

# TRENTON POTTERIES

Newsletter of the  
Potteries of Trenton Society



## *The Manufacture of Ceramic Tiles in Trenton-Part 2: The Trent Tile Company (1882-1939)*

by Michael Padwee

The Trent Tile Company was first organized as the Harris Manufacturing Company, c. 1882, but soon had its name changed to Trent. By 1892 Trent operated 20 kilns--including six round biscuit kilns and upwards of a dozen enameling or English muffle kilns<sup>1</sup>, and by 1910 employed 300 workers. By 1912 Trent ran into financial difficulties and was placed in receivership. In 1916 Trent was purchased by the Receiver, Thomas H. Thropp, who died in 1931. The company was then purchased from Thropp's family by R. P. Herrold, but it went into receivership, again, in 1939, and was closed down. In 1940 the Wenczel Tile Company bought the factory. The tile factory was located at Klagg Avenue and Plum Street.<sup>2</sup>

Everett Townsend, who was born in 1866 and started his career in the tile industry in 1895, wrote a brief history of his recollections of the tile industry in 1943<sup>3</sup>, and was involved with the Trent Tile Company after a receiver was appointed in 1912. Townsend's reminiscences discuss the people who were involved in the organization of Trent: he states that Benjamin F. Lee became the sole owner of Trent in the early 1890s, however, he was Chief Clerk of the Supreme Court of the State of New Jersey at the time and did not take an active part in the company. Alfred W. Lawshe, who worked for Mr. Lee, was made the Treasurer and Secretary of the company, and his son, Charles, eventually became Trent's Superinten-

dent. Mr. Lee died in 1905. In 1912 Thomas Thropp, a member of the Eureka Flint and Spar Company of Trenton, was appointed receiver, and Lewis Whitehead of the Providential Tile Company and Everett Townsend were appointed appraisers by the receiver. Mr. Thropp purchased Trent in 1916, and at the time of his death in 1931, Trent had 22 periodic kilns (12 biscuit and 10 glost) and one continuous tunnel kiln, and the factory could produce 8,000,000 square feet of floor and wall tile annually.

The years prior to World War I, and especially the 1880s and 1890s, were the heyday of Trent's production of art tile. Isaac Broome, who had worked for the Etruria Pottery of Trenton and for the Ott & Brewer Pottery, was Trent's designer and modeler from about 1883 to 1885, when he left Trent to help organize the Providential Tile Works. According to Edwin Atlee Barber Isaac Broome left enough art tile designs at Trent that many were still being made in the 1890s. Another major artistic influence at Trent was William Wood Gallimore. Gallimore, an English modeler of portrait busts and vases, came to work at Trent in 1886 and stayed for six years. Gallimore's specialties were the portrayal of boys, cupids and portraits.<sup>4</sup> Also, about 1905 Charles Babcock Upjohn, who had worked for Weller Pottery and the Cambridge Art Pottery as a designer and modeler, and who organized the ill-fated C.B.

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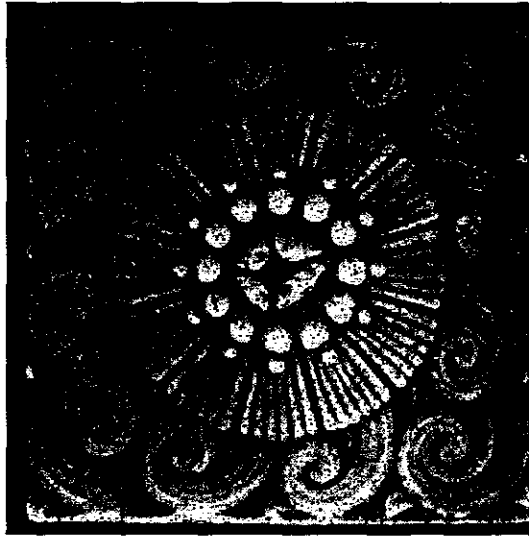
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The Potteries of Trenton Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to the study and preservation of Trenton's ceramic past. Officers: President—Patricia Madrigal; Treasurer—Amy Earls; Secretary—Christy Morganstein. Board: Ellen Denker, Barbara Goldberg, Richard Hunter, Jay Lewis, Emma Lewis, William Liebeknecht, Molly Merlino, George Miller, Brenda Springsted, Rebecca White. Newsletter Editor: Patricia Madrigal

## Trent Tile Company

Left: Figure 1a  
Right: Figure 1b



(Continued from page 1)

Upjohn Pottery of Zanesville Ohio, joined the Trent Tile Company.<sup>5</sup>

Trent's specialty in the 1890s were "dull-finished or 'Trent finished' tiles in alto-relievo, which...[were] treated by the sand blast process after being glazed. The effect ...[was] a soft, satin-like finish..." Trent also made a variety of glazed and enameled art tiles including 6" x 18" panels, 12" x 24" panels and soda-water fountains. In addition, Gallimore modeled a large coat-of-arms of the State of New Jersey for Trent.<sup>6</sup>

Tile companies used a variety of key patterns<sup>7</sup> and manufacturer's markings on the backs of tiles, which can help the tile historian or collector identify the tile maker. Trent was no exception, and I have included a number of illustrations of these key patterns and manufacturer's marks below:<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 1.a:** A 6" square, low molded relief and intaglio tile in green glaze.

**Figure 1.b:** A 6" square, low molded relief and intaglio portrait tile, marked "Broome" in the lower left corner.

**Figure 1.c:** Grooved tile back with impressed maker's marks. This is an early tile back and is reminiscent of the tile backs of the J. & J. G. Low Art Tile Works of Chelsea, MA. Both figures 1.a and 1.b have this tile back.

**Figure 2.a:** A 6" square, low and medium molded relief tile in blue glaze.

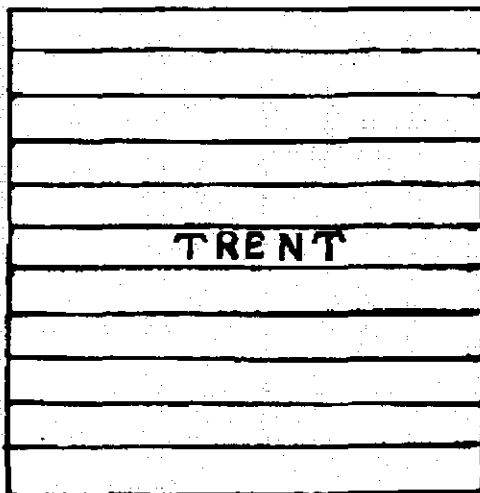
**Figure 2.b:** The back of this tile has eleven alternately raised and recessed bars that extend from edge to edge. "TRENT" in raised letters is in a re-

(Continued on page 3)



Figure 1c

# Trent Tile Company



Left: Figure 2a  
Right: Figure 2b

(Continued from page 2)

cessed bar.

Figure 3: 2" and 3" square, dust-pressed, 9 molded relief tiles. Raised mark in one of three recessed "bars".

Figure 4: 6" square, dust-pressed, molded relief tile, c. 1885. Raised marks in four recessed bars.

Figure 5: Trent made many stove tiles, marked and unmarked, with one, two or no notches. This stove tile has one notch and a raised ring border surrounding a central concave area. The

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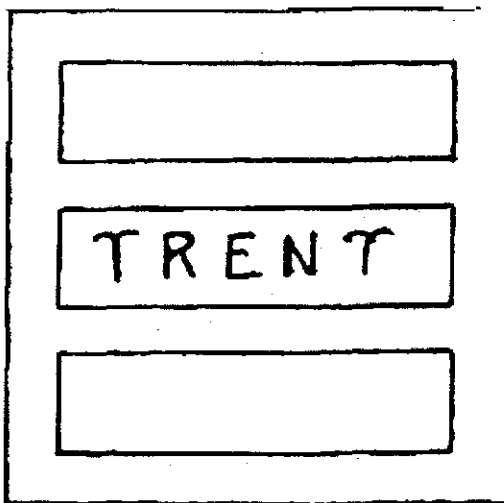
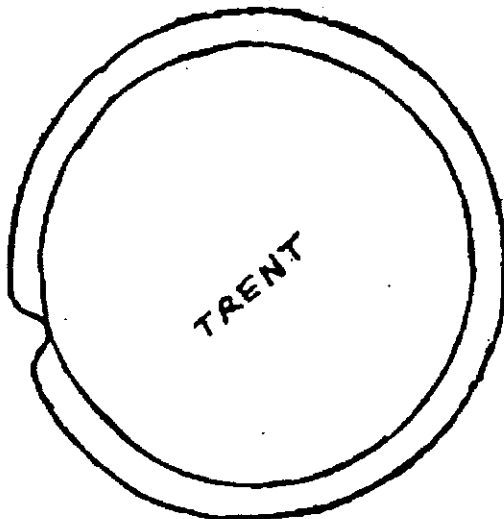
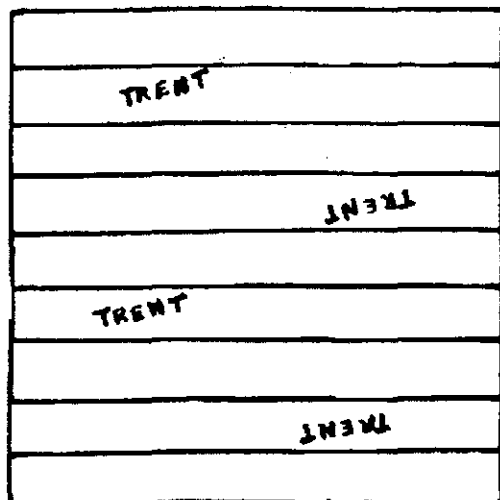


Figure 3



Left: Figure 4  
Right: Figure 5

# Trent Tile Company

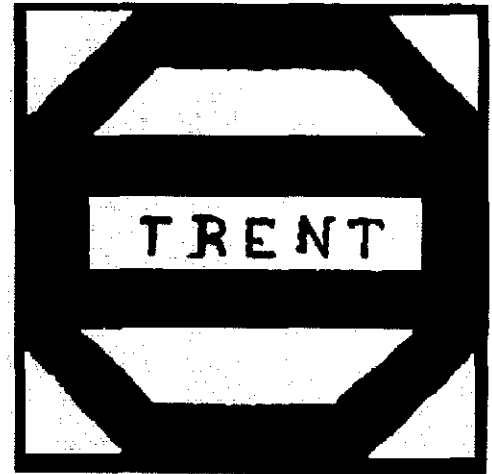
Left: Figure 6a  
Right: Figure 6b



(Continued from page 3)  
mark is raised.

Figure 6.a: A 3" square, dust-pressed, molded relief tile of a dragon.

Figure 6.b: The back of the dragon tile. An octagonal raised border with two raised internal bars. "TRENT" is raised in one of three recessed areas. The corners are recessed.



straight lines.

Figure 8.a: A 4 1/4" square, dust-pressed, molded relief tile.

Figure 8.b: Tile back of Figure 8.a. Two thin recessed rings surrounding a wide raised ring. Raised, cursive "Trent" on a raised central area.

Figure 9.a: A 6" x 3" dust-pressed, molded relief border tile.

Figure 9.b: The back of Figure 9.a. Impressed decorative grooved lines and markings.

Left: Figure 7  
Center: Figure 8a  
Right: Figure 8b

Figure 7: A 3" x 6" molded relief border tile. Impressed cursive "Trent" and impressed, decorative, curved and

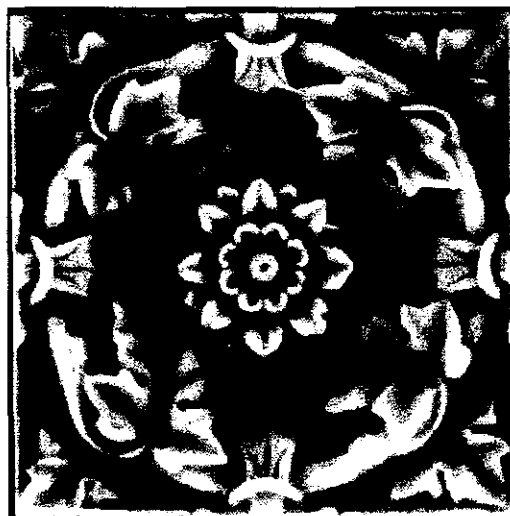
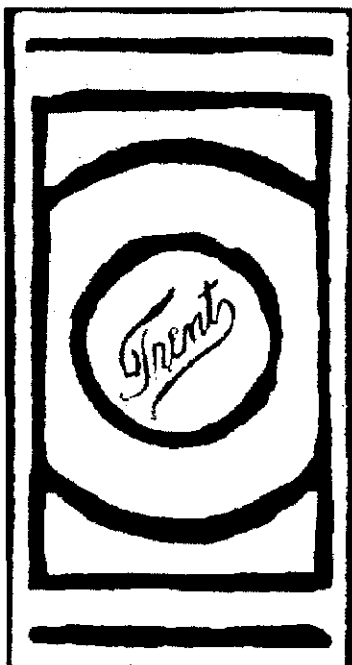


Figure 8a

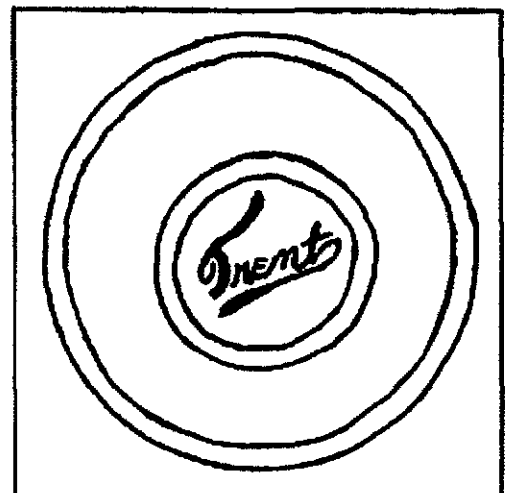


Figure 8b

## Trent Tile Company

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**Figure 10:** A framed, three tile, molded relief panel from a fireplace surround attributed to Gallimore.

**Figures 11a and 11b:** Two patented "grip backs" on dust-pressed, mono-glazed wall tiles. Most tile companies survived on the production of white and mono-glazed wall and floor tiles. Many companies, such as Trent, patented the key patterns on the backs of their tiles.

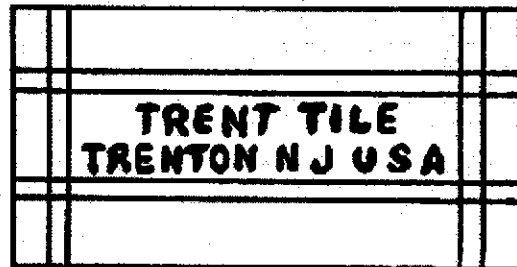
Some of Trent's relief molded tiles were also manufactured by other tile companies, illustrating that tile molds or models may have been sold or brought from one factory to another. A case in point is Isaac Broome's 6" square "Michelangelo" portrait tile, which has been identified as a Trent tile by both Barnard<sup>10</sup> and Kovel<sup>11</sup> (Figure 12.a.) This same tile was manufactured in England between 1894-1905 and marked "Flaxman".<sup>12</sup> Another Michelangelo tile was manufactured in California by either the Pacific Art Tile Company or the California Tile and Terra Cotta Company, a subsidiary of the Western Art Tile Company. Joseph Kirkham, a principal of the Providential Tile Works of Trenton, NJ, may have brought Broome's models to California. Kirkham's first tile factory in California appears to have been the Pacific Art Tile Company.<sup>13</sup> (Figure 12.b is the back of this California Michelangelo tile. The mark is raised in one of four recessed "bars".)

### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>Edwin Atlee Barber, *Pottery and Porcelain of the United States*, Century House



Top: Figure 9a  
Bottom: Figure 9b



Americana, Watkins Glen, NY, 1971 reprint of the 1893 edition, p. 363.

<sup>2</sup>Norman Karlson, *American Art Tile 1876-1941*, Rizzoli International Publications, New York, 1998, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Dick Sigafosse, *American Art Pottery A Collection of Pottery, Tiles, and Memorabilia 1880-1950*, Collector Books, Paducah, KY, 1998, p. 218.

<sup>4</sup>American Ceramic Society, *Ceramic Abstracts and the Bulletin*, May 15, 1943, Volume 22, Number 5, pp. 129-130.

<sup>5</sup>Barber, *Op. Cit.*, p. 362, 363 and 365.

<sup>6</sup>Paul Evans, *Art Pottery of the United States*, Second Edition, Feingold & Lewis Publishing Corp., New York, 1987, p. 292.

<sup>7</sup>Barber, *Op. Cit.*, p. 362, 363 and 365.

<sup>8</sup>Key patterns are the raised and/or recessed areas on the backs of tiles that help keep the tile in place when

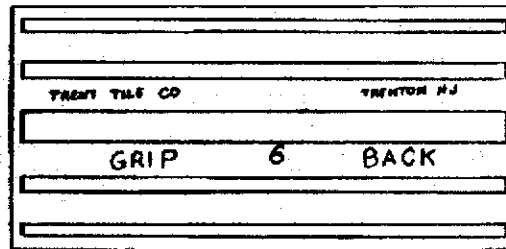
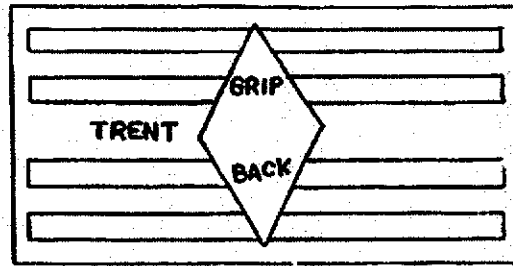
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Figure 10



## Trent Tile Company

Top left: Figure 11a  
 Bottom left: Figure 11b  
 Top right: Figure 12a  
 Bottom right: Figure 12b



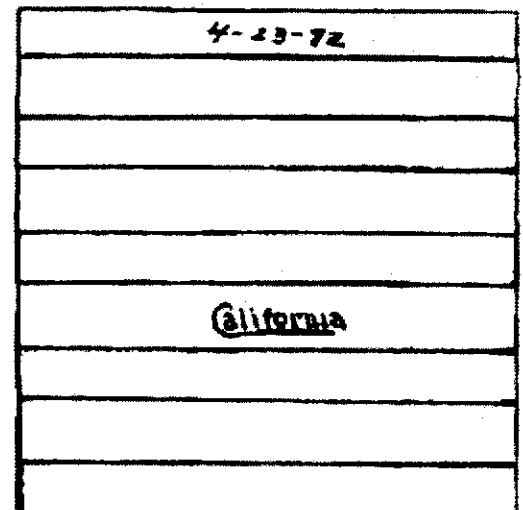
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mounted on floors or walls, etc.

<sup>9</sup>All illustrations are taken from the author's monograph, *A Guide to the Patterns and Markings on the Backs of United States Ceramic Tiles, 1870s-1930s*, The Whatnot Shop, Brooklyn, NY, 1997, and from research done for a revision of that monograph. The tiles pictured are from the author's collection.

<sup>10</sup>Dust-pressed tiles were made from finely ground, sieved and dried clay which were placed in a press and compacted between two dies. The dust-pressed process was patented in England in 1840 by Richard Prosser and refined in the United States in 1875 by Frederic H. Hall (Patent # 164553, June 15, 1875), a principal in the American Encaustic Tiling Company.

<sup>11</sup>Julian Barnard, *Victorian Ceramic Tiles*, New York Graphic Society, Ltd., Greenwich, CT, Figure 80.



<sup>12</sup>Ralph and Terry Kovel, *Kovel's American Art Pottery*, Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, 1993.

<sup>13</sup>Terence A. Lockett, *Collecting Victorian Tiles*, Antique Collectors Club, Ltd., Woodbridge, Suffolk, England, pp. 178, 180.

<sup>14</sup>Information obtained from tile historian Steve Soukup.

## Stoneware Symposium, March 6, 2004



### *Early Stoneware in New Jersey and New York: Origins of an American Industry*

The New Jersey/New York region was critical in the development of the stoneware industry in the United States during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Raw materials, skills, transportation and investment were combined from the early 1700s to transform an Anglo-Saxon tradition to an American enterprise. The Potteries of Trenton Society and The New Jersey Historical Society will collaborate in bringing key scholars and collectors of this material together for the first time in many years.

Mark your calendars now to be in Newark, New Jersey, on Saturday, March 6, 2004, for a day-long symposium of lectures and a panel discussion that will explore the genesis and early growth of the American stoneware industry in the northeast. Speakers will include William Liebeknecht, Principal Investigator at Hunter Research, Inc., who will provide an overview of 18<sup>th</sup> century New Jersey stoneware production (with special empha-

sis on Cheesequake); Brenda Springsted, a local historic archaeologist, will review her work on the Kempel potters of Ringoes; Richard Hunter, President and principal archaeologist of Hunter Research, Inc., will discuss the eighteenth-century Richards stoneware pottery in Trenton; and Meta Janowitz, Material Specialist with URS, will discuss the information gleaned from archaeological excavations on the stoneware potteries that dotted lower Manhattan. Ulysses Grant Dietz, curator of decorative arts at the Newark Museum, will lead a panel of curators and collectors: William C. Ketchum, Jr. ceramic historian; Laurel Racine, Senior Curator at the National Park Service's Northeast Museum Services Center; and Dan Bruhns, one of the foremost collectors of early American stoneware.

For more information, contact Patricia Madrigal, President, Potteries of Trenton Society at *president@potteriesoftrentonsociety.org* or 609-695-0122 (M-Th, 8:30-4:00). Visit our web site, [www.PotteriesofTrentonsociety.org](http://www.PotteriesofTrentonsociety.org), for registration information and form.

The registration fee is \$20 for members of POTS or the New Jersey Historical Society; \$25 for non-members. Registration includes a continental breakfast and closing reception. Lunch will be on your own in nearby restaurants.

The conference will be held at The New Jersey Historical Society, 52 Park Place, Newark, NJ. See the NJHS website for travel information: [www.JerseyHistory.org](http://www.JerseyHistory.org).

POTS received a minigrant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of Cultural Affairs in the Department of State, to help defray costs of the symposium.

### New Web Address

The Potteries of Trenton Society has a new web site address: [potteriesoftrentonsociety.org](http://potteriesoftrentonsociety.org). We regret any inconvenience this may cause.

Phone: 609-695-0122  
Fax: 609-695-0147  
Email: [president@potteriesoftrentonsociety.org](mailto:president@potteriesoftrentonsociety.org)

We're on the web! Check us out at  
[www.potteriesoftrentonsociety.org](http://www.potteriesoftrentonsociety.org)

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Trenton, NJ 08608

The  
Potteries of Trenton Society

## *POTS Membership*

Membership in the Potteries of Trenton Society is open to all interested in Trenton's pottery industry and the ceramic products manufactured here. We welcome pottery workers, historians, archaeologists and collectors. Your contribution is used to support newsletter, lecture, meeting, and conference costs.

**Annual Memberships:**

\_\_\_ Regular (\$20) \_\_\_ Couples (\$25) \_\_\_ Students (\$15, with ID) \_\_\_ Seniors (\$15)

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