Top: Vulcan Middle: Shape #827 Neptune and Vulcan glaze Bottom: Shape #102 Verdatone at right
AFTER 115 YEARS

By JAMES L. MURPHY

The Zanesville Stoneware Co., Ohio's longest-lived stoneware pottery closed its doors this spring, after 115 years of continuous operation - 113 of those years by three generations of the Milman Linn family, at two different locations. At 71, Milman “Bud” Linn determined it was time to retire. His son Andrew, manager and vice president of sales, decided not to continue the enterprise. The pottery has been sold to Robinson-Ransbottom Potteries of nearby Roseville, Ohio.

The Zanesville Stoneware story began in 1883 with the formation of the Ohio Encaustic Tile Co., a would-be rival to Zanesville's famous American Encaustic Tiling Co. Matters did not go well for this fledgling decorative tile factory. It was abandoned by 1886. A new firm, E. G. Bowen and Co., began operation at the site on Coopermill Road the following year. In 1889 it was reorganized as the Zanesville Stoneware Co. At this point, Milman Linn, Sr., joined the company as vice-president. He quickly rose to become president. Originally, the pottery produced a standard line of crocks, churns, jugs, stew pans, butter jars, and milk pans, as well as a stenciled stoneware two-part water filter that remained in production for many years. Although their Albany slip-covered milk crock was elaborately marked on the bottom with large raised letters, most of the ware was unmarked. When it was marked, a cobalt stencil was generally applied in a rather sloppy manner, so leaving many of the stenciled crocks with an almost illegible cobalt mark.

Zanesville Stoneware was the first pottery in Ohio to use a muffle updraft kiln, which protected the ware from direct flame and made for more even burning. In 1889, a state factory inspector listed the firm as employing 25, who were making stoneware and flowerpots. By 1901, the pottery employed 50 men and one woman.
LEFT: Shape #792 Molted Matte Rose variety

RIGHT: County Fair Sugar & Creamer

LEFT: Shape #851 Matte Rose and Ebonella
Around 1910, the company began the manufacture of garden ware and shortly thereafter developed a fine matte green glaze. Following World War I, it expanded its glaze lines, to include a variety of drip and multicolored “overflow” glazes. One of the company's first unusual glazes was a light gray with dark blue drip, with pieces occasionally marked “ZASKO” (Zanesville Stoneware Company) in tiny vertical impressed letters. One of the pottery's most popular shapes, a simple tapered vase with large molded leaf, (Shape #102) dates to this early period and can be found with many different glazes, though not Zasko. Matt green was tremendously popular at the time. Zanesville Stoneware products with this glaze still command premium prices today.

Some Zanesville Stoneware glazes were as unusual as their names—Verdantone (green flow over a gray base), Brunell (brown with light splashes), Vorosa (rose flow over ivory), Ebonello (black flow over yellow), Vulcan (reddish tan blend), Neptune (green with rust mottling), Bacorcy (black flow over light green), Montrose (rose mottling on ivory background), and one named Ebonivor (black flow over white)—which was apparently not all that popular, for examples are not common today. Exceptional glazes are Neptune and Vulcan, as well as a tremendous variety of experimental drip glazes.

For a short period the company offered one of its most artistic lines, “Rubble Ware,” which featured a cobblestone like effect as background for various designs. This line was offered only in matt lavender, matt blue, gloss green and gloss blue. Examples of Rubble Ware in any color are quite scarce today.

By 1921, there were 100 employees, mostly men. Along with the artware, stoneware filters, cuspidors, flower pots and jardinieres were still being made. In the late 1920s, tea sets were produced in a variety of colors. Although the company continued production of standard stoneware crocks, jugs, and kitchenware into the 1920s, including the decorated water filters featured on their letterhead, it was about this time that garden and patio ware also became very fashionable. Zanesville Stoneware began specializing in this product and never stopped—until this year.

A Harrop tunnel kiln was built in 1932 and the plant was enlarged in 1953. Although later wares were frequently embossed “ZSC” on the base, most Zanesville Stoneware is marked only by an impressed shape number. This, along with the usually strong mold mark bisecting the base, the general klunkiness of the pieces, familiarity with ZSC shapes and glazes, as well as referencing copies of old ZSC catalogs, usually make identification easy. Some pieces were even made for specific florists and potteries, such as Zanesville’s Marco Pottery and The Old Pot Shop of Norwalk, Connecticut.

Long after other potteries had abandoned the art of throwing, “Hank” (Lawrence F.) Pickrull, continued to throw large pieces of garden ware. Pickrull, who began throwing for ZSC in 1908, retired in 1946, but not before he posed for a series of photographs for Claude Horan's Ohio State University M.A. thesis. Zanesville Stoneware had a long-standing relationship with Ohio State's ceramics program. Arthur DeVol, son of Edward M. DeVol, an early plant superintendent and later vice-president, graduated from Ohio State and became ZSC's ceramics engineer. Many of the unusual glazes used by the company were developed by the two DeVols.
Particularly popular in the 1960s was the Company's two-toned brown and green "Country Fare" dinnerware, quite similar to and often confused with a line manufactured by Red Wing Pottery. This proved to be much more popular than an earlier version of tan and green ware marketed as "Lindenware" which is now quite scarce. This line is not illustrated in the only available book about the company.

A variety of small, unmarked cologne or perfume bottles also date to this 1950s - 60s period, as well as were other novelties, including marked containers for Dutchess Cheese and Wally Frank (tobacconist).
According to Bud Linn, a large garden ware urn embossed with clusters of grapes was especially popular with a particular California winemaker. These urns are not very commonly found in the East where they are often priced at hundreds of dollars.

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In 1990, shortly after the death of Milman Linn, Jr., the plant burned to the ground. To the surprise of some, Milman “Bud” Linn, chairman of the board, moved the pottery to a new location on Muskingum Avenue, along the river bluff, where he continued the successful production of garden and florist ware for another twelve years.

Throughout its history, Zanesville Stoneware had no problems with labor. One reason was suggested in a 1919 letter to its employees announcing a 2% bonus for all employees who had worked through the previous year. In addition, there was an employees benefit fund to be used “for sick benefits or in unusual cases of distress.” The company desired “to promote a closer bond of sympathy between the management and workers” and wished all “to feel that we are engaged in a common undertaking and that it should be our aim and purpose to turn out the best possible product in our line.” Although the amount enclosed with this letter to James White was only $13.30, the sentiments indicate and enlightened management for that time. Similar sentiments were echoed by Tom Drabik, pottery superintendent for 34 years, who was quoted by the Associated Press as saying, “I thought I had a home here.”

Ironically, this, the year of the factory's closing, witnessed the first book published about the company. This book includes an identification and value guide compiled by Jon Rans, Glenn Ralston, and Nate Russell and is published by Collector Books. It serves as an excellent guide to the variety of Zanesville Stoneware's shapes and glazes, and includes many catalog pages. However, the antique and collectible pottery market itself has yet to catch up with many of the
price estimates in the book. Zanesville Stoneware produced a lot of pottery, and there is a lot of it still around. While the more artistic and scarcer shapes and glazes may bring more than $100, and the more attractive, large garden pieces may command twice that, many attractive pieces can still be found for $25-35. For some reason, the small animal planters, though not particularly common, have yet to catch on with collectors.

Glaze imperfections are to be expected, for this was industrial artware, not Rookwood.

The Company's reputation will only continue to grow, due in part to the wide variety of shapes and glazes. The fact that a second book is already in the works attests to the fact that Zanesville Stoneware's appeal will be long lasting.

*Photo at left and below courtesy of Bud Linn*
Additional Reading


