

# Art for the People

## *Decorated Stoneware from the Weitsman Collection*

by John L. Scherer

Stoneware was the everyday ware of the nineteenth century. Used for such practical purposes as storing and serving food and liquids, it was also used to make such items as flower pots, banks, match holders, and pipes for tobacco. Potters often decorated stoneware with designs painted with a cobalt blue pigment that would withstand a high firing temperature. Salt thrown into the furnace would vaporize and produce a salt glaze finish.

The imaginative decorations that grace the many crocks and jugs produced by the potters

are now considered prime examples of American folk art. Simple birds and flowers are the most common form of decoration with other pieces elaborately adorned with more intricate scenes, created either as whimsy on the part of the maker or as presentation pieces.

Collector Adam J. Weitsman of Owego, New York, developed an early interest in decorated stoneware at the age of eleven. Encouraged by his parents he scoured the countryside in search of unusual and outstanding examples. In 1996 he donated one hundred and twenty pieces to the New York State Museum in

Albany. Since his initial donation Weitsman has continued to add to the museum's holdings, making it the premier collection of American decorated stoneware in the country.

Weitsman acquired the stoneware illustrated in this article during the last two years. He recently donated a number of them to the museum. Forty outstanding examples have been selected from the Weitsman Collection and are currently on exhibit at the museum. A complete catalog will be available this spring. For information call 518.474.5877 or visit [www.nysm.nysed.gov](http://www.nysm.nysed.gov).

Three Gallon Crock, c. 1870  
W. A. MacQuoid & Co. Pottery Works (1863-1879)  
Little West 12th Street, New York City  
10 inches high x 10¾ inches diameter. 2008.60.18.

The crock features a whimsical depiction of a cupid preparing to shoot an arrow through two burning hearts containing the words "Fair Love." This unique decoration is typical of the very unusual images found on pottery made by William MacQuoid. Could it have been a gift to someone's sweetheart? William MacQuoid, acquired the Little West 12th Street Pottery in what is today Greenwich Village, from Lewis Lehman in 1863. MacQuoid had worked at the pottery since 1861. The firm of MacQuoid and Company at 41 West Twelfth Street became the most important Manhattan pottery of the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> It produced a substantial quantity of blue-decorated stoneware with unusual and spectacular decorations. Among the more outstanding pieces are ones embellished with groups of American soldiers, faces, and animals, including pigs, horses, and zebras.





Jar, 1809  
 Paul Cushman (1767-1833)  
 Half mile west of Albany Goal  
 Albany, New York  
 10 inches high x 7¼ inches diameter at waist. 2008.60.12.

This unusual piece is stamped repeatedly, over thirty-six times, with the mark of the potter "PAUL-CUSHMAN'S:STONE-WARE-FACTORY-1809/HALF-A-MILE-WEST OF ALBANY-GOAL-." These marks form a pattern crisscrossing the jar and dividing it into horizontal bands and vertical halves. The marks even occur on the bottom of the jar. An incised inscription that reads: "C Russell/Pott/Sunday" and the date "1809" are also incised several times. "Goal" is a misspelling for Gaol, an alternate spelling for "Jail." Paul Cushman was born in Charlestown, New Hampshire, and came to Albany in 1805 where he operated his stoneware manufactory between 1809 and 1833. His vessels are heavy and often misshaped, displaying rather crude incised decorations.

Perhaps this piece commemorates the first piece of pottery fired at the Cushman kiln. The inscription with the name C. Russell lends credence to this possibility. A Caleb Russell is found in the 1813 Albany city directory as a mason living at 51 Deer Street, now State Street, not far from Cushman's address. Russell was also the fire inspector for Albany's second ward, which included the area of Cushman's pottery. Perhaps Russell helped Cushman to build his kiln and the jar was given to him as a commemoration.<sup>2</sup>



Three Gallon Jug, c. 1868  
 Haxstun, Ottman & Co. (1867-1872)  
 Fort Edward, New York  
 15¼ inches high x 8 inches diameter

The unusual decoration on this jug appears to be a representation of a bust of a bearded gentleman within a memorial basket. Memorial exhibits in baskets were popular funerary displays in the late nineteenth century. The bearded bust resembles a caricature of Abraham Lincoln. Perhaps this jug commemorates his assassination in 1865. Following his death he was immortalized by the public in many ways, becoming our most famous president after George Washington. Andrew K. Haxstun and William R. Ottman acquired the Underwood Pottery, one of two potteries at Fort Edward, in 1867. Haxstun left Ottman to establish a third pottery in Fort Edward in 1875.<sup>3</sup>

Six Gallon Churn, 1853  
W. H. Farrar & Co. (1857-1868)  
Geddes, New York  
19½ inches high x 12 inches diameter

Two roosters grace this churn, along with the date 1853. The depiction of barn yard animals on stoneware underscores the agricultural society of mid-nineteenth-century New York. The swirls beneath the roosters' feet seem to denote motion of some sort. Could it be that this churn depicts a cock fight? William H. Farrar (1813-1877), a Vermonter, established his pottery at Geddes, now a part of Syracuse, in 1840. By 1855, the business was a thriving enterprise employing six men and producing forty kilns of stoneware that sold for \$9,360. The Farrar family was large and connected with potteries in Vermont and Canada, as well as New York.<sup>4</sup>



Eight Gallon Churn, c. 1883  
Charles White and George Wood (1882-1888)  
Binghamton, New York  
20 inches high x 10 inches diameter at base. 2008.60.1.

An exuberant vase of antheriums, a tropical plant, decorates this large churn. It is stamped "WHITE & WOOD/BINGHAMTON." Various types of flowers and birds were by far the most common form of stoneware decoration. In 1837, the Chenango Canal linked Utica with the growing city of Binghamton, and in 1848 the first trains began to operate through the community. This made it possible to ship stoneware clay from New Jersey by boat and to transfer manufactured goods by both rail and canal boat. By 1850, William Roberts (1818-1888) was operating a stoneware manufactory in Binghamton that employed five men. Roberts was a son-in-law of Noah White who ran the Utica Pottery, and the White family helped to run the Binghamton manufactory. After 1882, Roberts was a potter at the firm of White and Wood. Although Charles N. White, grandson of Noah, and George H. Wood of Binghamton owned the pottery, Roberts ran it until his death in 1888, at which time the pottery closed.<sup>5</sup>







Six Gallon Crock, c. 1845  
 Nathan Clark & Company (1839-1851)  
 Rochester, New York  
 14½ inches x 13⅝ inches diameter. 2008.60.10.

Found in a barn in upstate New York, this crock features a rare and important decoration of the mythological phoenix. The painstaking detail used in the creation of this design gives it a three-dimensional quality. Nathan Clark (1787-1880) established a pottery at Athens, New York, in 1805, and with the construction of the Erie Canal in 1822 he established several more potteries in western New York including Lyons in 1822, and Mt. Morris and Rochester in 1839. The Rochester Pottery was managed by John Burger, a potter from Alsace-Lorraine who had come to New York in 1832. In 1851, Nathan Clark transferred his interest in the Rochester Pottery to John Burger and Thomas Harrington.<sup>6</sup>



Miniature Crock, c. 1840  
 George Nash (working 1832-1863)  
 Albany and Utica, New York  
 4½ inches high x 3¾ inches diameter at top

This beautifully decorated miniature ovoid crock features a wonderful incised cobalt blue bird, perhaps a peacock, encircled by a leafy vine on which the bird is feeding. The opposite side displays an incised cobalt blue flowering plant above which is incised "G NA" followed by the shadow of an "SH" that has been rubbed out in order to center the remaining letters. The lettering relates to the lettering on a covered stoneware sugar bowl incised about the middle "C. Nash Utica" that is attributed to the factory of Henry and George Nash in Utica, c. 1832-1839.<sup>7</sup> The sugar bowl was probably made for a member of the Nash family, and it is possible that this miniature crock was made and owned by George Nash himself or a member of his family. George Nash was probably the son of Henry Nash, who began work as a potter at the Boynton stoneware factory in Albany. Both Henry and George were potters who worked at potteries in Albany and Utica.

Jug, c. 1825  
 W. Lundy & Co. (1824–1828)  
 Troy, New York  
 16¼ inches high x 11 inches diam. at middle x 6 inches diam. at base

An incised cobalt blue merman graces the front of this large early ovoid jug. Additional incised lines around the merman represent the water through which the merman is swimming. Mermaids were popular folk art subjects for ships' figureheads, weather-vanes, carousels or simple decorations such as on stoneware. A number of other pieces of New York State stoneware also feature this subject, but most are mermaids rather than mermen. The depiction of fish on stoneware is more common than that of mermaids or mermen. Many different varieties of fish can be found as stoneware decoration and are more common on pieces made near rivers or lakes. William Lundy, who came from Northern Ireland to Troy as early as 1809, was involved in a number of Troy pottery ventures during the 1820s.



Four Gallon Crock, c. 1860  
 Franklin P. Goold (working 1859–1867)  
 Brantford, Ontario, Canada  
 11½ inches high x 12 inches diameter. 2008.60.4.

The one-room schoolhouse depicted on this crock was located on the Mohawk Indian reservation near Brantford. It shows the students entering the school complete with bell tower and smoking chimney. Goold was the only proprietor of the Brantford pottery that produced designs other than the standard floral motifs. Another crock made by Goold displays a stenciled decoration of a cow, and yet another, two incised birds. Justus Morton, a potter from the Nathan Clark Pottery at Lyons, New York, had come to Brantford in 1848 and established the pottery there. Franklin Goold, a grain merchant from Rochester, New York, acquired the pottery in 1859. Under Goold's ownership the pottery continued to make only basic salt-glazed wares. In 1864 he won first prize at the Canada West exhibition for an assortment of stoneware. Due to financial difficulties, Goold sold the Pottery in 1867.<sup>8</sup> @



**John L. Scherer** is curator of *Decorative Arts*, *New York State Museum, Albany, New York*.

1. Ketchum, William C., *Potters and Potteries of New York State 1650-1900*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 61-62.
2. McCombs, Douglas W. et al., *Paul Cushman: The Work and World of an Early 19th Century Albany Potter* (Albany Institute of History and Art: 2007) an exhibit catalog, 117
3. Broderick, Warren F., "A Survey of the Pottery Industry of Fort Edward and Sandy Hill," *The Hudson Valley Regional Review*, Volume 8, Number 1 (March 1991), 121.
4. Ketchum, 303-304.
5. *Onondaga Pottery*, an exhibit catalog for an exhibit at the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York, December 18 - January 13, 1973, 1.
6. Ketchum, 372-380.
7. Ketchum, 291.
8. Webster, Donald Blake, *The Brantford Pottery, 1849-1907*, (University of Toronto Press, 1968), 19-20.