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Other California Potteries

Arts and Crafts potteries boomed in California slightly later than on the East Coast, with much activity during the second decade of the century. Small companies came and went frequently, but the growth stopped only with the Depression. From a vast number, a few stand out.

Valentien Pottery was established in San Diego around 1911 by former Rookwood decorators Albert Valentien (1862-1925) and Anna Bookprinter Valentien (1862-1947). They hired Arthur Dovey, who had been a Rookwood thrower before moving to the Niloak Pottery in Arkansas. Many Valentien Pottery shapes and design elements recall their former employer's. Soft mat glazes often featured subtle gradations of atomized color. Art Nouveau decoration in low relief included raised flowers, vines and leaves. Anna Valentien's background in sculpture, combined with her exposure to Rodin earlier in Paris, is apparent in her figures that dramatically contour the rims of vases in a manner recalling Van Briggles. Unfortunately, the pottery's neighborhood turned residential, and people complained about kiln smoke. The pottery closed in a year.

Grand Feu Art Pottery in Los Angeles was operated by Cornelius Brauckman (1864-1952) from about 1912 to 1916. Other Southern California potteries used earthenware, but Brauckman worked with a vitrified stoneware body, like porcelain but not translucent, for classically simple thrown forms without applied decoration. Brauckman was a native of Missouri, and the name of his pottery recalls Taxile Doat's book, but he came to Los Angeles about 1909 and no connection to Doat is known. The pottery won a gold medal at San Diego's 1915 exposition and was exhibited at the First Annual Arts and Crafts Salon, Los Angeles, held in February 1916.

Sidebar: The Robertsons in Southern California

Alexander Robertson, formerly of Chelsea Ceramic and Roblin, was also involved in Southern California ventures. **Halcyon Pottery** opened in 1910 at a Theosophist cooperative community and sanatorium near Pismo Beach, with Robertson as instructor and director. Work was first displayed in January 1911. Still interested in California clays, he continued the Roblin style of applied decoration of lizards, flowers and other regional specifics. He used local red-firing clay that he bisque-fired only, which showed off the fine grain of the clay and detail of the relief. The pottery produced vases, pitchers, candlesticks, bowls, incense burners, whistles,

paperweights, toothpick holders and match holders. Robertson left in 1912, and the pottery closed in 1913.

He went on to experiment with the clays of Riverside County for **Alberhill Pottery**, earning a Gold Medal at the 1915 San Diego exposition, but the work never went into production. As he retired from active work, his son, Fred H. Robertson (1869-1952), began initialing experimental artware that he produced after joining Los Angeles Pressed Brick Company. He started luster and crystalline glazes in 1914 and made ceramic lamps with glass inserts in ceramic shades. Later, after work with another company, he and his son, George B. Robertson, organized the **Robertson Pottery**. Fred worked at the wheel while George decorated. Some shapes and glazes came from Chelsea Ceramic precedents, including a crackle, but they tended to use more vivid California colors. The pottery closed in 1952, the year Fred died, ending the Robertson clay dynasty.

Markham Pottery was begun in 1905 in Ann Arbor, Mich., by an amateur, Herman C. Markham (1849-1922). A lover of roses, he used clay from his own yard to make a porous pottery vase that kept the water cool by evaporation, so the flowers stayed fresh longer. With his son, Kenneth Sprague (1877-1952), he moved to California in 1913. Markham developed a surface treatment that he kept secret and which has never been duplicated. Most works looked like ancient excavated things. Slip-cast oriental-type shapes were completed in a single firing. Each was unique.

Markham pots were made in two styles. *Reseau* has a fine texture and delicate, web-like, slightly raised veins that evoke erosion, in colors varying from red to brown. *Arabesque* is coarser in texture and more evenly brown in color, with a maze of raised, irregular fine lines that may suggest fossils. Some had a metallic appearance. The works won awards and were popular—even though they were seen as technically primitive—because of their mysterious surfaces. Markham used the facilities of California China Products, and its failure in 1917 was the first of several setbacks that continued until he died in 1922.

California Faience was established in Berkeley in 1916 by William V. Bragdon (1884-1959)], who did the mold-making and other technical tasks, and Chauncey R. Thomas (1877-1950), who developed glazes. Bragdon graduated from Alfred (1908) and taught at the University of Chicago and then University City. In 1915 he came to the California College of Arts and Crafts. The two men first opened a storefront with a kiln out back. Tiles were usually mold-decorated with stylized designs and glazed in bright, glossy colors, especially vivid blues. The small company took on the enormous task of producing most of the decorative tiles for William Randolph Hearst's "castle" at San Simeon. Their pots,

by contrast, had monochrome mat glazes on simple forms, including a lot of florist ware. All artware production stopped early in the Depression.