

# *The Makers of Pottery in Lancaster County*

By M. LUTHER HEISEY

“The wheel goes round and round,  
And where it stops nobody knows.”

**S**O RUNS a radio couplet, but the wheel of the old potter has stopped, and mechanized methods have stolen the romance from the mystic makings of forms in clay.

The art of pottery-making was known to peoples of ancient times, and the symbol of the potter's wheel was used by Egyptians as “the very type of creation itself.” In fact, numbered among their deities was the figure of the potter moulding man on the wheel.

The figure is used in Christian hymnology. “Thou art the potter, I am the clay,” runs the gospel song, and proclaims God as the moulder of human character and destiny.<sup>1</sup> Job, when his patience was near exhaustion, and he needed relief from the sores of his body, scratched his annoying skin with a potsherd—a fragment of the potter's work.<sup>2</sup>

There seemed always to be a fascinating charm about the potter and his wheel, and his ability to give form to various objects from his crude equipment, working with his thumbs and fingers on a plastic mass of wet earth.

## **The Swopes**

Early in the history of Lancaster County the trade of the potter was not unknown. The clay found here, so well adapted for brickmaking, was equally serviceable in the making of earthenware. Andreas Fisher,<sup>3</sup> a potter, died here in 1753. A fellow-craftsman, George Michael Schwaab<sup>4</sup> (Swab or Swope) lived until 1758, being but thirty years old when he died. Swab owned a house and lot on West King Street, but no record is found of his pottery or its products.

It is thought that his son, John, was a surgeon in the Revolutionary War. The name Swab, later anglicized to Swope, persists

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 64:8, “We are the clay, and thou our potter, and we all are the works of thy hand.” Jeremiah 18:6, “Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.”

<sup>2</sup> Job 2:8, “And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal.”

<sup>3</sup> Burial records of Trinity Lutheran Church, Lancaster, Pa.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

in the pottery business throughout the whole life of the county. The father of George Michael was John Swope, born May 26, 1704, who settled in Upper Leacock Township in 1720. Here he pursued the occupation of potter and farmer.<sup>5</sup> From then on to 1908 Swopes dabbled in clay. Daniel, who at one time manufactured matches, was turning out earthenware at 24 North Mary Street, from 1862 to 1892. His son, George A., last of the local Swope potters, worked here until the close of the pottery about 1908.

Jacob, living north of Bird-in-Hand, was operating a pottery in 1820. His son, Zuriel, as a youth, was interested in potting, and was noted particularly for his glazed pipe-bowls, which he turned out in an efficient and rapid manner, sometimes completing three hundred in one day. He made rapid sales of these at one cent each to the stores in Lancaster. But his fame rested on other accomplishments. He studied in the law office of Colonel Reah Frazer, and was admitted to the Lancaster Bar in 1846. After practising for forty-nine years, he retired in 1895.

### Pipe Heads or Bowls

Early in the nineteenth century, Joseph Sturgis, of Lititz, was making earthen- and stoneware of the usual kind. About 1840, his son, Samuel, added a clever line of pipe-heads or bowls, finished with a glaze of yellow, green or brown.

Still another potter in the county, John Gible of near Manheim, included pipe-heads in his stock. These were made of the ordinary red clay, covered with a brown glaze.

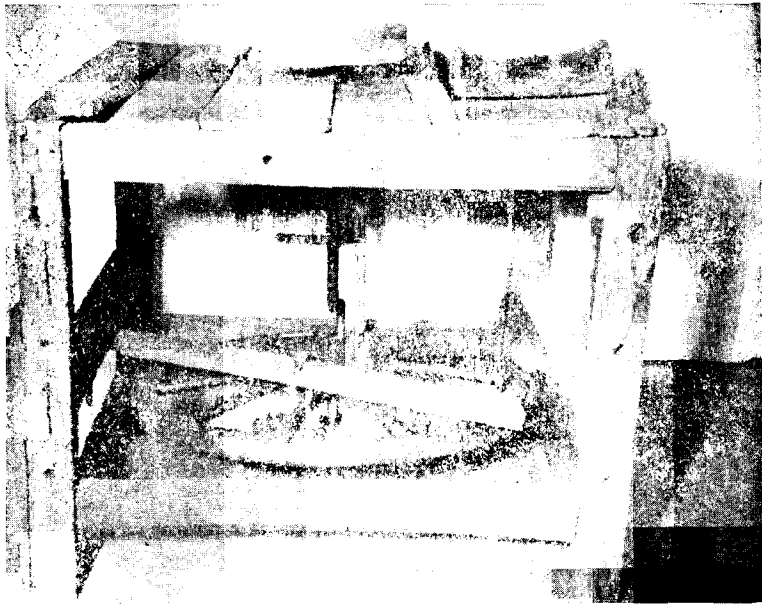
Some of these pipe-heads, by the various makers, were made in the facial form of prominent statesmen, presidents, Indians, etc., and were very attractive. Fancy clay pipe-racks were also made, with numerous arms upon which the pipes could be suspended.

By far the most numerous articles of clay manufacture were the common utensils in every-day service—the applebutter crocks, flower pots, milk crocks, jugs, bowls and plates. But the artistic nature of the Lancaster potter asserted itself in the making of fancy jardinieres, umbrella stands, huge vases, bowls, figures, etc.

Established in Lancaster much earlier than the Daniel Swope pottery were the Henry Gast and the Henry Ganse works in the same neighborhood. These three potteries formed by themselves

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<sup>5</sup> *The Swope Family*, by Gilbert Ernest Swope, 1896.



## A POTTER'S WHEEL

Courtesy of the Pennsylvania German Folklore Society

a veritable little "Bennington" here in Lancaster. While the common ware occupied most of their time, these artisans could and did turn out ware equal to the Staffordshire and Bennington type.

Describing pieces of Lancaster pottery among his vast collection, Cornelius Weygandt, noted author and antiquarian, wrote: "I have perhaps a dozen with stamped signatures, Gast, Swope, and Ganse, the prevailing names. Those signed Gast and Ganse are of the latest phase of redware making, moulded pieces in the shapes usual to Staffordshire, and Bennington wares. Such pieces marked the last efforts of Lancaster County potters to be up to date and to compete with the cheap china and whiteware and tin that were so surely driving the old redware out of the market."<sup>6</sup>

### The Gasts

Coming as immigrants to America through the port of Baltimore, the Conrad Gast family finally settled in Lancaster, finding a haven in a log cabin at Prince and James streets. Starting in the pottery business the pioneer Conrad prospered, and improved the corner properties. While the pottery closed about 1892, the family remained here until the third decade of the present century, the last Conrad among them moving then from the site, and dying just recently (March 27, 1945). The writer when a boy watched these potters at work at James and Water streets.

Another Gast — Henry — located at 7 (416) Manor Street, established his pottery about 1838, and did an extensive business in stone- and earthenware. With his son, he also operated a pottery on South Queen Street (rear) near Vine. Their home, at one time, was in Penn Square near the market house.

When Henry Gast died, Henry Ganse took over the Manor Street pottery about 1894. The Ganse's had been potting at West King Street, near Dorwart, having been established there in 1843.

Writing in 1893, Edwin Atlee Barber states: "The pottery now managed by the widow of Henry Gast, Lancaster, Pa., dates back to about 1825. Common red and yellow wares were made there, and at one time a limited amount of white ware. Fancy figures, fountains, and statuettes were also produced to some extent in red clay. Latterly this pottery has produced a considerable number of cinerary urns for crematories. At one time white clay

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<sup>6</sup> *The Red Hills*, by Cornelius Weygandt, Philadelphia, 1928, p. 112.

tobacco pipes were made, and a few fancy glazed umbrella and cane handles. Floor tiles of yellow clay, octagonal and rhomboidal, were also made to some extent, some fifteen years ago [c. 1878]. These were heavy, unglazed tiles, six or eight inches across, and an inch in thickness.

“At many small potteries in Lancaster County, Pa., roofing tiles have been made for upwards of a hundred and twenty-five years [c. 1768], and on an old smithy near the village of Bird-in-Hand one of the tiles which covered the roof bears the date 1769, which covers the entire surface, having been traced in the moist clay by the finger of the workman.

“Mr. Jacob Swope, of Bird-in-Hand, was making tiles in 1820.”<sup>7</sup>

Jacob Albright (1759-1808), founder of the Evangelical Association, lived at Frysville, East Cocalico Township, where he made bricks and tiles, between his tours as an itinerant preacher. He wrought so well that he became known as the “honest tiler.”

### Misfortunes

The following article appeared in the *Lancaster Zeitung* of March 2, 1791: “On Thursday evening a fire broke out in the work shop of the local pottery. There was no one in the shop at the time, and as the roof was made of straw it soon ignited. Fortunately, the flames were quickly extinguished with the help of the neighbors. Only the roof and the rafters were burned.” Because it is written “*the* local pottery,” must one infer that Lancaster had but one pottery in 1791? And who was the workman?

In August, 1844, Henry Gast had ill luck, for a frame building attached to his pottery on Manor Street, containing over \$400 worth of ware, broke down and destroyed every piece.

At the Conrad Gast pottery, it was the custom to place the newly formed ware along the James Street curb in stacks until it dried to a certain degree. All was well until one day in the 1890s, when a two-horse runaway team, probably scared at an approaching train, dashed madly down James Street and crashed into the pottery, destroying the work of several days.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Pottery and Porcelain of the United States*, by Edwin Atlee Barber, New York, 1893, pp. 51, 118.

## Potteries in Manheim

Frederick Druckemiller was a potter in Manheim about 1780.

John Gible, Sr., had a pottery on the Fruitville Pike, on the left side of the road as one leaves Manheim, just beyond the Chickies Creek. The business was continued by the son, John Gible, Jr., until the turn of the century. Some of the clay for this pottery was taken from a meadow along the Chickies on the Hernley farm, three miles north of Manheim. This farm passed into the hands of the antiquarian, George H. Danner.

The Singley pottery was established by Christian Singley on North Charlotte Street. His daughter, Mrs. Henry Eitnier, still living in Manheim, helped at times with the work in the pottery. Her brother, Jacob, lives in Lititz.

## Formulas for Glazes

at the John Gible Pottery, Manheim.

(Reproduced verbatim from the original.)

Of the preparation of transparent and coloured glazings for Stone or earthen ware.

N. B. The recipes are taken from Kunckel, being as he affirms, the true glazings used at delft and other dutch manufactories

Common glazing for any kind of earthen ware:

Take of white sand forty pounds, of red lead twenty pounds, of pearl ash twenty pounds, and of common salt twelve pounds. Powder the sand by grinding before it be mixt the other ingredients and then grind them together after which calcine them for some time with a moderate heat, which must be less than will make them melt and run to glass; and when the mixture is cold, grind it to powder again and when wanted, temper it with water and it will then be fit for use.

Transparent Glazing for any kind of earthenware prepared without lead:

Take of white sand 40 pounds, of pearl ashes twenty-five pounds, and of common salt fifteen pounds. Calcine them and proceed as with the above.

Another preparation of a white glazing:

Take one pound and a half of lead and one pound of tin. Reduce them to a state of a calx and then take of the calcined matter eight parts and of calcined flints and common salt each four parts.

Bring the mixture by heat to a state of fusion.

(On the bottom of each page is the following)

John H. Gibble in Warwick Township 1837.

(On the front leaf is a receipt dated Jan. 22, 1837, for \$1000.95, which seems to indicate that John Gibble paid that sum for the recipes.)

### "Pot-Sherds"

On April 8, 1781, Christopher Marshall wrote in his diary: "Mammy went to the potter's; bought eight hundred dollars worth of earthenware."<sup>8</sup> We wish that Marshall had mentioned the name of the potter.

The Eighth Census of the United States in 1860 for the county of Lancaster gives these figures of the potteries: seven establishments; capital invested, \$3,600; cost of raw material, \$2,762; number of hands employed, 21; annual cost of labor, \$5,076; annual value of products, \$11,293. (Average wages paid were less than \$5 per week.)

Levi Gast was an expert in modelling clay. While working for Fred Hardy, Sr., he made a beautiful piece of statuary, two and a half feet in height and two feet wide, of a boy and a girl seated on a log, the former holding a book.

When Henry Gast operated a pottery on South Queen Street, he marked his ware as follows:

*Eagle*  
*Porcelain Works*  
*Lancaster City, Pa.*  
*Henry Gast, S & Q St.*

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<sup>8</sup> *Diary of Christopher Marshall*, Albany, N. Y., 1877, p. 274.

## Potters and Poetry

In much of the old ware, especially pie plates and articles which were made for gifts, appeared verses of poetry among the designing. Most were written in Pennsylvania Dutch, and in the translation loses some of the sense and sentiment. Here are some sample verses:

1

I made this dish  
without a pie;  
Now try and  
make a pie  
Without a dish.

2

This pot is made of  
earth,  
And when it breaks the  
potter laughs.

3

### *Pennsylvania Dutch*

Glück, glas and Erde,  
Wie bald bricht die werke;  
Aus der Erde mit verstand  
Magt der Hoefner aller Hand.

3

### *English*

Luck, glass and earth,  
How soon the wares are broken;  
Out of earth with skill  
The potter makes anything.

Among the minor potteries in Lancaster City were those operated by Fritz, Harrison, Snofer, Johns, Gerz, Hardy and Weaver.

The pottery business produced articles of small value, and the frail nature of the product rendered them useful for but a short time. This business by its very nature could never be a "big money" venture. The Conrad Gast pottery about 1880 had annual sales ranging from \$4000 to \$6000, with six men regularly employed. The Henry Ganse works at the same time had annual sales from \$2000 to \$2500, and employed three persons. Their ware might have been attractive, but the returns from the business for employer and employee were never very alluring.

## Potters in Lancaster City and County

The following list gives the names of the potters, their location, and the approximate date of operation.

John Schwaab (Swope), Upper Leacock Township, after 1720.

Potters at Ephrata Cloisters, c. 1740.

Andreas Fisher, Lancaster, died 1753.

George Michael Schwaab (Swope), Lancaster, died 1758.

Potter at Moravian settlement, Lititz, before 1770.

Christian Weidle, Sr., Lancaster, 1772-1786.



Henry Grimler, Lancaster, 1773-1783.  
Henry Hottenstein, Lancaster, 1773.  
Christian Weidle, Jr., Lancaster, 1773-1786.  
John Snyder, Middletown, 1773.  
Frederick Weidle, Lancaster, 1779-1786.  
Frederick Druckemiller, Manheim, 1780.  
John Kraus, Lancaster, c. 1780.  
Johanes Dobler, Lancaster, c. 1780.  
Christe Grinder, Lancaster, c. 1780.  
Jacob Marx, Lancaster, 1781-1786.  
Jacob Albright, East Cocalico Township, c. 1786-1800.  
John Fullweiler, Waterford (Marietta), 1812.  
Four potters in Lancaster County in 1830.  
Reuben Chambers, Bethania, 1831.  
Henry Gast, Lancaster, 1838-1894.  
Conrad Gast, Lancaster, 1842.  
Henry Ganse, Lancaster, 1843.  
Jacob Sturgis, Lititz, 1843.  
Emanuel Swope, Upper Leacock Township, 1844; church deacon, school director, township clerk.  
Daniel Ranck, Gordonville, and Upper Leacock Township, 1846-1891.  
Frederick Swope, Leacock, 1850; at New Holland Pike and Newport Road; two-story building, two kilns.  
Henry Swope, above location after 1850.

#### Map of 1850:

Henry Gast, Henry Gantz (Ganse), Conrad Gast; J. Fritz, n. w. corner Andrew and Beaver streets.  
John Gibble, Manheim, 1856.

#### Directory of 1857:

John Fritz, n. e. corner Prince near Andrew.  
Henry Ganse, h. West King near Dorwart.  
Conrad Gast, James and Water, n. e. corner.  
Henry Gast & Son, rear Manor near West King, and rear South Queen near Vine.  
John Harrison, Church near Duke.  
Henry Snofer, South Queen near the cemetery.

#### Directory of 1859-60:

George John, Bareville.

Enoch Allmandenger, Groff's Store.

Daniel Rock (should this be Daniel Ranck?), Intercourse.

Catharine Klug, Maytown.

Christian Sangle, Manheim.

Johan Sangle, Manheim.

A. S. Swope, Leacock.

#### Directory of 1869-70:

Conrad Gast, Prince and James.

Henry Gast, Sr., 7 Manor Street.

John and William J. Gerz, pottery and fire-brick, 80 Middle Street.

Henry Weaver (Weber), 150 South Queen Street.

Jesse Klugh, Maytown.

Joseph Gensemer, Ephrata.

Tyson Reynolds, Wrightsdale.

Daniel Ranck, Gordonville.

Christian Single, North Charlotte Street, Manheim.

In 1873, add:

Daniel Swope, 526 West King.

#### Atlas of 1875:

Henry Gast, stone and earthenware pottery, 416-418 Manor Street, est. 1838.

Conrad Gast, potter and manufacturer of all kinds of earthenware, James and Prince streets, est. 1842.

Gerz and Brother, steam pottery, earthen yellowware and terra cotta fire-brick stove lining, etc., 401 Middle Street, est. 1860.

"Industries of Pennsylvania (and the City of Lancaster), 1880:" In this booklet appear advertisements of two local potteries. This is a rarity, indeed, for the potter was not given to publicity. Perhaps he was too busy with his vessels, or more likely he eschewed the expense of these announcements. Of Conrad Gast & Son, the notice tells us that the pottery was "equipped with all the requisite appliances for carrying on the business in its various departments. The business was established in 1842 by the present senior member of the firm, and his son, Amos C. Gast, was admitted as a partner in 1877. They carry an average stock of manufactured ware, amounting to about \$4,000, and their annual sales range from \$4,000 to \$6,000. Six hands are regularly employed, turning out about nine hundred pots per day. The capacity of the kiln is about 2,000 crocks, and the demand for the articles ex-

tends throughout the county. Mr. Gast has recently invented a new and beautiful style of ornamental glazing for the outside of flower pots for house plants, rendering them very attractive specimens of the ceramic art. Conrad Gast was born near Amsterdam in 1813. He came to this country with his parents when but six years of age. . . .”

Of the pottery at 526 West King Street, the notice reads: “This business was established upward of thirty-seven years ago [1843] by Henry Ganse, Sr. . . . On his demise, the business came into possession of his son, Henry Ganse, the present proprietor. He makes exclusively earthenware for dairies, family and gardener’s use. These articles find a ready market in Lancaster County, and are much sought after by the farmers. He turns out from \$2,000 to \$2,500 worth per annum, and gives employment to three hands. Born in Lancaster in 1842, Mr. Ganse learned his trade under the careful tuition of his father.”

#### Directory of 1882-83:

Henry Gast, Conrad Gast, George John, 401 Poplar; Daniel Swope, 24 North Mary; Henry Wippers (Weaver?), 423 South Queen.

In 1884: John Wesley, Alley N, above Fifth Street, Columbia.

In 1887, the clay supplying the five potteries was found in or about the city.

#### Directory of 1890:

Bradley & Wesley, 416-418 Manor.

Amos C. Gast, 114 West James.

Edward Hardy, 914 Manor.

George Johns, 401 Poplar.

D. Swope & Son, 24 North Mary.

Weaver & Son (Magdaline and Henry), 423 South Queen.

#### Directory of 1894-95:

Henry Ganse, 416 Manor.

Conrad Gast and Henry Gast no longer listed with the potters.

Edward V. Hardy, 916 Manor.

George A. Johns, 401 Poplar.

George A. Swope, 24 North Mary (listed until 1908).

To-day, there remains but one pottery in Lancaster, that of Fred H. Hardy, of 914 Manor Street.

## Brief Glossary

**SLIPWARE**—decorated by applying slip, that is a liquid light-hued clay, from a cup through stems unto the ware, usually in designs of wavy lines.

**SGRAFFITO**—(or graffito) decorative designs made by scratching through the glazing, revealing a different colored ground.

**GLAZE**—made of red lead or galena, sometimes mixed with coloring substances, such as manganese or verdigris.

**SPALLING**—chipping off.

**DECORATED CUSPIDORS**—usually of lavaware.

**STONEWARE**—made from bluish clays.

**YELLOWWARE**—made from natural buff-colored clays.

**ROCKINGHAM WARE**—yellowware covered with a dark-brown glaze.

**WHITE GRANITE OR IRONSTONE**—made of flint, feldspar, kaolin or china clay.