

## Twin Grove Pottery Green County - about 1850 - 1880

In about 1850 Isaac Sanborn started an earthenware pottery in Twin Grove, a small village in the Jefferson Township of Green County about ten miles southeast of the city of Monroe, Wisconsin. Isaac was born in Sommerset County, Pennsylvania in 1822. He moved to Indiana in 1843 with his parents and siblings and then came with his entire family to Twin Grove in 1845, becoming some of the first settlers there. Isaac learned the pattern trade in his early years.<sup>1</sup> It is not known where he learned potting.

The 1850 Census lists Isaac's parents, Abraham and Sarah (both age 56), as farmers. Their farm was forty rods north of town. Isaac's siblings included Jacob (24), Joshua (22) Abraham Jr. (20), Susana (17), and David (15). Isaac (27) owned a home and farm just east of his parents where he lived with his wife Vilette and his brother Jacob. His other siblings were living with their parents. All listed their occupation as "Farmer".<sup>2</sup>

The 1877 History of Green County contains this entry.

*Among the farmers who lived near was Isaac Sanborn who about 1850 started a pottery there, where jugs and crocks have since been made almost every year...*<sup>3</sup>

There was another mention of the pottery in another Green County History book in 1884.

*About 1850 Isaac [sic] Sanborn had a pottery "factory" [at Twin Grove] in which he produced crocks and jugs. This was in use until about 1880 and was located east of The Corners along the small stream.*<sup>4</sup>

Isaac listed his occupation as "Farmer" in the 1850 Census. It was common for rural potters to also farm, listing their occupation as whichever occupied most of their time or generated more income. Potting was often seasonal, done when the demands of farming allowed time. Indeed, the 1884 passage shown above states that pottery was made "every year" instead of continuously. All the Sanborn brothers reported farming as their occupation until 1870 when Joshua reported his occupation to be "potter."

Isaac may have had help from his brothers in the early 1850's. Joshua took over the business by the mid- to late-1850's, and David potted

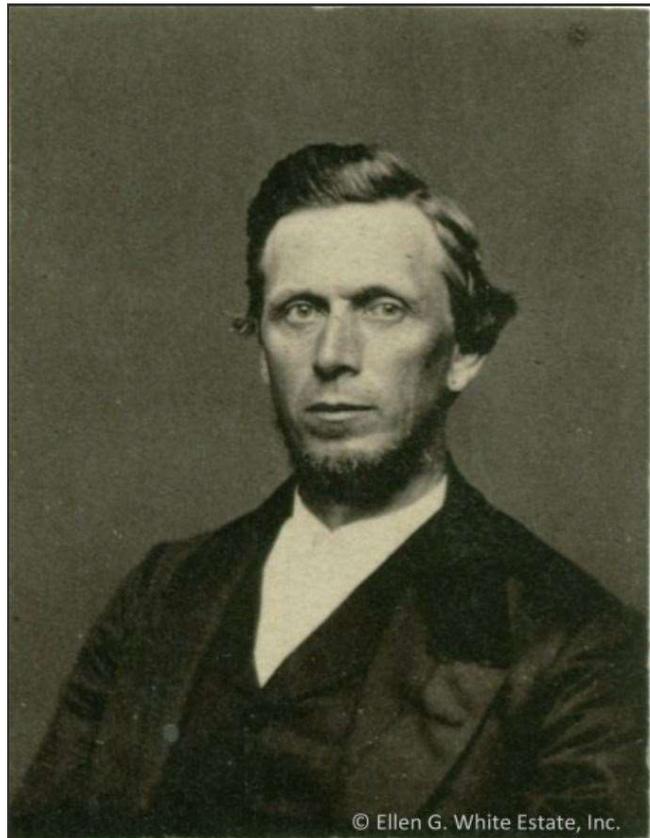


Figure 1 Isaac Sanborn. It appears that this photo dates from about the 1860's.

before the Civil War. Dearolf reported that David worked at the pottery except while serving in the Wisconsin 22nd Volunteer Infantry (Company K) for three years. He survived the war. Another employee was Joshua's brother-in-law, Perry Yarger. He enlisted at Monroe with Co. C of the 3rd Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry on April 22, 1861, suffered wounds in several skirmishes, and died in General Hospital of Typhoid Fever at Fredericktown, Cecil County, Maryland in 1862.<sup>5</sup>

A 22-year-old man named Nelson Cain lived three miles from Twin Grove. He listed his occupation as "potter" in the 1850 Census, but we found no evidence that he worked in Twin Grove. Still, the fact that Isaac apparently had little potting experience suggests that some other yet unidentified potter helped the Sanborn's start up the pottery.

Isaac dropped out of the pottery business in the mid-1850 to pursue work with the church.

*He [Isaac] was ordained to the gospel ministry [of the Seventh Day Adventist Church] in 1855 and began preaching in 1856, and at once gave himself to the study of the advent message with great zeal...He was ordained to the gospel ministry by Elders James White and W.S. Ingraham in August, 1856. From that time to the time of his death he gave himself to the preaching of the word, and many churches were raised up under his labors.<sup>6</sup>*



Figure 2 This 1861 Plat Map shows the pottery building. It shows the homes of Abraham Sr., Isaac, and Joshua to the north of the pottery. The "groves" on this map are greatly reduced today. Much of the surrounding land was barren of trees. This site, with access to fuel and clay, was an attractive spot for a pottery. This map is from the collection of the Green County Register of Deeds.



Figure 3 Joshua married Phoebe Yarger by 1860. Her brother Perry worked for the pottery until he left for the Civil War. Joshua owned and operated the pottery until about 1880. Photo was taken in about 1901

Isaac reported his occupation as "clergyman" in the 1860 Census.<sup>7</sup> In 1861 Elder Sanborn held church tent-meetings in several Illinois towns. He later became president of the church conference that included Wisconsin and Illinois. Isaac moved away from Jefferson Township in the 1860's.

We found very little information about the operation of the pottery during the 1860's and 1870's. Joshua is listed as the property owner on an 1873 Jefferson Township Atlas and Joshua reported his occupation as "potter" in the 1870 Census.<sup>8</sup>

By 1880, Joshua Sanborn listed “farmer” as his occupation in the US Census. While it is possible his clay source ran out, it is more likely his business succumbed to the advent of the mechanized production and durability of mass-produced stoneware.

In a 1940 letter to the Green County Historical Society, Edna Dunwiddie, a niece of Phoebe and Joshua, briefly describes Joshua’s vocation.

*Uncle Joshua and Aunt Phoebe lived on the first farm east of the crossroads, on the north side of the road. Besides farming, this uncle made pottery, having a kiln; he obtained clay from across the road to the south.....After the supply of clay gave out, Uncle gave up the work; he made jugs, pitchers, etc.; of course, in a crude way. He was also one of the first farmers in that locality to grow tobacco...<sup>9</sup>*



Figure 4 Sanborn’s pottery was located just east of the small stream that runs south. The clay source was a pit across the road has since filled with water. A local resident remembered digging clay there to make a piece of pottery for a high school class.

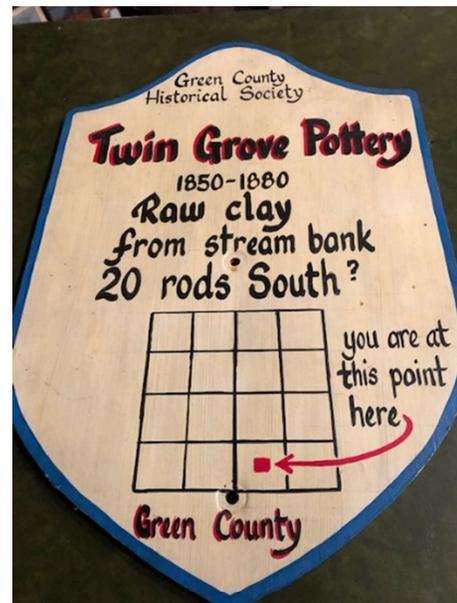


Figure 5 The Green County Historical Society ran a road tour of historical sites at some point. They posted this sign at the pottery site and then taken down after the tour and stored at the Society.

A 1936 WPA Wisconsin folk lore book mentioned the pottery.

*In the village of Twin Grove in the late ‘40’s and ‘50’s, there used to be a pottery factory which was owned by Joshua Sanborn, who hauled his product as far as Milwaukee. Mr. Dunwoodie as a kid used to go there and make marbles. The factory no longer functions nor stands.<sup>10</sup>*

Joshua and Phoebe moved to Mississippi in their twilight years. Joshua died on May 11, 1901, and Phoebe on February 5, 1922. They are interred at Jessamine Cemetery in Ridgeland, Mississippi.



*Figure 6 This jug and jar are the only pieces of pottery we can attribute to the Sanborn Pottery as of 2022. The jug has a scratched letter J, presumably for Joshua [Sanborn]. Its shape closely matches that of jug fragments found at the site. The pottery stamped the jar with the letters "JS" (Joshua Sanborn) and has a deep olive-colored glaze. It appears to have been over-fired - the glaze is rough and bubbled. It closely resembles a sherd we found at the site. (In private collections.)*

In 2020 and 2021 the authors visited the site to search for pottery fragments with permission from the owners. We were able to find and photograph about a cubic yard of broken pottery and learned a great deal about the types and characteristics of the pottery made in Twin Grove. A detailed report is available on this website.<sup>11</sup>



*Figure 7 A few of the sherds from the site.*

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<sup>1</sup> The Field Work Life Sketch of Elder Isaac Sanborn June 19, 1913, p 597

<sup>2</sup> 1850 Manuscript Census, Green County, Jefferson Township.

<sup>3</sup> Helen M. Bingham, History of Green County, Wisconsin, Burdick & Armitage, Printers, Milwaukee, 1877, p. 175.

<sup>4</sup> History of Green County, Wisconsin, Springfield, Illinois: Union Publishing Company. 1884, p. 1152.

<sup>5</sup> *Wisconsin Folk Pottery*, Kenneth Dearolf, Kenosha: Kenosha Public Museum, 1986, p. 52

<sup>6</sup> *The Field Work Life Sketch of Isaac Sanborn* June 9, 1913

<sup>7</sup> 1860 Manuscript Census, Green County, Jefferson Township.

<sup>8</sup> 1870 Manuscript Census, Green County, Jefferson Township.

<sup>9</sup> Dunwiddie, Edna. Letter to Green County Historical Society, August 13, 1940. "Mr. Dunwoodie" was probably John Dexter Dunwiddie, possibly related to Phoebe Sanborn.

<sup>10</sup> Federal Writers Project. Records 1936-1939: Folk Lore Wisconsin, Washington, D.C. 1984, p. 471. Blue Men and River Monsters, Story told by Emery Odell from Monroe p

<sup>11</sup> Madefromclay.org *Twin Grove Pottery Dump Dig*