

Majolica Matters

The Quarterly Newsletter of the
Majolica International Society
Summer 1996



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Eighth Annual Meeting

by Polly Wilbert

If you don't mind, I'd like to start off this issue with a report on the Sunday morning business meeting in April at the Society's eighth annual meeting, which was held in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. This was my sixth annual meeting, and I can say with great assurance that our group has "The Big Mo" -- momentum! Before the weekend began, in discussing an agenda for Sunday morning's business meeting, some members of the Executive Committee were a little concerned that we wouldn't have enough to talk about at the meeting to fill an hour. Well, was there a lot to talk about! Everyone had suggestions. Joan Stacke ran around the room with a portable microphone so that everyone's contributions could be heard. I took notes on a flip chart at the front of the room. Everyone was participating. Ideas that two or three years ago wouldn't even have received consideration -- like taking a future meeting as far west as Texas -- were met with enthusiasm by collectors and dealers alike. Five members volunteered to help

with the newsletter: Helen Cunningham (Nashville), Nicholas Dawes (NYC), Pam Ferrazzutti (Toronto), Marshall Katz (Pittsburgh), and Moe Wizenberg (Oklahoma City). Cheryl Smith of Scituate, Mass. volunteered to help with our membership/ mailing database. It was great!

So, the meeting . . . Our treasurer Joan Stacke gave her report, noting that we work with a budget so that the registration fees for the annual meeting weekend cover all, or almost all, of the expenses related to the weekend. After the meeting bills are paid, we expect to have approximately \$10,000 in the bank to cover 1996 expenses (with some dues still coming in).

(This reminds me that if you haven't paid your dues for 1996, we take this to mean you are no longer interested in being a member of the Society and this will be your last issue of the newsletter. Shortly, we will purge the membership/ mailing lists of non-current members. We expect to have about 500 fully paid active members following that process.)

Locations for future meetings were discussed. Our 1997 meeting is slated for a return on the weekend of April 11, 12 and 13 to The Nikko Hotel in the Buckhead section of Atlanta, which was the site of a spectacular MIS annual meeting in 1995. These dates are the same as those of the expanded Scott's Antiques Show, which

now runs a shuttle bus between its two exhibit facilities just south of Atlanta. And, we are looking into holding our 1998 10th anniversary meeting in New York City.

Much discussion ensued as to other future meeting locations (Texas noted above). Places like Chicago and New Orleans received positive comments. The idea of holding the meeting on the same weekend each year also generated a great deal of discussion and comment. This might make it easier for a number of dealers with busy show schedules to participate in Majolica Heaven every year. Michael Strawser (Society founding president and majolica auctioneer from Indiana) volunteered to poll the dealers on this subject. Tying our gathering to a specific weekend would essentially split it away from the tradition of scheduling the meeting in conjunction with a major antiques show. Please, if you haven't sent back your blue questionnaire sheet from the meeting, take a moment to fill it out and send it back. If you weren't with us this year and would like to contribute to the discussion of where and when for future meetings and whether you enjoy an antiques show or are just as happy visiting antiques shops and/or cultural sites, please drop us a line. We want to hear from you.

Other ideas that were offered: More activities for new members and beginning collectors to educate them about majolica. A light buffet supper on Friday night, when members would be introduced during our "all around the room" tradition, slides of individual collections and majolica reproductions could be shown, and there could be a speaker on a majolica-related topic. Seminars on special topics could be held on Saturday morning or in the afternoon before Barter 'n Buy. Suggested

topics were: Reproductions, repairs, registry marks, glazes -- the differences between American and English, appraisals, insurance. There was particular interest in individual collections and one suggestion was to video tape collectors at home with their collections. A program committee was also suggested as a way to ask for topics, especially from dealers. Suzy Benzinger (NYC), offered to assist with program development. Words of caution were expressed reminding us not to lose our focus on majolica, no matter how we change the format of the weekend. The need for more publicity and for postcards for exhibiting dealers to send out in advance of Majolica Heaven was also pointed out.

After a full hour of energetic back and forth on all these topics, the meeting ended and Majolica Heaven '96 opened its doors. All in all, it was very gratifying for the Executive Committee to have such an energetic and spirited discussion occur at this year's business meeting -- gone are the days when these discussions might at best have been described as laconic.

Friday:

MajoliCake and Coffee started off the weekend on Friday night beginning at 8 p.m. Marshall Katz of Pittsburgh spoke about the 19th-century followers of the highly innovative 15th-century potter Bernard Palissy and showed slides, many of which were from his just published and very beautiful book written with Robert Lehr, Palissy Ware. (Information on ordering their book can be found on Page 13)

Following his first encounter with a piece of Palissy ware at the home of a friend, Marshall began his passionate pursuit of not only actual pieces of Palissy ware -- he

owns one of the largest private collections of Palissy ware, more than 200 examples -- but also of information on the makers of this imaginative and at times somewhat "over the top" variation of majolica. As a result, he has become a leading authority on the subject and has very generously shared information on Palissy and his followers with the Society and the public through many articles and two books. In his talk, Marshall offered a survey of the followers of Palissy, beginning with the School of Paris and following with what he calls "The Independents". He pointed out the brilliant and unsurpassed cobalt glazes of George Pull, stating that, in his opinion, not even Minton's blue glazes were as fine as Pull's. He noted that the publication of Charles Darwin's book, The Origin of the Species, in 1859 created a great awareness of the animal sciences and stirred people's interest in the natural world. He also emphasized that Palissy ware was made to sell and that the publication of Darwin's book occurred at the same time as Palissy's followers were creating some of their greatest works.

Marilyn Karmason showed slides of majolica from a number of private collections and Joan Stacke showed slides of reproduction majolica so that members could be educated about some of the flood of reproductions that have entered the market. Generous London dealers Ian and Rita Smythe brought a case of 17 photo albums to the meeting, which featured many amazing pieces of majolica that they have seen and sold over the years and these were particularly enjoyed by everyone.

Saturday:

Saturday morning dawned bright and cold, with a bit of brisk wind. After a slight delay, the MajoliVan departed for antiquing

in Adamstown, Pennsylvania and many members saw each other in and about Black Angus and the other antique malls there. One member reported that the Eastern National Show in Harrisburg was one of the nicest shows that she had ever attended. Several other members visited Chadd's Ford to see the Wyeth paintings and The Barnes Foundation in Merion for the amazing collection of French Impressionist paintings amassed there in the home of Dr. Albert Barnes.

John and Beckie Boraten graciously hosted an open house of their collection of Etruscan majolica in Phoenixville, the site of the Griffen, Smith & Hill pottery. Many members who visited the Boratens reported that this was one of the highlights of the weekend. "Majolica John" has also offered to open their collection to any other members who find themselves in the area in the future. Please feel free to call John and Beckie if you're headed their way. (Ph. No. 215-933-7620)

At the end of the afternoon, everyone was back at the hotel for Barter 'n Buy and the bounteous offering of hors d'oeuvres at the cocktail party. After catching up on the day's activities, everyone went into the dining room and we began our traditional introductions of all the members and guests present.

Following dinner, we were presented with one of the most successful and delightful talks that we have yet been privileged to hear. Eric Knowles, the bow-tied auctioneer from the noted London auction house Bonhams, had us rolling in the aisles with his witty and informative talk on auctions and his advice on how novice auction attendees should approach their first auction

experience. To illustrate his lively talk, Eric showed slides of some of the more magnificent pieces of majolica that Bonhams has auctioned and some that were part of his personal collection of "cheeky monkeys."

All in all, the weekend was a success, and we are already looking forward to next year's gathering in Atlanta. ♦

Research on Etruscan Majolica and the Griffens

by Polly Wilbert

For years, I have been promising myself that if I were ever in the Philadelphia area for more than a day or two I would do some research at the Chester County Historical Society on the Griffens (my mother's side of our family) and the Etruscan majolica manufactured in Phoenixville, Pa. by Griffen, Smith & Hill. Last year, to accomplish this project, I had planned to drive to Atlanta for the Society's annual meeting and to stop in West Chester, Pa. on the way. Unfortunately, I couldn't get away from my office in time and had to fly directly to Georgia. Thus, this year's meeting in Valley Forge presented the perfect opportunity to finally do my research. I put in for some vacation, organized a bed and breakfast near the Historical Society, and then made myself a constant presence in the Society's library. My thanks to all of the librarians there and to the curatorial staff as well for making my three days there truly rewarding. The records in their beautiful new library are easily accessible and most items can be photocopied. What follows are bits gleaned from the local newspapers of the day as they reported on the events and activities of the

Griffens, their potteries and the associated clay mine. The principal local newspapers that are used here are: **The Local News, The Daily Republican, and Chester County Day.** (Some of the clippings in the Historical Society's files were unattributed.) In part, I reproduce these "articles" (most are very short pieces) here because I believe that the events and activities of Griffen, Smith & Hill are representative of those at many of the other American potteries -- majolica or otherwise -- of the day. Moreover, I think majolica collectors -- especially those of Etruscan majolica -- will find these accounts of the events of that time of great interest.

To set the stage, let me recall for you the origins of the Griffen, Smith & Hill pottery. Following their graduation as engineers from the Polytechnic College in Troy, N.Y. (the predecessor of today's Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), two brothers, Harry and George Griffen, along with two other men -- an English potter named William Hill and a fellow local businessman, David Smith, who became the superintendent -- established a pottery in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. They did so with the encouragement and financial support of the father of the Griffen men, John Griffen, who was a highly regarded inventor as well as a very successful businessman in his own right, being the general superintendent of the Phoenix Iron Co., one of the most extensive iron works in the country. The pottery went into initial production about 1879 and finally ceased to manufacture majolica in 1889 following a major fire. During its years of operation, Griffen, Smith & Hill was the largest producer of majolica in the U.S.

The origins of the pottery are detailed beginning on page 267 in Edwin Atlee

Barber's The Pottery and Porcelain of the United States, written in 1909:

"Pottery at Phoenixville, Pa.

The Phoenixville Pottery, Kaolin, and Fire-brick Company was organized in 1867, and a few years later was succeeded by Messrs. Schreiber & Co., who made yellow and Rockingham ware, and terra-cotta ornaments and wall-pieces. Heads of hounds and stags in several sizes, and large boar's heads, were made extensively here, and twenty years ago were in demand for decorating the interiors of public houses. Some of these may still be seen in country taverns. These were considered works of considerable artistic merit when first produced. The antlers and horns of stags and antelopes were made separately and afterwards inserted. Messrs. Beerbower & Griffen took the pottery in 1877 and commenced the manufacture of white granite ware. In 1879 the firm name was changed to Griffen, Smith & Hill, and the following year the manufacture of "Etruscan" majolica was added. Through their majolica ware the firm became widely known. The modelling of some of the pieces such as *compotieres* with supports composed of three intertwined dolphins, boudoir flower-shells or jewel cups, and other fancy shapes, was refined and artistic, the designer being an English artist of the name Bourne. . . ."

Now, imagine, if you will, that you are looking through the newspapers of the day and encounter the following "articles".

1-18-1878 PPI

CO-PARTNERSHIP - We the undersigned, have this day formed a co-partnership, under the firm name of Griffen, Smith & Hill, for the manufacture and sale of White Earthenware &c., at the Phoenix Pottery Works, Phoenixville, Penna. We have purchased the business and interest of Beerbower & Griffen for that purpose, and all accounts of the said firm will soon be settled by us.

Henry R. Griffen
George S. Griffen
David Smith
William Hill
Phoenixville, Pa., Jan. 1st, 1878

4-7-1879 Local News

Engaged on Majolica Ware - The Phoenix Pottery has recently engaged in the manufacture of majolica ware, which is already acquiring an extensive reputation. They have within a few days past received large orders for this ware from Philadelphia and New York. We are pleased to learn that these works are in a flourishing condition and have plenty of orders on hand for their wares.

5-8-1879 Local News

Pottery Improvements - Owing to the increase of business at the Phoenixville Pottery, a shed is now being erected near the packing room.

11-17-1879 Local News

Majolica Ware - Having occasion on Saturday to visit the Phoenix Pottery, we were surprised to find so many specimens of beautiful majolica ware now being manufactured by Griffen, Smith & Hill, the present proprietors. They are one of two companies only in this country that have been successful in making this ware.

11-20-1879 Local News

West Chester has a pottery which is turning out majolica ware - **Phila. Star**. We only wish we had.

11-22-1879 Local News

Griffen, Smith & Hill of the Phoenix Pottery, contemplate the erection of an additional steam engine in their works, to meet the increased requirements of trade.

12-2-1879 Local News

Potters' National Convention - The Potters' National Convention meets to-day in Cincinnati, Ohio. The Phoenixville potteries, as well as the kaolin works of Major Willauer, will be represented in this Convention.

12-12-1879 Local News

Potters' Association - The Potters' Association of Phoenixville, will give their first grand ball in Temperance Hall on Wednesday evening, December 21, next. They have formed a beneficial branch to their order, and will pay five dollars weekly to all members who may have become disabled or are sick.

2-2-1880, Local News

Handsome Ware - The Phoenix Pottery Works are turning out some beautiful majolica ware. One of the most beautiful of their later patterns is a dish for

salad dressing and other purposes. The sides of the dish are ornamented with white and pink daisies, while over the top and between each flower are green leaves. The whole makes a fine specimen of the potter's art.

2-3-1880, Local News

Sale of a Grist Mill - The large brick flouring mill situated on Starr street, Phoenixville, belonging to H. and J. Gable, Pottstown, was sold on Saturday to the Phoenix Pottery Company, of the former place. The sale was effected through Jonathan Rees, Esq., real estate agent, Phoenixville. The price paid was \$5,000 cash. The purchase of this property by the pottery company looks very much as if they intended enlarging the present works. If used for moulding purposes they will be enabled to increase largely their force in the department. The mill is quite convenient to the pottery works, being separated only by Church street. Its purchase by them and the using of it for making flour only will allow the filling up of Starr street and altering the grade thereof, which has been long desired.

2-6-1880, Local News

New Kiln - We learn that the Phoenix Pottery Company, of Phoenixville, contemplate erecting a new kiln for the burning of their wares. This company has been very successful in the manufacture of Majolica ware, and find a large demand for the beautiful patterns they are turning out.

5-8-1880 Local News

The partnership heretofore existing between Griffen, Smith & Hill engaged in the pottery business, Phoenixville, has been discontinued. Mr. Hill retires from the concern.

6-3-1880, Local News

Phoenix Pottery - The Phoenix Pottery Company, Phoenixville, is now engaged in making some of the finest kind of Majolica ware, equal to either the French, German, Dutch or Italian wares. They have not yet been enabled to get all the designs they desire, but are gradually accomplishing this. They are now getting up a toy set for children of a neat and beautiful design. They are also getting out what is known as the Dolton [sic] ware, in which the decorations are made in the clay and not in the external decoration, as in the Majolica. This company is also putting in new machinery for the grinding of feld-spar and quartz, which is largely used in the ceramic art.

6-26-1880 PM

Started - The machinery of the Phoenix Pottery Company's grinding mill, at Starr and Church streets, was started on Monday evening, preparatory to going into regular operation.

8-6-1880, Local News

The Phoenix Pottery, at Phoenixville, is now making arrangements to lay the pavement around their property on Starr and Church streets.

11-18-1880, Local News

Kaolin Lands Leased - John Griffen, Esq., of Phoenixville, has recently purchased or leased a property near Brandywine Summit, Delaware county, upon which there is a rich deposit of Kaolin. The land lies in close proximity to one of the best, if not the very best Kaolin mines in the United States. Mr. Griffen is making arrangements to open these mines at an early day. Mr. Griffen is one of the proprietors of the Phoenix Pottery, Phoenixville, and the Kaolin taken from these mines will be used at that pottery. Mr. Griffen visited Brandywine Summit on Wednesday, we presume for the purpose of making arrangements to commence operations.

12-3-1880, Local News

Kaolin Analyzed - Charles Hewes, Esq. chemist of this borough, was sent a day or two ago a sample of the kaolin taken from the mines now being opened on the farm recently purchased at Brandywine Summit, by John Griffen, Esq., of Phoenixville. He reports the quality excellent and thinks it will be much better when taken out below the surface. The sample sent him is the best he has ever examined, with one solitary exception.

12-6-1880, Local News

Phoenix Pottery - The Phoenix Pottery Company is now largely engaged in majolical and other wares of an antique pattern. They have some thirty hands employed on these wares.

12-18-1880, Local News

The Phoenix Pottery Company of Phoenixville is making what they call ivory ware, which is beautiful.

1-10-1881, Local News

Resumed Operations - Owing to the recent cold weather one of the pumps in the Phoenix Pottery gave out and compelled the stopping of the works for several days. They will go into operation again to-day.

2-17-1881, Local News

Kaolin Mines at Brandywine Summit - Preparations are being made for working the kaolin mines at Brandywine Summit, recently purchased by John Griffen, of Phoenixville. There are nearly completed a large wash-house 30 by 100 feet and a dry-house 30 by 60 feet, the latter containing eight vats eight feet deep and eight feet square, beside a number of other improvements necessary for the proper working of the mines. There are some intimations that a kiln for burning fine brick and another for making common red brick are to be built.

2-28-1881, Local News

Injured at the Phoenix Pottery - A pile of "bung" used in one of the kilns at the Phoenix Pottery for burning crockery in, fell on Friday last and struck William Steward and Addison Gilbert. The former was severely injured on the hand which will prevent him from attending to his duties for some days to come. The latter was but slightly injured.

3-19-1881, Local News

Timothy and Michael Farrell, of this borough, will open out a kaolin mine near Media next week, for a company of Phoenixville gentlemen.

4-26-1881, Local News

Base Ball - The Etruscan and Common Heights Base Ball Clubs, composed of men engaged in the pottery at Phoenixville, the former making the ware and the latter laboring at the kilns, had a game of base ball on Morgan's fields on Saturday last. The game resulted in the "Etruscans" beating the "Common Heights" in a score of 28 to 22.

5-17-1881, Local News

A Bicycle Ride - We were somewhat surprised this morning, about nine o'clock to see enter the LOCAL NEWS office Messrs. Harry and George Griffen, proprietors of the Phoenix Pottery, Phoenixville. These gentlemen informed us that they were on their way to Brandywine Summit to visit their Kaolin mines at that place. They left Phoenixville at five o'clock on bicycles, and were, owing to the heavy state of the roads through the valley caused by the rain of last night, nearly three hours in making the trip. From a mile or two this side of Phoenixville until they reached the White Horse the roads were very muddy; but from there into West Chester they made good time. They brought up at the Green Tree Hotel, this borough, where they stopped for breakfast, and after taking a short turn around town

they again mounted their wooden steeds and sailed gracefully down the Wilmington turnpike, in the direction of the Summit, which they no doubt made in good time. If rain did not set in they proposed to return to West Chester this evening and remain over night, and to-morrow morning take up their line of march for home. If it rains they will take the cars at Brandywine Summit and make the return trip by rail. These gentlemen relate a number of amusing incidents which occurred on the route. At the house of the Pennsylvania R. R. Co., near Stewart's Grove, the entire inhabitants of the village were out to see what to them must have been a strange sight. Those working in cornfields would drop their implements and rush to the fences to see them pass. In descending a hill on the way the bicycle upon which Mr. Harry Griffen was seated struck a stone, reared up behind and sent him sprawling in the mud. They say if the first part of the road had been as good as the last they would have enjoyed it very much.

5-28-1881 PM

The Majolica Girls - On Monday afternoon last the majolica young ladies of the Phoenixville Majolica Works, took half a day off and went over to Mt. Clare where, in Thompson's Grove, they had a high old time all to themselves, which must have made the boys mad, for they now say all kinds of funny things about that frolic, and among the rest, that, running out of pennies, the girls had to row themselves back across the river. Of course envy prompts all this sort of thing.

10-17-1881, Local News

Griffen Kaolin Mines - The kaolin mines of the Messrs. Griffen at Brandywine Summit are now ready for operation. A large quantity of clay has been taken out and the process of washing it will be commenced this Monday morning. The Messrs. Griffen have in contemplation erection of a rather novel method for conveying the clay to the railroad. It will consist of an endless chain erected on poles which will carry buckets containing each some 300 pounds of the clay, which will empty themselves on arriving at their destination. The plan as shown us looks perfectly feasible.

11-12-1881, Local News

Phoenix Pottery - The Phoenixville Etruscan Company, have commenced the manufacture of stucco ware, something new in this country, but which has only been manufactured in Europe for a year or two past. This new ware is said to be

beautiful. They have recently employed a number of persons from Europe skilled in the manufacture of this and majolica ware.

12-6-1881 Local News

Petty Thieving - The Phoenixville "Independent" says: Three young girls from the pottery called on Gus. Vogel on Saturday, and while one engaged his attention, showing goods, the others stole a number of silk handkerchiefs and neckties. He caught them and the goods were returned; but they should be prosecuted as thieves and be taught a wholesome lesson.

2-27-1882 Local News

The Griffin kaolin works, near Brandywine Summit, Delaware county, have 500 tons of crude clay ready to wash when the weather of the approaching spring shall permit. A new dry-house 28 by 80 feet is in course of construction. This building will be erected for the purpose of putting the crude clay through the process which is necessary previous to its use in manufacture. These works belong to Mr. John Griffen, Gen'l Spt. of the Phoenixville Iron Works.

3-20-1882 Local News

Another House Attacked - On Saturday night last a number of ruffians visited the residence of James Hickey, watchman at the Etruscan Works, Phoenixville, and broke in the windows with stones. It appears that an unmarried man who was boarding with Mr. Hickey had joined the Union and went out with its members in the strike. It is said that he called on the association for four dollars per week, which had been promised him, but was refused on the ground that he was a single man and that they were only providing for those with families. The man then stated that he would leave the association and return to work. He did so, and on Saturday night the house in which he boarded was stoned as above stated and a note was sent him giving him until Sunday night to leave the place, and if he did not "his coffin would be sent around for him." The recipient of the note concluded he would remove his boarding house from the North to the South Ward and wait for that coffin.

3-20-1882 Local News

Handsome Ware - We have been shown a number of articles of Majolica ware just manufactured at the Etruscan Works, Phoenixville, which were equal to any made at the Wedgewood [sic], Mintons or other celebrated potteries in Europe. The articles above alluded to consisted of two strawberry dishes with

sugar bowl and cream mug attached, two cylinders [sic] for coal oil lamps and a pitcher, all in new and tasteful designs. By the side of the strawberry dishes was another made by one of the most celebrated manufacturers of England. The ones made at the Phoenixville works were similar in form but the details are more carefully worked up while the glazing and coloring was, we think, superior to the English article. The lamp cylinders and pitcher were quite novel in design and very beautiful. The proprietors of the Etruscan works, at Phoenixville, are making rapid strides in the manufacture of Majolica ware, and now stand No. 1 on the list of establishments making this kind of ware in the United States.

5-15-1882 Local News

Shooting at a Watchman - James Burns, of Phoenixville, was arrested on Sunday morning by officers Moore and Moyer, charged with shooting at James Hickey, watchman at the Etruscan works at that place during the night previous. Burns was given a hearing before S. D. Hunter, Esq., and bound over in \$800 to answer the charge at court.

5-5-1882 Local News

The National, the Griffen Co. and other kaolin works near Brandywine Summit, Delaware county, are all taking out large quantities of kaolin, which is being shipped to Phoenixville, Philadelphia, Trenton, and to Liverpool, Ohio, where it is manufactured into wares.

7-17-1882 Local News

Died - George Badeley, a foreman in the Etruscan Works of Griffen, Smith & Co., at Phoenixville, died on Sunday afternoon last, aged 46 years. Deceased was an Englishman by birth and was a most excellent potter as well as an estimable man. He has been engaged in the pottery business both in Trenton and Phoenixville for several years. Since coming to Phoenixville he lost his wife and leaves, we believe, two children to mourn his loss, one a daughter who lived with him at Phoenixville and a son who is now, we are told, on shipboard crossing the Atlantic to see his father.

6-22-1883

Pottery Matters - Harry Boyer, one of the kiln hands of Phoenix Pottery, left Phoenixville on Monday for Elizabeth, N.J. to work in the pottery of that place.

A number of kiln builders of Trenton arrived at Phoenixville, on Tuesday morning. They will build a small kiln for Griffen Smith & Co., proprietors of the Etruscan works, at that place.

1-15-1884 Local News - Obituaries

GRIFFEN -On January 14th at Phoenixville, John Griffen, [father of Henry and George] in the 72nd year of his age.

The relatives and gentlemen friends of the family are respectfully invited to attend the funeral, from his late residence on Wednesday, the 16th inst. at 1 o'clock.

Date? 1884

A New Industry - Griffith [sic], Smith & Company, proprietors of the etruscan works at Phoenixville, have been making a number of experiments in the way of glazing and coloring bricks, with which they have been highly successful. It is said they will add brick glazing business to their present business, and will engage in it quite extensively.

7-14-1884 Local News

The Etruscan Works of Griffin, Smith & Co., at Phoenixville, have closed during the summer.

7-15-1884 Local News

Postponed - Mr. David Smith of the firm of Griffen, Smith & Company, proprietors of the Etruscan Works, at Phoenixville, intended going to Europe this summer, there to visit some of the potteries, but has concluded to postpone his visit until next season, the reason wherefor is, we understand, the prevalence of the cholera.

11-7-1884 Local News

The Etruscan Works of Phoenixville are in operation, but are running only about one-half the full force.

3-5-1885 Local News

The Phoenix etruscan works of Messrs. Griffen, Smith & Co., of Phoenixville, are now engaged in the manufacture of china ware. It is very thin, light and transparent, in every respect equal to the French -- a new industry in this country -- which bids fair to become one of great importance. These works, we understand, are the first in this country that have been successful in the manufacture of this ware.

4-15-1885 Local News

Brandywine Summit Kaolin Works, owned by the Messrs. Griffen, of the Etruscan works, Phoenixville,

have been getting out large quantities of clay since February last, and next week will put their mill in operation for grinding flint and washing the clay. Mr. H. R. Griffen passed through this borough Monday morning for the Summit to perfect the arrangements for doing so.

Griffen, Smith & Co., proprietors of the Etruscan works, have recently received orders for majolica and other wares that will keep their potteries in operation for some time, running to their fullest capacity.

6-9-1885 Local News

Industrial - The Etruscan works of Phoenixville are now very busy filling large orders for their wares. They have been running night and day for three weeks past and are now putting on an additional force of workmen.

6-23-1885

The Etruscan works of Griffen, Smith & Co. are running in a very lively manner. The force of workmen has been trebled within a short time.

10-27-1885 Local News

Kaolin Works Explosion - The boiler at the Manly Kaolin Works, near Brandywine Summit, blew up on Monday morning about 7 o'clock. The engineer, Joshua Etchell, is reported to have been buried under the wreck of the boiler, and Wm. Happersett of Coatesville, considerably crushed. Joshua Etchell is about 55 years old, and had been employed at the works for the past two or three years. He had previously lived at Chester. He is a widower, having buried his wife last spring. His family consists of two grown daughters and a little boy about 3 years old. The works are owned by G. S. and H. R. Griffen, Phoenixville, and operated by W. F. Manly, manager; are quite extensive, and the kaolin obtained and prepared there is said to be of excellent quality.

ADDITIONAL PARTICULARS

Since the above was put in type we have obtained the following additional particulars of the sad occurrence: Engineer Etchel, who has been employed at the Griffen & Manly Kaolin Works, Brandywine Summit, was Monday morning cleaning up his engine preparatory to starting her up for the day. He was just about pulling the whistle when he heard a sort of hissing noise about the boiler. He then asked some of the Italians who were standing around warming themselves if they knew what it was and they said they didn't. Presently the boiler

exploded and the brickwork and mortar crashed against the engineer, pinning him to the wall and covering he and his fireman over, bruising and burning them horribly. Etchel is burned from the breast down, and it is feared he has inhaled some of the steam which escaped after the explosion. He was literally cooked by the scalding steam and hot brickwork and mortar from the front of the boiler. No hopes are entertained of his recovery. The fireman, who came from Coatesville only a week or so ago, is also, it is thought, fatally injured. The physicians took a large piece of iron out of his head shortly after the accident and he is now in a critical condition. Four other men were injured but how badly we did not learn only that they are all expected to recover. Etchel is a Philadelphian but moved to Brandywine Summit some time ago, where he has occupied the house of Milton S. Hepburn. His wife died at the Summit about a year ago, since which time he has been living with his two daughters, who are very estimable young ladies. He has also a son six years old. The works where the explosion occurred are superintended by Mr. Manley.

8-12-1886 Local News

Phoenix Etruscan Works - Mr. David Smith, one of the firm of Griffen, Smith & Co., proprietors of the Etruscan Works at Phoenixville, states that the demand for majolica ware is not as great as it was a few years ago, although they are still making it in considerable quantities to supply orders. The wares they are working on now are the "Pandora" and "Venicene" wares. The former is finished in unique glize [sic] and gold, while the "Venicene" is finished with an ivory glize and decorated in colors and gold. There is a great demand for these wares. These gentlemen have fifty decorators at work, thirty of whom are engaged in these two wares, and the remainder in decorating majolica. The wares turned out from this establishment are said to be the best in the United States, and the demand for them is constantly increasing -- so much so that the company were recently compelled to build two new kilns to enable them to supply the demand.

3-29-1887 Local News

Passed into Other Hands - Owing to the death of John Griffen of Phoenixville, the Brandywine Summit Kaolin Works had to be sold by the executors, George and H. R. Griffen, which has been done. Monday the charter for a new company was obtained through the courts of Delaware county. The new organization is called the Brandywine Summit

Kaolin and Feldspar Company. The stock was all readily taken, of which the Messrs. Griffen retained a large share. The last named gentlemen are, in connection with David Smith, largely engaged in the pottery business at Phoenixville in what is known as the Phoenix Etruscan Works. The new company starts off with fine prospects. It has orders enough already to keep the workmen in its mines busy for six months to come. Mr. Manly is making arrangements for largely increasing the capacity of the works. The company has recently struck some fine veins of clay, which cannot scarcely fail to make it one of the best paying mines in the county.

5-16-1887 Local News

N. W. Howell - An employee of Griffen, Smith & Co., Phoenixville, had one of his feet badly mashed, by one of the moulds on one of the whirlers being thrown on it with great force.

5-23-1887 Local News

Fine Pottery - The Etruscan Works of Griffen, Smith & Co., Phoenixville, are now manufacturing a very fine quality of white granite and procelain ware. They also continue to manufacture large quantities of majolica ware.

5-30-1887 Local News

Closed - The Phoenix Etruscan Works closed at noon on Saturday for the day and paid their employees so that they could enjoy Decoration Day to their heart's content.

The clay hands and the kiln hands of the Etruscan Works, Phoenixville, have each formed a base ball nine from their number and will on Saturday next try conclusions. As both clubs contain some good players the game is looked forward to with much interest by the lovers of the game.

1-11-1888 Local News

Obliged to Shut Down - Griffen, Smith & Co., extensive potters at Phoenixville, who use considerable coal in burning ware, were obliged to shut down their works on account of the miner's strike in the coal regions. Their supply is about exhausted. Coal is extremely scarce in Phoenixville and the dealers are unable to get any.

1-13-1888 Local News

The Phoenix Pottery Company have received two cars each of coke and bituminous coal, and will use

the same as a substitute for anthracite coal owing to the scarcity of the latter.

2-23-1888 Local News

The hands employed by Griffen, Smith & Company, of the Phoenix pottery, this place, went on strike Wednesday and at noon of that day the pottery was closed, the proprietors say, for an indefinite period. This will throw about 100 hands out of employment.

4-21-1888 Local News

Harry S. Griffen, of the firm of Griffen, Smith & Co., manufacturing potters of Phoenixville, is erecting a kiln and works for the manufacture of fine enamelled brick, at the junction of the P.S.V. and Perkiomen Railroads, near Perkiomen Station.

[Editor's Note: A fire destroyed the Griffen, Smith & Hill majolica pottery in 1889.]

3-28-1891 Local News

A Phoenixville special of March 27 says: The creditors of Griffen, Love & Co., potters, who have failed with \$80,000 liabilities of which \$25,000 is held by Mr. Griffen's mother and sister, to-day appointed a committee to consider if it was feasible to turn the concern into a stock company, the creditors to take stock in the amount of their debts.

This morning Sheriff J. G. Parker went to Phoenixville to levy upon the property.

4-16-1891 Local News

The firm of Griffen, Love & Co., proprietors of the pottery at Phoenixville, have been in financial trouble, but there is a prospect of an arrangement being made and a resumption of business. The creditors of the concern held a meeting on Monday, when it was ascertained that the firm has debts to the amount of \$95,000 and assets amounting to \$82,000. It was resolved that the creditors should form a stock company, and an assessment of 15 per cent was levied, for work capital.

5-23-1891, Daily Republican

CHARTER NOTICE -- Notice is hereby given that an application will be made to the Governor of Pennsylvania on Monday, May 25 (twenty-five), A.D. 1891, by N. H. Benjamin, F. A. Tencate, Mary E. Griffen, Esther L. Griffen, Michael Towers and others, under the Act of Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, entitled "An Act to provide for the Incorporation and Regulation of

Certain Corporations," approved April 29, 1874, and the general supplements thereto, for the charter of an intended corporation to be called THE GRIFFEN CHINA COMPANY OF PHOENIXVILLE, PA., the character and object of which is for the manufacture by any process of China and Stoneware in the borough of Phoenixville, county of Chester, and disposing of said ware, and for these purposes to have, possess, and enjoy all the rights, benefits, and privileges of said Act of Assembly and its supplements.

CORNWELL & CORNWELL, Solicitors

7-11-1891 Local News

Griffen China Co. of Phoenixville is burning three kilns of ware this week.

2-11-1892 Local News

Michael Drexel, formerly foreman for the Griffen China Company, moved his household effects to Brookyn, where he will take up residence.

[Editor's Note: A fire destroyed the Griffen China Company pottery in 1892.]

4-2-1892 Local News

The stockholders of the Griffen China Company held a meeting in Camden and decided to start their pottery at this place as soon as the necessary arrangements can be made.

(Editor's Note: The following piece was undated, but must have been printed in January 1893)

In Memoriam

The sudden death of George S. Griffen [in January 1893 at age 40], which occurred at his home on Main Street, this Borough, yesterday, was a shock to this community, where he was so well known and so universally beloved.

He had rallied from the first attack which had prostrated him on New Year's even, and his family and friends had for some days entertained hopes of his speedy recovery. He seemed much better yesterday and his condition was a matter of congratulations, when the dread summons came and

"At midday on the King's highway
There met him an angel in the way."

Mr. Griffen was born at Safe Harbor, Lancaster County, Pa., on January 11, 1854, and was therefore on the Sunny side of forty when he died.

He entered the Polytechnic College at Troy, N.Y., in the year 1870, and was graduated in his profession of Civil Engineering in 1874. Mr. David Reeves and Mr. William H. Reeves were schoolmates if not members of the same class at Troy.

After receiving his diploma, Mr. Griffen went West and was for three years employed as Civil Engineer with the Grand Tower Mining and Manufacturing Co., of Grand Tower, Ill.

In 1878, he returned to Phoenixville and associated himself in the pottery business with his brother, Henry R. Griffen, and L. B. Beerbower, under the firm name of Beerbower & Griffen, which business was continued under the firm names of Griffen, Smith & Co., and Griffen, Love & Co., until 1891, when the business was disposed of to the Griffen China Company.

As a citizen Mr. Griffen took but little interest in politics or public affairs, and held but one office in the Borough, that of Town Councilman, in which he served the interests of the Borough with rare good judgement and intelligence. His knowledge and experience in engineering rendering his services valuable.

From a social standpoint the death of George S. Griffen will be keenly felt, for he was singularly blessed in those graces of heart and mind which endeared him to all, and made him the true friend, the kindly neighbor, and the courteous gentleman. His personal qualities and characteristics were of the most engaging character, and he combined in his nature, as few men can, the gentle sweetness of a woman with the manliness of a true man.

10-9-1893 Local News Potteryware Sold

The potteryware, etc., the property of the Griffen China Company, Phoenixville, was sold to N. H. Benjamin for \$89.

2-22-1894 Chester County Day

A force of about 21 workmen are dipping and burning the biscuit ware that was left in the Phoenix Pottery and recently purchased by Mr. Cooper, a

wholesale dealer in crockery ware in New York City. There is enough ware to fill 3 kilns and it will take about three weeks to complete the work. Harry Griffen, a former member of the concern, is superintending the work.

6-7-1894 Chester County Day

The Phoenix Pottery, after several years idleness, started up on Monday morning, under the management of David Smith. The new firm of the pottery is Buckwalter & Brownback.

10-4-1894 Chester County Day

There was a slight fire at the Phoenix Pottery on Saturday morning, the roof of the kiln shed catching fire. The Hose Company came and quickly extinguished the fire with only slight damage.

Caption beneath a photograph of two large kilns at the Griffen, Smith & Hill pottery:

When these kilns were torn down, the bricks were used for wall material in building St. Peter's Parish house. The kilns were located at Church and Starr streets and demolition was started in 1902 and completed in the year 1903.

3-19-1948 Daily Republican

. . . In 1894, Mr. Enos Buckwalter and Mr. Harry I. Brownback, the latter being a one-time owner of the local Colonial Theatre, operated the plant until the turn of the century and made such articles as white plates and dishes, umbrella stands, toilet sets and table pieces.

After another reorganization, the pottery closed its doors for the last time in the year 1902 and the final curtain dropped on one of Phoenixville's most colorful industries.

Editor's Note: Following his brother George's death, Henry Griffen ended his efforts in the pottery business. He subsequently manufactured brick, utilizing his previous experience in this field and his expertise as a glaze expert. Later, he was affiliated with the Phoenix Iron Co. in the shipping department and as an auditor and then was an inspector for Pennsylvania Lines West of Pittsburgh, Pa. Henry Griffen died unexpectedly in November 1907, at the age of 50. ♦

Are There Etruscan Oyster Plates in Your Collection?

Readers of the July 1996 issue of Better Homes and Gardens' Traditional Home magazine may have noticed an article on oyster plates featuring photos of several fine examples in majolica. The article's writer speculates that only three examples of oyster plates in Etruscan majolica survive. It would be very interesting to hear from Society members who own such an oyster plate or who are aware of the whereabouts of any of them. Hey, Dealers, Are there any in your backrooms? Are there really only three left? We'll report back.

Editor's Summer Transition

by Polly Wilbert

As some of you may know, this spring one of my goals was to change jobs, which I have now accomplished having moved from the administrative staff of one investment firm to another. In the process of making that change, however, I had some very lumpy software transitions with our mailing and membership databases. Therefore, if you encounter mistakes in your address/membership information, please let me know. I apologize in advance, but this was one of the busiest times of my life and in the middle of it all I had to reconstruct our database (so that I could get out this issue of the newsletter and then turn over the database management to Cheryl Smith of Scituate, Mass., who has generously volunteered to take it on). I have been proofreading all of this practically in my sleep, but there are 500+ entries and I plead guilty if there are still gremlins in the works. Also, for any of you who had my old work phone number, I am deferring giving out my new one so that for at least the first 90 days

at my new post I can try to qualify as a model new employee. I hope you all will understand.

Palissy Ware Book Information

If you would like to order Marshall and Robert's beautiful book Palissy Ware:

In the U.S.: Make checks payable to **Humanities Press**. Price: \$120.00 plus \$2.50 shipping for first book and 75¢ for each additional book.

Humanities Press International, Inc.
165 First Avenue
Atlantic Highlands, NJ 07716

In UK and Europe: Make checks payable to **The Athlone Press**. £60/each plus £2.50 shipping in U.K. and £3.50 overseas per copy

The Athlone Press,
1 Park Drive,
London NW11 7SG
ENGLAND

Spring Auction Highlights/England

Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury, February 16.

Minton majolica game pie tureen and cover modelled with a hound lying on a gun and a base moulded with four paw feet. £3,000.

Eldred's, Plymouth, March 12.

Minton majolica crab dish, lid moulded with seaweed handle surrounded by 12 alternate blue and beige small dished compartments. 16 in wide. £4,600.

Heathcote Ball, Leicester, April 18.

Mid-Victorian tray by George Jones, with a moulded basket-weave gallery and cane handles, blue ground decorated in high relief with barley, a butterfly, a dragonfly and a bee. November 1875: £1,750.

G.E. Sworder & Sons, Bishop's Stortford, April 23

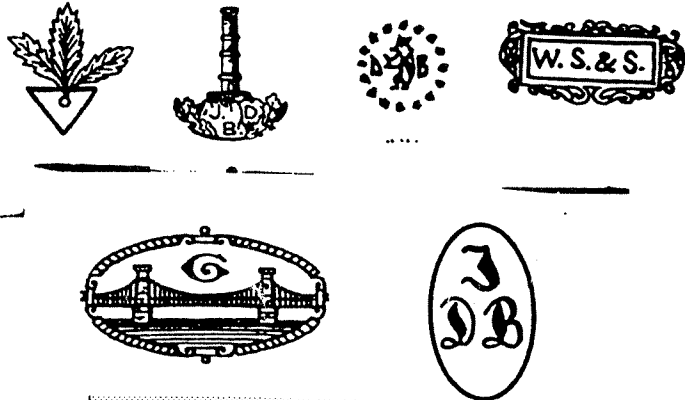
Stilton dish modelled with green leaves, a deep blue border and a cow finial. The color variation set it apart. £2,200.

MajolicAds

Wanted

Author seeks information and photographs regarding any majolica pieces stamped with the following marks:

W.S.&S. TETSCHEN S&G BB



EICHWALD

Please contact: D. Michael Murray, Esq.
Murray & Litteer,
PO Box 467, Batavia, NY 14021-0467
Ph: 716-343-5575 Fax: 716-343-6959

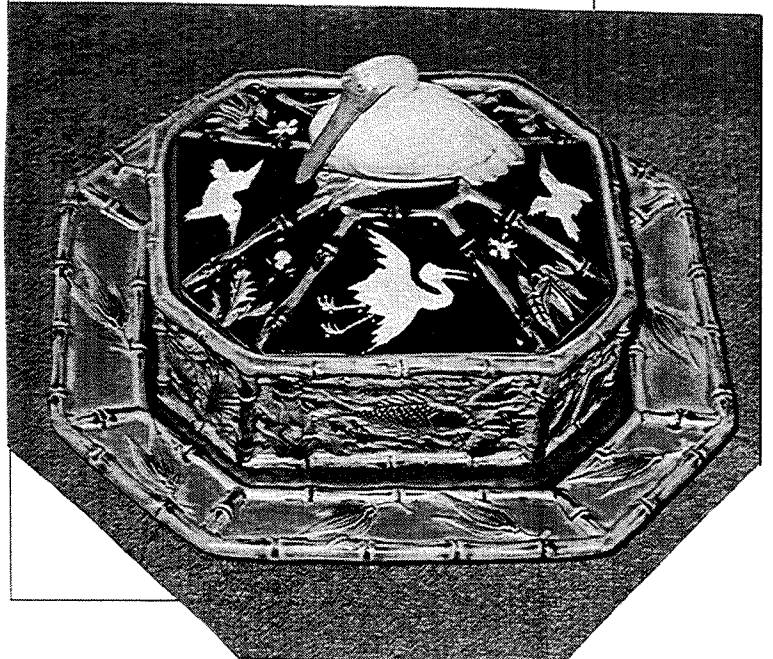
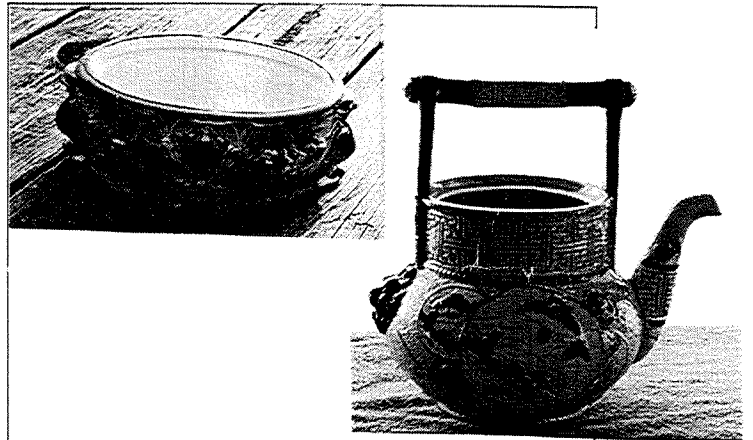
Wanted

Lids, lids, lids...for the following:

(See Photos)

1. Wedgwood tureen with turquoise background.
2. Oriental-style teapot (finial of missing lid has a bent fish).
3. Jones sardine box presently has cobalt top. Would like to trade cobalt top for matching turquoise top to present base. Cobalt lid is BEAUTIFUL!

Contact: Marla Chaikin, William Charles Antiques,
703 Broad St, Shrewsbury, NJ 07702
Ph: 908-530-9090 or 908-222-0922



Wanted
(See photos)

1. Underplate for George Jones sardine box.
2. Two Choisy-le-Roi rabbit plates to complete set.
3. Baseball jugs: Red, cobalt, and multicolor.

Please contact:
Jeff or Brandon Queen
909 Hayslope Drive
Knoxville, TN 37919
Ph: 423-693-9517



Majolica Matters is published quarterly for its members by:

Majolica International Society
Suite 103, 1275 First Avenue
New York, NY 10021

President
Gerald Leberfeld

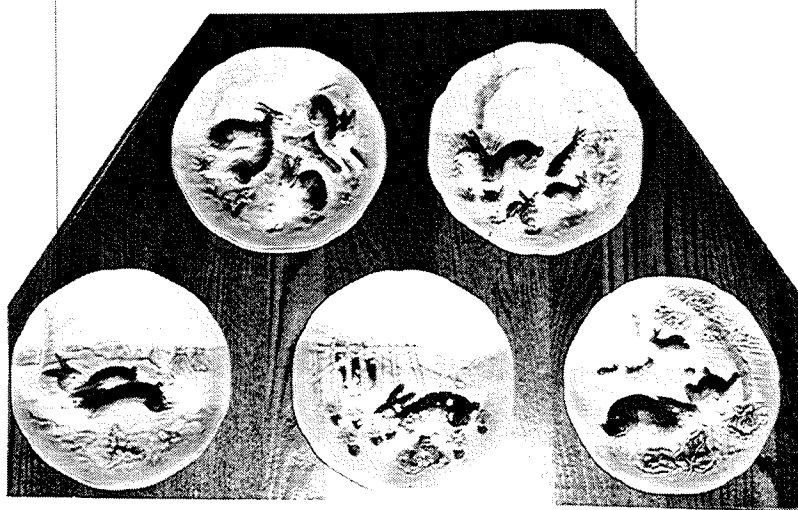
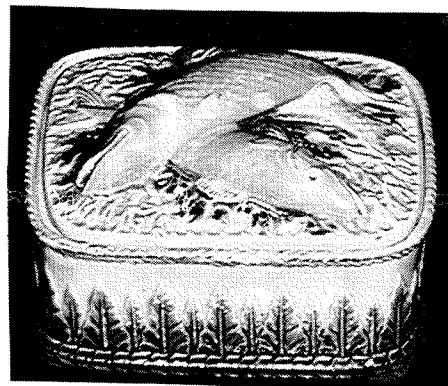
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Majolica Matters
1996 Publication Submission Deadlines

Fall: 9/15/96
Winter: 12/15/96

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