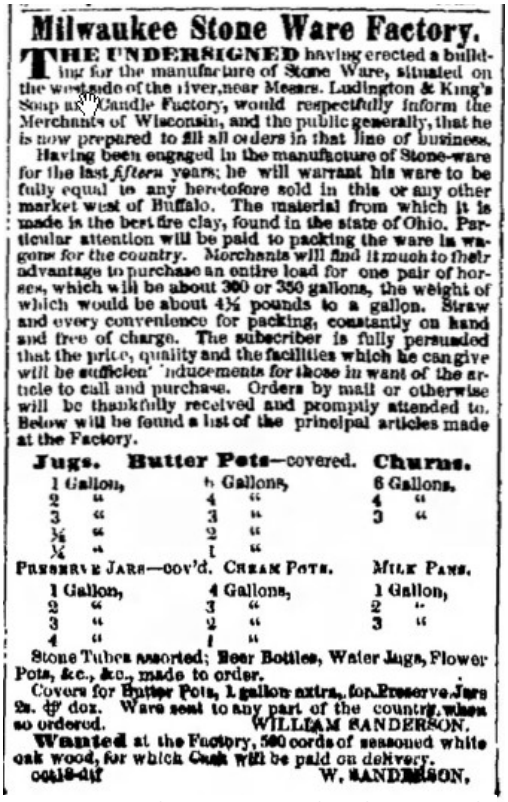
Milwaukee Stoneware Factory
1848 - 1858

The Milwaukee Stoneware Factory was started in late 1848 and operated for ten years. Ownership changed frequently during the first five years until the Maxfield brothers bought it in 1853. Most of the owners were merchants with retail and wholesale stores who sold general merchandise to settlers and residents of the fast-growing city, and to farmers in the region. Milwaukee Stoneware Factory's products were mostly made for farmers for dairy products like milk, cream, and butter.

Before the pottery opened there were several potteries already established in Milwaukee, all making lead-glazed earthenware from local clay. Milwaukee clay is not suitable for making salt-glazed stoneware. Frederick Herman's pottery on Johnson Street had been operating since 1845. There was also a small earthenware pottery on Chestnut Street operated by Isaac Brazelton, another on Water Street run by Henry Nunnemacher, and other small potteries. There were many merchants selling salt-glazed pottery brought by ship from Ohio and New York. They often advertised the arrival of goods in Milwaukee newspapers and sold out quickly.[1] During the winter months ships could not deliver due to ice, leading to shortages.

Salt-glazed pottery was better suited to the needs of farmers and their rugged lifestyle. Earthenware pottery broke easily, delaminated with freezing and thawing and absorbed liquids. Stoneware was preferred when it was available and affordable.



Milwaukee Stone Ware Factory.

THE UNDERSIGNED having erected a building for the manufacture of Stone Ware, situated on the west side of the river, near Messrs. Ludington & King's Soap and Candle Factory, would respectfully inform the Merchants of Wisconsin, and the public generally, that he is now prepared to fill all orders in that line of business.

Having been engaged in the manufacture of Stone-ware for the last *fifteen* years; he will warrant his ware to be fully equal to any heretofore sold in this or any other market west of Buffalo. The material from which it is made is the best fire clay, found in the state of Ohio. Particular attention will be paid to packing the ware in wagons *for the country*. Merchants will find it much to their advantage to purchase an entire load for one pair of horses, which will be about 300 or 350 gallons, the weight of which would be about 4½ pounds to a gallon. Straw and every convenience for packing, constantly on hand and free of charge. The subscriber is fully persuaded that the price, quality and the facilities which he can give will be sufficient inducements for those in want of the article to call and purchase. Orders by mail or otherwise will be thankfully received and promptly attended to. Below will be found a list of the principal articles made at the Factory.

Jugs.	Butter Pots—covered.	Churns.
1 Gallon,	5 Gallons,	6 Gallons,
2 "	4 "	4 "
3 "	3 "	3 "
½ "	2 "	
¼ "	1 "	

Preserve Jars—cov'd.	Cream Pots.	Milk Pans.
1 Gallon,	4 Gallons,	1 Gallon,
2 "	3 "	2 "
3 "	2 "	3 "
4 "	1 "	

Stone Tubes assorted; Beer Bottles, Water Jugs, Flower Pots, &c., &c., made to order.

Covers for Butter Pots, 1 gallon extra, for Preserve Jars 2s. ₰ doz. Ware sent to any part of the country when so ordered. WILLIAM SANDERSON.

Wanted at the Factory, 500 cords of seasoned white oak wood, for which Cash will be paid on delivery.

oct18-d1f W. SANDERSON.

Figure 1 November 25, 1848, Milwaukee Sentinel announcement.

Milwaukee's main source of salt-glazed stoneware was the Akron area in Northwestern Ohio. A pottery district flourished there in the 1840's and later. It had abundant stoneware-quality clay deposits and direct access to Great Lakes shipping via the Erie Canal. Many potteries had been established near Akron by 1848. Milwaukee merchants bought pottery by the tens of thousands of gallons – enough to fill a good-sized ship. Some Milwaukee merchants ordered stoneware with their names stamped into the clay, including L. J. Farwell and William Cunningham.

One of the larger Akron area stoneware producers was the I.M. Mead Pottery in Mogodore. The flower decorations on some Mead pottery looks almost identical to those on stoneware attributed to the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory. During the first few years of operation, the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory did not mark its products, so it's difficult to tell if a surviving piece of stoneware was made in Ohio or is an unmarked Milwaukee Stoneware piece. Both Ohio and Milwaukee Stoneware used the same clay and similar firing techniques, and both used similar cobalt decorations.

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Author: Peter Maas

Figure 2 The jug on the left is stamped "I.M. MEAD / Mogodore, / Ohio,". The center jug is unsigned but is attributed to Milwaukee Stoneware factory (1848 and 1851.) The cream pot at right is stamped "O.F. BAKER & CO./ MILWAUKEE." All appear to be the work of the same decorator, Thomas H. Williams.

Merchants in Milwaukee were some of the best customers of I. M. Mead and other Akron area potteries, so it is not surprising that someone there decided to start a pottery in Milwaukee. A Milwaukee pottery maker could undercut importers' prices and provide a more reliable, year-round supply for the hungry Milwaukee market. That someone was potter William Sanderson, who was living in Ohio in 1848 but who had previously owned a pottery in Poughkeepsie, New York around 1840.[2]

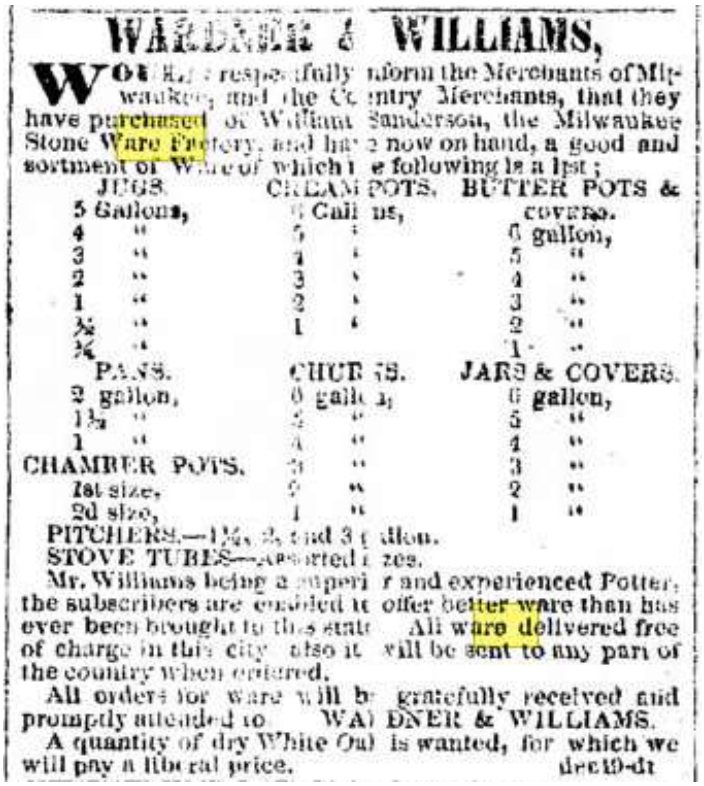
Sanderson chose a site that is now on the Northwest corner of Clybourne Street and Plankinton Avenue on the west side of the Milwaukee River. The land was leased, and the pottery buildings and kiln were built and in operation by November 1848, just months after Wisconsin became a State.

Sanderson's advertisement in the Milwaukee Sentinel gives detailed information about the products offered and other insights about his business plan. In the ad, Sanderson mentions his fifteen years of experience, so he started potting in 1832. He offered to sell to merchants and directly to the public. His fire clay came from Ohio, and wares could be packed for the country. A common method of selling pottery was through peddlers who drove wagonloads of goods directly to farms and town centers. Sanderson's ad offers straw for packing and states that a wagonload for a pair of horses held 300 to 350 gallons of stoneware that weighed a ton-and-a-half. The most common product types listed are jugs, butter pots (crocks), churns, preserve jars, cream pots, milk pans (for milking goats and cows), stone tubes (to insulate metal stove pipes), beer bottles, water jugs (usually with spigot holes), flowerpots, and custom items of any kind, in sizes up to six gallons. It also mentions covers for butter pots and jars. The ad also solicits 500 cords of "white oak wood", for which he would pay cash on delivery.

The 1847 *Pioneer History of Milwaukee* describes Sanderson's Pottery this way.

> "*Among these, is a large building 80 by 40, with an addition 30 by 50, designed for a stoneware factory. It is to be occupied by Mr. William Sanderson, late of Ohio, who has supplied this market with stone ware for several years past, and now transfers the manufacture of the article to this city. The raw material is imported from Ohio, to be worked up here. This is an important branch of manufacturing industry and will give employment to many hands."*

It is quite possible that Sanderson built the business to flip it for profit. On April 9, 1849, just four months after opening, another ad appeared in the Milwaukee Sentinel announcing new owners – "Wardner and Williams".[3] James Wardner had a retail store that sold general merchandise. Thomas H. Williams was an experienced potter who recently came from Ohio. Williams was probably involved in the startup of the factory and came with Sanderson from the Akron area. Sanderson and Williams may both have worked at the Mead factory. It appears that Thomas H, Williams was a decorator at the I.M. Mead factory for a time and was the primary decorator for the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory based on the similarity of the decorations. The product list in the advertisement is like Sanderson's with the addition of pitchers and chamber pots. It offers free delivery in the city and delivery to the county, presumably for a fee.



WARDNER & WILLIAMS,

WOULD respectfully inform the Merchants of Milwaukee, and the Country Merchants, that they have purchased of William Sanderson, the Milwaukee Stone Ware Factory, and have now on hand, a good and assortment of Ware of which the following is a list;

JUGS.	CREAM POTS.	BUTTER POTS & covers.
5 Gallons,	5 Gallons,	6 gallon,
4 "	4 "	5 "
3 "	3 "	4 "
2 "	2 "	3 "
1 "	1 "	2 "
½ "		1 "
¼ "		

PANS.	CHURNS.	JARS & COVERS.
2 gallon,	6 gallons,	6 gallon,
1½ "	5 "	5 "
1 "	4 "	4 "
CHAMBER POTS.	3 "	3 "
1st size,	2 "	2 "
2d size,	1 "	1 "

PITCHERS.—1¼, 2, and 3 gallon.
STOVE TUBES—Assorted sizes.

Mr. Williams being a superior and experienced Potter, the subscribers are enabled to offer better ware than has ever been brought to this state. All ware delivered free of charge in this city also it will be sent to any part of the country when ordered.

All orders for ware will be gratefully received and promptly attended to. WARDNER & WILLIAMS.

A quantity of dry White Oak is wanted, for which we will pay a liberal price. dec19-dt

An April 1849 *Milwaukee Sentinel* article describes the factory. "*The establishment of Messrs. Wardner & Williams, in the fourth ward, is turning off stone ware of the first quality, to the extent of their capacity for manufacturing. The building is 90x20 feet, with a wing adjoining, and business office in front. They have for some time past, sold about $600 of ware a month — the market almost entirely in the city, and country west of us. They use about three hundred tons of clay in a year, which is brought from Ohio, and also about nine cords of wood per week. Four journeymen and three common hands are employed — all busy — and more will soon be constantly occupied, as the demand is daily increasing.*"

James Wardner and Thomas Williams placed a separate ad on June 28th, 1849, offering flowerpots, 100 dozen stove tubes and many "pressed quart and pint beer s".

Figure 3 Pressed "small beer" bottle made for Taylor & Brother, ca. 1849/50.

July 1849 Thomas Williams sold his ownership interest to Wardner for unknown reasons. However, Williams continued working at the Factory at least until after the 1851/52 Milwaukee City directory was published in which he is listed as a potter. When the directory was published Oscar Baker owned the factory.

December 1849 James Wardner sold the Factory to Edwin Saph, another Milwaukee merchant. Saph owned the factory for one year. The June 1850 Products of Industry Schedule of the Census gives detailed information about Saph's operation.[4]

$6,000 (60,000 gallons) sales in the past 12 months
Eight hands (some journeyman potters and some labor)
Horse as motive of power (for grinding clay)
250 tons of clay valued at $1,250 ($5 per ton)
350 cords of wood valued at $520

Saph continued the practice of not stamping his name on stoneware. Thomas Williams continued to work there, presumably as the master potter and main decorator.

October 1850 Saph sold the pottery to Grocery and Provisions store owner Oscar Baker.[5] One change Baker made was to mark his pottery. It's surprising that he was the first owner to do so given the large amount of similar Ohio stoneware available to buy in Milwaukee at the time. Baker's wholesale and retail store was located at 172 Water Street, across the river from the pottery. Thomas Williams still worked at the pottery as of the publishing of the 1851/52 Milwaukee City Directory which lists him as a potter. The flowers on some Baker pieces closely resemble the decorations on earlier, unmarked stoneware attributed to Milwaukee Stoneware Factory.

MILWAUKEE STONE WARE FACTORY,
West Water street, near Ludington & King's Soap and Candle Factory.
O. F. BAKER,

WISHES to inform his old friends and the Merchants of Wisconsin, that he has purchased the entire interest of Edward Saph, in the Stone Ware Factory, which is now in successful operation, and will yield from 4,000 to 6,000 gallons of Ware per week, and will enable the proprietor hereafter to supply all demands; and the quality of the Ware now manufactured will compare favorably with the best made East

All orders left at the Factory, or at the subscribers' Store 127 East Water street, nearly opposite the United States Hotel, where samples of the Ware can at all times be seen, will be promptly executed

List of Stone-Ware manufactured at the Milwaukee Stone-Ware Factory.

Jugs—3 gallons, 4 do, 2 do, 1 do, ½ do, ¼ do;
Cream Pots—6 gallons, 5 do, 4 do, 3 do, 2 do, 1 do,
Churns—6 gallons, 5 do, 4 do, 3 do, 2 do, 1 do;
Jars & Covers—6 gallons, 5 do, 4 do, 3 do, 2do, 1 do;
Pitchers—3 gallons, 2 do, 1½ do;
Pans—2 gallons, 1½ do, 1 do;
Butter Pots and Covers—6 gallons, 5 do, 4 do, 3 do, 2 do;
Stone Tubs—assorted sizes;
Flower Pots—assorted sizes.

A quantity of the above list of Ware constantly on hand. Ware delivered to any part of the city free of charge. Ware nicely packed to go into the country.

O. F. BAKER.

Figure 4 Baker announced the acquisition of the Saph pottery.

About 1852 to 1853 It is not known exactly when Baker sold the pottery, or even who bought it, but by 1853 the pottery was owned by John and Amos Maxfield. It appears that Thomas Williams had left Milwaukee by then.

The butter churn in Figure 18 has a Maxfield stamp and 1853 date. There was no Milwaukee City Directory published in 1853 and we found no Deeds for the property because it was probably leased. There is an 1854 City Directory listing for the Maxfield brothers as owners of the pottery. The Maxfield's were merchants, not potters, and with Thomas Williams gone they needed someone to run the factory. Two skilled potters started working there in 1853. One was 57-year-old William Gunther, and another was 26-year-old Weimar

Remy. Gunther was a skilled German potter. His son, Theodore, later came to Milwaukee, working at the Hermann pottery before moving to Sheboygan to start a pottery there. Gunther's other son Peter also came to Milwaukee and potted. William Gunther's daughter Maria married Weimar Remy in 1854.[6] Remy worked at the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory until 1856 when he left to co-found the Charles Hermann & Co. pottery. William, Maria, and Weimar were from Nassau Germany and probably came to Milwaukee together.

Stoneware exists with an "RANSOM & CO. / MILWAUKEE" stamp, and decorated pieces with this stamp have the standard Maxfield-style cobalt flowers (Figure 16.) The "MILWAUKEE" portion of the stamp is in a Serif-style italic font, which is only found on the earlier "J. B. & A." stoneware that dates from before 1855. It is likely that Ransom bought stoneware from the Maxfield's with his name on them to resell. A butter churn exists with his name, indicating that he was not using stoneware as a container to sell a product like whiskey. Ramson was a carpenter/builder by trade and had no potting or retail experience. He had no known ties to retail, but somehow he got involved in the pottery business in the early 1850's. Pottery assortments could be purchased by the wagonload and taken west to sell. He may have bought wagonloads of stoneware to peddle off a wagon.[7]

It is a slight possibility that Ransom owned the pottery before the Maxfield's bought it in 1853. If so, he would have been the one who hired William Gunther and Weimar Remy to replace Thomas Williams. He would have bought it from Baker and sold it to the Maxfield's after a period of months.

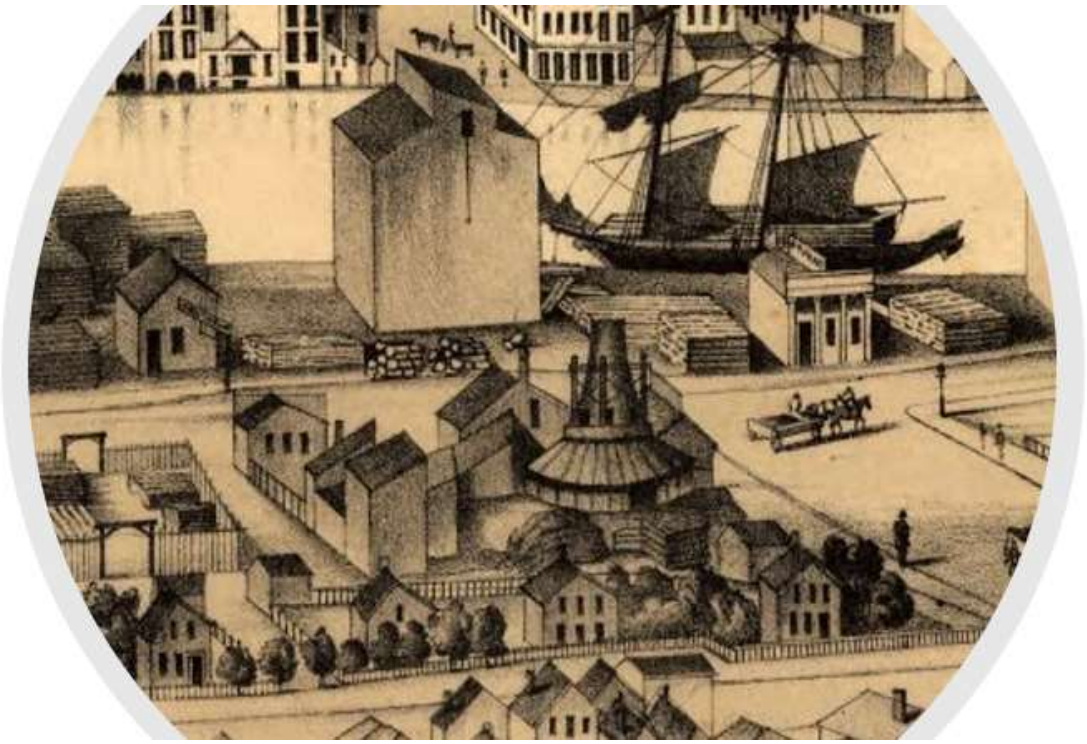


Figure 5 This lithograph is from 1854 when John & Amos Maxfield owned the pottery. It shows the kiln, warehouse and office buildings, and the Milwaukee River in the background. In front of the kiln is a large pile of clay, brought in from Akron, and on the right a pile of White Oak wood for fuel. The openings near the top of the kiln are for shoveling in salt.

The decoration on Maxfield pottery resembles earlier Milwaukee Stoneware decorations with two main differences. Many of the larger pieces were stamped, and many of those had a distinctive cobalt flower.

This decoration was consistent for the entire five-year period that the Maxfield's owned the pottery. It appears that the main decorator was William Gunther. He is the only potter known to have worked for Maxfield from 1853 through 1858 when Milwaukee Stoneware closed. John Stoeckert worked long-term for Maxfield but didn't arrive in Milwaukee until late in 1854. Maria and Weimar Remy were married in May 1854 and the Marriage Certificate lists Remy as a "potmaker."

A view of the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory as it appeared in 1854 is shown in Figure 4.[7]

1855 Amos Maxfield left the partnership, leaving John as the sole owner. The stamps on Maxfield pottery changed from "J.B. & A. Maxfield / Milwaukee" to "J. B. Maxfield / Milwaukee." There is also a rare stamp that includes an "& CO", indicating there was a partner with an ownership interest at some point.

1858 John Maxfield sold the business to E.D. Chapin who used the property for other purposes. The reasons Maxfield closed the pottery are not known, but he faced more competition from the expanding Hermann/Remy stoneware pottery that started in 1856. There was also a severe economic recession in 1857 which also didn't help. Margins were getting smaller there was increasing availability of wooden, tin and glass alternatives to stoneware. The pottery of Thomas Williams's brother/cousin George on Fremont Steet in Whitewater also closed in 1858. Both potteries faced the same economic and competitive headwinds.

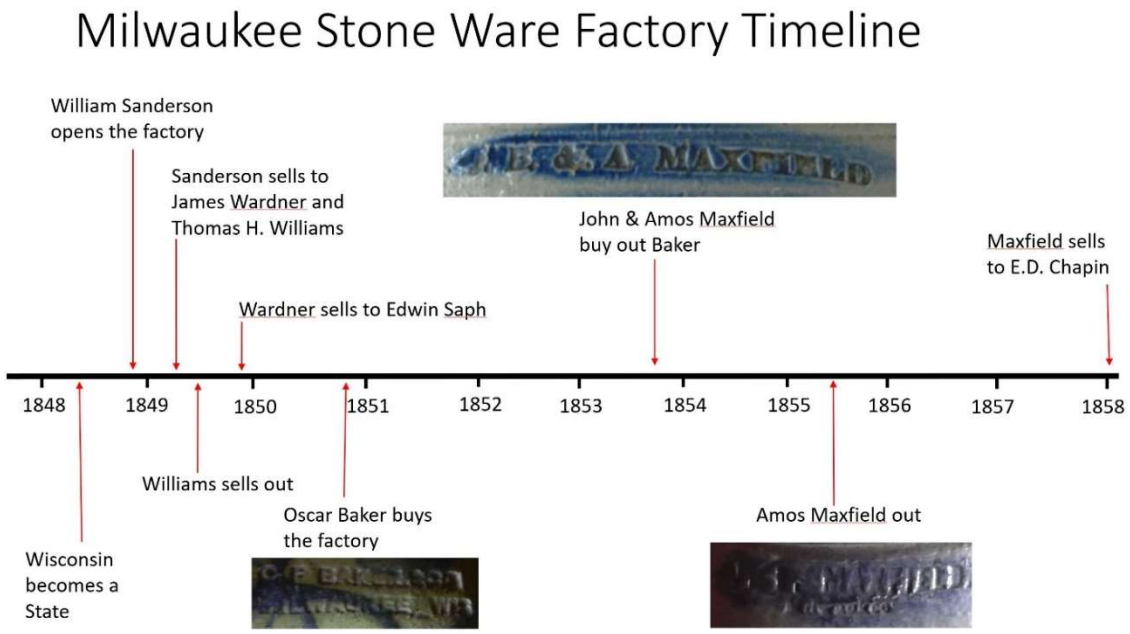


Figure 6 Timeline of ownership changes.

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Figure 7 Churn at Left is stamped I. M. MEAD / MOGODORE, / OHIO,". Center: Unsigned cream pot from the collection of the Kenosha Museum attributed to the MSWF. Pitcher is stamped "H. W. CHAMBERLAIN / SHEBOYGAN." Right: Cream pot stamped "O. F. BAKER & CO. / MILWAUKEE." We attribute all the decorations to Thomas H. Williams.

Figure 8 We attribute these pieces to the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory based mainly on the decoration, but also to the fact that so many have been found in the Milwaukee area. The flower closely resembles the decoration on the pitcher stamped "CHAMBERLAIN" in Figure 6 that was also made at the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory.

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Figure 9 More examples of pieces we attribute to the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory.

Figure 10 Pitcher and jug attributed to the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory, probably made during the Saph or Baker era. Note the similarity of the flower on the pitcher with those in Figures 6 7, and 8. If you look very closely at the decoration on the jug you will see a freshly caught Lake Trout in the talons of American Eagle in flight. The areas brown discoloration on the front of both pieces is a result of contact with other pieces during firing due to stacking. From the collections of Henry Heck and Mark Knipping, respectively.

Figure 11 We attribute these two jugs to the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory. The jug at left is A.G. Burley from Chicago and the other was made for Smith and Clark who were Janesville merchants. Both probably date from before 1851.

Figure 12 The jug at left is stamped "S. JOHNSON JR. / WHOLESALE DRUGGIST / 151 E WATER ST. / MILWAUKEE". Johnson bought a retail Merchant business from Wm. Cunningham. The Johnson jug was made by the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory. The center jug is stamped "O.F. BAKER & CO./ MIWWAUKEE". Notice the similarity of the flowers. The Baker advertisement was published in an 1851/52 Milwaukee City Directory.

Figure 13 The advertisement is from the November 1851 Milwaukee Sentinel. It is interesting that his groceries and provisions store got top billing in the ad over the stoneware business. It is not known who the "& CO." in the stamp refers to. The jug at left has the flower that is most often seen on decorated Baker pieces, but Baker stoneware had other flowers too. The jug at right with the bird that resembles a Toucan is the only known bird-decorated Baker piece.

Figure 14 These three pieces have the "O.F. BAKER & CO. / MILWAUKEE" stamp. The jug has the typical Thomas H. Williams flower. The jar in the center has an elaborate but amateurish decoration. At right is another example of a different flower used by Baker. One or more other potters apparently tried their hand at decorating.

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Figure 15 These jugs were decorated by the same person, but the jug on the left is stamped "J. B. & A. MAXFIELD / MILWAUKEE" which dates it to before 1856. The jug on the right is stamped "C. HERMANN & CO. / MILWAUKEE" which started in 1856. Weimar Remy left Milwaukee Stoneware in 1856 and went to work for Hermann. The other potters we know of who went to work for Hermann after Maxfield are John Stoeckert and William Gunther, but they went in 1858 after Maxfield sold out, so these two pieces are probably the work of Weimar Remy.

Figure 16 Comparison of the Baker flower (left) and the Maxfield flower (right). The looping branch and the leaves of the flower tend to be more compact on Maxfield pieces. The flower was very consistent for the five years that Maxfields owned the pottery, and was used on most of their decorated pieces.

Figure 17 Stoneware with L. Ransom stamps are rare, and decorated pieces have the standard Maxfield flower. By 1854 Ransom was fully engaged in building lighthouses so if he ever had an ownership interest the pottery it was most likely before the Maxfield brothers bought it in 1853. We are unable to find evidence that Ransom was an owner. He may have just ordered pottery with his name on it to resell.

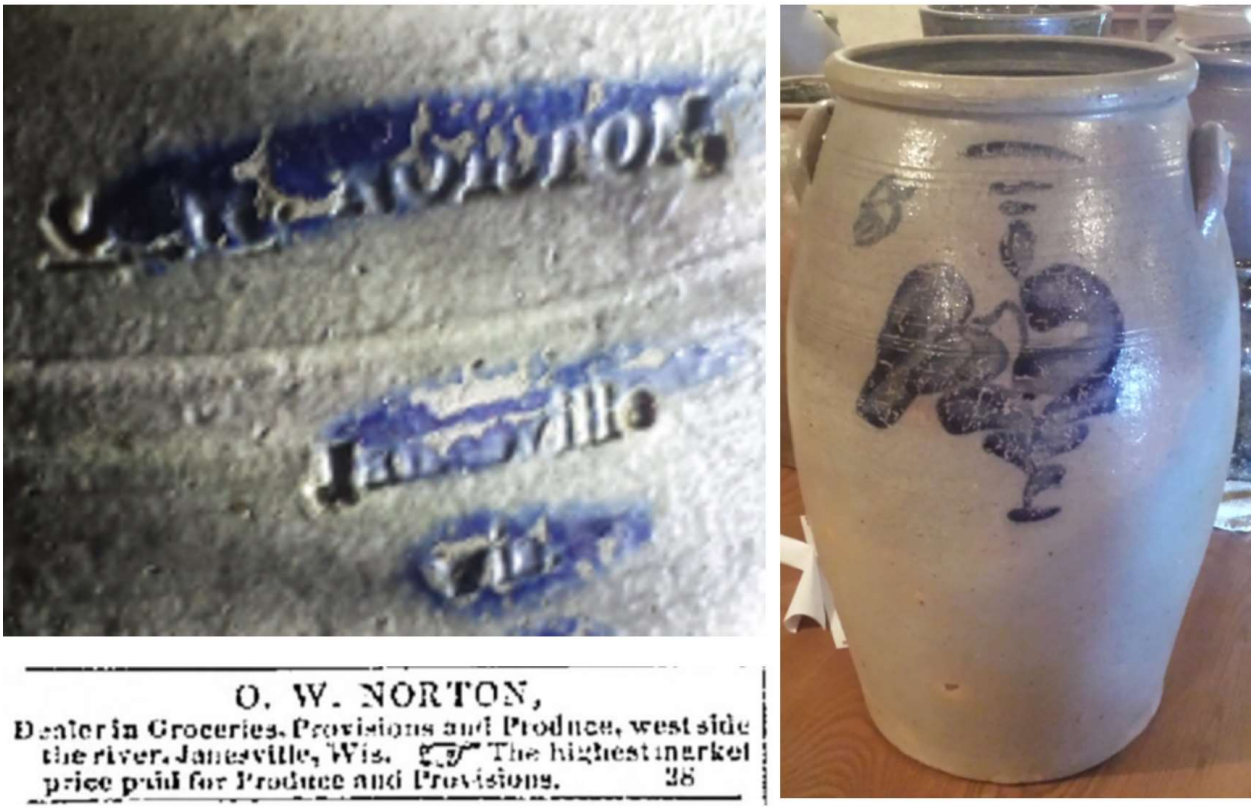

Figure 18 Maxfield merchant butter churn stamped "O. W. NORTON / Janesville, Wis.". Norton was in business between 1853 and 1854.

Figure 19 Maxfield dated butter churns. The 1853 churn is stamped "J. B. MAXFIELD / MILWAUKEE" which is curious because this stamp was used after Amos left the pottery in 1855. It could be a commemorative piece made after 1855. Another possibility is that John Maxfield initially stamped pieces this way and added Amos's initials after this piece was made. Either way, it suggests that Maxfield owned the Milwaukee Stoneware Factory by 1853.

Figure 20 Decorated examples of both the earlier "J. B. & A." and later "J. B." Maxfield stamped stoneware are abundant. The flowers are consistently rendered – all probably painted by William Gunther. Pieces of Maxfield stoneware with anything other than the standard flower are the exception. Many pieces of Maxfield pottery have stamps with no decoration and many more have no stamp or decoration.

Figure 21 Maxfield pieces with non-standard flowers are rare. Here are three examples.

Figure 22 Three other Maxfield examples with non-standard flowers. The crock at left is both incised and painted which is extremely rare for Maxfield. The straight-sided form of jug at right is more typical of later jugs. It is stamped "J. B. MAXFIELD / MILWAUKEE" indicating it was made after 1855. These pieces are from the collection of Henry Hecker.

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Figure 23 Left: Jug decorated with brown glaze are rare. Center: Many undecorated stamped pieces are glazed with Albany slip. Right: Most undecorated stamped Maxfield pieces are salt glazed. There are also many types of stoneware that Maxfield made that is not marked, like milk pans, flowerpots, and smaller pieces.

Figure 24 This cream pot from J.B. Maxfield has an incised "2" instead of the script capacities seen on the vast majority of Maxfield stoneware. The large lettering used in the name stamp is also unusual.

Figure 25 Jug stamped "J. B. MAXFIELD & CO. / MILWAUKEE" (1856-1858). At some point John Maxfield had a partner, but whether this refers to his brother, William Gunther, or someone else is not known.

Figure 26 J.B. Maxfield envelope with a advertising logo in the shape of a jug. It identifies Maxfield as a manufacturer and wholesale dealer, indicating he was selling stoneware made by others, presumably imported from outside of Wisconsin.

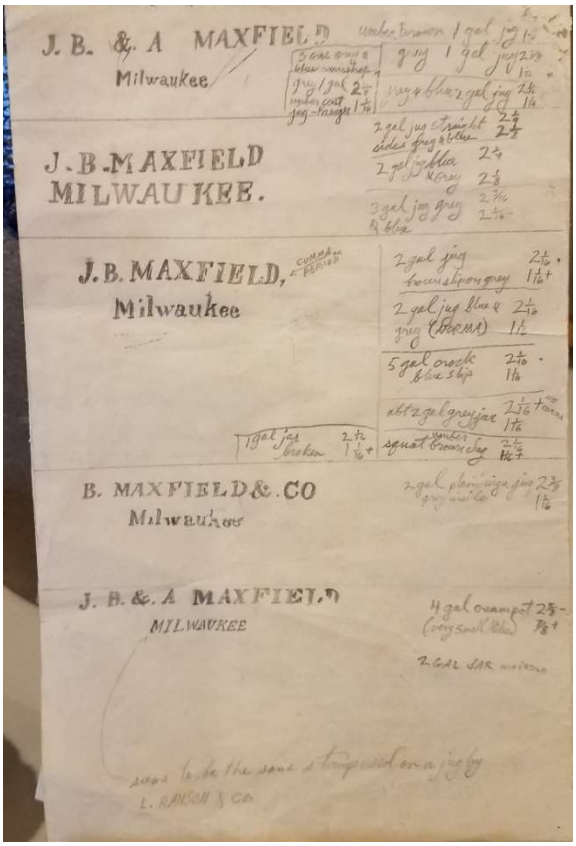

Figure 27 Detailed notes about stamp variations by Wisconsin stoneware collector Don Mericle from the 1970's.

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Figure 28 Maxfield stamp variants. It appears that the second line with "Milwaukee" was separate from the first, so the location of the city stamp varied from one piece to another.

[1] *Milwaukee Sentinel* newspapers, various dates.
[2] Pioneer History of Milwaukee, 1847 by J. S. Buck
[3] *Milwaukee Sentinel* April 9, 1849
[4] US Census Products of Industry Schedule for Milwaukee 1850.
[5] *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Oct. 8, 1850
[6] Marriage Certificate of Weimar Remy and Maria Gunther, Milwaukee County
[7] Birdseye view of Milwaukee. Published by Smith Bros. & Co New York 1854.

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