

The Orcutt & Crafts Pottery in Portland, Maine

By M. LELYN BRANIN

AN earlier account traced the long history of the first pottery established in Portland, Maine, that of Benjamin Dodge who came to Portland from Exeter, New Hampshire, in 1794 or 1795. Earthenware was produced at this pottery from the time of its founding until the death of Mr. Dodge's son, Benjamin Jr., in 1875.

Evidence also points to Portland as the site of the first stoneware pottery in Maine, that of Martin Crafts of Whately, Massachusetts, who came to Portland during the latter part of 1833, the exact date being unknown. A record kept by his brother notes he went to Portland in 1834,¹ but this seems to be refuted by a deed drawn in Portland on the first day of January 1834 which refers to him as "Portland Potter."² In any case, he began to make stoneware in Portland in 1833 or 1834.

There is evidence he faced competition from ware imported by ship from states farther south, especially Massachusetts and Connecticut. Attwood & Quincey of 9 Jones Row, Portland, advertised in the *Eastern Argus* in 1822 (March 26) "A new consignment of | Stone Ware | which will be sold at the same | price and discount as at the | Pottery, Norwich, Connecticut." And in 1835, Joseph Ropes of Middle Street, Portland, announced (December 4) in the *Eastern Argus* that as agent for Goodwin, Webster & Company of Hartford, Connecticut, he had just received a new supply of stoneware which included "Butter Pots, Jugs, Cream and Preserve Pots, Churns, &c.

of all sizes" which he could supply "Traders and others . . . on as good terms as they are sold in the city."

Martin Crafts was born in Whately on the fourth of April 1807, son of a well-known and prominent potter of that community. He married Emily Ingram (1811-1885) of Newfane, Vermont, April 19, 1832, and they had eight children.³ The first child, Samuel Thomas, was born August 5, 1833, in Whately, and died less than three weeks later, on August 23. The move to Portland was probably made soon after the death of this first child. The next two children, Edward and Alonzo, were born in Portland August 17, 1834, and died the next day. Other children of this marriage were Mary Henry (b. Portland 1835; d. 1865), Harriet Mehitable (b. Nashua 1840; d. young), Harriet Triphena (b. Nashua 1843), Martin Alonzo (b. Nashua 1845; d. same day), and Emily Mehitable (b. Nashua 1847).

On arrival in Portland, Martin Crafts presumably rented or leased a house and set up a pot shop to make stoneware either in or near his residence. He undoubtedly made the first stoneware in Portland and probably the first in Maine, since the only other early stoneware pottery in the state, that of Lyman & Clark in Gardiner, did not begin to turn out ware until 1837.⁴ A three-gallon stoneware jug made by Martin Crafts in the collection of the New Hampshire Historical Society at Concord should, I think, be attributed to this 1833-1834 period. It is potbellied in shape with a tooled line around the

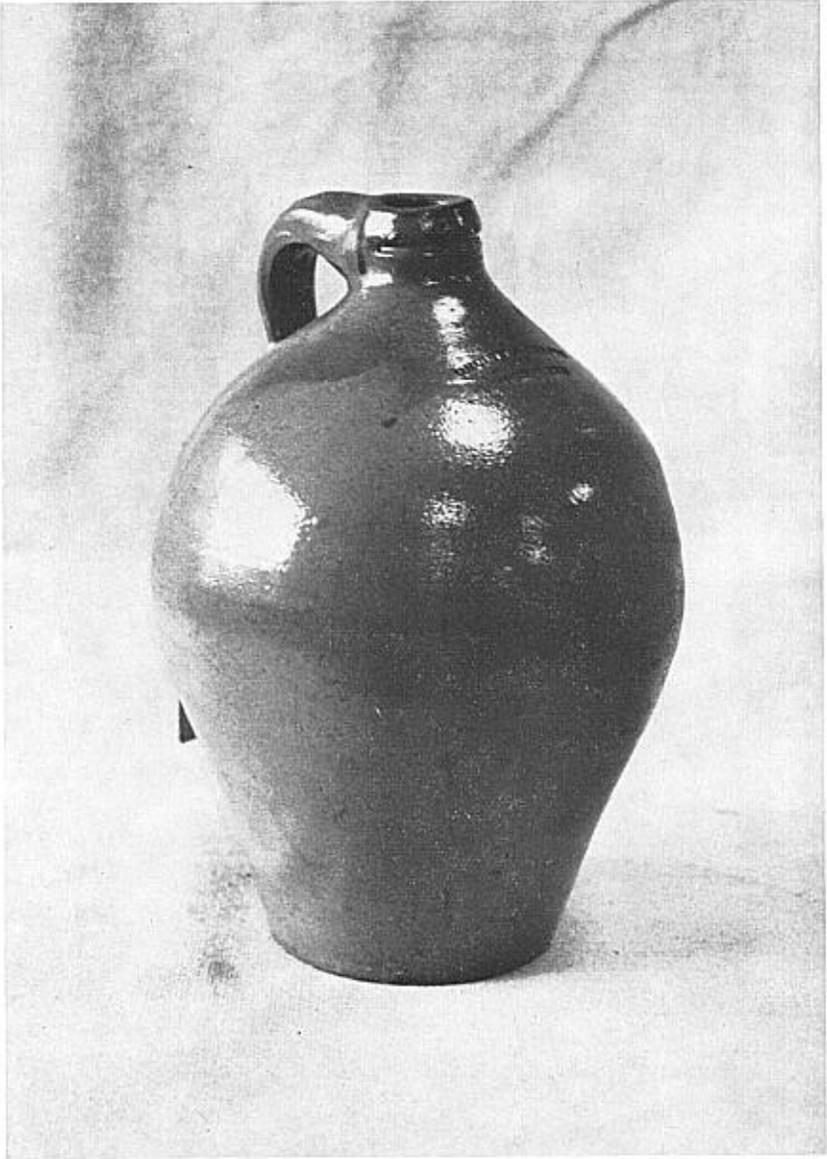


FIG. 1. ONE-GALLON STONEWARE JUG RAISED FROM PORTLAND HARBOR IN 1913 DURING DREDGING OPERATIONS

Grayish tan in color, shading somewhat deeper on neck and shoulder, with a medium glaze and faintly "orange peel" surface. Impressed mark: ORCUTT & CRAFTS | PORTLAND

Courtesy of the Maine Historical Society.

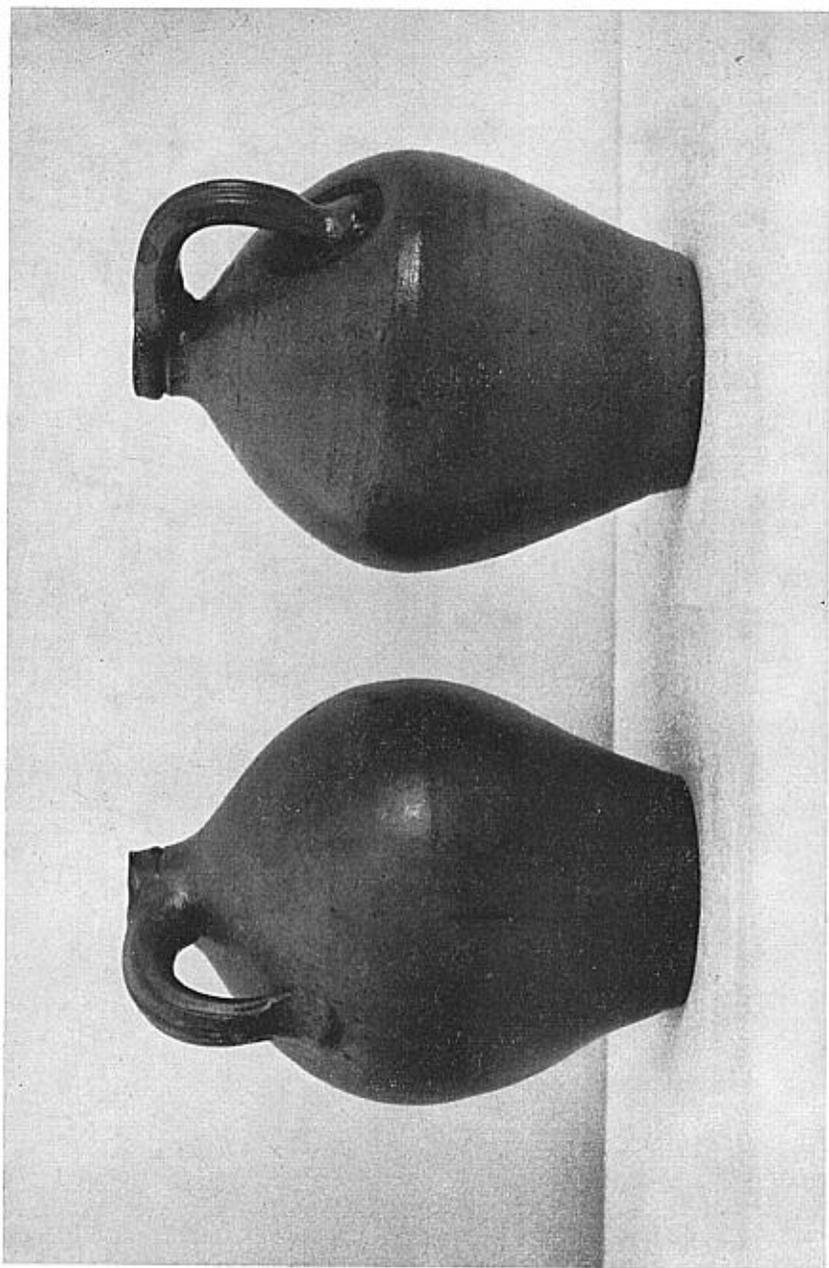


FIG. 2. TWO ONE-GALLON JUGS BEARING THE MARK ORCUTT & CRAFTS | PORTLAND

The one on the left is grayish-tan in color with a matte glaze and very smooth surface. It is virtually identical in color, form and finish with the one-gallon Orcutt & Crafts jug in the Maine Historical Society's collection. The jug on the right is medium gray in color with a heavy transparent glaze of the so-called orange peel type. Note the brushed-on dabs of dark brown slip at the points where the handle is attached.

shoulder, buff in color with a transparent glaze tinged with amber, especially in the neck area, measures approximately $16\frac{1}{4}$ inches high by $10\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide, and bears the impressed mark M. CRAFTS & CO. | PORTLAND. However, for reasons unknown, Martin Crafts' name was not listed in the 1834 Portland directory. There is the possibility, of course, the pottery did not get into operation until after the directory had gone to press.

By the terms of the deed dated January 1, 1834, Martin Crafts acquired a plot of land on the northwest corner of State and York Streets from a Portland merchant named John D. Gardner. The purchase price was \$1,200 and Gardner held a \$900 mortgage on the property. Crafts sold a strip of this land five feet wide to Mason Greenwood of Portland the following May for \$105, and the remainder to Henry Gooding of Portland on June 30, 1835, for \$2,000, at the same time acquiring from Gooding a parcel of land "with buildings thereon" on Mechanic Street for \$650.⁵ This Mechanic Street property apparently was a dwelling house, to which Martin Crafts soon moved and continued to occupy until June 1837.

Crafts in January and February of 1835 was joined in the business by Eleazer Orcutt, another potter from Whately, Massachusetts, whose father, like Martin's, was a well-known potter of that community. Orcutt was born in Whately December 7, 1796. Before coming to Portland he had worked as a potter in Troy, New York, where he married Jane Giles, of Troy, by whom he had six children.⁶ He had several brothers and sisters, including a brother named Walter with whom he later became associated in the making of stoneware at Ashfield, Massachusetts.

About this time, on February 17,

1835, Martin Crafts purchased a plot of land on the westerly side of Green Street from William Gorham for \$800 "together with the Distillery and appurtenances thereof & all other buildings standing thereon. Also, one privilege in the common passage way between Benjamin Larrabee's land & these premises" This property, measuring about 65 by 222 feet, was located "eleven rods and seven feet" (about 188.5 feet) northerly from the division line of James Deering and Benjamin Larrabee and it had formerly been owned and operated as a distillery by Thomas Millions.⁷ It was encumbered by a \$2,000 mortgage held by the Cumberland Insurance Company and secured by Nathaniel Stevens of Westbrook and Oliver Everett of Portland. A note for \$800, payable in ninety days and bearing the signatures of both Martin Crafts and Eleazer Orcutt, was given to Gorham and was secured by a mortgage on both the Green Street and State Street properties.⁸ Acquisition of this property marked the beginning of the partnership between Martin Crafts and Eleazer Orcutt. No doubt the pottery-making equipment was transferred to this site soon afterwards and the pottery began to function under the style Orcutt & Crafts.

About two months later, on April 7, Orcutt and Crafts assumed responsibility for the \$2,000 mortgage against the property, stating they "are holders and stand firmly holden and stand firmly bound and obliged unto Nathaniel Stevens of Westbrook and Oliver Everett of Portland . . . in the sum of two thousand dollars . . . to be paid to the said Nathaniel and Oliver . . . dated the seventh day of April . . . one thousand eight hundred and thirty five."

The conditions of the above obligation is such, on the twenty third day of June, A.D. 1830, Thomas Millions made his deed of bargain &

Sale & warranty in mortgage to the Cumberland Insurance Company, a certain lot of land & all the buildings and improvements thereon situated at the easterly end of Deering's bridge & on the southwesterly side of the road, and is the same lot & premises & appurtenances which have heretofore been occupied as a distillery, for collateral security for the sum of two thousand dollars, from said date, with interest half yearly, on which note the said Nathaniel & Oliver were with the securities of said Millions. Alcott & Crafts having purchased the equity of redemption of said premises and taken possession thereof promise and covenant that we will, in all things save the said Nathaniel and Oliver harmless from said note, as to debt, costs trouble & expense. And that deed and note . . . were assigned, transferred & indorsed to the Ocean Insurance Company, . . . and have become the lawful and bona fide property of said Ocean Insurance Company. Now if Alcott & Crafts shall well and truly save said Nathaniel and Oliver harmless from said note in all things as aforesaid, then this obligation shall be void, otherwise shall remain in full force and virtue.

Recorded July 14, 1835
Samuel Small, Register

(Signed) Martin Crafts
Eleazer Orcutt⁹

Although a warm and close friendship must have existed between Martin Crafts and Eleazer Orcutt over a period of many years, the partnership arrangement for some reason—possibly financial difficulties—did not survive for long. On September 14, 1836, Orcutt for \$2,000 conveyed to Martin Crafts

all the right, title and interest in and to the property called the stone ware factory establishment in said Portland on the westerly side of Deerings bridge so-called and is the same lot and buildings which said Crafts bought of William Gorham as appears by said Gorham deed of bargain and sale and quit claim dated the 17th day of Feby A.D. 1835 and recorded in the Cumberland County Record Book 141 Page 33 together with all the personal property belonging to said Stone ware factory except the portable furnaces now on hand and unburnt and the flower pots now on hand unburnt and the fire brick now on hand provided also that no personal property belonging to said Orcutt in his

private capacity and not belonging to the company is to pass to said Crafts by this deed and said Crafts is also to take on his own hands and pay the Mortgage from Thomas Millions to the Cumberland Insurance Company for two thousand dollars dated June 30, 1830 and the said Crafts does not have exclusive possession of the property conveyed by this deed untill after the last day of May next and the partnership to continue as it now is unless otherwise dissolved untill that time

September 14, 1836 (Signed) Eleazer Orcutt
Recorded April 5, 1837 Jane Orcutt¹⁰
Samuel Small Register

Coincident with this and on the same day, September 14, 1836, Martin Crafts for \$800 sold his Mechanic Street property to Orcutt, retaining for himself the right to occupy the premises until June 1, 1837. Martin's father, Thomas Crafts, signed this deed as a witness. Orcutt kept the property only until February 7, 1837, when he sold it to George W. Woodman of Portland for \$800."

Since Orcutt stipulated in his deed of sale that the partnership was to continue "as it now is unless otherwise dissolved" until May 31, 1837, and Crafts in his deed of sale reserved the right to occupy the Mechanic Street property until the end of May 1837, an agreement apparently had been reached by them in September 1836, when the deeds pertaining to those two transactions were drawn, to dispose of the business in June 1837 or soon thereafter. Hence, it is not surprising that on July 3, 1837, the stoneware factory, including land and buildings, were sold by Martin Crafts to his uncle, Caleb Crafts, who had recently come to the Westbrook area of Portland from Troy, New York.

Caleb Crafts was another of the Whately, Massachusetts, potters, having been born there July 29, 1800. He married Sophronia Morton (1806-1866) of Whately May 18, 1823, and they had

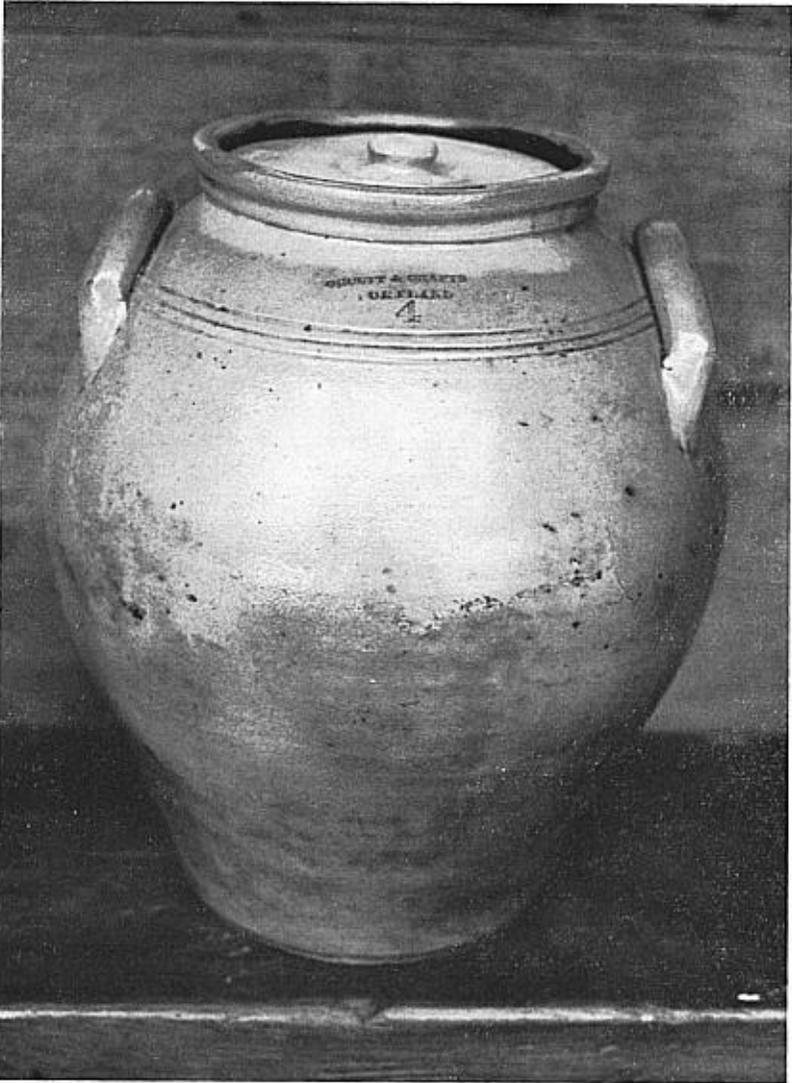


FIG. 3. FOUR-GALLON STONEWARE JUG WITH IMPRESSED MARK
OF ORCUTT & CRAFTS | PORTLAND

Natural buff in color, salt-glazed with a semi-matte finish, and with a few
specks of blue slip scattered over the surface.

Courtesy of Mr. Charles Van Rensselaer, Hopkinton, N. H.

seven children, four boys and three girls, only one of whom was born in Portland. Their son George Morton was born in Troy in 1835 and the next child, Thomas Hart Benton Crafts, was born in Portland in 1837, indicating they probably moved to Portland sometime during 1836-1837.

In view of the short duration of the Orcutt & Crafts partnership arrangement, scarcely more than two years, an astonishingly large quantity of ware must have been turned out at the factory. Although mostly of a utilitarian kind, without decorations, a variety of types were produced. Many of the pieces bore the impressed mark of the factory, ORCUTT & CRAFTS | PORTLAND, usually in characters four to six millimeters high. Most of the pieces reflected good taste in design and skill in execution, indicating the potters were competent craftsmen. Examples of the ware are still found quite often in Maine and New Hampshire.

One of the most interesting pieces of Orcutt & Crafts stoneware, by virtue of its history, is a one-gallon jug bearing the mark of the factory which was recovered from the mud in Portland harbor during dredging operations in 1913. Now in the collections of the Maine Historical Society in Portland, the jug is grayish tan in color, potbellied in shape, and is in excellent condition. A one-gallon jug in my own collection, similar in size and appearance and also in excellent condition, was found in New Hampshire. A three-gallon, potbellied jug, similar in color and having the Orcutt & Crafts mark, is owned by Mrs. Grace Davis of West Buxton, Maine. A fine example of a four-gallon, vase-shaped jar with two handles and a lid, also bearing the impressed mark of the pottery, is owned by Charles Van Rensselaer of Hopkinton, New Hamp-

shire (Fig. 3). It is natural buff in color, salt-glazed, with a few tiny pits containing blue slip scattered over the surface. A smaller jar, gray in color and without a lid, is in the collection of the New Hampshire Historical Society at Concord.

Associated with the Orcutt & Crafts venture was another potter from Whately, Massachusetts, named David Belden (or Belding). He probably was employed as a potter and had no financial interest in the business. A few years later, in 1842, Belden married Martin Crafts' sister, Triphena, described at the time as a very attractive young woman, but it proved to be a tragic marriage because of the death of the young wife about six weeks later. Belden was born in 1813 and was about six years younger than Martin Crafts. He was listed in the 1837 Portland directory as "potter at Martin Crafts'." A close relationship must have existed between the Crafts and Belden families, for two of Martin Crafts' daughters married Belden brothers whose mother was Aurelia (Crafts) Belden.

Another potter employed at the factory was Willaim Fives of Portland, referred to in the 1837 directory as "potter at Eleazer Orcutt's." Unfortunately, not much is known about Fives, although he continued to be associated with this factory for more than ten years, under successive owners, until his death in 1849-1850. His wife, Abby Fives, is listed as a widow in the 1850-1851 Portland directory. Fives' name appears in the 1838 and 1846-1849 Portland tax books, those for the intervening years 1839-1845 having been destroyed by fire.

In April 1837, about three months before he sold the pottery, Martin Crafts and Rufus Moses, a blacksmith of Portland, purchased eight acres of land in

Westbrook "on the back Cove road near Graves Hill (so-called) . . ." There is no indication what they had in mind; possibly the feasibility of setting up another stoneware factory or, more likely, the land was acquired for some other reason. In any case, Martin soon disposed of his half of the land to Caleb Crafts on May 18, 1838, one of the witnesses to the deed being Abigail Fives.¹²

On or soon after April 24, 1838, Martin Crafts received a surplus tax refund from the city treasurer, William Lord, receipt of which was acknowledged with his signature. Since no evidence to the contrary has been found, it is assumed he left Portland about this time and went to Nashua, New Hampshire, where for some years he operated a stoneware factory with his brother, James M. Crafts. Martin Crafts died in Newark, New Jersey, on March 29, 1880, his death certificate revealing that he had been a resident of that city for eighteen years. The Newark Directories for 1869 and 1870, incidentally, list Martin Crafts as a "potter."

Eleazer Orcutt and David Belden probably left Portland in June 1837, at the time the Orcutt and Crafts partnership was dissolved, and went to Massachusetts to become associated with Eleazer's brother, Walter, in the making of stoneware at Ashfield. Belden eventually became proprietor of the business. A tax refund in Portland was due Orcutt in 1838, but the tax book shows it was never collected and on April 3, 1840, was credited on the Orcutt & Crafts tax bill for 1837. Belden's name was not listed in the 1838 tax book, showing he had left Portland before the assessments were made.

By the deed of July 3, 1837, previously mentioned, transferring ownership of the factory, Martin Crafts conveyed the

land and buildings to "Caleb Crafts of Westbrook and William Fives of Portland . . . also one privilege in the common passage way between Benjamin Larrabees land and the premises . . . being all the premises I purchased of William Gorham as by deed of February 17th

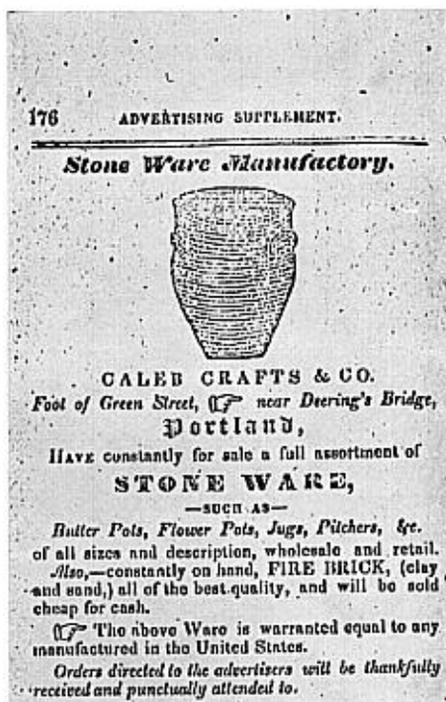


FIG. 4. CALEB CRAFTS & COMPANY ADVERTISEMENT WHICH APPEARED IN THE 1841 PORTLAND DIRECTORY

1835 and recorded in the Cumberland County Registry Book 141 Page 33 . . ." The deed was signed by Martin and Emily Crafts and witnessed by Rufus Moses and David Belding (Belden).¹³

The new owners operated the factory for several years under the style Caleb Crafts & Company, Caleb probably having the major financial interest in the

business. An advertisement of the pottery which appeared in the 1841 Portland directory (Fig. 4) pictured an ovoid pot with handles and read:

Stone Ware Manufactory. | CALEB CRAFTS & CO. | Foot of Green Street, near Deering's Bridge | Portland, | Have constantly for sale a full assortment of | STONE WARE, | such as | Butter Pots, Flower Pots, Jugs, Pitchers &c. | of all sizes and description, wholesale and retail. | Also, —constantly on hand, FIRE BRICK, (clay | and sand,) all of the best quality, and will be sold | cheap for cash. | The above Ware is warranted equal to any | manufactured in the United States. | Orders directed to the advertisers will be thankfully | received and punctually attended to.

Caleb Crafts and William Fives were both living on Green Street at this time, according to the Portland directory. Thorne attributes the impressed mark "CALEB CRAFTS" to this factory, but I have not seen any stoneware so marked.¹⁴

The company was soon in financial difficulties, not having paid full taxes for the years 1839 and 1841, so in 1843 the deputy collector of taxes for the city, Curtis Meservey, advertised the property on the westerly side of Green Street for sale at public auction. The land and buildings were sold June 28, 1843, for \$20.75 in taxes and \$3.79 in costs to the Ocean Insurance Company, now holder of the mortgage, it being the highest bidder. However, the former proprietors were given the "right of redemption thereof within two years from said 28th day of June 1843."¹⁵

Inasmuch as the pottery was still in operation early in 1841, as shown by the advertisement in the directory, it probably did not close until the latter part of the year or in 1842. The Crafts family genealogy states that Caleb Crafts moved to Nashua, New Hampshire, about 1841 where he remained in business several years, subsequently returning to Whately, Massachusetts, where he held various local offices prior to his death January 1, 1854. Referring to him as "Colonel," the account states that he had a "natural taste for military life, holding all the various offices of the company and regiment."

In conclusion, it seems appropriate to point out that the Orcutt & Crafts venture not only introduced stoneware pottery making to Maine, but also furnished the stimulus for what developed into one of the major industries of Portland during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

I wish to express my thanks to the Maine Historical Society and its staff members for use of the library and permission to photograph the Orcutt & Crafts jug in their collection. Thanks also are due Mrs. Grace Davis of West Buxton, Maine, and Mr. Charles Van Rensselaer of Hopkinton, New Hampshire, for permission to photograph the Orcutt & Crafts pottery in their collections. Assistance with the early Portland tax records was given me by Mr. A. Holman Wilson, to whom I am grateful.

Deeds of Martin Crafts, Eleazer Orcutt, Caleb Crafts, and William Fives in the Cumberland County Registry

<i>Book-Page</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Grantor</i>	<i>Grantee</i>	<i>Location</i>
139-12	Jan. 1, 1834	John D. Gardner	Martin Crafts	State Street
135-616 (M)	Apr. 19, 1834	Martin Crafts	John D. Gardner	State Street
139-395	May 8, 1834	Martin Crafts	Mason Greenwood	State Street
138-583 (M)	Feb. 17, 1835	Martin Crafts	William Gorham	State Street
141-33	Feb. 17, 1835	William Gorham	Martin Crafts	Green Street

142-299	July 1, 1835	Henry Gooding	Martin Crafts	Mechanic St.
142-300	June 30, 1835	Martin Crafts	Henry Gooding	State Street
143-67 (B)	Apr. 7, 1835	Orcutt & Crafts	Stevens & Everett	Green Street
150-489	Sept. 14, 1836	Martin Crafts	Eleazer Orcutt	Mechanic St.
151-175	Sept. 14, 1836	Eleazer Orcutt	Martin Crafts	Green Street
150-532	Feb. 7, 1837	Eleazer Orcutt	George Woodman	Mechanic St.
151-390 (M)	Feb. 7, 1837	George Woodman	Eleazer Orcutt	Mechanic St.
154-64	July 3, 1837	Martin Crafts	C. Crafts & Fives	Green Street
154-417 (M)	July 3, 1837	C. Crafts & Fives	Martin Crafts	Green Street
159-55	Apr. 5, 1837	Frederick Wescott	M. Crafts & Moses	Westbrook
159-56	May 18, 1838	Martin Crafts	Caleb Crafts	Westbrook
162-489	Feb. 13, 1839	Caleb Crafts	Samuel F. Hagget	Westbrook
173-189 (S)	May 22, 1841	John D. Gardner vs	Martin Crafts	State Street
173-328 (F)	May 22, 1841	John D. Gardner vs	Martin Crafts	State Street
184-45 (S)	June 28, 1843	Curtis Meservey vs	Caleb Crafts & Co.	Green Street

Key to symbols: M—mortgage B—bond S—suit F—foreclosure

NOTES

¹ Watkins, Lura W., *New England Potters and their Wares*.

² Cumberland County Deeds, Vol. 139, p. 12.

³ J. M. & W. F. Crafts, *The Crafts Family*.

⁴ Another stoneware potter in Gardiner named Thompson may have preceded Lyman & Clark. A jug bearing the impressed mark of Thompson is owned by Charles Van Rensselaer of Hopkinton, New Hampshire. It appears to be an early type.

⁵ Cumberland County Deeds, Vol. 135, p. 616; Vol. 139, p. 395; Vol. 142, p. 300; and Vol. 142, p. 299.

⁶ J. M. Crafts, *History of the Town of Whately, Mass.*

⁷ Cumberland County Deeds, Vol. 141, p. 33.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 138, p. 583.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 143, p. 67.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 151, p. 175. This deed in the Cumberland County Record Book is a typewritten copy of the original (or a previous copy). An error was made in transcribing it, for the pottery was located on the *easterly* side of Deering's Bridge and on the westerly side of Green Street, as may be seen by reference to Cumb. Co. Deeds, Vol. 141, p. 33; Vol. 143, p. 67; and Vol. 184, p. 45. All of Green Street was east of Deering's Bridge in 1837, according to the Portland Directory for that year.

¹¹ Cumberland County Deeds, Vol. 150, pp. 489 and 532.

¹² *Ibid.*, Vol. 159, p. 55 and Vol. 155, p. 56.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 154, p. 640.

¹⁴ Thorne, *Handbook of Old Pottery and Porcelain Marks*.

¹⁵ Cumberland County Deeds, Vol. 184, p. 45.