

IDENTIFYING AND DATING A BLUE TRANSFERWARE PATTERN

The Warner site, 20LV334, located in Brighton Township, MI has yielded a variety of historic ceramics dating from the early 1840's to the 1940's. Several blue, red, green, and brown transferware patterns have been discovered, especially in a disturbed trash pit area near the existing clothesline. Hundreds of ironstone sherds with a bright blue pattern have been especially dominant in the archaeological record. Finding information on the maker could yield important clues regarding the age, utilization timeframe, availability, and value when purchased. However, initial efforts to identify the available portions of this pattern by comparing it to hundreds of others found in transferware and Staffordshire books proved unsuccessful.



Hundreds of blue and brown sherds from plates, saucers, and cups with a matching pattern have been recovered at the Warner site. Photo by author, 2007.

Much is known about the site from historical records and family stories. The property has been used as a farm for nearly 170 years to grow crops such as corn, navy beans, potatoes, wheat, and hay (R. Warner 2009). An orchard was maintained on several acres providing apples and pears. Two barns likely dating to the 1840's, a gambrel style barn from the 1920's, a milk house, chicken shed, pig shed, outhouse, "blacksmith" shop, and wood shed

supported activities at the farm. The earliest structure, circa 1841, was a log cabin built west of the current frame house (Chase 1980). At one point the Warner's owned and farmed nearly 600 acres and were involved in a number of business, civic, and governmental roles (Chapman Bros 1891).

Several characteristics make the Warner site distinctive from other Michigan historic sites. The original frame house dating to 1855 is still located on the property that was purchased in 1841 and has been utilized by nine generations of the same family. The farm is the only actively registered Sesquicentennial farm in Brighton Township and one of just four in of Livingston County.

Hundreds of family photographs dating from the 1870's to present have assisted in historical and archaeological research. Members of the family still occupy the house that contains items dating to the mid 19th century. As a direct descendant, the author is afforded access to these antiques for comparative analysis.

One item in particular, a nearly complete sauce tureen on display in a china cabinet, was the key to identifying the



The Davenport Brothers sauce tureen on display in the house was the key to determining the manufacturer and pattern name. Photo by author, 2007.

pattern and manufacturer of the most common archaeologically recovered sherds. The text inside the maker's mark on the tureen reads "Manufactured for Davenport Bros. 203 Greenwich St New York City". The blue pattern on the rim of the tureen matches the pattern on excavated pieces suggesting that they are likely from the same set. This pattern exhibits the standard mid 19th century classic images of Greek/Roman figures, temples, urns, as well as natural scenery including mountains and a lake in the distance.



Three different maker's marks for Joseph Clementson's "Sydenham" pattern. The Davenport Brothers were importers of Clementson wares beginning in 1842. Photo by author, 2009.

Further historical research indicated that the Davenport Brothers were importers of ironstone and earthenware from a pottery owned by Joseph Clementson located in Shelton, England and began selling his wares around 1842 (Kowalsky 1999:150). Clementson had other importers including Evans and Hill in Concord, NH (Snyder 1997:45). The pattern found at the site was also made under the Clementson name, in which his maker's mark included an image of a phoenix, "J Clementson", as well as the pattern name "Sydenham". Comparing plates with the Clementson mark with the Davenport Brothers' tureen revealed that that the color and pattern on the rims of the two vessels were identical. The central figure on each were different, but had elements of a common theme.

An article by Pat Halfpenny entitled *Joseph Clementson: A potter 'remarkable for energy of character'*, published in 1985 provides detailed information on how Joseph Clementson started his career in the potteries, beginning at the age of 17. In 1820, he apprenticed himself as a printer to J & W Ridgeway, possibly due to their acquaintance made by attending the same Methodist church. Twelve years later, in 1832, he formed a partnership with Joseph Read after visiting Canada to pursue his own business opportunities. The firm was started in Burslem but he went on his own a short while later, likely in 1839. Clementson purchased a second potworks adjoining his property in Shelton around 1840. About 1850 the factory became known as the Phoenix pottery works and he had an image of the mythical bird prominently displayed on his building, producing both earthenware and ironstone. Later in 1858, he began listing his maker's mark with the location of Hanley, which is adjacent to Shelton, both now located in the city of Stoke-on-Trent, the heart of the Staffordshire pottery manufacturing district.

He is well known for his Classical Antiquities Series that was registered in 1849, which included patterns called "Nestor's Sacrifice", "Phemius Singing to the Suitors", "Ulysses at the Table of Circe", and at least eight others. His experience as a printer was put to

good use for producing many different high quality transferware patterns. From a series of letters compiled by Halfpenny she suggests that he focused on the export market almost exclusively, setting up dealerships in a number of foreign countries including Canada, the United States, and several in continental Europe. Clementson retired in 1865 and operations under his name ended in 1867 when the firm became known as Clementson Brothers, in which several of his sons produced wares until 1916 (Halfpenny 1985).



The Sydenham pattern distinguishes itself from other mid 19th century transferware patterns with a different central design on each type in the set and was available in blue, brown, green, and mulberry. Photo by author, 2009.

Patterns including classical elements of grandeur such as Greek/Roman temples and medieval castles were often paired with natural scenery containing lakes, mountains, and trees to provide a background for central figures in poses reminiscent of ancient statuary. During the Victorian era beginning in the late 1830's, interest in ancient civilizations as well as foreign places grew. Sons of wealthy aristocrats typically would go on trips to Europe and other areas to become educated men of the world and patterns were named after popular attractions such as "Rhine" and "Parisian Chateau" (Williams 1987). The Far East was another popular subject, with patterns named "Mogul Scenery", "Palestine", and "Canton" (Williams 1987). Those who were not so fortunate to travel abroad could simply enjoy scenes that combined elegance, romance, and history on their dinner ware, named after a far away place.

While it includes the "romantic" elements of mid 19th century design, the "Sydenham" pattern is distinguished in that it exhibits a different central design on each part of the set while maintaining a common pattern on the rim. Petra Williams provides the following detailed description of the pattern in her book *Staffordshire Romantic Transfer Patterns*:

“The rim is decorated with cartouches flanked by long, foliated scrolls. Each reserve pictures a statue of a woman and a large dark handled urn at right. There are a lake, castle and mountains in the left background. These alternate with three small oval cartouches which contain a picture of an urn on a pedestal base. A row of fringe surrounds the well. There is a different scene on each of the various items in the set.” (Williams 1987)

Ideas for pattern designs came from a variety of sources, including other potters. There were a large number of potteries in the Staffordshire area and it wasn't uncommon to copy a pattern that became popular. Copying was so rampant that the British government started a registry for patterns in 1842, after which the diamond registry marks began to appear along side the maker's marks giving them some copyright protection for three years. Engravers creating the copper plates from which the pattern was made often sold their designs to a number of different potteries or simply created designs as variations on a theme. In one case, Clementson capitalized on this idea by using the same central design with a different border to create two patterns called “Loretto” and “Tessino” in 1846 (Snyder 1997:46).

Retailers also provided design specifications to manufacturers that mimicked fast selling items (Halfpenny 1985). An article online by Gordon Hepworth shows several patterns by different potteries including “Pamona” by Shaw, “Carrara” by Holland, “Athena” by Marple, Turner & Co, “Minerva” by Podmore, Walker & Co, “Colonna” by Goodfellow and “Sydenham” have nearly identical central themes down to the placement of an urn, inclusion of two female figures, and a temple in the distance on the left side (Hepworth 2007). However, Hepworth suggests another source may have inspired the design(s) as well as provided the origin of the “Sydenham” name.

The Great Exhibition that opened in London in 1851 was showcased in a spectacular iron and glass building called the Crystal Palace. The exhibits included not only latest achievements of the industrial revolution from around the world, but also a series of courts depicting the history of art from ancient times. The 13,000 exhibits attracted over six million visitors from around the globe and would have been well known in countries that Clementson exported his wares (Victorian Station 2001). Clementson displayed a number of patterns at the Great Exhibition including “Tillenberg”, “Classical Antiquities”, “Siam”, “Tessino”, “Corea”, “Leipsic”, and “Chusan” and may have been inspired by the Greek and Roman statues on display for new patterns (Ellis 1851). The Crystal Palace was moved to Sydenham Hill, one of the highest points in London, and reopened in 1854. Clementson may have decided to name one of his patterns after this new location.



An image taken inside the Crystal Palace shows Greek and Roman statues that may have provided the inspiration for patterns by many English potters during the 1850's. Photo by George Strout, circa 1851.

The Sydenham name was not exclusive to Joseph Clementson. Other manufacturers, including T & R Boote used “Sydenham” to describe the shape of a white ironstone set. No transferware pattern was applied to this type but it instead exhibits a gothic style with its paneled sides, scalloped rim, and scrolling handles. This style was registered in 1853 and is a slightly more ornate variation of his “Octagon” design introduced in 1851 (Birks 2009). Examples stamped with the “T & R Boote Sydenham Shape” maker’s mark were found with the British diamond registry stamp dating to September 3, 1853, while another dated to June 21, 1854. Likewise, Clementson registered a shape closely resembling Boote’s “Sydenham” shape called “Columbia” in 1855.

The process of creating the transferware pattern started with an engraved panel of metal, typically copper. Pigment was rubbed on the warmed die and any excess removed. A special piece of dampened tissue paper was placed on top of the plate and the print was forced onto the paper by a press. The paper was then lifted from the plate and carefully placed on the item and rubbed down with soft, soaped flannel, transferring the design from the paper to the dish. This task, typically performed by women called “transferers”, involved placing the pattern and joining the seams of the border. The seams didn’t always get applied perfectly and some finished examples clearly display the misaligned ends of the pattern. The vessel was then placed in water allowing the paper to float away, leaving the print remaining on the dish.

To seal the transferware print and provide a durable surface, both ironstone and earthenware relied heavily on lead based glazes. Although lead glazes today are confined to ornamental and decorative pieces, these were widely used for utilitarian and food consumption wares in the 19th century. One formula called Longport Old Stone was one of the most successful and called for 100 lbs of lead, 45 lbs of stone, 25 lbs of flint, 15 lbs of china clay, and 5 lbs of flint glass (Binns 1901:64).

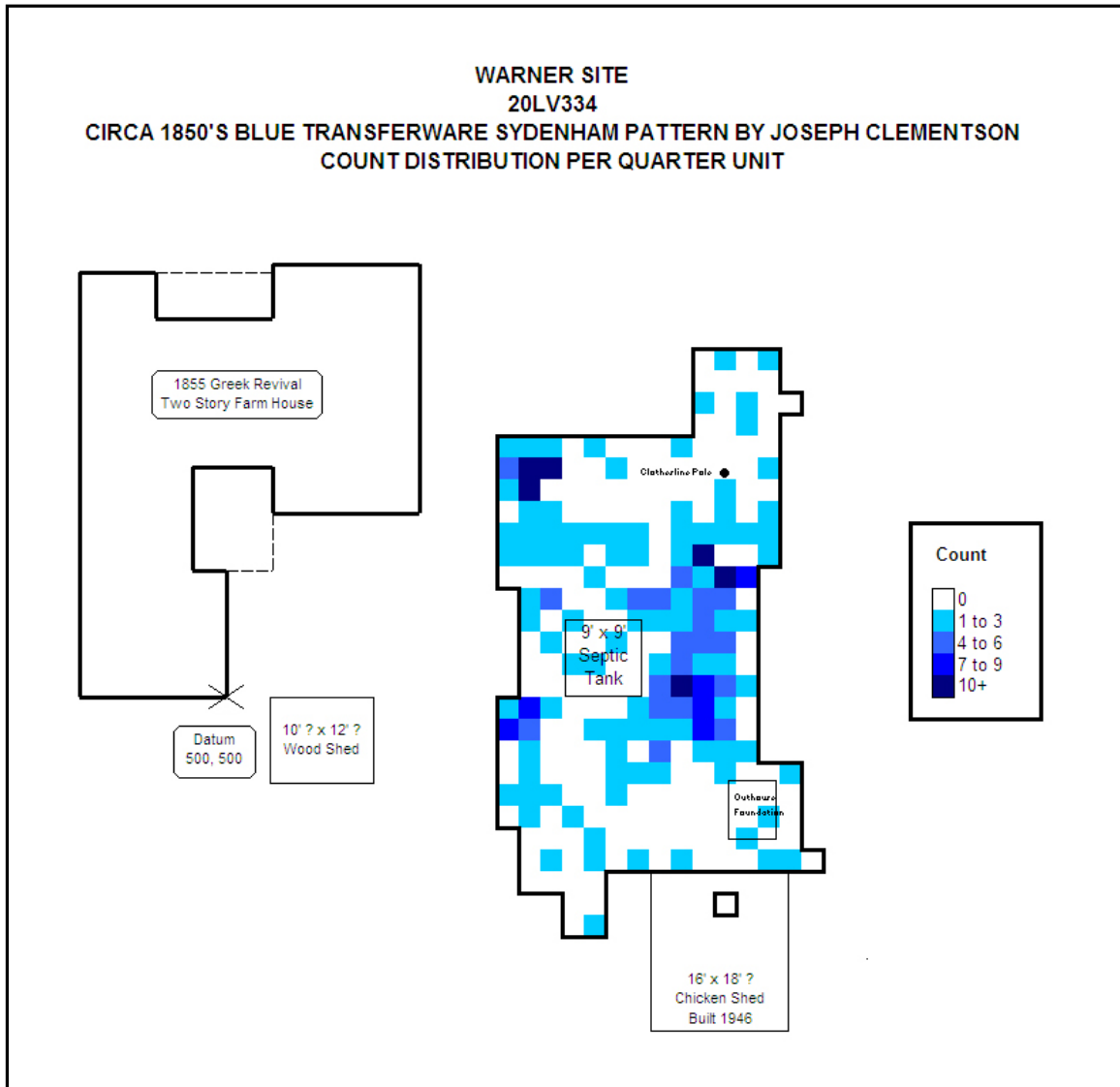
The “Sydenham” pattern has been produced in blue, brown, green, and mulberry. However, only the blue and brown variations have been recovered at the site. Pieces ranging from thumbnail to palm size sections of the blue have been found, mostly from medium and large sized plates. Some exhibit pot-lidding and other fractures likely due to frost. The surface of others has been marred by on site refuse burning. The area where the “Sydenham” sherds are concentrated was excavated several times to install and maintain a septic tank and drainage system. Mechanical excavation may have also been a factor in damage to a number of pieces.



A handleless cup was found in the 1960's below the floor of the Greek Revival house built in 1855. Photo by author, 2007.

Parts of at least two brown handleless cups and a cup saucer have been excavated near the area producing the blue variation. In addition, the author’s uncle, Elroy Warner, found a complete handleless cup with the brown “Sydenham” pattern in the 1960’s while fitting a pipe to install the indoor bathroom (E. Warner 2007). The cup was located in the soil below the floor joists of the 1855 Greek Revival house.

Excluding areas excavated in the locations of the log cabin and blacksmith shop, the blue variety is consistently found in many of the units with concentrations located east and north west of the septic tank. Pieces in brown are also spread among a contiguous eleven quarter unit area, with a few more pieces found in non adjoining units. Multiple topsoil fill and gravel layers cover the original “A” horizon surface and the unit thickness ranges from 14” to 23” thick. Although the “Sydenham” pattern in either blue or brown has been found 1” below the surface to as far as 23” below, it typically appears at the 11-12” depth below the current surface, which was likely the original floor before the fill was deposited.



Distribution map of Clementson's blue Sydenham pattern based on count per 2 ½ foot quarter unit as of November 2009. Location and dimensions for the wood shed and chicken shed structures are estimated.

Plow scars in a north/south direction indicate that the original topsoil level was plowed at some point, but it is unclear why the pattern is scattered both horizontally and vertically. Plowing may have contributed to the vertical and horizontal spread of artifacts within the original topsoil layer, however, the area is between the house and where the clothesline is located making it unlikely that this living area was used to grow crops much after the house was built. The most likely possibility includes soil excavated for the 9' by 9' 1500

gallon septic tank in the 1960's was spread across the yard instead of hauling it away. The area of the septic tank may have contained a concentration of artifacts, including the "Sydenham" pattern and was spread across many units with the soil to make for a new, level surface, possibly explaining the position of sherds found nearer to the current topsoil horizon.

Still unclear is if a complete set is represented by either the blue or brown or if these were combined to make a complete or partial set. Nearly all of the twenty brown sherds are from cups or cup saucers, while the blue variety is mostly from different sized plates. Several pieces of blue from cups and possibly cup saucers have been found, but are very few when compared to the total amount found, even when considering that cups and their saucers are considerably smaller than the companion dinner plates. Further analysis is necessary to determine the full extent of types represented and if there were indeed two sets or a set was used from both the blue and brown varieties. Another possibility is that the pattern in brown was used to replace missing or broken items in blue.

Several blue pieces with portions of the Davenport Brothers maker's mark as well as a single piece with part of the J Clementson mark have been recovered. These marks match the maker's mark on the tureen found in the house further indicating that it is highly probable that they are from the same set. Also, the sherd with the J Clementson mark may indicate that he sold his wares overseas under his own name instead of solely through the dealership network. Although only a single sherd in the brown variety displays a maker's mark (J Clementson), this isn't unusual as the handleless cups typically were absent of the mark in lieu of having them on the bottom of the cup saucer.

Williams provides a date range of circa 1839 – 1864 for the "Sydenham" pattern, which are actually the operation dates of the J Clementson firm (Williams 1987). However, the actual starting production date for "Sydenham" may be able to be refined to a slightly later period. Although this pattern does not include a registry mark to precisely date it, it does closely match a number of other patterns produced by competing potteries in the vicinity of Clementson's operation that date to the early 1850's. Two similar designs, "Cararra" by John Holland and "Athena" by Marple, Turner & Co do have registry marks that date to 1852 (Hepworth 2007).

Several other factors suggest an early to mid 1850's production date. The name Sydenham may have become well known in 1852 when reconstruction of the Crystal Palace was begun at Sydenham Hill, one of the highest points in London, and formerly was known as the Great North Wood. A cup in the brown "Sydenham" pattern was found below the floor of the house built in 1855 and another design by Clementson, the "Claremont" pattern, has both the Davenport Brothers mark and a registry date of June 30, 1856.

Two other patterns, made by Clementson, were recovered at the site and have listed registry dates. Several pieces of "Tessino" dating to January 1846 and two pieces of "Siam" dating to 1850 were found in the same area producing the "Sydenham" pattern. Maker's marks for these two patterns include the image of the phoenix identically as it appears on the "Sydenham" wares. This maker's mark was used through at least 1856 and the phoenix was used in different forms as part of the maker's mark by Clementson into the 1860's as well as by his successor, Clementson Brothers, into the latter part of

the 19th century. It should also be noted that two other registered Clementson patterns, “Rustic Scenery” and “Lucerne” dating to December 1842 do not use a phoenix as part of the maker’s mark (Kowalsky 1999:402). Using the common maker’s mark as an age indicator could date “Sydenham” as early as 1846, however, stylistic comparisons suggest a production date from the early to mid 1850’s. It is very possible that the set was acquired to furnish the new 1855 frame house to replace the dish set used in the log cabin built nearly 15 years prior.

The “Sydenham” name appears to have held distinction for a long period of time as it was used and registered multiple times by several different manufacturers to describe various shapes and patterns over a fifty year period through the early 20th century. Anthony Shaw, credited with the origin of the “Tea Leaf” design, used this on a pottery shape described as “Sydenham” in 1856 (thepotteries.org 2009). Francis Morley and Co., in operation from 1845 to 1858, produced a floral pattern called “Sydenham” in the early 1850’s (Williams 1978:51). Later, during the 1880’s, Belleek of Ireland used it to describe an open woven basket pattern adorned with yellow, pink, and lavender flowers and was re-launched as a limited edition in 2008 (House of Ireland 2009). Burgess and Leigh of Burslem registered the name for a pattern in 1905 (thepotteries.org 2009).

Although the “Sydenham” pattern on ironstone cannot be grouped with porcelain, china, and flow blue at the highest end of the pottery spectrum, it certainly can be regarded as above mid grade quality. Creating and designing a different scene for each part of the set would likely make this pattern more expensive than its other transferware counterparts. Blue was more expensive to produce and was more popular than the brown or green versions. The pottery could be a reflection of the beginning of an upper middle class lifestyle for the Timothy Warner family that extended to the late 19th century.

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Involvement of descendants on archaeologically excavated historic sites is rare but has been the norm at the Warner site. The author’s uncle, Elroy Warner who lives next door in the area that was formerly the orchard, has assisted in excavation at nearly every occurrence. The author also appreciates the efforts of Dennis Warner, another uncle, for assistance in maintaining the site, use of the tractor, and allowing the pole barn to be used for equipment storage. The author would also like to recognize and thank his grandmother Rose Warner for allowing excavation on her property as well as making family possessions available for study.

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