

### The Farrars of St. Johns (St-Jean) and Iberville

crossing the Richelieu at St-Hilaire.

Saint-Denis was no longer the hub of the area. The community's energy began to wane. The potters left were not strong enough to combat the challenge of the increasingly popular wares of the tinsmiths and they were overshadowed in their own craft by the growing activity in St. Johns where American stoneware was being produced from 1840. A few attempts were made to improve techniques and expand the range of products. In 1844 Joseph Duplaquet dit Lambert's inventory showed attempts at double-firing and liquid-glazing.<sup>18</sup> But it was too late to win back that portion of the market that Canadian-made products could secure in a field dominated by imports.

As the potteries closed, the potters looked for jobs elsewhere. In 1811 Joseph Maillet had moved to Ste-Marie to operate a pottery there for Seigneur Thomas P.J. Taschereau. Now the Maillet family scattered completely—Amable and his brother Narcisse went to St. Johns sometime after 1843 and joined the Farrars. Édouard went to St-Ours about 1845 and Jean-Baptiste left for St-Eustache about 1851 with his son. Siméon Joubert, who had moved to St-Ours in 1830 made a short-lived attempt to return to Saint-Denis in 1839 but left again for Machiche in 1840.<sup>19</sup> The potters whose families had worked in Saint-Denis for generations began to disappear from local records. By 1871 the only four potters left in Saint-Denis bore the names of those two men who had introduced pottery-making to the village a century before: Courtemanche and Belanger. Before the nineteenth century closed, no potters were left in Saint-Denis, once the pottery capital of Lower Canada.

The potters of Saint-Denis were individual, unsophisticated rural craftsmen producing work designed expressly for the rural community around them. There had been no real market for more expensive decorated majolica and they seem to have produced none. For those who wanted and could afford it there was Staffordshire porcelain flooding Canada in the first half of the nineteenth century. Stoneware was also coming in from Britain as the manufacturers realized the particular needs of the colonial market. But New England potters had also seen the value of stoneware and managed to establish a North American industry. Stoneware was harder than earthenware and cheaper than porcelain, and—most important—relatively easy to produce given suitable conditions. The most important factor in establishing a stoneware industry in Canada to compete with imported goods would be geographical location. Easy access to transportation and consequent lowering of cost were vital for bringing in raw materials not readily available and for shipping out the finished products to a wide market.

St. Johns, in 1838 much smaller in size than neighbouring Saint-Denis, had not been affected as seriously either by the turbulent uprisings or the harsh repressive measures that followed. The only railroad in Canada was the line running from Montreal to St. Johns. Here the railway connected with the Canadian terminus of the Lake Champlain steamship services. The Chambly canal was under construction and would open up navigation to the St. Lawrence. Industry established here then could not only ship in raw materials at relatively low cost but also reach out to an expanded market. St. Johns was the customs port on the Richelieu and a rapidly growing, prosperous, bustling town in 1840.<sup>20</sup> It was

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natural enough that a family of stoneware manufacturers established in Vermont, looking for new worlds to conquer, should realize the possibilities of the town, strategically situated in Lower Canada where no stoneware was as yet being made.

The first stoneware manufacture in Quebec and probably the first in Canada<sup>21</sup> was established at St. Johns in 1840 by two men who had already learned the techniques of their trade among the skilled potters of Vermont: Moses Farrar (a Canadian by birth)<sup>22</sup> and his father-in-law Isaac Newton Soule. They bought land in St. Johns only 500 feet from the terminus of the Champlain and St. Lawrence Railroad and less than 500 yards from the steamship wharf<sup>23</sup> so that New Jersey fire-clay could be easily shipped in as needed. The factory was soon in production and a few years later Moses Farrar's nephew<sup>24</sup> from Vermont arrived to join the staff already enlarged by the addition of two former Saint-Denis potters.<sup>25</sup> Farrar and Soule stoneware products were generally made of stoneware clay burned to a blue-grey colour, salt-glazed or with an opaque slip-glaze (that is, a natural clay containing sufficient flux to function as a glaze) which gave them a dark brown, generally dull finish. Sometimes the slip-glaze was employed only on the inside of the vessels. The pottery weathered the depression of 1846-47 and Isaac Soule turned over his share of the factory to his son, Warren Hoxie Soule<sup>26</sup> as business began to improve. The firm celebrated its decennial in 1850 by winning first prize for stoneware at the Provincial Industrial Exhibition in Montreal.

The partnership of Farrar and Soule ended in 1852.<sup>27</sup> Warren Soule continued to run the existing plant for two years more with the help of capital from

Henry Gillespie, master-carpenter and joiner of St. Johns.<sup>28</sup> In 1854 however, Gillespie and Soule were bought out by another Farrar newly arrived in St. Johns from Vermont (where he still maintained his residence)—Eben L. Farrar. The Gillespie name continued to be associated with pottery-making in St. Johns for a few more years since Henry's son John Gillespie (who had perhaps learned his trade with Warren Soule) established his own small pottery in the spring of 1857 with the aid of his brother-in-law Thomas Mace.<sup>29</sup> He gave up in 1860<sup>30</sup> but some stoneware vessels found today in the province marked J.T. HAZEN/ST. JOHNS seem to have originated in Gillespie's pottery. Hazen, a merchant, was responsible for the pottery property taxes from 1865 to 1872<sup>31</sup> and may have had stoneware made there for his own use and marked with his own name. Apart from this interlude Gillespie's pottery seems to disappear almost completely from the record.<sup>32</sup>

Moses Farrar, in the meantime, had set up within three weeks of the termination of the Farrar and Soule partnership in 1852 an independent pottery close to his brick house on the corner of Partition and Grant (today Laurier) Streets. Here from 1852 to 1854 he turned out products with the mark MOSES FARRAR/ST. JOHNS L.C. He had taken with him from his original plant Narcisse Maillet<sup>33</sup> and the two seemed to be thriving. But Moses Farrar was losing interest in the industry he had come to Canada to establish.

The Crimean War broke out in 1854 and postponed the threatened recession. The Farrar clan in Vermont could see the still growing importance of St. Johns, now linked by railway with Boston and New York and by steamer with other points in the United States. The situation was encouraging for

business interests and as reciprocity was introduced and capital moved into Canada so did Eben L. Farrar, a senior member of the family. In March 1854 (as mentioned above) Eben bought out Gillespie and Soule intact, with a guarantee that Soule would not try to compete either in Canada or within forty miles of Fairfax, Vermont.<sup>34</sup> Stoneware with the mark E.L. FARRAR/ST. JOHNS, C.E. seems to belong to this first step in Eben Farrar's establishment in Canada. Eben Farrar did not enjoy competition, it seems, even from relatives, and he eliminated any threat from the other pottery in town by merging with Moses Farrar in what turned out to be a short-lived partnership. The company of E.L. and

M. Farrar seems to have survived only a few months: from the latter part of 1854 until the spring of 1855. It was too uneven a partnership, perhaps. Moses seems to have felt that he was still young enough to try a new career and he needed little persuasion to give up the pottery when a man of much the same age, Eben L.'s brother George Whitfield Farrar, arrived in St. Johns from Fairfax. Like Soule, Moses Farrar agreed not to set up a new manufacture nor to trade as a potter within the marketing area he had himself begun to develop 15 years before. He had, in fact, no desire to compete and in August 1855 after selling his share of the pottery, including "all the clay now being on the wharf at this port of St.



Plate 1

*Left:* Burned to a blue-grey, salt-glazed and with a design in cobalt blue, this two-gallon stoneware jug is marked "Gillespie and Soule St. Johns." Date: 1852-54. Dimensions: height 14 in., diameter of base  $8\frac{3}{8}$  in.

*Right:* Large crock of slate-grey, salt-glazed, and with a flower and leaf design in cobalt blue; stamped "E.L. Farrar St. Johns 3." Date: 1854. Dimensions: height  $9\frac{1}{2}$  in.; diameter of top  $10\frac{1}{2}$  in.

Johns," to G.W. Farrar,<sup>35</sup> he returned to Vermont.

The brothers Eben L. and George W. Farrar felt this was the moment to cull profit from the now vigorous Canadian market. The first thing to do was to step up production and for this a new plant was built, fronting on Partition Street and encompassing stables for the horses that distributed their wares by wagon, as well as sheds for storing clay. It seems to have been an impressively large establishment for the time, much of it replacing premises damaged by fire. The next step was to enlarge the range of wares offered. Their close connections with the new techniques being developed by the Vermont potteries was of great value and with better equipment they could introduce double-firing techniques, new glazing processes and moulds like those in use in New England. They branched out into such new stoneware items as ginger beer bottles and snuff jars. They could even offer their customers enamelled wares.<sup>36</sup> All seemed to be going well, and plans for further development were gathering form. The abrupt death of Eben Farrar on June 26, 1857 brought the flourishing partnership to an end.<sup>37</sup>

Stoneware vessels bearing the mark O.L. BALLARD/ST. JOHNS reveal the hiatus in the Farrar careers caused by the sudden death of Eben. Despite his skilful organization of his business affairs, he had made no will and by the laws of Vermont his estate had to be divided among his three brothers and his widow. Orrin L. Ballard, himself a prominent Burlington pottery manufacturer, arrived in St. Johns to help unravel the legal tangle and on November 16, 1857 assumed control of the firm.<sup>38</sup> Two months later, with everything sorted out, he was able to convey sole ownership to the surviving partner.<sup>39</sup>

George W. Farrar operated the pottery alone for eight years but after his brother's death, he marked the stoneware simply ST. JOHNS/STONE WARE. The factory was turning out thoroughly practical articles—in 1861 the 18 employees of the firm used up 500 tons of clay producing 36,000 jugs, 30,000 butter pots, 300 dozen teapots, 600 pitchers and 600 spittoons.<sup>40</sup> They were producing, in fact, what the market demanded of home industry and business ran smoothly. So much so that in March 1866 Farrar transferred control of the pottery to his eldest son George Henry,<sup>41</sup> then 23 and representing the firm in Montreal, in order to allow himself an opportunity to follow his new interest in white earthenware then developing rapidly within the United States industry.

Two years later, in 1868, the second son Lucius E. Farrar reached his majority and the two young men made a formal partnership "for the manufacture of earthen and stone-ware."<sup>42</sup> Six potter's wheels were already busy and the young men were anxious to modernize the plant by introducing steam power. Their ideas seemed justified within three years since the municipal evaluation of the pottery jumped from \$1,500 to \$7,000.<sup>43</sup> After 1871 the pottery was proudly known as the St. Johns Steam Power Stone Ware Factory! The brothers divided the supervision of the concern: George managed the factory while Lucius represented the firm in Montreal and the youngest brother Eben, then 18, learned his trade as a potter. Rockingham ware, the brownware long popular among Vermont potters, was added to the repertoire.

But the dynamism of the young men was useless in the face of the new depression settling on the country by the end of 1873. Debtors went

bankrupt with consequent loss to the firm.<sup>44</sup> Loans had to be negotiated at crippling high interest rates.<sup>45</sup> By 1874 the firm had to slash its prices by as much as half in order to sell at all.<sup>46</sup> The firm of G.H. and L.E. Farrar was floundering and in December 1875 as the depression intensified, the partnership was dissolved. George Henry Farrar withdrew and went into partnership with Louis Deneau—a Montreal trader for some time associated with the firm—marketing the Farrar products on an exclusive franchise in the firm of "Farrar and Deneau."<sup>47</sup> The father, George W. Farrar, now resumed control of the family firm.<sup>48</sup> The year 1876 was disastrous. Business concerns collapsed everywhere in the province. Banks folded. In the midst of this misery a fire in June ravaged the entire business district of St. Johns. The Farrars escaped this but shortly afterwards a fire on the premises destroyed the St. Johns factory where stoneware had been produced for a quarter of a century. George W. Farrar and his eldest son abandoned the scene of defeat and moved to the opposite bank of the Richelieu, to Iberville. Lucius E. Farrar sold up and moved to the United States.<sup>49</sup>

George Whitfield Farrar was not ready to give up. Iberville offered the same easy access to transportation by rail and water as St. Johns and the town was ready to encourage new industry by granting tax privileges to manufacturers preparing to locate there.<sup>50</sup> Farrar bought a house and land in Iberville in September 1876,<sup>51</sup> and immediately set about establishing on his depleted resources a new and modest pottery in an annex at the back of his newly acquired house. He requested Council to grant exemption from taxes for 10 years, brought in fireclay by barge from New Jersey as before, and restricted produc-

tion to stoneware. The Farrars' Iberville pottery was to survive for another half a century but G.W. Farrar did not live long enough to see his new pottery securely established. He died in 1881<sup>52</sup> and his youngest son, Eben L. who had stayed in St. Johns for a while, rejoined George Henry Farrar to help keep the Iberville pottery operating. The 1883-86 recession and the competition from the Bertrand and Lavoie company in Iberville between 1885 and 1895 made the early years a constant struggle. It was 1890 before G.H. and E.L. Farrar dared make the first tentative move towards expansion. They bought a small piece of adjoining property on Napier Street so that they could extend the brick residence. At this time a new type of stoneware preserve jar was being developed and was selling well. Its top was a glass seal attached to the jar by a wire clamp. These glass tops were made especially for the firm, marked, "Farrars Patent SelfSealing Jar—1893," and the same device was used on an assortment of stoneware jars from the common salt-glazed variety to the more elaborate models decorated with incised banding.

The success of these years was accentuated by the collapse of the Farrars' only rival of the early years in Iberville, Bertrand and Lavoie. Calixte Goyette, carpenter and master-builder of Iberville, had made an abortive attempt in January 1885 to move into the stoneware industry by putting up the capital for a new manufacture in partnership with Hubert Lavoie, journeyman, and Julien Bertrand, potter.<sup>53</sup> The partnership got as far as buying land for the enterprise but Bertrand had to cede his share to a creditor and in August Calixte Goyette withdrew from the agreement and looked for a more stable investment. Bertrand and Lavoie decided to persevere. Their first announcement of



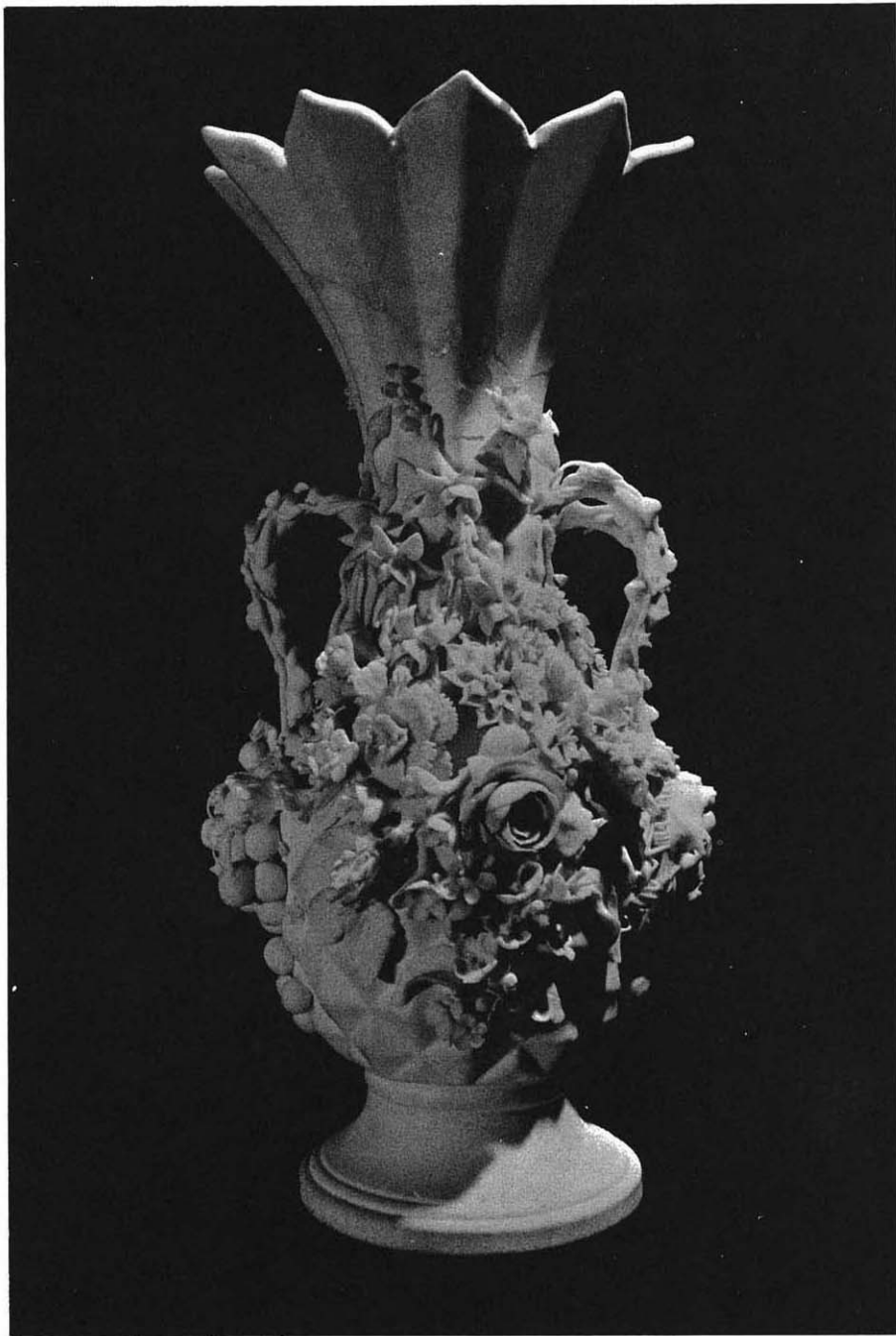


Plate 2

Parian porcelain vase, richly decorated, made by Philip Pointon, possibly while working in New Jersey before coming to the Farrar potteries in St. Johns. Unusual type of ware, rarely found.

Date (inscribed on bottom): "November 19, 1871 from P. Pointon to his wife Alzina C. Pointon."

Dimensions: height  $10\frac{1}{8}$  in., diameter  $4\frac{3}{4}$  in.

intent to produce a wide range of crockery never materialized,<sup>54</sup> and actual operations were put off for two years. A new announcement was made in November 1887 and the partnership managed to hang on for five years. The pottery restricted itself to stoneware and most of its products were marked MFG. BY/BERTRAND & LAVOIE/IBERVILLE, P.Q. In November 1892 Bertrand was forced to sell his share in the firm to Charles Adolphe Loupret (agent for the enterprise), and continue

as an employee although the name of Bertrand and Lavoie was continued.<sup>55</sup> In September 1894 Loupret bought out Hubert Lavoie<sup>56</sup> but he had little time to enjoy his ownership. A few months later Loupret went into bankruptcy. The mortgagee took over the property<sup>57</sup> in February 1896 and the pottery remained dormant until the Farrars bought it in 1900.

By this time the Farrars seemed to have adapted well to the changing needs of the market and the challenge of the



Plate 3

Mixing bowl from Iberville potteries; has a Rockingham glaze obtained by brushing mottled, brown glaze over the red earthenware and then covering with a clear lead oxide glaze.

Date: ca. 1885.

Dimensions: height  $3\frac{1}{2}$  in., diameter of top  $6\frac{1}{2}$  in.

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growing glassware industry. George Henry Farrar, who looked after the administration of the firm, was prominent in municipal affairs<sup>58</sup> and about 1901 was appointed Harbour Master in Iberville.

After 1910 the popularity of stoneware began to wane. In 1912 the Farrars sold the former Bertrand and Lavoie pottery and it was dismantled.<sup>59</sup> Eben L. Farrar died in August 1918 at the age of 66.<sup>60</sup> He was the last member of the Farrar family to turn a potter's wheel in

Canada. The plant had long been referred to as the "E.L. Farrar Pottery Works" and after his death the name was changed to "Canada Stoneware Works." George Henry Farrar continued to operate the factory until 1926 when, six weeks before his death at the age of 84, he sold it.<sup>61</sup> The new owners—George H. Sheppard, William Knight (of the Dominion Sanitary Pottery company) and William Campbell—were able to continue production without interruption since Farrar had included in the



Plate 4

This common yellowware bowl is a superb example of a clear glaze over a cream-coloured body; made in the Iberville potteries.

Date: ca. 1885.  
Dimensions: height 5  $\frac{1}{2}$  in., diameter of top 12  $\frac{1}{4}$  in.



## Ceramics in the Richelieu Valley

sale not only all the equipment and patents but also all the technical data on production methods, the formulae for the stoneware clays and glazes, and exact details on the correct firing of the kilns. The Farrars had been producing stoneware for nearly 90 years but the stoneware industry died with them in the St. Johns-Iberville area. The new form lasted until a fire in June 1930 severely damaged the premises and shortly afterwards the partnership broke up.<sup>62</sup> Five years later George

Sheppard sold all the equipment of the Canada Stoneware Works to the Edison Institute for re-assembly at Henry Ford's historical village in Dearborn, Michigan.<sup>63</sup>

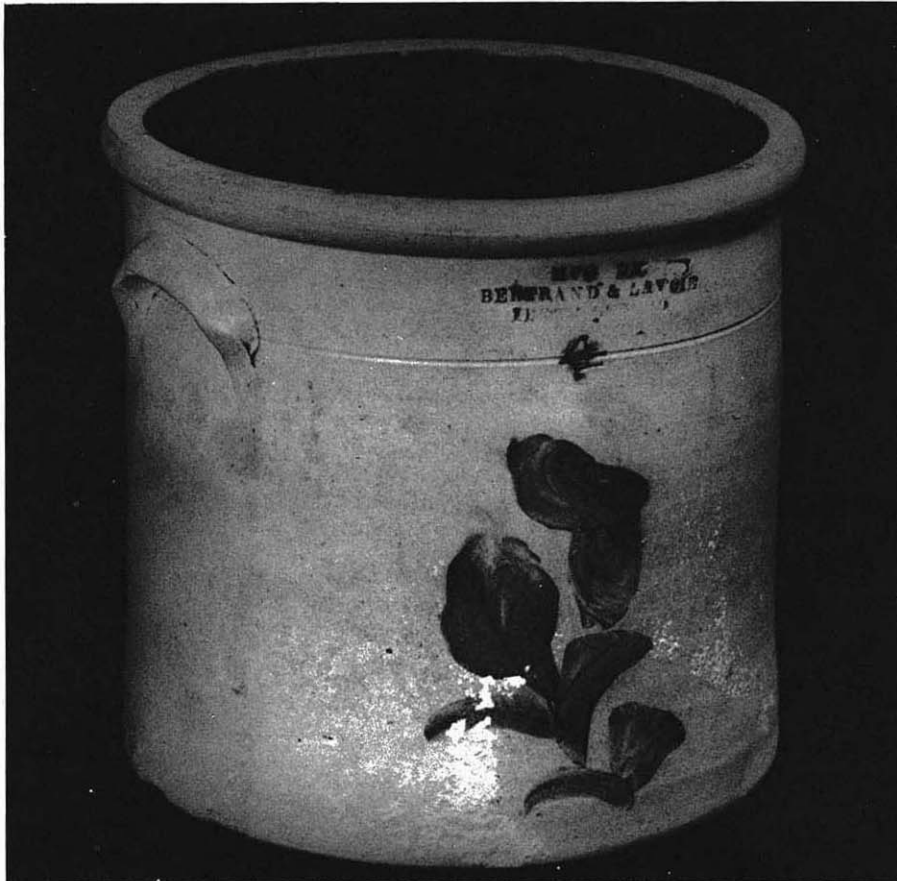


Plate 5

Stoneware storage crock, covered with a clear salt glaze, and decorated with a blue floral design; glazed opaque brown interior. Stamped "Mfg. by Bertrand & Lavoie Iberville P.Q. 4."

Date: ca. 1885-95.  
Dimensions: height 11½ in., diameter of top 11¼ in.