

Transition and Survival

It seemed a sound enough venture on paper. The Canada Stone Chinaware Company was officially born¹⁰⁰ at the beginning of 1897 with an impressive list of directors. The group from France included Leon Graves, manufacturer of Clairfontaine; Adrien Vannier, a chinaware factory manager, of Gien; and Charles Douin, manager of the enamel works at Beauvrages. The Vicomte C. de Bouthillier Chavigny of Richelieu, District of St-Hyacinthe, added the prestige of his name. The resident manager was to be Raoul Aube, formerly of Paris but Alexander Macdonald was assured a place as one of three members forming the committee of management. Annual meetings were to be held in Paris.

It was a clever idea but it failed to save the firm, in fact it proved merely an appendix to the chronicle of the St. Johns Stone Chinaware Company. The Franco-Canadian group was bankrupt within two years. All production stopped before the company's actual liquidation on April 6 1899.¹⁰¹ Alexander Macdonald sold what was left to him of the "small pottery" to Elmer Crawford of New York in 1902,¹⁰² and after Macdonald's death in 1905 the rest of the property was sold by the Sheriff. Part, including the warehouses with the bridge across St. George Street, was acquired in 1906 by the Canadian Trenton Potteries Company Limited.¹⁰³ The "large pottery" passed through the hands of the Montreal Loan and Mortgage Company and served from 1911 as part of the Collège de Saint-Jean.¹⁰⁴ It was razed by fire in the 1930s and the site is now a playground.

Undeterred at first by the growing St. Johns Stone Chinaware Company, two potters—Henry Arthur Hammond and Thomas James Mostyn—bought land in St. Johns in 1876 and established a small pottery for Rockingham ware.¹⁰⁵ The citizens of Iberville looked rather jealously across the river at the active industry in St. Johns. The Farrars had just transferred their stoneware manufacture to Iberville. Why not add a pottery? A fund of \$200 to buy land was raised by subscription among 26 merchants of the community. Hammond and Mostyn were offered this land in return for moving their enterprise across the Richelieu to Iberville.¹⁰⁶ It was a condition of the grant that the products of the new factory not compete directly with those of the Farrars: five of the prominent citizens of Iberville pledged solid financial backing for the manufacture specifically of "pottery, pottery faience and plates of superior substance."¹⁰⁷ Thus for the first 15 years of its life the Iberville pottery restricted its production to Rockingham and yellow (cane) wares, in designs created for the most part by its own craftsmen.

Once in Iberville, Hammond and Mostyn gave up their title to the property and equipment in return for stocks in the new company, and the Glasgow Poterie d'Iberville was officially sanctioned on September 8, 1877.¹⁰⁸ A year later Mostyn died¹⁰⁹ and in the subsequent reorganization of the company, the directors rented the factory to Charles E. Pearson who was to run the concern in an unusually favourable period, the brief trade revival of 1878 to 1882.¹¹⁰ Pearson felt that more working space was needed for storing clay and fuel and for warehouse and packing facilities and to this end he bought more property at the rear of the pottery in January 1880 so

that he could expand operations,¹¹¹ for the pottery's products were receiving favourable attention at annual exhibitions and sales were encouraging.¹¹² In 1881 Pearson purchased most of the shares of the Glasgow Poterie d'Iberville.¹¹³ Business was still flourishing and although the pottery was now employing between 35 and 40 men, it could not fill all its orders.¹¹⁴ *La Minerve* reported in Montreal on October 31, 1882 that Pearson was preparing to expand his pottery and to double the number of employees in the coming year.

The newspaper report must have been based on hearsay since on October 21 Pearson had already switched his attention to St. Johns and taken over the fading Canada Pottery. It was undoubtedly a great temptation to him to try to revitalize this firm and he might have succeeded had it not been for the vagaries of the economic situation. As it was, a month after *La Minerve's* optimistic report, the Glasgow Poterie d'Iberville was in the hands of David Emery Palmer, a friend and business associate of Pearson.¹¹⁵ Palmer operated the pottery from November 25, 1882 until March 13, 1886 but there is little record of his tenure and it is quite possible that the financial difficulties resulting from the depression of 1883-86 seriously hampered production. In March 1886 Calixte Goyette—who had put some capital into the Bertrand and Lavoie venture in 1865, then withdrawn—bought the Iberville pottery for \$4,000.¹¹⁶ It was a good time to buy. The low price was probably due to depressed business conditions but a new upward surge was about to begin. In September 1886 Goyette won first prize for his Rockingham ware at the Dominion and Provincial Exhibition in Sherbrooke,¹¹⁷ so it would seem that standards had

been maintained. When the St. Johns pottery of William Sherratt was eliminated by a fire in the winter of 1886-87, the Iberville pottery had a virtual monopoly of Rockingham and yellow or cane ware production in the area and enjoyed considerable success in the next six years.

By 1891 Goyette felt the moment had come to convert his factory to white earthenware production and move into the sanitary earthenware market then being explored by two new companies just established in the area. The Iberville Municipal Council had been making grants to new manufacturers for a decade in order to stimulate industrial development,¹¹⁸ and Goyette and his new partner, Edmond Melançon, petitioned Council in December 1891 for assistance. A bonus of \$6,000 and a 10-year exemption from municipal taxes was made on condition that Goyette and Melançon use the money to enlarge the existing plant to a total value of at least \$10,000 and put the new facilities into operation within eight months.¹¹⁹ To guarantee further benefits to the community, Goyette and Melançon promised to operate the manufacture for 10 years employing an average of 70 people daily.¹²⁰ *La Compagnie Centrale de Faïence* (Central Stone Chinaware Company) was formed officially in January 1892.¹²¹ Land was purchased on St. George Street and by September 1892 the new kilns and buildings seem to have been completed.¹²² But the company soon began to disintegrate. By the end of 1893 Council was threatening legal action if the terms of the contract were not fulfilled.¹²³ By March 1894 the company was finished.¹²⁴ The properties of the Central Stone Chinaware Company were sold by the Estate Melançon to Frederick Bruce Dakin—the man who had piloted the

British Porcelain Manufacturing Company in St. Johns through its brief life from 1885 to 1888. Dakin organized the Dominion Porcelain Works with the help of Joseph H. L. Pelletier, an accountant of Iberville, but the association was soon terminated, and Dakin ran the firm alone.¹²⁵ Lovell's *Montreal Business Directory* of 1896 records only: "DAKIN, F.B. & CO. manufacturers of vitreous sanitary ware, Rockingham, Cane and White ware." This appears to be the first recorded reference to vitreous sanitary ware in Canada and suggests that F.B. Dakin should be acknowledged as the pioneer in Canada of this development.

But Dakin's initiative had no time to ripen. His operation of the pottery seems to have ceased by the end of 1896,¹²⁶ and in 1901 ownership reverted again to the Estate Melançon.¹²⁷

There was an abbreviated epilogue in 1903 when William Jones seems to have leased the pottery briefly. Jones had established what became known as the Queen Street pottery in St. Johns in 1880 in partnership with another potter, Charles Bowers.¹²⁸ They produced "brown crockery" at first and after Bowers withdrew from the firm (in March 1881), Jones seems to have used part of an inheritance from his father in England to convert part of the workshop to white earthenware manufacture and to enlarge his range to include chambers, bowls and spittoons as well as plates, cups and saucers and teapots.¹²⁹ The 1883 depression ruined this venture. Creditors became insistent and despite help from Dame Hannah Smith who came into partnership with him in March 1883, financial problems mounted and Jones & Company was replaced on New Years Day 1884 by Matheson and Jones. Malcolm Matheson of the Township of Whitney was to control

management and sales while Jones confined his attention to production. Title to the site had already passed from Jones to the mortgagee and in September 1884 Matheson took over all the moveable property and agreed to pay all the debts.¹³⁰ Jones seems to have stayed at the Queen Street pottery until 1890 when it was acquired by Campbell and Purvis for the production of sanitary earthenware. Jones moved then to Montreal and tried for five years to continue production (mostly of Rockingham ware) in a site on St. Patrick Street rented to the firm of Jones and Robinson by John McDougall, a merchant.¹³¹ The pottery cannot have proved successful since by 1895 the firm was known as the Montreal Pottery Company and landlord John McDougall was listed as proprietor.¹³² Rockingham teapots produced by the company had a round trademark on the bottom with the words (in relief): "Montreal Pottery Co./Montreal, P.Q./Warranted Fireproof." The company seems to have been active until about 1905 producing Rockingham and cane ware, some stoneware, and even terracotta flowerpots and *jardinières*. One section of the plant looked after the decoration of ceramic wares such as china, semi-porcelain, sanitary and cream-coloured wares. Despite such activity the company did not last long. In 1903, two years before the building in Montreal was dismantled,¹³³ Jones came to Iberville. He seems to have been doomed always to start too late. His was to prove the last manufacture of crockery or household earthenware in the St. Johns-Iberville area.

To survive in the twentieth century, the ceramic industry in the Richelieu area was forced to concentrate on the most practical objects: drainpipes and sanitary pottery. Two companies were

successfully producing sanitary pottery in the twentieth century. The Iberville pottery started producing drainpipes under the name of the Canada Pottery Company¹³⁴ in 1906-7 when taken over by Albert Clayton and his three brothers who had been manufacturing clay products in Montreal at the Montreal Fire Brick and Terra Cotta Works. It was a logical step for the Claytons to try to establish such an industry in Iberville. In 1887 their father had been superintendent in St. Johns of the Standard Drain Pipe Company—the only area pottery dependent on local clay deposits for most of its raw materials. A brick-making plant had been operated on the St. Johns site by Joseph Bourdeau of St-Georges de Henryville from 1872 until 1873¹³⁵ and then Albert Mochon had used the plant to supply brick for the foundations of the St. Johns Stone Chinaware Company which he was constructing.¹³⁶ The factory lay dormant from 1876 until 1879 when W.H. Parsons, a consulting engineer, interested William Livesley in organizing a drainpipe manufacture. They approached Municipal Council in 1879 with a request for a loan to help establish such a factory and won approval subject to certain guarantees.¹³⁷ But by this time Livesley had lost interest since his attention had been diverted to the more interesting problem of establishing a white earthenware manufacture. Parsons waited two years and then found a fellow engineer, George B. Capel, who agreed to revive the project with him. The old brick factory site was bought from the Blacks and a supply of American fireclay imported for mixing with the local clay.¹³⁸ But Parsons died before their schemes for setting up a two-storey factory for pipes could materialize. In 1884 Wallace C. Trotter of St. Johns bought the property,

organized the Standard Drain Pipe Company and started production of drainpipes and refractory products.¹³⁹ When the property was transferred to Standard Clay Products Limited in 1912,¹⁴⁰ it had 12 circular down-draft kilns in operation, producing a pipe with a reddish, vitrified body, covered with a uniform dark brown glaze. A few garden urns were also put on the market in the same body and glaze.

Production continued for some 80 years in the St. Johns drain-pipe plant but the Iberville attempt lasted less than four years,¹⁴¹ from 1906 to 1910. The kilns of the Iberville pottery were never fired again. In 1921 they were dismantled and the brick used for an extension to the new firm started on the site by Calixte Goyette.¹⁴² There was only one tenuous link between this new enterprise and the ceramic industry: it manufactured shipping crates for Canadian Potteries Limited.¹⁴³ Today some of the fire-brick from the kilns, still carrying traces of glazing, are incorporated in the walls of a manufacturing plant on the same site.

The chronicle of the Glasgow Poterie d'Iberville reveals something of the change taking place within the industry in the last years of the nineteenth century. Dakin had seen the direction of the future in introducing his vitreous (or non-absorbent) sanitary earthenware in 1895. In the decade before this it had become apparent to other men too that sanitary pottery could provide home industry with a sound basis for survival; by the end of the century it seemed clear it would be the only basis for the local survival of the ceramic industry. Since about 1873 sanitary earthenware had been produced in the United States and imported into Canada to compete with British goods. But the cost of importing such bulky items pushed up prices. By 1888 all but two of the St.

Johns-Iberville potteries lay idle and a skilled labour force built up by the formerly active industry was serving no useful purpose. Idle kilns, equipment and men could be put to work if an attempt was made to undercut the expensive imported sanitary pottery. Two specialized companies were founded in 1889: the Dominion Sanitary Pottery Company and the Caledonia Pottery. They soon won for themselves a clear hold on the market.

The first sanitary earthenware made in Canada seems to have been produced in the former Blackburn and Rowe pottery on Allen (Cousins) Street in St. Johns. This pottery had been sponsored by the Blacks in 1882 and first operated by William Blackburn of Montreal (who directed finances), Andrew Blackburn of Kemptville (who added his capital) and John Rowe, a potter of St. Johns, who managed the plant and produced the necessary moulds for the production of white earthenware to begin.¹⁴⁴ The usual trademark was a large British coat-of-arms and underneath it the words: IRON STONE CHINA/BLACKBURN, ROWE & CO. But production ceased in 1884 and the entire enterprise reverted to the Blacks¹⁴⁵ who sold it five years later to the Dominion Sanitary Pottery Company, the brain-child of Elijah Bowler of St. Johns.

Bowler had the practicality born of many years' experience weathering the vicissitudes of the industry. He was apparently one of the first employees of the St. Johns Stone Chinaware Company and in 1877 had set up an independent pottery in the factory built by Olivier Deslauriers and Amable Maillet in 1876 in St. Johns but unused by them.¹⁴⁶ Bowler bought the plant with another potter, John Reade, and together they started production. The partnership was dissolved in November 1878 and Bowler ran the plant alone for

the next five years.¹⁴⁷ It was during the brief period of trade revival and at first he did well. In 1880 with some financial help from the St. Johns Municipal Council and several other loans,¹⁴⁸ he expanded the plant, building two new kilns, and almost doubling the number of his employees. "Bird's Eye View of St. Johns," painted in 1881 by H. Wellge, shows the impressive size of Bowler's factory, identified as the "St. Johns Porcelain Works." But it was proving too much for Bowler to shoulder alone. In October 1882 he divided the pottery, leasing half to his son-in-law Wesley Knight to supervise Rockingham and yellowware production, and leaving the other half free for white earthenware production under his own guidance, helped by his son William. It seemed a sensible move, but business conditions were deteriorating rapidly and the pottery had to keep seeking financial aid just to stay alive. There were payments to be made to the municipal council for a \$2,000-loan. Other creditors accumulated. It was impossible to keep up. The mortgagee assumed title to the property and in 1883 Bowler reorganized,¹⁴⁹ forming a partnership (E. Bowler and company) with his son and son-in-law. A reshuffle of this kind was no answer to a depression. Their finished wares stayed in the pottery and there was little use in continuing production, once the stockpile of raw material was exhausted, if they couldn't sell their work.¹⁵⁰ On December 28, 1884 the factory was destroyed by fire.¹⁵¹ It was not rebuilt. The title passed subsequently to the Merchants Bank of Canada which later sold part of it for the widening of Thomas Street.

There is no clear record of Bowler's activities in the next four years though he may have continued operations for a while in Gillespie's old pottery. He

reappears distinctly in the record in January 1889 when with William Baxter Malcolm of Toronto, a dealer in plumbers' supplies, he purchased the Blackburn, Rowe and Company pottery from the Blacks and started the Dominion Sanitary Pottery Company, specializing in sanitary ware.¹⁵² The first closet apparently produced in Canada was a two-piece model copied from one imported from their home warehouse in Scotland by Thomas Robertson and Company of Montreal and known as a "crown bowl and trap."¹⁵³ Elijah Bowler headed the company until his death in 1894 and shortly afterwards Malcolm withdrew, leaving control of the company to Elijah Bowler's son William and son-in-law Wesley Knight who thus resumed within this new firm the partnership abruptly terminated a decade before.¹⁵⁴

Ten months after the foundation of the Dominion Sanitary Pottery Company, William Anderson Campbell (formerly a warehouseman with the St. Johns Stone Chinaware Company) and Charles Watson Purvis (a potter) established a rival concern: the Caledonia Pottery.¹⁵⁵ They began operations in November 1889 in the former Queen Street pottery of William Jones and soon expanded, developing a substantial business within a short period of time. The St. Johns Stone Chinaware Company recognized the new trend and began the manufacture of sanitary pottery in 1890, decorating their sanitary wares together with table and toilet wares in the same shop at the same time, firing them all in the same kilns under the same conditions.¹⁵⁶ The less expensive closets were made in a cane and white combination much like that used for kitchen bowls; the more expensive closets mostly in a white body embossed with designs in relief similar to Rockingham or yellowware

designs or hand-decorated to order.

But the new wares were not to be lumped in with the old. The market demanded greater efficiency. F.B. Dakin's alertness in switching to an improved vitreous body, impervious to moisture, in 1895 (at much the same time as this was introduced in the United States) had not saved his company. By 1898 Dakin's Iberville pottery had fallen by the wayside. And the French ceramists brought in to bolster up the remnant of the St. Johns Stone Chinaware Company were on the verge of defeat. The two specialist companies then had a clear field, and were made more efficient by Henderson Black's sponsorship of the Potters' Manufacturing Association which joined them together for marketing purposes.¹⁵⁷ In January 1900 the P.M.A. Catalogue was advertising the "Richelieu" closet as "The Standard Washout Closet of Canada and the Best and Cheapest Closet in the World"! The vitreous body was now offered at only a slight increase in price and the St. Johns companies could proclaim themselves "the only manufacturers of Sanitary Earthenware in the Dominion."¹⁵⁸

William Bowler died in March 1901 and the Dominion Sanitary Pottery Company fell to the sole direction of Wesley Knight.¹⁵⁹ Charles Purvis retired from the Caledonia Pottery a few months later and William Campbell became sole owner.¹⁶⁰ Between 1902 and 1903 a third factory, the Richelieu Pottery was set up jointly by Campbell and Knight in the former Canada Pottery plant on St. George Street. Knight withdrew from this in September 1903 to concentrate on his own firm, leaving Campbell to run two plants for the next two years.¹⁶¹ In 1905 both the Caledonia Pottery and the Richelieu Pottery were absorbed into a new enterprise—Canadian Trenton Potteries

Company Limited, in association with the Trenton Potteries Company of Trenton, New Jersey.¹⁶² This new organization had the advantage of being able to draw on the advanced techniques of the American industry in turning out the highest grade of sanitary earthenware. Wesley Knight, however, refused to merge his Dominion Sanitary Pottery Company into the new firm and he continued independently by producing a limited line of the more staple items of sanitary ware. His son took over from him and in 1920 the title passed to the Dominion Sanitary Pottery Company Limited. Operations continued until about 1939.¹⁶³

The sole survivor today is the Canadian Potteries Division of Crane Canada Limited, successor in 1920 to the Canadian Trenton Potteries Company Limited.¹⁶⁴ Sanitary ware, exclusively in vitreous china, is now produced in a modern plant with tunnel kilns built in 1929-31 in the suburbs of St. Johns. Here the skilled hand-craft methods developed over two centuries in the Richelieu valley area turn out over 400,000 pieces a year. The St. George Street pottery, the last of the old earthenware potteries of St. Johns, kept functioning until 1944 when the property was finally sold to the city.¹⁶⁵

One brief sidetrack was made into "fancy lines" during the depression of the 1930s in order to keep the Canadian Potteries Limited plant and personnel employed. At first these items, including ash trays and beer mugs carried the company's usual trademark, "Made in C.P.L./Canada" and appeared in the standard vitreous body, finished with a standard glaze.¹⁶⁶ Between 1931 and 1933 an amateur artist and potter of Montreal, Mrs. Beatrice Rickards, carved models by hand for a group of 25 flower vases and bowls and some items on a dragon-fly motif or depicting crab-

apples or poppies advertised as "Pottery Gems for the Garden or Conservatory."¹⁶⁷ These were offered in matt or bright glazes and in a wide variety of colour combinations. They carried the mark "Canadian Potteries Limited, St. Johns, Que." in a circle and in the centre the word "VITRIAN" displayed on a pennant. Another group of VITRIAN products consisted of 30 vases of plain design in a variety of shapes, colours and glazes; and an elaborate pedestal for a *jardinière*, a bird bath, sun dial or "gazing globe."

A few spittoons, kitchen bowls and water jugs mostly in plain white were also produced with the VITRIAN trademark but they were discontinued as soon as the market improved and the plant could resume its production of sanitary ware. Smallware with the VITRIAN mark was completely phased out during the 1950s.

The eighteenth century had seen the beginnings of pottery-making in the Richelieu valley with the earthenware vessels of the individual Saint-Denis potters. Their workshops fell into decline as the Farrars introduced the production of harder stoneware into Canada at St. Johns. One of the Farrars, closely connected with the Vermont potters, led the way into the home production of white earthenware which reached the peak of its popularity in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. But imports maintained their hold on the Canadian market despite what had at first seemed a strong challenge. By a process of natural selection the ceramics industry of the Richelieu valley, surging forward in bursts of enthusiasm, choked back by economic realities, was forced to narrow its focus and confine itself to the production of sanitary ware, the one product with which it could compete successfully and survive after two centuries of transmutation.