and focused on a combination of pricier custom orders and a collection of low-cost stock patterns which could be shipped to the customer in less than two weeks. In 1978 Canadian Pacific Ltd. took an interest in Syracuse China after already investing in several other successful American corporations. Additionally, Canadian Pacific's rail systems had been purchasing tableware from Vandesca-Syracuse for several years, so corporate management knew they had a good product. In March 1978, Canadian Pacific made an offer to purchase Syracuse China. Knowing that the plant desperately needed cash for an expensive modernization project, Theis agreed to the offer and encouraged stockholders to do the same. The stockholders approved the deal soon after and Canadian Pacific purchased all 729,575 shares of the pottery for $19.5 million. Syracuse became a subsidiary company while all current management remained in place. The plant would continue to prosper

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for the next several years under Canadian Pacific, eventually eyeing the Mayer China plant previously owned by Shenango and then its parent company INTERPACE. Following the conglomerate's breakup in 1979, Mayer fell into the hands of private investors but had lost a significant amount of money due to imports, opening the door for Syracuse’s purchase of the pottery in December 1984. Syracuse president Charles Goodman (who took over upon Theis's retirement) lauded the deal as beneficial for both companies, claiming that the combination of Mayer's craftsmanship and experience combined with Syracuse's size and resources would enable both to better combat foreign china.10

The Homer Laughlin China Company stopped production of Fiesta and all of its home dinnerware lines in 1972. With import prices so low, the company felt their best fortune lay in the production of hotel china. But the opening of that market to imports, the lowering of the hotelware tariff in the 1979 Trade Agreements Act, and the entry of China into the ceramics market made this route perilous as well. By December 1979 the company laid off more than two hundred workers, within five years that number soared to seven hundred (half of the plant’s total labor force) out of work for extended periods of time. Joseph Wells III (who took over for his father in the early 1980s) and Marcus Aaron II, determined not to let the factory their families ran for generations fall by the wayside, announced an ambitious investment program. The centerpiece would be a new $750,000 tunnel kiln which could finish ware in one firing, eliminating several costly steps. Other kilns received more than $250,000 in renovations to modernize and streamline production as much as possible.11


Around this time, another development would shape the company’s future. In the years since production of Fiesta ended, a collector’s market for the vintage pieces began to grow. Baby boomers who fondly remembered the china of their mothers and grandmothers started buying up as much Fiesta as they could, sending the price for a place setting which originally cost less than one dollar into the hundreds. The obsession also tied into a trend of casual dining and the revival of art deco shapes and colors in home fashion, one that department stores hoped to capitalize on. Around 1985 Bloomingdale’s purchased the design rights to Russell Wright’s American Modern, a prominent line of 1930s dinnerware originally manufactured by the Steubenville Pottery. The store approached Homer Laughlin about recreating the Russell Wright china from the original molds and a few test pieces were made and fired. But Jonathan Parry, Laughlin’s Art Director, stated the obvious: why recreate someone else’s china when the Laughlin plant already had the designs and molds for the most popular home dinnerware in American history? At first, Wells harbored some reservations about bringing Fiesta back. The cutthroat competition from foreign-made ware led the company to leave the home market in the first place and with China in the game it would be even tougher. Yet he consented to the plan, charging Parry with updating the line to match current home tastes and needs.  

Parry made a few significant changes to the Fiesta line. The biggest of these was the decision to switch from a semi-vitreous to a fully vitrified body. This allowed the new Fiesta to be utilized in foodservice outlets as well as in the home (although it forced a redesign of several of the vintage molds as vitrified clay shrinks more upon firing). Next, he widened the dinner plates and added rims to the soup bowls, tapping into trends towards larger servings and less  

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spillage. Finally, the glazing process would be changed to give the pieces a dry (non-glazed) bottom, allowing them to better grip the table. As far as color, the bright Mexican-inspired hues of the 1930s did not fit in with decorating trends fifty years later. Throughout late 1985 the company test marketed twenty different colors at foodservice shows and focus groups in New York, Chicago, and Atlanta. Five colors emerged as the overwhelming favorites for production: apricot, rose pink, cobalt blue (a much darker shade than the original from the 1930s), black, and white. Parry noted that the marked difference between the colors would not hurt the collector’s market for the vintage pieces, as the two could not be confused.13

The new Fiesta pieces made their debut in grand fashion at a party hosted by the West Virginia Department of Culture and History at the State Museum on February 28, 1986. Governor Arch A. Moore attended the celebration as did Parry and members of the Wells and Aaron families. Homer Laughlin made place settings of the new china available for purchase and issued with a special first day certificate. When it came time to put Fiesta back on the mass market, the company offered Bloomingdale’s a special six-month exclusivity window to sell in gratitude for initiating the return to production. Seeing its success, the store encouraged Homer Laughlin to release more colors. The first new shade, yellow (a much paler shade than the

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13 Bob Huxford and Sharon Huxford, *Collector's Encyclopedia of Fiesta Plus Harlequin, Rivera, and Kitchen Kraft*, ninth edition (Paducah, KY: Collector Books, 2001), 53 and Kathleen Sterritt, “A Sleek, Colorful Classic is Back: Fiesta, First Introduced in the 1930's, Launches a New Line of Plates and Accessories,” *Washington Post*, March 6, 1986, 24. Collectors now use the term “vintage” when describing the Fiesta manufactured in the 1930s-70s and “Post-86” when describing the Fiesta currently on the market. Use of the term “Fiestaware” is discouraged by Homer Laughlin. Because vintage molds were used wherever possible to save costs, the older and modern pieces are visually very similar with the exception of some slight changes in the coffee and tea pots to accommodate the new vitrified clay. In 1998 the color pearl gray was added to the lineup. Since that shade was very close to the gray from the 1950s, a small stamped “H” was added to the underside of pieces made from vintage molds to avoid confusion by collectors.
vintage color), joined in 1987, followed by turquoise (also different from the original),
periwinkle, sea mist green, persimmon, and others. Today, the company averages one new color
introduction per year (although 2015 saw two new colors, sage and slate gray). Collectors and
casual buyers alike celebrated the return of Fiesta: by 1993 Laughlin sold over four million
pieces per year, representing 20% of company revenue and rising.  

Bringing back Fiesta helped bolster Homer Laughlin’s fortunes in the 1980s. Meanwhile,
Shenango and Syracuse would continue to go through buyouts. When Newell purchased Anchor
Hocking in June 1987, Shenango China’s fate originally remained unclear. The new owners
would not hold on to the pottery long, putting the entire Anchor Foodservice Division up for sale
on July 24th. Newell decided that foodservice did not fit its corporate vision and hired Merrill
Lynch to sell the subsidiaries either as a unit or individually. Despite the fact that Shenango had
lost money for several years, at least five buyers (among them Oneida, World Tableware, and
Canadian Pacific/Syracuse China) showed interest and made offers to purchase the plant. On
December 31 management told Shenango employees leaving for the holiday that a deal would be
complete by the end of that day. Quickly word got out that none other than Syracuse China, its
biggest rival in the industry, purchased the plant with a closing date set for January 22, 1988.  

Syracuse immediately began the process of merging operations of the two plants.
Shenango’s sales force would be absorbed into the existing crew while Shenango China itself

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14 Polick, Modern Fiesta, 20-21, 26; Sterrit, “A Sleek, Colorful Classic;” and Oliver, “Keep it Trendy.”
Today, Homer Laughlin keeps fifteen colors of Fiesta in production at any given time. The 2015 introduction of
Slate and Sage led to the discontinuation of Peacock and Black, one of the original 1986 colors, while the 2016
introduction of Claret meant the retirement of Plum. Of the initial five, only White and Cobalt Blue remain in
production (apricot was the first Post-86 color ever retired in 1998).

“Pottery May Get a Buyer by Today,” New Castle News, December 31, 1987, 1; and John L. Touchett, “Notice to
Employees,” January 4, 1988, Onondaga Historical Association, Syracuse, New York (hereafter referred to as
OHA). Of the other prominent bidders, Oneida would end up purchasing the Buffalo China plant, shutting it down
and moving production overseas in 2005. World Tableware would eventually be purchased by Libbey Glass and is
also manufactured overseas.
ANOTHER
REVOLUTION
IN CHINA.

Once again, Syracuse China Corporation is changing the face of the commercial china industry. With the united strengths of Syracuse China, Mayer China and Shenango China, today we can offer the widest array of foodservice chinaware available from any source in the world.

This will be no surprise to Syracuse China users. As America's leading supplier of commercial china, our goal for years has been to anticipate and respond to your needs better than anyone else.

TO SERVE YOU BETTER

We're proud to bring three of the most respected tabletop brand names in America under one corporate organization. It signifies our long-term commitment to the foodservice industry and to the things we know are most important to you: consistently high quality in china body, glaze and decoration; durability with no fading, easy replacements, timely delivery, and professional consultative service by sales representatives attuned to the needs of the market.

THE SYRACUSE CHINA PROMISE

Our commitment also holds the promise that each of these fine dinnerware brands will retain its own uniqueness. That includes the world-class character of uniquely personalized Mayer products, the durable value of classic shapes from Shenango, and the design sophistication of Syracuse China’s expanding program of “Continental Flair, American Care” patterns.

Figure 53: Advertisement for Syracuse's purchase of Shenango China. Restaurant Hospitality, May 1989, page 61.
would be marketed as a division of Syracuse China (similar to Mayer China). Syracuse promoted its own product as well as Mayer as ideal for high-end restaurants and hotels. Shenango on the other hand, catered to a middle-to-low-end clientele with more basic designs and lower prices. A five-year plan developed by Syracuse officials laid out their vision for the plant: Shenango would anchor the economy level of the marketplace, taking over production of Syracuse’s low-cost shapes while developing new ones. The plan also anticipated new advertising campaigns and catalogs that kept the Shenango identity but as part of the Syracuse family. Finally, the new owners developed expectations to overhaul the nearly ninety-year-old facility with new equipment that could nearly double daily production numbers. “Industry participants expect and desire that Syracuse China will energize, revive, and make viable the Shenango brand, as they know we have been doing with the Mayer brand,” the plan noted. The acquisition gave Syracuse the confidence that they would enhance their reputation at all levels of the foodservice industry.16

But before Syracuse China could begin developing any future plans, they first had to deal with Shenango’s workforce, then numbering around 650. Syracuse President Chester Amond sent a letter to Shenango employees on January 14 announcing that all would have to reapply for their jobs at the plant while agreeing to new terms of employment. Employees had until July to submit applications in order to be considered before outsiders. In the meantime, the plant would shut down completely once the sale became final on the 22nd and remain closed until the rehiring process finished. After nearly a month shut down, Syracuse reopened the Shenango plant in late February under the leadership of newly promoted Bob Bean. Of the more than six hundred employed when Newell sold the plant, Syracuse only invited back 250 (though nearly all had reapplied). Those who did return faced drastic wage cuts, some as much as $4-6 per hour, the

elimination of bonus and incentive pay, and cutbacks in vacation time. Long-time workers agreed that the plant likely would never be the same.17

By all indications, Syracuse China prospered in the 1980s. Not only did they purchase two rival plants, eliminating significant competition, but they developed several new product lines, upgraded plant equipment, and kept labor relations at a peaceful level. Nevertheless, parent owner Canadian Pacific made the decision in the summer of 1989 to put the division on the market along with several other subsidiaries. Canadian Pacific decided to move away from U.S.-based businesses as well as from those whose activities did not relate to their core identity as a railway company. They did not need to wait long to find a buyer: the Pfaltzgraff company, manufacturers of high-end home dinnerware, eagerly purchased Syracuse and its two satellite plants in October 1989. Already a leader in home dinnerware, the new ownership eagerly looked to extend that same leadership into the foodservice market as well. As the 1980s came to a close, some stability finally appeared to be on the horizon but changes would soon come even more rapidly than before.18


The 1990s: Decline and a Shutdown

Joseph and Ernst Mayer started the Mayer China company in 1881 in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania (approximately thirty miles south of New Castle). Their fine china graced high-class hotels, restaurants, and country clubs across the United States and they gained fame for being among the first potteries to adopt a tunnel kiln in the 1920s. The Mayer family remained close friends with Shenango’s James M. Smith Sr., but little would anyone at the time suspect that in 1964 Shenango would purchase their plant. Mayer operated as usual through the ownership of Shenango and its eventual parent corporation INTERPACE. When the conglomerate broke up, Mayer continued to run under the management of investors until Syracuse purchased it in 1984. But by 1990, the expense of owning three plants (two of them quite old and inefficient) started to take a financial toll on Syracuse China. That August, they announced the closure of Mayer China and the consolidation of their production into the Shenango plant. Of more than one hundred employees, Syracuse could only offer a handful of skilled workers jobs at the Shenango plant due to restrictions from USWA 3125 (and of those, very few actually accepted due to the lengthy drive from Beaver Falls to New Castle). Syracuse announced the closure as a way to “prove a stronger, more efficient company,” noting that the facilities at Mayer were too small and outdated to turn a profit in a soft economy.19

With Syracuse’s shutdown of Mayer China, perhaps what came next should not be a surprise in retrospect. At the end of the work day on February 1, 1991 as rumors swirled throughout the plant and the city of New Castle, Syracuse Executive Vice President William Fenn confirmed to Shenango China employees that the plant would be permanently shut down. An official press release from Syracuse China circulated earlier in the day stated the continued

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depression in the foodservice economy necessitated a consolidation of production in the Court Street location (New Castle News editor Mitchell Olszak noted angrily that the press release never actually clearly admits that the Shenango plant would be closing). A statement from Chester Amond offered some highly skilled workers the chance to relocate to Syracuse, but no Shenango employees took the offer. In all, nearly 275 workers lost their jobs, as last-minute efforts from city leadership and the union failed to either change Syracuse’s mind or permit the sale of the pottery as an employee-owned facility. The shutdown occurred as a series of layoffs in eight two-week periods (April 12-26, May 7-21, May 31-June 14, July 19-August 2, August 9-16, September 27-October 11, November 27-December 11, and December 20-January 3) as production slowly phased out. The last employees, mainly office and janitorial workers, left the plant for good in January 1992. Two months later, Syracuse hired the Mohr Corporation, specialists in industrial auctions, to sell any viable remnants of Shenango China including production machinery, office furniture, kilns, and other supplies. On March 25, Mohr sold the building itself at auction. One of the largest and most successful commercial potteries in the United States was gone.20

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Syracuse may have shut down Shenango to cut costs, but they still had to endure considerable expenses in 1991 stemming from their use of lead-based glazes. For decades in the pottery industry, companies added lead to the glaze to help with smoothness, clarity, and to prevent the decoration underneath from fading. The United States Potters Association recommended lowering levels of lead as early as the 1970s in response to dangerous levels found in imported china (at least one reported death occurred). Homer Laughlin began phasing out lead altogether with the reintroduction of Fiesta in 1986 and by 1992 all of their products could be advertised as “lead free.” Syracuse China still used small amounts of lead in the glaze at this time, leading them to be among the ten domestic and international ceramics manufacturers sued by the California Attorney General and the Environmental Defense Fund for being in violation of Proposition 65. California state law prohibits lead levels above 0.1 parts per million (nationwide the FDA recommends no more than 0.5 parts per million). The suit charged the ten companies named, including Syracuse, Wedgewood, Lenox, Mikasa, Royal Doulton, Fitz & Floyd, Noritake, Pickard China, Pfaltzgraff, and Villeroy & Boch with using dangerous levels of lead in their products (the suit claimed some contained as much as one hundred times the Proposition 65 limit). The state of California recommended consumers not use lead-glazed dinnerware and accused the ten companies of withholding information on the amount of lead in their products. The potteries risked a $2,500 fine every day they did not post lead warnings on their products and the prospect of sale being banned in California if they did not lower levels to meet

1992, 1, 7; and Mohr Corporation, “Public Auction by Order of the Board of Directors, Sale of the Assets of Shenango China,” March 1992, <www.mohrcorp.com> accessed January 30, 2014. The Mohr Corporation has also uploaded the videotaped auction catalog onto Youtube. This twenty-minute video takes a tour through the closed plant showcasing the machinery and equipment slated for auction. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HM08bSKZhY>. In a conversation the author had with Homer Laughlin General Manager Ken McElhaney in August 2014, he recalled that their company purchased some of the auctioned Shenango machinery for use in Newell.
Syracuse reformulated their glazes and met the requirements in early 1993.21

Syracuse’s troubles with lead did not stop at Proposition 65. That same year the Department of Environmental Conservation in New York cited the company after finding high levels of lead in landfills near the plant. Management offered to build a fence around the site, a dumping ground for broken or imperfect china, to contain the lead. But four years later, the DEC cited Syracuse China again once testing of the groundwater beneath the landfill showed lead contamination. The levels of lead contamination forced the DEC to name the plant among the ten worst polluters in the state. Additionally, Syracuse employees showed higher than recommended levels of lead despite company claims that workers underwent regular blood tests. President Charles Goodman (who returned to the position upon Amond’s retirement) lamented that “we are looking at hundreds of thousands of dollars” to potentially clean up what the DEC termed a toxic waste site.22

In 1995, Syracuse’s parent owner Pfaltzgraff decided it no longer wanted to hold onto the plant, opting instead to refocus on its upscale consumer market. In May they put the pottery on the market and a buyer quickly surfaced in Libbey Glass Company of Toledo, Ohio. Libbey, with their focus on glassware, looked to add Syracuse China as a companion to provide customers the entire tablescape in one location. A two-page advertisement running in trade

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journals pictured a single wine goblet on the table and a caption that “after 177 years of dining alone, we decided we’d like some company,” followed by a second image where an elegant china place setting joins the glass. The purchase closed in October, with Libbey paying $40.7 million to acquire the plant. Despite now falling under its third owner in seventeen years, management of both Libbey and Syracuse insisted that the purchase would not affect overall employment at Court Street and that production would continue as before.23

Figure 55: Libbey Glass advertisement announcing the purchase of Syracuse China. Restaurants & Institutions, November 1, 1995, pages 107-09.

Homer Laughlin remained relatively stable throughout the 1990s. The reintroduction

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of Fiesta proved a major success and sales continued to grow as new colors joined the lineup and others retired. In 1997 the company announced a one-time-use glaze called raspberry which would grace a limited edition of presentation bowls. Five hundred bowls glazed in the special color commemorated that year marking the 500 millionth piece of Fiesta manufactured. Most of these rare bowls went either to management or stockholders, with an additional fifteen set aside to be auctioned off to raise money for Joseph Well’s favorite charities. In 1998 Art Director Jonathan Parry began working on a new shape for the company which he called Fiesta 2000. The pieces used the existing colored glazes of pearl gray, cobalt blue, persimmon, and the new juniper but instead of the signature concentric rings, a more random embossed line design adorned the rim. Like the Epicure line in the 1950s, Parry envisioned the Fiesta 2000 pieces to be multi-functional for a greater number of uses. The new shape debuted in January 2000 to decidedly mixed reviews. Stores such as Bloomingdale’s (a longtime Fiesta supporter) hesitated to stock Fiesta 2000, fearing it would not sell well. Additionally, Parry succumbed to cancer and did not finish the development of all the new shapes before his passing. Less than a year following its debut, Homer Laughlin quietly discontinued the Fiesta 2000 line, focusing instead on the classic.24

The New Millennium: Loans, Buyouts, and another Shutdown

By the year 2000, the American china industry had been in existence nearly a century and a half. Yet of the hundreds of potteries that called the United States home, only a few remained. Those that did continued to face pressure from imports and costly labor strife from their workers. Homer Laughlin survived a close call and arranged a loan to stay in business. Less than ten years later, Syracuse China would not be so lucky.

24 HLCCA, Fiesta, 199 and Polick, Modern Fiesta, 144-45.
From the time that Homer Laughlin sold the plant that bore his name, it had been jointly owned and operated by members of the Wells and Aaron families. While the Aarons originally came on as financiers, they did have a significant say in many plant decisions over the decades. In 2002, the Aaron family made the decision to sell their shares of the company. Wells knew he had to act: if anyone other than the existing ownership purchased the Aaron shares, the plant very likely would close or be moved overseas. Wells arranged for a loan through the state of West Virginia, taking advantage of a fixed interest rate. With the approval of the West Virginia Economic Board, the company received the $10 million loan and purchased the Aaron family’s share outright, saving the plant from a probable bleak future.25

Despite the small number of remaining potteries and the absorption of the Brotherhood of Operative Potters into the Glass, Molder, Pottery, Plastic and Allied Workers International Union, labor unrest still hit Homer Laughlin and Syracuse China in the 2000s. On November 16, 2003, GMP Local 419 voted to strike Homer Laughlin by a twelve-to-one margin. With more than 600 of the plant’s 1,100 employees to picket lines, nearly all production had to shut down. The two sides remained divided on wage and insurance increases and a second company offer quickly met with rejection by the rank-and-file on November 18, as did a third offer on December 3. The workers would hold out past Christmas and into the new year. Finally, the GMP executive board refused the rank-and-file vote and approved a new contract on January 13, fifty-four working days after the strike began. Joseph Wells III noted that company orders dropped by nearly two-thirds during the strike and could not guarantee that all of the 654 strikers would immediately return to their jobs. While the strike left feelings of resentment for a time,

relations have been relatively smooth ever since, although the contract negotiations in 2012 had to go past the deadline to finally gain approval.26

Following the bitter two-month walkout in 1978, Syracuse China’s labor relations remained calm for several years. One close call came in 1993: rank and file voted to go on strike but the GMP board approved a new contract mere hours before the picket lines arrived. Many did not like the new contract which gave a lump sum bonus rather than a wage increase and included a provision paying new workers less than current employees for the same job. Despite the tension, no walkouts occurred until 2006. That year, Libbey proposed to freeze wages, arguing the plant did not turn a profit. Already the parent company eliminated bonuses and incentive payments and reduced overtime opportunities. The final straw came when Libbey asked Syracuse employees to pay more of their insurance premiums, a contribution nearly double what they currently paid. Workers voted 2-to-1 to strike starting April 1 and 250 of the 360 employees walked out and formed a picket line. Talks on April 2 and April 18 ended in a stalemate as employees readied to be out for an extended period of time to protest the wage cuts and insurance payments.27

In the midst of the strike, Libbey released a report detailing the corporation’s yearly earnings. They claimed that Syracuse China lost $2 million in the first quarter of 2006 despite


the rest of Libbey’s holdings turning a profit. The parent also claimed that in the past ten years it poured $25 million into improving the Syracuse plant but that prohibitively high labor costs kept those renovations from translating into earnings. While a skeleton crew of office workers and management worked to fill orders from back stock, Libbey warned that an extended strike would only further the plant’s mounting losses. The union bristled at the announcement and filed a grievance with the National Labor Relations Board accusing Libbey of withholding information on the plant’s performance during negotiations as well as videotaping the picket lines. In the midst of this animosity, a third contract offer met with rejection on April 25. The union offered a one-year wage freeze in exchange for lowering the insurance premiums to previous levels, an offer Libbey rejected. No more talks occurred until May 6. That evening, the GMP executive board approved a new deal (though terms were not released to the public) to end the five-week strike.28

In a way, the 2006 strike at Syracuse China signaled the beginning of the end. Employment would drop over the next two years from 360 to about 275 as efforts to cut costs did not work. With the plant continuing to lose money, Libbey announced on December 9, 2008 that it was closing Syracuse China permanently by the end of next March. Like with Shenango, the factory closed in phases with the final employees leaving for good on April 9 and the outlet store selling remaining product through mid-June. With the country in the middle of one of the worst recessions in recent memory, many Syracuse employees worried about their prospects of finding new work, especially those who spent their entire lives in the plant. Homer Laughlin China publicly expressed sympathy following announcement of the closing (while reassuring customers

it would stay open for the foreseeable future following an investment in new equipment).

Echoing the long-standing ideal of the USPA, where rival businessmen nevertheless could come together to benefit the industry as a whole, Laughlin praised Syracuse’s history. “The Syracuse China factory has been a fixture in the china industry for over 100 years producing quality products and providing steady employment in their community […] while they are a competitor, they are also part of a proud manufacturing heritage that is irreplaceable.”29

While the plant did not survive, the product did, as Libbey contracted with a Chinese plant to manufacture ware marked as “Syracuse China,” something the devastated community took as a final insult. In July 2009 House Representative Daniel Maffei, a Syracuse native, introduced HR 3499, an amendment to the Trademark Act of 1946. The proposal, named the “Trademark Protection Act,” attempted to block Libbey’s continued production of Syracuse China overseas. The Act would prohibit use of a geographic-based trademark to describe goods not made in that location. Specifically citing the case of Syracuse, the language of the Act argued that the trademarked name “Syracuse China” was well enough known that Libbey engaged in

deliberate deception by continuing to manufacture the product outside of Syracuse, New York. The House of Representatives refereed the bill to the House Committee on the Judiciary but it died there without any further action taken. To this day, Libbey continues to import and sell dinnerware from overseas marked as “Syracuse China.”

While the closures of Shenango China and Syracuse China did not singlehandedly devastate their local communities, they surely played a contributing role. Syracuse can count on the business related to their university to keep a stable economy, New Castle has not been so lucky. Shenango’s shutdown came on the heels of a number of steel mill closings and followed by the loss of two Rockwell factories and the bankruptcy of a major local discount store chain. New Castle remains economically depressed under Act 47 of Pennsylvania law and has lost nearly half the population it had in 1950. Not surprisingly, the city experiences a high amount of crime, especially theft. For several years, the area suffered a rash of arsons stemming from copper pipe and wire thieves burning vacant buildings to cover their crimes. On June 28, 2011 the former Shenango China plant caught on fire around 5:30 in the evening. Hours earlier, city police had been called to the building to investigate a possible copper theft. The fire could be seen nearly thirty miles away and almost immediately the fire chief ruled it arson. Just short of one year later a second major fire broke out at the plant in a second floor office. Once again, officials suspected arson. Forty-four firemen from all over the county spent nearly four hours in ninety-degree heat to control the blaze. After two severe burnings, the building remains an

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eyesore too damaged for a business to inhabit yet the current property owner refuses to tear it down, still hoping to lure in a potential occupant.\textsuperscript{31}

The Syracuse China building stood empty for two years when Amparit Industries of Utica, New York, purchased the property in May 2011. They looked to redevelop the site as an industrial park but most of the current pottery building could not be saved as its structure proved too old and inefficient. Amparit earmarked around 200,000 square feet as salvageable (from


The collapse of Shenango and Syracuse marked the end of a major American presence in industrial pottery. The market which had been plagued by imports since the 1950s, finally took two of its biggest contributors. Shenango remained in business for ninety years, Syracuse for one hundred thirty-seven and both at one point led the entire industry. Today, the history of American pottery paints a portrait of an industry seemingly doomed from the start. China companies across the United States struggled with never truly emerging from the shadow of foreign goods and American political policy tends to favor far larger and more profitable ventures while relegating small businesses to the dustbin through harsh tariff policy and a lack of
compassion or protection. Even those who aggressively marketed their products and themselves often fell victim to outside forces such as corporate buyouts or internal strife with labor. In this harsh atmosphere, why has Homer Laughlin survived when nearly all others have failed?

A large part of the success of the Homer Laughlin China Company undoubtedly comes from the fact that it has had stable ownership for the duration of its existence. Unlike Shenango and Syracuse, the factory has never fallen to corporate or outside ownership nor have the managing families remained absent from daily operations. When Homer Laughlin himself decided to sell, he entrusted William Wells and Louis Aaron to keep the plant running. And for the next 144 years, the company remained with their descendants for four generations. When current president Liz McIlvain returned to the company after taking time to raise a family, she brought in her own daughters to begin learning the business, improving the chances that one day a fifth generation of the Wells line will oversee operations. Not only have the Wells family maintained their leadership in the company, they have also aggressively committed to keeping it and its jobs in the Newell area. Despite several offers, the Wellses refuse to sell, knowing fully that an outside owner likely would shut down the plant and ship the jobs overseas just as Libbey did to Syracuse China. Many members of management including Vice President Peter Wicks and Marketing Director Dan Williams promote Laughlin china as an American manufactured product, much as Joseph Wells Sr. helped to found the Made in America Club. Many manufacturers and stores now promote goods produced in the United States as a special selling point to consumers appealing to pride and patriotism. Homer Laughlin, as part of the Association of Glass and Pottery Manufacturers, has adopted the Made in USA Brand Certification logo created by Columbus-based marketer Marcie Gabor. Gabor began the initiative to help customers
clearly identify American products and to give companies an opportunity to showcase their
dedication to keeping jobs in the United States.\footnote{33 Liz McIlvain interview; “It's a Fiesta for New President of The Homer Laughlin China Company, Liz McIlvain,” \textit{PR Newswire}, March 27, 2013; Allison Zisko, “Domestic Bliss,” \textit{Home Furnishings News}, July 2012, 28-32; Made in USA Brand Certification Mark, “About,” <https://www.madeintheusabrand.com/about/> accessed August 22, 2015; Pete Wicks, interview with the author, Homer Laughlin China Company, Newell, West Virginia, August 4, 2014; and Dan Williams, phone interview with the author, July 15, 2014. Laughlin became one of the early verified members of the Made in USA initiative, although complications with the Federal Trade Commission keep the company from being permitted to publicly display the logo on their packaging (the FTC requires anything labeled “Made in the USA” to also include raw materials also from the United States; since Laughlin buys some specialty clay from England, the FTC has ruled their products not completely American-made). Made in America branding campaigns have also taken root in other industries. See Timothy J. Minchin’s \textit{Empty Mills}, chapter 6 for a discussion of Made in America awareness campaigns undertaken by the American textile industry and see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKL254Y_jtc> for an example of the “Imported from Detroit” advertising campaign launched by the Chrysler Motor Company in 2011.}

Strategically, Homer Laughlin’s recent ability to compete in a tight china market comes from offering both home and foodservice products. Once thought too difficult to achieve successfully, nearly every member of the plant’s management agreed that the upkeep of both sides has helped balance the company in tough times. That way, if one segment struggles (as foodservice has since the 2008 recession) the other makes up the difference. Liz McIlvain went as far as calling the reemergence of Fiesta critical to Laughlin’s survival, as the attention from regular customers and collectors continues to drive excitement and ultimately sales. Fiesta in particular appeals to a modern mindset, as today’s consumers favor more casual approaches to dining. Gone are the days of the “good” china service for eight or more displayed in a cabinet as a sign of good taste. Fiesta mixes the quality of china with the fun of bright colors and mix-and-match appeal that younger families relate to better. In this sense, it is not surprising that Fiesta regularly tops bridal registries around the country. And Homer Laughlin is fiercely protective of its biggest star. The iconic blend of colored glaze and art deco design has been imitated over the years but the company sought a court injunction against Target stores in 1997 when their Cantinaware came a little too close to the trademarked designs. The Court agreed that the Target china blatantly copied Fiesta in both color and shape and upheld a ban on selling providing
Laughlin paid $500,000 in reparations. Monitoring and protecting Fiesta from poor-quality imitators (nearly all imported from China) keeps Homer Laughlin and its product synonymous with quality.

That quality is also key to both bringing in and keeping customers. Homer Laughlin is beginning to re-attract the attention of several leading restaurant chains. Either entire services or select pieces are currently used by The Cheesecake Factory, Red Lobster, Chili’s, and Applebee’s. Many of these returned as customers after an extended absence once they realized that Homer Laughlin, while initially costing more, held up much longer than imported china. Additionally, when replacements were needed, the company could turn around an order in mere days as opposed to the multi-week wait getting product from China. The company keeps 1,900 actives shapes in their production rotation, allowing for a selection that imports cannot match. Laughlin also offers perks that foreign suppliers cannot, such as custom decorating and special or rush orders. With high-quality product and the availability of specialized service, many foodservice vendors have taken a statement from Arthur Wells Jr. to heart: people will indeed pay more for a good product.

To produce a high-quality product, the Homer Laughlin China Company keeps up continuous improvements in its plants, a practice stretching back decades when the company was among the first to install a tunnel kiln in the 1920s and an automatic jigger machine in the late 1930s. Laughlin uses a combination of inventing their own equipment as needed as well as

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34 Pete Wicks interview; Liz McIlvain interview; “China Company Takes Aim at Target Stores,” AP Newswire, August 3, 1997; and “Court Tells Target: Cantinaware is Out,” Home Furnishings News, August 4, 1997, page unknown. Homer Laughlin succeeded in stopping Target because the iconic look of Fiesta could be trademarked. The company did not have such success in a previous effort. Attempts to trademark their “Gothic” shape met with multiple refusals from the US District Court, as the Court considered the shape too generic for protection.

purchasing the latest available machinery they can. Even in lean times the company reinvests in
the plant, knowing that keeping up with imports is critical to survival. In 1995 Laughlin began a
five-year modernization plan committing $7 million to a new high-tech, fast-fire kiln that can
finish ware in five hours and an additional $5 million to improving other automatic equipment
and expanding warehouse space. Today, reinvestment and modernization remain high priorities.
In addition to the kiln, recent upgrades include new glazing machines, robotic casters, RAM
presses, and ergonomic kiln cars on a computer-programmed track. While so much machinery
eliminates some of the human element from production, Plant Manager Ken McElhaney notes
that the new equipment increases efficiency to the point that an additional shift of work could be
added, preventing job loss. Additionally, dies and molds are made on-site to cut down on costs.
Finally, the company’s embrace of “going green” has allowed them to save money by reclaiming
unused clay, glaze, and even rerouting heat from the kilns to warm the rest of the production
areas and offices in the winter.36

With constantly improving facilities, Homer Laughlin can keep up that balance of
foodservice and retail critical to their recent success. Irv Mills claimed that part of why Shenango
declined steadily after the 1950s was that they did not diversify their product the way that
competitors such as Syracuse China did. When INTERPACE took over the company in 1968,
they had no desire to promote Castleton China and allowed the line to wither in the heat of
competition. Joseph Brice, a member of Homer Laughlin’s management who previously worked
for Shenango, elaborated on this point, saying that once Robert Carpenter died, INTERPACE
replaced him with a manager who worked in tile and knew nothing about dinnerware. Shenango

36 Alfred C. Allen, “A Leader Stays on Top,” Ceramic Industry, April 1970, 63-65; Sam Vargo, “Homer
Laughlin Initiating $5 Million Investment in Company,” The State Journal, April 10, 2000, 1; Linda Harris, “Homer
Laughlin China had Fought Import Battle for Nearly a Century,” The State Journal, October 1, 2001, 34; and
Kenneth McElhaney interview.
could not regain a home retail presence after Castleton, a trait that ultimately hastened their
decline. Homer Laughlin on the other hand, not only managed to successfully return to retail but
continues to diversify their products and presence even further.\textsuperscript{37}

In March 2010, Homer Laughlin announced their purchase of and merger with the Hall China Company of nearby Chester, West Virginia, one of the last remaining domestic producers of vitrified foodservice ware. The Hall family wished to retire and leave the high stakes pottery industry. Joseph Wells III understood that all other buyers would surely move production overseas if they bought the plant and because of the family’s existing commitment to keeping jobs in the Newell area, he proposed that Homer Laughlin buy the company with which they shared a long history and occasional collaboration. Today, Hall operates as a subsidiary of Homer Laughlin China, manufacturing institutional ware and some shapes that are too difficult to produce at the Laughlin plant. The two share a common leadership and Hall takes part in some of Laughlin’s promotions such as the annual tent sales. With this move, Laughlin has further expanded their product offerings while saving the jobs of the friends and neighbors of their own employees. The company also for nine years served as the exclusive American distributor of RAK Porcelain, a line of ultra-fine china manufactured in the United Arab Emirates.\textsuperscript{38}

Nearly one hundred years ago, United States Potters Association President Charles Ashbaugh addressed his fellow pottery managers. He said, “Men, let us put more time, effort,

\textsuperscript{37} Irv Mills oral history statement, 1 and Joseph Brice, interview with the author, Homer Laughlin China Company, Newell, West Virginia, August 4, 2014.
\textsuperscript{38} Dave Conley, e-mail interview with the author, August 18, 2014; Pete Wicks interview; and The Homer Laughlin China Company, “China Industry Leaders to Partner in ‘Solidifying’ Move,” press release, March 25, 2010, courtesy of the Homer Laughlin China Company. Also see “Hall, Homer Laughlin Complete Partnership,” Steubenville Herald Star, March 28, 2012; “Homer Laughlin Merges with China Maker,” Charleston Gazette, March 26, 2012; and “Homer Laughlin, Hall China to Merge,” Manufacturing.net, March 26, 2012. McElhaney noted that the decision to distribute this foreign-made line was to provide Laughlin’s client base with ultra-fine china too delicate to manufacture at the Newell plants. The agreement to distribute RAK Porcelain began in 2007(originally under the name Kenilworth) and ended in January 2016.
and thought in the production of better goods at a less cost than we do tariff, consular reports, and foreign competition […] so long as we occupy our time on them alone, we are merely acting on the defensive, and if we as an industry expect to forge ahead we must be aggressive and progressive.” Leaders of the American pottery industry always knew they faced an uphill battle and that outside problems would often overshadow the goods they made. While nearly all of the hundreds of potteries across the United States are long gone, can the industry really be considered eternally doomed to fail? It is true that the American government has done little to help potters over the years, as they consider the industry too small for significance. As a result, imports continue to flood in each year with very little in terms of a tariff payment. Marketing and public relations can help, as can stable relations with laborers, but this alone certainly did not offer full protection even for the industry giants like Shenango and Syracuse. Reflecting back on Ashbaugh’s words, it is clear that in order for American pottery to survive, it needs to produce a quality product, something consumers will not mind paying more to have. Homer Laughlin provides a model: they manufacture one of the most well-loved dinnerware brands in the country, they have strove to keep that line vibrant and diverse, and they have management who invest time and money into making their product the best it can be. Homer Laughlin represents the devotion to quality that can keep the American pottery industry alive in the face of imports and keep the tradition of American craftsmanship alive in an era where so many others have failed.

APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: POTTERY MANAGEMENT

Homer Laughlin China Leadership, 1871-present

1871-1877 Homer and Shakespeare Laughlin
1877-1897 Homer Laughlin
1897-1930 W.E. Wells (financial backing by the Aaron family)
1930-1959 Joseph M. Wells, Sr. (financial backing by the Aaron family)
1959-1986 Joseph M. Wells, Jr. (financial backing by the Aaron family)
1986-2012 Joseph M. Wells, III (financial backing by the Aaron family until 2002)
2012-present Liz McIlvain (daughter of Joseph M. Wells, Jr.)

Onondaga Pottery/Syracuse China Leadership, 1871-2009

1871-? R. Nelson Gere
?-1892 Mills Pharis
1892-1910 E. B. Judson
1910-1913 James Pass
1913-1941 Bert E. Salisbury
1941-1958 Richard Pass
1958-1967 Foster Rhodes
1971-1978 Robert J. Theis
1978-1991 Chester Amond
1992-1998 Charles Goodman
1998-2009 Plant managers under Libbey Glass:
            Wayne Zitkus, 1998-2003
            Willie Purvis, 2003-2005
            Peter Lebied, 2005-2009

Shenango China Leadership, 1909-1991

1909-1943 James M. Smith, Sr.
1943-1952 James M. Smith, Jr.
1952-1964? George Zahniser
1964?-1968 C.R. Crowder
1968-1979 Vice Presidents/General Managers under INTERPACE:
            Robert Carpenter, 1968-1974
            J. Philip Sawyer, 1974-1977
            George S. West, 1977-1979
1979-1987 General Managers under Anchor Hocking:
            Ken Moore
1988-1991 Plant managers under Syracuse China:
            Robert H. Bean, 1988-1990
            Michael Haben, 1990-1991
### APPENDIX B: UNITED STATES POTTERS ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Members</th>
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<td>1910</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1940</td>
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<td>24*</td>
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<td>57</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td>1948</td>
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<td>1887</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>57</td>
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<td>1920</td>
<td>58</td>
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<td>1889</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>41***</td>
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<td>1924</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>1893</td>
<td>53**</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>1894</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>1896</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>69*</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>64*</td>
<td>1936</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>64*</td>
<td>1937</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Meetings ceased 1966</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>66*</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: USPA Annual Meeting programs 1875-1966, Ohio Historic Connection, Columbus, Ohio*

*members present at the meeting (may not reflect total membership) – rolls not available for that year*

**this is the first year that an “associate member” category was created for firms that provided the materials and supplies of the pottery industry or those who engaged in related work – some previous full members dropped to associate member status**

***in 1951 the USPA accepted the membership of 10 California potteries, within 10 years all had dropped out again***

Onondaga Pottery joined the association in 1875, dropped out in 1959
Homer Laughlin joined the association in 1876, remained until USPA folded in 1977
Shenango China joined the association in 1901, dropped out c.1905; rejoined 1909, dropped out 1911; rejoined a final time in1915, dropped out 1949
## APPENDIX C: TARIFF RATES ON POTTERY AND CHINA, 1864-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/Name</th>
<th>Rate on undecorated earthenware</th>
<th>Rate on decorated earthenware</th>
<th>Rate on undecorated china</th>
<th>Rate on decorated china</th>
<th>Rate on hotelware</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1864 Morril Act</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
<td>First pottery tariff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883 Mills Act</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890 McKinley Tariff</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Imported ware must be marked with country of origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894 Wilson-Gorman Tariff</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Devastated the industry, led to a strike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898 Dingley Tariff</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913 Underwood Tariff</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td></td>
<td>More clearly delineates earthenware and china</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922 Fordney-McCumber Tariff</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Introduces flexible provision allowing president to shape rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date/Name</td>
<td>Rate on undecorated earthenware</td>
<td>Rate on decorated earthenware</td>
<td>Rate on undecorated china</td>
<td>Rate on decorated china</td>
<td>Rate on hotelware</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff</td>
<td>45% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>50% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>60% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>70% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td></td>
<td>Most favorable tariff ever for industry, adds additional duty per piece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934 Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act (RTAA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>President now has power to set tariff rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939 UK Agreement (RTAA)</td>
<td>45% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>30% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>60% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>70% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td></td>
<td>Duty on bone china reduced from 50% to 40-45% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945 Czech Agreement (RTAA)</td>
<td>25% + 5¢ per dozen</td>
<td>25% + 5¢ per dozen</td>
<td>60% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>70% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948 Geneva Agreement (GATT)</td>
<td>25% + 5¢ per dozen</td>
<td>25% + 5¢ per dozen</td>
<td>60% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>45% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>70% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>First GATT agreement, hotelware now treated as a separate category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952 Torquay Agreement (GATT)</td>
<td>25% + 5¢ per dozen</td>
<td>25% + 5¢ per dozen</td>
<td>35% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>45% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>70% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955 Japan Agreement</td>
<td>25% + 5¢ per dozen</td>
<td>25% + 5¢ per dozen</td>
<td>35% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>45% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>45% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962 Trade Expansion Act (TEA)</td>
<td>21-37% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>21-37% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>36-55% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>36-55% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>45% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>Duty now depends on the price of the ware (cheaper ware has a higher duty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date/Name</td>
<td>Rate on undecorated earthenware</td>
<td>Rate on decorated earthenware</td>
<td>Rate on undecorated china</td>
<td>Rate on decorated china</td>
<td>Rate on hotelware</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
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<td>---------------------------------------</td>
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<td>------------------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967 Kennedy Round (GATT)</td>
<td>10.5-21% + 5¢ per dozen</td>
<td>10.5-21% + 5¢ per dozen</td>
<td>36-55% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>36-55% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>45% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972 Nixon Relief (Trade Act)</td>
<td>21% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>21% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>36-55% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>36-55% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>45% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td>Relief for earthenware after escape clause petition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977 Ford Reductions of Nixon Cuts</td>
<td>17.5-21% + 8.5¢ per dozen</td>
<td>17.5-21% + 8.5¢ per dozen</td>
<td>36-47% + 8.5¢ per dozen</td>
<td>36-47% + 8.5¢ per dozen</td>
<td>45% + 10¢ per dozen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979 Trade Agreements Act</td>
<td>11.4-23.5%</td>
<td>11.4-23.5%</td>
<td>18.4-38.6%</td>
<td>18.4-38.6%</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
<td>The per piece extra duty eliminated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981 Pre-Tokyo Round (GATT)</td>
<td>9.7-20.5%</td>
<td>9.7-20.5%</td>
<td>15.8-35.5%</td>
<td>15.8-35.5%</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984 Tokyo Round (GATT)</td>
<td>7.1-16%</td>
<td>7.1-16%</td>
<td>11.9-30.7%</td>
<td>11.9-30.7%</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988 Trade and Competitiveness Act</td>
<td>4.5-11%</td>
<td>4.5-11%</td>
<td>8-26%</td>
<td>8-26%</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1994 Uruguay Round (GATT)</td>
<td>4.5-10.8%</td>
<td>4.5-10.8%</td>
<td>8-26%</td>
<td>8-26%</td>
<td>33-33.6%</td>
<td>Earthenware hotelware added as a separate category</td>
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<td>2001 Doha Round (GATT)</td>
<td>4.5-9.8%</td>
<td>4.5-9.8%</td>
<td>8-26%</td>
<td>8-26%</td>
<td>28-30.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>4.5-9.8%</td>
<td>4.5-9.8%</td>
<td>8-26%</td>
<td>8-26%</td>
<td>25-28%</td>
<td>Current tariff as of January 1, 2016</td>
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Source: United States International Trade Commission
### APPENDIX D: BROTHERHOOD OF OPERATIVE POTTERS LOCALS

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<tr>
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<td>Tiffin, OH (kilnmen/dippers/saggers)</td>
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<tr>
<td>224</td>
<td>Ontario</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>225</td>
<td>Joliet, Quebec (Syracuse China Canada)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>226</td>
<td>Colton, CA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>227</td>
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<td>235</td>
<td>Trenton, NJ</td>
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<td>236</td>
<td>Pomona, NJ (Lenox)</td>
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<td>Toronto, Ontario</td>
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<tr>
<td>241</td>
<td>Cambridge, OH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No locals numbered 242-300
365  New Castle, PA (sanitary)  418  East Liverpool, OH (Taylor Smith Taylor)
366  Toronto, Ontario  419  East Liverpool, OH (Homer Laughlin)
367  Cornwall, Ontario  421  Cambridge, OH
372  Nevada, MO  422  Louisville, KY
373  Albany, IN  423  Arlington, KY
375  Mayfield, KY  378  St. Jean, Quebec
377  Monroe, GA  379  Social Circle, GA
378  St. Jean, Quebec  380  Minerva, OH
379  Social Circle, GA  381  Syracuse, NY (Syracuse China)
380  Minerva, OH  382  Thetford Mines, Quebec
381  Syracuse, NY (Syracuse China)  384  New Albany, IN
382  Thetford Mines, Quebec  387  Moore, SC
388  Ottumwa, IO  393  Union Point, GA
393  Union Point, GA  395  Social Circle, GA
395  Social Circle, GA  396  Lewiston, NY
396  Lewiston, NY  400  Thetford Mines, Quebec
400  Thetford Mines, Quebec  407  Macon, GA
407  Macon, GA  413  Piedmont, AL
413  Piedmont, AL  414  San Dimas, CA
414  San Dimas, CA  417  East Liverpool, OH (Hall)

Presidents of the Brotherhood
1. Harry Layden (1890-1891)
2. A. S. Hughes (1891-1903)
3. Thomas J. Duffy (1903-1912)
4. Edward Menge (1912-1921)
5. John T. Woods (1921-1927)
6. James M. Duffy (1927-1953)
7. Frank Hull (1953-1956)

Source: International Brotherhood of Operative Potters records, Kent State University Special Collections and Archives, Kent, Ohio
APPENDIX E: LIST OF POTTERY STRIKES, 1882-2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Workers involved</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Knights of Labor</td>
<td>June 17-September 17 (61 days)</td>
<td>Knights members locked out and replaced with other workers; those returning had to sign an iron-clad contract (end of KoL in Liverpool)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local Assembly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1853 in East</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liverpool</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>All NBOP locals</td>
<td>January 22-July 22 (182 days)</td>
<td>First industry-wide strike overseen by NBOP; Onondaga workers briefly joined in a sympathy strike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Onondaga female decorators and 400 other male workers</td>
<td>April 13-18 (5 days)</td>
<td>Workers struck without a union, James Pass gave into their demands to keep the peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>All NBOP locals</td>
<td>September 30-December 6 (67 days)</td>
<td>Second industry-wide strike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>NBOP Local 54 at Shenango Pottery</td>
<td>October 16-c. December (some members remained on strike rolls for 10 years)</td>
<td>Shenango president James M. Smith dissolved the union during the strike and reopened the plant as open shop by December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>NBOP Local 130 at Homer Laughlin</td>
<td>August 1-18 (17 days)</td>
<td>Strike declared illegal by NBOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>USWA 3125 at Shenango Pottery</td>
<td>October 1-11 (11 days)</td>
<td>First USWA-led strike at Shenango</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>IBOP Local 124 at Homer Laughlin</td>
<td>August 21-September 5 (15 days, intermittently)</td>
<td>Strike twice declared illegal by IBOP before ended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>USWA 3125 at Shenango Pottery</td>
<td>November 1-December 13 (43 days)</td>
<td>Union wound up accepting company’s pre-strike offer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>IBOP Local 9 at Homer Laughlin, TST, &amp; Edwin M. Knowles</td>
<td>September 10-21 (10 days)</td>
<td>Strike declared illegal by IBOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>IBOP Local 9 at Homer Laughlin</td>
<td>June 3-5 (3 days)</td>
<td>Strike declared illegal by IBOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>IBOP Local 124 at Homer Laughlin</td>
<td>February 5-18 (13 days)</td>
<td>Pickets shut down plant for all workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>All IBOP generalware locals</td>
<td>April 14-May 7 (23 days)</td>
<td>Third industry-wide strike; does not include plants under chinaware agreement of USPA or non-IBOP plants (such as OPCo or Shenango)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>IBOP Local 141 at Homer Laughlin</td>
<td>September 27-October 15 (19 days)</td>
<td>Strike declared illegal by IBOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>IBPAW Local 320 at Homer Laughlin</td>
<td>April 15-19 (4 days) and November 1-8 (8 days)</td>
<td>Both strikes declared illegal by IBPAW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>USWA Local 3125 at Shenango China</td>
<td>March 1-April 4 (35 days)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Workers involved</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>IBPAW Local 381 at Syracuse China</td>
<td>April 3-May 1 (28 days)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>All IBPAW generalware locals</td>
<td>November 15-January 8, 1977 (54 days)</td>
<td>Final industry-wide strike called by IBPAW; does not affect chinaware plants (like Onondaga)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>USWA Local 3125 at Shenango China</td>
<td>March 2-April 24 (54 days)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>IBPAW Local 381 at Syracuse China</td>
<td>April 1-May 1 (30 days)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>USWA Local 3125 at Shenango China</td>
<td>March 1-27 (27 days)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>GMP Local 419 at Homer Laughlin</td>
<td>November 16-January 13 (58 days)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>GMP Local 381 at Syracuse China</td>
<td>April 1-May 6 (36 days)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: list only contains stoppages of three days or more, it does not list the numerous times that workers walked out for a day or two in wildcat disputes (these strikes were always considered illegal by their respective unions). It also does not list the several stoppages and strikes that occurred before the start of unionization in the East Liverpool area in 1882 or strikes that were exclusive to the Trenton area or other areas beyond the vicinity of the three principal potteries of this study.
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