

# More dots to connect... (Continued #3)

## Larkin Premiums - China and Pottery

Last month's article was an overview of the history of the Larkin Soap Company (Note that the company's name was changed from time to time over the years; I refer to "Larkin Soap Co., or LSC," as a generic name, not necessarily as its legal name.) This month we take a look at a category of premiums given by the company to customers as they acquired "certificates" with their purchases of LSC products. This was much like the S&H Green Stamp program in which many companies participated in more recent years.



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Catalogs of products and premiums began to be published by the company in 1893; by 1905 almost 900 items were listed. We are taking a look, in this article, at china and pottery premiums.

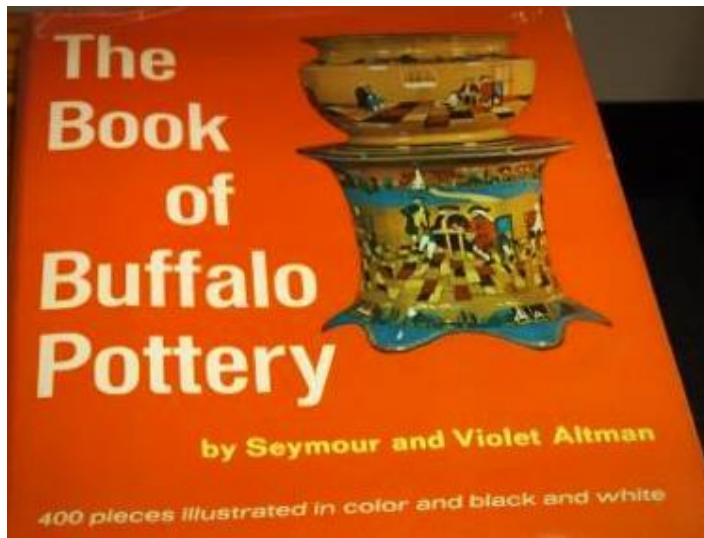
A Japanese company, Noritaki, manufactured one of the early china/pottery premiums offered by LSC. The hand-painted pattern of pink and white azalea blossoms surrounded by blue-green leaves on a white background was first introduced to the U.S. in 1915 by LSC as a premium and retained its popularity for many years. Larkin initially offered cups and saucers, tea plates, a whipped cream set of bowl, ladle and underplate and a creamer and sugar bowl set. By 1925 Larkin's catalog featured 16

piece shapes. Ten years later there were over 50 pieces. Larkin was its sole distributor in the U.S., offering it as premiums and also marketing it to retail stores. But when the Japanese factory was severely damaged in World War II, production of the original pattern ceased. Other companies "recreated" the pattern with subtle changes and sold it, but not through LSC.



As mail order and direct sales of products and the variety of premiums

increased, the company sought less expensive ways of providing premiums. One of the sources of china and pottery had been Crescent Pottery of Trenton, New Jersey. Crescent salesman, Louis Bown, and John D. Larkin, frequently discussed the desirability of establishing a pottery company to be owned by Larkin. Ideas morphed into action when Larkin applied for a corporate charter on October 23, 1901. Five days later the first shareholders' meeting was held where John D. Larkin was elected President, his son, Charles, was elected Vice-President, Darwin Martin was elected Secretary and son, John Larkin, Jr., was elected Treasurer. Buffalo Pottery Co. was born.



Property was initially purchased at Seneca and Fillmore Streets, but was deemed too small. Instead of using it for the pottery, LSC established Buffalo Leather Company on the site. Property was then purchased at Seneca and Hayes Streets, with eight and a half acres available and ideally situated with railroad lines bordering it. These lines would be invaluable for transporting clay from

southern states, Pennsylvania and even England for delivery to the Buffalo Pottery kilns. Robert Reidpath, a structural engineer who had also been the structural engineer for all of the Larkin manufacturing and warehouse buildings and was later to serve that function on the Frank Lloyd Wright designed Administration Building (and was also the cousin of Darwin Martin's wife), laid out and designed the Pottery buildings. Construction began in 1902 and was completed a year later. The first kiln was fired in October 1903, a fitting celebration of the second anniversary of the new company.

The Buffalo Pottery complex grew to eight buildings and was the largest fireproof pottery in the world at that time. The 80,000 square foot building complex had over 400 windows and skylights permitting light and fresh air for the employees. It was the only pottery in the world at that time to be powered completely by electricity. By 1913 the company had 300 employees. The fifteen kilns were initially coal-fired and were so large that thousands of pieces of ware could be fired in each of the kilns at the same time. In 1915 another three buildings adding another 60,000 square feet, were built.

Pieces of ware were placed in round earthenware containers called "saggers" which the workers carried balanced on their heads to the kilns and up steep ladders to place in the kilns. The saggers were then baked for fifty hours at 2300-2400 degrees Fahrenheit. Once out of the kilns, pieces were brushed and sandpapered. Then, depending on the style of the piece, it was subjected to either underglaze or overglaze technics.

*With underglaze, the artists decorated the pieces first; they were then glazed and re-fired. Sometimes a design required more delicate, lighter colors to be added on top of the glaze and then subjected again to a mild heat firing, referred to as overglazing. Buffalo Pottery became famous for its underglaze pottery with, with its artists producing beautiful designs, which were also quite durable since the design was protected by the additional glazing.*

*The first pottery produced were premiums of dinnerware and tea sets labeled Lamare and Modjeska in catalogs beginning in 1904. Bathroom sets of a washbowl, pitcher, shaving mug, covered soap dish and small pitcher appeared beginning in 1905. These sets were produced in several patterns, including chrysanthemum sprays in green on a white base. That pattern appeared in catalogs from 1905-1910.*



*The china produced was mostly semi vitreous, rather than bone china, which required hotter baking. The Buffalo Pottery artists became very skilled at creating beautiful designs, the quality of which greatly exceeded that made by other potteries, yet was less expensive to produce. The company began making vitrified, or bone china, in 1915 at which time the company's name was changed to Buffalo China Company.*

*Louis Bohn had been hired away from Crescent Pottery by John Larkin in 1903 to become Buffalo Pottery's first general manager. The nascent company was soon hiring the best manufacturing experts and craftspeople from around the country.*

*One of the outstanding ceramic artists was Ralph Stuart, who was hired away from Onondaga Pottery Works in Syracuse. He, his father and his grandfather had worked in potteries in Staffordshire, England, including Wedgwood and Doulton. He was also related to Gilbert Stuart, a renowned artist who painted the famous portrait of George Washington. A copy of that portrait was placed on a gold-embossed plate made by Buffalo China in 1932 for the Chesapeake Railroad.*

*Initially Buffalo Pottery produced premiums only for the LSC. In addition to the dinnerware patterns mentioned above, Buffalo Pottery began making a version of Blue Willow china dishes in 1905 that was far superior to what had been*

previously imported into the U.S. Beautiful hand painted plates and oval platters decorated with fish, fowl or deer emerged beginning in 1907. Various shaped pitchers, jugs and plates were made as premiums but also sold to companies or entities that commissioned them. Design subjects included historical scenes, literary themes, outdoor and wildlife scenes, Dutch subjects and other patterns. A pitcher and a plate with a whaling scene and the whaling ship, "Niger," were produced as a souvenir of New Bedford, Massachusetts.



Commemorative and advertising pieces were created for specific customers, so never appeared in Larkin catalogs. They were often made in celebration of a specific event, for example, a scene of the locks in Lockport made for "Old Home Week, July 24-30, 1910."

The most famous product, rare and highly collectible, however, was the Deldare line of artistic pieces. The line was the result of the combined creative genius of Louis Bown, William Rea, Ralph Stuart and George Wood. They desired to develop a line of fine products that would compete with the very best of Staffordshire, England companies. In 1908 they came up with a unique



bisque, olive-green in color, made from a mix of English Ball and Tennessee Ball clays, to which oxide of chrome was added.

The decoration was created by applying a transfer to the fired bisque, then using 10 to 12 colors hand mixed by each artist as he or she worked on a piece, painting the images within the lines of the transfer. The glaze was applied, and then the piece was again fired. Subject matter included "The Fallowfield Hunt" scenes by English illustrator, Cecil Alden (1870-1935). This set of patterns was made only in 1908 and 1909. "Ye Olden Days" was a

*series of English village life, some of which were taken from Goldsmith's, "The Vicar of Wakefield." They, along with a series entitled "Ye Lion Inn," were created in 1908 and 1909 and then again in 1923, 1924 and 1925.*

*Emerald Deldare, most made in 1910 and 1911, has a lot of green in its decoration, especially in its elaborate, often Art Nouveau style borders. Even more rare than Deldare, it is very valuable.*

*The late Lester Rickard, who had been Senior Process Engineer at Buffalo China for many years till his retirement around 2004, and who was a historian of Buffalo China, said in a 2002 Buffalo News article, that a great deal of effort and expense went into making Deldare. Twenty to thirty people each made about two-dozen pieces a day. He noted that most Deldare was sold in high-end department stores by the piece, not in sets. It was offered as a premium only once, in 1923. Most pieces bare the Buffalo Pottery trademark and date. The initials or name of the artist who painted the piece can usually be found on its design.*

*Buffalo Pottery survived the demise of Larkin Soap Company and continued producing mostly institutional china. Restaurants (like the Olive Garden which required that the company's name not appear on the back of dishes of what otherwise appear to be Italian in design), schools, churches and even military bases ordered china from them. In 1983, at a point when Buffalo China was one of the country's largest commercial china manufacturers, Oneida, of Syracuse bought the company. It continued to make commercial china, but in March 2004, it closed the company, putting 325 employees out of work. It also took with it the Buffalo China trademark and logo.*

*However, Robert Lipica, who had been an executive of Buffalo China, pulling together an investment group, purchased the plant for \$5.5 million dollars. Former County Executive and then (and now) Congressman, Chris Collins, invested personal cash, and with bank financing together with tax incentives, enabled the employees to continue the company - except Oneida refused to sell the trademark and logo. The new company became Niagara Ceramics, and continued manufacturing commercial ware. Among its customers were local entities like the Frank Lloyd Wright Martin House, Graycliff and Roycroft Inn. But what was really fun was that Oneida apparently forgot all about the Buffalo Pottery trademark, which, though unused for many years, was still a viable trademark. Niagara Ceramics produced a number of pieces under that treasured trademark.*

*Unfortunately, in 2013 Niagara Ceramics, without warning, closed the company. The 110 employees still were suddenly out of the jobs they had cherished. And another historic company followed the path of its originator, Larkin Soap Company.*

*~ From the Desk of Sharon Osgood*