

A Blue Willow Tureen with a History

Michael Weinberg

On the surface, only its size and the huge Foo Dog Finial and Boar's Head Handles distinguish this large Mason's Ironstone Blue Willow Pattern Soup Tureen from dozens, if not hundreds, of other examples. The color of the Blue Willow transfer was a pale blue, and so bad was the light in the auction hall that I even missed on first (and second!) inspection, the rather crude repair to a large chip on the tureen's side. But the sheer size of the piece and the amazing detail molded into the Foo Dog more than made up for any afflictions.

Flipping the piece instantly added to the mystique: In addition to the Mason's Patented Ironstone mark (the standard mark used by Mason after about 1815), there was an importer's mark – "Imported by T.T. Kissam & Co. for Ruddock's Hotel New Orleans." Since the tureen dated c. 1845, I had visions of this piece being Civil War Booty, captured when Commander Farragut forced the city to surrender to Union troops in 1862.

A left bid secured the tureen and it sat in the middle of my dining room table for a number of months until I could find the time to research the marks. T.T. Kissam & Co., it turns out, was Mason's New York (and probably sole American) Pottery importer,

supplying hotels in New York and elsewhere. The Astor House was among the firm's clients. It was in business in Lower Manhattan from the 1830s through the 1840s, located at 97 Water Street until destroyed by the 1835 fire

kind librarians checked a few New Orleans Street directories for me and found no reference to a Ruddock's Hotel. One found mention of a town west of New Orleans - Ruddock, Louisiana - that no longer existed, and suggested the hotel may have been located there. (Ruddock, Louisiana, was, in its prime, a lumber town, population about 900. It was destroyed in the hurricane of 1915, along with 3 other nearby communities, and never rebuilt. Only a highway marker keeps it from being forgotten completely.)

Enter Jane Diemer, a TCC member from the Philadelphia area. In a friendly exchange after an eBay transaction, Jane asked me if I had, by any chance, a Mason's Ironstone Tureen with a large Foo Dog Finial (she had missed one at an auction, I believe, but NOT the same auction where I found mine). Much to her surprise, I sent some photos of the one I had and it was virtually identical to the one she missed. She, too, became intrigued with the Kissam/Ruddocks Hotel mark and her research skills were far superior to mine. Jane called the New Orleans State Library in Baton Rouge, and found that a man named Ruddock ran a hotel in New Orleans in the 1840s. He



that ravaged Wall Street. It then relocated to Maiden Lane. So far, so good: certainly the piece was pre-Civil War and my next step was to try to find something, anything about Ruddock's Hotel in New Orleans.

A call to the New Orleans Public Library Reference Desk yielded no useful information. The



appears on the city's census reports from 1845-1850 and then disappears.

If only this tureen could talk: who was Mr. Ruddock and what kind of establishment did he run (let your imaginations run free, people: we are talking *antebellum* New Orleans here!). What happened to him, to his hotel, and its dishes? How many pieces of Blue Willow did he have? To use the same importer

as the Astor House in New York certainly implies that this hotel was more than just a flop-house. Was this piece captured by Union troops, brought back to New England and used in a Yankee homestead, only to surface 140 years later at a Western Massachusetts auction?

Interestingly enough, a Blue Willow toast water jug surfaced on eBay with these same markings shortly after Jane Diemer supplied

me with the above information. Neither she nor I were able to purchase the jug, but it came out of Southern Connecticut, perhaps the same estate that supplied my Western Massachusetts auctioneer. The possibilities are almost endless.

In its 'retirement', this large tureen has resulted in the creation of TCC friendships, and allowed transferware to take on a very human dimension.

TCC NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

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Copies of Past Bulletins

Copies of all previous TCC bulletins are now available through the Website: www.transcollectorsclub.com on the Bulletin Archives page.

Recent bulletins (back through August 2003) were already posted.

We have now added the earlier bulletins (beginning Autumn 1999).

Members can download for free; non-members \$5.00 per issue.

Author's Addendum:

Between the time that the Spring 2006 issue of the *TCC Bulletin* was printed and mailed, and before the on-line version was made public, I was asked a question about the transfer pattern found on the large Masons Tureen; I called it "Blue Willow", but had never tried to identify it further. Was it traditional Blue Willow, or a variant? Loren Zeller, the TCC President contacted Masons Expert (and TCC Member) Janice Paull, who provided a fascinating and intriguing response:

"The soup tureen is in the earliest of the Mason's shapes, the "Nankin" shape, copied from the Chinese 18th Cent. version; this shape is dated from 1813.

"The pattern is not a true pattern but the blue transfer base of the "Chinese Vista" Pattern, the enameled colours have not been added, as with the finial and boar's head handles. I call these Friday afternoon pieces. They were never completed and as such are not considered rare, just unusual.

"The retailer mark is for Timothy Tredwell Kissam of 141 Maiden Lane, New York, who was the largest retailer for hotel ware in the US. His family still lives on Long Island and have their own examples of his pieces. The family has a wonderful web site for those interested: <http://www.kissamfamily.org/>., well worth a look."

Janice Paull

<http://www.janicepaull.com/>

Specialist in English Ironstone China

Our large tureen now has a true identity, as well as a history. Ms. Paull has not only clarified that the pattern as a hybrid -- an 'end of the day' special that may have been destined for the 'seconds bin'-- but also that Kissam was a major importer/retailer of Staffordshire used in American hotels prior to the Civil War. And we all had to wonder why the Foo Dog is smiling!