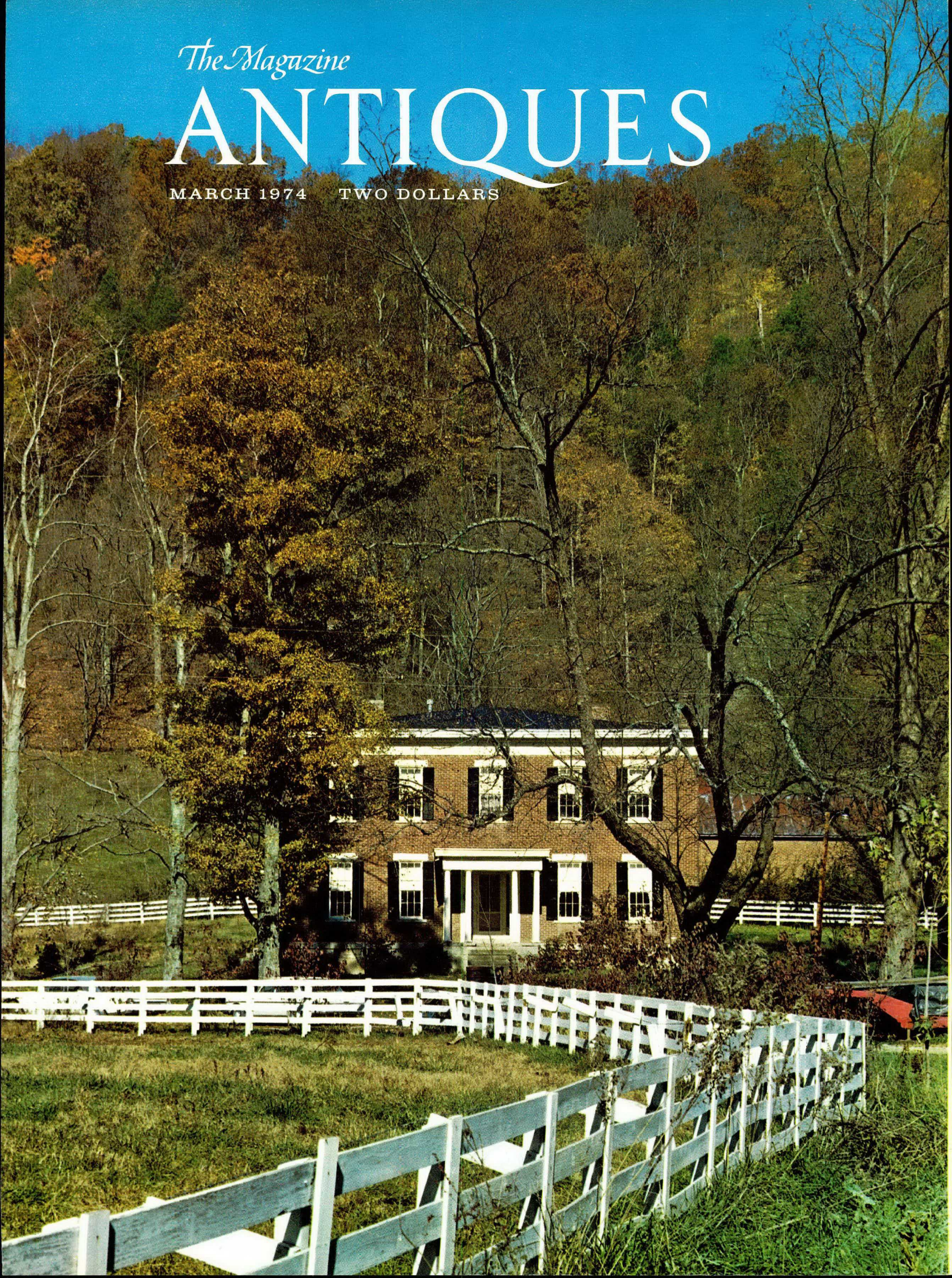


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# James Clews, nineteenth-century potter

## Part II: *The American experience*

BY FRANK STEFANO JR.

AT THE BEGINNING of the 1830's the United States made no equivalent to the white-clay Staffordshire ware that was imported so successfully and in such large quantities from England. The domestic earthenware industry was limited to redware, brownware, and the stoneware used for jugs and crocks.

In 1837 the Indiana Pottery Company was started near Louisville, Kentucky, to produce the white earthenware known as queen's ware. The three principals in the venture were Jacob Lewis, a Louisville potter, Samuel Casseday, a Louisville importer of earthenware, and James Clews (Fig. 1), the Staffordshire potter whose career in England was reviewed in Part I of this article, which appeared in *ANTIQUES* for February.

Jacob Lewis had been interested in producing whiteware from local clays since the early 1820's, and in 1828 he sent samples of those clays to England with John P. Bull, a partner of Casseday's in the Louisville earthenware importing firm of Bull and Casseday. As Bull wrote: "I had a small pitcher made of it: it was mixed up and made in my presence, and marked with my name on the bottom. . . . It can be easily seen that the quality is finer than the English ware. I gave it to Mr. Lewis when it arrived in 1829."<sup>1</sup> In 1828 and 1829 Lewis furnished local whiteware clays to William Frost and Jabez Vodrey who in 1827 had started a pottery in Pittsburgh. Lewis later persuaded Frost and Vodrey to come to Louisville and work for the Lewis Pottery Company, incorporated there in 1829 to make queen's ware.<sup>2</sup> About the enterprise Vodrey later wrote: "We did not succeed in making all good ware in the first attempt of new materials. The company became discouraged, and all of them abandoned it except Mr. Lewis. He continued, and saved it from being lost to the State and country."<sup>3</sup>

When Samuel Casseday first came to Louisville in 1822 he worked as a clerk in a crockery store.<sup>4</sup> In June 1824 he and John P. Bull started a business as dealers in queen's ware, chinaware, and glass. The firm was one of the first west of the Alleghenies to import Staffordshire directly. The vegetable dish shown in Figure 2, with a view of Louisville, was one of the many patterns which Bull and Casseday probably imported from Staffordshire. It is from the unmarked Cities series attributed to James and Ralph Clews.<sup>5</sup>

Casseday also recognized the importance of promoting a domestic earthenware industry and was the first of more than fifty signers of a "Memorial of Certain Citizens of Louisville, Kentucky" dated May 14, 1834, asking Congress to grant Jacob Lewis a tract of land "for the establishment of a manufactory for fine earthenware."<sup>6</sup> Two years later Casseday bought land near the village of Troy, Indiana, some distance downriver from Louisville,<sup>7</sup> on which the Indiana Pottery Company came to be estab-

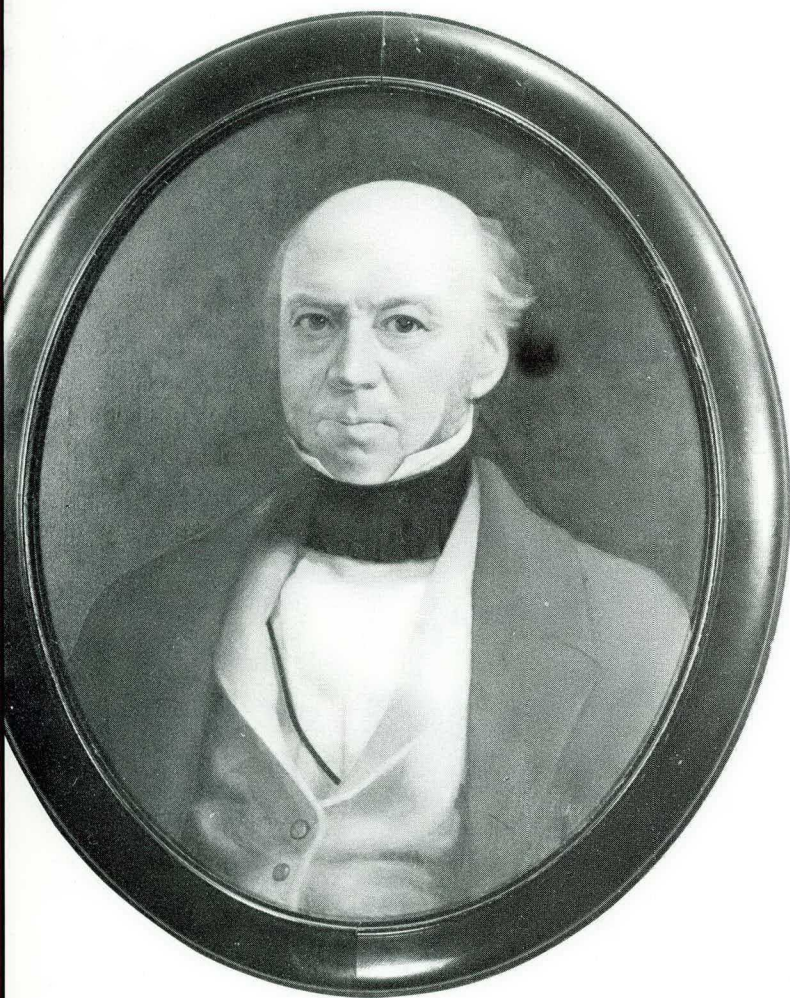


Fig. 1. Portrait of James Clews (1790-1861), artist unknown. Oil on canvas. Collection of John E. Parsons.



lished. The location was chosen because of the availability of the necessary clays and coal. The company was incorporated by a special act of the Indiana legislature on January 7, 1837, and started with a capital of \$100,000 and eleven partners, most of them Louisville businessmen.<sup>8</sup> One of the partners was James Clews, who had come to Louisville in 1836 on Casseday's invitation. Late in that year Clews imported thirty-six potters from Europe to staff the Troy pottery,<sup>9</sup> a task doubtless facilitated by the fact that thousands of workers had struck the British potteries that autumn.<sup>10</sup> The new venture also drew other British potters who had previously emigrated to America, including James Bennett, who had come to the United States in 1834 at the age of twenty-two and worked in Jersey City. Bennett was one of the real founders of the American earthenware industry, not at the Troy works, which he subsequently left, but at East Liverpool, Ohio.

The Indiana Pottery Company's first kiln of ware was pulled in June 1837.<sup>11</sup> The snuff bottle in Figures 3 and 3a was made and transfer printed by the company while Clews was associated with it. The glaze flowed imperfectly so that it is lighter on the front than on the back, and although the transfer is in blue, it is not the rich dark blue of the English wares. Nonetheless this snuff bottle is one of the first examples of transfer-printed earthenware produced in America.<sup>12</sup> No examples are known of white earthenware marked with the firm's complete name, perhaps because it was felt that Clews' name (Fig. 3a) would sell better.

At the end of the first year of operation the directors of the company petitioned Congress for a donation of public land containing the raw materials the pottery needed. The petition, dated January 4, 1838, stated:

That, for a number of years, many of them have been engaged in examining and experimenting upon the clays and other materials west of the Alleghany Mountains necessary for Manufacturing Queensware and China; that they so far satisfied themselves of the abundance and quality of these materials, in the western

country that they obtained a year ago an act of incorporation from the State of Indiana, under the style and name of 'The Indiana Pottery Company'. That they located the establishment at Troy, in said state, and erected large and suitable buildings and machinery, for the said manufactory, and sent to Europe and imported a number of potters, say in all, thirty-six, at very great expense and trouble. That their manufactory is now in operation, and the company have fully and completely tested and proved the practicability of rendering our country independent of foreign nations, for the articles of queensware and china; but then find that it will be impossible ever to make the business yield a profit until workmen can be made of American citizens. They are, therefore, convinced that they must pursue this business at a heavy loss for several years to come, and having already expended over fifty thousand dollars, and their means being so far exhausted that they can not divert them from the works, they respectfully represent that there is in the States of Indiana, Illinois and Missouri, clay, marl, flint, spar and other material necessary for the manufacturing of queensware and china; that they are to be found, generally, on poor and broken public lands, that they have been many years in market and remain unsold, that it is necessary for the future prosecution of their manufactory that the company should possess some of these lands, and they are of the opinion that their success is of great national importance.

James Clews remained part of the management of the ailing company until 1842, when he sold his three shares back to the company.<sup>13</sup> He must have remained in America until at least 1847, for in that year "James Clews of the City of New York"<sup>14</sup> sold the five acres of property in Troy that he had bought in 1838, after being in Troy for about two years.<sup>15</sup> British records show that Clews had taken up residence near Hilderstone, which is near Stoke on Trent, in 1849, and that he died there on July 7, 1861.<sup>16</sup>

The Indiana Pottery Company continued under that name and was managed by Jabez Vodrey until 1846. From then until 1859, when he sold it, the property continued to be owned by Samuel Casseday but was leased and operated by others.

Fig. 2. View of Louisville, Kentucky, from the Cities series attributed to James and Ralph Clews. Dark-blue transfer-printed vegetable dish. The view shows the city and the Ohio River in the early 1830's with Sixth Street the broad thoroughfare leading down to the water. *National Museum of History and Technology.*





<sup>1</sup>From "A brief view of efforts made to get a Fine Ware Pottery established in Louisville," appended to the "Memorial of Certain Citizens of Louisville, Kentucky," of May 14, 1834, addressed to the 23rd Congress, First Session. Pamphlet in The Filson Club.

<sup>2</sup>That the Lewis Pottery Company was making queen's-ware pottery was noted in the following advertisement, which appeared in the Louisville *Public Advertiser* for March 2, 1830: "STONEWARE: Issac Dover informs the Public, that he has established a Pottery, east end of Main Street (North Side), a short distance from the Queensware Pottery of Mr. Jacob Lewis, where he keeps on hand an assortment of Stoneware. . . ."

<sup>3</sup>From "A brief view . . ." appended to the "Memorial of certain citizens. . . ."

<sup>4</sup>A summary of the life of Samuel Casseday appears in *History of the Ohio Falls Cities & Their Counties*, Cleveland, 1882, pp. 565-566.

<sup>5</sup>The attribution was made in *ANTIQUES* for March 1954, p. 238. Also in the Cities series are other views of the growing Midwest showing Chillicothe, Columbus, and Sandusky, Ohio; and Detroit, Michigan.

<sup>6</sup>The memorial says, in part: "Your memorialists, citizens of the city of Louisville and its vicinity, respectfully represent to your honorable body, that they are deeply impressed with the opinion that it is the true policy of every enlightened nation to encourage and promote domestic manufactures, particularly the manufacture of such articles of necessity, comfort, and convenience, as can be introduced without increasing the burden of the people; and that it should be the policy of our Government to aid and support such manufactures, as the country will thereby be rendered less dependant upon the skill and industry of foreign nations.

"Amongst other manufactures of daily domestic use for which the people of the United States have been, and still are dependant upon other nations, are the various articles of queensware, or white earthenware, which your memorialists believe can be advantageously manufactured in the United States, if suitably encouraged, of a quality fully equal in all respects to similar articles imported from Great Britain."

<sup>7</sup>Indenture for fifty acres of land dated June 18, 1836, from Samuel and Nancy Connor to Casseday; indenture for six acres of land dated August 4, 1836, from Alexander M. Fountaine *et al.* to Casseday. Courthouse records, Cannelton, Indiana. I am indebted to Frank Baertich for making these and other Indiana records available to me.

<sup>8</sup>The partners were: James Clews, Samuel Casseday, Jacob Lewis, Willis Ranney, Reuben Bates, William Bell, James Anderson Jr., Edmund T. Bainbridge, Perly Chamberlin, John B. Bland, and William Garvin (Edwin Atlee Barber, *The Pottery and Porcelain of the United States*, New York, 1893, p. 159). Ranney was Casseday's current partner in the earthenware importing business. Bates was a merchant from Troy who also contributed some land to the venture. Except for Lewis and Clews the other partners were Louisville merchants.

<sup>9</sup>Petition to the 25th Congress, Second Session, by the Indiana Pottery Company dated January 4, 1838. William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indianapolis.

<sup>10</sup>In anticipation of the annual hiring date of Martinmas (November 11) some 3,500 employees at fourteen manufactories in Staffordshire came out on strike in September 1836. They were followed on Martinmas itself by a total of some 20,000 employees of sixty-four manufactories (Harold Owen, *The Staffordshire Potter*, Bath, 1970, pp. 36-37).

<sup>11</sup>John Ramsay, *American Potters and Pottery*, Clinton, Massachusetts, 1939, p. 106.

<sup>12</sup>Transfer printing was also being developed by David Henderson at his American Pottery Manufacturing Company in Jersey City, New Jersey, in the early 1840's.

<sup>13</sup>In return for the shares he was allowed \$500 for bringing out his family from England and \$2740 for bringing out hands for the pottery from England. Each party released the other from all liability arising out of James Clews' management of the concern. (James Clews vs. Samuel Casseday, May 1842 term of the Perry County, Indiana, court. Courthouse records, Cannelton.)

<sup>14</sup>Indenture dated August 25, 1847. Clews to Taylor Basye, Perry County courthouse records.

<sup>15</sup>Indenture dated November 13, 1838. Catherine and Denison Mason to Clews, Perry County courthouse records.

<sup>16</sup>Staffordshire directories 1848 to 1861; death notice in the *North Staffordshire Mercury*, July 13, 1861: "on the 7th instant, James Clews, Esq., of the Ox Leasows, near Hilderstone, in his 71st year."



Fig. 3. Whiteware snuff bottle made by the Indiana Pottery Company, c. 1837-1842. The Baltimore directory for 1835-1836 shows "Starr, Tobacconist 27 S Calvert Street." The next available directory, of 1845, gives Starr's address as "31 S Calvert Street." Height 6¼ inches. Collection of Mrs. Spencer Woodbridge.

Fig. 3a. Bottom of the snuff bottle in Fig. 3 showing the mark CLEW'S MANUFACTURER'S. Diameter 3¾ inches.





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