THE POTTERY INDUSTRY IN McDONOUGH AND WARREN COUNTIES, ILLINOIS*

JOHN FREDERICK LOUNSBURY
University of Illinois, Urbana

The production of clays and clay products in Illinois is valued at approximately $32,000,000 annually. This is the third largest mineral industry in the State following coal and petroleum. In 1946, the production of pottery and whiteware in Illinois accounted for about one-third of the total value of all clay products made in the state. Illinois is surpassed by Ohio, New Jersey, New York, California, and Pennsylvania in the manufacture of pottery.

The potteries in Illinois are concentrated in two general areas. The largest, in terms of numbers of establishments, is the Chicago area. In Chicago itself, Antioch, Dundee, Crystal Lake, and Elgin, there are eighteen concerns manufacturing a variety of products. It can be generally stated that the large market and excellent transportation are the chief factors for the concentration of potteries in this area. The potteries in smaller towns near Chicago utilize the large market, but lower taxes, intelligent labor and, in some cases, financial support from the towns, influenced their establishment in the perimeter of Chicago.

The remaining potteries in the state, with the exception of the Case Manufacturing Company in Robinson which produces sanitary ware, are located in western Illinois.

The potteries in western Illinois can be divided into three groups determined by factors which controlled their original establishment. The first group are those potteries located in White Hall. The basic and dominant condition which determined their location was the existence of excellent stoneware clays in and around White Hall and the proximity of coal. These clays were found in abundance and in such a state that mining could be done easily. The existing clay banks attracted potters who began to manufacture stoneware, and the two potteries of today, Ruckell's Pottery Company and The White Hall Sewer Pipe and Stoneware Company, are the result of these natural resources. Also the establishment of the Illinois China Company in Lincoln can be traced to the stoneware plant in Roodhouse where again the fine White Hall stoneware clays were utilized.

The second group of potteries is located farther north at Macomb and Monmouth. Again, clays of the Pottsville formation, found in the vicinity of Colchester, were of such quality that potters were attracted, and they established potteries using only the local clays. Because of the potteries, a concentration of semi-skilled workmen gradually became concentrated in this area, and the town of Macomb and adjacent villages, with a large number of their population engaged in clay working industries or indirectly dependent

*This paper is a revised portion of a thesis presented for the degree of Master of Science in Geography at the University of Illinois, August 1946.

upon them, became ceramic conscious. With existing plants and trained labor, it was a natural step to improve upon their products, and gradually fine clays and materials were brought in. However, the local clay was the dominant factor in their early establishment. The potteries of this group are the Macomb Pottery, Illinois Electric Porcelain in Macomb and Western Stoneware in Monmouth.

The third group consists of diversified potteries which have no common physical factor in their early establishment. The physical environment played a subordinate role and human factors were decisive in their location. These varied factors would have to be discussed as they apply to the individual pottery. This group consists of the Abingdon Potteries Incorporated located in Abingdon and the Morton Pottery Company in Morton.

The Potteries of Monmouth and Macomb

The Macomb Pottery

In Macomb the former Buckeye Pottery Company, makers of stoneware, was taken over in 1939 by the Haeger Potteries. The name changed to the Macomb Pottery and it began to make the Haeger style of art pottery. The old Buckeye Pottery made only stoneware products and utilized only the local clay found in abundance near Colchester. The competition from China and finer grades of earthenware had forced the Buckeye Pottery Company into the state of bankruptcy in 1938.

Over sixty years ago in Dundee, Illinois, the Haeger family began to manufacture brick using the local clays. Gradually the kilns were used in burning other forms of pottery until today no brick is made at all and the entire output is art pottery.

Art pottery, a relatively new trend, is noticeable in the pottery field today, and it can generally be stated that the comparatively newer potteries produce art ware. In the older pottery centers of Ohio and New Jersey, more dinnerware and sanitary ware are made. In these older potteries a tremendous amount of this type of ware was and is produced, and consequently the more recent potteries had a greater commercial opportunity in the making of art pottery. This can be seen in the great numbers of art potteries in the southern California area. This area is the most recent pottery center to be developed and at present is experiencing a rapid expansion.

Another factor in the more recent impetus in the the manufacture of art ware is the result of the War. The seizure of Moravia, Bohemia, and Slovakia by Germany decreased our imports from those areas as early as 1939. Later, at the outbreak of the war, little pottery made in the European centers came to this country. Also during this period changes in duty rates and regulations governing imports further decreased the small amount of European pottery coming to this country. The war, of course, also halted all importation of Japanese ware and seriously decreased that made in China. The lack of foreign products and resulting competition resulted in a large expansion of the ceramic industry in this country, especially in the gift and art ware fields. Many potteries began to make art ware in addition

to their main products, and new potteries sprang up to meet the domestic need.

Haeger Potteries diversified its line to include a great deal of ware of the type formerly made in Japan and Czechoslovakia. The pottery experienced a rapid rise in production and soon outgrew its building in Dundee. The Buckeye Pottery in Macomb, with its buildings and machines intact, and the semi skilled labor in the city, was therefore an exçellent location in which to overflow. Further, Macomb, from its beginning, has been ceramic conscious due to the fine local clay and relatively large clay working population. The city was anxious for the pottery to resume operation after the Buckeye pottery declared bankruptcy and made a cash donation to the Haeger Pottery to take over the plant.

The Haeger Potteries are the world's largest producers of art ware and the markets are nation wide. Some pottery is exported to Canada, Hawaii, Phillipines, South America, England and other countries of the world. Sales offices are located throughout the country, and the majority of the pottery is sold through their own sales organization; jobbers market a small amount. The finished products are transported primarily by the C. B. & Q. Railroad. Trucks transport an ever increasing amount, usually when the distances are short.

The plant employs an average of 160 people. The amount of local labor is practically 100 percent, however, a small number of supervisors and administrators came from the pottery in Dundee. The skilled workmen represent about 15 percent of the total labor. They are for the most part mould makers and decorators. The designers, of which some are internationally famous, are located in Dundee, not in Macomb. Their designs are sent to Macomb where they are utilized in producing Haeger pottery. The plant has the capacity to produce 8,000 pieces of art pottery daily.

MATERIALS USED IN ART POTTERY

Years ago only the Colchester clay was the basic material used in the manufacture of stoneware. But today, materials are brought in from afar and the local clays are no longer used. The factory is situated on the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad and the raw materials are brought in by rail. Kaolin is brought in from Georgia. Over three-fourths of the kaolin produced in the United States comes from a belt extending from Taylor County in western Georgia to Richmond County in the eastern part of the state extending into South Carolina. Kaolin is used in the manufacture of art ware to impart whiteness to the products being made and to give refractoriness to the products. Ball clay is also used in large amounts in the production of art ware. It is of sedimentary origin and usually more or less colored by impurities. These impurities tend to make the clay plastic and permit its moulding. Ninety-five percent of the ball clay produced in the United States comes from a belt extending from Graves County in southwestern Kentucky to Weakley, Henry, and Carrol counties in Tennessee. Feldspar is used as a component of white wares and semi-porcelain serving as a flux

binding the mass together. It is obtained from the Black Hill region of South Dakota. Quartz is used to prevent excessive shrinkage and obtained from LaSalle County, Illinois. Small amounts of special glazing material of various types are used depending on the type of ware being made. The kilns burn natural gas piped from Texas. Oil can be used as a fuel if necessary and is obtained a few miles south in the vicinity of Colmar.

THE ILLINOIS ELECTRIC PORCELAIN COMPANY

There is only one pottery in western Illinois which makes electric porcelain. It is the Illinois Electric Porcelain Company located in Macomb.

In 1884, C. W. Kettron came to Macomb from the southern part of the country. He learned his trade as a potter in Mississippi, and in Macomb he worked as a turner producing stoneware items of various shapes and sizes. In a few years Kettron went to Ohio, and worked in and observed many of the potteries located around the pottery center of the United States—East Liverpool. Here he saw a relatively new trend in the field of ceramics—the production of electric appliances. He believed that with the harnessing of electrical power, a great market for electric porcelain would arise. He returned to Macomb, dissolved his interests in the stoneware establishment, and interested the already ceramic-minded citizens of Macomb in this new and promising field of pottery. In Macomb there were the existing kilns which could be converted easily to the firing of porcelain, the large supply of semi-skilled labor and the complete lack of competition, as the nearest plant producing electric appliances was hundreds of miles distant. A few highly skilled technicians were brought to Macomb from East Liverpool to form the nucleus of the new concern. C. W. Kettron was the principal figure in the establishment of the Illinois Electric Porcelain Company in 1910, and his son, H. P. Kettron, is the president of the company today. The raw materials in the manufacture of electric porcelain are of unusually high standards. The only local material used is the Colchester clay which is utilized in making saggers. All other materials are transported from greater distances. The kaolin is an extremely fine grade imported from south England which is mined close to the English Channel. At present, no kaolin yet produced in the United States is quite equal to the English clay in the necessary qualities needed to produce electric porcelain. The ball clay is obtained in Kentucky. The feldspar is brought from the Abingdon Potteries Inc. who grind the feldspar which is mined in the Black Hills of South Dakota. The flint is ground from fine quartz obtained in Ottawa, Illinois. The glazing materials consist of ball clays, feldspar, flint, and other secret ingredients. Most plants add small, but varying amounts of talc, soda ash, silicate of soda, dextrose, etc. to accomplish correct special characteristics. The materials are brought in by the C., B. & Q. Railroad which has a spur leading to the factory door. The fuel used for firing is crude oil obtained in fields in the vicinity of Colmar.

The market for electric porcelain is country wide, and some goes to Europe, Canada, and South America. The company has sales offices throughout the United States and in Europe, and the products are marketed through their own sales organization. The finished products are transported primarily by the C., B. & Q. Railroad. However, if time is a critical factor, trucks usually handle the transportation. During the war air express was frequently used. The products were trucked to Moline and then shipped to their destination by air. Critical items in this way could reach any section of the country on the same day they were shipped from the factory.

The establishment employs 300 to 350 people all of whom come from Macomb or the adjacent country. The amount of highly skilled labor is approximately 15 percent. About 75 percent of the labor is semi-skilled. The workmen learn their trade at the plant.

The plant produces about 7,000 tons of electrical porcelain annually in the form of insulators, knobs and cleats, switch covers, and chemical porcelain such as valves and pipes of various types.

THE WESTERN STONEWARE COMPANY

Years ago, it was believed that coal could be found in the vicinity of Monmouth, the home of Western Stoneware Company. In search of coal, a clay was discovered which was of excellent grade for the manufacture of tile and brick. Because of this clay, the Monmouth Mining and Manufacturing Company was established in 1872 and began to manufacture tile and sewer pipe and a smaller quantity of brick. Twenty years later a number of men, of whom William Hannah was the principal figure, organized the Monmouth Pottery which utilized the nearby clay and produced stoneware jars, jugs, churns, etc. From these two concerns, in 1900 the Western Stoneware Company was established. It was a stock company and was fostered by the local men who had developed the two preceding clay working industries. The clays near Monmouth were still used in the beginning, but later a superior stoneware clay was found in the Pottsville formation in the vicinity of Colchester. The company leased hundreds of acres in this area and began to mine the clay and transport it to Monmouth. Today clay from the same mines is used in the production of stoneware.

The Colchester clay is brought in by rail to the factory at the rate of about a carload daily. The site of the industry is on the C., B. & Q. and the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railways. The C., B. & Q. transports the clay from the Colchester area. In 1927 the company began to make art pottery along with the stoneware products. This necessitated bringing other materials from other sections of the country. The manufacture of art pottery demanded kaolin which was obtained from Georgia, ball clay from Kentucky, flint from LaSalle County, Illinois, and feldspar from the southeast, primarily North Carolina. Both railways, but primarily the Minneapolis and St. Louis, bring in these raw materials.

Stoneware is the principal product produced and the art pottery,

though increasing, is secondary.

The fuel for the kilns is crude oil obtained from the relatively old oil fields in the vicinity of Colmar.

The markets for the finished products are country wide. The majority of the pottery reaches the market by the company's sales organization which has sales offices located in many sections. The major portion of pottery is transported by the C., B. & Q. with the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad handling a smaller amount. When the products are transported but a short distance, trucks often are used.

The company employs approximately 400 people of which 15 percent are skilled. The skilled labor again consists of the mould makers, designers, and decorators. The labor is all from in and around Monmouth. The skilled workmen learn their trade by experience in the factory.

The plant produces 1000 carloads of ware annually of which the majority is flower and garden ware. The company uses the trade name of "Maple Leaf" for their stoneware.

The company has also a small branch operating in Macomb which makes only terra cotta flower pots. The clay used is of local origin, and the products are made by stamping or pressing the clay into shape and then firing the ware at a low degree of temperature. The plant employs about twenty men, all of whom are from Macomb.

It is unlikely that in the relatively near future new potteries will be established in western Illinois. However, the existing potteries producing art ware and specialty products should experience a slight expansion within the next few years.

It has been mentioned that the only physical factors to attract new industries are the stoneware clays, but the existing potteries more than meet the local need. In other types of pottery, materials would have to be brought in from great distances and also the markets are relatively far. Freight rates and transportation in Western Illinois are not such that they in themselves would attract industry. The only inducement or positive factor would seem to be a comparatively large financial bonus from a specific district or town. The existing stoneware potteries of the State, excluding Western Stoneware Company, should remain about the same. The products produced are of relatively low value, and therefore the markets are restricted to a definite locality. Also the potteries should be located near the source of clay. Transportation costs are in this case a limiting factor. In the case of Western Stoneware Company they are almost fully dependent upon the florist trade, and they should experience the same trend as the art ware pottery.

It has been mentioned that art ware has experienced a great rise in production to meet the increasing domestic needs since the war. No doubt in the near future, some art ware will be imported from Europe and China. However, importations probably will never reach such relative proportions as existed before the war. The art ware potteries, however, will manufacture an increasing variety of products, and many experiments and changes will take place in art ware in an effort to keep the domestic markets. It is interesting to note that in times of depres-

sion art ware potteries are the first to suffer and usually are the hardest hit, but, on the other hand, in prosperous eras the demand for art ware increases out of proportion to other types of pottery.

Electric porcelain is related to construction and improvements in rural areas. The Rural Electrification Administration, a federal act to extend electricity in rural areas all over the country, did much to increase demands for electric porcelain. Also a great deal of porcelain is being sent to Europe and other countries engaged in reconstruction and internal development.