Pennsylvania Pottery and how it Relates to
Virginia Pottery and
Mr. Isaac Lam’s Pottery

Thomas J. Etergino
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Dr. McDaniel
The purpose of this paper is to give a short history of Pennsylvania stoneware, to show what some of the typical characteristics of stoneware pottery made during the 19th century in Pennsylvania are, and how these wares compare to both typical Virginia wares, and to Mr. Isaac Lam's wares. During the 19th century these durable, clay molded pieces were as common to the average household as tupperware is today. There are many reasons why these wares were so popular during this period in time, not the least of which is the absence of plastic containers, as well as metal storage containers. Another reason why these wares were so popular is due to the lack of refrigeration at this time. Since these wares were made by so many people, there had to have been variation amongst the different potters. This paper is designed to show what the typical pieces of these places looked like, and how they compare to the typical pieces Mr. Lam was making at his kiln in Rockbridge Baths, Virginia.

CHARACTERISTICS OF STONEWARE

In order to discuss the characteristics of stoneware pottery, the characteristics of stoneware must be understood first. Stoneware is made from a much higher quality clay then that of earthenware. Normally this clay is not as abundant as the red earthenware clay, making it harder to obtain, and more expensive.
to buy. Due to the fact that stoneware clay is more dense than earthenware clay, it takes a much higher temperature to fire it. Stoneware should be fired at a temperature between 1200-2300 degrees F. Because this clay can and does withstand such high temperatures, stoneware is a very durable product (much more so than earthenware). It is due to these facts that, while both stoneware and earthenware were being made, stoneware was in a much greater demand and was more expensive than its relative earthenware. It is for this reason that stoneware potteries flourished for the better part of the 19th century (until plastics, refrigeration, etc. were introduced).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF POTTING IN PENNSYLVANIA

The earliest potting in Pennsylvania dates as far back as 1690. There is only one pottery that is known to be in operation at this early a time, and the name of the potter is not known. One reason there was such a paucity of stoneware at this early date may be due to the difficulty in transporting the large amounts of quality clay needed to make stoneware, since the nearest known source of quality clay known at this time was in the New York, New Jersey area. Another reason for the lack of American made stoneware was "...because of the ready availability of imported wares." (1)

During the 18th century the pottery industry grew steadily, a major portion of this growth being in Pennsylvania. Many of the potters of this time were taught about pottery in their home country, and almost all potters at this time were of German or
English descent. For both the 18th and 19th centuries a major factor as to where a pottery was located was dependent on easy access to a major means of transportation. There were two reasons access to transportation was important: the first reason was to be able to obtain the fine quality clay needed to make stoneware that was found only in New York and New Jersey in the early years of potting in America. The second reason is the necessity to transport the finished pottery cheaply and easily. At this time the only economical means of transporting goods was by railroad or canal systems. The problem was especially great for potters before 1840. It was in 1840 when the Pennsylvania canal system was completed, and it was not until the 1850's-60's that the expansion of the railroads took place.

The first known pottery to be built in the 19th century was located in Philadelphia. This kiln was started in 1810 by a man named Henry Remmey. Mr. Remmey passed along his skill in the potting trade to the other male members of the family, and gave ownership of his kiln to them upon his partial retirement. This practice of passing on the trade from father to son was common practice and was expected. At this early site the things that seem to have been made the most are the items that were needed the most and would be used quite frequently, not many novelty items are thought to have been made here. The things made the most seem to have been mugs, pitchers, jugs, crocks, and spittoons. These early 19th century potters were well versed on the newest trends in German and English pottery since almost all of these potters originally came from there. This does not mean they could use all these techniques since many of the materials
needed were hard to obtain. To look at the most basic of all materials a stoneware potter needs, high quality clay, the early potters had to import it from New York and New Jersey. This problem was solved rather early in the 19th century when clay deposits suitable for stoneware were found above the Monongahela river. According to an article in Early American Life entitled "Stoneware from the Monongahela Valley" by Phil Schaltenbrand, "The deposits of stoneware clay discovered in southwestern Pennsylvania afforded more than an alternative clay to local redware potters. This mother lode, located high above the Monongahela river on a wide terrace, was the first major source of quality stoneware to be unearthed west of Amboy, New Jersey."(2) This new source of clay made it possible for Pennsylvania potters to offer stoneware products of the same quality as those made up north, for less money than it took to make the same pottery with the imported clay they were using before. Because of the accessibility to navigable waterways and a nearby source of clay, Pennsylvania became a desirable production center for pottery making. This was proven to be the case, because during the early and middle years of the 19th century the pottery industry grew in Pennsylvania as much as it did any where else in the U.S.

Although many potteries were started in the early part of the century, a major portion of the potters came to America during the 1940's, coming mainly from Germany and England, as most of the earlier potters did. These potteries flourished for the next forty years. Because of the amount of pottery needed to
supply the demand, production methods were streamlined. The potters started to eliminate unnecessary steps such as fancy decoration in the interest of saving time. New potteries were springing up all over, especially in the German settlements, but this time of good fortune did not last. Starting around 1860 the potters found themselves in serious trouble, so serious it lead to the virtual extinction of pottery making in America. This change in fortune was mainly due to a major break-through in types of storage containers, but was also aided by the increasing railroad rates and diminishing clay sources. As stated in Made of Mud, "All potters were effected by the change in food preparation that began with the advent of the lightweight glass canning jar and tin can, by the steady advance of rail-rates for both the transport of clay and finished pieces, and by the elimination of some clay sources."(3) Because of the decrease in number of customers, the competition became fierce between rival potters. The smaller potteries began to fail, and the larger potteries were suffering from major economic troubles. In order to make up for lost business, "the larger potteries... continued to operate by adopting to change in demand: producing drain tile, sewer pipe, and flower pots or by adding building supplies."(4) This did not make up for all of their lost business, and by the turn of the century the number of potteries left was drastically reduced from what it had been just twenty years earlier.

TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PENNSYLVANIA POTTERY

Pennsylvania pottery had its own particular characteristics that make it especially distinct when comparing it to other
pieces made in other regions. A mix between English and German type wares was characteristic of early Pennsylvania pottery, like the pottery made before the Revolutionary war. An example of pottery that was popular in England and in Pennsylvania was the "mariner's design." This design is one of a star with additional points added on. A technique used to decorate stoneware early in the century that was common to German as well as Pennsylvania potters was the use of a roulette. This is "... used in making a band of regular indentations around the edge of a piece..." (5) These two practices that were typical of two different countries were both being used in Pennsylvania early in the 19th century. Potteries in Pennsylvania before the Revolution seem to have been of four major types: 1) Common lead glaze on red or reddish brown earthenware, 2) Stoneware, 3) Imitative wares from England and Germany, and 4) Pennsylvania slip wares. Slip ware decorating was common in these early years, but because of the amount of time it took to do it was later abandoned for faster more economical ways of decorating. Slip ware was done by taking what is called a slip cup and stenciling the figure or design desired. A slip cup is "A small cup made of clay with an opening at the top and a very small opening at one side of the base. The small opening was fitted with goose quill and the cup used to trail colored slips over pots for decoration." (6) This type of decoration, though not found often, was found at a few specific sites in operation during the 1800's. Overall, decorated pottery in Pennsylvania during the 19th century became less and less common as the century progressed. The reason for
this was the factor of time, it simply took too long to decorate. It often took more time to decorate a piece than it initially took to make it. Since incising (and the other styles of decorating) couldn’t be done economically, but because competition was becoming more fierce, potters had to find a way to have designs that were quick and attractive. Using glazes as decoration was the answer, especially the use of cobalt blue. The potters would brush on the cobalt blue in various shapes and figures, which did not take long, but was pleasing to the eye.

Stamps were commonly used to identify where a piece was made, although early pieces were commonly unidentified. One reason for not identifying the earlier pieces may be because American pottery at this time was thought to be of a lower quality than that of imported wares, so without the stamp the American wares may be mistaken for the "higher quality" imported wares. Sometimes decorative stamps were used in order to make attractive designs quickly, but this technique was "... far more common on stoneware of the first half of the 19th century. To be sure, it was used throughout the era of decorated stoneware, but to a far lesser extent as the century progressed."(7)

The pieces of pottery produced in the 1840's and 50's in southwestern Pennsylvania seem to be "... superior in color, form and decoration to any which followed. Pieces produced during these years are usually bright grey in hue, attributable to the fine grade of clay and the manner in which kilns were fired."(8)

The way in which the wares of this time were fired was by a wood-fired kiln. When wares were fired with wood, the natural grey color of the clay was preserved behind a shiny salt glazing. When
kilns became coal-fired the color of the salt-glazed wares changed. The shiny grey surfaces are not seen as much, but rather the wares take on a much darker hue, sometimes turning the pieces a dark brown.

When analyzing what features are characteristic of a specific region, one of the most important features to study is the varieties in form. In order to fully understand what is going to be described in the way of typical characteristics of form in Pennsylvania, a look at the inserted sheets describing the general forms of wares, the different types of jug and bottle necks and mouth rims, the various rims used on jars, bowls, and churn mouths, and the various types of handles should be of some help.

Many Pennsylvania potteries seem to have similar forms during the same period in time. The forms seemed to change with time, but the change was usually widespread amongst the Pennsylvania potters. In the early-middle of the 19th century (around 1840) the forms of the wares were very similar from one potter to the next. “Forms from the period are somewhat bulbous and reminiscent of eastern pieces. There is a rich variety of utilitarian shapes in southwestern Pennsylvania (and in the rest of Pennsylvania) wares, which includes several types of canning jars, storage crocks, milk pitchers, cream pans, churns, water coolers, flower pots, and jugs, as well as novelties and one-of-a-kind articles.” (9) The pieces of this time were much more ovoid than they were later in the century. Starting around 1870 a subtle change took place in both the color and form of the
pieces. The pieces became much less ovoid and started to take on a semi-ovoid or even cylindrical form. This cylindrical form can be seen in the pictures in diagram 1. The pieces also started becoming much darker at this time, due to the change from wood to coal firing.

The cylindrical shape was as true for the jugs being made as it was for any piece. The rims of jugs is another important characteristic of form that will be looked at. Later Pennsylvania jugs seem to have a wide band for their rims, though these rims are wide they are also slightly squared off, this is a very important feature to note. Something else to take note of is the absence of any incised decoration, particularly on the neck. This wide collar (or band) and lack of incised decoration can be seen on the jugs in diagram 1. Another feature of these jugs, which cannot be seen as clearly in the pictures, is the types of handles used. This type of handle is called a pulled on, or attached end handle. A major portion of the jugs made in Pennsylvania had this type of handle.

Another type of ware that will be looked at is the crock, and its various characteristics. As can be seen on the crocks in the pictures in diagram 1, the sides of the crocks are cylindrical, or very near so. The rims of these crocks are flattened roll, but with the edges slightly more squared off. There may be some incised decoration, but at best it is scarce. For the crocks that do have handles, they seem to all have the same type, this type being a projecting cupped handle. This type of handle is attached long-ways on the crock.

Decoration, though not found on every piece, can be helpful
in determining what typical Pennsylvania potters used when they did decorate their wares. The use of cobalt blue for decorating was not unique to the potters of Pennsylvania, but was their most widely used decorative technique because of the speed and attractiveness of the decorating. "The most popular of the region's decorative motifs were stylized tulip and fuchsia flowers..." (10) Vines, leaves, and clever flourishes of cobalt blue were also quite common. Stenciling, common in the very early 19th century, started to become popular again during the 1870's when speedy decoration was vital. An example of a stenciled makers mark on a crock is given in diagram one. Incised decoration was not used much at all because of the time it took to perform. It seems that the extent of incising was limited to putting a few horizontal lines on crocks and bowls. The makers marks were often the only form of decoration on the wares, and these marks were usually a stamp the potter would apply before the piece was fired. Sometimes a brush-stroke of cobalt blue was applied over the mark.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TYPICAL VIRGINIA POTTERY IN RELATION TO PENNSYLVANIA POTTERY

Typical Virginia pottery, on the whole, very closely resembles Pennsylvania pottery. Their is one major reason for this, it is because of the fact that a good portion of the potters in Virginia were originally from Pennsylvania. The overwhelming majority (83.6%) of potters in Virginia were in one particular region (based on information given in paper entitled
"A Research Design for the Investigation of the Early Historic Pottery Manufacturing Industry in Virginia, by Kurt Russ). This region is called the Shenandoah Valley and is located in the western sections of Virginia. As stated in the book, Folk Pottery of the Shenandoah Valley, "As did most of the other craftsmen of the Shenandoah Valley, the potters migrated by way of the northern states, particularly Pennsylvania and Maryland. Much of the Valley folk art heritage is related to the southern movement who are primarily German in heritage." (11) This pottery seemed to follow the trends of the Pennsylvania potters rather closely.

In this region the "Earlier designs... are more ovoid, with rapidly converging sides. As time went on, these pieces became more squared off and the sides more parallel." (12) This change from ovoid to cylindrical is the same change that occurred in Pennsylvania, and took place at about the same time. Diagram 2 contains pictures of typical later 19th century Virginia pottery, and as can be seen, these pieces look very similar to the Pennsylvania pieces shown in diagram one. The semi-ovoid and straight-sided forms are the same as the Pennsylvania pieces, as are the types of jug necks used. The limited amount of incising, and use of cobalt blue are other similar features. The types of handles used on the crocks (projecting cupped handles) and the figures made with the cobalt are also similar. The book Folk Pottery of the Shenandoah Valley addresses the issue of the designs used in the Valley by saying, "Very little existing stoneware has animal or human figural designs. Instead, most pieces bear tulips, various other plant forms, or crude C-
scrolls." (13) As far as what has been found out, the differences between the typical Pennsylvania pottery and Virginia pottery are no more significant than the differences found between neighboring potteries within Pennsylvania.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ISAAC LAM’S POTTERY AND HOW IT COMPARES TO TYPICAL PENNSYLVANIA POTTERY

Mr. Isaac Lam owned and operated his kiln in Rockbridge Baths, Virginia from 1840-1870. During this time he made stoneware as well as earthenware. Mr. Lam, though he was a Virginia potter, does not seem to be characteristic of the typical Pennsylvania potters as most other Virginia potters are. The first type of piece that will be looked at is the crock. The typical form of Mr. Lam’s crocks seem to be much more ovoid than the Pennsylvania pieces. This is one of the most distinguishable features of Lam’s pottery when comparing it to Pennsylvania wares. Some of Lam’s wares would be considered "Tall Ovoid" (To distinguish between the "ovoid" and "tall ovoid" look at the inserted sheet called "General Forms"). Another major difference is the type of rims used. Lam seems to have mostly used what is called a "rolled rim" which is a much rounder rim than the "flatten roll" or the squared off "wide band" rims used most frequently in Pennsylvania. These differences can be seen when diagram 3 (typical Lam pieces) is compared to diagram 1 (typical Pennsylvania pieces). Another characteristic of Lam’s ware that was just recently discovered as a result of the excavation of Lam’s kiln site (44 RB 84) is the incised decoration that was put on some of the pieces. This incising is more than just the
horizontal rings that were found on some of the wares in Pennsylvania, incised birds with blue cobalt brushed over the lines have been found, though it can not be determined as of yet how often decorative treatments like this were applied. This decorative treatment is atypical of the Pennsylvania wares for two reasons: the first reason is the actual incising itself; most potters of this time did not use incising when making anything that was even slightly elaborate. The second reason this is atypical is the fact that it was a bird. Although making animal figures was common in other regions not being discussed, it was not typical of Pennsylvania or Virginia wares. It does not seem reasonable that this was an everyday practice at Lam's pottery because most pieces found had no incising at all. It can be said, with reasonable certainty, that Lam did use cobalt blue as the major way in which to decorate his wares. The handles Lam used for all his wares do seem to be the same as the ones used in Pennsylvania. He seemed to use the projecting cupped handles for his crocks, and the pulled on or attached end handles for his pitchers and jugs.

Lam's jugs seem to be quite ovoid, unlike the Pennsylvania jugs, and the bottle necks he used seem to be quite different. Although various types of bottle necks have been found, the one that seems to have been found most often is the reeded neck. Also some ringed or fancy collars have been found. Both of these types of necks are very different from the wide band, and flattened collar necks typically found in Pennsylvania.

Mr. Lam's makers mark, which can be seen in the pictures in
Diagram 3, seems to have been typical of a lot of makers marks from all over. It is a curved stamp that said "ROCKBRIDGE" in capital letters, and was applied before firing, but after the piece had been able to dry for a time. Mr. Lam's marks often had a strip of cobalt blue over the makers mark, probably for one of two reasons: 1) to add color or 2) just to help the letters stand out so they could be read easier.

CONCLUSION

The wares made by Pennsylvania and Virginia potters were, especially in the beginning, influenced by their German and English backgrounds. This does not seem to be as true for Mr. Lam, who was, to the best of our knowledge, of German background. As shown through descriptions of typical Pennsylvania wares, Virginia wares, and Mr. Lam's wares, the Lam pottery seems to be atypical of the other two, which are very similar to one another. The uniqueness of this pottery for this region may have been a major factor in the spurring on of interest in pottery among many of the students involved in the excavation of 44-RB-34. It will take a long time before everything from this site is analyzed, and many of our questions about Mr. Lam are answered, but it will be an interesting and profitable endeavor.
The following photocopies and pictures have been taken from these various sources:

1) Elmer Smith, Pottery - A Utilitarian Folk Craft

2) Kurt Russ, His private collection

3) Jeannette Lasansky, Made of Mud

4) Webster Donald Blake, Decorated Stoneware Pottery of North America
GENERAL FORMS

- Spherical or Globular
- Ovoid
- Cone Shaped
- Bell Shaped
- Semi-Ovoid
- Cylindrical
- Tall
- Bellarmine with elongated neck
- Tall Ovoid
- Squat Ovoid
- Barrel Shaped
- Baluster Shaped
- Flattened on Sides
- Rounded with Shoulder
- With Rounded Shoulders
- With Tooled Shoulders
- Short

Bowl Forms
- Rounded

Pan Forms
Rims: Jar, Bowl, and Churn Mouth and Rim Types

- Rimless or Plain Rounded Edge
- Lid Ledge within Mouth
- Flattened Roll
- Rolled Rim, Full
- Plain Edge Everted
- Indented Banded Rim
- Canted Rim
- Thin Tapered Roll, Flat Rim
- Cavetto Banded Rim
- Flat Rim
- Wide Flat Banded or "Collared" Rim
- Ogee Curve Rim

- Lid Ledge
- Wax Seal
- Wavy or Fluted Rim
- Pouring Spout in Rim
- Rolled Rim Everted (Bowls)
- Wide Banded Rim on Bowl
- Flat Rim Everted (Bowls, Jars, etc.)
- Small Flat Rim (Tapered Bowl)
Jug and Bottle Necks and Mouth Rims

- Straight or Rimless
- Simple Roll
- Long or Bellarmine type neck
- Wide Band or Collar
- Reeded Neck
- Flattened Collar
- Inverted Cone Collar
- Inner Screw
- Outer Screw
- Indented Band Collar
- Pouring Spout
- Ringed or Fancy Collar
- Neckless with Single Roll
HANDLES

Strap: usually attached vertically

Occasionally attached over the top

Laid on

Loose end

pulled on, attached end

Pulled Attachments

Lug:

attached at ends only

Open Loop

attached along length

round, attached along length

Pipkin Type

Hollow thrown (usually has a small hole)

attached along full lengths:

Flat

Crescent

Projecting straight

Projecting cupped

wheel made

Knobs: Solid thrown

Flat

Round

Cupped

Cupped
DIAGRAM 1

Typical Pennsylvania Jugs and Crockes
DIAGRAM 2
Typical Virginia Pieces
DIAGRAM 3

A Typical Lam Jug and Crock
FOOTNOTES


4) Ibid, Page 5


7) Ibid, Page 55.


10) Ibid, Page 41.
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"On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on this paper."

Thomas J. Etergino