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Feature article by: James L. Murphy



Fire once again has destroyed one of Roseville, Ohio's major pottery landmarks. Although not in operation since 1982 and recently used only for storage, the massive brick building of the Brush Pottery Co. was a significant Roseville fixture, and its loss creates a substantial void, both physically and historically, in the small southeastern Ohio village.

Ironically, the fire occurred at the beginning of the Crookeville-Roseville-Pottery Festival in July. Discovered in the early morning hours of July 15, the blaze also consumed most of the village's water supply and forced residents to rely on bottled water. All but the southern portion of the 28,000 square foot complex was reduced to smoldering rubble by the next morning. The remains of the office, with its painted Brush legend, still partially stand, but for the rest, only concrete and rusted metal equipment remain.

The long, rather complicated history of the Brush (earlier known as Brush-McCoy) Pottery has been punctuated with several disastrous fires, both here and at its Zanesville plants.

Between fires, it and its precursor, the J. W. McCoy Pottery Co., produced a remarkable variety of quality art pottery, as well as what has become highly collectible utilitarian stoneware and earthenware. This pottery should not be confused with the Nelson McCoy Pottery which operated on the north side of Roseville for many years.

It all began in 1899 when James W. McCoy formed the J. W. McCoy Pottery Co., with the pottery located on the west side of Perry St., just south of the Columbus and Muskingum Valley Railroad Depot, and across the tracks from the Roseville Pottery Co. and the W. B. Lowery Pottery Co. Here, according to the 1901 Ohio Factory Inspector's report, McCoy employed 76 men and women to manufacture "glazed pottery." At this small plant were produced McCoy's Rosewood and Mt. Pelee lines, now quite rare, for the pottery and storage shed burned to the ground in early 1903. Also destroyed in that fire was the adjacent Presbyterian church. History almost repeated itself 96 years later; but the little white Full Gospel House of Prayer which stands across Perry Street from the 1999 Brush fire site managed to escape with badly warped and melted siding.



Recently, a rare real photo post-card of the rebuilt J.W. McCoy plant has come to light, providing the only known view of the building taken while operated by J.W. McCoy. Although not postmarked, the card must date to the period between 1903-05, when the new plant was built, and 1911, when the J.W. McCoy Pottery became the Brush-McCoy Pottery.

Immediately rebuilding after the 1903 fire, McCoy abandoned the production of Mt. Pelee but expanded his artware lines to include Olympia and Loy-Nel Artware, named for his three sons, Lloyd, Nelson, and Arthur. This standard glaze, hand-painted ware was typical of the period, high-glazed brown to green pottery with hand-painted flowers for the most part. Matters changed, however, in 1908, when Albert Cusick joined the firm as a designer and began to develop more original art lines, including his corn and grape utility wares, his Liberty Bell umbrella stand, Woodland and various other lines of jardinières and matching pedestals.

In the meantime, there were important corporate changes taking place. In nearby Zanesville, George S. Brush, who had worked for the J.B. Owens Co., bought the short-lived Union Pottery, located near the Muskingum River bank in the Putnam section of town. There, beginning in 1906, he produced kitchen ware and sanitary ware, most notably the Lucille Toilet Ware line, named for his young daughter (Mrs. Clare Barnett). Fire also plagued this original Brush Pottery, for the one-kiln plant burned to the ground in the winter of 1908.



For a short time Brush then operated the Crookeville Clay Products Co. and the Globe Pottery Co. in Crookeville, but in 1909 he bought a modest ten shares in J.W. McCoy's pottery and a few years later purchased the old J.B. Owens Zanesville plant. In 1911, G.S. Brush and J.W. McCoy joined forces to operate the Brush-McCoy Pottery, utilizing the former Brush plant in Zanesville for the production of art pottery and the Roseville plant for utilitarian ware.



J.W. McCoy died in 1914, but not before setting up his son Nelson in the pottery business, thereby creating no little confusion to pottery collectors. The Nelson McCoy Sanitary Stoneware Co., located in the north end of Roseville and later known simply as the Nelson McCoy Pottery, began producing sanitary and kitchenware in 1911, later turning to the gardenware, planters, and cookie jars for which it is most famous, and continuing production under various managements until 1990.

Back on Perry Street in Roseville, the Brush-McCoy Pottery continued to develop its artlines, culminating in the 1920's with such elaborate products as Jetwood, Jewel, King Tut, Panelart, Kracklecraft, Florastone, Cleo, and Zuniart. The Zanesville plant (formerly J.B. Owens) had been badly damage by fire in 1918, and all production moved to Roseville. Many of these attractive lines utilized the squeezebag decorative technique that Cusick had mastered years earlier in his career at the Avon Faience Pottery in Tiltonsville, Ohio, and the Craven Art Pottery in East Liverpool.

The McCoy family withdrew from the Brush-McCoy concern in 1918, though the name of the pottery was not changed from Brush-McCoy to Brush until 1925. A graduate of Ohio State University's ceramics program, W. Clare Barnett began working for the Brush Pottery in 1928 and soon installed a modern Harrop tunnel kiln, an improvement that substantially increased production.

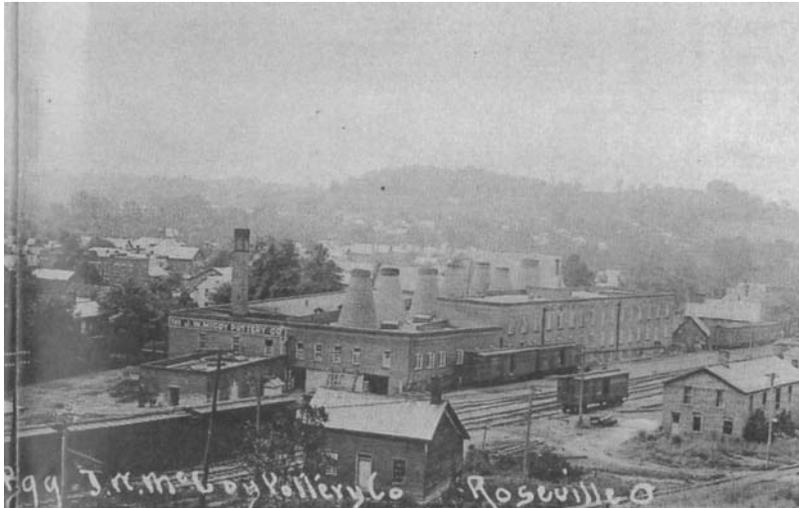
About this time, beginning with Colonial Mat and Art Vellum lines in the mid-1920s, the firm turned towards a variety of softer, semi-matt finishes such as Ivo tint, Vestal, Sylvan and Cameo, though its brightly glazed Kolorcraft and mottled Onyx lines also proved popular through the 1930's. In kitchenware, its faux Rockingham Nurock glaze on various peacock shapes proved popular, and examples are often attributed to various 19th century yellowware and Rockingham potteries.

Albert Cusick died in 1946, and with a few exceptions, the artistic quality of the company's later products declined, though much of this decline has to be attributed to the buying public. In later years, as tastes changed, Brush placed more emphasis on novelty and floral items, including more than 50 cookie jar shapes which were made from 1954 through 1971. Its whimsical frogs, in just about every shape, size, and attitude, probably remain Brush McCoy's most readily identified product.



After the Brush Pottery ceased operation in 1982, the buildings were used for storage. Robinson Ranebottom used it for storage space for a time. More recently, the northern part was utilized by Perk Ater and son, Steve Ater, as storage for their wholesale china distribution. There were also old plaster molds for the Brush Pottery, McCoy Ltd., and the defunct Cookson Pottery, which went out of business in the mid 1990s. Newspaper reports that the building contained 100-year-old pottery at the time of the recent fire simply are not true, and fortunately some years ago Clare and Lucille (Brush) Barnett had the foresight to remove the historically significant Brush Pottery records and catalogs later used in the writing of the Sanford's two books on Brush Pottery.

Steve and Martha Sanford happened to be in Roseville at the time of the fire and witnessed the destruction first hand. Steve Sanford had played in the building as a child has many of his friend's parents worked there. Many an onlooker must have been saddened as the building's walls fell or were pushed in by firemen to prevent their falling in the street.



Neighboring, Full Gospel House of Prayer

The empty site today is littered with fragments of ceramic history but present a bewildering display for any would-be archaeologist. The northern end is littered with recognizable fragments of Robinson-Ransbottom pottery, while abundant fragments marked Homer Laughlin and Bel-Terr Ceramics apparently represent the Ater distribution business. But careful looking along the edges of the foundation has also turned up colorful sherds of early Brush and possibly even J.W. McCoy blended glaze ware-shapes that do not appear in any of the Brush-McCoy books-as well as sherds of Nu-Rock, Brush-McCoy's Dandy Line yellowware, and many pieces of its distinctive Bohemian cooking ware. No pieces of Mt. Pelee or Rosewood were found, but numerous colorful sherds of later Brush-McCoy and Brush lines occurred. Probably the most interesting in terms of new information are a few fragments marked "Twentieth Century

German.” This drab, white- or light blue-lined cooking ware does not appear in any of the Brush catalogs, and it is very likely, judging from its name, that it was a relatively short-lived product of the earlier J.W. McCoy pottery around the turn of the last century.

For a time, at least during the Pottery Festival, the smoldering ruins of the Brush Pottery seemed to breathe new interest and even a little humor into the history of the Brush and Brush-McCoy Pottery. One Pottery Festival fan told the local newspaper that she was prompted to buy a Brush pottery leprechaun or garden gnome just because of the fire. Alas for the noble sentiment, this most likely was one of the many pieces of garden decorations produced by Robinson-Ransbottom or possibly Burley & Winter of nearby Crookeville, for Brush never manufactured any such leprechauns.

Additional Reading

Martha and Steve Sanford

1992 - *The Guide to Brush-McCoy Pottery*. Campbell, Calif.: The Sanfords.

1996 - *Sanfords Guide to Brush-McCoy Pottery Book 2*. Campbell, Calif.: The Sanfords.

Jeffrey B. Snyder

1990 - *McCoy Pottery*. Atglen, Pa.: Schiffer Publishing Co.