

FLIPPING THE PLATE: CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF THE SHENANGO CHINA
COMPANY, 1945-1991

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will explore the years of decline of the Shenango China pottery plant in New Castle, Pennsylvania. After three decades of rotating ownership the plant was sold to its largest competitor Syracuse China in 1988 and shut down three years later. Throughout this thesis I will examine the waning years of the company through the methodological lens of the paradox between the “American Dream” of prosperity and the reality of failure as experienced by the company’s management, its public image, its employees, and the community at large. Shenango China was motivated by a desire to succeed even in the face of losing its autonomy in the late 1950s, and its impending closure by the late 1980s. During this time it used its corporate, public, and employee influence to stave off both the image and reality of failure. This thesis will examine the variety of ways – design innovations, product improvement, public marketing strategies, advertising, and facility renovations – in which Shenango defined itself in light of the reality of its decline between 1959 and 1988 and attempted to create its own definition for its past success, ignore its decline, and deny its failure. Shenango tried in vain to hold onto the “American Dream,” the belief in the ability for any man (or in this case business) to achieve their goals of success through hard work and ingenuity. But buyouts and the plant’s eventual shutdown altered the image of the company to one of disappointment as their hard work did not pay off as promised. As such, its efforts to hold

on outline the historical paradox between success and failure and its effect on business, employees, and the larger communities.

The goal of my research is to analyze the efforts by the company to stave off failure and how the fear of such influenced the thoughts and actions of the management and the employees. I will address questions such as: how did the company maintain a sense of normalcy and even growth even as it was being sold to its strongest competitors? How did Shenango manipulate its public image through product exhibitions and advertising show the company as prosperous through displays of luxury and modernity? In what ways did Shenango China appeal to its workers and the city of New Castle in order to keep their faith in the company? How did the attitudes of employees and the community change when the plant finally failed? Finally, how does the legacy of Shenango's failure fit into the overall economic decline and legacy of deindustrialization in the New Castle area and the greater Rustbelt Midwest?

The subject of Shenango China's closure is intriguing for several reasons. As a historian interested in both social and business history, studying the effects of Shenango's desire not to fail and its eventual shutdown is a unique opportunity for untouched primary research. The company has not been studied in comparison to other china-producing areas such as Trenton, New Jersey, East Liverpool, Ohio, and Syracuse, New York and therefore offers a story that has not been explored. The company left a wealth of available sources, including entire boxes of Shenango's records located in the Lawrence County Historical Society. Those records provide a bountiful company archive consisting of internal memos, managerial meeting notes, and company bookkeeping untouched since

the closure in 1991 as well as a number of employee newsletters, handbooks, and advertising.

On a more personal level, I am interested in investigating the decline of Shenango China because several members of my family either worked for or had retired from Shenango China. When the plant announced the shutdown, it did not simply mean massive job loss, for even as a young child, I understood that people I loved no longer would go to work at the pottery. Later I better understood the financial hardship this caused as I watched these same loved ones worry about pensions and look for jobs. By exploring the effect of the company's failure, I am exploring the complicated and more global problem of deindustrialization and its effects, and answering questions that remain deeply personal precisely because of their impact at a local level.

The closure of Shenango China in 1991 profoundly changed the city of New Castle and the greater Shenango Valley. Its closure in tandem with the shutdown of Rockwell International and several steel mills in the New Castle and especially Youngstown, Ohio area, devastated the area and affected nearly one third of the labor force. Unemployment spiraled to a peak of 12.2% in Lawrence County (where New Castle is located) by February 1992, just as Shenango's final remaining employees lost their jobs.¹ The New Castle area has yet to recover from these closings. Its population

¹ Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, *Not Seasonally Adjusted Labor Force, Employment and Unemployment Data in Lawrence County*, accessed online October 2009, <<http://www.paworkstats.state.pa.us/analyzer/qsllabforcedata.asp?geo=4204000073&origgeo=&tableused=LABFORCE&cat=LAB&session=LABFORCE&subsession=99&rollgeo=&sgltime=0&time=20100303:19920312:19920311:19920310:19920309:19920308:19920307:19920306:19920305:19920304:19920303:19920302:19920301:19910312:19910311:19910310:19910309:19910308:19910307:19910306:19910305:19>>

continues to drop: Lawrence County's numbers have shrunk from 105,120 in 1950 to 90,160 in 2010 and the city of New Castle has fallen from 28,334 persons in 1990 (just before Shenango China closed) to 24,412 today.² Many remaining residents get by through minimum-wage jobs or reliance on the public welfare system as the area shifted from a production to a service economy (table 1).

Year	# of workers in service occupations	% of total	# of workers in sales occupations	% of total	# of workers in manufacturing	% of total
1990	1,490	15.0%	1,135	11.5%	2,042	20.6%
2000	1,852	18.7%	2,954	29.8%	1,427	14.4%
2006-2008	2,151	22.1%	2,757	28.4%	1,192	12.3%

Table 1. Economic characteristics: New Castle, Pennsylvania. Data from U.S. Census Summary File 3 (1990 and 2000) and from the American Community Survey 3-Year estimates (2006-2008).

Yet these issues were not exclusive to the New Castle area but are symptomatic of larger trends. The beginning of the 21st century has been marked by a continued hardship in many old industrial towns that lost their manufacturing plants in the previous decades and follow the cycle of unemployment, underemployment, and a general downturn in the local economies and worker morale. The American midwest continues to reconfigure their positions in the economy and work to deal with these problems. The most recent economic crisis has brought to the forefront the areas still struggling from the closures of the 1970s and 1980s in even tougher times. These events have opened the field of

910304:19910303:19910302:19910301&multiselect=&selectall=&adjusted=0&areaname=Lawrence+County&rndtotal=0>.

² U.S. Decennial Census, *Pennsylvania Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990*, by Richard L. Forstall, Bureau of the Census (Washington, D.C.: Population Division, 1995). And John K. Manna, "Census Estimate: County Loses More than 4,000 People," *New Castle News*, May 8, 2010.

business history to a wealth of new topics to explore and the analytical lens of “failure” will prove to be an important contributor in explaining the history of companies in uncertain times and how they dealt with the realization that not everyone can achieve the unbridled success promised by the American Dream. The shifting economic reality of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries makes the need for an investigation of failure and ways to prevent failure not only useful but necessary.

The failure of Shenango China can best be understood within the historiography of deindustrialization, the process by which manufacturing industries decline until their eventual closure. The seminal work for the field came in 1982 with Barry Bluestone and Bennet Hanson’s *The Deindustrialization of America*. The authors define the term as “a widespread, systematic dis-investment in the nation’s basic productive capacity” where capital shifts from one plant to another or by a physical relocation of a factory, or by shutdowns.³ The worldwide economic problems coupled with poor production decisions often made reinvestment and therefore plant closure an attractive idea, causing massive waves of unemployment that profoundly affected the community.

For twenty years, Bluestone and Bennet’s work defined the field of deindustrialization as a primarily economic phenomenon. Recently, some historians have begun to look beyond why manufacturing declined and focused on how it affected those areas. In *De-Industrialization: Social, Cultural, and Political Aspects*, Bert Altena and Marcel van der Linden argue that little attention has been paid to the social, cultural, and

³ Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry*, (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 6-7.

political aspects of deindustrialization and social historians are only just beginning to explore. They suggest the three elements of interest to historians: social consequences to families, the role of politics in deindustrialization, and the effects on area as a whole. They also argue that deindustrialization must be looked upon as a global phenomenon, as economic shutdowns affect the entire world.⁴ Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott expand on the themes of social consequence and view plant shutdowns *not* as singular events, but as processes that change the pattern of local employment and affect the entire social fabric of a community.⁵

Focusing on the community marks some of the newer work done in the field of deindustrialization. Sherry Linkon and John Russo made a significant contribution to this historiography in *Steeltown, U.S.A.*, their study of deindustrialization in its “poster child,” Youngstown, Ohio. They explore how the Youngstown area (which is a mere twenty miles from New Castle and Shenango China) copes and struggles with the memory of their industrial past and the harsh reality of their future. They saw industrial labor not only as a job but as a purpose connecting workers in Youngstown’s steel mills to their society as a whole and constituting a distinct part of their identity. When the mills closed, that identity came into question and needed to be resolved, a process that Linkon and Russo feel comes through memory and acceptance.⁶ Steven J. High has also done

⁴ Bert Altena and Marcel van der Linden, *De-Industrialization: Social, Cultural, and Political Aspects*, International Review of Social History, vol. 10 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-3.

⁵ Jefferson R. Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 2-7.

significant work on deindustrialization and the community. In an approach that encompasses the American and Canadian Rust Belts, High's 2003 book *Industrial Sunset* traces and compares industrial transformation by examining the history and politics of plant closings combined with the responses of workers. He reads deindustrialization in a cultural and anthropological context in order to explain the myths of community and nation (the notion that community is bound by place, people, and occupation). He expands on the concept of community in his 2007 work *Corporate Wasteland* by describing deindustrialization as a secular ritual involving the "displacement of industry and of industrial workers to the cultural periphery." High's goal then becomes the examination of such displacement through photography, poetry, song, and especially oral history to see how those moved to the margins cope with their situations.⁷

Going hand in hand with deindustrialization is the emerging historical field of "failure." For the first time, economic and social historians have begun to examine how men and women as well as companies that do not meet with the definition of success deal with the effects produced by their failure. An early view of failure comes from Mark Hager and others in "Tales from the Grave." This study consisted of a survey involving several organizations which had failed to see the reasons why. In Hager's definition, an organization can be considered dead when it closes down operations, or when it loses its

⁶ Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown, Culture America*, edited by Karal Ann Marling and Erika Doss, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 2-3.

⁷ Steven J. High, *Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America's Rust Belt: 1969-1984*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 4-10 and Steven J. High and David Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), 25.

corporate identity/capacity to govern itself (an important component for a company such as Shenango China that lost its autonomy yet continued operations for several decades). When weighing external factors beyond organizations' control such as ecology/environment, market, resources, and positive outlook in face of dangers, the study found that in most instances organizations that are older and larger tend to weather failure much better than a young and inexperienced firm.⁸ However, Hager's study begs the question of long-established industries such as U.S. Steel and in the case of this thesis, Shenango China, which ultimately closed despite decades-long existences.⁹

A more complex examination of how failure is a part of the American experience, albeit connected to individuals not businesses, comes from Scott A. Sandage's *Born Losers*. Sandage argues that the American promise that everyone will be a success, makes low ambition a major character flaw and failure "the most damning incarnation of the connection between achievement and personal identity." Despite this, failure is almost impossible to avoid for most individuals and companies: the U.S Census Bureau's Statistics of U.S. Businesses show that on average, nearly 700,000 business establishments close each year.¹⁰ The trials of businessmen especially affect economics, politics and culture. This paradox necessitates acknowledgement of the economy in

⁸ Mark Hager, et al, "Tales from the Grave: Organizations' Accounts of their Own Decline," in, *When Things Go Wrong: Organizational Failures and Breakdowns*, ed. Helmut Anheier (Thousand Oaks, London, and New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1999), 52-62.

⁹ While it is true that Shenango was in business for ninety years, it is also true that the firms involved in its closure were actually older: Syracuse was founded in 1871 and Pfaltzgraff in 1889. Hager's study does not account for old established firms being bought out by even older ones.

¹⁰ Statistics of U.S. Businesses, *Employment Change Tabulations, 1997-1998, 2005-2006*, (Washington, D.C., Bureau of the Census), 2009, <<http://www.census.gov/econ/susb/index.html>>.

addition to the idea of ambition as a whole as at least partially responsible for failure. The American pottery industry was losing business to imports as early as the 1950s and the problem magnified as trade with Asian countries grew despite increased ambition and marketing tactics on the part of American firms such as Shenango. Sandage also notes cases of personal ambition could be seen as a classic American trait, best described in the capitalist ethos as a fear of failure which could drive men (and presumably business such as Shenango as well) to take steps to save themselves from becoming yet another of the overwhelmingly large amount of doomed management and doomed industries.¹¹

While investigations of deindustrialization and failure on both a business and personal level have been conducted in a variety of industries including steel, automotive, coal mining, and rubber, a major study of commercial American china manufacturing is still needed. In the past several decades, the china and pottery industries in the United States confronted a sharp decline in sales that rivals other earth-based materials industries. Employment in the industry has dropped substantially in the past several decades (table 2). In fact, among the major china companies who dominated the industry in the previous two centuries, nearly all have closed or succumbed to foreign buyouts that move the manufacturing overseas for a cheaper price. And those smaller firms, still left with their autonomy, face an ongoing struggle to stay open and compete with these cheaper imported goods. This dramatic decline opens up a hole for the study of deindustrialization in the American Rust Belt and its connection to china manufacture, as most were located

¹¹ Scott A. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 2-13.

here due to a need for coal to power the kiln furnaces. This study will break new ground in the scholarship for this often overlooked manufacturing sector, no less significant than the steel, mining, or other industrial closures.

	1958	1967	1977	1987	1997	2007
US firms with 20 or more employees	155	141	147	147	187	87
Pennsylvania firms with 20 or more employees	N/A	N/A	8	11	15	3
Total US employment	25,100	20,800	22,600	17,700	20,548	8,774
Total Pennsylvania employment	N/A	N/A	1500-2999	1250-2499	1,690	250-499

Table 2. Business and employment numbers in the china industry (including fine and earthenware utensils/kitchen products and miscellaneous non-plumbing and non-electrical pottery goods which), a fifty year trend from the US Economic Census 1967-2007. Data for Pennsylvania not available from 1958 or 1967.

In order to fully investigate Shenango China, including the attitude of management, the employees, and what actions each took to deal with failure, I will utilize several related theoretical models. Any labor history begins with Karl Marx's history of materialism -- that economics is the determining factor in all of society. However, Dennis Dworkin argues that an overarching theory such as Marxism is not good enough to explain the motives of businesses or workers in a postmodern world. The industrial proletariat that Marx described has been replaced by a postindustrial labor force that is not self-conscious and lacks solidarity. Workers in the new economy, which consists of flexible systems, decentralization, and increasing discrepancies between skilled and

unskilled service sectors, have led to new forms of inequality and new struggles.

Dworkin concludes by rejecting materialist determinism in favor of flexible and weak class relations (such as organizations, attitudes, etc) based on culture, not economics.¹² In studying a large company such as Shenango China it is appropriate to utilize the modified Marxist view for several reasons. From a materialist perspective, Shenango should have been dictated by the actions of the market. This should have led the company shut down earlier when it was in financial trouble before 1991, yet it continued to be bought out or otherwise bolstered. This is because Marx's critical explanation of capitalism never took into account an interventionist system in which the state would boost the economy or the struggling business would develop ways to survive. The ways the company worked to avoid failure defied the natural cycle of economics, thus leaving workers hanging in a balance of employment that would not allow for their predetermined eventual victory. Dworkin's critique, unlike Marx, also sees class as a form of representation, not an identity. This allows workers to have a voice within the workplace but also to look at their lives as outside of the labor system.¹³ Shenango's employees indeed had an active voice within their workplace and through physical contributions such as product and equipment improvement and ideological contributions in company newsletters, actually aided in prolonging the life of the plant.

If a strictly Marxist view cannot explain the motives of management and employees to avoid the failure of Shenango China, then other theories must be utilized

¹² Dennis Dworkin, *Class Struggles*. History: Concepts, Theories, and Practice, edited by Alun Munslow (Harlow, England, London, and New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 64-78.

¹³ Ibid, 85-95.

which take a more modern postindustrial firm's activity into account. Richard Cyret and James March apply a revised economic theory directed to large firms to explain their actions in terms that encompass the sociological (bureaucracy of an organization), the psychological (efficiency of workers), and the administrative (choices made by management). They begin by looking at an organization's goals and objectives. These are created and evoked by problems that arise and change as new participants enter and old ones leave the organization. A problem with many firms' goals, which can be seen in Shenango's day-to-day struggles, is the focus on short-term relations between their payments and outside demands. In doing this, firms do not always aim for the maximum balance between payments and resources – this is called organizational slack and can be a major reason for the failure of many companies.¹⁴ In their rotating succession of owners, Shenango China rarely looked beyond a five year window, and, while improvements and even expansions were planned, they were rarely completed as progress would be halted with another takeover.

Cyret and March break down their theory for a firm's behavior into four parts. The first is the quasi-resolution of conflict: organizations have conflicting goals and as a result problems are subdivided so that an individual only deals with a limited set of problems at different times. Another aspect of behavior is the principle of uncertainty avoidance: organizations are always faced with uncertainty but try to focus on short-term rather than long-term goals, thereby treating their environment as something that can be

¹⁴ Richard M. Cyret, and James G. March, *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*, Prentice-Hall International Series in Management, edited by Herbert A. Simon (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), 11-20, 36.

controlled and predicted. The behavior of Shenango's management can clearly be seen as a means of controlling a difficult environment, as they tended to look no further than one-year goals for sales and only occasionally mentioned long-term issues for the company such as the problem of imports. The third part of firm behavior is the problemistic search: firms will seek out solutions for problems until they are solved either by finding something that satisfies their goals or by changing the goals themselves. The final part is organizational learning: firms will adapt their behavior to their surroundings over time.¹⁵ The last two parts of Cyret and March's theory work well to explain Shenango's behavior. As part of their fight to stave off failure the company changed their goals to solve the problem of declining sales (an example being their dropping of the Castleton fine china line as it lost money and their temporary embrace of imported ware) and also their adaptation of product design and advertising to satisfy new owners.

Despite Shenango behaving in line with Cyret and March's model, the company could not avoid decline and ultimately failed. This can be explained in part by Albert Hirschman, whose theory expands on Cyret and March, to explain how a firm's behavior sometimes is not enough to keep away failure. He argues that failure is a real possibility (even if an accidental one), but little attention has been paid to lapses of economic actors. This is because a company is assumed to be rational, and it is not always necessary for those actors to recover because another one will always replace them. Hirschman believes that rationality cannot be assumed and that the performance of a firm is assumed to always be subject to failure to the point that it cannot return to its previous state. This

¹⁵ Cyret and March, 117-123.

failure is measured in two customer responses: exit (customers stop buying products or members leave organization) and voice (customers vocally express dissatisfaction to the management). Building off of Cyret and March's idea of organizational slack, he argues that organizations may falter due to a "failure of nerve" where a firm is not totally concerned with the maximum profit but only a level to get by.¹⁶ As noted previously, Shenango often could not be concerned with maximum profit when they had to worry about satisfying new owners' needs and subsidiaries or when they lost control almost completely.

Hirschman continues by arguing that a competitive market does not allow for firms suffering multiple lapses of the kind suffered by Shenango. Eventually, the troubles of the company lead to an inevitable decline in the quality of goods produced. Customers then react by either exiting their support of the organization or voicing their displeasure or by a combination of the two. In a few cases, customer loyalty to the company will dictate their actions. Loyalty makes exit less likely and makes use of voice more likely since dedicated customers have more influence with the firm and stand a better chance of forcing improvement.¹⁷

While Hirschman's theory describes the actions typically taken by customers as a company fails, it only takes us so far in explaining Shenango's decline. Hirschman uses an autonomous firm, not one under the control of another parent organization. The domination of Shenango China, the actions of both the controlling company and the

¹⁶ Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970), 1-11.

¹⁷ Ibid, 30-38, 77-79.

efforts of its subordinate, can be explained in the theoretical framework of power. Power in relation to economics is discussed by John Kenneth Galbraith in terms of imposition of will. In a modern industrial society, power and sources of subordination are subject to rapid change but are generally exercised in one of three methods: condign (imposing an unpleasant alternative to subordinate), compensatory (winning submission by means of reward), and conditioned (changing beliefs to accommodate submission).¹⁸

Over the years, outside ownership exposed Shenango to all three means of subordination. The Sobiloff Brothers used condign power to purchase Shenango at a time when the alternative was shutting down in 1959 to settle a lawsuit. International Pipe and Ceramics rewarded Shenango with plant expansion as a condition of their ownership, and Syracuse put on an act of changing their status from main competitor to partner in order to complete their final purchase of the plant. Galbraith proposes that the purposes for gaining power are often carefully hidden but often involve the exercise of power itself: this would certainly be true of Syracuse China who never really had much intention of keeping their competitor as a partner but simply wanted to eliminate Shenango, thereby making themselves more powerful within a shrinking china market. In this way, Syracuse fulfilled Galbraith's final point on power: that organizations use power to escape the limiting tendencies of the market but at the same time a greater choice of consumer goods keeps organizations from becoming too powerful or from being deceptive in their

¹⁸ John Kenneth Galbraith, "Power and Organization," in *Power*, ed. Steven Lukes, Readings in Social and Political Theory, edited by William Connolly and Steven Lukes (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 213-14.

advertising.¹⁹ By purchasing its competition and gaining control over the choices of consumer goods, they were able to manipulate that power and close Shenango for good.

Talcott Parsons discusses power within a social system, but his theory can also be applied to the world of business and Shenango. Power, he argues, is a *means* of acquiring control of factors, not as a factor itself. Therefore, power is a circulating medium similar to money, and like currency, it becomes a symbolic means of exchange, a universally understood mode of communication, one capable of securing compliance for the owner. As a symbol, power has to be legitimized in order to be a medium of mobilizing resources, by making compliance optional but in the best interests for those lower in the hierarchical system.²⁰ This compliance was often used by the various owners of Shenango to create a kind of hegemony over Shenango's management, its employees, and the city of New Castle. It encouraged the ways that Shenango tried to ward off failure by making the plant's very existence the best interest scenario for all.

Because Parsons saw power as circulating, the comparison to money led him to grapple with the "zero-sum" problem-it implies a finite amount that once one party has possession of, the other loses out. He gets around this sticking point by arguing that power controls a circular flow of polity that *ideally* balances input and output even though changes of obligation or extraordinary circumstances can disrupt that balance,

¹⁹ Galbraith, 222-23.

²⁰ Talcott Parsons, "Power and the Social System," in *Power*, ed. Steven Lukes, Readings in Social and Political Theory, edited by William Connolly and Steven Lukes (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 98-109.

leaving power to be once again one-sided and problematic.²¹ Michel Foucault proposes an alternative to Parson's dilemma by suggesting that power is not only a symbol but a discourse linked to truth. Because it is a discourse, Foucault argues that power is in fact everywhere:

Power must be analyzed as something that circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power.²²

Since medieval times royal power has been the focus of legal thought; and the theory of right was used by rulers to legitimize/abuse power and used as a reaction by subjects to eliminate domination by anyone other than the king. Foucault implies that abusing the balance of power led to domination, or an uneven shift in one direction since power circulated to all. He extends this idea into the modern era to expose the ways in which domination continues in the name of right throughout all of society.²³ Syracuse China, this thesis will show, practiced domination in the name of the consumers' rights by claiming the purchase of Shenango was in the best interest of both companies' customers. The rights of the consumer allowed for the domination of Shenango China.

Foucault continues by suggesting that the easiest places to look for the effects of where and how subjects are dominated is at the local or regional margins and extremities

²¹ Parsons, 126-135.

²² Michel Foucault, "Lecture: 14 January 1976," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 98.

²³ Ibid, 93-96.

where power becomes most dissipated and least legal.²⁴ In the case of Shenango, this can be clearly seen in some of their advertising. Advertisements allow companies to be either championed or neglected in ways that it could not be done otherwise, especially in the eyes of its hometown. Advertising in the *New Castle News* by the company's various owners could either play up the company's dependence on the city (thereby making the company subordinate to its workers) or could use the newspaper to challenge or even coerce striking workers to return to the plant for the greater sake of themselves and all of the New Castle area. This represents the evolution from the royal sovereign-subject type of domination to a non-sovereign power relationship in which the community becomes the constituent of the company through industrial capitalism. In this relationship, Foucault argues that the large firm acts as the sovereign and subjugates through discipline to achieve time or labor from a subordinate (which in the case could either be workers or a weaker firm such as Shenango).²⁵

Foucault concludes his argument by arguing that knowledge is the antidote for outdated forms of domination such as the sovereign-subject and the more recent industrial firm-workers/weaker firms. Knowledge is naturally linked to identity and memory which are both important to understanding the effects of Shenango's failure. Knowledge contributes within a social group to form a collective memory according to Maurice Halbwachs. Facts of history are used as framework to help fit our memories and

²⁴ Foucault, 97.

²⁵ Ibid, 103-106.

give them meaning within the parameters of our social surroundings.²⁶ The employees at Shenango China formed a social group through their shared employment. Through the use of interviews and oral history testimonies, I will connect the memories of the plant's closing to form a collective narrative of what happened.

Halbwachs, however, notes that many collective memories are “reconstructed,” meaning they may not be factual. The social group sometimes bolsters certain remembrances of their members and often emotion can affect a collective memory of a traumatic event. But collective memory can still be useful in studying Shenango, as oral history opens the door for the employees to share how they felt and reacted to certain events instead of just telling what happened. Halbwachs supports this by saying that collective memory and formal history are not the same. Formal history selects the facts and memories that are deemed important to remember while social groups hold onto all memories of their members as a means of showing their unchanging nature.²⁷ This is why, despite Halbwach's assertion that history is not needed as long as memory persists, that collecting the memories of Shenango's workers is important. The shared unique experience of living through the company's failure and their firsthand feelings are as important as the selected facts. Once all of the employees have passed away (as a great many already have), the time is right to compose history according to Halbwachs, but the actual experience will be gone.

²⁶ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York, et al: Harper Colophon Books (Harper & Row Publishers), 1950), 54-58.

²⁷ Ibid, 78-80.

A social grouping such as employees not only provide the basis for collective memories, they also serve to shape identity. Richard Jenkins defines a social identity as “ways in which individuals and collectives are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities.”²⁸ His theory on the construction of the individual and on social consciousness depends on the relation between the two. Identity is necessary for social life but society also shapes selfhood. Therefore, identity is an internal-external dialectic: what people think about us is just as important as what we think about ourselves (social identity is never unilateral).²⁹ The balance of internal and external correlates to how Shenango China operated in its declining years. The company worked to construct an internal identity through product improvement and based on progress and modernity even as management was losing control. This corresponds to the outer society of employees and the city that also worked to fashion an idea of stability for the company and themselves.

Jenkins goes on to argue that an important context in which identification becomes consequential comes through the institution. An institution that is task-oriented becomes an organization which can produce and reproduce identities within a power-based relationship through means such as the ones discussed by Galbraith. Institutions are useful ways to see how individual and collective identities coincide – they order social life, provide predictability, and permit for lower levels of attention than required by outside world. The structure of Shenango China’s plant provided that institutional

²⁸ Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, Key Ideas Series, edited by Peter Hamilton (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 4.

²⁹ Ibid, 19-24.

identity to its workers by promoting their stability and staying power through company newsletters and positive advertising centered around New Castle. This structured form of identity is useful then in providing an ideology of community, symbolization of identity, comradeship and support, and even the creation of opportunity (though by the later years this last point was downplayed to Shenango). Finally, Jenkins concludes that the external definitions of identity such as those through institutions become part of self-identification. Social identity then becomes a foundation for understanding the past, which collectively then becomes history.³⁰

The history of Shenango China in its declining years is a complicated one. The motives and behavior of the company's management, its workers, the community around it, and its rotating outside owners all collide in ways to stave off the inevitable future of the company. At times their actions are guided by economics, while other times by the acquisition or exercise of power. When the plant appeared to be on its final legs both company and workers searched for their identity and later used their memories of those times to form a history of what happened and how they coped. Above all, these thoughts and actions were guided by a desire to avoid the stigma of failure, as Shenango China knew how the loss of this long-standing company would affect not only those on its employment rolls, but the entire New Castle area for years to come.

The first chapter will briefly outline the company's history and set up the parameters for potential failure. I will utilize the official timeline issued by Shenango as well as company newsletters and articles in the *New Castle News* to trace the plant's rise

³⁰ Jenkins, 24-28, 127-149.

and decline. Chapter two will begin to outline the efforts taken by management to bolster the company's position and to ward off the potential for loss through plans for product and facility improvement as well as records of marketing campaigns to bolster sales. Chapter three shifts the view from management to how the company presented to the public through the imagery and language offered in advertising to convince them of the company's staying power in the face of decline. The final chapter looks at the reactions of Shenango's employees as the company declined and their reactions to the shutdown. The thesis will conclude with a brief exploration of how Shenango's shutdown continues to impact the New Castle area to this day. Shenango China was motivated by a desire to succeed and used its corporate strategies and improvements, its public imagery, and its employee influence to stave off both the image and reality of failure by creating its own definition for its past success, ignoring its decline, and denying its collapse. Its efforts outline the historical paradox between success and failure and its effect on business, employees, and the larger communities across the United States.

CHAPTER I

Identity and Reality: The History of Shenango China

Shenango China began as two separate plants at the turn of the twentieth century in New Castle, Pennsylvania. The first, established in September of 1901, was the New Castle Pottery located across 91,000 square feet in a former shovel plant along the banks of the Shenango River. The pottery was the first of its kind in the region and relied on importing skilled workers from china producing areas such as East Liverpool, Ohio and Trenton, New Jersey to supplement the estimated 400 local employees. The New Castle Pottery specialized in supplying “queensware” (cream-colored earthenware china) to the growing hotel industry in both undecorated and decorated styles with hopes to later move into the fine china market.³¹

Less than one month after the New Castle Pottery planned to open, a new firm, Shenango China, announced its intentions to begin operations in New Castle in early 1902. Also situated along the river on Grant Street and just north of the New Castle Pottery plant, Shenango China aimed its sights on durable ware for the general home market. The presence of two companies within a few hundred yards of one another producing similar products for commercial and home use did not seem to concern the

³¹ “New Castle’s Pottery,” *New Castle News (NCN)*, July 3, 1901, and “Pottery Will Start,” *NCN*, August 28, 1901.

local press. The *New Castle News* lauded both firms, reasoning that the pottery business could not be affected by problems of overproduction as the product “does not last forever. It must be continually replaced in every household and there is always a demand for pottery wares.”³²

Despite the *New Castle News* assuring that two pottery plants each could be successful in the city, both the New Castle Pottery and Shenango China nevertheless quickly found themselves in financial trouble. New Castle Pottery did not see returns to match the money invested in the firm and in 1904 fell into receivership with the intent of not restarting the business. By 1905, Shenango China filed for bankruptcy and was bought out by its bondholders after paying workers extraordinary wages for doing little to no actual production. The bondholders reinvested in the company and reopened to initial success but by 1908 the plant once again was broke. A new group of investors took over the company led by a hardware store owner named James M. Smith, Sr. Even though Smith had no experience with the pottery industry, he was a businessman who enforced stricter working conditions and turned the company around, assuming the role of President. He then purchased the New Castle Pottery building and moved the now-named Shenango Pottery into this facility.³³

Under Smith’s leadership, Shenango Pottery prospered and grew. He invested in plant expansions, adding twelve new kilns in 1913-1914. By 1927, it was the largest

³² “Another Pottery to be Built Here,” *NCN*, July 31, 1901.

³³ Aaron L. Hazen, *20th Century History of New Castle and Lawrence County, Pennsylvania and Representative Citizens*, (Chicago: Richmond-Arnold Publishing Company, 1908), 132-133, “Bought by Bondholders,” *NCN*, September 6, 1905, and Shenango China, Inc., *History of Shenango China* (New Castle, PA: Shenango China, Inc., 1985), 1.

producer of hotel and restaurant china in the country, employing 1500 men and women, mostly from the town of New Castle. That year the plant expanded into two additional buildings, added a continuous fire kiln system and employed a tunnel kiln, a new innovation in pottery making which produced far stronger ware in a shorter amount of time.³⁴ Shenango's customers stretched across the globe, from American Legion and railroads across America, to World War I hospitals in France. Shenango even supplied the four main concessions of the Century of Progress exhibit at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair.³⁵

While Smith kept the focus of the plant on hotelware through the 1910s and 1920s, he hoped to develop a fine china line in the future and ran many trials to develop vitrified (glazed non-porous) ware for the home.³⁶ When the Great Depression hit, Smith shelved the fine china plans until 1936. That year, William Haviland of the Theodore Haviland pottery in France, one of the world leaders in the manufacture of fine china approached Smith. Haviland traveled to America in search of a manufacturer for the Theodore Haviland products as the impending war was making export to the United States prohibitively expensive. Haviland was so impressed with the Shenango plant that

³⁴ *History of Shenango China*, 1 and "To Enlarge Pottery to Double Capacity of Plant," *NCN*, May 10, 1927.

³⁵ "Wonderful Dinnerware is Being Manufactured in New Castle Pottery," *NCN*, December 2, 1921, "Shenango Pottery Serves in France," *NCN*, January 6, 1919, and "Chicago World's Fair Will Use Shenango Pottery Extensively," *NCN*, April 20, 1933.

³⁶ *History of Shenango China*, 1 and Harold Donaldson Eberlein and Rodger Wearne Ramdell, *The Practical Book of Chinaware*, rev. ed., (New York: J.P. Lippincott Co., 1948), 305. The authors note that Smith had "a drawerful [sic] of plans" for a fine china product he was continually improving in hopes to manufacture.

he and Smith made an agreement by handshake for the pottery to produce Theodore Haviland china in America for the next twenty-two years (figure 1).³⁷



Figure 1: A plate for Haviland China produced at Shenango

Haviland was not the only foray Shenango Pottery would take into the fine dinnerware market. In 1939 Smith perfected his own vitrified china base body, and in that same year met with Louis E. Hellmann of the Rosenthal China Company based in Germany. Hellmann hoped to find a manufacturer to produce patterns in his fine china shapes for the American market during the coming European conflict. The two men reached a production agreement with Smith investing \$25,000 from Shenango Pottery to form the Castleton China subsidiary company with corporate offices run by Hellmann in New York and production in New Castle. Castleton would prove to be a successful

³⁷ "Shenango Pottery – 1909," *NCN*, Pioneer Week special supplement, March 30, 1940 and *History of Shenango China*, 2.

product for many years and even attracted artist Eva Zeisel, an expatriate Hungarian artist to design the “Museum” shape in 1941, the first mass-market free form china in the United States in conjunction with the Museum of Modern Art.³⁸

Soon after forming Castleton, America was moving toward World War II and like many manufacturing industries Shenango was asked to give its services toward the forthcoming war effort. This was beneficial, as historian Samuel Rosenberg notes, because the transformation from peacetime to wartime finally boosted production in a United States economy still struggling from the Great Depression and for the first time in nearly a decade increased corporate profits. All this was spurred on by a government purchase of goods totaling \$269.7 billion a year by 1944.³⁹ Government spending was not only on items such as artillery and ammunition, but also on durable goods to supply their soldiers’ basic needs such as dining. This provided an opportunity for china companies such as Shenango to secure millions of dollars in contracts to provide dinnerware for the millions of men in the armed forces. As early as February 1941, the Navy ordered \$67,228 worth of china dinnerware from Shenango for their ships’ mess halls in the winter of 1941 and within a few months’ time, Shenango’s combined contracts for the Navy and Army totaled over one million dollars, forcing Smith to build two new decorating warehouses to store the enormous amount of wares. By 1942,

³⁸ *History of Shenango China*, 2, and Eberlein and Ramdell, 305.

³⁹ Samuel Rosenberg, *American Economic Development Since 1945*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 19, 21, 33.

Shenango had contracts totaling over two million dollars in contracts for dinnerware for mess halls, ships, and hospitals across England and throughout the Pacific.⁴⁰

Following the end of World War II, the United States saw a period of economic prosperity and the growth of the consumer market. Historian Lizabeth Cohen describes this movement as a carefully planned return to capitalism in the face of a Communist threat. “Mass consumption in postwar America would not be a personal indulgence,” she notes, “but rather a civic responsibility.” Americans were not only encouraged to consume but to constantly buy the newest and best goods as thriftiness was looked down upon as unpatriotic and selfish. This overwhelming rise in spending led to a one of the longest lasting periods of prosperity in American history, a period that lasted for the next twenty-five years.⁴¹

The abundance of postwar prosperity spread to many of the durable goods categories, including the china industry. Global conflict reduced the importation of many manufactured goods which for American potters created a much-needed opening: before World War II they only held a mere 3% of the domestic market. Following the war, American china manufacturers doubled their production from 1945 to 1946 and soon were making two million dozen pieces per year, a tenfold increase from previous levels. American potters were also responsible for setting postwar trends in the industry, most

⁴⁰ “Defense Orders Cover Wide List,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 17, 1941, “Defense Plant Additions to Hire 12,750 in District,” *Pittsburgh Press*, April 23, 1941, and “Industries Supply Services,” *PP*, January 2, 1942. Shenango Pottery was also commissioned to manufacture the raw parts for ceramic landmines to aid the war effort, a move that would later get the company in trouble with its stockholders. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

⁴¹ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, (New York: Vintage Books (A division of Random House), 2003), 116, 113 (quote), 119-121.

notably the introduction of new shapes and designs inspired by modern art.⁴² Shenango Pottery realized this trend even before the war with their “Museum” shape in the Castleton line designed by Eva Zeisel and soon were branching out even further into the world of contemporary art. Hellmann commissioned several modern artists to design exclusively for Castleton China and also acquired pieces from such masters as Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dalí to reproduce on specialized service pieces (figure 2). The Contemporary Artist series served to heighten attention to Castleton around the country, particularly in New York. Local publications in New Castle bragged about how “the Castleton display is described in lavish terms by the New York papers [and] today it ranks as the finest china in the world.”⁴³



Figure 2: Pablo Picasso's *Vin Rose* on a Castleton platter from the Contemporary Artists Collection

⁴² “American Potters Increasing Output,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1946.

⁴³ “Shenango Pottery is Boosted,” *NCN*, November 10, 1942.

During this time Shenango Pottery continued to grow under the leadership of Smith's son James M. Smith, Jr. following his father's retirement in 1948. In 1951, Shenango bought out the remaining stock of Castleton China from Hellmann and moved the corporate office and decorating studio from New York to New Castle. With offices, production, and decorating in one location, Shenango saved the considerable cost of shipping undecorated plates to New York and then onto dealers.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, the company's customer base expanded into high-end clientele including the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York City, the Pennsylvania and the Baltimore & Ohio railroads, and the Republican National Committee. Most impressive was a set of dishes commissioned in 1953 for Haile Selassie, the emperor of Ethiopia. In the early 1950s, Shenango was doing over ten million dollars in business per year from customers around the globe and in 1952 celebrated the manufacture of the half-billionth piece of pottery in a plant which by acreage was the largest in the world.⁴⁵ With this success and as the plant branched out into commercial fine dinnerware, the Board of directors decided that the term "Pottery" no longer represented Shenango's output (the term pottery often referred to non-vitrified and earthenware products). So in 1954 the company name was changed back to its

⁴⁴ *History of Shenango China*, 3 and "Castleton Headquarters Now Located in New Castle," *NCN*, November 22, 1952.

⁴⁵ "Haile Selassie's Dinner Parties Served on Plates Zahneiser Makes in New Castle," *Youngstown Vindicator* (?), date and month unknown, 1953 and "Half-Billionth Piece of China Made by Pottery," *NCN*, September 17, 1952. The article on Selassie was unmarked and comes from the collection of the Lawrence County Historical Society archives.

moniker of 1905, Shenango China, to represent the variety of products coming from the growing plant.⁴⁶

But Shenango's success stood in comparison with its own inner turmoil in the 1950s. Although the American china market increased tenfold since the war, goods from countries such as England, Germany, and Japan still accounted for 5.5 million pieces of imported china sold in the United States. With identical technologies in their factories, these importers had a distinct advantage over American firms such as Shenango: wages. Without a minimum wage, foreign factories could pay their workers as low as sixteen cents per hour for the same job that was done in America for a \$1.51 minimum wage. Local citizens, such as those in the Greater New Castle Association, worried that Shenango would not be able to compete with the cheaper goods. Shenango's management agreed in a report for Congress in which new president George Zahneiser (who took over following the death of Smith Jr. in 1952) called for an extension of the tariff on china imports, especially fine china arguing that Castleton's sales in 1951 were half of 1949 levels due to cheaper goods with which they could not compete (figure 3).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ "Pottery Name Changed to Shenango China," *NCN*, August 23, 1954. The name change can also be considered appropriate as Shenango's earthenware line, Inca Ware, was discontinued around the 1950s in response to a consumer demand for more lightweight ware in restaurants and hotels.

⁴⁷ Greater New Castle Association, "Why Employment at the Shenango Pottery has Dropped," *NCN*, June 18, 1952 and "American China Market Endangered by Japanese," *NCN*, September 18, 1953. Shenango seemed to have no affiliation with the Greater New Castle Association and this report can be assumed to have been filed without the cooperation of the company.

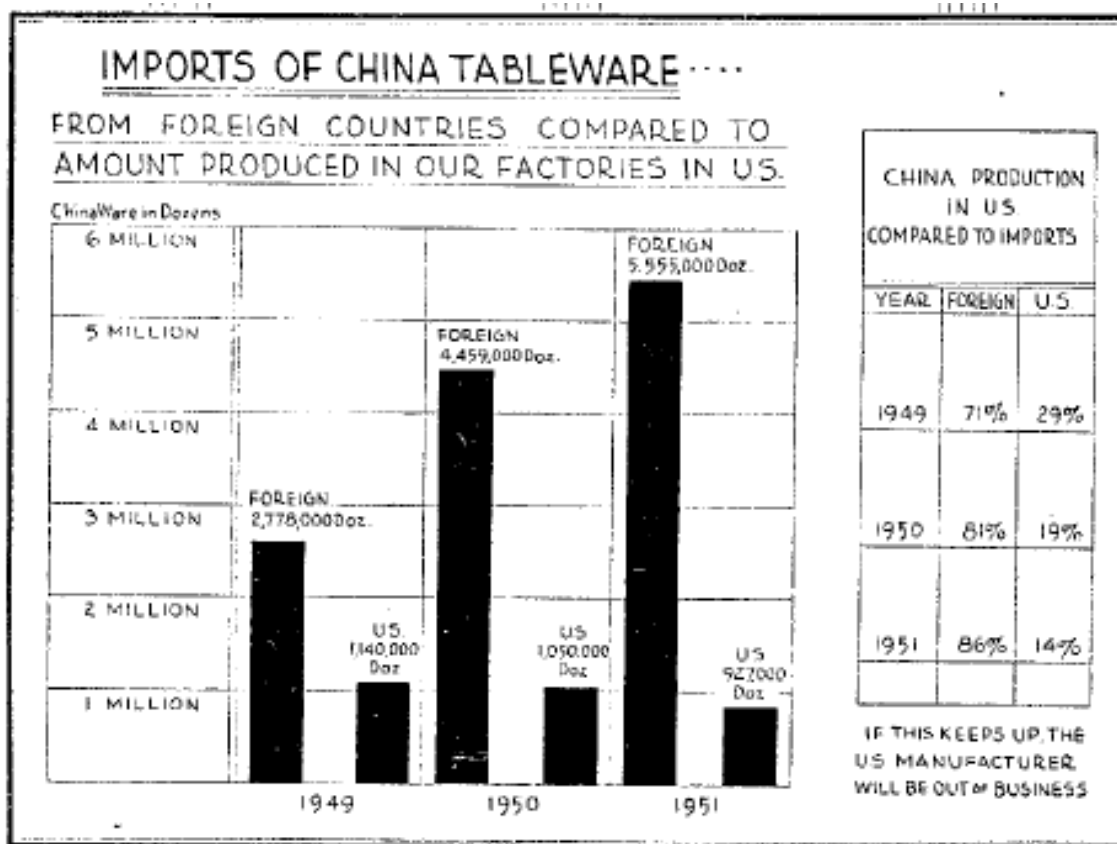


Figure 3: Imports of China Tableware, published in the *New Castle News* by the Greater New Castle Association to illustrate the danger of a revitalized import market to the Shenango Pottery, June 18, 1952.

While the threat of foreign china caused a financial fear, the setbacks caused by two large strikes at Shenango in the 1950s also contributed uncertainty. During World War II, United Steelworkers organized the employees at Shenango and their first strike was staged in 1950 when nearly two thousand walked off the job demanding the company drop a profit-sharing plan in favor of a twelve and a half cent per hour raise. Workers returned after eleven days but a longer 43-day strike broke out three years later

when the bargaining agreement ran out. These labor disputes pushed orders back for several weeks and caused great financial hardship for the company.⁴⁸

Shenango was also rocked by several personal events in the 1950s. In 1952, James M. Smith, Jr. the former president and current Chairman of the Board of Directors died suddenly following a heart attack. Three years later his father James Smith, Sr., the company's founder, also passed away.⁴⁹ The only remaining member of the founding family was Smith Sr.'s daughter Alice Higgins, but in January 1950 she filed a lawsuit which would change Shenango China forever. Her suit against the majority stockholders of Shenango including her brother, James M. Smith, Jr. and George Zahneiser, as well as five other men concerning wartime landmine contracts meant for Shenango Pottery but subcontracted to an outside company formed by the defendants. In 1942 the United States Army began contracting the manufacture of ceramic landmines to Shenango's biggest competitor, the Onondago Pottery (later Syracuse China). Two years later a similar contract was offered to Shenango which Smith Jr. refused without the consultation of minority stockholders. Yet at the same time, he, Zahneiser, and others formed their own company, Castle Engineering, to handle the same landmine contract which Shenango refused. The members of Castle Engineering bid on the contract listing Shenango as the parts supplier as well as the financial liability. With Shenango's name attached to the project Castle won the right to handle three separate landmine orders in 1944. The

⁴⁸ "New Castle Potters Strike," *PPG*, October 2, 1950 and *History of Shenango China*, 3.

⁴⁹ "Pottery Head Dies Thursday," *NCN*, September 5, 1952 and "James M. Smith Died in Home Today," *NCN*, June 6, 1955. Smith Sr. was already completely retired from Shenango when he died. Smith Jr. had stepped down as president of the company a few months before his death, giving the job to his cousin George B. Zahneiser who then also took the position of Chairman upon Smith's death.

ceramic parts for the mines were made at Shenango and then “sold” to Castle through Smith and Zahneiser who, along with the other five men assembled them by hand in a rented skating rink. The total cost put into Castle Engineering only totaled around \$32,200, whereas the mines made a profit of \$316,603 for the group.⁵⁰

The creation of Castle Engineering and the subsequent profits made from the landmine manufacture was completed without the knowledge or consent of the minority stockholders, of which Higgins held the largest share as the daughter of the original plant owner James Smith Sr. She felt cheated because the minority bondholders were not consulted in either the contract presented to Shenango or the appointment of Castle Engineering to handle the project. More importantly, since the work was done outside of Shenango Pottery, the company made no profit and the bondholders like her saw no dividends. Higgins, joined soon after by another stockholder named Harry Barkby, filed suit calling for a complete tallying of all accounts from Castle Engineering, a reimbursement to Shenango Pottery (and subsequently to the bondholders) of all profits made by Castle Engineering, and the return of all salaries and bonuses earned by Smith, Zahneiser, and all Shenango personnel involved in the outside operation.⁵¹ Upon hearing of the suit, representatives from Shenango Pottery counter-sued Higgins for malicious intent but the court dismissed the case as having no basis in fact and ordered the suit to go forward.⁵² The Federal District Court in Pittsburgh began hearing the case on January 3,

⁵⁰ Higgins and Barkby v. Shenango Pottery Co. et al, 256 F.2d 504 (3rd Cir. App. 1958), 506-507.

⁵¹ “Stockholder Sues New Castle Firm,” *PP*, January 6, 1950.

⁵² Higgins v. Shenango Pottery Co. et al, 99 F.Supp. 522 (D.C. Pennsylvania 1951), 524-525.

1955 and rendered a verdict in April 1956. They ruled that the formation of Castle Engineering was a breach of company duty towards Shenango and ordered restitution from the seven men to the company and minority stockholders in the amount of \$316,603 plus interest of six percent for a grand total of \$538,396.⁵³

By the time judgment was issued, Smith Jr. was dead but Zahneiser spoke out on behalf of the defendants in an open letter to Shenango employees. He emphasized that even though the defendants were found to be acting against the goodwill of the company, they committed no actual crime or fraud. He announced that the Board of Directors voted after the trial to keep all the involved persons in their current positions (including himself as Chairman of the Board and company president) and promised that the members of Castle Engineering would appeal the case and that it would not affect the daily operations of Shenango China.⁵⁴ The first appeal came in 1957 to drop the liability of three of the defendants on the grounds that they did not know that Castle Engineering was profiting off Shenango Pottery's reputation. Higgins and Barkby then filed a counter-appeal to restore blame to all Castle members. This court again ruled on the side of the stockholders, agreeing that the "plaintiff's above detailed evidence points to a conflict between the Shenango officers and director defendants' obligation to their company and their self-interest. That evidence indicates those defendants used most every element of Shenango but the hotelware product itself for their own selfish interests." In other words,

⁵³ "Judge Sets New Trial in Pottery Case," *NCN*, October 5, 1956 and Higgins and Barkby v. Shenango Pottery, 279 F.2d 46 (3rd Cir. App. 1960).

⁵⁴ George B. Zahneiser to Shenango employees, May 8, 1956, reprinted as "Zahneiser Letter Discusses Case Against Pottery," *NCN*, May 10, 1956.

the partners knew that Castle Engineering was acting in a way that was exploiting and going against the best interests of Shenango, that knowledge was enough to make them liable as well. The guilty parties were ordered to pay an adjusted restitution of \$181,603 taking into account payments made to the War Contracts Price Adjustment Board.⁵⁵

The following July, four Castle members were once again exonerated of blame and again Higgins with Barbky's estate filed an appeal to restore them. Like the previous appeal, the court sided with Higgins and Barkby. This time, they were more specific in the reasoning why Castle Engineering acted against the best interest of the plant:

Shenango, outstanding in its field, at the time the largest producer of pottery in the world, first refuses to enter into a contract because of the difficulties involved and immediately thereafter, agrees to accept full liability under the same contract, the liability hinging solely on the success or failure of a new, untried firm existing only on paper. It was to this later decision that the trial court found the business judgment of the Board was influenced by the knowledge that three of the Board members were organizers and owners of Castle.⁵⁶

The Appellate Court restored blame to all members of Castle, noting "they cannot be allowed to escape responsibility because they, in effect, say they closed their eyes to the obvious. All are jointly and severely liable with Smith Jr. and Zahneiser." The six remaining members of Castle Engineering along with the estate of James Smith, Jr. were ordered to pay in full the amended amount of \$181,603 to Shenango China and return all salaries and bonuses. The Court also ruled this to be the final appeal of the case.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Higgins and Barkby v. Shenango Pottery Co. et al, 256 F.2d 504 (3rd Cir. App. 1958), 508.

⁵⁶ Higgins and Barkby v. Shenango Pottery Co. et al 279 F.2d 46 (3rd Cir. App. 1960), 52.

⁵⁷ Higgins and Barkby v. Shenango Pottery Co. et al, 279 F.2d 46 (3rd Cir. App 1960), 54-55.

With the members of Castle Engineering found liable, the issue of payment became pressing. Zahneiser settled his own liability with the stockholders through a payment of \$20,000 in 1957 that covered his salary at Castle plus interest. At this time Smith's estate also tried to settle but the court rejected the offer.⁵⁸ To pay for Smith's liability, his estate had no choice but to sell his majority stock options in Shenango China, totaling over ninety percent of the company's stock. These were purchased in 1960 by Bowman and Long, a California company owned by Hyman Sobiloff.⁵⁹ For the first time since the plant's reformation in 1907, Shenango China was owned by an outside company and despite assurances of management remaining the same, the future felt uncertain.

Once Sobiloff completed the purchase of Shenango's stock in 1960, the working capital of the company (including assets, patents and product designs, and trademarks) transferred into a new subsidiary renamed Shenango Ceramics Inc. to help finance other corporate interests of Bowman and Long. Despite worry that the new owner would ignore or even close down its new acquisition, Sobiloff took an interest in furthering Shenango and continuing with the strides made by Smith Sr., Smith Jr., and Zahniser (who was retained as president). In fact, Sobiloff used the subsidiary to diversify Shenango beyond its Castleton line, a move that was both profitable and costly throughout the 1960s.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ "Court Oks Settlement by Zahneiser," *NCN*, May 25, 1957. Settlements by the other five members of Castle are not discussed in any newspapers and are assumed to have been settled privately.

⁵⁹ *History of Shenango China*, 3 and "Pottery Share Sale Revealed," *NCN*, January 26, 1960.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 3-4, and "Shenango China Forms Subsidiary," *NCN*, August 6, 1963.

The first move to expand the pottery's interests was the purchase of Wallace China, a firm located on the West Coast making products similar to Shenango. Shenango operated the plant as a subsidiary for five years but the venture proved to be a disaster as a series of poor business practices and errors in counting inventory cost Shenango nearly three million dollars, forcing the total shutdown of Wallace in 1964.⁶¹ A more successful purchase came that same year when Shenango bought out its local competitor, Mayer China, located in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. Like its own parent company, Shenango allowed for Mayer to run as an independent subsidiary with all management and policies remaining the same.⁶²

Amidst the aftermath of the trial and buyout, the company continued to be seen as an industry leader, especially through its Castleton line. Castleton achieved renowned success from both its modern art series and its everyday line. In the middle of the Higgins suit, Castleton in 1956 received commission to design china for President Eisenhower to use in the White House (figure 4). This was followed by two more sets for the president as well as pieces for the Strategic Air Command and a set of china presented to Senator John F. Kennedy as he stopped in New Castle during his campaign for president in October 1960. Kennedy's successor, Lyndon Johnson, also received a set of Castleton China during his time in the White House.⁶³

⁶¹ "Shenango China Buys New Plant," *NCN*, February 19, 1959, and *History of Shenango China*, 4.

⁶² "Shenango Buys Out Mayer Co.," *NCN*, September 3, 1964.

⁶³ "Shenango China...Created for the Most Discriminating," advertisement from author's personal collection, c. 1960, and "Castleton is Moving into the White House," *NCN*, January 20, 1968.



Figure 4: Plates made for Presidents Eisenhower in 1956 (left) and Johnson in 1968 (right)

Even as Castleton maintained its position as a leader, profits still declined in the face of cheap foreign competition and the weakening economy of the 1960s. The increase in consumption was met with tax cuts under the Kennedy administration according to Rosenberg. These tax cuts for both individuals and businesses spurred on further investment and spending, ballooning the economy even larger than before. However, Rosenberg notes that soon the growth led to stagnation as prices stabilized by the mid 1960s. This same time brought an escalation to the American military presence in Vietnam and the years between 1965 and 1968 saw \$30 billion go towards the war effort. The United States fell into deficit spending while not having a shortage of labor to fill the growing need for more production. The result according to Rosenberg was widespread inflation that did not match an increase in salary for wage workers. Companies in all industries had to raise prices to keep up with their own growing costs and the threats of

cheap foreign competition while still having falling profits as their workers could no longer afford the luxury consumer goods they were encouraged since the 1940s to buy.⁶⁴

Economic instability led to refiguring of marketing in a number of American companies, including Shenango in order to both remain competitive and to cut costs. New strategies were taken to revitalize the Castleton line, starting with the discontinuance of many older patterns and less popular shapes in 1966. To coincide with the lower number of pieces in the new “Symphony” shape, Castleton downsized their remaining items, which sometimes numbered as many as two dozen for certain patterns into the thirteen most used pieces. The organization also cut down on the number of stock patterns and shifted many existing ones into custom orders.⁶⁵ In addition to consolidating the product itself, Castleton also shrank their sales force to only concentrate in major metropolitan areas and eliminate the costly smaller accounts. Most surprisingly of all, the organization approved the creation of a new low-cost line designed to compete with imported china because the new pieces themselves would be made in Japan. This new Independence Ironstone line was still marked with the Castleton name and sold to dealers just as the New Castle-made product accompanied by matching glassware also made in Japan.⁶⁶ Much of the Independence Ironstone ware was sold in Shenango’s new factory outlet, the China Cupboard. The store opened in New Castle in 1967 to sell discontinued,

⁶⁴ Rosenberg, 113-15, 119.

⁶⁵ W.W. Pfeiffer to W.J. Rech, “Discontinuance of Castleton Items,” inter-plant correspondence, November 23, 1966, Lawrence County Historical Society archives, New Castle, Pennsylvania, and Bettie Natcher to W.W. Pfeiffer, “Castleton Line for 1967,” inter-plant correspondence, October 24, 1966, LCHS.

⁶⁶ “Castleton Plans Move to Strengthen Sales,” *NCN*, January 20, 1961.

imperfect, and overruns in the Shenango and Castleton lines as well as the new product and several other small gifts such as candles and glassware.⁶⁷

From 1959 to 1967, Sobiloff spared Shenango China after the buyout and also did his part to continue improvement on the facility. This however, made the company an attractive prospect for even larger corporations. In January 1968, International Pipe and Ceramics (commonly referred to as INTERPACE) purchased the assets of Shenango, along with Castleton China and Mayer China in cash from Sobiloff. INTERPACE looked to expand its position in the fine china field (the corporation already owned the Franciscan China company of California) and to enter the hotel and restaurantware market for the first time. Shenango became an obvious choice as the combined worth of the company exceeded \$15 million, and soon the small local plant became part of a sixty-two conglomerate factory system stretching across the United States and abroad.⁶⁸

The years under INTERPACE saw Shenango's sales move through a series of ups and downs in an uncertain economy. The beginning of 1970 saw Shenango in its seventh year of record sales and its best January sales in company history despite a series of kiln failures at the plant and increased competition for both china manufacturers and restaurant owners.⁶⁹ However, as 1970 continued the company's sales, while good, fell below INTERPACE's goals for the plant. This is not surprising as the 1970s marked an end to a cycle of prosperity which had been growing since the end of World War II

⁶⁷ "Shenango Ceramics Moves into New Lines, Patterns," *NCN*, January 31, 1967.

⁶⁸ "Shenango Ceramics Purchase is Approved," *NCN*, January 26, 1968.

⁶⁹ "Firm Sets Goal," *NCN*, January 27, 1970, and "Industry Down...Tabletops Up!," *Shenango Table Top-ics* company newsletter, February 1970, LCHS.

according to economic historian Ezra Solomon. Around 1973, the U.S. government's economic policy finally caught up with its prosperity. Worldwide inflation led to a dramatic increase in prices of commodities, most notably oil and an increased taxation on many industries. This combination led to an overall slowdown in production as companies struggled to power their equipment in a fuel shortage and pay higher taxes on their goods. As a result, many industries such as Shenango China continued on up-and-down patterns of production through the 1970s, often hitting periods of high sales but then falling below expectations.⁷⁰ One aspect of the company which was not keeping up with sales was the Castleton China line. Despite the prestige of another White House contract in 1968 and the expansion into the sale of imported china and glassware, Castleton was not performing to INTERPACE's hopes. In 1974 all of the everyday china patterns were discontinued and following a special series of presidential reproductions, the specialty pieces ceased production as well.⁷¹

INTERPACE also oversaw Shenango during the two worst labor disputes in company history. In 1974, a 34-day strike commenced over wages and pensions in the midst of an economic recession. Following the dispute employees gained escalating wages, increases in pensions, extra vacation, and expanded benefits for injury or illness. But the strike had repercussions on the plant's employment: the next year, Shenango laid

⁷⁰ Ezra Solomon, *Beyond the Turning Point: The U.S. Economy in the 1980s*, (Stanford, California: Stanford Alumni Association, 1981), 24-30; "Shenango China Aims at Goals Missed in '70," *NCN*, January 26, 1971; and "Shenango China Had Record Year for Sales, Shipments," *NCN*, January 29, 1972.

⁷¹ *History of Shenango China*, 3. The Independence Ironstone line is not mentioned in any company information or advertising after 1971, so the line is assumed to have ceased production around this time.

off 125 workers due to a slumping market and a decline in orders. The company even briefly resorted to a four-day work week to save costs.⁷² The hard feelings on both sides from the 1974 strike were renewed in 1977 when the bargaining agreement once again ran out between Shenango/INTERPACE and United Steelworkers. That February the longest and costliest strike in Shenango's existence began, lasting 77-days. Management resorted to threatening striking employees in an open letter published in the *New Castle News* in which it announced the withdrawal of wage and pension offers and other concessions since "Shenango's ability to retain its customers, assure future business, and offer continuing employment at pre-strike levels is seriously threatened."⁷³

About two weeks after the open letter appeared, the strike ended as Local 3125 voted to approve a new contract with a 40 cent raise, increased vacation time, and a pension boost. Work resumed at the plant but as the letter predicted, Shenango's business was indeed hurt. Despite earning over \$14 million in profits from their china division, the unstable domestic market led INTERPACE to consider putting Shenango and Mayer China up for sale in January 1979. The top interested party in Shenango was the Anchor Hocking Corporation of Lancaster, Ohio who specialized in home and commercial foodservice products such as glassware, plastics, metal kitchenware, and tray service

⁷² "Shenango to Begin 4-Day Work Week," *NCN*, February 19, 1975 and W.W. Pfeiffer to All Production/Maintenance Employees, "Four Day Work Week," memo, February 18, 1975, LCHS. A handwritten note on the Pfeiffer memo says that the four-day work schedule only lasted one week before a return to normal.

⁷³ "Shenango Strike is Over," *NCN*, April 4, 1974 and "An Open Letter to Shenango Employees," *NCN*, April 9, 1977.

products.⁷⁴ Anchor agreed to the purchase of Shenango that spring while Mayer China was purchased in June by a New York businessman.⁷⁵

In late May 1979, Shenango China employees were greeted with the news that as of June 2, Shenango would become a division of the Anchor Hocking Corporation, the company's third owner in twenty years. Shenango was to be operated as its own subsidiary within the Anchor's Household Products Division which produced glassware, chinaware, plastics, drinkware, and ovenware to homes and foodservice suppliers.⁷⁶ The takeover by Anchor Hocking came at an uncertain economic time for the city of New Castle. The area's other leading manufacturing firm, Johnson Bronze, was facing a downturn due to poor labor-management relations and failing quality control. In 1980 the owners declared bankruptcy and began the process of closing down the plant at a cost of nearly one thousand jobs.⁷⁷ Concern for Shenango's future was also in the air less than a year after Anchor's purchase and in May 1980 a rumor circulated around New Castle that if Anchor could not secure a loan it would shut the pottery down. Anchor was quick to respond to the rumors, issuing a letter through Shenango General Manager Edwin

⁷⁴ "Dinnerware Merger Eyed," *PPG*, January 10, 1979.

⁷⁵ "Mayer China Firm Sold," *Beaver County Times*, June 13, 1979. Shortly after the sales of both Shenango and Mayer, INTERPACE's declining profits led to the breakup of the conglomerate and the sale or liquidation of all remaining subsidiaries.

⁷⁶ "Welcome Anchor Hocking," *Shenango Pacesetter* company newsletter, May 1979, LCHS.

⁷⁷ Gail B. Miller, "A Case Study of Phoenix Entrepreneurship in a Small Manufacturing City," (paper presented at the Third Annual Meeting of the Applied Business and Entrepreneurship Association International, Kona, Hawaii, November 16-20, 2006).

Stahura assuring employees and the public that from the time of purchase, Anchor never had intentions to shut down Shenango.⁷⁸

For the first few months under Anchor Hocking's ownership, Shenango China still had not met sales expectations. General Sales Manager David Davin noted that commercial sales in the first three quarters were down due to delays in plant remodeling and a poor economy. Davin outlined the strategies Anchor planned for the company, including promotions, increased advertising, and new products, in order for Shenango to bounce back in the coming years.⁷⁹ By 1982 Shenango was seeing improvement. A mix of better marketing, product innovation, and increased productivity along with future investments in computerized coloring, firing, and printing made Shenango a bright spot in what had been a down year for Anchor due to a slow-to-recover foodservice industry.⁸⁰

The flood of imported china, a constant problem to Shenango since the 1950s, had come to dominate a large part of the dinnerware industry by the early 1980s. The result meant that since 1976, the pottery industry in the United States, especially around Ohio and Pennsylvania (location of both Anchor and Shenango) dropped its total employment by 16%. Major competition in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea possessed facilities that were comparable with American ones in terms of modern technology yet could

⁷⁸ Edwin Stahura to all Shenango employees, letter, May 15, 1980, LCHS.

⁷⁹ David Davin, "Sales Overview," *Shenango Pacesetter* company newsletter, October 1980, LCHS.

⁸⁰ Anchor Hocking Corporation, *1982 Annual Report*, (Landcaster, Ohio: Anchor Hocking Corporation, 1983), 2, 4-5, 19.

produce and ship wares for far lower prices due to cheaper labor. With over \$470 million in imported china annually rolling into the United States, American companies who could not match the low costs struggled to keep up.⁸¹ At Anchor Hocking, the concern over imports was very real: a letter from Shenango Controller James Bergman summed up the situation as “war declared on us by our foreign competitors.” Bergman went onto pledge changes in marketing and in the factory itself, because “Shenango must become the leanest, strongest, most efficient pottery possible or our chances for victory in this war are dim [...] it is essential for our survival.”⁸²

The foreign market continued to weaken the domestic producers, not just from imported goods, but also because U.S. exchange rates reduced importation possibilities. By 1984, Anchor Hocking was losing a large amount of money from their Household Division lines, including Shenango which still had not turned a profit since 1981. In order to save money, Anchor decided to combine Shenango and the rest of the Household lines into one entity, the Foodservice Division, and focus solely on restaurant and hotel accounts instead of home-based customers. This, of course, meant that Shenango China no longer would function as an autonomous company. Anchor Hocking was still committed to keeping the company, but warned that if Shenango could not keep up with customer demands, the parent organization would shut it down.⁸³

⁸¹ “Imports Chipping Away at Domestic Pottery Industry,” *PP*, October 11, 1983.

⁸² “Economic War,” *Shenango Shenanigan*, company newsletter, February 1984, LCHS.

⁸³ Anchor Hocking Corporation, *1984 Annual Report*, (Lancaster, Ohio: Anchor Hocking Corporation, 1985), 2, 7-9 and “Pottery Trying to Get Back on Track with Marketing,” *NCN*, date and month unknown, 1985, LCHS.

This harsh treatment of a once-dominant Shenango China plant interestingly was coupled with another large investment to modernize the facility as part of a company-wide movement to aggressively promote its product in 1985 and 1986. While sales for 1985 were an improvement over 1984, Anchor still fell short of overall earnings goals and hoped that a new print and television advertising campaign in addition to improved production and quality at plants like Shenango would jump start the corporation.⁸⁴ However, Anchor's plans for an improved 1986 took a drastic turn. Starting that August and continuing for the next several months, Anchor Hocking was subjected to an attempted takeover bid from the Newell Company, a hardware and homeware manufacturer best known for being the parent company of Rubbermaid. Anchor initially fought the \$330 million dollar stock buyout, calling it "a real non-offer."⁸⁵

Newell, however, was persistent throughout 1986. In November another offer was made totaling \$338.2 million for Anchor's stock. In January, the corporation took the offer and put the purchase up for stockholder approval. An announcement in the corporation-wide newsletter *AnchoScope* asked stockholders to approve the merger with Newell in their forthcoming summer meeting. The two companies, Anchor Hocking and Newell, would become subsidiaries to a newly-created holding company and function as before. The fate of Anchor's divisions, such as Shenango, was a bit murkier. Anchor wanted to keep Shenango open following the Newell purchase but admitted it would have no control over the matter once the merger was complete and the new owners could

⁸⁴ Anchor Hocking Corporation, *1985 Annual Report*, (Lancaster, Ohio: Anchor Hocking Corporation, 1986), ii, x, 2-5.

⁸⁵ "Company News: Newell Bids for Hocking," *NYT*, November 7, 1986.

indeed sell or close the plant when they took control. For New Castle officials, the threat of massive job losses was very real.⁸⁶

Shenango China and its employees were on edge about whether the company would again survive a regime change. Quickly after the Anchor Hocking purchase finalized in late 1987, Newell placed Shenango on the market deeming the company “no longer fit into its corporate plans.” In January 1988, the announcement came that many who knew Shenango China over the years would never have expected: the pottery was sold to its biggest competitor in the industry: Syracuse China. Syracuse president Chester Armond announced that Shenango would operate as a separate division within Syracuse, just as Mayer China had been functioning since Syracuse purchased it in 1984. Despite stressing that the plants were working within two different parts of the market (Syracuse aiming for high-end restaurant and hotel contracts and Shenango manufacturing for more of a middle market) and that no consolidations were decided upon, many wondered how long Syracuse China would deal with its rival as its partner.⁸⁷

The first year under Syracuse China saw a three-month closure of the Shenango plant followed by a layoff of nearly two thirds of the workforce upon its reopening. In 1989, the situation became further complicated when Syracuse’s corporate owner Canadian Pacific Inc. placed the entire organization up for sale. Canadian Pacific wished to refocus on its core industries, which did not include dinnerware production. Syracuse

⁸⁶ “Company News: Newell to Purchase Anchor Hocking,” *NYT*, February 25, 1987, “Stockholders Meeting Postponed,” *AnchoScope* corporation newsletter, Spring 1987, LCHS, and “Plan Will be Developed in Effort to Keep Pottery,” *NCN*, April ??, 1987, LCHS.

⁸⁷ “Syracuse Buys Competitor,” *Syracuse Post-Herald*, January 23, 1988.

and its two divisions were bought out by the Pfaltzgraff Company, the longest-operating china manufacturer in America, at the end of 1989. Despite the sale, representatives from Pfaltzgraff assured customers and the general public to “expect business as usual” at Syracuse, Shenango, and Mayer in terms of production and employment.⁸⁸ Under Pfaltzgraff, Syracuse retained its autonomy and more importantly, continued to control both Mayer and Shenango.

By the middle of 1990, Syracuse’s commitment to client service no longer included Mayer China in its plans. In August, Syracuse announced through a press release that Mayer’s plant would be closed as part of Syracuse’s restructuring and renovation program. The facility would close by the end of the year with production of the line consolidated into Shenango’s location along with a select number of employees. President Armond boasted that “there is no doubt the restructuring will result in a stronger, more efficient company” and promised “no other impact on the Syracuse China or Shenango China operations is expected.” Still, the decision was alarming to Shenango: Syracuse chose to shut down Mayer, a high-end china facility that was turning a decent profit at a time when Shenango was not. Even more troubling was the suddenness of the Mayer announcement after several months of assurance on Syracuse’s part that their sub-companies were important enough to remain open. Syracuse and Pfaltzgraff remained silent on the Shenango China question through the remainder of the year and implied that moving Mayer’s operations into the New Castle plant would ensure its continuation for

⁸⁸ “Syracuse China Corp. for Sale, Parent Company Official Says,” *SPH*, June 29, 1989 and “Pfaltzgraff Wins Fight to Buy Syracuse China,” *Syracuse Post-Standard*, October 5, 1989.

the near future. Still, the parent company acknowledged that Shenango was not making the money that Syracuse hoped.⁸⁹

Syracuse was under continued pressure to perform economically with all of its lines. By 1990, the long-anticipated fears were realized as imported ware finally made large strides beyond fine china and cut into the commercial hotel and restaurantware market. Foreign-made commercial china now accounted for 42% of the total product, up from a mere 6% only ten years before. This was occurring at a time when the restaurant industry as a whole was in a downturn and less china was being purchased in a poor economy. The main goods affected by this increase in imports were those for middle-market establishments, Shenango China's main customers.⁹⁰

Syracuse was hurting financially and something had to give. On February 1, 1991, Syracuse issued a press release detailing the next phases of its upgrade program, "a series of innovations for more efficient manufacturing operation controls, improved product quality, and greatly enhanced customer satisfaction." Buried within the language of the press release was the following phrase: "in support of these commitments [...] all production for all brands will be consolidated into the firm's Syracuse, New York facility."⁹¹ In other words, Shenango China was closing for good and hundreds of local jobs were moving to New York. The justification from Syracuse said that the restaurant

⁸⁹ Eric Moyer and Associates to Syracuse China, "Press Release: Mayer China's Production Facilities to be Consolidated," letter, August 16, 1990, LCHS and "This Plant is Going to Close," *BCT*, August 19, 1990.

⁹⁰ "China Syndrome: Syracuse China Battles Economy's Meltdown, Foreign Competition," *SPS*, November 5, 1990.

⁹¹ Syracuse press release excerpts reprinted in Mitchel Olszak, "Company Shows Contempt," editorial, *NCN*, February 1991, LCHS.

industry's slowdown period created a natural decrease in production for the china industry and the Shenango plant had not been an industry leader since the days of INTERPACE. With employment steadily declining in the previous years (the number of workers was by 1991 only two hundred sixty-five, a far cry from the seven hundred under Anchor and the more than three thousand in the plant's heyday), it was more cost effective to keep all production in one plant where at the location of the corporate offices.⁹² Syracuse China closed down Shenango in phases, beginning that April. Additional layoffs occurred in July, August, September, November and December until the plant was empty at the end of the year.⁹³ Ironically, the Shenango China product itself was not discontinued with the closing of the plant. Pieces marked with the name "Shenango China" continued to be produced by Syracuse until the late 1990s without the aid of any of the original employees from New Castle.⁹⁴

Shenango China certainly was not the first business to fail in the Rust Belt area. Since the 1970s, the area around Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan experienced their flagship industries' decline. Like Shenango, these industries collapsed from a combination of external factors and internal weakness which could not be overcome. The automotive industry suffered too at the hands of foreign imports, losing more than half of the worldwide market by 1981. Automotive journalist Brock Yates acknowledges the

⁹² "Pottery 'Phasing Out' Operations During 1991," *NCN*, February 2, 1991 and "Syracuse China to Close Plant in Pennsylvania, Move Jobs Here," *SPS*, February 3, 1991.

⁹³ Chester Armond to Alice Hoffman, "WARN: Plant Closing Notice," letter, May 14, 1991, LCHS.

⁹⁴ "Shenango China Date Codes," *Restaurantware Collector's Network*, 1999-2009, accessed 20 June 2010, <<http://www.restaurantwarecollectors.com/datecodes/shenangodates.html>>.

impact of imports but also notes that the automotive industry has done itself a great deal of harm as well by remaining stubborn in the face of innovation and relying on outdated concepts of consumer desire when designing their product.⁹⁵ The same problems are seen by John Hoerr when looking at the steel industry. He views the decline of steel as not only stemming from global competition but that “the American system of organizing and managing work is obsolete.” The industry was plagued by the arrogance of management toward its workers and the suspicion and hard-line stance of unions to resist change. With both groups unwilling to bend, the entire industry was forced to break at the expense of millions of jobs.⁹⁶

In the case of both the automotive and steel industries, decline was seen a long time coming and the leaders did not, either by intentional stubbornness or unfortunate short-sightedness, prepare themselves to survive. Shenango China through the years showed resilience through its many turbulent times. The company had many opportunities to fail, from its disastrous start in 1901-5 through the Great Depression and a lessening of the market. Yet Shenango developed ways to hold on through two world wars and into the prosperity of the 1950s. The company should have faced failure following the Higgins suit and the sale to Sobiloff, yet the new owners carried on in the tradition of the Smith family. Shenango also carried on through purchases by INTERPACE in 1968 and Anchor Hocking in 1979. After so many close calls and near

⁹⁵ Brock Yates, *The Decline and Fall of the American Automobile Industry*, (New York: Empire Books, 1983), 15, 89, 97.

⁹⁶ John P. Hoerr, *And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry*, Pittsburgh Series in Social and Labor History, edited by Maurine Weiner Greenwald, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 3, 14 (quote).

disasters, Shenango China developed an underdog mentality, believing that the company had been through so much that things could not possibly get any worse. Despite the years of hardship and uncertainty, Shenango never lost its own sense of company pride, manifested in the management and employees who worked to not only keep the facility running but also to find ways to improve their image and output and to avoid the inevitable.

CHAPTER II

Corporate Strategies for Success

Throughout the years of decline, Shenango China's management did not sit idle but used their corporate influence in a variety of ways to stave off failure. As the years progressed from the 1950s to the 1980s, the a variety of presidents, managers, and other officials from Shenango's owners--Sobiloff, INTERPACE, and Anchor Hocking--also participated in corporate strategies for success. Shenango attempted to remain relevant in a shrinking and increasingly competitive market by the constant improvement and introduction of new products. Through constant renovation and automation of the plant itself, production costs decreased while output remained high. Finally, with the use of wage incentives and morale boosters for both their salesmen and plant employees Shenango hoped to achieve its highest quality and increase sales throughout the country.

For many years, Shenango China looked to continually improve their product. Even before the company was first sold in 1959, Shenango's management had created new and innovative shapes of china as well as a variety of decorating and firing techniques to keep their ware up to date. Despite the changes in ownership, this practiced continued, as well as taking out patents on these innovations. INTERPACE, upon taking over in 1968, promised to continue with Sobiloff's policy of taking out patents on any new goods, machines, or processes with the intention to ensure the security of Shenango's

products and to strengthen the company's position in the market.⁹⁷

Shenango not only paced itself with the development of new shapes and patterns but kept their manufacturing processes up to date to ensure the best quality ware. The hotel and restaurant industry was plagued by certain china problems, particularly with cracks or splits from frequent use. Not only was the actual breaking of dishes or bowls troublesome, but many had the problem of starring, a starburst-shaped crack in the center of a piece rendering it unusable. Cups were also prone to breakage along their handles from the stress of stacking. To address issues such as these, Shenango challenged their designers and producers to develop improvements. In the case of the starred ware, an internal disc of clay was inserted beginning in 1955 as part of the clay mold. The thicker inside of the plate added some weight but reduced breakage and made the force needed to star a plate nearly equal to the amount needed to break it completely. The handle problem on the cups was tackled with a new method of construction where the handle and cup went through their first firing separately. The handle was then attached to the cup not with slip (liquid clay) but with a plastic adhesive. Both cup and handle were then glazed given a final firing as a whole, with the plastic allowing for more movement of the handle during the firing and less stress once the cup was complete.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ W.D. Spore to all personnel, "INTERPACE Patent Policy," inter-plant correspondence, June 27, 1968, Lawrence County Historical Society Archives.

⁹⁸ David H. Harris, 1957, Dishware Construction, US Patent 2,795,942, filed January 7, 1955, issued June 18, 1957 and Harold B. Cummings, 1965, Handled Cup, US Patent 3, 224, 629, filed March 4, 1958, issued December 21, 1965.

In addition to improving the construction of a piece, the entire process of manufacture was altered to enhance the product. Items, such as footed platters, were fired upside down to even out the upper rims. Unfortunately, this often led to a distorted foot, which eventually was reshaped into a longer oval design that gave better support. Other clay products suffered from the mixing of water and clay to make for an easier flow into the molds. Often, the impurities in the clay would trap water inside the molds instead of allowing it to be absorbed by the mold walls. Problems such as these were a continual source of experimentation, improvement, and fostering the development of processes to improve foot shapes, mold shapes, and clay impurities and give Shenango a better quality product.⁹⁹

Shenango's management understood that improving existing ware would not keep the company afloat as they drifted through various owners. Beginning in 1947, Shenango hired young designers fresh out of art school and put them through a training program to design for china and ceramics. The young artists worked clay on their own wheels, practiced making shapes, and learned how their ideas were fired and translated into decorated china. Many of the top students were hired on at the pottery, and several others went on to careers within the ceramics industry.¹⁰⁰ As ownership of the plant moved from the Smith family to Sobiloff in 1959, the dedication to design continued as a way to keep

⁹⁹ William J. Rech, 1965, Dishware Construction, US Patent 3,190,486, filed October 15, 1959, issued June 22, 1965; Howard B. Cummings, 1969, Ceramic Casting Techniques, US Patent 3,431,332, filed July 16, 1962, issued March 4, 1969; and Howard B. Cummings and Ralph Gibson, 1970, Process for the Manufacture of Ceramic Articles and Product Derived from Such Process, US Patent 3,533,812, filed November 7, 1961, issued October 13, 1970.

¹⁰⁰ Bill McBurney, 2nd interview by Beverley Zona, date unknown, Shenango China Heritage Project, transcript, Lawrence County Historical Society, 3-4. Transcripts of this and all oral history interviews done by the author.

up with the marketplace.

This commitment to design came at a moment when art was of growing importance to the china industry, both home and commercial. The period just before and following World War II brought an influx of design to pottery which was a “breaking with the time-worn patterns and designs of foreign inspiration.” Hazel Ervin, a ceramics expert and later a consultant for Shenango’s subsidiary Castleton, questioned that since Americans of the twentieth century enjoyed changing the styles of their cars and home interiors every few years, why would they want to hang on to their grandmother’s china? The look of American homes no longer matched the fussy, Victorian ideal and she felt that china needed to match the mood of the modernized family. Design based on modern art was not only aesthetically pleasing but also practical. Patterns with new configurations of rims or handles often stacked easier than old-fashioned china, creating less opportunity for breakage and more space for storage.¹⁰¹

The first new contemporary shape for commercial use developed at Shenango was FöRM, introduced in 1962. Shenango's *Stylebook 70* announced "this contemporary shape has a pure architectural beauty to dramatize a variety of tabletop models. [...] You'll find that FöRM offers unique advantages with its beauty. The functional shape permits lighter weight, yet it is stronger. It stacks more securely, is easier to store, and carry. The two finger handle on the cup is a pleasure to hold."¹⁰² The key developer of FöRM, Bill

¹⁰¹ “Tradition Ignored in American China,” *New York Times*, November 7, 1942 (quote); “Art: The Shape of Dishes to Come,” *Time*, July 29, 1946; and “Table Setting: China Needs to Keep Up with the Times,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 10, 1951.

McBurney, emphasized that the design was a key to its success because it eliminated many of the impractical features of traditional china. The rim of the dinner plate was removed and the size reduced from nine inches to seven to be more compact while holding the same amount of food. The plates, cups, and even sauceboats stacked into one another to save space and prevent breakage from falls (figure 5). The design of the cups was also unique in that they contained redesigned handles for an easy grasp and were shaped to appear larger than their actual size, saving money for restaurants by cutting back on refills. McBurney looked back on FöRM as "putting in twenty-five years of experience and everything I knew" for an economic shape that would impress current and potential customers.¹⁰³

2. ¹⁰² Shenango China, Inc., *Stylebook 70*, (New Castle, Pennsylvania: Shenango China, Inc., 1965),

¹⁰³ Bill McBurney, 2nd interview, 9-10.



In elegant dining rooms and busy cafeterias,
FöRM fits, adds new excitement to eating.

Figure 5: Shenango's FöRM china

In 1966 amidst great fanfare, Shenango introduced its newest shape, Citation, at the National Hotel and Motel Exposition in New York City. Nearly three years in the making, Citation in appearance resembled fine china but with durability for the hotel and restaurant industries. The shape was thinner and whiter thanks to the presence of alumina in the body yet still withstood the wear-and-tear of heavy use. Shenango's realization of the importance of fashion in commercial dining was met with enthusiastic response at the show and a high level of endorsement from both dealers and customers.¹⁰⁴ Shenango bragged that Citation was a winner in the industry, noting the fast pace at which orders

¹⁰⁴ "Shenango to Unveil 'Citation'," *New Castle News*, November 8, 1966 and "New China Product Shown," *NCN*, December 29, 1966.

for the line were being booked with clients including the new Regency Hyatt hotel in Atlanta. Management also noted that Citation was popular with "price buyers," customers who purchased based on value, not quality. As the tabletop industry grew more competitive, even price buyers were forced to take note that fashion led to greater sales and Citation's beauty was matched by its durability (figure 6). The life expectancy of the product lowered even the high price of Citation to the point where it was a value. Citation continued to be a high-selling product throughout the late 1960s in both its plain shape and in a variety of contemporary patterns.¹⁰⁵

This is Shenango's new Citation.
Thinner, whiter, brighter, lighter, yet more durable than conventional china.



Figure 6: Advertisement for the new Citation shape, November 1966

¹⁰⁵ "Top Foodservice Firms Swing Vote to Citation," *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, January 1967, LCHS and "Citation Winning Over Price Buyers Too!," *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, July 1967, LCHS.

The dedication to new shapes and designs was restated once INTERPACE took over the company in 1968. INTERPACE championed the necessity of fashion to the tabletop china industry and recognized that importance by calling for fresh ideas. Despite the obvious expense of creating a new shape in china, INTERPACE felt it was a necessary investment to satisfy customers, reasoning "Shenango's new shapes have been one of the key reasons why we're walking off with an ever increasing market share" in the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁰⁶

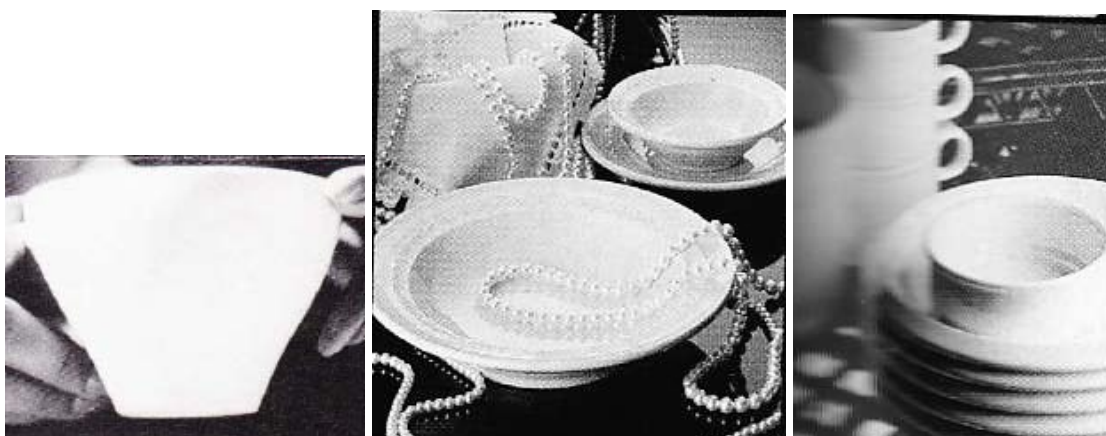


Figure 7: Omega, Perle, and Stackables, some of the new shapes introduced under INTERPACE

Other new shapes soon followed throughout the 1970s (figure 7). Omega, an even thinner alumina coupe shape than Citation, was introduced in 1970 as “delicate, thin – like the china you find in an elegant home setting. Its cost story is as exciting as its beauty. It’s whiter than white.”¹⁰⁷ This was followed in 1975 by Perle, a more traditional design with pearl-like indentations along the rim. Unlike previous shapes which had

¹⁰⁶ “Shenango Shapes the Future,” *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, January 1969, LCHS.

¹⁰⁷ “Here Comes Omega...the Shaped Shape,” *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, September 1970, LCHS.

mainly been promoted in their pure white undecorated form, Perle was very successful in a variety of Shenango's new patterns.¹⁰⁸ The last major product to be introduced at Shenango China was the Stackables line in 1978 in response to a growing trayware market in hospitals and cafeterias. The Stackables boasted high-angled sides and the only interlocking feet on flat items to stack securely in place. They were also made in Hilumina to be high-strength and safe in the newly popular microwave ovens.¹⁰⁹

New shapes were expensive to develop by the time Anchor Hocking was already losing money in the market and with Shenango. Economic historian Erza Solomon points to the increased inflation throughout the 1970s as a leading factor causing the U.S. dollar's decline in value beginning in 1977. The low value of the dollar coupled with an increasing dependency on imported goods (especially for oil which was made all the more difficult by the crisis in Iran) brought about a trade deficit lasting into the present day.¹¹⁰ The trade deficit caused prices on imported necessities to soar, and new ideas had to be introduced to keep companies such as Shenango competitive. Shenango was in danger of failing if it did not manage to boost its sales and Anchor Hocking needed a new angle to keep the pottery afloat. They worked to do this through new patterns and product lines, a far more affordable way to bring in fresh ideas for their customer base than creating new shapes from scratch. In 1975, Anchor rolled out the largest number of new

¹⁰⁸ "Perle Wins Wide Approval," *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, May 1975, LCHS.

¹⁰⁹ "Shenango Introduces...The Stackables," *Shenango Pacesetter*, company newsletter, September 1978, author's collection and "One Name: Tangerine," advertisement, *Restaurants and Institutions*, July 15, 1982, Kent State University Library periodicals collection.

¹¹⁰ Ezra Solomon, *Beyond the Turning Point: The U.S. Economy in the 1980s*, (Stanford, California: Stanford Alumni Association, 1981), 37-40.

designs since *Stylebook 70* and made the older designs more appealing through small reworkings. Existing items were outfitted in new decoration and colors such as pink, peach, and pale yellow and older shapes such as Carlton were reintroduced in new decoration.¹¹¹ When Anchor Hocking took over in 1979, they announced the first of their new lines for Shenango in the Naturals Collection, a group of items in earth-based patterns such as “Sandstone” and “Seastone.” This line also introduced new pieces for the existing shapes such as a toast mug and a jumbo Boston Coffee cup (figure 8).¹¹²

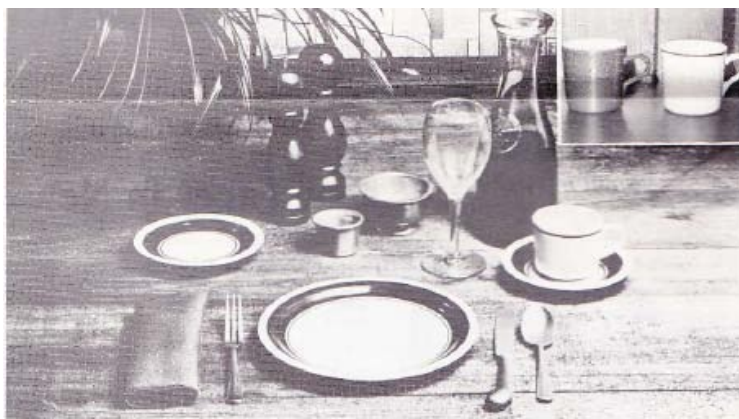


Figure 8: The Naturals Collection, a new pattern set by Anchor Hocking

The patterns in the Naturals Collection were designed to be always in stock at Shenango, a policy heavily championed by Anchor Hocking as they downplayed the custom patterns the company had been known for in the past. Anchor brought out several new collections of stock patterns each year in the early 1980s starting with a group of thirty designs in the Placesetter Collection. This was followed in subsequent years by four new patterns in the Trendsetter Collection and sixteen in the Dependables. Anchor’s

¹¹¹ “Pottery Trying to Keep on Track with Marketing,” *NCN*, day and month unknown, 1985, LCHS.

¹¹² “NRA Show,” *Shenango PaceSetter*, company newsletter, May 1979, LCHS.

final effort to launch a new line came in 1984 with the Ameri-Country collection, country-themed dinnerware with a classic look and a guaranteed two week delivery (figure 9).¹¹³ Ameri-Country was the final original product line put out by Anchor Hocking, as Shenango China was soon after enveloped into the Foodservice Division, Anchor's blanket division for the restaurant and hotel industry consisting of china, glassware, kitchenware, and trayware. In the confines of this division, Anchor promoted Shenango's older stock patterns in conjunction with their own lines of glassware and flatware. After the purchase of the company by Syracuse, only one other new design was introduced, the Great Plate, an unusual item that was sized between a dinner plate and serving platter. This was not on the market long, however, as Syracuse shut the company down less than one year after the Great Plate's introduction.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ "Placesetter Collection for the Eighties," *Shenango Pacesetter*, company newsletter, May 1980, LCHS; "Designed to Set Trends...Not Follow Them," advertisement, *Restaurants and Institutions*, September 1, 1981, KSU Library periodicals; "For China You Can Depend On...We Deliver," advertisement, *Restaurants and Institutions*, February 1, 1982, KSU Library periodicals, and "Imported from Pennsylvania," advertisement, *Restaurants and Institutions*, August 15, 1984, KSU Library periodicals.

¹¹⁴ "Not too Rich for Your Tastes," advertisement, *Restaurants and Institutions*, May 2, 1990, KSU Library periodicals.



Figure 9: Shenango's final pattern promotion, the Ameri-Country Collection and their final original product, the Great Plate

Product introductions and improvements were not the only means by which Shenango China's management strived to stave off failure. From the time James Smith Sr. took over in 1907, he worked to keep his facility constantly up-to-date. He added new machinery from the 1910s through World War II. When many of the plant's male workers were lost to the draft, the belt system was introduced to keep production at a high level for the armed services ware. This system, one of the first in the plant to be mechanized, put the ware onto a belt to quickly train new decorators off the street. Each worker had one job as product moved along, whether it be varnishing, placing a decal, rubbing, or counting. With each part of the job isolated, new employees were able to learn the steps faster and overall production speeded up.¹¹⁵ Shenango's method of piecemeal assembly fit perfectly into the system known as scientific management or Taylorism, after pioneer Frederick W. Taylor. At the heart of Taylorism was the belief that work could be made more efficient with fewer motions. By isolating each part of a

¹¹⁵ Bill McBurney, 2nd interview, 6.

job, a worker (or several workers along a belt in the case of Shenango) became skilled in that part of assembly, thus making the entire job faster with better quality. Business historian Harley Shaiken notes that in addition to the speed that Taylor-style belt manufacturing improves, it can also foster a greater sense of pride in workers. When a worker becomes specialized in a part of production, they take pride in that work and will make a conscious effort to keep the quality of their job high.¹¹⁶

Pride was important to the operation of the Shenango China plant and to continue fostering that feeling, plant improvements and increased mechanization continued after the war and into Shenango's post-family ownership. Just before the purchase by Sobiloff was completed, Shenango unveiled its two newest innovations: the Ramac inventory machine and the fast-fire kiln. The Ramac was a state-of-the-art computer developed by IBM capable of storing inventory data and speeding up order processing from six weeks to one. The new kiln was made of steel, not brick, and could fire ware in only one hour and fifteen minutes, a dramatic decrease from old firing methods that could sometimes take days. Shenango hoped that the Ramac and fast-fire kiln would be an investment capable of saving not only themselves but the entire china industry from cheap imports and rising production costs.¹¹⁷

Other improvements to the new and existing machinery were also introduced during Sobiloff's ownership. Not long after its completion, the fast-fire kiln as well as the tunnel kilns were improved upon by a new conveyor system which bolted down the

¹¹⁶ Harley Shaiken, *Work Transformed: Automation and Labor in the Computer Age*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1984), 23, 32-34.

¹¹⁷ "Pottery Looks to Speedy Methods," *NCN*, October 9, 1959.

delivery car to the belt and added a slot under the kilns where the cars could continuously travel back to the starting point rather than be lifted off the belt and carried across the room. The removal of ware from these kilns was also modified. In the past, the ware had to be loaded and unloaded from the kilns by a two man team, a practice that led to high labor costs in a world of cheaper goods. In the 1960s, Shenango introduced a kiln loader machine that set up a conveyor to be marked with the optimum locations for ware and then loaded by only one person. The machine used to continuous conveyor system to carry loads to and from the kiln, thus saving backbreaking work and making sure that the maximum amount of ware got fired at once with less labor involved.¹¹⁸ Social psychologist Ann Majchrzak notes that very often the immediate goal of mechanization in the workplace is for reducing labor costs, and while it costs some jobs, it also preserves or creates new positions in the maintenance of machinery. This is linked to an organization's means to prevent failure by providing new ways to grow in the market, a process which she says actually "increases worker commitment because the workers now see a future in the company."¹¹⁹

Changes to equipment were meant not only to speed up the production process while reducing labor costs but also to improve the appearance of the items and to cut back on poor-quality goods that had to be thrown out and redone. In the late 1950s

¹¹⁸ David E. Tomkins, 1961, Tunnel Kiln and Continuous Conveyor System, US Patent 2,974,387, filed April 21, 1958, issued March 14, 1961 and Howard B. Cummings, 1967, Kiln Loader and Unloader, US Patent 3,360,102, filed June 17, 1964, issued December 26, 1967.

¹¹⁹ Ann Majchrzak, *The Human Side of Factory Automation: Managerial and Human Resource Strategies for Making Automation Succeed*, The Jossey-Bass Management Series, (San Francisco and London: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1988), 4, 20.

Shenango developed its first automatic decorating machine designed to handle techniques such as spraying and stamping work in one location. As the desired decoration was programmed into the machine, ware traveled along a conveyor system into different stations for application. The fact that the machine was programmed made it constantly upgradeable and never obsolete. An additional apparatus was created to decorate hollowware (pieces without a flat surface such as cups, bowls, and teapots). Traditional machines could not handle the combination of a curved periphery and a single stamp design on hollowware, but Shenango's new apparatus used a series of plates and stamps to decorate either a band around all or part of the outer edge as well as stamping an emblem in one place.¹²⁰

The final facility improvement carried out under Sobiloffs was a rethinking of the pug mill, a machine that mixed raw clay with water then extruded it in appropriate sizes for the formers or molds. A traditional pug mill, while useful, often came with several inherent problems. First and foremost was the fact that the mill could not fully de-aerate the clay as it mixed. This led to large air bubbles which in the best case scenario did not cut into the proper sizes for the handlers and in the worst case made weak spots or even large cracks in dried and fired pieces. The new pug mill's main goal was to eliminate these problems by a better aeration of the clay. This was accomplished in 1966 by the use of a vacuum chamber that the clay entered before it left the mill which caused the air

¹²⁰ Howard B. Cummings, 1960, Dishware Decorating Machine, US Patent 2,946,278, filed November 1, 1957, issued July 26, 1960 and William Cope and David E. Tomkins, 1961, Decorating Apparatus for Hollow Ceramic Ware, US Patent 2,974,584, filed September 2, 1959, issued March 14, 1961.

pockets to burst before exiting. With no air bubbles, the result was a stronger product and less breakage.¹²¹

Sobiloff did its part to keep Shenango China contemporary with the china industry both at home and abroad. When the company was purchased by INTERPACE in 1968, no one was certain how or even if the new owners would take the same interest in renovation. These fears were soon alleviated as INTERPACE planned a five-year modernization and expansion program. Because Shenango was still posting record sales, INTERPACE felt that the \$2.7 million project was essential to keep that top position and announced five goals for the renovated plant:

1. to boost capacity beyond the sales department's ability to sell
2. to improve working conditions so that we can keep and attract the best personnel, and of course to provide the kind of working conditions that boost morale and output
3. to protect ourselves from 'energy crisis' problems by optimizing our use of fuels
4. to provide the kind of production that will enable us to gain maximum return on investment through more effective operating controls
5. to make better use of the increasingly valuable and hard-to-find skilled personnel available to us – and to make the most of cost-efficiencies in production¹²²

The factory expansion began in 1972 with plans to add two new fast-fire tunnel kilns, bisque processes, and the centerpiece of the project: a fully automated cup roto-matic system to produce cups directly from clay to kiln.¹²³

¹²¹ Howard B. Cummings, 1969, Pug Mill Apparatus, US Patent 3,451,107, filed October 27, 1966, issued June 24, 1969.

¹²² "Factory Expansion Notes," *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, October 1973, LCHS.

In September 1974, the first major part of the plant expansion was completed: the highly anticipated automatic cup machine. The machine was able to fully form cups from pieces of clay, a process that cut overall production time from 72 to 16 hours, an 85% reduction. The cup roto-matic could turn out sixty-three dozen cups per hour yet with less human contact also managed to reduce total breakage (figure 10). By early 1975, the plant renovations were completed two years ahead of schedule. A new flatware system was operational, consisting of two new fast-fire kilns with a programmable control system that maximized production and cut bisque time from twenty-four hours to only three. INTERPACE intended to use the renovations as an appeal for dealers to market Shenango products to a customer base which looked to quality of product and speed and size of delivery. They boasted that with the new machinery installed and all kilns operational, “Shenango now supports you with the largest capacity of any quality manufacturer in the industry.”¹²⁴

¹²³ “China Company to Begin Five-Year Modernization,” *NCN*, January 27, 1973 and “Shenango China Expansion Necessary,” *NCN*, January 26, 1974.

¹²⁴ Quote: “Shenango Backs You Up with Service and Deliveries You Can Now Count On,” *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, February 1975, LCHS and “Growth Plans Given the Nod by INTERPACE,” *NCN*, January 25, 1975.

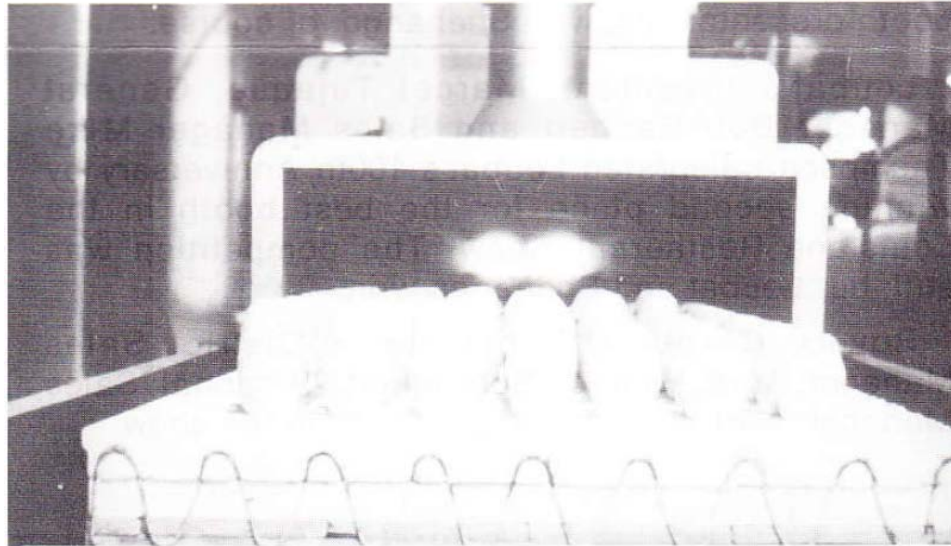


Figure 10: The cup roto-matic machine, the jewel of INTERPACE's \$7.2 million expansion program

INTERPACE hoped these innovations would carry Shenango for the next ten years. However, they lost control of the company in 1979 to Anchor Hocking. The new owners promised to continue to invest in the improvement and modernization of the facility to keep it at an equal level to the rapidly automating china companies at home and abroad. The first new machinery installed under Anchor was the Neztech Brush Lining machine, which automatically applied lines or bands of color on flatware. The Neztech could add up to four different colors, or four lines of the same color, in a single run. With a machine adding the lines, labor costs could be cut down, as only one employee was needed to operate the machine on each shift.¹²⁵ Shaiken notes that machines such as the Neztech helped to cut down labor and as a result supposedly led to an increase in productivity. However, sometimes machinery in the factory setting did the opposite. At

¹²⁵ "Neztech Brush Lining Machine," *Shenango Pacesetter*, company newsletter, December 1979, LCHS.

times when “the heavy artillery is dragged into position when all that is necessary are a few rifles,” productivity could still go if it was prone to malfunctioning.¹²⁶ Anchor and INTERPACE promoted their new machinery heavily in their newsletters for employees and dealers and in trade magazines (figure 11). Yet even this had to note the production slowdowns, shipment delays, and overall cost of the projects that were ultimately carried over to the customer.

¹²⁶ Shaiken, 140-42.

**\$3,000,000
is a lot of money
to spend
speeding up china delivery.
At Shenango/Interpace
we think you're worth it.**

That's why Interpace invested nearly three million dollars in plant expansion. To guarantee you on-time delivery. Service you can sell — and depend on. Tighter quality control. Our expanded production facilities include sophisticated new techniques and equipment—like our new 200' long Reidhammer Kiln that fast-fires bisque in just 3 hours instead of the usual 30, and our electronic cup maker—to give us the capability we've needed. More importantly, we have the commitment of our people to perform.

We had problems last year. You know it. We know it. From here on, we're not going to make fancy promises. We're just going to deliver. To everyone who stuck with us even when the going got a bit rocky, we say 'thank you', and welcome to the new Shenango.

R. D. Carpenter
Edward B. Massey

P.S. Just in case you're not tuned in to the fantastic future of Shenango-style tabletops, call Sales Manager Ed Massey. The sales are there, and Shenango has the program to help you make the most of it.

Look for the Indian on the back. He says, 'we care'.

SHENANGO CHINA

INTERPACE
CORPORATION




Figure 11: "Three Millions Dollars" promoted the expansions by INTERPACE yet noted the problems that went along with it

During the next several years, Anchor Hocking added computerized ingredient mixing, mechanized kiln firing, computer tracking programs, and pad printing machines. The biggest addition was the Quintomatic, a five-headed automatic jiggering system. The

Quintomatic was able to take five pieces of flatware at once through the seven major phases of construction: jiggering, drying, transferring, finishing, wax footing, stacking, and bunging. The Quintomatic's control system was fully computerized with a Programmable Logic Controller which reduced the changeover time of having to carry each piece of china to the various departments.¹²⁷ In 1983 Shenango continued to improve with two new pieces of machinery. One was the Dekram II, an improved version of Shenango's automatic decorating machine. The Dekram II used a conical silicone pad to silk screen print a design onto a piece of flatware in two different colors. The other new innovation was a modernized computer inventory system. A far cry from the outdated Ramac, the new system bar coded each box of finished ware with its department, body number, item code, decoration code, and location in the warehouse. These codes were stored in the computer where an employee could call up the location and allowed Shenango to keep a perfect count of their current inventory at all times, a practice which was increasingly important as Anchor Hocking promoted a variety of patterns guaranteed to always be in stock.¹²⁸

By 1984, Anchor Hocking was feeling increased pressure from imported ware and non-china tabletop options. Although they admitted that Shenango China never recouped the initial investments, the company decided to continue modernizing the plant to increase operating efficiency and improve quality. In 1984, improvements were made to

¹²⁷ Anchor Hocking Corporation, *1982 Annual Report*, 4,7 and "Quintomatic," *Shenango Pacesetter*, company newsletter, July 1981, LCHS.

¹²⁸ "Dekram II: A New Decorating Machine," and "A New Inventory System for Shenango," *Shenango Shenanigan*, company newsletter, June 1983, author's collection.

the roto-matic from the INTERPACE days to eliminate the sharp edges left on cups. By the addition of an abrasive screen on the finishing unit's cutting tools, the sharp tops were ground off during the finishing process, saving the labor of hand-grinding the cups afterward. A number of new projects were slated for 1985, including a new kiln and a cup handle cutting and decorating machine to come in May and a new glaze machine set for October. This equipment, along with other plant improvements, were expected to save over one million dollars annually, savings that Anchor only enjoyed for a year before being sold to Syracuse China.¹²⁹

New and improved pieces and better machinery meant that Shenango had more to market than ever before in the 1960s and 1970s. To improve sales of the Shenango brand, company management offered a number of incentives to their sales force for the promotion and purchase of the product and for the employees to keep both production and quality high. The idea of offering rewards for motivation was not exclusive to Shenango China, but occurred in other manufacturing industries such as automotive and steel. Auto makers had offered their workers enticements since the days of Henry Ford where wages were intentionally set so that employees could afford their own Model Ts with their paychecks. These high pay rates continued into the mid twentieth century, egged on by the United Auto Workers and eventually contributed to the stereotypical view of the lazy, overpaid auto worker as the quality of American-made cars declined. To combat this, the leading companies in Detroit worked to implement a quality control

¹²⁹ Anchor Hocking Corporation, *1985 Annual Report*, "Department 11," *Shenango Shenanigan*, company newsletter, June 1984, LCHS and "1985 Projects," company memo, 1985, LCHS.

system encouraging employees to put out the best quality. Yet the proposed measure of escalating pay with better quality only reinforced the stereotype as wages went up while quality did not.¹³⁰ In steel too, wage incentives were negotiated to protect against poor quality and to appease the union's demands for a profit-sharing plan. Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) bonus systems were implemented into the collective bargaining agreements of all USW plants. Companies were to place twenty-five percent of all profits into a pool to be paid out as bonuses when the cost of living for employees rose. This measure actually backfired as the cost of living grew at a faster rate than company profits, which were already stretched thin by the pay raises already in effect from previous union negotiations.¹³¹

Shenango's incentive systems differed than those of auto and steel because they went out to both manufacturing and sales and also did not pay a premium until after the better product was finished. Bonus events and incentive programs for dealers and salesman were especially prevalent under INTERPACE who less than two months after purchasing the plant rolled out a Hollywood-themed spectacular dubbed "Top of the Table." The highlight was a twenty-minute full-color movie about Shenango's importance to tabletop decoration designed to stir excitement, change customer approach, and most importantly, to drum up orders.¹³² Shenango was further promoted by its

¹³⁰ Brock Yates, *The Decline and Fall of the American Automobile Industry*, (New York: Empire Books, 1983), 238-242, 247.

¹³¹ John P. Hoerr, *And the Wolf Finally Come: The Decline of the American Steel Industry*, Pittsburgh Series in Social and Labor History, edited by Maurine Weiner Greenwald, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 345, 607

dealers through promotions such as 1970's "Shenango Super Service." In order to handle the common problem of customers ordering at the last minute then expecting a quick delivery, Shenango's salesmen were instructed to emphasize a collection of forty patterns that were ready in stock for two-week delivery. This way, customers got what they wanted even at the last minute while Shenango's reputation for reliable service was kept intact. After INTERPACE's renovations to the plant were completed in 1974 a similar promotion was again offered through a new color stock catalog and idea book that showcased ready-stock patterns and trumpeted the company expansions as a means to provide new patterns in a timely manner.¹³³

In addition to creating promotional programs, Shenango also gave salesmen plenty of rewards for opening new accounts and selling targeted goals. Among these were the "T-N-T, Take off-n-Travel" campaign, a spectacular deal that promised seventy-six vacation packages ranging from weekend getaways to \$1,000 Caribbean resort packages. Other incentives included several opportunities for bonuses with the sale of certain patterns. Promotions such as "Style-o-Rama," "Come Alive in '75," "Cavalcade of Cash," and "Cool Cash" wrote checks for high volumes of sales in certain stock designs and even in one case ("Come Alive") gave the customer himself a buy eleven, get one free deal.¹³⁴ The final campaign under INTERPACE's direction was its biggest yet:

¹³² "Making Movie to Move Shenango," *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, March 1968, LCHS.

¹³³ "Shenango Super Service... Your Big Selling Edge These Days!," *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, September 1970, LCHS and "ShenanGrowth," *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, October 1974, LCHS.

“What We Promise, We Deliver.” The entire line of Shenango goods was advertised to increase sales as Shenango stalled in a poor economy and needed an increased customer base. Part of the deal included bonuses to dealers and salesmen for opening new accounts, getting customers to “Trade-Up” to Shenango.¹³⁵ If the promotion was meant to improve Shenango’s sales for INTERPACE, it may have come too late: the “What We Promise” campaign ended on June 1st, the next day Shenango was officially part of Anchor Hocking.

The instances of dealer promotions were far fewer under Anchor as they were for INTERPACE. Gone were the incentives for salesmen themselves (trips, bonus checks) and instead all campaigns were focused on the product and the customer. “Measure Up to Shenango” was the first of these, designed to acclimate the sales force with Anchor Hocking’s products and how Shenango China fit in to the existing lines of glassware, flatware, and trayware. Other programs tended to follow the same format: Shenango as the centerpiece but being promoted alongside Anchor Hocking’s other products. One major exception was the “Shenango LPs” companion deal, promised to be “the best promotion ever offered at Shenango China.” To push the sales of newly dubbed “Low-Price” (LP) stock patterns, Shenango offered a coupon to all customers for three dollars off each dozen of the “LP” patterns and two dollars off per dozen on any other Shenango

¹³⁴ “Shenango’s T-N-T Contest Will Send You...,” *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, June 1968, LCHS; “Style-O-Rama Bonus Checks Nearing 1000,” *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, January 1971, LCHS; “Come Alive in ’75 with Shenango,” *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, April 1975, LCHS; “Cool Cash Promotion Starts August 1” and “Dealers Like ‘Cavalcade’ Promotion,” *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, July 1975, LCHS.

¹³⁵ “What We Promise, We Deliver,” *Shenango Pacesetter*, company newsletter, February 1979, LCHS.

items ordered including custom made patterns.¹³⁶ Shenango taking the savings directly to the customer represented a shift away from relying on dealers to make the sale as the china industry became dominated by more direct orders. It also allowed for a transition to encompassing Shenango into the Foodservice Division and away from independent dealers.

All the product improvements, renovations to the plant and incentives for dealers to sell more Shenango goods meant little if the workforce did not make a quality product. In the years following World War II, the number of employees at Shenango fell from three thousand to under one thousand by 1980. This dropoff was mainly due to the introduction of technology and machinery that eliminated as many as thirty jobs with one piece of equipment. But despite the influx of automatic machinery, many of the steps in the chinamaking process still required a human hand. If workers allowed defective ware through then the company as a whole suffered. To ensure improvement, Shenango's management often created incentive programs to ensure that production was at the highest level. Workers across the three turns in Department 26 (responsible for passing groups of ware called saggars through a tumbler) were offered a \$.01 per hour bonus starting in 1966 for every sagger produced over a decided base amount of 2400 saggars in 48 hours of work. The bonus amount was split evenly amongst all employees working that department.¹³⁷ However, this evenly split bonus system soon caused trouble in

¹³⁶ "Measure Up to Shenango," *Shenango Pacesetter*, company newsletter, March 1980, LCHS; "NRA Show Set for May 21-25," *Shenango Shenanigan*, company newsletter, June 1983, author's collection; and "The Shenango LPs," advertisement, *Restaurants and Institutions*, May 15, 1983, KSU Library periodicals.

several areas due to slacking workers not doing their part yet still receiving a reward. Often in those cases, production amongst all participants went down as morale fell. Shenango had to devise a new system in 1978 that only split bonus savings with those who actually did the work over the set average. This type of incentive boosted participation to as much as eighty-nine percent in some areas and increased the actual bonus earnings themselves.¹³⁸

The arrangement of incentives and piecework bonuses provided an opportunity for an employee to secure a better pay check, but the system as a whole still had its problems as far as the union was concerned. James Viggiano, president of USW Local 3125 from 1973 to Syracuse's 1988 shutdown, noted the tensions in negotiating with Shenango's corporate owners regarding incentive pay. The heads of INTERPACE and Anchor Hocking knew very little about the day-to-day operations of a china plant and often set base rates at ridiculous levels that employees could never reach to receive a bonus. Other times, the bonus system for different departments would be radically different and favor one job over another. Viggiano recalled, "we almost had to fight every day to get what we thought was fair when you get into time study rates and stuff like that [...] trying to get them adjusted to a point where it would be fair to the people."¹³⁹

Despite management offering rewards for high output, Shenango and its corporate

¹³⁷ "Incentive System – Tumbler Crew Members," deposition of rate request, May 4, 1965, LCHS.

¹³⁸ D.D. Perillo to E.H. Rodgers, "Incentive System, Department 27," inter-plant correspondence, May 10, 1966, LCHS.

¹³⁹ James Viggiano, interview by Steve Keller, Lawrence County Unemployed Committee office, New Castle, Pennsylvania, April 2, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 7-8.

owners often still faced the unpleasant side effect of continued lowered standards. As employees strived to get more and more ware over the lines, the quality of that product decreased. By the late 1960s, foremen had to be reminded that pay rates depended directly on the goods that the company sold. By letting employees who were paid by piecework leave when they reached a certain quota, they tended to rush the work so as to go home early and the items produced tended to suffer. Foremen were recommended by management to spend a good deal of time on quality and to stress high-caliber production to their charges whether the workers wanted to take the time or not.¹⁴⁰ By 1971, INTERPACE formed a Progress and Improvement Committee to check why common standards in clay moisture and cup production were no longer met. The problem again was pointed to the piecemeal pay of the cup shop employees and foremen which advocated quantity over quality. Recommendations by the committee included slowing machinery down for better handling, improving the pug mill's clay composure, and establishing a better training program that stressed a superior product.¹⁴¹

After Anchor Hocking took over, the problem surfaced again. The company newsletter, the *Pacesetter*, ran a letter on quality for all employees to see. It noted that caliber of ware directly impacted the price of the items and the more that high-level production fell, the more the price rose for the customer. If the final product's value did

¹⁴⁰ D.C. Myler to all Manufacturing Division Superintendents and Foremen, "Quality," inter-plant correspondence, July 14, 1967, LCHS.

¹⁴¹ W.W. Pfeiffer to Progress and Improvement Committee, "Report of Progress and Improvement Committee held Friday, November 12, 1971," inter-plant correspondence, November 16, 1971, LCHS and W.W. Pfeiffer to Progress and Improvement Committee, "Progress and Improvement Committee Second Week – Observations and Recommendations for Corrective Action," inter-plant correspondence, November 19, 1971, LCHS.

not justify the cost, then many of Shenango's customers would likely go elsewhere for their china orders. The letter closed by explaining that management knew that no employee intentionally created poor goods, but that greater care needed to be paid in the area of control to eliminate defects, "It's everybody's job to be sure all the ware they handle is good ware."¹⁴²

But by 1983, the caliber of goods coming from Shenango China was still not up to its former standards of the 1950s. Because the plant underwent a large mechanization program during that period, Shaiken reasons that automation led to a profound impact on the minds of workers. Unlike the simple belt system from the 1940s, where the extent of automation was scientific efficiency in each job, the machinery of the 1960s and beyond was actually doing much of the work. Shaiken points to this as a source of demoralization as workers felt alienated compared to the programmed equipment. He quotes one factory worker who complained that mechanization "hurts [...] You want to say something, but they don't want to listen. They have their program and that's it."¹⁴³ Increased automation also led to higher standards in production, greater quantity expectations, and of course, greater layoffs or underemployment. Shenango's production was lax because they did not have much assurance from the rotation of corporate owners that their jobs would be safe.

Management looked into the creation of a communication program between themselves and the foremen of individual departments to see where problems were coming from and how they could be stopped. The main objective outlined by Quality

¹⁴² "The Quality Scene," *Shenango Pacesetter*, company newsletter, October 1979, LCHS.

¹⁴³ Shaiken, 134 (quote), 267-69.

Assurance Manager Lou J. Walls was "to maintain our market quality level at the traditional Shenango-Syracuse level." To do this, he set out a list of deficiencies with the goods made by Shenango and problems with some of the recent efforts to better the company. Among the current problems were increased warpage, scuffing of the unglazed foot on the fast fire kiln, poorly ground pin marks, and inconsistent colors on decals. Also, the new shapes such as Omega, which were advertised as being durable despite its thinness, was in reality very prone to chipping along the edges.¹⁴⁴ As Shenango's leaders saw it, the best solution to the present situation was to once again make the foremen very aware of the problems surrounding them. Better communication, first between management and foremen by the discussion and understanding of company reports and then between foremen and employees to explain the problems of the items made was critical to make the problem of quality meaningful for everyone.¹⁴⁵

The final attempt by management to get the point across to employees revised an earlier strategy from 1979. The front lobby by the time clock each week displayed a piece of ware which was returned by a customer as being defective. The pieces were labeled with the defect, the price the customer paid, and the department responsible. Underneath was a sign for all employees asking, "Would You Accept this Kind of Quality?" As the economy struggled in the 1980s and Shenango steadily lost its position as a world leader in the china industry, such harsh and direct measures were needed to make Shenango's

¹⁴⁴ L.J. Walls to J.C. Bergman, "Re: Objectives," inter-plant correspondence, June 30, 1983, LCHS.

¹⁴⁵ J.C. Bergman to L.J. Walls, "Specific Objectives," inter-plant correspondence, September 7, 1983, LCHS.

workforce recognize the effect bad goods and returns had on the price of product and in turn on the survival of the company itself.¹⁴⁶

In the eyes of management, the issues of product decline pointed to an overall problem with the workforce morale. Employees at the pottery were only concerned about getting their pay and not with the items they produced. This could be explained by a number of reasons in looking both at Shenango's plant and other industries. Journalist John Hoerr, writing about the steel mills in Pittsburgh, feels that a large part of productivity is connected to worker morale. When a company falls into decline, either by failing to keep up with technology, relying too much on automation, or by increasing bureaucracy, the workers fear for the safety of their jobs. This fear combined with distrust of new machines or bosses, leads to a general decline in quality and output.¹⁴⁷ To combat the animosity towards management, Shenango's leaders began in 1979 to remedy this situation through an incentive program to reward individuals for outstanding workmanship. The awards would be given at a large banquet where winners would receive a small statue of the Shenango Indian and a savings bond. The reward program would "help convey the message to the grassroots level that Shenango management is interested in improving the attitude toward workmanship and in developing a respect for the product."¹⁴⁸

If small gains were seen through this incentive program, Shenango soon tried out

¹⁴⁶ J. Baker to L.J. Walls, "Suggestion," inter-plant correspondence, October 21, 1983, LCHS.

¹⁴⁷ Hoerr, 296.

¹⁴⁸ T.R. Pavore to H.J. Pangels, "Quality Program – 1979," inter-plant correspondence, August 16, 1978, LCHS.

an idea to give its employees a greater voice in their plant as a whole. The initial idea was proposed by Industrial Relations Manager David Perillo in 1983 as “a program of increasing worker involvement in the manufacturing and problem solving decisions in the plant.”¹⁴⁹ A similar concept was already at work in many automotive plants and steel mills as either a Quality of Worklife (QWL) or Labor-Management Committee system. These programs as Hoerr suggests, “sought to replace adversary relations with cooperation through various forms of worker participation.” The union leadership in these instances was to have a say in many corporate decisions, reducing in theory the atmosphere of distrust between management and workers.¹⁵⁰

The plan for a participatory management system grew into the Gearing Up for Tomorrow at Shenango (G.U.T.S.) program, launched in 1985 with the objective “to develop and implement plans of action that will encourage each employee to enjoy coming to work, work effectively with a sense of fulfillment, [and] return home reasonably tired.”¹⁵¹ The increased cooperation between management and employees aided in company-wide problem solving and led to the implementation of several new ideas to boost company awareness and pride. The first of these were dining cards to be left behind at restaurants frequented by Shenango workers. The cards served a dual purpose, either asking a restaurant owner who did not use Shenango to consider a switch, or to thank establishments that did. Other new changes from G.U.T.S. meetings included

¹⁴⁹ Bergman to Walls, “Specific Objectives.”

¹⁵⁰ Hoerr, 207, 276.

¹⁵¹ “Gearing Up for Tomorrow at Shenango,” *Shenango Shenanigan*, company newsletter, September 1985, LCHS.

a job analysis committee to check that employees got properly paid for their type of job, the incorporation of flex time into the schedule, and bulletin boards to keep everyone informed of Shenango's current orders placed and shipped. Most importantly, G.U.T.S. fostered a "we" attitude around the plant in order to encourage cooperation for the greater good of the company.¹⁵²

Evaluating the strategies management took over the years to advance Shenango China and prevent its failure leaves a mixed legacy. On the positive side, the G.U.T.S. program's positive attitude had a profound impact on contract negotiations. In 1986, Shenango China and United Steelworkers were able to agree on a new contract without any threat of a strike. Representatives on both sides credited G.U.T.S. with making everyone more open-minded of their common goal during negotiations. The meeting of the program also helped to settle twenty-one grievances going back to 1982 and helped the company go without any grievances in over six months during 1986 – an impressive feat considering the average amount of employee grievances in that time period usually averaged at least thirty.¹⁵³

The investments in new products and machinery to keep Shenango relevant certainly helped the company in the short-term but these often also did not help to keep quality up to par and either reduced or eliminated many jobs over the years. A 1983 survey of the machinery by department showed that in many cases automation led to an inferior product in comparison to handcrafting. Machinery such as the Quintomatic put

¹⁵² "Tomorrow is the #1 'T' in China – An Update from Shenango," *AnchoScope*, corporate newsletter, No. 1, Spring 1987, LCHS.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

undue wear on the molds and contributed to sharp edges or residue on the finished items. The speed of the fast fire kiln made quotas higher for incentive programs and many employees tended to rush inferior ware with either chips or uneven glazing through to meet their numbers.¹⁵⁴

Shenango's management tried to solve the problems of the plant, but in some cases they themselves wondered whether they were the ones to blame. In 1969, members of INTERPACE's management team were given a review of a new book called *The Peter Principle* by Laurence J. Peter and Raymond Hull as a means of explaining why things tend to go wrong in a corporate setting despite seemingly dutiful leadership. The thesis of the book explains the Peter Principle as the theory that "in a hierarchy, every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence." All hierarchies, whether they be academic, political, religious, or business were controlled by the Principle and the constant promotion of workers to their maximum incompetence tended to lead to the "accumulation of dead wood at the executive level," the overabundance of useless management that made no significant contribution to the good of the company and in fact only sucked up resources while all the time blaming the hierarchy itself for their troubles.¹⁵⁵ Obviously, the collection of useless managers worried officials at INTERPACE at the same time Shenango's employees were blaming the rotating corporate ownership as allowing responsibility to go slack and tried to keep themselves

¹⁵⁴ "Deficiencies," company memo, 1983, LCHS.

¹⁵⁵ "Why Things Don't Work," *Bulletin to Management*, (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of National Affairs, Inc., 1969), LCHS and Laurence J. Peter and Raymond Hull, *The Peter Principle*, 20th printing, (New York: Bantam Books (William Morrow and Company, Inc.), 1969), 7 (quote), 8, 21 (quote), 79, 95.

from falling into the trap of the Peter Principle. This often led to managers and other executives being either hired from the outside or being promoted from the ranks of the parent companies instead of Shenango. This along with the participatory management systems like G.U.T.S. was hoped to infuse new confidence in the workforce and in management themselves to do the best job possible for the sake of the plant.

In the end, the leaders of Shenango realized they must manage the company in a way that would keep them from collapsing into uncertainty, a way that would require looking at things differently. Shenango's managers were given articles that stated that time was a resource equal to money, labor, or capital. The misuse of time determined a company's chances of failure as management often underestimated its importance. Therefore, those in charge were encouraged to use thoughtful planning and initiative to motivate their employees for a given task to make time the most effective resource possible.¹⁵⁶

More important was an article from *Strategic Management* distributed to Shenango management in 1985. The article, titled "Evolution or Revolution?," laid out the place of manufacturers in a post-industrial economy. As the world moved into high-tech industries, older industrial giants had to keep up with the new demands of their customer base and focus their energies for the first time on maintaining rather than expanding their plants. The article offered ten ideas for testing, including decentralization of management, delegation, upgrades of technology and workforce, improvement of

¹⁵⁶ "Time is a Manager's Most Important Resource," article source unknown, date unknown, LCHS.

working conditions, cooperative efforts, and a shift towards a consumer-oriented company plan. These suggestions, while calling for the entire managerial style to change, offered new hope for firms such as Shenango to thrive against the modernizing world.¹⁵⁷

The strategies that had been tried or pondered by members of the company management were meant to keep Shenango from the brink of failure. New product design was effective but expensive and not all of the new shapes rolled out were as high quality as hoped. The increased automation in the plant kept it competitive with the foreign markets but often created unease amongst the workforce that diminished productivity, and when Anchor Hocking came in, they could no longer keep up with the prohibitive cost of modernization. But other gambles, such as the G.U.T.S. program, worked in the company's favor to boost morale in the workplace for those who were closely connected to the program. Yet in the end, Shenango still declined as did many other industries and ultimately failed. Similar to what Hoerr notes as one of the biggest problems with steel, Shenango suffered in its later years from outside management which did not necessarily have the company's best interests in mind. While INTERPACE and Anchor Hocking tried to keep the plant afloat, they lacked either the knowledge or concern to do so successfully and as a result, many of the objectives designed to keep Shenango from failing did little. Still, they kept trying strategies even beyond the product and plant themselves. As the world economy changed and many industries moved towards a consumer-oriented sales program, Shenango would soon follow suit and look at their customers and their public imagery as a means of remaining relevant in the new economy

¹⁵⁷ "Evolution or Revolution?," *Strategic Management*, 1985, LCHS.

of post-war America.

CHAPTER III

Timeless Images: The Advertising of Shenango China

In order to continue their efforts to avoid failure, Shenango China looked to not only improve their products and processes, but to win over customers with their enhanced public imagery. Looking at Shenango's advertising, from the early Castleton pieces in the 1940s, and especially as the plant entered into a final decline in the late 1980s, can reveal the shift in tactics from an outward approach for American homes towards advertising reserved for internal customers in the foodservice industry. This shift paralleled the closure of Shenango's Castleton China division, marking the company's disappearance from most of the public eye. As Shenango moved through successive owners, the company's presence shrank as part of various umbrella divisions that affected its existence and autonomy in advertising until it was little acknowledged to current and potential individual consumers at all. By the time that Syracuse China closed the plant, no public mention of Shenango had been made in the foodservice industry for nearly a year, a sure sign the plant was approaching its final failure.

Advertising and public imagery are useful in gauging the success or failure of a company. As the United States grew into an industrial power in the late nineteenth century, advertising also grew and modernized to showcase the exciting new world that was at hand. Historian Pamela Walker Laird describes this time as an era where focus shifted from the might of the producers and factory owners to the customer. In this way,

marketing techniques became the “business of progress,” tied to promoting the idea of a better world where abundance and advancement were one purchase away.¹⁵⁸ Regina Blaszczyk in her work *Imagining Consumers* discusses the importance of marketing in the twentieth century as the country moved into a consumer-based society -- “a company’s survival rested on its ability to envision its target audience and to design products for them.”¹⁵⁹ This was especially true in the pottery and china industry, where customers still wanted the individuality present in a set of fine dinnerware and manufacturers had to remain flexible enough to keep up with design. The example for this was Josiah Wedgwood in England, who provided the model for marketing by only producing items in short runs and switching as preferences changed. This allowed him to publicize his products as limited, thereby increasing demand, yet still helped to standardize tastes of the very audience that claimed to want individuality.¹⁶⁰

With the considerable investment spent in promoting consumer goods, it is not surprising how a company marketed its goods was critical to whether it succeeded or failed. Shenango and its subsequent owners did their part to include the company in the public marketplace from the establishment of Castleton China in the 1940s until Syracuse bought the plant in 1988. Shenango’s advertising over fifty years falls into several defined categories. Early ads appealed to the home environment, with an additional

¹⁵⁸ Pamela Walker Laird, *Advertising Progress: American Business and the Rise of Consumer Marketing*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 2, 4-5.

¹⁵⁹ Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers: Innovation and Design from Wedgwood to Corning*, Studies in Industry and Society, Philip B. Scranton, series ed, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 1-2.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 3, 9, 12-13.

emphasis on patriotism during the years of World War II. These ads, almost entirely for Castleton China, appeared in a variety of publications and formats for public consumption. In the postwar years, new strategies centered on Castleton and Shenango as works of contemporary art for both the home and for restaurants and hotels. In the 1960s, as Sobiloffs and then INTERPACE took control of Shenango, marketing moved away from the public sphere and catered to the foodservice industry. INTERPACE and Anchor Hocking pushed appeals to customer service in Shenango's final years, a method of promotion that effectively removed Shenango from the eye of home users but at the same time adapted to the highest customer priority as the company declined.

Shenango China was not a novice to the concept of advertising their product: as early as 1903 the original Shenango plant put notices in trade journals for a full line of “dinner, tea, and toilet ware. Designs are original, artistic, and decorations are latest on the market.”¹⁶¹ This simple insert with little fanfare and no illustration was a far cry from later efforts, which began in earnest in 1940 with the establishment of Castleton China. The first pieces of Castleton China were ready for American markets in 1940, and that October newspapers across the country ran two advertisements for the new line. “If Beauty Tempts You” was a simple motif featuring only the Castleton logo and descriptive text with space for a retailer's information at the bottom. The more detailed “Presenting Castleton China” featured a place setting of the new product amongst an elegant dinner table. These first pieces not only appealed to home markets but articulate

¹⁶¹ “The Shenango China Company,” trade journal advertisement, *Illustrated Glass and Pottery World*, vol. XI, no. 1, 1903, Google Books.

the earliest theme seen in Shenango's advertising strategies: an appeal to patriotism as the country readied for war (figure 12). The texts in both ads are very similar, describing not only the beauty of the line with a variety of similes such as a "pearl-like luster" and decorations "glowing as a summer sunset." but also emphasizing a product "made in America, made of America" which was "a proud patriotic possession."¹⁶²

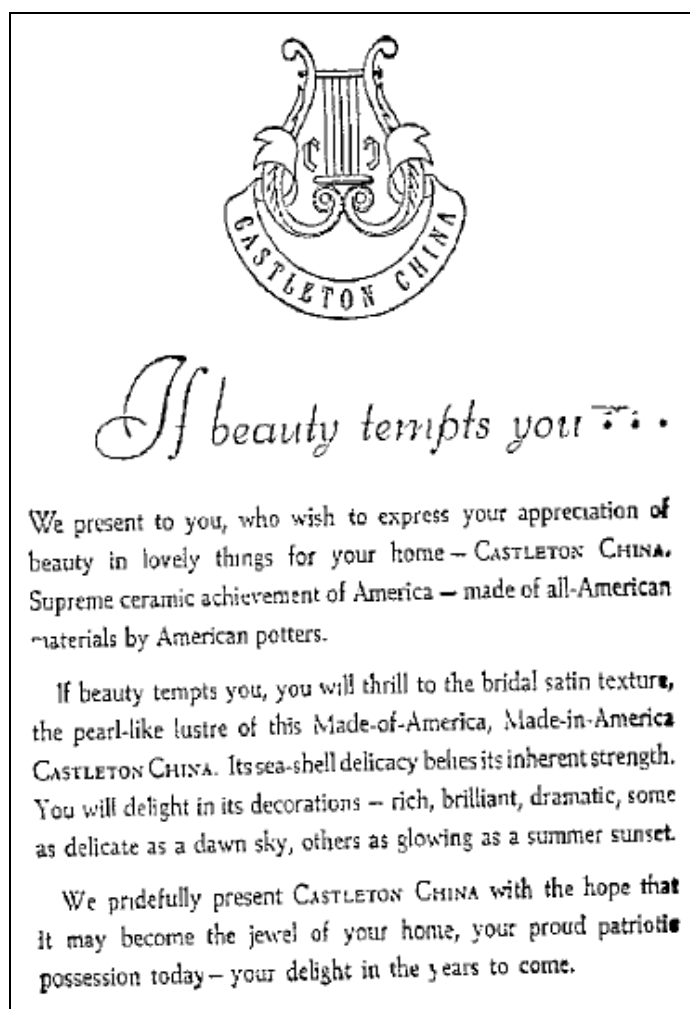


Figure 12: "If Beauty Tempts You," one of Castleton China's first advertisements, 1940

¹⁶² "Presenting Castleton China," newspaper advertisement, *Pittsburgh Press*, October 1940 and "If Beauty Tempts You," newspaper advertisement, *Helena Daily Independent* (and others), October 1940-December 1942.

With the fine china of Europe (which graced most tables before the war) no longer available, Shenango emphasized the Castleton line in support of national industry. In 1942's "You Too May Own the World's Finest China," the bold print of the ad highlighted the fact that the pieces were made by American craftsmen and with American materials.¹⁶³ Because of this, the purchase of a Castleton place setting not only provided the customer with a superior quality product but also supported Americans in what was a traditional Euro-centric industry.

Promoting Castleton China as patriotic was far from the only action Shenango took during America's involvement in World War II. The company had to cut back on its hotelware products in order to keep up with Castleton orders as well as the high volume of production for the armed forces. In a 1944 advertisement aimed at hotel owners entitled "Mess Time," Shenango displayed seven different patterns for the Navy and explained its manufacturing priorities had to reside with the pictured seamen "and all our fighting forces and war workers." Shenango reminded customers that manufacturing for the war effort was the ultimate source of pride for the company but gave the assurance the product would once again be available for all at the war's end. The ad ended with a timely reminder to buy War Bonds in the hope of a speedy end to the conflict.¹⁶⁴

With the arrival of peace, Shenango turned its focus back onto hotel and dinnerware. With patriotism no longer a top priority, much of the company's advertising

¹⁶³ "You Too May Own the World's Finest China," newspaper advertisement, *Hutchinson (KS) Herald Journal*, October 1942.

¹⁶⁴ "Mess Time," magazine advertisement, *Hotel Management Magazine*, 1944 (month unknown). Photo courtesy of <www.thepirateslair.com/navy_naval_china.html>.

focused on the home. Following the war, there was an emphasis according to historian Elaine Tyler May on “a reaffirmation of domesticity that rested on distinct roles for women and men.” The ideal of a woman at home surrounded by consumer goods was seen as not only comforting but a patriotic statement against the growing Communist threat. In addition, a championing of women at home worked to ease women who worked during the war back into their acceptable roles. The postwar vision of leaders such as Richard Nixon associated working women with danger to the country’s stability. Women instead were to assert their power in a family’s purchase of consumer goods which reflected social prominence and the embrace of the American Dream.¹⁶⁵

The postwar era had brought in increased prosperity and a larger than ever wave of mass consumption. As manufacturers worried about maintaining profit levels, they opted to change advertising strategies to stimulate demand. The most successful of these according to historian Lizabeth Cohen, was market segmentation, a strategy experimented with in the mid-1950s. This was advertising targeted to certain traits of the consumer base, such as gender, age, race, and social standing to create specific and symbolic demands. By playing on the psychological priorities of consumers as well as internalized fears of social conformity, market segmentation further advanced advertising into an \$11 billion industry by the end of the 1950s.¹⁶⁶ The most popular grouping singled out for attention was the housewife who, while not the breadwinner in most cases,

¹⁶⁵ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 9 (quote), 12, 164-67.

¹⁶⁶ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, (New York: Vintage Books (A division of Random House), 2003), 293-295, 298, 301, 306.

still dictated how much of a family's income was spent. This target audience, wives of an affluent middle class, was Shenango's priority in public imagery. Advertising appeared both in newspapers and in high-end magazine publications such as *Mademoiselle*, *House Beautiful*, *House and Garden*, and *Modern Bride*.¹⁶⁷

These publications also provided addresses for women to write and receive brochures with more information about a company. Castleton China offered two such brochures, the first of which arrived just after the war and entitled "Things You Should Know About China." The booklet told the story of china from ancient times to the present, illustrated with drawings of Shenango China employees creating and decorating Castleton pieces. Amidst the informative text and imagery, the brochure emphasized Castleton as the best American china had to offer with a wide selection of stock patterns, hand-painted studio pieces, and the contemporary artist series, all of which were included in a price list in the back.¹⁶⁸ Castleton released a second booklet in the early 1950 specifically for young brides-to-be. This "Wedding Etiquette" brochure walked a young woman all through her bridal journey from accepting the proposal all the way through planning and celebrating the ceremony and reception. Nestled amidst the hints and advice were several place settings of Castleton with recommendations for every personality and another price list in the back.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ "New Castleton Advertising Campaign Breaks in July," *Shenango Shenanigan*, company newsletter, June 1954, Lawrence County Historical Society (LCHS).

¹⁶⁸ Castleton China, Inc., "Things You Should Know About China," (New Castle, Pennsylvania: Shenango China, Inc., 1946)

To appeal to the variety of women viewing Castleton's advertisements in newspapers and magazines who did not desire to order brochures, Shenango utilized many different kinds of imagery. Under their ownership, the promotion of the Castleton brand continued in earnest, employing new and fashionable marketing. The earliest pre-war pieces often only featured a photograph or illustration of the Castleton logo or a specific pattern. "Castleton China for the Finer Table," released in November 1947, pictured four of the most popular patterns (Laurel, Belrose, Castleton Rose, and Sunnyvale), their descriptions, and prices. The text played up the urgency of having fashionable china for Thanksgiving holidays, "the start of the social season" and the convenience of Castleton sold in individual place settings so that the social hostess on a budget only had to purchase the number of pieces she needed.¹⁷⁰ As time went on, the newspapers began to feature the customers as well. These were often middle-class women (sometimes with their husbands) in marriage scenes or fashionable homes. A 1952 piece entitled "The Right Note in the Bridal Chorus" shows a bride and groom happily unwrapping their wedding gift of china. The text reminded readers of the "freshness" and "stateliness" of a new bride, which corresponded perfectly to the long-lasting beauty of Castleton China. Several different choices are shown, designed "with newlyweds in mind" to have in their homes with the assurance of "a host of happy and

¹⁶⁹ Castleton China, Inc., "Wedding Etiquette," (New Castle, Pennsylvania: Shenango China Inc., 1954)

¹⁷⁰ "Castleton China for the Finer Table," newspaper advertisement, *Arizona Republic*, November 1947.

successful dinners to come.”¹⁷¹ (Figure 13)

CASTLETON CHINA

the right note in the Bridal Chorus

CASTLETON 'YORK ROSE'—Two full blown white roses embedded in luxurious green foliage on Castleton China's beautiful pearl-edge shape. 5-piece place setting, \$17.75

CASTLETON 'GLORIA'—Two roses and delicate leaves in red. 5-piece place setting, \$16.75

CASTLETON 'SUNNYVALE'—Dainty flower sprays framed in gleaming gold. 5-piece place setting, \$16.75

CASTLETON 'CAPRICE'—Carnations in tender shades of gray and green. 5-piece place setting, \$14.75

CASTLETON 'CARLTON'—A dainty circle of gold leaves creates a design of rhythmic beauty on the beautiful Century shape of fine, made-in-America Castleton China. 5-piece place setting, \$20.75

CASTLETON CHINA

Russell's

Figure 13: "The Right Note in the Bridal Chorus" from 1952

Castleton's newspaper promotion tapered down in the 1960s as Sobiloff focused more on magazine and trade journal promotion of its new shapes. One of the last original newspaper advertisements came in 1961 in a piece called "Beautiful Home But..." which was unusual by picturing no actual china in the ad. The outside of a ranch-style home is shown in illustration, yet it seems to be empty. The text laments that the woman living in the home has a beautiful and handsome abode, but still does not entertain friends or employers because her china is of poor-quality and outdated. The allusion to social

¹⁷¹ "Right Note in the Bridal Chorus," newspaper advertisement, *Denton (TX) Daily Record*, May 1952.

disgrace was a powerful tool to entice housewives into purchasing a new set of Castleton to alleviate the guilt of becoming a failure.¹⁷²

Meanwhile, Castleton's advertising for magazines featured photographs in glorious full color to show off the luxurious patterns more than a black-and-white photo or illustration could. One of these series, entitled "When Smart Women Entertain," features housewives coordinating their dining tables with Castleton and matching decoration. An ad for the "Peony" pattern shows a woman expertly arranging fresh peonies on the table by her place settings.¹⁷³ Here the company appealed to flattering the intelligence of their customers, proud that they would not only purchase quality American-made china but would also use it in entertaining to showcase the elegance of their homes (figure 14). Another campaign in 1954 featured Castleton as the centerpiece in a series of Impressionist-inspired watercolor paintings which ran in high-end publications such as *House Beautiful*, *Modern Bride*, and *Mademoiselle*. The images integrate the Castleton patterns into the vignettes of adoring young women and men (implied to be either engaged or newlyweds) while emphasizing the china settings as "lovely lasting things" with strength as "rewarding you forever for your choice." Yet while stressing the high quality of the collection, the advertising also makes Castleton within reach for all new couples by noting the ease of purchase from any dealer and the

¹⁷² "Beautiful Home But..." newspaper advertisement, *Ironwood (WI) Daily Globe*, November 1961 and Stephanie Vincent, "Timeless Images, Gathering Shadows: The Public Imagery of Shenango China in a Time of Decline, 1940-1990" (seminar paper, Kent State University, spring 2010), 15-16.

¹⁷³ "When Smart Women Entertain (Peony)," magazine advertisement, *House Beautiful*, November 1950, 44.

many payment plans available.¹⁷⁴

*When
Smart Women
Entertain...*

MADE IN U.S.A.

Costume • Louise Barnes Gallagher

CHINA • CASTLETON

Pattern • Peony

The PEONY—legendary symbol of happiness—is the enchanting theme of this beautiful dinner service in fine, made-in-America CASTLETON CHINA. The radiant flowers, exquisitely shaded from rose-pink to delicate carmine, bloom among amber-green leaves on the translucent ivory-toned china. The pearl-embossed edge is enriched with gold. Five piece place-setting, \$12.75.

CASTLETON CHINA

"THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CHINA"
an interesting booklet with illustrations
of 35 Castleton Patterns awaits your request.
Ten cents for mailing costs, please.

CASTLETON CHINA, INC., Dept. H-11, 212 Fifth Avenue, New York 10, N.Y.

Figure 14: "When Smart Women Entertain," Castleton advertisement from 1950 in full color

¹⁷⁴ "Beautiful Beginnings," magazine advertisement, *House Beautiful*, September 1954, 77; "The Beautiful Things," magazine advertisement, *House Beautiful*, May 1955, 76; and Vincent, "Timeless Images," 12.

As Castleton moved into the 1960s, the subsidiary was beginning to struggle. The influx of cheap imported ware entered American households at an alarming rate, prompting Shenango to look to Japan to produce a new line of Castleton-branded Independence Ironstone china. The company promoted Independence Ironstone not for young newlyweds or those looking for tradition in china but as fresh and contemporary for fashion-minded couples of the 1960s. A 1963 piece pictured an older (and obviously wealthier) man and woman playing a guessing game of “what’s black and white and fashion all over?” A photo of the new “Classica” pattern by Castleton’s Independence Ironstone appears underneath the cartoonish illustrated couple who mention the chic new pattern that would be perfect “on that magenta linen we brought back from Madrid” while still being durable enough for the oven and dishwasher so that “cook will love it!”¹⁷⁵ (figure 15)

This late marketing for Castleton imagined a far more lavish lifestyle at the same time that the subsidiary was struggling to survive. By the mid and late 1960s, Castleton was being scaled back and as INTERPACE took over, it was all but dropped in favor of the imported Independence Ironstone and the parent company's Franciscan China line. As Castleton faded, so did its advertising. They no longer ran in major magazines and in only a few newspapers. These, too, had become a shadow of their heyday by dropping the clever illustrations and appeals to social dignity. A 1969 feature for the “Majestic” pattern showed only a photo of a cup and saucer, a look similar to the simple advertising

¹⁷⁵ “What’s Black and White and Fashion All Over?,” magazine advertisement from unknown magazine, 1963, photo courtesy of <www.ebay.com>.

of the early 1940s.¹⁷⁶

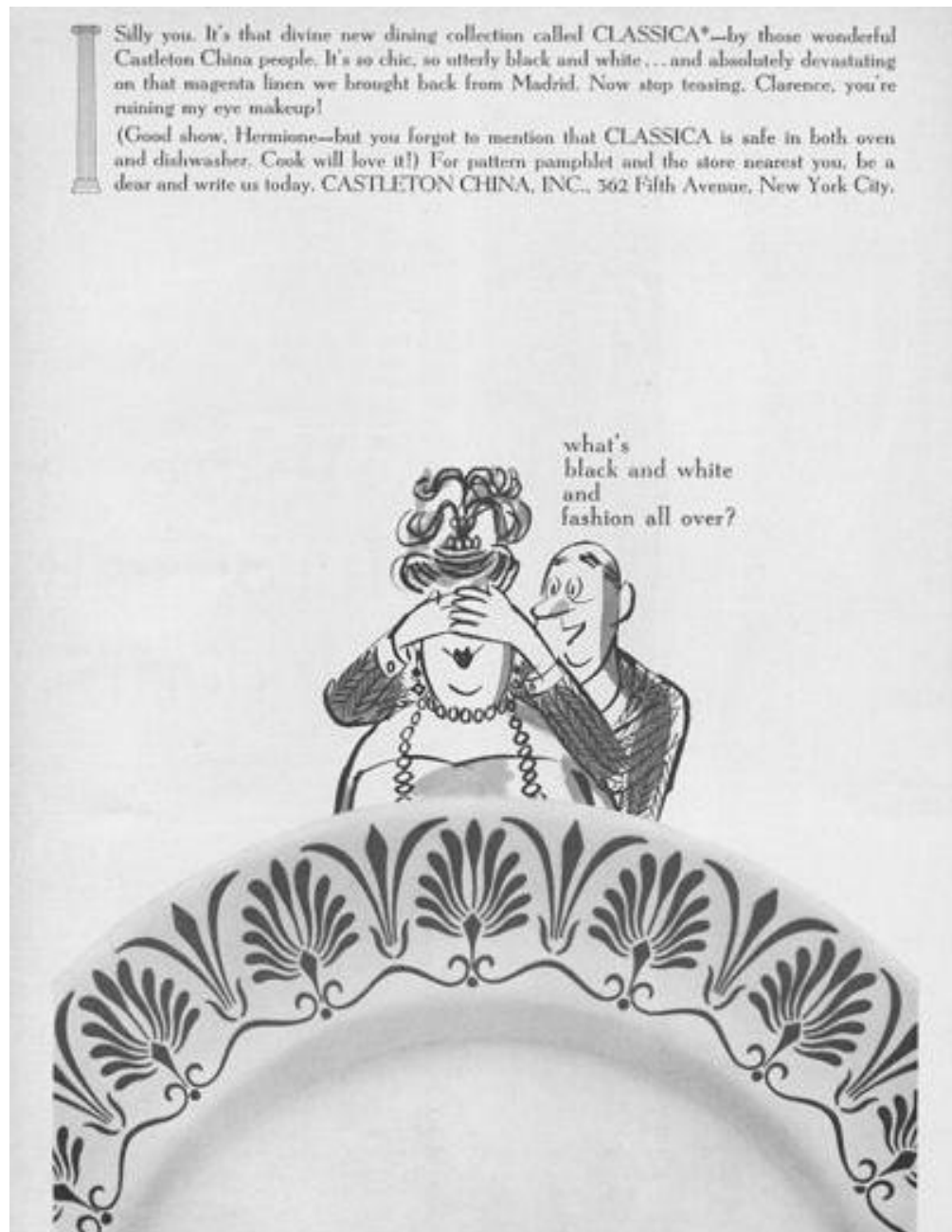


Figure 15: The 1963 ad for "Classica" is far different than the usual Castleton pieces

¹⁷⁶ "Symphony Collection: Majestic," newspaper advertisement, *Racine (WI) Journal*, September 1965.

Shenango limited most of its appeals to the home market to Castleton with only two real exceptions where it made its own product available to the public market. Promotion for these lines appeared in many of the same high-end magazines carrying Castleton ads to appeal to like audiences but also showed up in more mainstream publications such as *Good Housekeeping* and *LIFE* to reach the broadest segment of America as possible. In the fall of 1950 Shenango began a national advertising campaign to bring its vitrified (heavy-duty chinaware usually made for hotels or restaurants) product into American homes, introducing the Epicure ceramic cookware line. The ad campaign featured the Epicure line of ceramic cooking vessels surrounded by a seasonal fall motif of leaves, seashells, and stalks of wheat, to bring to mind the upcoming holidays in the same way that Castleton's ads reminded readers of the important social period. Shenango emphasized that its new product was *china*, not earthenware like competitors' lower quality cookware and could be brought to the table without embarrassment. The wording within the advertisement promises a perfectly cooked dinner since "heat seeps through evenly," a presentable meal for family and friends, and an easier time cleaning up afterwards because Epicure was "glazed both outside and inside so dribblets of grease slide right off in the dishpan," all techniques that would apply to busy homemakers of the 1950s (figure 16).¹⁷⁷

Shenango's other public marketing was for its new home line of china, Peter Terris. This was thinner and more fashionable than its common hotelware but not as

¹⁷⁷ "Advertising News and Notes," *New York Times*, April 28, 1950; "Shenango Epicure," magazine advertisement, *House Beautiful*, October 1950, 263; and Vincent, "Timeless Images," 9-10.

elaborate (or expensive) as the Castleton. Its advertisements were exciting, touting the china as sturdy enough for baking in the oven, going through the dishwasher, and assured against breakage for an entire year. The illustrated images showed the practical side of chinaware rather than the simple smiling couples in the Castleton imagery. The Peter Terris appeared in ovens and out-of-doors with older-looking women who would know the ins and outs of entertaining and practicality. The text assumes readers would admire china which could ease the burdens of everyday life, an appeal that went hand in hand with the championing of convenience in the middle and late 1950s.¹⁷⁸

SHENANGO'S
Epicure Ceramic Cook Ware ... is china, not earthenware ... see what a savory difference it makes! Heat seeps through evenly, unlocks hidden flavours, and suddenly ... an old recipe is a tangy new delight! Bring Epicure from the range right to the table ... its lovely beige and brown china frames your culinary triumphs. Individual as well as family sizes and glazed both outside and inside so dribblets of grease slide right off in the dishpan.

Write for the name of the store nearest you and for FREE RECIPE BOOKLET, "Epicure Ceramic Cook Ware ... the Secret of Famous Chefs."

SHENANGO POTTERY COMPANY, • Home Products Division • Dept. B2, New Castle, Pa.

ovenproof!
real china
for everyday use

Bake on it
Serve on it

16 piece starter sets service for four from **\$12⁹⁵**

- One year replacement warranty on breakage
- Beautiful patterns—Dishwasher proof
- Savings on 16 and 45 piece sets

Peter Terris

DIVISION OF SHENANGO CHINA, INC.
BOX 100, NEW CASTLE, PA.

Figure 16: Advertising for the Epicure and Peter Terris lines by Shenango

¹⁷⁸ "Ovenproof!," magazine advertisement, *LIFE*, June 1956, 124.

Both the Epicure and Peter Terris lines did not carry over into the 1960s when Sobiloffs bought out the company. Instead of the home, the new owners embraced an advertising strategy begun earlier with Castleton and extended it into the commercial ware lines: an appeal to the fine art quality present in Shenango-produced goods. Among the innovations contributing to the increased interest in American china in the pre and postwar periods were the trends of new shapes and designer motifs created by American artists, a trend that Castleton was quick to pick up.¹⁷⁹ In 1942, the company approached the Industrial Design department of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York to seek out a designer for a modern new shape in china.¹⁸⁰ The staff recommended Eva Zeisel, a Hungarian-born ceramic designer who was now living in New York after fleeing the Nazis in 1938. Her reputation in ceramic design came from industrial art, not on artisan handicraft and she created pieces based on look and feel. With the set she designed for Castleton, Zeisel hoped to capture American etiquette in a service that was erect and dignified and in her words, “to look as if it was growing up from the table.”¹⁸¹

Despite a delay in production due to American involvement in World War II, the Zeisel china, dubbed “Museum White,” debuted at MoMA in June 1946 as “the first fine china of modern design.” The set launched simultaneously in four premier New York stores and in all locations “demand exceeded production.” Zeisel’s work for Castleton

¹⁷⁹ “American Potters Increasing Output,” *NYT*, November 16, 1946.

¹⁸⁰ Edgar Kaufman, Jr., “The Department of Industrial Design,” *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, Vol. 14. No. 1 (Autumn 1946), pp 2-14, 6.

¹⁸¹ Lucie Young, *Eva Zeisel*, Compact Design Portfolio, eds Marisa Bartolucci and Raul Cabra, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 2003), 16-18.

was soon noted all across the country and played a large part in launching her American career.¹⁸² After the success of "Museum White," Castleton made the pattern available to the general public in 1951, marketing it as the "Fashion of the Future" and emphasizing the pieces as the first free form modern china ever created and the "envy of the world." With Museum, homeowners could have a dinnerware set that was contemporary in the postwar atomic age and "the heirloom of tomorrow."¹⁸³ (figure 17)

the fashion of the future





museum

in castleton china

MUSEUM - the first china dinner service of free form shapes is made in America and the envy of the world. Only the lustrous pearl-white tone and rare translucence of Castleton China could adequately present these beautiful forms, free of decoration, flawless and elegant as a gem.

MUSEUM was created by a famous modern designer to adorn contemporary tables—it is destined to be an heirloom of tomorrow.

Figure 17: Eva Zeisel's Museum, "the fashion of the future"

¹⁸² Kaufman, 6 (quote) and Young, 18.

¹⁸³ "The Fashion of the Future," newspaper advertisement, *Waterloo (Iowa) Daily Courier*, December 10, 1951.

With the overwhelming success of “Museum,” Castleton sought out other art designers to create new patterns for both the classic “Corona” shape as well as Zeisel’s “Museum.” Amongst the many artists sought out by Hellmann were Thomas Hart Benton, Ludwig Bemelmans, Roberto Montenegro, Thomas W. Nason, Marcel Vertes, Salvador Dalí, and Pablo Picasso.¹⁸⁴ And like the original piece in the set, they too received glowing adoration in advertising. In 1947, the “Ma-Lin” pattern by well-known artist Ching-Chih Yee was introduced. Marketing for the new pattern lauded it as a modern look telling the “timeless loveliness of an ancient culture” based on the old masters of China. The design was made to appeal to an audience which wished to be contemporary and exotic yet classic, tasteful, and elegant.¹⁸⁵ Castleton placed other pieces in the artist series alongside traditional magazine advertisings such as “When Smart Women Entertain.”

By 1949, the Castleton China Collection by contemporary artists was complete and to celebrate, the company took the ceramic pieces as well as the artwork that inspired them on a national exhibition tour to several galleries, department, and jewelry stores which carried Castleton products. The show was presented either in full or in two halves and a representative from Castleton accompanied many of the showings to lecture and spark interest in ceramic as art.¹⁸⁶ Newspapers across the country placed advertising for

¹⁸⁴ “Shenango Pottery is Boosted,” *New Castle News*, November 10, 1942.

¹⁸⁵ “Ma-Lin by Ching-Chih Yee,” newspaper advertisement, *Wisconsin State Journal* (and others), October 1947.

¹⁸⁶ “Famous China Exhibited at S.L. Show,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, August 6, 1952. The exhibitions for Castleton began in 1949 and continued across the country until around 1952. The art pieces themselves

the exhibition in their pages with a number of the ceramics shown (figure 18). The text in these celebrated the combination of art and china in a variety of ways. Ads in Milwaukee, Wisconsin played up the American-made quality of the manufacture and the wide variety of patterns available since "Castleton is the manufacturer of American china that uses world-famous artists to create styles for you." In Charleston the text played up the value of the art itself, "You will see how the works of these great artists are taken off museum walls and onto your very own dinner table." For the average American who had the taste for high art but not the budget, Castleton allowed for the works of masters to be in the home on fine china. San Antonio, Texas's ads made an appeal to modernity in the art of the ware, "with deference to culture of the past, with keen appreciation for the contemporary, urged by a vision of the future," and trumpeted the excitement of having such a display in San Antonio.¹⁸⁷

were available as special-order studio patterns through Castleton until the subsidiary was discontinued in 1974.

¹⁸⁷ "Exquisite Castleton China," *Charleston Gazette*, November 8, 1950; "Announcing an Exhibition of Castleton China," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 17, 1949; and "Castleton Exhibit by Contemporary Artists," *San Antonio Express*, April 9, 1950.

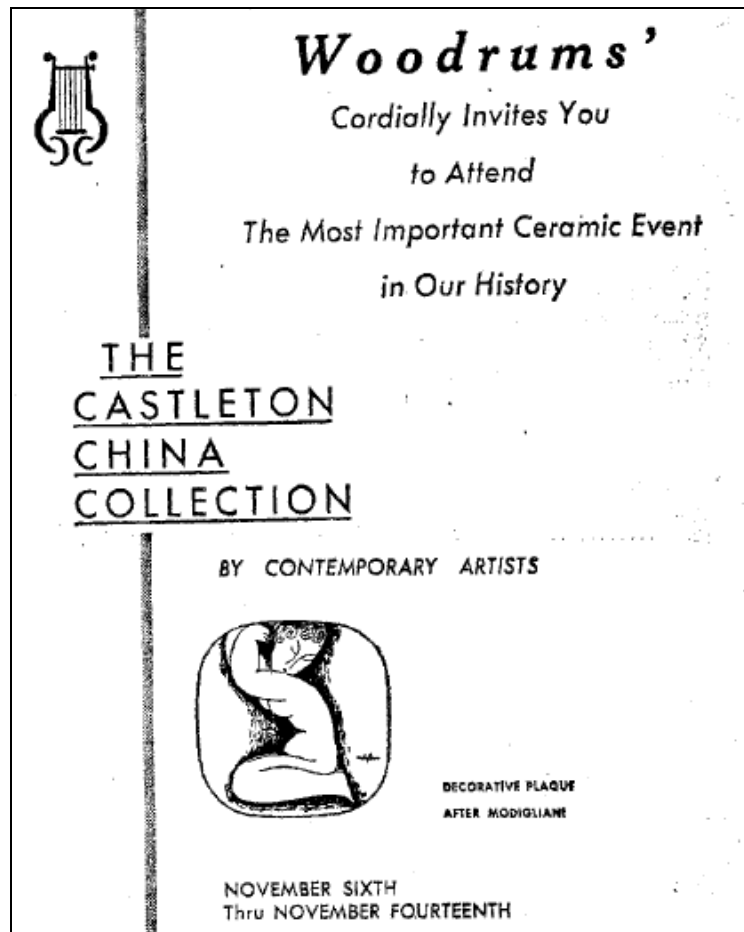


Figure 18: An example of an advertisement for Castleton's Contemporary Artists Collection exhibition

The exhibit itself contained all or part of the twenty-eight paintings, drawings, and etchings used to create the ceramic goods and the finished china product and even souvenir brochures for patrons. This contained a letter from Hellmann describing how "the beauty of olden times and distant lands, from unknown craftsmen and famous painters, unites in the Castleton Collection." He explained the china traditions of Asia, Europe, and America and how they all went into the making of Castleton China along with the best ingredients in the country for American kilns. The Contemporary Art pieces were also for sale along with Castleton's everyday lines at each venue. They could be

produced on special order and ranged from \$15.75 for a place setting of Zeisel's "Museum" service to \$100 for a pair of dinner platters with Modigliani's "Caryatides" all the way up to \$600 for a dozen service plates featuring work by Picasso and plaques by Salvador Dalí for \$500 *each*.¹⁸⁸ The brochures and displays proved that Castleton wanted to treat these pieces of art china as an event, not just a mere sale.

The Contemporary Artists Collection showed the ability of Castleton to take china beyond the tabletop and into the world of art and fashion. Another campaign was launched in 1954 for Castleton's four new studio patterns ("Thistle," "Snowflake," "Lace," and "Turquoise.") The new pieces were tied with complementing summer dresses by top 1950s fashion designers such as Oleg Casinal, Vera Maxwell, Adele Simpson, and Mollie Paris. The promotion featured its own fashion show and a four-page color spread in *Harper's Bazaar* (figure 19). The magazine showed sketches of the dresses and place settings along with portraits of the designers who quoted the china as "movement and rhythm that is pure classic beauty," "a table fashion that knows no period," and "so right for fashion you *live* with."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Castleton China, Inc., "The Castleton China Collection," advertising brochure, (New Castle, Pennsylvania: Shenango China, Inc., c.1949). The brochure in the author's collection is printed for Hudson's Department Store in Detroit, Michigan.

¹⁸⁹ "China to Complement Fashions," *NCN*, April 17, 1953 and *Harper's Bazaar*, April 1953, 48-50.

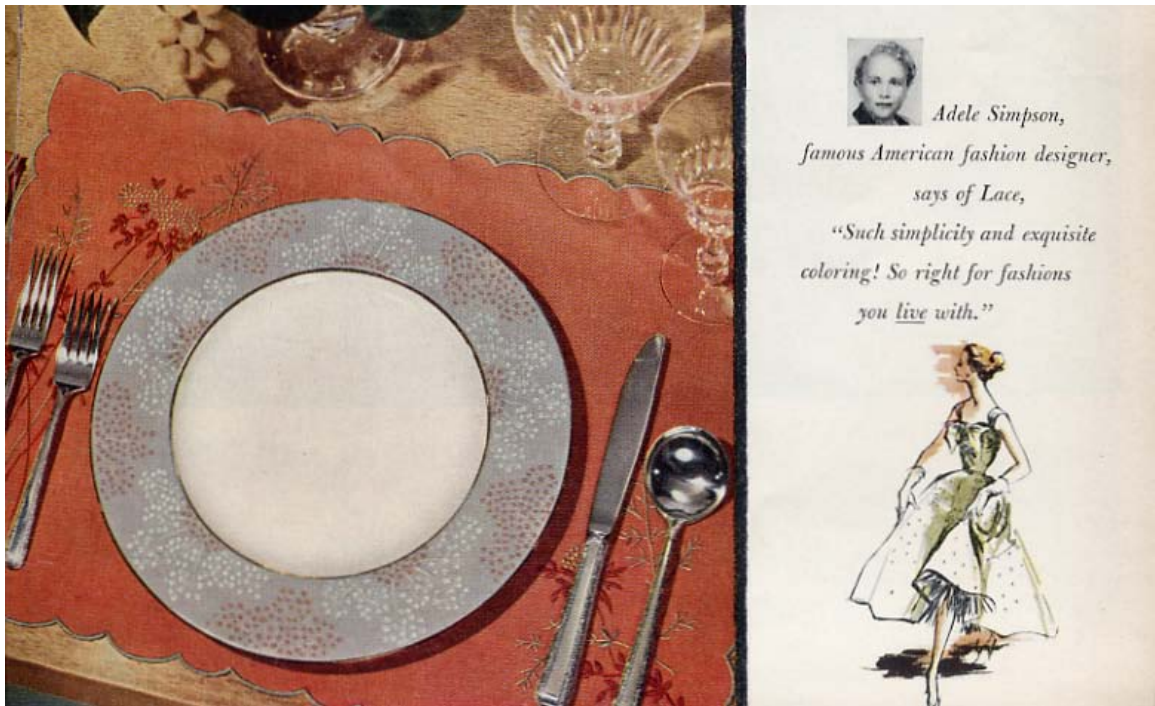


Figure 19: Castleton China's "Lace" pattern paired with fashion in *Harper's Bazaar*, April 1953

When Shenango was purchased by Sobiloffs, the company began the transition back to a focus on commercial ware. The high cost of producing the Castleton was becoming too prohibitive for Sobiloff and later INTERPACE who closed Castleton down in 1974. The new owners still used art as a means to sell the product: building off of a successful 1953 catalog that for the first time pictured all available items under one cover, Shenango hoped to further revolutionize the china catalog by not only using full-color images but to place the china in artful, realistic settings with fashion in mind.¹⁹⁰ The end result was *Stylebook 70*, released in 1965 and touted by Shenango as a "revolution." Unlike old-fashioned product catalogs that consisted of little more than a stock photo of one dinner plate per pattern, *Stylebook 70* engaged the chinaware with its

¹⁹⁰ "Pottery Issues Modern Catalog," *NCN*, February 21, 1953.

surroundings. They were placed in table settings with color coordination between the pieces and the scenery (figure 20). Also, in a move that “tosse[d] out old-fashioned tabletop selling methods,” the place settings pictured for the first time food as part of the tablescape and included photos of actual people using and enjoying the china, making the visualization of Shenango’s ware in a restaurant setting more concrete and believable.¹⁹¹



Figure 20: A page from Shenango's *Stylebook 70*

Stylebook 70, with its fifty-two pages, ten new patterns, and more than one hundred color photos, rethought how china was viewed in catalog form, as it

¹⁹¹ Shenango China Inc., *Stylebook 70 Tabletop Catalog*, (New Castle, PA: Shenango China Inc., 1965).

“introduce[d] the first coordinated fashion-conscious merchandising approach to this key part of food service.” Management lauded the huge response the publication got at its first public showing in New York: dealers agreed that it could boost sales for Shenango upwards of thirty percent by just showing an image of the product to go with a description and by showing the complete tabletop at use. Also, the open praise of *Stylebook 70* in New York led to greater sales confidence with 25,000 copies distributed within the first year of publication.¹⁹² *Stylebook 70* not only succeeded in boosting Shenango’s presence, it also won a number of awards including the Printing Institute of America’s first prize in the Geographic Arts category and the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company’s Printing Job of the Year. Most importantly, *Stylebook 70* helped bring in an additional \$500,000 in sales for Shenango China in 1965 and 1966.¹⁹³

The significance of *Stylebook 70* was not only limited to the catalog itself: for the next decade, the imagery of the product within the realm of the tabletop carried on into Shenango’s other advertising. This catalog and subsequent advertising also marked a shift towards customers within the foodservice industry rather than the public. From this point on, most of Shenango’s advertising appeared not in magazines or newspapers but in trade journals for the restaurant and hotel industries such as *Restaurants and Institutions*, *Hotel and Motel Management*, *Restaurant and Hotel Design*, and *Restaurant Hospitality*. INTERPACE hoped that dropping the more expensive Castleton line and focusing on the core of the company would help to improve the status of the plant for the long term.

¹⁹² “Revolution,” *Shenango Table-Topics*, company newsletter, October 1965, LCHS and “I’m Running out of Superlatives!,” *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, November 1965, LCHS.

¹⁹³ “Shenango has Top Stylebook,” *New Castle News*, December 16, 1966.

Promotion of *Stylebook 70* went hand in hand with Sobiloff's tactic to further increase Shenango's presence at industry trade shows, another representative break with the home and public market. Shenango began ramping up its trade show presence at the end of the 1940s by innovating the display of their product. Director of Design Bill McBurney recalled that the established practice for chinaware companies was to display their new patterns as dishes on a rack. Under his guidance, Shenango began setting up their china at shows in the form of small vignettes consisting of a tabletop outfitted in curtains, napery, candlelight, and flatware with a full place setting of china instead of just one plate. "Sure," reasoned McBurney, "I may spend a couple hundred dollars in accessories, but that's what made the booth, the attraction [...] they didn't go by, they all stopped." The idea caught on and by the 1950s these vignettes, christened the "Rooms of Tomorrow," were a standard practice at trade shows around the United States.¹⁹⁴

Under Sobiloff's ownership and McBurney's innovation, Shenango kept up a large presence at trade shows across the country throughout the 1960s. These locations became the major venues to introduce new products and advertising. The National Hotel and Motel Exposition became a common launching ground for an audience of forty thousand representatives from the leading hotel chains on the East Coast where Shenango unveiled FöRM, Citation, and gave the first viewings of *Stylebook 70*.¹⁹⁵ The National Hotel and Motel Exposition was one of the two major industry shows that dominated

¹⁹⁴ Bill McBurney, 1st interview by Beverly Zona, October 3, 1990, Lawrence County Historical Society, Shenango China Heritage Project, 6-7.

¹⁹⁵ "Shenango China Official Announces New York Display," *NCN*, November 8, 1962; "New York Show," *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, October 1965, LCHS; and "Shenango to Unveil 'Citation'," *NCN*, November 8, 1966.

foodservice, the other being the National Restaurant Association Show in Chicago, where Shenango always had a major presence and where McBurney introduced his “Rooms of Tomorrow.” The show, commonly referred to as NRA, was where Shenango often turned in its later years to showcase what was new and exciting in front of an audience that easily reached over one hundred thousand. This presence was especially prominent under both INTERPACE and Anchor Hocking. In the 1970s, INTERPACE used NRA to gauge the response from customers, both positive and negative, about the large factory renovations that caused initial delays but in the end quicker service. Anchor Hocking later used the show for discussing new designs as well as strategies to return Shenango to its top position within the foodservice industry.¹⁹⁶

While NRA and the National Hotel and Motel Exposition were the two largest shows throughout the country, Shenango also made appearances at various smaller shows over the years. Shows for groups like the American Dietetic Association were common stops to promote Shenango to an audience that was not made up of the typical restaurant and hotel owners but to instead customers such as hospitals and schools. The company also displayed at West Coast shows such as Food-O-Rama and the Pacific Coast Regional Exposition. Under Anchor Hocking, Shenango was even able to go international for the first time in 1979 at the Frankfurt Fair in Germany.¹⁹⁷ With

¹⁹⁶ “National Restaurant Show Marks Significant Turn Around,” *Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, May 1975, LCHS; “National Restaurant Show,” *Shenango Pacesetter*, company newsletter, June 1981, LCHS; and “Shenango Stars at NRA Show,” *Shenango Shenanigan*, company newsletter, June 1986, LCHS.

Shenango's owners committed to its institutional consumer base instead of home markets, it needed this variety of trade show experience to make up for the lost notoriety from its absence in newspapers and magazine and made sure its show displays followed the same appeals to appearance and service that were present in printed promotion.

At the time it was promoting the new catalog at trade shows in the 1960s, INTERPACE took a page from *Stylebook 70* and designed innovative advertising campaigns that included striking uses of color, lighting, and props. A 1970 ad entitled "It's IN" for the new "IN" pattern on Shenango's FöRM shape used extensive color coordination to get the point across, pairing the brick red accents on the china with matching accessories and red wine for a look that stressed the need for contemporary fashion: "Are your tabletops in with the 1970s? Get with it!"¹⁹⁸ Instead of needing to keep up with neighbors, now Shenango China was pushed as a means to compete with other restaurants.

INTERPACE also continued to feature in-use products photographed with food as part of their marketing. A series from 1971 entitled "You Think A Lot Of..." emphasized china carrying items such as steaks and specialty desserts. The text notes that even the best dishes need help with appearance as customers take careful notice of the presentation as well as the taste. With Shenango, a meal can be complimented and enhanced to the

¹⁹⁷ "Shenango to Display at Two Trade Shows," *NCN*, November 3, 1965; "Shenango-Rama Exhibits at Food-O-Rama," *Shenango Table Top-ic*, company newsletter, June 1969, LCHS; and "Shenango Wows Them at NRA!," *Shenango Pacesetter*, company newsletter, July 1979, LCHS.

¹⁹⁸ "It's IN," advertisement for trade journals, 1970, LCHS. All of the author's copies of INTERPACE's advertising come from Shenango China's newsletters which reprinted the current advertising for employees to view, Lawrence County Historical Society.

point that a restaurant owner would be foolish not to change over.¹⁹⁹ A devotion to the customer continued in ads from 1972 and 1973 in the “Look At Your Food the Way Your Customer Does” series for several stock patterns in FöRM and other classic shapes. A woman reaches for coffee to go with her dessert as the text notes that Shenango’s FöRM shape china looks better to a customer in addition to being durable, stackable, and low cost. This forces restaurateurs to actually think about their client’s desires when designing a décor. Customers were pickier than ever and even a simple steak was no longer good enough without the addition of appealing china such as Shenango (figure 21).²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ “You Think A Lot of Your Steak,” advertisement for trade journals, 1971, LCHS; “You Think A Lot of Your Specialties,” advertisement for trade journals, 1971, LCHS; and Vincent, 18.

²⁰⁰ “Look At Your Food the Way Your Customer Does,” advertisement for trade journals, 1973, LCHS and Vincent, 19.



Look at
your steak
the way
your
customer
does.

On the plate. And look at how much the plate can do for your steak. This is Shenango's Covington on Staffordshire shape. The smart black pattern, distinctive fluted rim and ivory body make your steaks look proud — and worth more. This is the kind of place setting you need to set off your steaks — and set your foodservice apart from the competition.

Equally important, Covington is remarkably low priced and remarkably durable — to give you a more favorable in-use cost.

For new tabletop Stylebook 75 ideas, write Shenango China, P.O. Box 120, New Castle, Pa. 16103.

Look for the Indian on the back.

SHENANGO
INTERPACE

SHENANGO

Figure 21: An example of INTERPACE's "Look at Food the Way Your Customer Does" advertisements

Despite the colorful and eye-catching marketing, Shenango was falling behind in the mid and late 1970s. The stagnant economy coupled with the slowdowns at the plant from renovations led to the first non-record setting year for Shenango in 1974 since INTERPACE took over. However, the parent company recognized that appealing to a new start for restaurants could also be a means to refresh Shenango. To do this, they took measures to emphasize the low price of Shenango as a way for revitalizing a tabletop on a budget. While the times were tough, “people don’t eat out just to eat”: quality in food and even china service still mattered a great deal to customers and Shenango continued to offer its patterns at a better value so that even restaurant owners on the tightest budgets could in reality consider redesigning their establishments. By 1975, INTERPACE was promising its lowest price ever on five different stock designs that “anyone can afford.” Additionally, the company promoted a return to some of its older designs in an appeal both to nostalgia felt by customers but also as a way to sell new china without having the expense of creating new patterns. Shenango not only had to deal with the faltering economy but it was still under the constant threat of imported (and lower quality) china. As a result, the ads stressing lower costs also noted that Shenango was every bit as affordable as “cheap” pieces from overseas.²⁰¹

INTERPACE continued using an appeal to its foodservice customers to try and sell Shenango China. By the late 1970s, the company was not finding the expected results and instead sold the plant to Anchor Hocking. At first, Anchor held Shenango as its own

²⁰¹ “People Don’t Eat Out Just to Eat,” advertisement for trade journals, 1974, LCHS; “Introducing Shenango Low Price Value Patterns,” advertisement for trade journals, 1975, LCHS; “Why in the World?,” advertisement for trade journals, 1976, LCHS; and Vincent, 19.

independent subsidiary and continued marketing the product to the foodservice industry, albeit with less of the artistic flair and integrated with its existing products. In a 1981 advertisement, “All Across the Board We Deliver Value,” the artistic style of advertising is replaced instead with a traditional restaurant setting where the Shenango products are shown at an elegant table with Anchor Hocking glassware and flatware. Similar language is used in promoting the china line seen through the mention of how dinnerware can be an essential part of the dining experience. From this perspective Shenango offered a wide variety of stock patterns and durable shapes to choose from and maximize value as well as custom-made patterns to personalize the eating experience.²⁰² Anchor continued to laud their ability to fill an instant need for new china service in their “One Name” campaign in 1982 and 1983 (figure 22). These advertisements used a block pattern spreading across several pages of a typical trade magazine, each containing a photo of one Shenango place setting (which rotated through different patterns in each use of the ad across a year and a half span). At the end came a final block with the Shenango logo and ordering information. It stressed the company’s well-known name within the industry and its eighty years of experience as an assurance that Shenango had something in stock to satisfy the needs of any restaurant.²⁰³

By 1984, Anchor Hocking was facing dropping profits from the economic recession and increasing foreign imports. To cut costs, the various subsidiaries, including

²⁰² “All Across the Board We Deliver Value,” magazine advertisement, *Restaurants and Institutions*, April 1981, Kent State University Library periodicals collection.

²⁰³ “One Name,” magazine advertisement, *Restaurants and Institutions*, March 1982-September 1983, KSU periodicals.

Shenango, were integrated into the Foodservice Division. This saved money by allowing for a consolidation of advertising from the many pieces for each line into one campaign every few months. A prototype of this practice began by the summer of 1983, when the “One Name” ads were converted into a new strategy called “One Call.” The format remained the same with the small blocks of each product spread across several pages. But now mixed in with the Shenango designs were other products by Anchor Hocking and the final block featured not the Shenango Indian but instead the Anchor Foodservice logo as the place to call for both china and glass needs.²⁰⁴

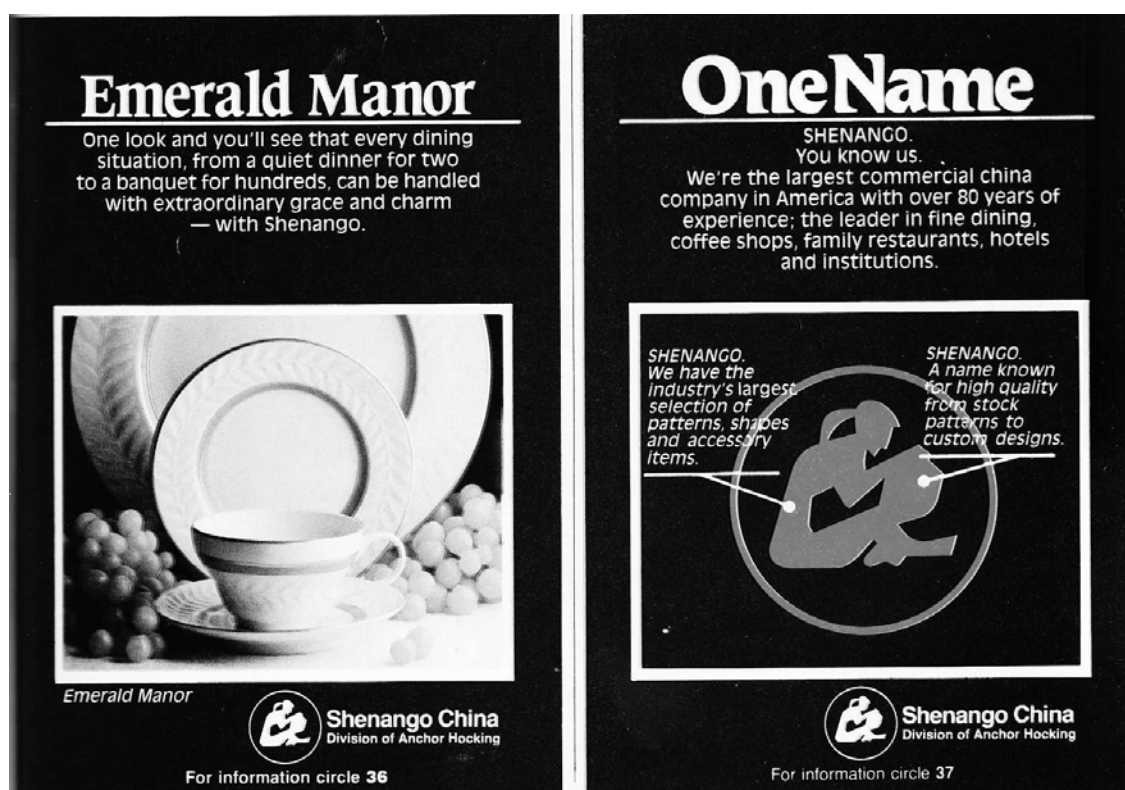


Figure 22: Two panels from Anchor Hocking's "One Name" campaign in 1982-83. The final panel was replaced in summer of 1983 with the logo of Anchor Foodservice

²⁰⁴ “One Call,” magazine advertisement, *Restaurants and Institutions*, July-September 1983, KSU Library periodicals.

Further pieces in the mid-1980s such as 1984's "Everything Under the Sun" placed Shenango as an affordable, charming product *within* the greater foodservice division as an all-in-one convenience to alleviate a customer's hassle of having to go to several sources to furnish their business.²⁰⁵ Photography within these advertisements downplayed Shenango and only featured its items within settings of other Anchor products. "Discover the Difference" from 1986 did not show the vast table settings of earlier years, but instead one single Shenango plate in the "Carlton" design, a very old pattern promoted by Anchor Hocking in an appeal to nostalgia overwhelmed by three Anchor Hocking glasses. The "Carlton" plate got a brief mention in the text (ironically describing the shape as modern) which did not match the description of the glassware's "outstanding durability" and "casual elegance" (figure 23). While the two items were meant to be complementary, the advertising tends to favor the more established Anchor lines over Shenango.²⁰⁶

The incorporation of Shenango China into the Foodservice Division helped cut down on advertising costs for Anchor Hocking but still did not improve sales to the point that the company could stave off a takeover bid from Newell. As soon as Newell showed little interest in keeping Shenango around, Syracuse China spared no time in acquiring the plant. While Syracuse's motives may have been to shut down Shenango, they initially made the public claim that the ownership of Shenango along with its former subsidiary

²⁰⁵ "Everything Under the Sun," magazine advertisement, *Restaurants and Institutions*, July 1984, KSU Library periodicals.

²⁰⁶ "Discover the Difference," magazine advertisement, *Restaurant and Hotel Design*, April 1986, KSU Library periodicals.

Mayer China would be a means for hotel and restaurant owners to have a convenient central company for multiple china needs. Syracuse took out advertising in several leading trade magazines to announce their “Revolution in China,” the acquisition of Shenango as well as re-promoting their ownership of Mayer. The shining silver background displayed the logos of the three china companies and in promoting Mayer and Shenango as part of Syracuse, the ad assures customers that “each of these dinnerware brands would retain its own uniqueness.” As always, better serving customers was the ultimate goal of these acquisitions and with the three leading foodservice providers now together, this was easier than ever.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ “Another Revolution in China,” magazine advertisement, *Restaurant and Hotel Design* (and others), May-June 1988, KSU Library periodicals and Vincent 28-29.

Discover The Difference.

Beauty and High Strength!

Discover the Narrow Rim Carlton difference. This modern, low profile shape is available undecorated or in five elegant patterns. Six sizes, including the popular 12 1/2" plate are available. For the perfect complement, discover the Newport difference. The fresh new look of Newport's fully tempered stemware disguises its outstanding durability. The casual elegance of the line is complemented by its five rim-tempered tumblers.

Narrow Rim Wide Rim

Fully Tempered

For information call or write:
Anchor Foodservice
P.O. Box 171
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007
1-800-323-8772

Anchor Foodservice

New
Anchor Glass®
Fully Tempered
Newport

New
Shenango China
Narrow Rim Carlton

© 1985 Anchor Foodservice

See us at RHTDEC # 3247

Circle number 38

Figure 23: "Discover the Difference" overshadows a Shenango plate with Anchor Hocking's Newport Glassware

Syracuse promised the autonomy of both of its sub-companies, yet it ignored Shenango China in its advertising for the first year and a half of its ownership. In comparison, this same time span saw products from Mayer advertised eight separate times in the leading industry publication, *Restaurants and Institutions* as well as many others. The first (and only) promotional piece for Shenango appeared in May 1990 to feature the new Great Plate.²⁰⁸ The nontraditional item, while a way to gain interest with their customers also reinforced the marketing strategy of Syracuse towards Shenango. Syracuse maintained their own china line as a product for classy, high-end restaurants and during the years of ownership, did the same with Mayer. Shenango, on the other hand, was reserved for middle and lower-end institutions who wanted durability over prestige. A product like the Great Plate could hold multiple uses for smaller restaurant owners who were trying to get by on a tight budget.

The early days of Shenango saw its products marketed in a number of thematic ways through the world of newspapers, magazines, and home brochures. As the plant moved from owner to owner, the overall strategy of promotion changed from one of showcasing the company and its products to the public eye to one of highly selective advertising for only the foodservice industry with the company's presence only visible in industry magazines and at trade shows. Lizabeth Cohen notes that advertising changed after the end of World War II, becoming more targeted to certain segments of the population and more innovative in its appearance in new mediums such as television.

²⁰⁸ "Not Too Rich for Your Taste," magazine advertisement, *Restaurants and Institutions*, May-September 1990, KSU Library periodicals.

When Shenango China was first bought out in 1959, the company was on the edge of innovation in terms of its product, yet its new owners only partially embraced changes in technology for advertising. While the outdated newspaper pieces were abandoned by the 1960s and 1970s, Shenango never kept up with the times by appearing in television commercials. Perhaps this was, as Blaszczyk noted, because china dinnerware was from its earliest days meant to be a possession as unique as the owner. And in fact, Castleton's advertising played up the idea of having individualized china. Television would have introduced a standardization that was against the product's core message.²⁰⁹ To make up for a lack of television promotion, INTERPACE and Anchor Hocking's print ads kept up with artistic trends throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Yet these were only seen by a small portion of the country instead of the public-at-large and only contained within the commercial restaurant and hotel industry.

The shutdown of Castleton China became the ultimate symbol of this internalization: the loss of public recognition from no longer producing Castleton may have been greater than the savings that INTERPACE claimed by its discontinuation: after that point the plant saw a marked decline and the idea of its failure became real. Shenango employees Anthony Conti and Ed Bistyga lamented the loss of the "Cadillac of the Industry" and blamed INTERPACE for the discontinuation by reasoning that despite claiming the prohibitive cost, the conglomerate in reality wanted to focus instead on the

²⁰⁹ This was not an idea unique to Shenango: according to Blaszczyk, no manufacturer of home or commercial china outside of Corning Ware ever regularly advertised their products on television. Bill McBurney recalled bringing Castleton China onto the set of the home décor program "The Home Show with Arlene Francis" as a guest spot in the early 1950s but not as a commercial venture. Blaszczyk, 2, 265-269 and Bill McBurney, 2nd interview by Beverley Zona, Shenango China Heritage Project, McBurney residence, 1992, 12-13.

Franciscan China line that they already owned before the purchase of Shenango. “That was your prestige, that carried,” noted Bistyga, “When you mention Shenango China that was automatically Castleton and Haviland. [...] People that used to work there, they could never accept the fact that they done away with that.”²¹⁰

Along with the decrease in public promotion came a decrease in autonomy for Shenango: by the time Anchor Hocking bought the company, the onetime leader of commercial chinaware was reduced to a component in an overall foodservice package. When Syracuse took over for the plant's final years, they only marketed Shenango as a low-end product, a far cry from the china used by dignitaries and premier hotels in the 1940s and 1950s. Syracuse's treatment of Shenango was a humiliation, yet not surprising given the ultimate motive of Syracuse to shut the company down. By that time the rest of the world was none the wiser about Shenango's failure. But the people who worked for years at the Pottery and the citizens of New Castle knew all too well what the failure of the company meant and would express their emotions in a number of ways to come.

²¹⁰ Ed Bistyga and Anthony Conti, 1st interview by Steve Keller, Lawrence County Historical Society, New Castle, Pennsylvania. April 1, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 12-13.

CHAPTER IV

A Multitude of Voices: Employee and Community Reactions

“We heard rumors that Syracuse would always try to get us,” she recalled, “And when they did acquire, it was said that in three years we were gonna go down. And by God, we did.”²¹¹ This quote by Shenango China handler Dolores De Lio summarizes the feelings of the company’s workforce in the face of decline. At its peak, Shenango China’s employed over three thousand workers, almost all of them citizens of New Castle. Even with the decline in employment over the years, the company always played a significant role in the hearts and minds of the town and when Shenango failed, workers past and present and the city as a whole were affected. They cried out against the closing but also remembered the glory days of the plant. For this reason, memories and oral histories can shed light on what Shenango China meant to its workers and its community and how these groups tried in their own ways to both remember the company and define their own failure.²¹²

²¹¹ Dolores De Lio, interview by Steve Keller, De Lio residence, New Castle, Pennsylvania, April 23, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, Lawrence County Historical Society, 16.

²¹² The oral histories utilized are a set of twelve interviews conducted by the Lawrence County Historical Society in October 1991, April 1992, and July 1992 with various employees of Shenango China. A variety of workers are included in this sample including both management and rank-and file employees in skilled and unskilled positions, union leaders, and a number of females and one African-American member. The participants represent a fair sample of Shenango’s employees working across a sixty-year span, including those that retired and quit on their own, those who were laid off in Syracuse China’s 1988 plant shutdown and those laid off in the final closure at the beginning of 1992. All recorded interviews were transcribed by the author for the purpose of this thesis.

Business history, which is used to explain industries like Shenango, does not often focus on oral history testimony despite the growing popularity of this methodology. Carl Ryant notes how business history focuses on “the meanings and symbols shared by employees within all levels of an industry.” To unearth this culture, oral history from both management and the rank-and-file can shed light on the decisions and practices not traditionally documented in industry files.²¹³ In a company like Shenango, which went through so many changes of ownership, oral testimony can also aid in the understanding of how these upheavals affected the plant, the product, and the workforce.

The announcement of Shenango’s shutdown hit New Castle hard and emotions ran high when the doors closed in spring of 1992. Historian Kerwin Lee Klein argues that memory is the ideal venue to make connections related to emotion, even suggesting that some scholars believe traumatic events to be the key to authentic memory. Despite the problems associated with oral history testimony, the fragmentary disjointed nature of memory is well suited to the uncertainty of the present because it has no relation to the traditional (and constrictive) frameworks used in traditional history. These traits are useful when looking at deindustrialization, a chaotic phenomenon marked by uncertainty and a general distrust of the old traditions, especially by workers. By listening to the voices of Shenango’s labor force, not only is the relevance of both the company and deindustrialization in Pennsylvania made clear but the workers themselves can preserve a sense of identity that comes from remembering their jobs.²¹⁴

²¹³ Carl Ryant, “Oral History and Business History,” *Journal of American History*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (September 1988): 560.

Memory for employees of a failed company such as Shenango can be a difficult balance between the pride of past success and the disillusionment of the present. Sherry Linkon and John Russo sense this ambivalence in Youngstown, another city rocked by deindustrialization. They reason that memory of work serves as a link between the worker and his/her overall society that helps pinpoint his/her significance within that overarching narrative. The failure of the steel industry in the Youngstown area caused a crisis of identity and a questioning of the pride associated with working in the mills.²¹⁵ This same alienation can be seen in the oral histories taken of Shenango China's workers and the observation of New Castle's citizens. Their recollections show a fondness for the plant run by James Smith Sr., an uncertainty of the changes brought about by the slew of corporate owners, an anger and suspicion directed towards Syracuse China. Finally, their feelings of despair and bitterness came through when discussing the failed plant and its aftermath.

Shenango China's workforce had many long-term employees, and as a result, they still remember a time before the plant was overtaken by Sobiloff Brothers. The years under James Smith Sr. (and to a lesser extent his son and George Zahneiser) reflect a company at its high point in terms of worker relations. The elder Smith was seen as a father figure, knowing all of his workers by name and looking out for their welfare both in injury, and for men drafted into World Wars I and II, with words of encouragement

²¹⁴ Kerwin Lee Klein, "On the Emergence of *Memory* in Historical Discourse," *Representations*, 69 (Winter 2000): 128-29, 137-38, 143.

²¹⁵ Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown*, Culture America, edited by Karal Ann Marling and Erika Doss, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 2-3, 8.

and extra pay. James Viggiano describes Smith's tenure as family-like where "people had the right to walk into [Smith's] office and explain whatever problems they had" to an open management that then worked to solve the issue at hand.²¹⁶

An open and easygoing style of management under Smith Sr. impacted how the employees viewed their work in the 1940s and 1950s. While some such as Naomi Clark, were unhappy about having to work Sundays as part of the schedule, most were satisfied with the everyday schedule and pace of their work. Since a large part of Shenango's pay strategy involved piecework (getting paid by the amount put out, not an hourly rate), workers set their own rate and be comfortable in their work and if they chose, go over the top to make some extra money. Safety was always a tricky situation in the early days of the plant when jobs such as pin grinding did not require any protection from the flying shards of pottery. In time however, these hazards were corrected with the requirement of goggles, earplugs, dust masks, and routine chest x-rays paid for by the company to ensure the health of their many workers.²¹⁷

In addition to minding their employees' health, Shenango also provided a number of activities outside of the plant to build community relations. Foremost among these was the annual company picnic held at area amusement parks where workers and their families could enjoy a picnic, games, and swimming. The company provided food and

²¹⁶ "Carm Sacco Molds Career in China," *New Castle News*, August 6, 1964 and James Viggiano, interview by Steve Keller, Lawrence County Unemployed Committee office, New Castle, Pennsylvania, April 2, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, Lawrence County Historical Society (LCHS), 7.

²¹⁷ Naomi Clark, interview by Steve Keller, Lawrence County Historical Society, New Castle, Pennsylvania, April 22, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 8, 16, 20; and Sue DeVitte, interview by Beverley Zona, Lawrence County Historical Society, New Castle, Pennsylvania, July 8, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 3, 7.

transportation. Other popular activities included company-sponsored sports teams, including popular men's and women's bowling leagues, a baseball team, and bocce games.²¹⁸ Both Sue DeVitte and Bill McBurney also remembered more informal gatherings among the labor force of Shenango China. DeVitte fondly recalled going out to dinners with her fellow decorators and winning a set of Castleton China in a company trivia contest. McBurney, as the superintendent of the decorating department in the 1950s, often accompanied his girls out to parties or dinners, "I was the only guy there and if someone was having a party and they needed a bartender they would call me. This was the kind of rapport I had with the girls at work."²¹⁹

Employees also forged connections with their labor union, United Steelworkers Local 3125. During the early years of the plant, the presence of a steelworkers' union for pottery employees seems like an odd choice but as Viggiano, (himself a former president of the union local) explained, the steelworkers' organization allowed for the membership of both skilled and unskilled workers into the same union unlike the Brotherhood of Pottery Workers. "Everybody was recognized, whether you were a skilled maintenance man or whether you were a laborer. You were recognized as part of that local." Viggiano also championed the union for allowing Shenango's laborers to make strides far ahead of their peers in terms of benefits. Under USW, Shenango was able to secure pay raises that

²¹⁸ "Picnic Time," *Shenango Shenanigan*, company newsletter, June 1984, LCHS; "The Shenango China Ladies Bowling League" and "Remember When," *Shenango Shenanigan*, company newsletter, June 1983, author's collection; and "Grays Will Play Lawrence county Champs Saturday," (*Rochester and Beaver*) *Daily Times*, October 2, 1931.

²¹⁹ Sue DeVitte, 12, 16; and Bill McBurney, 2nd interview by Beverley Zona, McBurney residence, New Castle, Pennsylvania, month unknown, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 8.

were on average twenty cents above other potteries and started the first pension program in the entire industry. While not spectacular, the ten dollars per year of service payout still remained the best among all potteries for a long time.²²⁰

Between the relationship amongst management and rank-and-file, the beneficial union agreements, and the company-sponsored extracurricular activities that spurred employee camaraderie, it is not surprising that many of Shenango's workers looked back on the years under Smith Sr. as the best of the plant. Historian Steven High, in his analysis of the memories of displaced workers, notes that employees of failed industries seek to identify with their place of employment as an extension of themselves and often that same location takes on a symbolic role once it shuts down. By remembering the best years of a plant, employees recreate the social bonds they had through working and gain an attachment to their own culture. As this occurs, the place of work transcends the difficult past and even the owners to become in their minds their own possession as members of the labor force.²²¹

This association is evident when Shenango workers speak with immense pride about their plant and in their work. Ed Bistyga, who worked at Shenango for over forty years, referred to the Pottery as "our" plant, devoid of the many corporate owners. He characterized Shenango as a place where one worked hard, but in an enjoyable way. He looked forward to coming to the plant and joking around with his friends while getting his work done: "it was a job that you strived and a lot of pride went into your work and I

²²⁰ James Viggiano, 3, 8-9.

²²¹ Steven High and David W. Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 9, 93-95.

would say the majority of people put a lot of pride in their work. Years ago, certain jobs like jiggermen, they would come out practically in uniforms. White trousers and they took a lot of pride and a lot of skill.”²²² Connected to this pride how they could see their labor a finished product respected around the world. Rita Rosati felt that the company endured through its hardships because the product they made was so good: “I have dishes in my cupboard older than me,” she boasts. When she could turn a bowl over and see the Shenango Indian stamped on the bottom, “that’s where your pride is.”²²³ The affinity for their goods led many employees and salesmen to form a club called the Official Plate Flipper’s Society. Members of the Society dutifully checked the bottom of their dinnerware at restaurants all over the U.S. while carrying membership cards (figure 24). If an institution was found to not carry Shenango China, the “flippers” left the cards behind with information about the company. The whimsical campaign was intended for fun but also reinforced the pride that Shenango employees felt for their product and the determination to see their handiwork spread across the country.²²⁴

²²² Ed Bistyga and Anthony Conti, 1st interview by Steve Keller, Lawrence County Historical Society, New Castle, Pennsylvania, April 1, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 18, 4 (quote) and Ed Bistyga and Anthony Conti, 2nd interview by Steve Keller, Lawrence County Historical Society, New Castle, Pennsylvania, April 22, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 8. The jiggermen Bistyga spoke of were the workers who shaped clay into various ceramic articles by hand without the use of molds. The job was considered highly skilled in the heyday of the plant and became extinct with the addition of automatic forming machine in the 1970s and 1980s.

²²³ Rita Rosati, interview by Steve Keller, Rosati residence, New Castle, Pennsylvania, April 20, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 11, 25.

²²⁴ “Plate Flippers – Fill Up and Update,” *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, February 1970, LCHS and “I’m a Plate Flipper Freak, What Are You?” *Shenango Table Top-ics*, company newsletter, April 1972, LCHS.

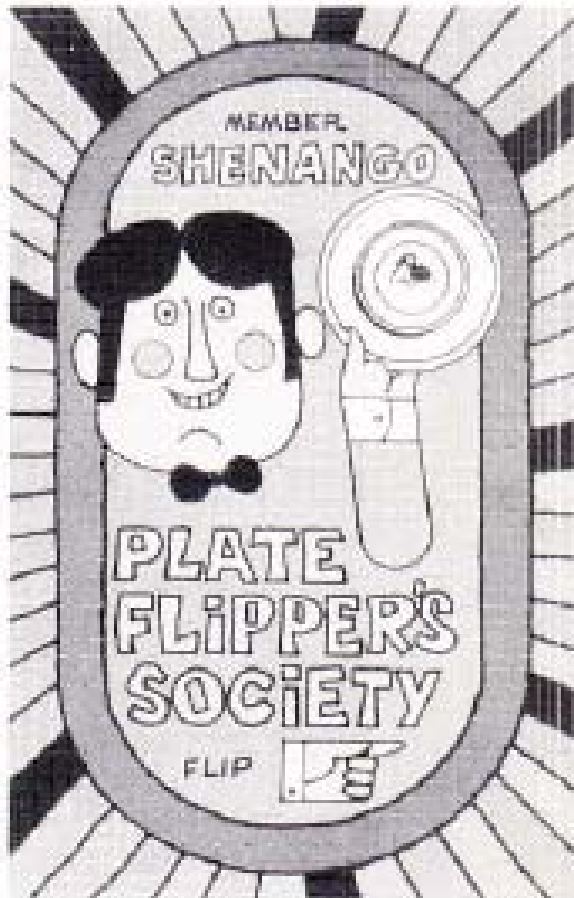


Figure 24: The membership card of the Shenango Plate Flipper's Society in the early 1970s

When Smith retired prior to his 1955 death, a noticeable change took place within Shenango China. Former manager Irv Mills felt that Smith's son, James Smith Jr., was an inept and suggested Smith Jr.'s profit-sharing plan, despite the plant not turning a profit the year prior as evidence. Smith Jr. also let sales distributions continue on pre-war models and failed to address an anemic distribution presence on the West Coast. Smith Jr.'s successor George Zahneiser had big plans for the pottery but according to Mills, "did not have a clue of how to make his dreams a reality. To add to the Pottery's

problems, he did not have the skill to select good people for top management positions.”²²⁵

Other employees on the floor also noticed the transition away from the days of the elder Smith, which soon became symptomatic of a company in danger of failing. Viggiano praised the relationship that Sobiloff tried to maintain with workers after purchasing the shares of Smith Jr.’s estate and taking over the plant. However, when INTERPACE came in nine years later that relationship strained despite the new owners pumping millions of dollars into the plant. Viggiano noted that the conglomerate was nothing more than a holding company for a number of loosely-related industries and entered into Shenango with no knowledge of the commercial china business or how the plant in New Castle operated. INTERPACE’s attitude of wanting total control over the affairs of a company they knew little about also resonated in the mind of Rita Rosati and other women making hollowware in the casting shop. As management demanded new work without knowing the difficulty involved, women went out on dozens of small, independent wildcat strikes in the 1970s to show their opposition.²²⁶

A couple of the wildcat strikes were successful in maintaining relations between skilled employees and INTERPACE’s management. However, the changing attitude of corporate owners continued to grow worse under Anchor Hocking and peaked with Syracuse, when Rosati claimed “there was such a change that you didn’t recognize your

²²⁵ Irv Mills oral history statement, Lawrence County Historical Society, New Castle, Pennsylvania, month unknown, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 1-2.

²²⁶ Viggiano, 7, 11 and Rosati, 14-15.

own sister if she was working beside you.”²²⁷ A large part of this schism was the insistence of newer management on quantity over quality in the eyes of workers. Despite the outward efforts of INTERPACE or Anchor Hocking to improve quality of the ware, laborers such as Anthony Conti insisted that in reality Shenango’s operations had become a “numbers game” where foremen ignored or approved poor quality ware because they “needed the count” to please the upstairs bosses who demanded a daily quota with no excuses. And while programs such as the Gearing Up for Tomorrow at Shenango (G.U.T.S.) were supposed to eliminate such friction between the needs of management and the limits of rank-and-file, Conti lamented that the program never persisted despite a good start. According to him, with the supervisors of the plant still demanding their absolute authority and unwilling to cooperate, employees were hesitant to trust the program under fear of rebuke for speaking the honest truth about the product.²²⁸

To deal with the instability and annoyance of the newer management, many of Shenango’s labor force turned to their union as a means to try and alleviate the strained relations. However, the union was going through its own issues trying to adapt to the changes in the plant. Under the leadership of Viggiano, United Steelworkers 3125 secured not only the first pension in the pottery industry in 1960 but also gained higher raises than ever before. Yet not all of Shenango’s workers appreciated the effort: DeVitte blamed the union outright for the plant’s failure by putting itself before the workers. Union rules allowed for anyone to bid into jobs at the pottery whether qualified or not,

²²⁷ Rosati, 19.

²²⁸ Bistyga and Conti #2, 6-9. See chapter 2 for more information on the aims and goals of the G.U.T.S. program.

causing hardship for those already trained in the positions. She also lamented that the raises and pensions gained came only after several difficult strikes that cost both sides weeks of productivity and anger. Frances Via also felt let down by the United Steelworkers during her time as a decorator. The inequality in pay between decorating (strictly a women's occupation at the time) and other jobs often led to wildcat strikes amongst the decorators, strikes in which she recalled the women got little help from the male-run Local 3125.²²⁹

Via's complaint about the discrepancies in pay between men and women formed a central tension among workers from the 1950s onward. Historian Alice Kessler-Harris examines the role of women workers throughout American history and notes that following World War II, most of the female labor force in industrial jobs before the conflict remained and that by 1950, thirty-two percent of women worked. Such a large amount of female employees became a source of unease to those who feared women demanding their right to work. To discourage the idea of a female breadwinner, many employers took steps to keep the pay of both sexes separate and unequal. At the war's end, women on average only earned fifty-five percent of what men in the same position did and efforts on behalf of women's organizations to close the gap were met with little success in Washington.²³⁰ At Shenango, Clark recalled hearing the stirrings of wage discontent and her own growing anger at the gap, "I was very upset because I felt that a

²²⁹ DeVitte, 6, 14, 18 and Frances Via, interview by Steve Keller, Lawrence County Historical Society, New Castle, Pennsylvania, April 18, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 9-10.

²³⁰ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 277, 290, 305, 311.

woman should get the same pay for doing the same job.” The jobs and wages remained this way until a union agreement in the 1950s equalized the pay scales. From then on, women were able to bid into male positions, something Via soon took advantage of as a ware mover. However, the decision did not please everyone; at times men made the jobs harder for the incoming women, taunted their new coworkers, or flat out resisted the change. Ed Bistyga remembered a rumor in the plant that illustrated the unease of male workers with women’s new opportunities: “they had a job up for a pipe fitting job. They got the word that there was gonna be a woman bidding on it and they pulled the job! They cancelled the job just for that. [...] eventually it did go up for bid but no woman bid on it.”²³¹

The unease of Shenango’s employees stemming from the shifts in management and their own changing work roles affected attitudes over time. Clark became increasingly alienated, saying it “was just a job for me.” DeVitte blamed the decline on the influx of younger workers who, secure in the union, came in not caring about doing a good job but only for the paycheck. She watched as employees moved from one department to another whether they knew the position or not and as unskilled employees vied for the positions of skilled laborers just for the increased wage.²³² The frustration with management and tensions with each other as the company declined encouraged many workers to lose the sense of pride they had working under Smith. With a

²³¹ Via, 3-4, 11; Clark, 9; and Bistyga and Conti #1, 15-17, 18 (quote).

²³² Clark, 23 and DeVitte, 8, 20.

disillusioned rank and file, Shenango was losing a support system it needed to keep from failing as they moved into the 1970s and 1980s.

The changing ownership of Shenango China took its toll on the company's image and profitability. The first few years under INTERPACE saw record profits but when the prosperity ceased by the mid-1970s, the tactics management tried to save the company often left its labor force in shock. Later, this turned to anger when Syracuse China bought the company and employees realized that failure seemed assured. The first blow came in 1974 when INTERPACE made the decision to cease production on Castleton China. Director of Design Bill McBurney (angered since he at the time was developing a line of glassware and accessories to complement the Castleton designs) blamed the move on the fact that INTERPACE's unfamiliarity with Shenango as a company meant that it only had the momentum to run a profitable plant for a few years. When the economic times toughened, INTERPACE turned to promoting its own china line, Franciscan, instead of the Castleton which the entire workforce in New Castle felt was the superior product.²³³

The role of mechanization also led to a breakdown in employee confidence as it reduced the number of jobs in and the workers wondered if they were next. At first, the influx of technology met with little fear, according to Bistyga, because no one felt that they could produce as good of ware at a high rate of speed. "But it worked, and every time it worked another machine would come in and more people would go out."²³⁴ The shrinking number of workers affected every department in the plant, from the lay off of

²³³ Bill McBurney, 3rd interview by Beverley Zona, McBurney residence, New Castle, Pennsylvania, month unknown, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 1, 9.

²³⁴ Bistyga and Conti #1, 5.

thirty decorators when a silkscreen machine was introduced in the early 1970s to dozens of turners and liner makers first bumped into other positions and then laid off with the introduction of a new cup-master in the 1980s. By 1988, the workforce, which totaled over three thousand under Smith, fell to around five hundred.²³⁵

These remaining employees suffered what they saw as an insult of all in early 1988. On January 14th, they received a letter from current owner Newell announcing the sale of the plant to Syracuse China, Shenango's biggest rival in the industry. Worse news came afterward when Syracuse announced it was shutting the plant down effective the following week. The pottery remained closed for three weeks and then Syracuse announced it would hold interviews for re-hiring. Of the five hundred workers employed in January, Syracuse only re-hired one hundred and twenty based on unknown selection methods. In the next months, the pottery hired an additional one hundred and sixty-five, but these were new bodies off the street because, according to Bistyga, Syracuse "would not, under any circumstances, re-hire former employees" after the initial group.²³⁶

Syracuse's surprise shutdown and selective re-hiring caused a lot of hardship and anger among those not called back. Conti remembers a lot of his friends who were laid off questioning the company's motives: "why did you call him back? Why not me?" Clark also reflects on the bitterness of some of her coworkers and noted that many of them got new jobs they disliked and longed to return to the pottery. Viggiano, for example, was one not re-hired by Syracuse and for a long time he struggled with feelings

²³⁵ Via, 18-19; De Lio, 7.

²³⁶ Viggiano, 13-14; Via, 14; and Bistyga and Conti, 1-2 (quote).

of failure, resentment, and self-doubt. He speculated that his termination may have been due to his fifteen-year leadership of Local 3125, “your mind starts wondering, are these people still holding a grudge against you because of your activities in the union? [...] it makes you mistrust people.”²³⁷

Conditions were not much better for those called back to work by Syracuse. With only one hundred and twenty people doing the work of five hundred at first, the plant was in a state of chaos. Workers shifted from job to job to cover the essential positions, regardless of their training. Syracuse eliminated certain jobs, like board movers, but found they had to restore them due to the difficulty encountered when women tried without success to move the product on their own. Rita Rosati remembered Syracuse running the plant “like a military” after 1988, erasing seniority, slashing workers’ pay by up to three dollars per hour and making the company run without the protection of a union for the first six months. Adding insult to injury was the employment of new people off the street, which Syracuse dropped into the facility without any job training and expected the current employees to teach the new ones the craft. This move outraged handler Dolores De Lio: “they wanted us to do our work, teach these people, it’s impossible! You can’t go at that rate of speed and teach this new girl here, she don’t know what she’s doing!”²³⁸

Syracuse China’s tactics made employees wonder if the new owners were no longer concerned with trying to keep the company afloat. In fact, many began to suspect

²³⁷ Bistyga and Conti, 11; Clark, 24; and Viggiano, 13-14.

²³⁸ Clark, 25; Via, 14; Rosati, 19; and De Lio, 10.

that Syracuse had ulterior motives. Clark remembered hearing rumors that Syracuse would shut the plant down but never believed them at the time. De Lio, however, felt otherwise and thought that Syracuse had a certain motive in their minds the entire time. “I think Syracuse was trying to get a hold of us for a long time [...] it was heartbreaking. And then that was the big downfall.”²³⁹

In 1991, everyone’s worst fears were confirmed as Syracuse announced the closure of Shenango. The employees felt distraught and placed the blame on a variety of sources. Syracuse China obviously bore the brunt of their bitterness for not only being the owners who shut down the plant but also for the bad treatment they displayed in the three years prior. An irrecoverable split developed between the Syracuse officials and Shenango workers that destroyed any feelings of pride or unity, and cemented the feelings of “us and them” and transformed “our” plant into “their” plant. Employees especially hated Bob Bean, a Syracuse official who traveled to New Castle to run Shenango. Anthony Conti explained that Bean had no connection with the rank-and-file and would “sit up in what they called his ivory tower and he didn’t want to hear nothing, he wouldn’t talk to anybody about anything.”²⁴⁰

Many blamed Syracuse for stringing them along for three years. Rosati accused Syracuse of talking out of both sides of their mouths, implying that the company never really cared about the workers in New Castle. “They said it would take three years for everybody to learn everything. Well, it took three years and then they shut it down.” She

²³⁹ Clark, 26 and De Lio, 9.

²⁴⁰ Bistyga and Conti #2, 7-8, 12, 10 (quote).

recalled that Syracuse not only promised long-term jobs to Shenango but even accepted job-training money from the state of Pennsylvania. Shenango's employees had been working ten-hour days to cover all of their orders plus leftover business from Mayer China. Rosati, like everyone else, thought the company was doing well enough to survive, making the shutdown even more of a shock. Via bitterly complained that Syracuse had intended to shut down the plant all along to rid themselves of competition. Most insulting, "they took our name, Shenango China, with them" to prevent any future hope for resurrecting the failed plant.²⁴¹ This anger reflects some of the same bitterness seen in Youngstown several years before when faced with the closure of the steel mills. Like Shenango, the many mills in Youngstown came under the control of a holding company, the Lykes Corporation. Lykes had opportunities to modernize and improve the facilities, yet did not and opted instead to invest in other ventures which proved unsuccessful. Also similar to Syracuse's actions, Lykes kept assuring their large workforce that the mills were never in danger of closing and in fact business was looking up. This façade was maintained all the way until "Black Monday," September 19, 1977 when Lykes announced the shutdown and loss of over five thousand jobs.²⁴²

While the two-faced approach of current owners outraged employees in Youngstown and New Castle alike, others at Shenango placed the blame all the way back to the period following James Smith Sr.'s retirement and charged the company for not doing enough to prevent failure. Mills accused the leadership (starting with James Smith

²⁴¹ Rosati, 20 and Via, 19.

²⁴² Staughton Lynd, *The Fight Against Shutdowns: Youngstown's Steel Mill Closings*, (San Pedro, California: Singlejack Books, 1983), 24-5, 18-20.

Jr. and George Zahneiser) as lacking in creativity and not preparing for a time after World War II. When other potteries such as Syracuse were developing new designs and innovations, Mills alleged that Shenango was only interested in putting out large amounts of undecorated ware and as a result had to spend years playing catch-up. Viggiano blamed the constant change in management once the plant was sold since each incoming leader had a different vision of how to keep Shenango going in theory, which in reality translated into a lack of direction.²⁴³

In 1984, when Anchor Hocking consolidated Shenango and others into the Foodservice Division, matters were made worse because the incompatibility of products caused not only confusion but declining sales. Clark lamented that despite INTERPACE and Anchor Hocking's investment in new machinery, they never could quite keep up and still remained obsolete in many areas to the point where they lost in competition with Japan and China. With poor leadership and equipment, Shenango suffered to the point where large amounts of ware were being returned to the company. Despite this, managers like Bean continued to push numbers and set employees to almost unattainable high quotas.²⁴⁴ For the employees, this represented the final straw of Shenango's management and signified their inability to stave off failure.

Interestingly, the current or former owners of Shenango China were not the only ones implicated in the company's failure. Former workers cited a variety of other factors as either contributing to the failure or for not doing anything to prevent the plant from

²⁴³ Mills, 1; Viggiano 12

²⁴⁴ Viggiano, 12; Clark, 27-28; DeVitte, 17; and Bistyga and Conti #2, 9.

closing its doors after the announcement. Some, like De Lio, blamed the United Steelworkers for causing friction on the already strained relations between Syracuse and Shenango's workers. She cited an incident where Syracuse wanted to bring in Mayer China's lining department as employees at Shenango since they had experience with the pattern of a current order. The union membership voted the gesture down, drawing the ire of the owners. Even those leading the local chapter charged the international with letting the pottery down. Anthony Conti took over as president of Local 3125 when Syracuse reinstated the union. When they announced the shutdown in 1991, he felt that United Steelworkers stood by and watched without even offering to negotiate with Syracuse or Pfaltzgraff's leadership. Yet when a Pittsburgh-area steel plant was in danger of closing, USW international president Lynn Williams met with plant owners and even brought in the governor of Pennsylvania to save it. "Just because we make pottery, that doesn't say 'well, to heck with them,'" Conti complained, "we paid dues the same as they paid dues. We're a local union, 3125, and we should be treated as such."²⁴⁵

De Lio and others also believed that the state of Pennsylvania did not put forth the effort to save the pottery or the jobs of New Castle. She noted that at the time, the plant in Pennsylvania was doing a higher percentage of business than the one in New York, yet it was chosen to shut down because Syracuse did not want to bother moving their corporate offices down to New Castle. And after Syracuse decided to close Shenango, Pennsylvania Governor Bob Casey refused to take action to keep the jobs from moving out of state, even when Syracuse took state-issued training funds. When Conti traveled to Harrisburg

²⁴⁵ De Lio, 22 and Bistyga and Conti #2, 2-3.

in person to plead Shenango's case and try to set up a government-sponsored meeting with Pfaltzgraff president Lou Appel, he did not gain permission to meet with Governor Casey.²⁴⁶

Several Shenango employees also blamed the downturn of manufacturing in the United States for the plant's demise despite everyone's efforts. Other major industries such as steel and coal mining already saw drastic reductions and shutdowns, especially in the Ohio and Pennsylvania areas. With foreign imports already eroding business for decades, something had to give. Shenango, with its strong union contract, could not match the low prices on imported ware because these workers were getting paid less than a dollar per hour. In a world where "it's the dollar that means everything," larger American businesses were forced to consolidate or risk vanishing. Syracuse decided to just cut their losses with Shenango and its workers became the victims.²⁴⁷

However, in the case of Shenango China, the plant and employees were not the only of these victims: the local area as a whole suffered the effects of the company's failure. For years, the city of New Castle enjoyed a close relationship with its pottery and the plant often played a large role in community employment and service. At the company's height, the *New Castle News* lauded the \$6.5 million payroll of Shenango's workforce. "Every place this money was spent someone's income was increased [...] from the money brought into New Castle by Shenango Pottery." The article went on to regard the plant as the foremost member of New Castle's industrial "family" and one of

²⁴⁶ De Lio, 21 and Bistyga and Conti #2, 3.

²⁴⁷ Viggiano, 10 and Bistyga and Conti #1, 4.

the city's "most valuable assets."²⁴⁸ In later years the newspaper also commented on the fame that the pottery brought to the city. Regarding the tendency of employees to flip plates, the author noted that while the practice may be seen as eccentric, "it is an eccentricity that is rooted in pride [...] today the name Shenango or Castleton is synonymous with "the finest in the world".²⁴⁹

New Castle contributed to community service by the company and its workers, offering recreational programs to the children of Shenango's employees through the "Sons of Shenango." These gave dozens of boys the opportunity to join the local YMCA at the company's cost and enjoy the benefits of a number of activities throughout the summer. The plant's work force also remained active in neighborhoods in the later years of the company, running donation and blood drives multiple times per year. The largest campaign was the annual United Way fundraisers which recruited Shenango's finest to donate both money and volunteer time to improve the lives of the less fortunate in Lawrence County.²⁵⁰

Advertising also reinforced the relationship between plant and community through the *New Castle News*, a trend begun under Sobiloff back in the 1960s. To celebrate the pottery's 60th anniversary and to promote the idea of the Plate Flipper's Club to the public, an ad ran featuring a couple in a classy restaurant. The text encourages

²⁴⁸ "New Castle and Her Industrial Family," *NCN*, August 12, 1950.

²⁴⁹ "Made in New Castle," *NCN*, February 6, 1957.

²⁵⁰ "New Castle and Her Industrial Family;" "Summer Red Cross Blood Drive," *Shenango Shenanigan*, company newsletter, Oct-Nov 1986, LCHS; "United Way – Over the Top!" *Shenango Pacesetter*, company newsletter, December 1979, LCHS; and "United Way Helps," *Shenango Pacesetter*, company newsletter, October 1980, LCHS.

the reader (assumed to also be in the restaurant) to go ahead and “turn it over.” For people from New Castle, the practice of flipping plates was acceptable because the chances were good that the ware would feature the Shenango China Indian on the back. This strengthened the pride of Shenango being found across the country and allowed for locals to show off their hometown when traveling.²⁵¹ Shenango’s goods and employees were celebrated in 1967 along with promotion of the new Citation line, touted as an exciting event for New Castle which would not be possible without Shenango’s workforce. Production of Citation improved the quality of jobs in the community and assured better and more meaningful employment for New Castle men and women. They also appealed to the community’s pride in Shenango, describing the area as “a good place to work” where New Castle pride could be found in every piece of china coming out the doors.²⁵²

INTERPACE followed the same suit as Sobiloffs in advertising to the local area, starting with its introduction to New Castle and Shenango China. In an advertisement that ran in the *New Castle News*, a few months after they finalized the purchase of the plant, the large conglomerate International Pipe and Ceramics invited locals to “Please call us INTERPACE,” showing images of materials and employees from their various product lines. The company wished to become a part of the community through their acquisition of Shenango and assured that their new leadership would not affect the top service and

²⁵¹ “Turn it Over. You’ll Find This Shenango Indian...,” *NCN*, January 26, 1965.

²⁵² “Shenango Makes News in New Castle,” *NCN*, January 31, 1967 and “New Castle Pride,” *NCN*, date unknown, 1967.

quality that the home company was known for.²⁵³ The pottery's new owners continued to appeal to New Castle throughout the 1970s. One piece features an illustration of a pottery worker turning clay in a mold (figure 25). It then asks the question, "Did you know that your New Castle neighbors make the world's finest china right here in your backyard?" Not only did the ad reinforce the local pride in the plant, but also stressed how that pride was present all across the nation in many restaurants wherever New Castle residents flipped over their plates and found the familiar Indian potter logo on the back. This dinnerware used in even the finest establishments would not, of course, be possible without the skill of local men and women.²⁵⁴

²⁵³ "Please Call Us INTERPACE," *NCN*, May 15, 1968.

²⁵⁴ "Did You Know?," *NCN*, January 27, 1970.

Did you know that your New Castle neighbors make the world's finest china right here in your backyard?



If you'd like proof, you'll find it in the proud list of homes and fine restaurants that serve on Shenango China. Join the 'Plate Flipper's Club!' Turn over the china next time you're dining out. Chances are you'll see the made-in-New Castle Shenango Indian—in places like Disneyland or famous restaurants like New York's famed Club 21 or in Holiday Inns and Howard Johnson's all across the country. The skilled hands of your New Castle neighbors produce the quality which puts Shenango on gracious tables everywhere.

Shenango China



P.O. Box 120, New Castle, Pa. 16103



SHENANGO CHINA
Leadership in quality and design
for the modern American



CASTLE CHINA
America's celebrated
chinaware for every occasion



SHENANGO INTERPACE
Specialty high quality china
products for the discerning hostess

proudly made in New Castle, Pennsylvania

Figure 15: "Did You Know?," one of the advertisements INTERPACE ran in the *New Castle News* to show pride in the plant and the city

As the 1970s wore on and the plant saw a number of troubles with declining sales and the threat of labor strikes, some of INTERPACE's strategy seemed designed to win over the good graces of those skeptical workers. In January 1974, on the same day that INTERPACE announced plans for another expansion and five weeks before a large strike, they published an ad entitled "It Takes Great People to Produce Great China." Pictured is a Shenango worker removing china from a kiln as the text lauds people as the heart of the company and their source of pride- "people like you or your next door neighbor or the guy down the road." They repeated the technique once more in February 1977 in "It's Our Bread and Butter." The ad explains that Shenango was responsible for producing china for hotels and restaurants around the world for over seventy years, yet the most important aspect of the company was being the "bread and butter" for over 1000 men and women in New Castle and a source of community service. INTERPACE drove the point home one final time just before Anchor Hocking's purchase of the plant was complete. While previous advertising hinted at the importance of Shenango workforce, the "1000 Very Good Reasons" advertisement did something novel: it listed the name of each man and woman working in the pottery as of February 1979 (figure 26). While thanking employees in a blanket statement was pleasant, taking the time to individually list everybody showed a real commitment to the people in New Castle who helped keep the plant going through all of the hardships and changes.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ "It Takes Great People to Produce Great China," *NCN*, January 26, 1974; "It's Our Bread and Butter," *NCN*, February 19, 1977; and "1000 Very Good Reasons," *NCN*, February 24, 1979.

[illegible]

When the American Indians started making pottery over 300 years ago, the artists did everything by hand. They took enormous pains with their work. And it showed. At Shenango we strive to be equally demanding of ourselves. The Indian by our name serves as a constant reminder of our industry's proud heritage.

People who care. You'll find them at the core of every successful community and every successful company. New Castle and Shenango China have over 1000 of these very special people in common. We think they deserve mention.



SHENANGO CHINA
New Castle and Shenango China..
Partners in Pride.

Figure 26: "1000 Very Good Reasons" lists the name of every Shenango employee

The close relationship fostered between Shenango China's management and the city of New Castle was also not immune to the shock of the plant's shutdown. Unlike some of the workers who believed they saw the end coming due to Syracuse's actions, the closure seemed to hit the town like an explosion. Ed Bistyga said the reaction was one of surprise and questioning at the suddenness, "what do you say when you get hit all at once like that?"²⁵⁶ *New Castle News* editor Mitchel Olszak reacted with outrage at Syracuse's actions, specifically the ploy to bury the announcement of the shutdown within a press release touting the improvements being made to satisfy customers. Olszak fumed that the press release was an "insult, a display of absolute contempt for the employees of Shenango China and the people of Lawrence County. Here is an economic tragedy of community-wide proportions and Syracuse China didn't have the guts to say flat-out what it intends to do." He continued to cry out against the fact that Syracuse had also accepted money from the state of Pennsylvania designed to provide job training and keep the plant from failing in the face of foreign competition. Believing that Syracuse took the funds despite already planning for Shenango's closure, he condemned the action, "if that's not illegal, it ought to be."²⁵⁷

Local government officials were also outraged at the shutdown of the plant, as they had been trying to keep Shenango open since Newell stepped in. All throughout 1987, Lawrence County's leaders tried without success to secure low-interest loans and technical assistance to purchase the plant in order to preserve the five hundred jobs there

²⁵⁶ Bistyga and Conti #2, 5.

²⁵⁷ Mitchel Olszak, "Company Shows Contempt," editorial, *NCN*, February 1991.

and to prevent the “ripple effect it will have on the community if one of the largest employers is lost.”²⁵⁸ After the final shutdown announcement came, Lawrence County government attempted once more to keep the plant open, but this time the *New Castle News* chided local officials for waiting too long until the matter was no longer in theirs or even the state’s hands. “The opportunities to make positive impact increase when officials anticipate crises, rather than merely react to them,” cautioned Olszak as he insisted that they should have done a better job in 1987 to prevent Syracuse (an outsider) from taking over the local plant in the first place.²⁵⁹ Conti echoed the same sentiment as he recalled his own efforts to get Lawrence County’s state representatives involved in negotiating with Syracuse and Pfaltzgraff. The meeting accomplished nothing as he and the representatives clashed over politics and never saw eye to eye on the matter at hand. Following that, they turned to the Steel Valley Authority to try and secure local bank loans to buy the plant from Syracuse, but this too failed and in the end the workers of Shenango had nowhere left to go. They watched helplessly as their ninety year old pottery collapsed.²⁶⁰

The failure of Shenango China came at a time when New Castle was already in the midst of an employment crisis. As Viggiano viewed New Castle in 1991, “you look around and say ‘what the hell happened here?’ You see all these empty buildings and

²⁵⁸ “Plan Will Be Developed to Keep Pottery Open,” *NCN*, date unknown, summer 1987.

²⁵⁹ Mitchel Olszak, “Pottery Efforts Come too Late,” editorial, *NCN*, February 1991.

²⁶⁰ Bistyga and Conti #2, 3-5. Conti would not get into specifics during his interview but he implied that the clash with local representatives was related to the Republican officials disagreeing with the actions of the United Steelworkers during the period of Syracuse’s ownership and immediately after the announcement of the shutdown.

whatnot.” The period from 1979 to 1991 saw several of the area’s biggest firms fail, beginning with several of the local steel mills under US Steel and Pennsylvania Engineering in the mid and late 1970s. In 1978, Johnson Bronze, a leading metals refinery, declared bankruptcy and laid off three hundred workers. This was followed by the refinery Pentex in 1981 laying off nearly two hundred and the spring plant of Rockwell International the following year losing another one hundred sixty jobs to closure. As if Shenango’s failure was not a bad enough for New Castle, with over six hundred jobs lost between Syracuse’s two closings, the city received another blow six months later with the announced shutdown of Rockwell’s axle plant. De Lio wondered how all of the laid off employees, especially those from Rockwell, would survive the change from seven day work weeks and salaries up to seventeen dollars per hour. “You go work on five dollars,” she cautioned, “they won’t be able to survive because they’re used to all this money.”²⁶¹ By 1991 it was clear that life in New Castle would never be the same.

When analyzing the struggle for memory in Youngstown, Linkon and Russo determined that “how Youngstown remembers its past plays a central role in how it envisions its future.”²⁶² Like Youngstown, New Castle is conflicted with how to remember Shenango China, whether as a center of great pride and prosperity or as a symbol of failure and exploitation. The bitterness with which employees regarded the

²⁶¹ Viggiano, 10; “Lawrence County Reeling as Pentex Foundry Closes,” *Pittsburgh Press*, June 28, 1981; “Rockwell Closing New Castle Plant,” *Tyrone (PA) Daily Herald*, February 26, 1982; “Rockwell to Close Axle Plant,” *Indiana (PA) Gazette*, October 16, 1991; and De Lio, 26.

²⁶² Linkon and Russo, 3.

three years under Syracuse China chokes the memory and leads many to only think of the plant's failure. Gone is the meaning of the pride they took in their work until the end. Linkon and Russo suggest Youngstown needs to overcome its painful past in order to face the reality of its future. Both the employees of Shenango China and the citizens of New Castle should also focus on defining the plant as a source of pleasure, hard work, and quality in their memories. Only then can the blow of its failure be accepted in order for the city to move on.²⁶³

²⁶³ Linkon and Russo, 189, 240.

CONCLUSION

The Legacy and Lesson of Shenango China's Failure

The shutdown of Shenango China, coupled with the closure of several other large industrial plants, left the Lawrence County area facing the largest unemployment numbers since the 1984 collapse of the steel mills. The number of citizens out of work jumped from 2,600 in 1971 to 8,300 as the last steel mills shut down in 1985 and continued to hover around 4,000 once Shenango and Rockwell shut down. While unemployment numbers are smaller today, the rate of unemployment remains high due to the declining population in the New Castle area (table 3).

	Time prior to industry shutdown, 1971-74	Time of Johnson Bronze decline, 1975-76	Time of steel mill shutdowns, 1982-1985	Time of Shenango and Rockwell shutdowns, 1991-1993	Unemployment since current recession, 2008-2009
Unemployment numbers	2,600-3,000	3,800-4,400	4,300-8,300	3,800-4,400	2,700-4,100
Unemployment rate range	6.1-7.2	9.0-10.5	10.4-18.2	9.0-10.3	6.2-9.4

Table 3: Unemployment numbers and range of unemployment rates in Lawrence County during key times in recent history, 1970-2009. Source: Pennsylvania Center for Workforce Information and Analysis Not Seasonally-Adjusted Labor Force

Shenango laid off two hundred and seventy five workers when it failed in 1991, not counting the nearly four hundred who were never called back by Syracuse in 1988. The pottery's employees had the option of filing for Trade Readjustment Act (TRA)

benefits after the federal government determined foreign imports to be the chief cause of the plant's failure. Anthony Conti recalled how some of the former workers used the TRA to improve their lives with trade or medical schooling. However, a large number of Shenango's labor force was older and as Conti put it, "going to school for a person fifty, fifty-five years old [...] is really pushing time backwards and it's tough for anyone of that age to go to school." He and friend Ed Bistyga noted that many former Shenango employees were working two minimum wage jobs at places like McDonald's or local grocery stores in order to provide for their families.²⁶⁴

By the early 1990s, New Castle, Pennsylvania became an undeniable example of the failure of deindustrialized American cities. Historian Steven High describes deindustrialization as an event where both industry and workers become marginalized and are forced into new situations. This marginalization affects the area as a whole through social problems connected to an idle population.²⁶⁵ The most apparent was the population drop: with the loss of so many large employers and the chance for some of Shenango's ex-workers to receive schooling through TRA, the number of individuals and families leaving the area swelled. The *New Castle News* cautiously reported the 1990 census showing a loss of at least three thousand persons before Shenango closed. Subsequent counts put the city's current population at 24,412; more than eight thousand

²⁶⁴ Ed Bistyga and Anthony Conti, 1st interview by Steve Keller, Lawrence County Historical Society, New Castle, Pennsylvania, April 1, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, Lawrence County Historical Society (LCHS), 3.

²⁶⁵ Steven High and David W. Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 25.

less than the time before deindustrialization began.²⁶⁶ Shenango China's workers saw this trend even as the plant closed. Burnisher Naomi Clark reasoned that there was nothing in New Castle, "all the younger people, they have to move out of town in order to get a job [...] So now we're mostly elderly people."²⁶⁷

More significant is the closer look at who left. Clark mentioned that only the elderly remained in the area and her testimony is backed up with the school enrollment records of Lawrence County. The number of students enrolled in secondary schools dropped nearly one thousand persons in a twelve-year span (table 4). In 1997, the generation of children born between 1980 and 1984 (just as the steel mills began to close) numbered approximately 7,500. That number fell to 6,570 in secondary school in 2010, and, thus reflects a birth decline between 1992 and 1996 (just after Shenango China and Rockwell closed down). These numbers, along with projected enrollments represent a population that is shrinking.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Mitchel Olszak, "Pottery Efforts Come too Late," editorial, *New Castle News*, February 1991 and John K. Manna, "Census Estimate: County Loses More than 4,000 People," *NCN*, May 8, 2010.

²⁶⁷ Naomi Clark, interview by Steve Keller, Lawrence County Historical Society, New Castle, Pennsylvania, April 22, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 26.

²⁶⁸ Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Data Services, 1997-2010, *Public School Enrollment by County and School District Enrollment Projections*, Pennsylvania Information Management System, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Year	Enrollment	Year	Enrollment
1997-98	7,500	2004-05	7,270
1998-99	7,448	2005-06	7,240
1999-2000	7,401	2006-07	7,121
2000-01	7,214	2007-08	6,859
2001-02	7,247	2008-09	6,756
2002-03	7,232	2009-10	6,570
2003-04	7,328	2010-11 (projected)	6,120

Table 4: Lawrence County Secondary School (grades 7-12) Enrollment, 1997-2011

Another consequence of deindustrialization in New Castle is the number of remaining citizens who rely on either minimum wage work or the public welfare system to get by. Dolores De Lio, a handler at Shenango, lamented the fate of those who lacked any skills or training in the workforce and had to rely on minimum wage jobs, “you can’t live on that, it’s depressing”. She felt that the outlook for the area would continue to be poor as even the new jobs coming in would continue to be minimally-paying as well.²⁶⁹ Even worse than the dead-end job outlook, according to Jim Viggiano, were the numbers of people forced to rely on welfare or social security. For him, being on welfare was a sign of hitting rock bottom, “there should never be a reason you even have to go on welfare. Jobs should be available [...] Some people had to work at McDonald’s and places in order to try and prevent themselves from going on that system.”²⁷⁰ In the time of Shenango China’s closing, the number of households below the poverty line ballooned

²⁶⁹ Dolores De Lio, interview by Steve Keller, De Lio residence, New Castle, Pennsylvania, April 23, 1992, Shenango Heritage Project, LCHS, 25.

²⁷⁰ James Viggiano, interview by Steve Keller, Lawrence County Unemployed Committee office, New Castle, Pennsylvania, April 2, 1992, Shenango China Heritage Project, LCHS, 16.

to 19.6%, more than twice the national average, and the percentages of families on various welfare systems rate consistently higher as well (table 5).

	Percent of households below the poverty line	Percent of households with Social Security	Percent of homes with Supplemental Security Income	Percent of households with cash assistance	Percent of households receiving food stamps
New Castle, 2006-2008	19.6	35.7	9.0	5.7	19.6
United States, 2006-2008	9.6	26.9	3.8	2.3	8.1

Table 5: New Castle's poverty level and public welfare recipients compared with the United States averages. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008, *Social Characteristics in the United States*, American Community Survey 3-year estimates.

The unfortunate situation of New Castle, Pennsylvania has been made worse by increases in crime and arson. Between 2008 and 2010, arsonists have set fire to more than fifty buildings, usually vacant, and often to cover up their theft of copper pipe to sell as scrap. The city has also been declared financially distressed under Act 47 of Pennsylvania Law and a controller from the state has been appointed to help the town recover its finances. Historians Sherry Linkon and John Russo's conclusions about the nearby Youngstown area again apply in New Castle as well through the observation that a mentality of putting the glory days of plants like Shenango China in the past ultimately leads to a loss of identity which opens the door to crime and corruption. This "problem of

memory” according to Steven High has also “undermined people’s faith in this urban and industrial version of the American Dream.”²⁷¹

The shutdown of Shenango China and its impact on New Castle is important because it represents the all-too-real scenario of a company trying to stave off failure and yet not succeeding and still closing its doors. Deindustrialization transplanted the failures of industries onto entire communities, bringing to light the paradox in American society between success and failure and the effects that it can have on a variety of companies and the men and women employed there. Linkon and Russo describe Youngstown as a place where the struggles of deindustrialization lead us to “see ourselves as belonging to a community of failure, a place that cannot act on its own behalf.” A clinging to the feeling of despondence that goes along with failure renders a community unable to handle its problems, and can lead to many of the problems seen in the Rust Belt area such as drugs and poverty. Scott Sandage suggests that despite the widespread actuality of failure, to not achieve the American Dream remains a flaw of character. He explores numerous accounts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries where lack of success is linked directly with an inferior personality. Those that cannot achieve greatness become anonymous and dejected. What is seen as true for individuals can also apply to businesses. Despite the fact that since 1993, over one million business firms fail in the

²⁷¹ “New Castle’s Financial Resources Stretched by Arsons,” *Erie Times-News*, July 27, 2009; Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown U.S.A.: Work and Memory in Youngstown*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 247; and High and Lewis, 3. Since this article was published, nine people in New Castle were arrested and charged with arson and theft of copper pipe to sell for drug money. This has eliminated the majority of fires, but a few still sporadically pop up.

United States each year (table 6), the those that shut down still face a stigma of not doing their best to succeed.²⁷²

Year	Number of Firms or Business that Failed	Change from Previous Year
1992	1,052,000	
1993	1,070,000	-18
1994	1,115,000	35
1995	1,142,000	27
1996	1,186,000	44
1997	1,234,000	48
1998	1,257,000	23
1999	1,308,000	51
2000	1,316,000	8
2001	1,360,000	44
2002	1,309,000	-51
2003	1,296,000	-13
2004	1,315,000	19
2005	1,352,000	37
2006	1,393,000	41
2007	1,453,000	60
2008	1,573,000	120
2009	1,582,000	9

Table 6: Number of Firms that Fail Each Year in US. Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Business Employment Dynamics

²⁷² Linkon and Russo, 245 and Scott A. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), 262-64.

“Over the past two hundred years in the United States, the image of failure has shifted, from the overambitious bankrupt to the underambitious plodder. Throughout our history, the loser bears material witness to the American Dream gone wrong.”²⁷³

Sandage’s words speak to the persistence of the idea of failure in American society. From the nineteenth century panics to the Great Depression to the recessions rocking the second half of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries, men and industries have fallen at alarming rates. In 2010, the United States finds itself still trying to recover from the largest economic recession in the past thirty years. As that economic turmoil in the 1970s and 1980s brought waves of deindustrialization, so too is the twenty-first century seeing large numbers of businesses failing. The specter of a closed factory or business is impossible to avoid and can no longer be blamed simply on a character flaw. To fully understand how failure impacts business and society in America, the failure itself must be looked beyond to see how, why, or even if those in charge of business are trying to prevent failure from happening.

Shenango China tried not to fail. They made improvements in product and machinery, worked for quality, and employed diverse advertising tactics. But several times these strategies either proved too costly, outdated, or simply did not work. Its workers saw a plant that never recovered from the retirement of its original owner and the early lawsuit that rocked the core of management. This started the pottery down a path of absentee corporate control who made attempts to grow the company, but they were not enough and (by accident of industry or with explicit intent) Syracuse China eventually

²⁷³ Sandage, 276.

closed the plant. Understanding the ways in which Shenango China sought to put forth a positive public image and identity while trying to survive the tumultuous economy, foreign competition, and ultimately their own shortfalls is important to thinking about the way that industry operates and affects all social levels in the twentieth century.

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