

## Local Industry Focuses on White Earthenware

The Farrars had been pioneers. Moses Farrar had introduced stoneware to St. Johns in 1840. George Whitfield Farrar had given up control of the firm in 1866 so that he could be free to focus on a new project: the production of white earthenware. No one had yet started to produce this in Canada although potters in Trenton, New Jersey had spent a decade establishing a market and making "white granite" ware the specialty of the U.S. industry. This "white granite" body was somewhat harder than the hardest English white earthenware but not so hard as the vitreous "ironstone" ware patented by Mason's in Staffordshire in 1813. The American product had become a commercial success by 1873 primarily by concentrating on heavy hotel and restaurant ware. Farrar was interested in exploiting the Canadian market.

He interested Edward C. Macdonald, a prominent St. Johns merchant and banker in the project. Together, despite the unpromising economic climate, they

raised subscribers in St. Johns and Iberville and organized a joint stock company, the St. Johns Stone Chinaware Company, in 1873.<sup>64</sup> Another potter, William Livesley, was recruited (probably from Trenton) to be the chief technician of the firm. Land was purchased at the corner of Grant and Partition Streets, a St. Johns contractor was signed on<sup>65</sup> and work began on construction of the plant. It took more than a year for the factory to be readied for the launching of home-made "granite" ware on the Canadian market but by August 28, 1874 the first shipment of the company's goods was sent off. As other enterprises crashed around them, the St. Johns Stone Chinaware Company cleared more than \$3,000 in its first seven months<sup>66</sup> and hoped to double production as it swung into its second year. In the first year of operation an average of 100 crates a month were turned out, carrying a wide range of goods from stove-lining fire bricks and stoneware to Rockingham, cream-



Plate 6

White ironstone bowl and pitcher, having a fine bright glaze and a moulded decoration. Both are stamped "Stone Chinaware Company, St. Johns, P.Q." and also with the British coat-of-arms.

Date: ca. 1880.

*Bowl:* height 4  $\frac{3}{4}$  in., diameter of top 10 in.

*Pitcher:* height 8 in., diameter of top 6  $\frac{1}{2}$  in.

coloured and "granite" wares. More investors<sup>67</sup> were attracted by the obvious success of the new company and their confidence seemed justified when the judges at the 1876 Philadelphia International (Centennial) Exhibition awarded the firm a medal for its "white granite" ware with the citation "commended for fair quality of body and glaze, good quality of colour in blue decoration." Standards, even in these early years, seem to have been high and work produced could bear comparison with that of the much more experienced American potters.

But much of the company's initial *élan* had come from Farrar and at the end of 1875 he had felt it urgent that he resume the guidance of his family's stoneware factory. His initiative and energy were thus taken away from the St. Johns firm and this loss was intensified by the departure of the other potter, William Livesley, who moved to Montreal before the end of 1876 to organize a new ceramic manufacture, the West End Dresden Pottery (*see* p.16). Abandoned by both potters and with the depression forcing prices down, the company abruptly lost its momentum and in the autumn of 1877 went into bankruptcy.<sup>68</sup>

E.C. Macdonald, by then 67 years old, refused to be disheartened. He was keenly aware of the possibilities of this type of industry and after buying out the company,<sup>69</sup> he ran it from March 1878 as a private enterprise, known locally as "Macdonald's pottery." His business acumen was unerring. The revised protective tariffs of 1879 gave home products an edge over American imports and business began to improve. Macdonald was quick to grasp the new chance to develop and planned far-reaching improvements in the plant to accelerate production. He constructed a large warehouse linked to the main

pottery by a bridge well above street level and added several additional kilns including a large two-decker type.<sup>70</sup> The company's white granite and cream-coloured wares earned a gold medal at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto in September 1879, and a year later, at the Dominion Exhibition in Montreal, it secured first prize for stone china and second prize for pottery. Six kiln chimneys now clustered around the main chimney. Macdonald's nephew Alexander (Sandy) Macdonald who had been helping with the supervision of the factory was rewarded by his uncle in November 1884 by a one-third interest in the concern.<sup>71</sup>

The depression of 1883-86 hardly touched the St. Johns Stone Chinaware Company though many other enterprises in the town crumbled under the pressure. One such casualty was William Sherratt's factory, in 1883 the third largest pottery in St. Johns. William Sherratt was from a family of Staffordshire potters and had arrived in St. Johns a few years before and worked for a while with Elijah Bowler at the St. Johns Porcelain Works (*see* p. 24). In November 1882, encouraged no doubt by the sight of vigorous business activity in the town, he decided there was room for at least one more firm and—with George Horatio Bacon, a mining engineer from Montreal—bought a pottery built by J. and H. Black on the corner of Queen and Glass Factory Streets (now Bouthillier Street and Gouin Boulevard).<sup>72</sup> There are few records of its brief life but the factory did turn out both Rockingham ware and white earthenware. It could not really hope to entrench itself within the shrinking economy. At the beginning of January 1884 Sherratt took over Bacon's interest in the enterprise. The partnership had lasted 14 months. Six months later an Ottawa boot and shoe

manufacturer, William Edward Brown, acquired the balance of Bacon's mortgage on the property and in 1886 bought out Sherratt who left for the United States.<sup>73</sup> A fire that winter left the pottery in ruins and four years later it was sold by the sheriff.<sup>74</sup>

In the years from 1879 to 1883 five such new potteries were established in the St. Johns-Iberville area. Three of them (William Sherratt, William Jones, Blackburn & Rowe) rapidly collapsed. All of the others in the area with the exception of the St. Johns Stone China-ware Company were adversely affected. Macdonald's enterprise, conversely, seemed at its most successful. The number of employees increased (a boon to the local labour force), production expanded, and plant and equipment were again redeployed. The company was reaching out well beyond the borders of Canada, exhibiting a collection of plain and decorated tableware and toilet ware, and domestic white granite ware at the Antwerp International Exhibition of 1885 and the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London in 1886. A description of the plant in 1888 states that there were then three glazing kilns (for glazing), three bisque kilns (for preliminary firing), one calcining kiln and one frett kiln (for special frit glazes) and one enamelling kiln. Steady employment was given to 200 persons using machinery driven by a steam engine of 100 horsepower.<sup>75</sup>

E.C. Macdonald died in January 1889 and his control of the firm passed to his brother Duncan Macdonald, father of Alexander.<sup>76</sup> The Macdonalds must have been closely interested in the formation of the Dominion Sanitary Pottery Company in St. Johns at this time and could certainly discern the importance of Elijah Bowler's new line of sanitary earthenware. They wasted no time. With a fresh injection of

capital, expansion into new property and the addition of at least one large kiln, they were rapidly in the vanguard with the new line of goods. A substantial amount of sanitary earthenware was produced in the following years, much of it on contract to railway and shipping companies.

The taste of the time called for an elaboration of design: water closets appeared in at least ten different patterns (such as "Richelieu," "Daisy" and "Excelsior"). Some flaunted elaborately embossed patterns, hand-decorated in gilt and gold and green. Tanks for toilets were just as elegant: they were placed high on the wall and fashioned in mahogany, black walnut, sycamore and bird's eye maple.<sup>77</sup> Round, oval and rectangular wash basins were available, not only in a range of sizes but also in a range of colours. "Maroon band and gold lines" was a particular favourite. Some were marbled. Many were hand-decorated. Tableware and toilet ware were produced mainly in a white granite although some were produced in the cream-coloured body used mostly for general utility items. The principal toilet ware pattern bore the name "Ribbon." Tableware items came in a wider variety and in such patterns as "Ceres," "Melon" and "Cable." The well-known "Wheat" pattern seems to have been obsolete by 1893<sup>78</sup> whereas the "blue-ware" was at this time enjoying great popularity. Sandy Macdonald used his office to show off the popular lines of bijou jugs, plain and in assorted colours or with gold head and lip, together with a group of shaving mugs and fan mugs in assorted colours.

Misfortune when it came after so many smiling years struck suddenly. On Saturday night March 4, 1896 the worst fire in St. Johns since the 1876 disaster gutted all four buildings of the main manufacturing plant of the St. Johns

Stone Chinaware Company. Damage was estimated at \$100,000 and only half this loss was covered by insurance. As many as 225 employees were abruptly out of work.<sup>79</sup> The Macdonalds could not afford to stop production. Four days after the fire they set up what became known as "Macdonald's small pottery" in the idle Canada Pottery plant on St. George Street which they had acquired the previous year.<sup>80</sup>

The Canada Pottery had been active for about eight years in the shadow of the nine busy kiln chimneys of the St. Johns Stone Chinaware Company but it had ceased to exist by 1890.<sup>81</sup> When William Livesley left the St. Johns Stone Chinaware firm in 1876 he had gone to Montreal with the idea of leasing part of

the former St. Lawrence Glass company plant in the suburb of Ste-Cunégonde<sup>82</sup> and establishing there a new pottery manufacture. He enlisted the valuable support of two of the original sponsors of the glassworks, William Workman and Alexander Delisle, and another useful man, Mark Tomkins, an importer of clay and other raw materials. By the end of 1876 Livesley not only had his lease from Workman for part of the plant but also the use of much of the equipment<sup>83</sup> and a year's freedom from rent. A company was set up in April 1877 under the name of West End Dresden Pottery<sup>84</sup> and operated for about two years until the death of Workman. Livesley stayed on long enough to see the firm change hands and become the

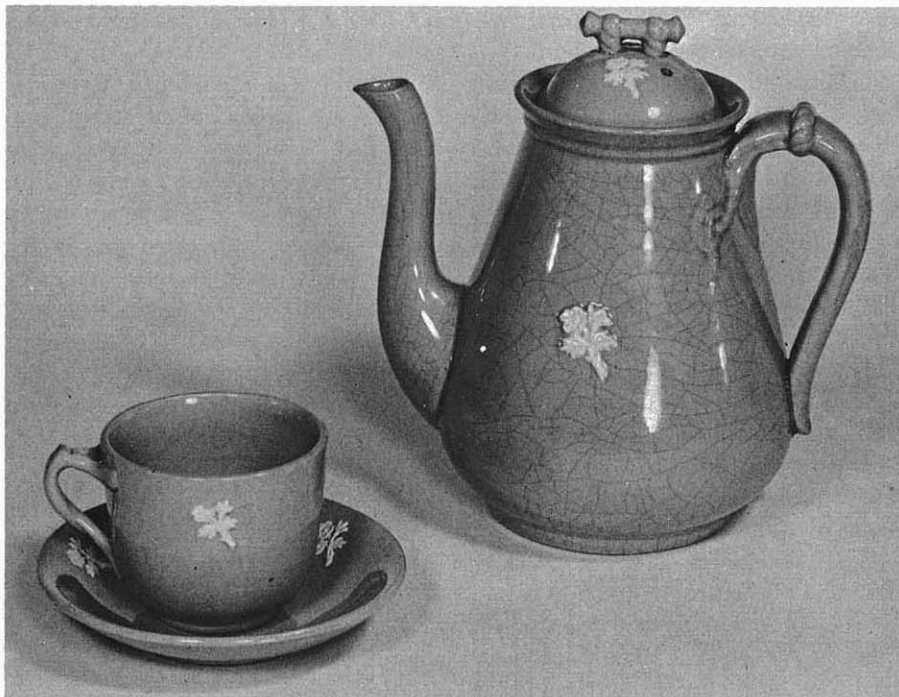


Plate 7

Coffee pot, cup and saucer from a set of 36 pieces of blueware acquired by the National Museum of Man. One of the more expensive and unusual lines of the St. Johns Stone Chinaware Company

Date: this type of ware was not made after the fire of 1896.

Dimensions: *coffee pot*—height 9 in., diameter 8  $\frac{1}{4}$  in.

*cup*—height 3 in.

*saucer*—diameter 5  $\frac{7}{8}$  in.

Stafford Pottery under the ownership of Mark Tomkins and Company. He left the enterprise in 1879 to return to St. Johns but Tomkins continued until the slump of 1883 killed his concern like so many others.<sup>85</sup> Livesley fared little better in St. Johns. The protective tariffs of 1879 had helped business recover briefly from the last stifling depression and Livesley came back to St. Johns with new ideas on the feasibility of establishing a drain-pipe industry there. His attention was soon diverted, however, to the more attractive project of competing with his old firm in the production of white earthenware. He negotiated with a low down payment the purchase of the new factory built by the Blacks on the ruined Farrar site on St. George Street. With J. Platt Rogers as partner, Livesley began operations in January 1881<sup>86</sup> and soon ceramic products appeared bearing the trademark, W.L. & CO. CANADA POTTERY, in an oval frame. But the venture seems to have been launched a trifle hastily without the capital necessary to make it viable. Debts piled up as the new firm struggled to accumulate the supplies needed for its white earthenware. The stockpile proved too costly. All the essential ingredients—ball clay, china clay, flint and feldspar—had to be imported from the United States or from England. A store of such glazing materials as white lead and zinc had to be purchased, and firebrick for the new kilns, lumber, iron roofing, stoves and new machinery. Unpaid bills piled up. Wm. Livesley and Company was finished. On October 21, 1882 the company was dissolved and taken over by C.E. Pearson and Company.<sup>87</sup> Charles Pearson, then owner of a Rockingham ware factory, the Glasgow Poterie d'Iberville, seems to have kept Livesley on as superintendent of the plant. The upswing in the

business cycle was proving merely an interlude. The slump renewed its hold in 1883. Pearson sold his Iberville concern and tried bravely to find business associates to help develop the Canada Pottery. It was not easy. People were wary of making new investments in such unpromising conditions and Pearson's first attempts<sup>88</sup> at organizing "The British Porcelain Manufacturing Company" for the production of "stone china, porcelain, white granite, delf or any other species of pottery, delf or earthenware" collapsed. Finally in September 1883 Pearson seemed to have cleared the first hurdle. Alexander Barbour Almour of Montreal agreed to take a one third interest in the manufacture.<sup>89</sup> The partnership was arranged to run for three years. It lasted six months.<sup>90</sup> Pearson tried again to carry on alone despite the obvious impossibility of coping with mounting financial difficulties. His wares of this period (1882-85) appeared with a trademark consisting of a British coat-of-arms enclosed by the words "British Porcelain" above, and below, the words "C.E. Pearson & Co." The close resemblance to English trademarks was neither accidental nor uncommon at the time. Some American manufacturers had made use of the trademarks of well-known English houses<sup>91</sup> feeling that this was the only way to break into the market. But the custom has made identification difficult and these native Canadian pottery products have been mistakenly labelled as English in origin. The subsequent trademark of the Canada Pottery was even more deceptive. After two and a half years of struggling alone, Pearson was joined in 1885 by Frederick Bruce Dakin of Montreal who had decided at 50 years of age to switch interests from printing to pottery. Dakin took over "The British Porcelain Manufacturing

Company," then valued at \$32,000 with Pearson as one of the principal shareholders.<sup>92</sup> The trademark used from 1885 to about 1888 was a large-size reproduction of the British coat-of-arms with the words BRITISH PORCELAIN WORKS above, and the words IRONSTONE CHINA underneath. This mark has sometimes been considered that of an English manufacturer and the Canada Pottery has not always received due credit for its part in the development of Canadian ceramics.

The company was producing a full line of tableware items including teapots and some hotel ware, in at least five patterns ("Wheat," "Cable," "Oak," "Ivy," "Ceres"). Toilet sets appeared in such patterns as "Queen Anne," "Spray," and "York." Spittoons ("Parlour" and "Oak Leaf"), plain bowls, sponge bowls, grape bowls, jelly cans and tobacco jars rolled off the production line. But the competition was fierce, especially from those actual English products still offered at equal prices. In April 1887 the creditors were clamouring for action and the firm was sold by the Sheriff to Henry Earle of Montreal, an earlier investor in the company.<sup>93</sup> Earle was an engraver, not a potter, and he brought in for a short time another potter (perhaps to replace Livesley) to help with management. In 1888 "Dakin & Allen" were listed as managers.<sup>94</sup> By 1890 the company had apparently ceased to exist,<sup>95</sup> and five years later the Macdonalds acquired an interest in the property. Naturally enough, when fire destroyed the main plant of the St. Johns Stone Chinaware Company the value of this particular asset was immediately realized and the site quickly put back into use.

It was to take two years to rebuild the ruined main plant to half its former value.<sup>96</sup> But in the interim, as soon as machinery, essential equipment and

such supplies as Decalomania varnish, grey black for marbling, enamels, printing colours and a few lustre colours could be gathered at the former Canada Pottery plant, the Macdonalds were back in production offering the familiar wares in the patterns proved marketable by long experience. One new pattern was introduced for toilet goods—"Monmouth"—perhaps to show that the pottery was still alive and attuned to new trends. The merchandise was still marked ST. JOHNS STONE CHINA-WARE COMPANY but heavier quality goods often carried the secondary mark, IMPERIAL. One of the patterns acquired with the former Canada Pottery plant was added to the Macdonalds' repertoire in this period (1895-96)—"Queen Anne." "Maple Leaf," "Rocaille" and "Ivy Leaf" jugs replaced earlier products. Coffee urns were being made in sizes up to eight gallons. By 1896 the company seemed to be manufacturing table, toilet and sanitary ware as strongly as before, supplying hotels and railways with their specialties.<sup>97</sup> All *seemed* as before. But it was only a surface confidence. The Macdonalds apparently never resumed production in the rebuilt main plant. The heavy loss in the 1893 fire was felt even more keenly the same year when a claim of \$20,000 was made against them from the company's bankruptcy in 1877.<sup>98</sup> *La Minerve* of Montreal got wind of new developments and reported on March 31, 1896 that the Macdonalds were negotiating sale of the factory to a group of French ceramists. The newspaper report was accurate. The Macdonalds were offering the whole enterprise at \$130,000 to a French group in the hope of attracting French capital to St. Johns. The offer proved tempting. By July the new organization had assumed control<sup>99</sup> and the "small pottery" was being renovated.

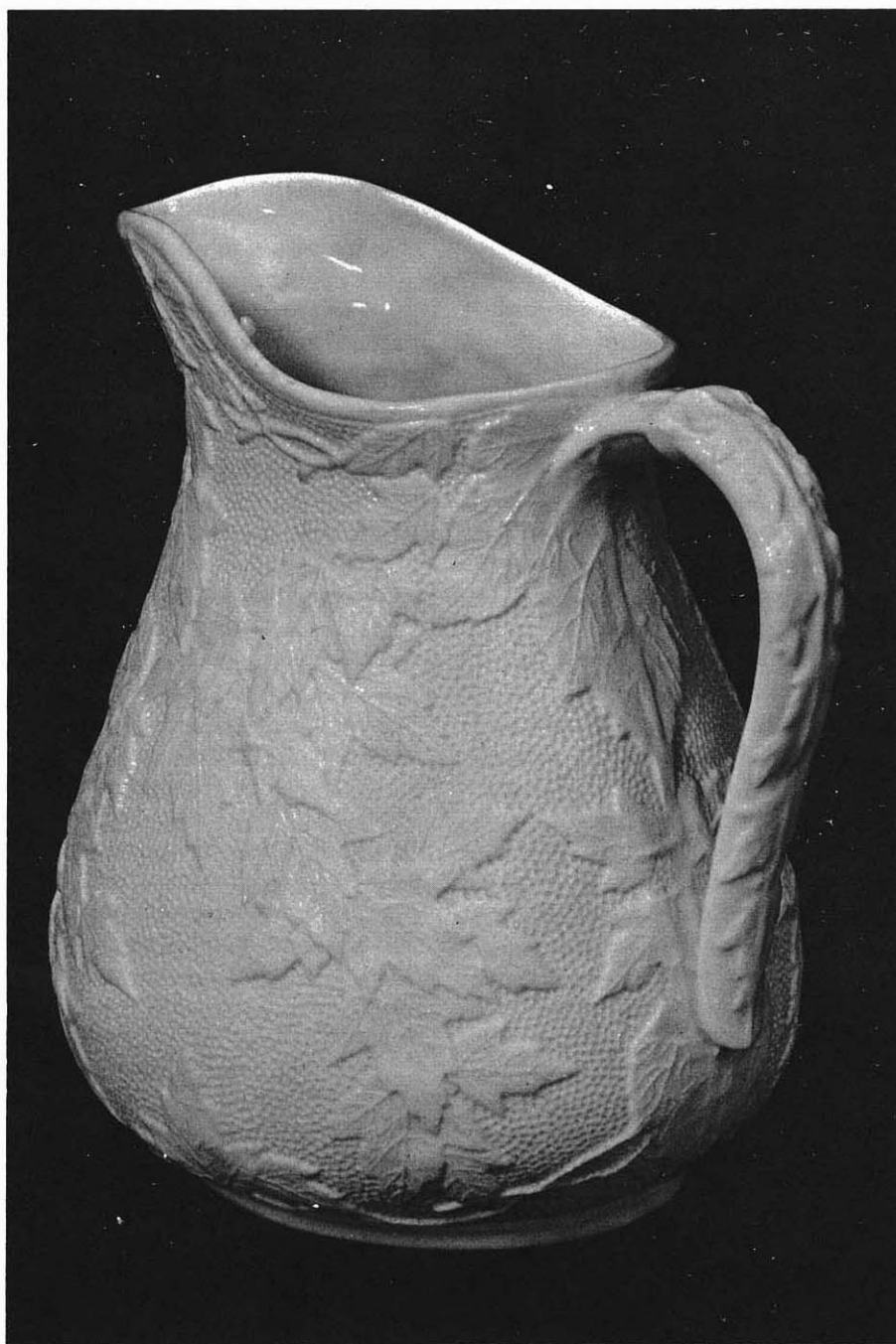


Plate 8

This white porcelain pitcher with maple leaf design in relief is the only piece of true hard-paste porcelain made in the early days of the Canadian pottery industry that has been found to date. It is believed to have been made by the St. Johns Stone Chinaware Company;

no mark but presumably an experimental piece made by Philip Pointon.

Date: ca. 1880.

Dimensions: height 7  $\frac{1}{2}$  in., diameter of base 6 in.