

**BLUE-PRINTED POTTERY ITEMS IN THE STOCK BOOK OF AN EARLY  
19th. CENTURY NEW YORK GENERAL MERCHANT  
(Finally!! Proof the American term "Cup Plate" is correct)**

by  
**Martin Pulver, F.R.S.A.**

An interesting hand-written stock-book, kept meticulously from April 28th. 1835 to March 20th. 1840 by a New York merchant, has somehow survived intact. The owners would no doubt have been astounded to learn that the line after line of items of stock with their individual prices, extensions, totals and suppliers' names, could hold any interest at all for readers over 180 years in their future. Yet we know that the chance of detailed contemporary information of the business procedures of such relatively humble firms is rare enough to excite our collectors, if ever it does turn up.

This particular firm starts out on April 27th. 1835 as "Messrs. North & Wheeler, New York" and in May 1836, it becomes "Messrs. Wheeler & Co., New York". The Company name remains the same until July 1839, although the address is occasionally varied from the majority of entries where it is still "New York", to "Catskill", "Walton", "Albany" or "Hudson". In July 1839, the firm's title becomes "Messrs. Wheeler, Gardiner & Co., New York" with an occasional address change to "Walton". There is a change of handwriting on 16th. October 1839 indicating a change of bookkeeper at that point and the address is less often given as "New York". The other addresses are "Athens", "Walton", "Catskill" and "Oxford". The last entry is dated March 20th. 1840 under "Wheeler, Gardiner & Co., Walton".

While the general merchandise purchased by this firm is fascinating in itself, preserved food, textiles, clothing and household supplies are not our particular interest -except where the household supplies are ceramic and peak of excitement -blue-printed pottery! Such items form a very small percentage of the goods listed, only eight pages out of ninety-seven show some mention and we illustrate a portion of these for clarity.

The reader will note that individual pricings are in British currency, presumably because, with few exceptions, the goods were purchased from importers handling only British goods, and then those prices were converted for totaling, to American currency. Details of the conversion rate, although not absolutely consistent, seem to indicate that eight British shillings (8/-) equalled \$1 American. As eight shillings in today's British currency equals forty pence, this indicates a conversion rate in 1835/40 of \$2.50 to £1. (Perhaps some

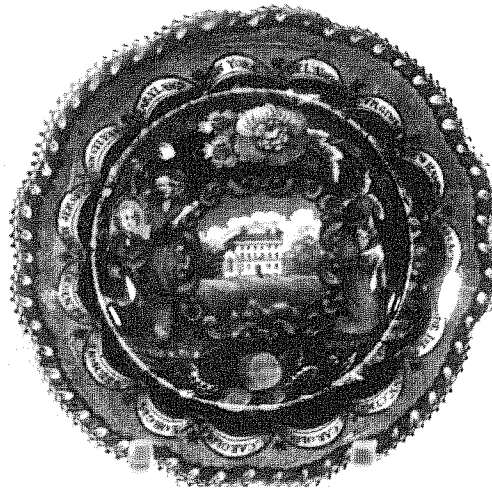
fiscal historian among our readers would be kind enough to confirm or refute my suggestion). At this point, our younger readers might find a table of the older form of British currency of some help. In that system, abandoned as recently as the early 1970s, twelve old pence equalled one shilling and twenty shillings equalled one pound sterling (therefore two hundred and forty old pence equalled one pound sterling).

Round sums in shillings were indicated thus 5/- (five shillings) and fractions of a shilling thus 3/6. The latter would indicate three shillings and six pence or three and one half shillings, (remember twelve pence, not ten, to a shilling). Where actual fractions of half or quarter were shown, they referred to old pence and fractions of a penny. Finally, in the book, quantities are priced in units or fractions of dozens (lots of twelve) or grosses (lots of one hundred and forty-four).

The book's earliest list devoted to ceramic pots is dated 27th. April 1835 and holds a great deal of interest for us. It is as follows:

- 2 doz. Black (?) tea pots
- 1 doz. C.C.(?) Chambers
- 3 doz. C.C.(?) Bowls (two prices presumably indicate two sizes)
- 1 doz. enamel ditto and half doz. creams (two prices again)
- Half doz. salts (two prices) and two doz. tumblers (two prices)
- 1 doz soups
- 2 doz. plates (three sizes)
- Half doz. nappies\* (two prices and large items as reflected in the prices)
- Half gross printed teas (priced in pence and no colour mentioned)
- 2 doz. pink muffins (not a popular colour in Britain at that time)
- 1 doz. **CUP PLATES\*\*** (PROOF AT LAST! THEY DID EXIST)
- Half gross enamelled teas "strangely enough, cheaper than the printed teas)

Cartage for all the above totalled twenty-five cents. The supplier was "J.Barrow & Co,"



A **cup plate** by Clews from the popular "STATES" series. This is a full border, 4 1/2" d plate

We can pick out several items of particular interest from the next delivery of pots. This was listed on October 1st. 1835 and the supplier was "Jno. Wright Jr. & Co." (Incidentally, this name tends to confirm what we might in fact expect, that the importer was American and not British; the suffix "Jr." being found much more commonly in American business names; and if more confirmation is needed, the list includes "Pitchers", a term used very rarely in Britain, the preferred description being Jugs).

For the first time, the list clearly stipulates "Blue Printed" wares and the first three items seem to refer to "1 doz. sets" of each. "Twiffler" is a plate size still recognized and refers to a "between" size - smaller than a tea plate but larger than a cup plate. "Hoop Plates" are mentioned. What are they? A word which is difficult to decipher but may be "Covd", perhaps a shortened form of "Covered", refers to "Dishes" and "Bakers" which is to be expected, but also to "Sauce Boats". Were they also sometimes supplied covered? (Could

*this refer to a sauce tureen?* ED) A most unusual form listed is "1 Pr. Decanters". These would surely be a great rarity for collectors



Above a sauce boat and a sauce tureen. Were the merchants referring to one of these when they wrote "2 pr cov'd sauce boats"?

to find; however, there are just a few glass items in the list and as the decanters are immediately below "1 doz. Cut Tumblers", which must certainly be cut glass, it is likely that the decanters were glass too, as were the next item - "1 doz. Wines" - and the next - "2 doz. Glass Cup Plates" clearly indicated. What exactly were a "Set Blue Soup Tureen Cups"? It is also quite a surprise to see "Tureen" spelt in the modern fashion; the old-fashioned spelling "Terrine" was used constantly in other documents of this date. "Moco Fruit Bowls" are also mentioned; could they possibly be referring

to Mocha ware? (that body was certainly at the height of its popularity at that time, the earliest known dated piece being 1799).

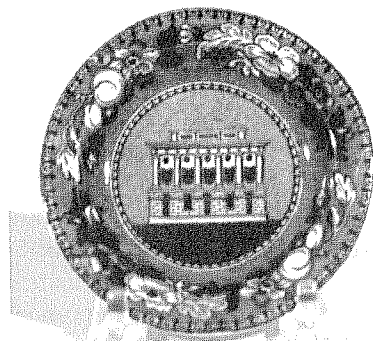
The next section of particular interest to us is dated "May 28th. 1836. Once again the supplier is "Jno. Wright Jr. & Co.", but this time their address is added - "36, Water St." Here a "Sauce Tureen" makes its appearance for the first time and "Moco Pitchers" are added to the "Moco Bowls". It is also worth noting that "1 Blue Ewer" (not Pitcher) "& Basin" is listed with other toilet items, "Soap Box" and "Brush Tray". Finally,

Lustre ware is mentioned for the only time in the book; "half doz. Lustre Creams". This ware was greatly in demand in Britain at this time and so it is very surprising to find it forming such a small percentage of this firm's imports of pottery.

The next listed section of pottery interest, dated "May 13th. 1837" seems to form the peak of the dealings in this material

shown in the book. The total value of \$115.24 for pottery plus a little glass, is by far the largest single transaction in those items. The same company has supplied the goods, (this time entered as "John Wright Jr. & Co." by the

new bookkeeper). Unfortunately, his writing is not as clear as his predecessor's and this makes it more difficult for us to decipher items of particular interest. Nevertheless, one item which alone totals the relatively enormous sum of \$16.20, seems to be for "3 Gross Pink Blue & Brown Teas" followed by another \$9 worth of the same. (Of course we can only speculate as to whether these "Teas" were a mixture of single coloured items, or whether each piece was printed in the three colours mentioned.) The listing of "Yellow Peppers" is the

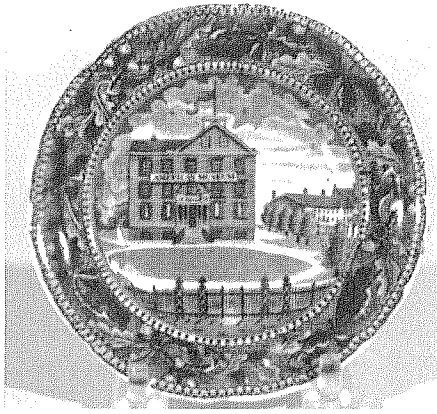


Here we have a 3 1/2" d medium dark blue cup plate, HOLLIDAY STREET THEATRE (Baltimore) by Henshall.



A true rarity in cup plates is this 4 5/8" d dark blue "THE AQUADUCT BRIDGE" (an Eric Canal view) from the Star and Flute border series (a series consisting of four known pieces).

only occasion on which we find a mention of items with that colour-glaze in this book, but this is in line with its comparative scarcity in other markets. So far, our sections of interest have contained items only of ceramics or glass, but two items here are ambiguous. "Stove foot Lamps" (whatever they may be) and "Japan Lanterns" might be manufactured in ceramics



4 5/8"d "AMERICAN MUSEUM" example from the Stevenson Acorn and Oak Leaf border series

or glass. but may equally well be of other materials and have been included mention of a "China" item; (the description itself is indecipherable). At the time in question, "china" was an acceptable alternative word for "porcelain", Could these half-dozen items have represented

a daring experiment by our merchant to raise his sights to include wealthier customers (and if so, did it succeed)? The cost of porcelains over earthenwares, since the earliest productions to the present day, has maintained a remarkably constant ratio of three to one and the high cost shown in the stock figures indicates that this "china", may well have actually been some form of porcelain. (If it originated in Britain, it would have been bone china, otherwise hard-paste).

The last two sections to concern us show a marked decline in purchases of pots. Probably it was found that profits in those items were less than expected and capital could be more usefully laid out in other directions, (The possible speculation in porcelain bodies may have gone horribly wrong). On "November 28th, 1837" a small purchase totalling \$9.76 for three items was made from "John Wright Jr, & Co." once again and, a long time after, on "July 3rd, 1839, the last order in the book for the material in which we are interested, was placed with a firm which may have been a continuation of the last supplier, "Wright Shillin & Co.". There is nothing of note in the items ordered on this occasion, except perhaps that green printing is mentioned for the first time - "2 gross Emerald Teas". The total cost was a respectable \$41.62, but still did not approach that of earlier orders and seems to have been a last fling after a long pause. As we know, the last overall entry in this hook (by no means necessarily the end of the firm) was to be less than a year later. For all we know, business in pots may well have picked up again in succeeding years and reached unprecedented heights.

To try to make definitive judgements on the entire early 19th, century ceramics import business into the USA, on the basis of the stock records of a single relatively small general merchant over a five year period, is of course an impossibility and I do not claim to do anything of that nature. However, this unexpected survival of a contemporary document

gives us an opportunity to lift a corner of the veil which hides from us a way of life (and business) which is long gone. In addition, steeped as we all are in our current business attitudes, without the puzzles posed by some of the seemingly incomprehensible preferences and actions of our business forbears, we would probably never be stimulated into trying to get into their skins and understanding a small part of their world.



3 1/2"d THE LANDING OF LAFAYETTE, with the solid blue band border.

\* "Nappies" were made at many British factories in the early 19th. century. Unfortunately, their precise use and appearance seems to have been forgotten. I have consulted Mr. Robert Copeland of the Spode/Copeland

factory who is a former practicing potter and who passed on to me his best educated guess. He thinks that they were flat-bottomed bowls (rather like soup plates without a rim) made in various sizes from six ins. diam. upwards. However, he cannot make a sensible guess at their use. Naturally, if any reader can put us right on this, we should be delighted.

\*\* "Cup Plates", as you know, have long been a source of dispute as to whether they actually existed, or whether the name was fabricated to fill a gap in our knowledge. On the whole, American opinion has been that cup plates have always been around and have always been referred to by that name. British opinion has always expressed doubt and has inclined to attribute it to American "wishful thinking". I feel that the references in this book establish beyond doubt that cup plates were a perfectly normal label to put on small plates in early 19th century America. To claim that it was in international use is a far more difficult matter. After much discussion, I feel that these plates may have originated in the early American method of taking tea, which followed closely the contemporary Continental European (not the British) of using the saucer to cover the cup while allowing the tea to steep. The wet saucer would then not be usable in polite society as a receptacle on which to put down the cup and so a small plate would have been necessary to take on that duty. This may have been the origin of the cup plate,

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT:** My profound gratitude goes to my good friend, Mrs. Bella Kleinman of New York who originally found the ledger, which inspired this article. She was later kind enough to present it to me, in view of my great interest in the subject.

*Two pages of the original ledger are reproduced on the next page. Ed.*

New York April 27 1835

2 doz 1/2 Blk Sea) Lot	10/-	2.50
1 " C. C. Chambers	18/-	2.25
23 " " Bowls 4/-		2.62
1 " Enal. do 4/- 1/2 doz Creams 4/- 2/-		.87
1/2 " Salt 4/- 5/- 2 " Dumbles 3/6 1/2		1.25
1 " Soap 4/-		.50
2 " Plates 3/6 3/3 5/-		2.44
1/2 " Stamps 12/- 15/-		1.69
1/2 doz Printed Seas	\$4	3.00
2 doz Milk Muffins	6/-	1.50
1 " Cup Plates	3/6	1.44
1/2 doz Enamelled Seas	12/-	7.50
Carriage		.25
		17.07
Rec'd Payment of 5/- Ct		.95
of J. G. Pearson & Co		18.12

New York April 29 1835

15 Bred Sherry 4/8 doz 6.025	34	38.00
2 Rhine's Nail Rods 1.0-0	50	6.25
2 Rhine's Nail Rods 2.17	38	2.28
1 Rhine's Nail Rod do 2.26	44	4.02
1 do 1/8 " Hook do 2.0	58	3.65
1 Row (A) 1/4 Steel 4 1/4	57	2.25
1 English do 26	14	3.64
1 doz Menard Forks \$1/2		3.25
1 Plate 2 4. 8. 10. 1/2 Mails 100	67	59.00
Carriage		.38
		92.70
Rec'd + J. G. Pearson & Co		4.09
		98.79

New York Oct 1 1835

10 doz Sugar Diamonds	27	2.50
10 " Lumps	20	1.00
3 " Love Drops	24	.44
1 " Liqueur	67	1.70
3 " Rose Lozenges	37	1.12
2 " Mottos	37	.70
1/4 " Crystaline Crispent		.70
1 " Rose		.20
		9.09

Rec'd Payment of 2

Eliza J. G. Pearson

New York Oct 1 1835

1 doz 1/2 Blue Printed Plates	1	1.00
1 " " " Swiffles	1	.75
1 " " " Muffins	1	.60
1 " " " Glass Plates	1	1.00
1 pr Card Plates	1	1.75
1/4 " " " Bowls 23/- 23/6	1	1.60
1/5 " " " Plates 23/- 23/6 17/-	1	2.20
2 " " " Paule Bowls 1/6	2	.30
1 " " " Jan Pat Sugar & Creams 7/-	1	3.60
4 Sets Seas 3/- 1 Bowl & 2 Plates 7/6	4	3.00
2 Dishes	31	1.70
1 doz Cut Dumbles		2.20
1 Pr Decanters		1.00
1 doz " " "		2.50
2 " Glass Cuped Plates	3/6	1.00

Ed. The confusion concerning the term "cup plates" has been around since A. W. Coysh disputed the term in his 1970 publication, *Blue and White Transferware*. Mr Coysh saw the light in his later book *The Dictionary of Blue and White Printed Pottery* co-authored with R. K. Henrywood. Many Americans do share Mr. Coysh's questions regarding these plates (see Norman Wolfe's comments at the end of his Part II coverage of the Clews pottery, in this issue), but the majority of us "Yanks" have sailed serenely along, unconcerned by these questions and totally at ease with our terminology (and possible ignorance). Both the American Glass world and the American collectors of English ceramics have always assumed the usage, as put forth by Mary Louise Gutman, in the next article was correct. The usage, as discussed by Mr. Pulver, at the end of his article, seems to make a lot more sense to me, however, who really knows?? These little plates will continue to be highly sought after and extremely hard to obtain, no matter what we label them.

"AROUND THE BLOCK" continued from page 25  
 and fragile pieces of Americana. I have felt for years, that this market has a long way to go to catch up. There may be

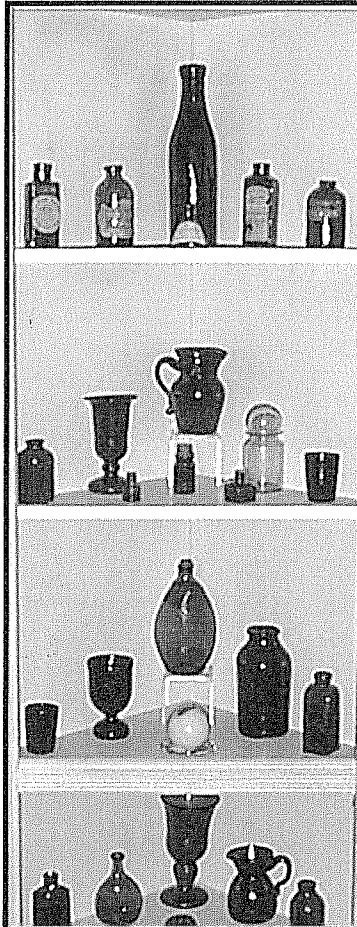
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# THE Q China and Glass Quarterly

Volume I

October/November 1997

No. 4



## Meet the Collector

A Rapidly Enlarging Collection of New England Blown Glass

## Meet Rex Stark



King George I of the House of Washington? But for the man, it could have happened.

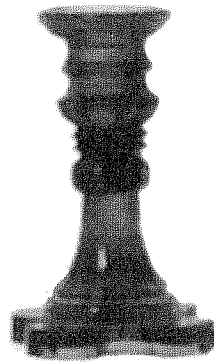
## What's Inside



Cup Plates - they are what they are. What are they?

## Going! Going! Gone!

Like the stock market, glass just keeps on going.



*Plus So Much More.....*