

Nic. Pottery

Newsletter of the Nicodemus Center for Ceramic Studies Vol. 12 No. 1 Winter/Spring 2011

Artistic & Economic Impact of the John Bell Pottery

In October 30, 2010 the firm of Pook & Pook in Downingtown, PA held an auction from the collection of Richard and Joane Smith. This auction produced quite a buzz within the Bell pottery community. A salt-glazed stoneware harvest jug with cobalt decorations, the one shown below, sold for \$59,250. The twin-handled jug is stamped John Bell on the neck and inscribed Waynesboro, PA May 12th 1860 on the opposite

shoulder, with the date underlined. On the base, the same information is repeated along with the name J W Bell (for John W., Bell's oldest son).

So what do we know about the Bell Pottery at the time it made the harvest jug? The Franklin County tax return for 1860 lists both John, age 60, and John W., age 32, as potters. That same year the U.S. Census of Manufacturers credits the Bell Pottery with making 10,000 earthenware pots and 700 stoneware pots. The total value of this production is recorded as \$700, or about 6.5 cents per piece on average.

How would these values translate into today's dollars and how would today's \$59,250 for the harvest jug translate into 1860's dollars? Thanks to others who have worked on measuring worth between different historical periods (www.measuringworth.com), we can estimate that \$1.00 in 1860 is worth

\$26.60 in today's dollars. Apply this to Bell's 1860 output of 10,700 pots and they would be worth all of \$18,620 in 2010. Really? That works out to \$4 a pot, barely enough to cover the cost of clay, glaze and fuel for the firing. And if we take that \$58,250 harvest jug of today, it would be worth \$2,227.44 in 1860's dollars, or more than three times the total value of pots made at the Bell Pottery that year.

What to make of this? Consider that no pottery marked John Bell has been made, at least legitimately, in more than 130 years and no pottery marked John W. in 116 years. And consider the increase in demand by the collecting/investing world for one-of-a-kind pieces of historic folk art. Through these pressures, those Bell pieces that are few in number bring prices in excess of their expected value by exponential amounts.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR 2011

- February through May

HISTORIC FOLK POTTERY FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE NICODEMUS CENTER FOR CERAMIC STUDIES, 11 AM to 2 PM, Monday through Friday and by special arrangement, room 302, General Studies building, Penn State Mont Alto (PSMA).

- April 18, July 11 and October 10

BOARD OF DIRECTORS QUARTERLY MEETINGS, 5:30 PM, room 302, General Studies building, PSMA.

- February 2 - March 9

INTRODUCTION TO CERAMICS STUDIO CLASS, meets 6 to 9 PM on Wednesday evenings in room 008, General Studies building, PSMA.

- May 6 - 7

CUMBERLAND VALLEY CRAFTS GUILD SPRING STUDIO TOUR, 10 AM to 5 PM, room 008, General Studies building, PSMA.

- May 26 through September 29

PENN NATIONAL FARMERS MARKET, Thursdays, 3:00 to 6:00 PM, Penn National Golf Center or Trellis Terrace.

- June 13 – 30

INTRODUCTION TO CERAMICS STUDIO CLASS, meets 6 to 9 PM on Monday and Thursday evenings in room 008, General Studies building, PSMA.

- July 16

CHAMBERFEST ARTS CELEBRATION DAY, Saturday, 9 AM to 4 PM, Chambersburg.

- August 27

SHIPPENSBURG CORN FESTIVAL, Saturday, 8 AM to 5 PM, Shippensburg.

- September 17

7TH ANNUAL CUMBERLAND VALLEY POTTERY FESTIVAL, Saturday, 10 AM to 4 PM at Renfrew Park, Waynesboro, PA. Guild members and 25 regional potters will be selling their works and conducting hands-on workshops for

visitors, including hand building and throwing on the potter's wheel.

- October 5 - November 9

INTRODUCTION TO CERAMICS STUDIO CLASS, meets 6 to 9 PM on Wednesday evenings in room 008, General Studies building, PSMA.

- October 15

STUDIO OPEN HOUSE, Saturday, noon to 3 PM, room 008, General Studies building, PSMA. Pottery making demonstrations and workshops for the general public.

- October 15 through November

POTTERY GUILD'S FALL EXHIBIT, room 302, General Studies building, PSMA.

- October 29 - 30

CUMBERLAND VALLEY CRAFTS GUILD FALL STUDIO TOUR, 10 AM to 5 PM, room 008, General Studies building, PSMA.

- December 2 through 9

POTTERY GUILD HOLIDAY SALE, 11 AM to 4 PM daily, in the pottery studio, room 008, General Studies building, PSMA.



Mont Alto Pottery Guild members David Goldstein and Mary Ashe-Mahr are shown helping at the guild's sales booth during last year's Cumberland Valley Pottery Festival at Renfrew Park, Waynesboro.

Photo: Tracy Holliday

MEMBERS — Nicodemus Center 2010-2011

* Pottery Students/Guild Members

Life Members

Mr. & Mrs. Kenton H. Broyles
Thomas S. Heefner

Master Potters

Marty Amrhein & Harvey Sheets
Marie & Ed Beck
Mr. & Mrs. Thomas E. Beck
Ruth S. Bryson
Mr. & Mrs. George P. Buckey
Greg & Debi Duffey
Mr. & Mrs. Patrick E. Fleagle
Richard & Kaye George
Dr. Edward S. Goodhart
Diana Keiholtz-Gunder & Paul
Gunder

Senior Judge John W. Keller
Marguerite F. Kiersz
Jerry & Mary Jo Kowallis
Krepps Dental Studio
(Mike & Brenda Krepps)

Tom McFarland *
A. Kathryn Oller
Dr. & Mrs. Paul Orange
Mr. & Mrs. Charles Roby
Mr. & Mrs. William J. Roby
Stephen & Sharon Rost
Mrs. Eunice Statler
Dr. John C. Stauffer
Betty D. Thompson
Dr. G. William Thorne
WACCO Properties
(Bob Correll)
John & Gloria Walker
Angela Grove Weagly

Journeyman Potters

Myrna Binkley
Don & Phyllis Brothers
Mr. & Mrs. Max E. Creager
Bill & Twila Flohr
Jack G. Handshaw, Jr. *

LeRoy S. Maxwell
Doris O. & Harry L. Oyler
Willard & Virginia Rahn

Potter's Apprentices

James & Melodie Anderson-Smith *
Mr. & Mrs. Stephen E. Beck
Mr. & Mrs. Robert W. Brown
Mr. & Mrs. Jon B. Cook
Mr. & Mrs. James Deegan
Jeffrey S. Evans & Associates
William & Elizabeth George
Paul & Joan Jones
Will & Jill Kessler Family
Wayne & Debbie Martz
Mr. & Mrs. Donald G. McCleaf
Mr. & Mrs. Edward A. Miller
Harry G. Morningstar, Sr.
Ken & Cheryl Plummer
Mr. & Mrs. Richard G. Shook
Mr. & Mrs. Walter P. Smith
Dr. & Mrs. Robert G. Steiner
Mrs. Mary B. Unger
Dan Wiley * & Joan Mitchell

Potter's Helpers

Mary Ashe-Mahr *
Michael Bannon *
Jackie Bayer *
Dr. & Mrs. Richard C. Bell
Judy Hoffman Bolton *
Sara Breed *
Nickole Bricker *
Buchanan Auto Park
Buchanan Automotive
Ed Burrows *
Nora Burrows *
Mary Carson *
Erin Delaney *
Mr. & Mrs. Paul E. Dunlap, Jr.
Ronald Freshman
Laurie Gamble *

Don & Pat Glasgow
Dr. David C. Gnage
Dr. David Goldenberg
David & Penny Goldstein *
Staci Grimes *
Grove-Bowersox Funeral Home
(James & Barbara Bowersox)

Lisa Hatch *
Jay & Pat Heefner
William H. Helfrick
Tammy Howe *
Pat Landerkin *
Doris Large
Peggy Lind *
Evangeline Long *
Linda & Terry Martin
Kelle & John Massimilla
Marilyn McCarney
Bev McFarland *
Mike Minster *
Andy Moats *
Kristie Moats *
Cathy Monn *
Paul Monn *
Gary Myers
Patrice L. Nitterhouse
Kumiko Nuss *
Laura Patterson *
Betsy Payette
Bill & Debbie Pflager & Family
Jack & Katrinka Pritchard
Michelle Radbill *
Kelsey Rohmer *
Mary Ellen Selvaggio
Deb Shandera *
Darla Shank *
Steve Sharp *
Beth Stephey *
Betty C. Sterner
Linda Stone *
Andrea Struble
Nikki Sussman *

(members cont., page 4)

WINTER & SPRING POTTERY CLASSES AT PENN STATE MONT ALTO

The Nic. Center will be offering introduction to ceramics studio classes for adults from February 2 through March 9 and from June 13 through June 30. The February class will meet on Wednesday evenings from 6 to 9 PM in the center's pottery studio, room 008, General Studies building on the Mont Alto campus. The June class will meet on Monday and Thursday evenings from 6 to 9 PM in the pottery studio. The instructor for both sessions will be Tom McFarland, fine arts teacher at St. Maria Goretti High School, Hagerstown, assisted by the center's James Smith.

The classes are designed to introduce students to the art of making pottery and sculptural objects in clay. Students receive instruction and produce their own projects using various clay working techniques that include coil construction, slab building, press molding and throwing on the potter's wheel.

McFarland holds both Bachelor of Fine Arts and Master of Fine Arts degrees from the Maryland

Institute College of Art, Baltimore. He has more than 43 years experience as an art instructor and free-lance artist and is internationally know for his ceramic and fiberglass sculptures. Smith holds both Bachelors and Masters degrees in Anthropology from the College of William and Mary and has spent the last 30 years as an historic archaeologist and museum director working in the field of historic folk pottery. He began creating his own works in 2003 and is the founder of the Mont Alto Pottery Guild.

The ceramic studio class size is limited to eight and pre-registration is required. The cost of the class is \$100 for center members and college faculty, staff and students and \$125 for the general public with a \$50 fee for materials for all registrants. All participants will be allowed access to the pottery studio outside class time. For more information and to pre-register for the February 2 or June 13 sessions, e-mail James Smith at jms48@psu.edu or call the center at (717)762-4670.

(members from page 3)

Sally Sussman *
Joanne Stepler Thompson
Lisa Wagner *
Don & Peggy Weller
Kirk Wishard *
Dr. & Mrs. Robert R. Zimmerman

Honorary

June Anderson
Penn National

NCCS Board of Directors

Marty Amrhein (President)
Dan Wiley (Vice President)
Walter P. Smith (Secretary)
Staci Grimes (Treasurer)
Richard C. Bell
Thomas S. Heefner

NCCS Advisory Board

Kenton H. Broyles
Donald Glasgow
John W. Keller

Willard Rahn
William Roby

NCCS Staff

James M. Smith (Executive Director)

IN MEMORIUM

Harry S. Anderson
(Founding & Honorary Member)

Pauline Maxwell
(Founding Member/Master Potter)

Mont Alto Pottery Guild and Pottery in the Raku Style

Beginning this spring, the Mont Alto Pottery Guild will expand its non traditional firing methods to include Raku pottery. In its original context within the Japanese pottery tradition, Raku meant simple, unadorned hand-built bowls created for the tea ceremony as part of the growing Zen movement within the religious boundaries of Buddhism. Chōjirō, son of a Chinese immigrant potter, is credited with first developing what later became known as Raku in Japan's pottery center, Kyoto, during the mid 1500s. Originally called Ima-yaki, or "now wares," Raku refers to both the pottery style and the surname of 14 successive generations of Chōjirō's lineage.

With the emergence of the studio pottery movement in the early to mid 1900s within Europe and North America, exploration of Raku style pottery began to make inroads into the more common firing practices. As with pit-firing, the Raku process creates decorative wares not suitable for food or drink. It relies on a rapid firing of less than an hour to reach the desired temperature, often less than 1750° F. Once this tem-



Tracy Holliday

Raku potter Mark Poole, Baltimore, is shown with his work at the 2010 Pottery Festival. Note the brilliant glaze colors and matte black of the clay body common to the Raku style in Mark's work.

perature is reached, the pot is pulled from the kiln and placed in combustible materials such as sawdust, leaves or shredded newspapers. The heat from the pot ignites these materials, using up the available oxygen surrounding the pot, resulting in an increase in the amount of carbon. This reduction causes the metal oxides within the glaze to brighten and unglazed surfaces to blacken.

(Note: Studio members Mike Bannon and Kirk Wishard share credit for pushing the Guild into the creative orb of Raku.)

(cont. from page 1)

For the Nic. Center, our interest in John W.'s harvest jug is not driven by the dollars it generated. Of greater interest is the jug's place within the body of work we know today as John Bell and of those pieces that are directly tied to the hand of John W.

And what are we to make of the date, May 12th 1860? Is it in commemoration of an event in the Bell family or an achievement of the pottery shop? Or is it a commissioned work for a Bell patron? At present, we don't know, though one thought for consideration is the role of John W. in the operation of the Bell Shop. Dated pots made by him are not unknown. In fact, the



Photos of the harvest jug are from Pook & Pook's online catalog of Oct. 30, 2010.

first piece entered into the center's permanent collection in 1994 is a faux stoneware earthenware crock. It is stamped John Bell beneath the rim, dated April 22, 1858 on one side with Waynesboro, PA on the opposite, both in cobalt lettering on the shoulder, and signed JWB in cobalt on the base. Is it a coincidence that John W. is making faux stoneware in 1858 and then salt-glazed stoneware in 1860? Could this harvest jug be from an early on, or even first, stoneware firing at the Bell Pottery? Most Bell scholars place this date a decade earlier. If any of you know of an earlier dated Bell stoneware piece, let us know. You can reach the center by e-mail at jms48@psu.edu.

NCCS Financial Statement January 1 to December 31, 2010 and current budget for 2011

Income	2010 (actual)	2011 (budget)
Grants/Professional Services	\$ 2,121	\$ 3,500
Membership & Corporate Contributions	\$ 5,540	\$ 6,000
Pottery sales/publications	\$12,557	\$13,500
Student & Guild Fees	\$ 8,365	\$ 8,500
Events	\$ 758	\$ 850
Misc.	\$ 349	\$ -00-
Total Income	\$30,844	\$35,100
Expenses		
Fund-raising expenses	\$ 1,988	\$ 2,000
Materials/postage		
Pottery reproductions		
Printing		
Newsletters		
Accessions	\$ -00-	\$ 500
Research/Exhibits (staff & materials)	\$20,000	\$23,000
Pottery Studio (instructor/materials)	\$ 3,275	\$ 3,500
Administrative		
Office rental	\$ 1	\$ 1
Communication	\$ 530	\$ 550
Insurance	\$ 1,597	\$ 1,700
Payroll taxes/FICA	\$ 1,250	\$ 1,300
Accountant	\$ 690	\$ 690
Total Expenses	\$29,330	\$35,101



NCCS

**NICODEMUS
CENTER FOR
CERAMIC
STUDIES**

of the Cumberland/Shenandoah
Valley Pottery Tradition

**Membership
Renewal for
2011**

- Sustaining Member**
\$500 – \$1,000
- Master Potter**
\$100 – \$499
- Journeyman Potter**
\$50 – \$99
- Potter's Apprentices**
\$50 (family membership)
- Potter's Helper**
\$25
- Student Member**
\$10

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

(used only for NCCS newsletters and event notices)

NCCS is a nonprofit corporation
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