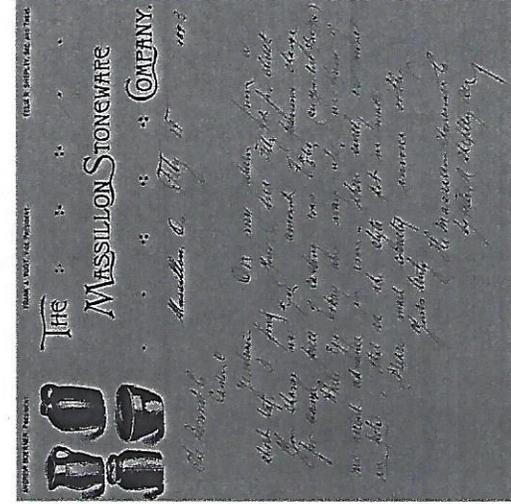


# STONEWARE UPDATE -- THE MASSILLON STONEWARE COMPANY

By Bob Treichler



Although examples of stoneware from Massillon have appeared in local antique sales, this pottery and its products were omitted from initial consideration as "historic" stoneware from Northeast Ohio. Typically, the products from this pottery were factory-made items

Figure 1

dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Further, because of its Stark County location, it was outside the Western Reserve area emphasized in the book, *A History of Northeast Ohio Stoneware*. However, discovery of further information, especially in the form of photographs and links to other recorded potters, has suggested that this firm should be documented. This discovery has been much aided by the very helpful and professional guidance provided by The Massillon Museum and its staff. Many of the illustrations in this report are noted as holdings from their restricted archival records. The exceptionally competent and generous assistance of persons associated with the museum is gratefully acknowledged.

The earliest known official notation of a stoneware facility in Massillon appeared in a local newspaper, *The Massillon Weekly American*, of April 16, 1884. This article reported that a new railroad spur to the plant would "facilitate the shipping of goods". Their goods included the usual array of manufactured products, "milk pans, cuspidors, stew pans, fruit jars, flower pots, churns, etc." The article also indicated that the firm was owned by the partnership of

Wm. W. Welker, Jacob Flickinger and Charles Flickinger. Welker seems to have been the originator of the company, and was indicated to be its plant supervisor. He was born about 1848 and grew up in the Massillon area, the son of Peter Welker, a printer, who lived next to his twin brother, George, a farmer. William Welker's mother died while he was quite young, and his father remarried a younger woman (just 8 years older than William). By 1880, William was listed in the census as making pottery and living on Richville Ave., east of the city limits. Sometime prior to 1900, Peter Welker, the father, died, but William continued to reside with his step-mother and half-sister. At that time, he listed his occupation as "agent roofing" and may have been working as a salesman for the Navarre pottery. However, William Welker spent most of his working career in Massillon, and it appears that he died just prior to 1910, although no official record of his death has been found. C. Howard McCollam's book on the history of Stark Co. brick making states that Welker's Massillon pottery was "a very small operation and continued for only a year or two". However, the 1884 newspaper article noted above states that it was "crowded with orders and run the year round, while most institutions close down or do a very light work during the winter season".

Jacob and Charles Flickinger were a father and son, respectively, and they apparently invested in the Massillon pottery in the early 1880s. Jacob Flickinger grew up as a member of a farming family in Wayne County, but in the 1850 census, he listed himself as a 19-year-old potter. By 1860, Jacob was living in Sugar Creek Township of Wayne Co. where it is speculated that he was trained at the pottery operated by the Houghton family of Dalton, OH (see p. 110 of *A History of Northeast Ohio Stoneware*). In the late 1870s, Jacob partnered with Peter Eckard in a pottery in Orrville, but appears to have moved to Massillon when the partnership with Welker began (seemingly in the late 1870s or early 1880s). Jacob Flickinger had five sons and at least three worked in the trade at some time. Jacob remained in Massillon throughout his adult life and in 1910 listed himself as a retired potter living next door to his son,

Frank who worked in a cement block factory. However, it was Charles, the son who was his early partner, who remained in the trade. Charles moved to Canton, OH, probably when the Massillon Stoneware management changed (probably late 1880s). He is recorded as a "pottery turner" in Canton as early as 1894 and remained there until after the census of 1900. However by 1907, he had moved to the pottery center in Akron's 6<sup>th</sup> Ward where he was variously recorded as a "stoneware potter" (1910), "salesman" (1913) and "pottery dealer" (1928). He died in Akron at the age of 81 (1941).

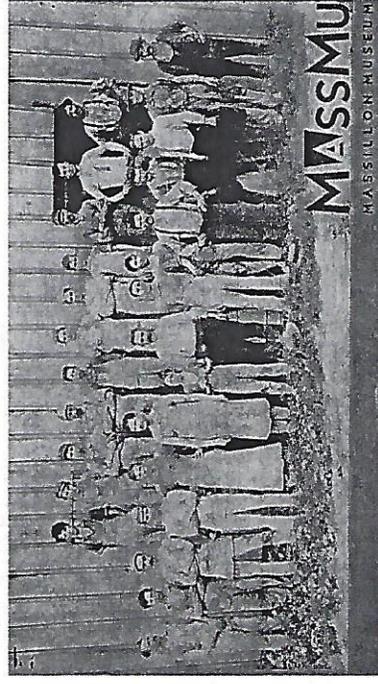


Figure 2

Meanwhile, around 1890 or a little earlier, the Massillon Stoneware Company became a corporate operation with officers as noted on the letterhead shown in illustration 1. The president, Andrew Boerner, was the son of German immigrants who farmed in nearby Jackson Township. His first occupational listing was as a teamster, and, by 1881, he was a member of Massillon City Council. The 1900 census recorded him as a "proprietor of pottery", and that business seems to have included three of his sons according to a list of names accompanying the 1898 photo shown in illustration 2. Andrew is the portly gentleman with the mustache in the middle of the front row. His eight children (4 boys; 4 girls) were all given first names that began with the letter "A".

The vice-president, Frank A. Vogt, was also the son of

local German immigrants; his father, Henry, was a stone mason. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several Vogt families settled in the Massillon area, and some still live there (although not direct descendants of Frank who had only daughters).

When the pottery closed, he became the local agent for a Toledo brewery and held that job until after 1910. When he applied for a passport to go to Germany in 1912, he reported his occupation as "lumber dealer", and a 1906 city directory lists him as an agent for both lumber and beer. He and his wife got back from Germany shortly before the outbreak of World War I, but he died prior to 1920 because that census records his wife as a widow.

The third company officer, Secretary-Treasurer, Felix R. Shepley, was also from a long-time local family. His father was recorded as a clothier in the 1850 census, and when Felix was 25 in 1880, his somewhat strange occupational title in the census was "traveler". Presumably, along with or immediately after his position at the stoneware company, he served as the Massillon postmaster in 1899 and 1900. At that time, he was 45-years-old and living with his widowed mother and older sister, but at age 54, he married the 24-year-old daughter of German immigrants. This couple had three children, and he survived until the late 1930s. His widow, Marie, appears to have been left well off because in 1948 she made a voyage to England aboard the Queen Mary. Later in life, she moved to Queche, Vermont where she died at age 95 (1980).

Felix Shepley's occupational record is relevant to this report because it provides some insight into the fate of the Massillon Stoneware Company. The undated advertising photograph shown as illustration 3 shows that under corporate leadership, the pottery was a large one that fit the 1884 newspaper description. Further, the company chose to note that William Welker was a part of the firm.

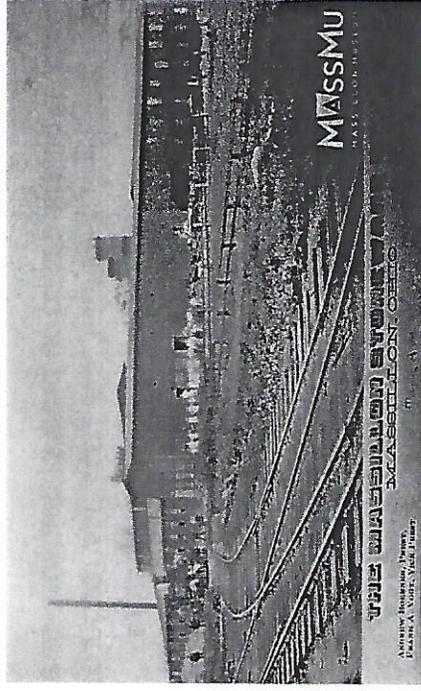


Figure 3

However, correspondence from Shepley dated 1901 (illustration 4) indicates that he was at that time representing the Rhodes Glass and Bottle Company (but using stoneware company letterhead). Indeed, sometime around 1901, Massillon Stoneware ceased to exist. By 1904, Felix Shepley is documented as President and Treasurer of the Rhodes Glass and Bottle Co. and his son, Jerome, was named as that company's Secretary. Felix continued to lead that glass firm until he was about 70. After that, he served at least four years as vice-president of a local coal company, and his son became Massillon's Director of Public Safety.

The failure of the stoneware company is also reflected in the occupational histories of Andrew Boerner and his sons. In 1901, Andrew's city directory entry revealed that he was then a foreman at the Rhodes Glass Company. He remained in that position until he retired about 15 years later. Similarly, two of his sons became glass blowers at that company for at least a decade.

Thus, it seems that the Massillon Stoneware Co. grew from the Flickinger/Welker operation of the 1880s to the corporate entity headed by Andrew Boerner in the 1890s, but it closed near the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It failed at about the same time as many other American stoneware

operations, probably based on product demand. In a move reflecting business evolution, the company resources and personnel were switched to glass manufacture. Some existing real estate records indicate that the clay pits for the Massillon Stoneware Co. were transferred to glass companies. Subsequently, Massillon, OH became a center for glass manufacture with three major companies located there, but that history deserves its own treatment.

The story of Massillon Stoneware would be incomplete without some mention of its products. Unfortunately, these were seldom very distinctive. Most of the ware was utilitarian containers of the kind illustrated on the company letterhead. Nearly all pieces were made with uniform brown Albany slip glazes and maker's marks were very seldom used. A few with

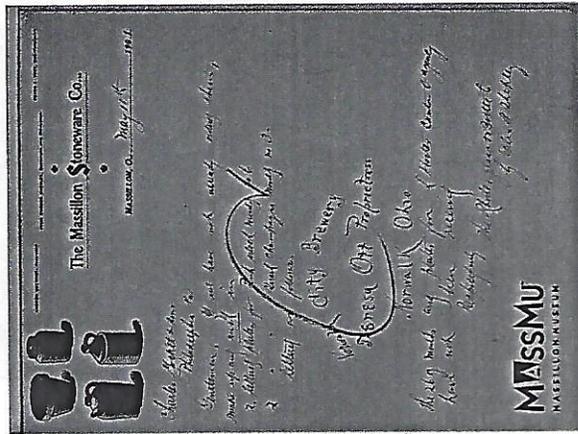


Figure 4

slightly contrasting stencils on the brown slip are known. The Massillon Museum has several examples, one with a stenciled mark, and some others authenticated by donation from descendants of potters, but typically, it is not possible to make reliable attribution of Massillon pieces.

Correction: In my earlier report on Stiles Patent Jugs, the name of Henry Stiles suddenly got changed to "Frank" on the third page. That mistake demonstrates one effect of aging on memory – Frank Stiles was a high school friend.  
Bob Treichler