

Ceramic Makers' Marks

By Erica Gibson

Review by Connie Rogers

147 pages, 336 marks from 112 different manufacturers

Erica Gibson, a TCC member, has studied the field of archaeology, specializing in the identification and analysis of 19th-century and early 20th-century material culture. She received her MA from the University of Pittsburgh in 1990 and moved to California in 1993. She is the Archaeological Lab Director for the Anthropological Studies Center (ASC) Sonoma State University, where she has developed and now oversees the operation of ASC's artifact processing and cataloging system, SHARD (Sonoma Historic Artifact Research Database).

The development of this book, originally intended as a reference tool for archaeologists, is helpful to ceramic researchers as well, especially for those of us working to identify patterns, makers and dates. It seems that we gain a lot from sharing information back and forth between the two disciplines. The marks identified are a reflection of the contexts of the archaeological deposits in which they were recovered (more than 250 collections from the state of California). During the mid to late 19th century American potters faced a domestic market that not only preferred British wares but considered them to be superior to those made in the United States. Large quantities of relatively inexpensive British wares were produced exclusively for the American market, and the predominance of this market is reflected in archaeological deposits. The marks used by British manufacturers for export are not the same as marks on domestic ware; therefore this collection of marks contains many not seen before in standard references.

The marks identified in this volume are primarily of British origin, though there are a few French and German marks. A few importers marks are included. With few exceptions United States firms are excluded, as they are well documented in other sources. The book is organized alphabetically by manufacturer, and within manufacturer by mark. Information includes manufacturer name, pottery name, pottery location, dates of operation, previous and subsequent pottery operators, wares produced, additional information about the firm, and references. Mark information includes the mark description, dates of mark use, additional comments and references. If known, the printed pattern found with the mark is noted.

A mark description that I appreciate is the distinction between two kinds of Royal Arms marks: standing Royal Arms mark and seated Royal Arms mark. An occasional photo of a mark reassembled from shards, serves as a reminder that this book is based on archaeological finds. At times the complete mark was not recovered, but the missing part(s) have been surmised. Rather than try and photograph the impressed marks, the author chose to have drawings made of these marks. As a result, these marks are very clear to read. I recognize many marks from the database, but I also see additional marks from particular manufacturers. The wealth of Royal Arms marks indicates that a lot of the patterns found were ironstone (perhaps white ironstone, which was a very popular export from Britain). It is also good to see sets of initials for

lesser known potters such as: S. F. & J. for Smith, Ford, & Jones, Lincoln Pottery, Burslem, Staffordshire. This volume has become another reference to use to attribute unknown initials.

The book has very helpful indexes as an aid to finding information. I commend Erica Gibson for her work and highly recommend the book.

Published by Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, CA; Volume 3 in "Guides to Historical Artifacts" series

Available at Amazon.Com \$24.95