

1980

The Kirkpatricks' Pottery, Anna, Illinois

Ellen Paul Denker

Follow this and additional works at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha>



Part of the [Archaeological Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Denker, Ellen Paul (1980) "The Kirkpatricks' Pottery, Anna, Illinois," *Northeast Historical Archaeology*: Vol. 9 9, Article 4.
<https://doi.org/10.22191/neha/vol9/iss1/4> Available at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha/vol9/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Northeast Historical Archaeology by an authorized editor of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact ORB@binghamton.edu.

The Kirkpatricks' Pottery

Anna, Illinois

Ellen Paul Denker

Between 1859 and 1896, the brothers Cornwall and W. Wallace Kirkpatrick built and operated a large stoneware pottery in Anna, Union County, Illinois. Although they exhibited at such important national expositions as the Centennial celebration in Philadelphia and numerous regional fairs, their important contribution to the American folk pottery tradition has remained largely unrecorded in this century. Investigation into their production is hampered by an absence of their own personal and business records, by the fact that the pottery site cannot be excavated (the site is paved over and occupied by two commercial buildings), and because most of those photographs which might have been taken by the several Anna photographers have not been found. Census information has been helpful, but this comes only once in a decade, and some, especially for the later years, is unavailable. Locally published newspapers and county histories of the period, though not always reliable, have also been useful.

As with all artifacts, the study of pottery provides innumerable insights into the patterns of lives past and present, patterns made by both makers and users. The specialty wares created by the Kirkpatrick brothers are particularly complex artifacts. Study of these reveals the complexity of life in Illinois during the late 19th century.

The Kirkpatricks did not begin their lives or careers in Anna. In order to understand the importance of Anna and pottery in their lives, we need to go back to their beginning. Cornwall and Wallace Kirkpatrick were quite literally born into the American pottery tradition (Perrin 1883: II, 72-74; Bonham 1883: 301-306). Their father, Andrew, was a potter born in Washington, Pennsylvania, in 1788. He married and moved to Fredericktown, Knox County, Ohio before 1814, the year of Cornwall's birth. By 1820, the family had moved again, this time to Urbana, Champaign County, Ohio, where Andrew had a small earthenware pottery in which he annually produced approximately \$1800 worth of "all kinds of potters ware" (U.S. Census of Manufactures 1820). Andrew and Ann Kirkpatrick had 13 children. Of their ten sons, five became potters each with their own potteries and four died relatively early in life.

According to Cornwall's biography, he left school at the age of 12 to begin work as a clerk and bookkeeper in a store (Perin 1883: II, 72-73). After seven years, he returned home and learned

the trade of potter with his father, remaining about one year, and mastering the business before the year expired. He then spent several months working on the flatboats that plied the Ohio and Mississippi rivers from Cincinnati to New Orleans.

In 1837, he took over his father's shop in Urbana. Andrew, his wife, and what children remained with them (including Wallace, born in 1828) had moved to Vermilionville, LaSalle County, in northern Illinois. According to a lease, Andrew took over a pottery begun by another son, John, several years earlier (Leonard 1939). From 1839 to 1848, Cornwall had a pottery in Covington, Campbell County, Kentucky. He returned to Ohio in 1848, and the next year bought a pottery from Sarah Lakin in Point Pleasant, Clermont County. Cornwall probably produced reed stem tobacco pipes at the Point Pleasant pottery, in addition to utilitarian stonewares--jars, bowls, pie plates, jugs, crocks, firebrick and flue pipe (Thomas and Burnett 1972; Murphy 1976). In 1850, with four employees, he produced 35,000 gallons of ware valued at \$2450 (U.S. Census of Manufactures 1850).

Wallace Kirkpatrick was also involved in the Point Pleasant venture (Perrin 1883: II, 73-74). He came from Vermilionville in 1849 to learn the pottery trade from his brother. However, his stay in Point Pleasant was short. He joined the gold rush to California in 1850; showed up in Cincinnati in 1852; and, in 1854, returned to northern Illinois for a brief period.

While still owner of the property in Point Pleasant, Cornwall established another pottery on Fulton Street in Cincinnati in 1855. This was shortlived, however, since this pottery is not in the 1857 Cincinnati directory. He sold the Point Pleasant pottery to Nathan S. Davis in 1856.

Late in 1857, Cornwall built a three story pottery in Mound City, Pulaski County, Illinois, on the Ohio River, and was joined in this venture by Wallace and Andrew, although they may not have invested in the enterprise. The Mound City pottery was to have been a large operation employing steam instead of horse power (Felts 1974: 38-39). Cornwall must have failed in this pottery, since in 1860 (in Anna), he valued his personal estate at only \$150, while Wallace valued his at \$8000 (U.S. Population Census



Figure 1. Mug with a painted green frog inside made at the Anna Pottery, stoneware with Albany slip and inscription "From the / World's Fair / 1893" enclosed in a circle, height $2\frac{1}{2}$ " (6.4 cm). Mugs have a characteristic squat shape, curving in slightly in the middle, with lines inscribed near the top and bottom. Private Collection. Photograph by the author.

1860). Pipes were a big production item at Mound City, where they also produced utilitarian stoneware.

In November 1859, the brothers fired their first kiln of wares in Anna (*Jonesboro Weekly Gazette* 1859). Their choice of Anna was not entirely arbitrary: reports of the state geologist suggested they would be able to find the proper clays in the vicinity (Bonham 1883: 303) Anna was a new town, where lots were still cheap, and it was along the Illinois Central Railroad right-of-way. Anna is located in the triangular shaped tip of southern Illinois, the area known as "Little Egypt", which is characterized by gentle forested hills in contrast to the flat grassy grand prairie lands farther north. Like all of "Little Egypt's" cities, Anna never grew to the proportions of other cities to the north; the population today is about 6,000.

The 1860 Censuses reveal that the Kirkpatricks were employing five other potters, in addition to themselves, their father and a small number of laborers. They were enjoying a prosperous business, having made 80,000 gallons of stoneware that year worth \$7200.

A newspaper article of 1866, described the pottery as:

a large two-story frame building, situated on the east side of the railroad track near the Depot. In the basement, or lower story, is the machinery for grinding clay, by horse power, two horses being used. adjoining is a large room containing a hot-air furnace, which warms the whole building, and dries the ware before going into the kiln. To the north of this room is another apartment in which are two kilns for burning ware; these kilns hold 2,000 gallons of ware each, and are filled and burnt twice during each week. In the sec-

ond and third stories are all of the latest and most improved machinery for 'moulding clay in the hands of the potter,' and for drying and storing ware. There is also a machine for moulding clay pipes, which turn out thousands of pipes per day. Everything in the line of churns, crocks, jugs, plates, pipes for draining, &c., are manufactured, and are pronounced by all who have used them, equal in every respect, to the celebrated Ohio stoneware (*Jonesboro Weekly Gazette* 1866).

The Kirkpatricks employed master potters who worked well and quickly and paid them on a piece work basis. Some potters earned as much as \$18 to \$30 per week in the 1860's (*Jonesboro Weekly Gazette* 1867). In addition to the pipes, churns, crocks, jugs, plates, and drainage tile mentioned above, over the years they also made funnels for chimney tops, pitchers, milk pans, fruit jars, firebrick, flower and cemetery urns, buckets, funnels for filling canning jars, and window sills, arches, mullions and roof tiles for buildings. The pottery they produced was indeed, "equal, in every respect, to the celebrated Ohio stoneware". Few of their wares were marked which makes these wares difficult to distinguish from other high quality midwestern stoneware of the second half of the 19th century.

The primary distribution area for their goods was within a 100 mile radius of Anna. Newspaper reports indicate that they also shipped stoneware to St. Louis, New Orleans, and New York. Reed stem tobacco pipes were also a major production item. Barrels of them were shipped to a number of places. For instance, in 1880, they shipped 2,000,000 pipes to one customer in St. Louis (*Farmer and Fruit Grower* 1880).

Late in 1867, their stoneware business was further enhanced by the discovery and purchase of extensive beds of kaolin about four miles northwest of Anna. By April 1868, they had begun to ship quantities of the raw material to Cincinnati, and were making plans to build their own white ware manufactory (*Jonesboro Gazette* 1868). The change to white ware production would have made this operation more fully industrial, but they lacked the capital necessary to exploit this resource. For nearly ten years after this discovery of kaolin, which saw the development of additional clay beds, the local newspaper urged people to invest in a white ware factory. Such financial aid was not forthcoming; but mining did continue through the 1880's.

Shipments of kaolin are reported to Cincinnati, Chicago, Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Detroit (Bonham 1883: 304). Since account books have not been located, it is not known how much clay was being shipped or which operation, mining or pottery making, was more profitable. They probably never produced much over 100,000 gallons of stoneware in any one year. This amount was considerably more than they had produced in other locations, but considerably less than would be expected from full industrial production. Growth in their production was not dramatic at Anna and pottery making remained essentially a hand craft for them. Thus, the mining of kaolin must cer-

tainly have increased their annual earnings and aided them to stay in business during a period in which consumer interest in utilitarian stoneware forms was declining.

In addition to their utilitarian wares, extensive pipe production, and clay mining business, the Kirkpatricks produced a number of stock novelties to promote the Anna Pottery at local and regional fairs. Because these were as much advertising as souvenirs, they were often marked and occasionally dated.

Miniature jugs and log cabins, one inch in height, were hollow to contain a small picture with a lense to magnify it when held to light. According to family tradition there were three varieties of pictures (made in Paris) that came in the miniature jugs: the Lord's Prayer, a snake coiled to strike, and a nude woman.

Animals, birds and reptiles appear often in their work, including dog figures, owl whistles, mugs with frogs in the bottom to surprise the drinker (Figure 1), shell-shaped inkwells with frogs perched on top, and little brown jugs with snake handles. Local newspapers mention more novelties that have not been found, including turtles sitting on logs, "Indian relics", and "vases from Pompeii, made to order".

Cornwall also made large commemorative urns and jugs for exhibits and fairs. These were laboriously inscribed with the names of county officers, fair officials and other prominent citizens and exhibit the "horror vacui": characteristic of the Victorian sense of design. They all have a grey saltglazed stoneware body, with incising filled with cobalt blue.

The pig bottles produced at the Anna Pottery are extremely complex artifacts. Reportedly made in the thousands, many survive today, enough to suggest their range in variety and purpose when originally made (Bonham 1883: 305). The Kirkpatricks began producing them at least as early as 1869 and made them at least as late as 1893.

The classic pig (Figure 2) is in stoneware covered in an Albany Slip with the design scratched into it. On one side is a pattern of lines which represent the routes of the railroads that crisscrossed Illinois in the second half of the 19th century. Cities along the routes are also identified, including Chicago, the "corn city" or sometimes "corn mart", at the mouth; Cincinnati, the "pork city" or "ancient porkopolis" underneath; and Anna, sometimes referred as "jug city" near the tail. The Mississippi River runs down the spine, with Eads Bridge, completed in 1874, crossing over to St. Louis, "the future capitol". The whole is titled the "Latest and Most Reliable Railroad and River Guide," and the inscriptions usually include the phrase "with a little good old bourbon in a hogs..." (flask opening, at the tail end).

The pig bottle is a metaphor of one respect of the midwest economy. Even in the 19th century, corn was one of the most important cereal crops

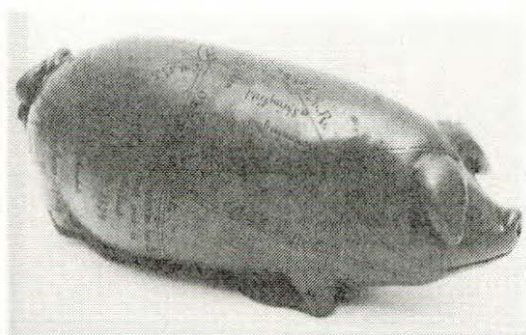


Figure 2. Anna Pottery pig bottle, stoneware with Albany slip, length 8" (20.3 cm), incised with a map of Illinois railroads and the towns through which they passed. This pig is dated by the inscription "Centralia has struck / coal and is / jubilant Nov 1874" pig bottles were produced at least as early as 1869. Nancy and Gary Stass Collection. Photograph by Steven N. Collins.

grown in the midwest, but it was worth little as corn on the commodity market. It was worth much more when used to fatten hogs or to make whiskey. The railroad, of course, was the primary transportation system of the period.

In addition to this economic metaphor, however, the Kirkpatricks have also indicated their attitude toward one of these commodities, best expressed in the words of a reporter in 1869:

"The pigs are a curious piece of workmanship, and appropriate, for it is rather a hogish propensity to be guzzling (sic) whiskey, and if the habit is indulged in, will soon reduce a man below the level of the hog, and cause him to wallow in the gutter" (*Jonesboro Gazette* 1869).

The meanings imbedded in this artifact are complex but quite clear. The pig bottles are a representation of one aspect of midwest economic interaction combined with moral comment. Not all the Anna pig bottles bear the same inscriptions. An investigation of these variations on a theme is fascinating. They were made for a variety of purposes, especially as souvenirs, gifts, and advertising.

The majority of the pigs I have seen range from 5-8½ inches in length. Since they were duplicated thousands of times, one would expect them to have been made in molds. Curiously enough this is not the case; they were all hand modeled. The potter first turned a cylinder, which was then pinched to indicate the basic pig shape and details of face, legs and tail, were added. The hand modeling of all these pigs reiterates the Kirkpatricks' devotion to pottery as a hand craft.

The Kirkpatricks' most dramatic contribution to American folk sculpture lies in the bizarre snake jugs made between 1860 and 1885 (Figure 3). There are 11 large snake jugs now known at present in public and private collections. They all share similar characteristics. The jug itself is a long-necked bulbous shape which Ramsay identified as an American form of the 16th century

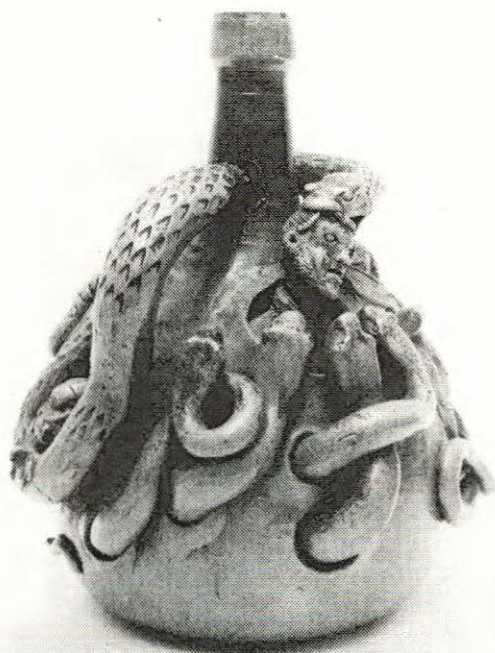


Figure 3. Snake jug by Wallace Kirkpatrick, ca. 1868, in saltglazed stoneware and signed with a drawing of the pottery. The 11 snake jugs now known all have the long neck and bulbous body seen here. Examples of these jugs are in the New York Historical Society, the Smithsonian Institution, the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fold Art Center, and several private collections. Height 10½" (26.7 cm). Nancy and Gary Stass Collection. Photograph by Steven N. Collins.

English greybeard or Rhenish bellarmine jugs (Ramsay 1947: 135, #10). Most of the snake jugs also have a bearded head emerging from the front shoulder, in a position similar to that of the bearded faces applied to bellarmine jugs. On the Anna jugs the head is always three dimensional and occasionally the shoulders and arms of the man are included. The jugs also share the features of being covered with snakes in various densities and have the bottom halves of human bodies attached so as to appear to be diving into the jug. The jugs are approximately 10-12 inches in height.

There is no doubt that Wallace was responsible for these jugs. He was quite familiar with snakes and kept a number of them always on display at the pottery. He used them for his own shows or sold them to side shows and circuses.

The temperance theme is quite explicit in these jugs. The configurations of snakes, frogs, spiders, lizards, and so forth suggest the drunkard's dream or delirium tremens (Figure 4). Samuel Clemens, through his character Huck Finn, provides a verbal description of this condition. In Chapter 6 of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck talks about his father:

I don't know how long I was asleep, but all of a sudden there was an awful scream and I was up. There was pap, looking wild and skipping around every which way and yelling

about snakes. He said they was crawling up his legs; and then he would give a jump and scream, and say one had bit him on the cheek --but I couldn't see no snakes. He started and run round and round the cabin, hollering "take him off! he's biting me on the neck!" I never see a man look so wild in the eyes.

The temperance cause was one of the strongest social reform movements in the 19th century. Public drunkenness, seen as a menace to decency and an affront to the genteel, was the primary target of temperance advocates. The town of Anna furiously debated the liquor question from the towns founding in 1855 through the 1860's and 1870's. Wallace and Cornwall Kirkpatrick were two of Anna's most prominent and industrious businessmen and took an active part in the social and political life of the town. Both were city councilmen at different times in the 1860's and Cornwall was Mayor for three terms between 1872 and 1884. When called upon for a public opinion, they always sided with the anti-saloon forces.

In the snake jugs, Wallace combined his fasci-



Figure 4. Snake Jug by Wallace Kirkpatrick, ca. 1870, with presentation "J.G.C. / Condt. I.C.R.R. / To / Bill Coulter / Pioneer Condr. N.J.R.R.". It has a grey saltglazed stoneware body with cobalt blue highlights, height 9 5/8" (24.5 cm). Under the bedraggled head emerging from the front is written "the Drunkard's Doom". Small figures lounge in railroad chairs to the right. The jug is signed with an incised drawing of the pottery, barely visible at the lower left, with inscription "Kirkpatrick Pottery / Anna Illinois". "J.G.C." is probably Joseph G. Cormick, a veteran conductor on the Illinois Central Railroad. Barry Cohen Collection. Photography by David Price.

nation for snakes with his own feelings about temperance and his own unique ability to model caricatures in stoneware of human and animal forms. Wallace also had his imitators (Figure 5). The characteristic long-necked bulbous shaped jug with a figure emerging from the shoulder and surrounded by snakes, lizards, and frogs was taken directly from the Anna jugs although the modeling on this jug is not as masterful as on those made by Wallace Kirkpatrick. As with many of the Anna jugs, this was a presentation piece. The cryptic signature on the back indicates the jug was probably made in Boonville, Missouri, but the potter has not been identified. There are other snake jugs associated with the Boonville area (van Ravenswaay 1951: Plate V).

No discussion of the Kirkpatricks' work would be complete without mention of Wallace's Pioneer Farms. One of the strongest strains running through the 19th century was nostalgia, seen quite clearly in the clutter of souvenirs, mementos, and remembrances that weighed heavily on the walls of late Victorian homes. With Wallace, nostalgia took the form of sweet memories of his rural childhood in northern Illinois. As an extension of his passion for modeling figures, he began filling his yard with "scenics" that especially involved snakes and log cabins, at least as early as 1875. These early attempts expanded quickly into a large, but portable, arrangement of various figures which he carried to fairs and exhibitions as an attraction.

Wallace made two complete farms, neither of which has been found. The first was sold in 1878; the second, which he "improved" over a number of years, must have been more elaborate. These farms of stoneware were probably painted in realistic colors and seem to have occupied approximately 25 square feet. According to descriptions in newspapers of the period, the arrangement included a prairie schooner, log cabin, old folks resting, young folks fishing (in a real stream), and men felling trees and building a schoolhouse. Deer, trees, and rocks completed the panorama with Indians lurking in the background. The images evoked were so powerful that "old people gazed upon it with tears in their eyes as they related to by-standers how it was and how it made them feel young again" (*Farmer and Fruit Grower* 1883). Wallace displayed them at many fairs and expositions, taking the second one as far as St. Louis, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, New Orleans, Boston, and Coney Island in New York, as well as many cities in his immediate area. As with the snake jugs, Wallace managed in the Farms to capture the prevailing Victorian attitude and combine it with his own experience, his observation of nature, and his unique ability to model caricature in stoneware.

Cornwall's health began failing in 1886, after which time he was confined to his home and did not take an active part in the pottery operations. In 1888, James Toler, who had worked for the Kirkpatricks as a potter for several years, took over Cornwall's position as foreman and superintendent of the pottery. Cornwall died in 1890, but the firm name of "C. & W. Kirkpatrick" continued to be used until 1893, when Cornwall's



Figure 5. Presentation Jug probably made in Boonville, Missouri, ca. 1885, Albany slip over stoneware with inscriptions: "To / O.T. Paley," From / J.W. Bray, "Broadway / Saloon," and "Pod K / S L B-n-ville." Height 10½" (26.7 cm). Private Collection. Photograph by the author.

wife sold her ½ interest in the pottery to James Toler, after which time became known as "Kirkpatrick & Co." or "Kirkpatrick & Toler".

In 1896, Toler sold his share to Wallace Kirkpatrick and went to Sioux City, Iowa, to establish a pottery. Wallace died that same year; however, the pottery remained in his wife's possession until 1900 when Toler returned to Anna and purchased it again. His attempt to produce white ware failed and he sold the pottery in 1903. The building was razed the next year.

Many of the standard questions involving the production of any pottery are unanswerable for the Anna Pottery. The site cannot be excavated, the account books have not been found, the proprietors and workers are dead, and the production stoneware was largely unmarked. What remains in-

stead from the Kirkpatricks' hands is a rich assortment of their more unusual artifacts. This legacy offers a multitude of insights into the character of the late 19th century and the impact of political and social events and movements. The Kirkpatricks' work offers a comment on existing regional economic conditions, and the distinctive mix of local fauna; on the witty perceptions of two uncommon potters with a passion for pottery as a hand craft.

van Ravenswaay, C.

1951 Missouri Pottery and Their Wares, 1780-1924. *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 7(4): 453-72.

REFERENCES

- Bonham, J.
1883 Cornwall Kirkpatrick. *Fifty Years' Recollections*. J.W. Franks & Sons Peoria, Illinois.
- Farmer and Fruit Grower*
1880 July 21, 1880.
1883 November 28, 1883.
- Felts, J.K., Sr.
1974 The Anna Pottery. *Chicago History* 3(1): 36-44.
- Jonesboro Gazette*
1869 June 26, 1869. Jonesboro, Illinois.
- Jonesboro Weekly Gazette*
1859 December 3, 1859.
1866 November 24, 1866.
1867 June 20, 1867.
Published in Jonesboro, Illinois.
- Leonard, L.
1939 *History of Union County (Illinois)*.
- Newspapers:
Jonesboro Weekly Gazette (later *Jonesboro Gazette*), Jonesboro, Illinois.
Farmer and Fruit Grower, Anna, Illinois.
The Talk, Anna, Illinois.
- Perrin, W.H.
1883 *History of Alexander, Union and Pulaski Counties, Illinois*, Volumes I and II. O.L. Baskin and Company, Chicago.
- Ramsay, J.
1947 *American Potters and Pottery*. Tudor Publishing Company, New York.
- Thomas, B.B. and R.M. Burnett
1972 A Study of Clay Smoking Pipes Produced at a Nineteenth Century Kiln at Point Pleasant, Ohio. In *The Conference on Historic Site Archaeology Papers* 1971, Vol 6: pp. 1-31. Columbia, South Carolina.
- United States Census of Manufactures*
1820 Champaign County,
1850 Ohio.
- United States Population Census*
1860 Champaign County, Ohio.