

Mineral Point Pottery - Bernard Klais

1858 - about 1880

Bernard Klais was born in about the year 1805 near the city of Köln (Cologne) in west-central Germany, not far from the Belgian border. As a young man he began to study for the priesthood but gave it up and settled instead on learning the potter's trade. He married his wife Cecelia sometime during the late 1830's, and the couple was blessed with the birth of two children, John in 1839 and Mary Anna in 1844. Just two years later, in 1846, "America Fever" prompted the family to emigrate. They landed at New York and journeyed onward to Milwaukee via the Erie Canal and the Great Lakes.¹ Klais established a pottery at the northwest edge of Milwaukee on the Fond du Lac Road.² Five more children were born to the family here: Margaret (1846), Gertrude (1849), Jacob (1850), Stephen (1852), and Michael (1855).



Figure 1 Klais' most noted characteristic was to attach storage jar handles at their ends only, leaving 1/8-to-1/4-inch distance from the handle to the side of the vessel (another characteristic of pottery from the Cologne area) as opposed to continuous ear handles found on most other Wisconsin pottery.

But Klais found his prospects severely limited by the number of other redware potteries and stoneware factories in and around Milwaukee, as well as out-of-state competition from imported wares sold through local merchants. He therefore determined to move his family and business somewhere farther away from these larger manufacturing interests. Accordingly, in 1858 he relocated to Mineral Point, heart of Wisconsin's mining region southwest of Madison and known as a boom town for the past 30 years.

A tiny mining camp derisively called "Shake Rag" in 1828 exploded into being as adventurers descended upon a 'point' of land where 'mineral' was discovered - rich Galena ore, 85% pure metallic lead found outcropping on the surface and in shallow crevice mines opened by members of the Winnebago tribe (Ho-Chunk Nation). And this opportunity less than 20 years after the War of 1812, when the United States imported its lead from Great Britain, with whom we were at war! The Lead District took on many of the aspects of and furnished numerous participants who would be seen in California twenty years later. The mineral would change from lead to gold, but, alas, the men did not.

The earliest settlers to arrive exploited the easy surface deposits of "mineral." They largely were unskilled adventurers, Southern in nativity and outlook, who came up the Mississippi River from Missouri, southern Illinois and the deep South, giving the region its wild, frontier flavor. During the so-called Black Hawk War of 1832, they built a stockade of palisade logs called Fort Jackson in Mineral Point, which place also hosted one of Wisconsin's few legal hangings in 1842. (An estimated 4,000 to 5,000 people descended on the village, a boon for local business, though some visitors brought their own picnic lunches. One resident recalled "*There never was such a big crowd in town before or since. The hills around were black with people. It was a real holiday.*")³ Payment for a new jail was held up until it could be fitted with iron stocks.⁴ Several arrivals brought slaves into the territory contrary to federal law, including Territorial Governor Henry Dodge, and engaged in feuds, duels, horse racing, fisticuff fights and gambling as matters of honor and sport. Gov. Dodge created quite a stir at a Milwaukee hotel when he forgot a large Bowie knife under his pillow. Of the Governor it was said:

*I had seen him on horseback in the streets of Mineral Point, and was struck with the appearance of his accoutrements, having, although dressed in plain clothes, immense horse pistols staring out of his holsters. He had been brought up on the frontiers, and since his manhood had been rather notorious for his desperate feuds with various individuals, many of whom still surviving, he always went armed, the invariable practice of bloods of his calibre [sic] being to fire immediately at any hostile approach.*⁵

*Although the settlers [around Wiotia] were all simply squatters, belonging with few exceptions, to the poorer classes of citizens, we never had the least difficulty or trouble with any of our neighbors We heard of no violation of law or other outrage, and although rumors reached us of lawlessness at Mineral Point, which became a great mining center, yet Wiotia, Hamilton's settlement and the Peckatonica country enjoyed peace and quiet.*⁶

*... the nucleus of the town [village of Mineral Point] was formed by the erection of a few small log cabins and huts built with square-cut sod, covered with poles, prairie grass and earth. These comfortable though temporary shelters were located in the vicinity of ... what now [are] called Commerce and High streets.*⁷

I were here [in Mineral Point] at a ball, a short time since, a stage was sent to Platville [sic] 16 miles for most of the Ladies. The ball commenced as they usually do. Before midnight the gentlemen (two of whom were Lawyers) were to [sic]O merry from liquor [.] before morning with [exception of] two or three all were drunk. the Ladies spent the better part of the night together... All such parties break up [in] a drunken scrape. The Court convened here in Nov. but Judge D. [Charles Dunn, Chief Justice of the Wisconsin Supreme Court] being drunk it was adjourned. Judge F. died of delirium tremens last year. [Associate Justice of the Supreme Court William Frazer reportedly became so drunk aboard a vessel on Lake Michigan that he had to be lowered to dockside in Milwaukee with a block and tackle.] The greater part of the Members of the Legislative [House] & Council are intemperate & some of them gamblers. Marriages are very often broken, the parties separate, & that without acrimony. Two respectable men swapped [sic] wives. one received for the better qualities of his wife in exchange a barrel of pork, that not being so good as represented, a Law Suit ensued. Such are the morals in the mines.⁸

An English traveler applied his sharp wit to sketch the town in 1836:

The advancing tide of white population, amongst which we had now got, had destroyed every chance [of cleanliness and comfort]: the miserable low taverns were kept by greedy, vulgar adventurers, who had come into the country to torment it with what they call "diggings," a name they give to the rude, shallow shafts, a few feet deep, which they sink in search of metal. Nothing could exceed the ignorance and filthy habits of the' working miners; the greater number of whom, being without skill, and becoming finally disappointed in their expectations, had fallen into the lowest state of poverty.⁹

Not a leaf was to be seen on the few stunted trees here and there, and the chilly, comfortless state of the weather was in perfect keeping with the dismal aspect of the place. At length came the summons to the never-failing repast of coffee, rice, treacle, and bread and butter

I found that the inhabitants produced nothing of any kind for their [own] subsistence, not even a cabbage, for there was not a garden in the place, and that they were as dependent upon others as if they were on board a ship The sole topic which engrossed the general mind was the production of galena and copper ...

It was, in fact, a complete nest of speculators, with workmen following in their train, traders again upon their traces, to sell goods and provisions, doctors, to give physic and keep boarding-houses; and lawyers, to get a living out of this motley and needy population. ¹⁰

A more melancholy and dreary place than this Mineral Point I never expect to see again: we had not tasted a morsel of fresh meat, or fish, or vegetables, since we had been here. There was not a vestige of a garden in the place, and the population seemed quietly to have resigned itself to an everlasting and unvarying diet of coffee, rice, treacle and bread, and salt butter, morning, noon, and night, without any other variety than that of occasionally getting a different cup and saucer.¹¹

*Mineral Point was then [1836] the most important town of Wisconsin. It was the county seat of Iowa County and confidently expected to be the territorial capital. Its population was nearly 2,000 and steadily increasing. There were a dozen lead furnaces constantly in operation ... and some profitable mines were worked, giving employment to a large number of people.*¹²

A grand celebration of Independence Day in Mineral Point, July 4, 1836, included a whole roast ox, and more than 50 "regular" and "volunteer" drinking toasts offered by His Excellency Gov. Henry Dodge and other assembled dignitaries. They toasted everyone and everything, from the "Memory of Washington, Drank in silence and standing," to the United States as "asylum for the oppressed of all nations," proudly to "The American people: May they always be right, and always successful, right or wrong," sweetly to "Our mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, and sweet hearts - not forgetting our dear grandmothers - In our hearts the first - tho' last in our cups," but mostly to "Our noble selves - none more noble."¹³ Those who still could walk or ride ended the day's festivities with a grand dance at the Mansion House Hotel. A contemporary description survives of this hostelry:

There were all kinds of fun, sports and music going on... It seemed that the miners were in the habit of assembling there on Saturday nights, to drink, gamble and frolic until Monday morning. The house was composed of three or four log cabins put together, with passage ways cut from one to another The bar room ... contained a large bar, well supplied with all kinds of liquors. In one corner of the room, was a Faro Bank, discounting to a crowd around it; in another corner a Roulette; and in another, sat a party engaged at playing at cards. One man sat back in a corner, playing a fiddle, to whose music two others were dancing in the middle of the room The landlord showed us through a dark room, and opened the door of another, in which two men were also playing at cards, and a third lay drunk upon the floor. The landlord sat down his light, seized the drunken man by the collar, and dragged him into the next room

*After studying [our situation] a while, we threw down the outside blanket, and quietly crawled into bed with all our clothes on, except cap and boots. We had a good bowie-knife in our belt, and a pistol in each pocket; we clasped a pistol in each band, and in this way we lay until daylight ... When daylight made its appearance ... our room-mates were still playing at cards.*¹⁴

Things became so raucous that in 1837 when the village drew up a charter to incorporate as a city, they found it necessary to include an ordinance providing

*Any person hallowing, shouting, bawling, screaming, profane or obscene language, fighting, dancing, singing, whooping, quarrelling, or making an unusual noise or sounds, in any house or in any part of this corporation, in such a manner as to disturb the good people of the neighborhood, or those passing through the streets, he, she or they, so offending shall be fined twenty dollars for the first offence.*¹⁵

The people of Mineral Point always did know how to party. Town fathers also regulated licensing of taverns and groceries (often called "groggeries" for the cheap whiskey sold there), forbade dueling and horse racing on public streets, and regulated how many kegs of blasting powder one might keep in their residence at a time. (It seems there had been a problem with miners preparing their explosive charges

at night by rolling up blasting powder in old newspaper in front of open fireplaces.) Once the "*Burying Ground*" filled up, local leaders had to contend with shallow, unsanctioned nighttime burials in dirt streets and vacant lots, resulting in hogs rooting up the dead and dragging them around the village. In 1849 local government finally sprang for a new cemetery to provide "*common decency*," at least for the dead.¹⁶ Just in time, as Mineral Point was ravaged by a cholera epidemic in 1850.

Happily, during the late-1830s the adventurers were joined and within a few years displaced by skilled immigrant miners from Cornwall, England, who possessed the knowledge and experience to pump out the water and dig the shafts deeper, and as devout Methodists (usually, except maybe on Saturday nights) were quite surprised at the shenanigans going on at 'The Point':

William Rablin ... is a native of Cornwall... born in the Parish of Camborne, Dec. 11, 1809 soon after being married [in 1835], they came ... direct to the Territory of Wisconsin, and arrived at Mineral Point on Saturday evening, June 27, 1835; the next day, Sunday, the first day spent in their new home, there were seven fights; it was a new experience to them ... on Sunday, when there was preaching at some cabin, they were obliged to cross a swampy place, and he would take his wife in his arms and carry her, jumping from one bog to another in doing so. Mr. Rablin continued mining about seven years ... [and then bought a farm].¹⁷

The character of the miners - being principally Cornish - was not that of a strictly mild and moral people, still they possessed and exercised some redeeming qualities, among which, to their praise be it spoken, was their uniform attendance, with their families, at the churches on Sabbath mornings; although, in the afternoons, they employed themselves in various recreations, but mainly in card-playing and drinking.¹⁸

A greater part of the miners as they term it prospect [ca. 1840]. Whenever one discovers a body of mineral ... he is at once made independently rich and reputable in character. The Miners are mostly Welsh, Cornish & other foreigners. They live in shantees of logs & turf. Their wages are from \$40 to \$50 per month which is generally spent at gambling or for drink ...¹⁹

Men were rolling in wealth then for they had all they wished and feared God and honored the King, for most of them were English. Some were Irish - they feared nobody and loved whiskey, and loved a fight also. Well in that respect the English were not a bit behind, for I have seen the streets of Mineral Point covered with fighting-mad English and Irish men, and scores of women also, as drunk as their men and fighting tooth and nail with each other ...²⁰

Another novelty [in Milwaukee] was the prairie schooners, loaded with pig lead from Mineral Point, Shullsburg, and vicinity, drawn by four or six yoke of oxen. The bull whackers with their long handled whip stocks made the air ring cracking their whips like pistol shots. They became very expert and delighted to show their skill in picking a fly off the left ox's ear without hitting the ox. The lead at that time was all shipped from [Milwaukee] to Buffalo, and the ox teams hauled loads of goods back for country merchants.²¹ [Another source estimated the lead freighters covered about 20 miles per day, fixing their own cornbread and bacon twice daily, grazing their oxen on whatever

was at hand, and sleeping under the stars at night. It took 8 to 10 days to travel by ox wagon from Mineral Point to Milwaukee at approximately 2 miles per hour.]

A drift in Major Gray's diggings, near Mineral Point, in a crevice twelve feet wide, was filled in with clay and ore. When I was there [in 1853], nine yards only of the contents of this crevice had been excavated, and out of that amount of excavation, 34,000 lbs. of ore had been obtained. At the new diggings ... two men can readily raise 2000 lbs. of ore in a day, and ... not more than twelve feet deep.²²

CRICKET

The regular meetings for play of the Mineral Point Cricket Club, are every Wednesday and Saturday. Play to commence on each day at 4 P.M. The Cricket grounds adjoins the Race Track.²³

VERY SAD OCCURANCE. We have the melancholy news, this morning, of the burying alive of one of our townsmen, Mr. Richard Jenkins, by the caving in of a mineral hole. Our citizens are now digging him out, he being covered about 25 feet. He leaves an affectionate wife to mourn his loss, having been married only about eight months.²⁴

TEMPERANCE MEETING.

The members of the Mineral Point Washingtonian Temperance Society, and the friends of Temperance generally, are requested to meet at the Court House this evening ... The alarming increase of drunkenness in our village requires earnest and efficient action on the part of the friends of Temperance.²⁵

ACCIDENT. At the South Diggings, last Saturday, a poor man named John Hays, an industrious miner, met with a terrible accident. He had just seated himself in the [mineral] tub attached to the windlass, for the purpose of descending a deep shaft, when the knot at the end of the rope gave way, and he fell to the bottom, a distance of 58 feet. He was taken out with his limbs broken in several places, and his body horribly bruised ... We learn, that Hays is since dead.²⁶

The time came that father died and left mother without a cent after he was buried, though someone gave her fifty cents. Fifty cents and two hungry children, and mother sick from watching and waiting for work hunger gripped us fast. For three days mother and I had water and not much bread... One day at noon mother put down the empty plates and dishes on the table and then sat down and cried ... "that's all we have to eat " We sat still and waited. Pretty soon a neighbor girl. Lizzie Cornelius, came vaulting over the fence with a big loaf of bread in her hand ... "Look, Aunt Lizzy, she said. "See what I've got" She insisted on mother breaking it in two ...

Brother Ephraim took sick and mother sat up with him till she was too weak... Then Uncle Sam Hornbrook's wife got the cholera and died. No one wanted to go near her but mother and Uncle Sam. Baby soon took sick and died also Three years afterward mother married William Whitford. They lived happily together for eighteen months, then he was brought home [dead] on a board from the Irish Diggings by four of his partners in

the mine there ... Mother was left with a little daughter. We called her Kate, though she was christened Catherine. Oh, never a brother thought more of his dear little Kate than I did of mine ... for we surely loved each other dearly.²⁷

FATAL ACCIDENT. Mr. John Roberts, of the town of Linden, was killed on Thursday last, by the falling of a rock, in a mineral shaft. Mr. Roberts was at work in the shaft upon his knees, when a rock of several hundred weight, about two feet above his head, gave way, crush[ing] his head so badly that he died in a few moments after he was taken out. He was about forty years of age, and leaves a wife and two children.²⁸

FATAL MINING ACCIDENT. Last Monday morning, as Mr. Thomas Vincent descended into his diggings, the rope broke, and he was precipitated to the bottom of the shaft, a distance of 40 feet. He was found in an insensible condition, taken out and carried to his home, when surgical examination showed the rear part of his skull shattered in fragments, and pressing upon the brain ... he lingered in an unconscious state until evening, when he expired. Mr. Vincent had been a resident of Mineral Point a great many years, and was respected as a good citizen and exemplary Christian... His bereaved wife and family have the sympathy of the entire community.²⁹



Figure 2 Klais Milk Pan. Milk pans were probably the biggest selling item for many Wisconsin earthenware potters, but very few of them survived because they were large, brittle and were used heavily. Wheel thrown with lead-based glaze tinted black with manganese. From the Wisconsin Decorative Arts Database KPM0332
<https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/wda/id/1182/rec/27>

The violence of the frontier had been replaced by violent death in the workplace, from rockfall, premature explosion, tumbling down a shaft, suffocation at its bottom from caving earth, bad air, "*the damp*," or breaking into an underground cavern full of water to be drowned like a rat. Plenty of danger is inherent in mining, but those who followed the life did so knowingly and most willingly. It was a demanding line of work, requiring much judgment, skill, courage, physical strength, and stamina. A skilled miner earned more than double what was paid to farm laborers, loggers, ranch hands or fishermen whose occupations also carried an element of risk. "*Below grass*" it was cool in the summer and warm in the winter. It was sort of a subterranean boys' club, friends and relatives laboring together for the common well-being, helping each other in good times and bad. As independent working miners they could take time off when necessary or just because they felt like it, as they answered to no boss. As potter Klais surely would come to know, Mineral Point was a far different American city than staid and sober Milwaukee had been, which itself must have seemed provincial and primitive to someone from well-regulated German society.

This, then, was the cultural foundation upon which German Catholic immigrant, ex-priest- hopeful, father-of-seven earthenware potter Bernard Klais hoped to build and better his family's future. Mineral Point had matured from its early pioneer beginnings of 1828 but its continued growth and prosperity as a mining community hinged upon such variables as international prices paid for metals, whether capital was available to invest in more efficient mining and smelting equipment, and rising costs to bring fuel to

the ore (at first the local oak trees, later Illinois coal). All of this tied the local mining industry and area economy to a series of boom-and-bust cycles which persisted well into the twentieth century.

The hardworking Cornish and their Methodism helped the city to mature, and by 1858 Mineral Point was considered a rising star of the west. It still was the Iowa County Seat with a large stone courthouse and jail, contained a population of close to 4,000, with a stone railroad passenger depot, engine house, machine shops, freight depot, 3 warehouses, 5 hotels, 6 churches, 4 public schools, 4 lead smelters, 1 zinc furnace, a brass and iron foundry, a grist mill, 16 dry goods stores, 2 hardware stores, 5 boot and shoe stores, 2 jewelry stores, 3 drug stores, a newspaper, book store and a bank; "15 stores are 3 & 4 story stone buildings." The local newspaper opined that a farm implement manufactory, a cooperage, a white lead factory and "A Pottery would find the best kind of clay and ready sale."³⁰

Perhaps the newspaper editor had been tipped off, for the very day previous, Nov. 29, 1858, at 11 o'clock A. M. Mr. James Peters and his wife Elizabeth sold a land parcel to potter Klais for \$1,858, located in Lot 94 along Hoard Street, called Shake Rag Street today. This was one of the earliest and most crowded neighborhoods in the old mining camp, established during the mid-1830's. Settlement predated land survey and consisted of odd-shaped parcels established according to the lay of the land and claims of early pioneers rather than an orderly, efficient rectangular grid system of public streets. The Klais lot was adjacent to a spring of water and small creek which ran through the triangular-shaped city block, providing a source of fresh water essential for pottery manufacture.

A week after purchase, Klais petitioned the City Council "to open a street through lots ninety-one and ninety-two, etc. in Vliet's Survey ... [but] not being in accordance with the requirements of the city

charter, was withdrawn."³¹ This would have allowed through traffic between Hoard Street and West Commerce Street, opening the old cul de sac and improving access to the pottery site. It didn't happen. The high cost of the parcel suggests that the brick house and a large stone structure already stood on the property which Klais adapted for use as family residence and pottery. The house still stands today in a tourist attraction called Shake Rag Alley, though in a much-altered state.

Both buildings required substantial modification of their roof structure, for each received German-style clay tile roofs which demand special and heavier roof framing to carry this substantial load. The house was covered with overlapping molded paddle-

shaped tiles glazed on their top center surface only, the pottery building with S-shaped pantiles which had been formed over an open mold and glazed topside. The ridge of both buildings received special T-shaped tiles to lock out the weather at the peak. Each tile was formed with an integral lug on its bottom



Figure 3 1876 Klais newspaper advertisement for roof tiles.



Figure 4 At left: Front and back views of paddle-shaped tiles. Center: Ridge Tile. Right: U-shaped pantile.



Figure 5 Molded earthenware roof tiles with lead glaze darkened with manganese. They were installed over horizontal wood slats.

surface to fit over and against horizontal sheeting laths, in turn supported by a stout rafter system. Clinging bits of plaster on interior surfaces suggest the roof was countersealed or caulked with a mortar mix in the attic area to seal out wind driven rain and snow. A descendant recalled visiting the old home in Mineral Point in 1916 when both tile roofs remained weather-tight and intact.³² This was not the only pottery to create German-style clay roof tiles in Wisconsin, as fragments show up as odd bits mortared into the fieldstone foundations of half-timbered houses in Washington and Ozaukee counties.

The buildings were ready for business by May of 1859:

*Pottery - We noticed a car load of very nice clay at the depot on Wednesday, to be used at the pottery in this city, for the manufacture of earthen-ware.*³³

The Federal Census in the year following enumerated the entire Klais family but did not examine the pottery as the business remained very small and did not generate \$500 in annual income required to be included in the Products of Industry schedule. Potter Bernard "Clais" (59), wife Cecelia (48), and children John (21, also a potter) and Anna (16), Margaret (14), Gertrude (11), Jacob (10), Stephen (8) and Michael (5) all remained at home. The Census reported the parents and two eldest children were born in "Prussia", though the family came from the heavily Roman Catholic area near Cologne in west-central Germany rather than Protestant Prussia in the east. The house, lot, pottery and all were valued at \$400, significantly less than the purchase price two years earlier and indicating a very small scale of operation indeed. In 1863 son John appeared on the Enrollment List of Mineral Point's 2nd Ward for the military draft instituted the previous year to speed the end of the Civil War.³⁴ There is no evidence he was drafted. The following year (1864) the same newspaper carried a listing of "all places of business" in Mineral Point but failed to mention the pottery, probably because of its small scale of operation:

18 dry goods, clothing, and grocery stores
 10 saloons
 9 harness, boot and shoes
 6 law offices
 6 blacksmiths
 5 meat markets
 4 hotels (United States, City, Wisconsin House, and Walker's Mineral Point)
 4 physicians
 4 wagonmakers
 3 book and stationary shops
 3 drug and medicine stores
 3 stove and hardware stores
 3 printers
 3 furniture stores
 2 newspapers
 2 banking houses
 2 photographers
 1 millinery shop
 1 jeweler³⁵

Also conspicuous by its absence is mention of lead smelters or zinc furnaces in the city as Mineral Point began to assume a new character as an agricultural service community rather than raw mining frontier. A firm called the Belle Vue Zinc Works had succeeded in smelting metallic zinc from the local 'Blackjack' (Sphalerite) or 'Dry Bone' (Smithsonite) ores in 1858 as one of, if not the first location for metallic zinc production in the United States. But fuel costs to import coal drove them out of business by the time the above list appeared. It was not until 1882 that a zinc oxide plant was established in Mineral Point to convert the ores to a white powdered ingredient for the manufacture of house and barn paint.

A shrinking family and confirmation of the pottery's small scale can be seen in the 1870 census. All three girls, Anna (Sherman), Margaret (Ableton), and Gertrude (Oaks), had left home to be married. Bernard at age 65 still labored as a potter and wife Cecelia (58) continued "*keeping house*." Their three youngest sons remained at home, but now Jacob (19) and Stephen (17) worked as day laborers, while youngest Michael attended school. We know from family members that Stephen was trained as a potter, and later worked at his trade in Galena, but the Klais Pottery reported only one person employed for 9 months of the year in 1870.³⁶ Capital investment of \$600



Figure 4 Klais often stamped the capacity of open storage vessels near one handle with what appear to be hand-carved wooden numerals.

reflects common earthenware production, motive power was by "*hand*" and \$300 in raw materials (clay, kiln fuel and glaze materials) went to create \$680 worth of pottery ware,³⁷ almost 7,000 gallons, perhaps 2,000 to 3,000 objects.

But sad to say, several conditions prevailing in the Mineral Point area worked against establishment of a successful redware pottery there in 1858. First, there was the timing of the venture, and to a certain extent the place. Redware continued to be used as a traditional product within a frontier environment or where transportation remained primitive. Even porous, fragile, lead-glazed earthenware was better than none at all, but Mineral Point was well-served by the lead freighters, large ox-drawn prairie schooners loaded with up to 6,000 pounds of lead which hauled that product outbound to Milwaukee and returned with the same weight of merchandise for local stores, including stylish and inexpensive imported crockery. Arrival of the railroad in 1856 would only make a difficult situation even worse for a redware potter.

Secondly, there was the matter of the people and their cultural attitudes as they developed in the southwest mining region. Small-scale intensive agriculture such as developed in eastern Wisconsin, especially among the Germans along the lake, did not catch on in a land of mining and mineral speculation (not to mention horse racing) where the focus was on quick riches and fast living rather than on establishing a farm in the wilderness to be inherited by your children. Agriculture was seen as a fallback position, something you did when mineral prices collapsed, or turned to as you approached old age and gave up risk-taking and financial reward in favor of comfort, safety and security.

But perhaps the greatest hindrance to successful pottery operation was the land itself, an open prairie, a region of thin upland soils, poor clay resources, and a rolling landscape. These conditions favored a pastoral or grazing form of agriculture over intensive dairying as developed along the Lake Michigan shore, which also contained a population base to support both dairy farms and their attendant potter. Mineral Point's potter appears to have been competent at his craft, but local materials proved inadequate, imported clay expensive, and a market for his product elusive. Like many others of his brethren, he ended up throwing endless numbers of flowerpots as the demand for tableware evaporated and dairy utensils failed to materialize as it had in eastern Wisconsin.

A list of Klais pottery products can be compiled from several sources including complete examples found in collections, notes compiled from family members, and shards collected before the pottery site was heavily graded and landscaped ca. 1971. The ware generally appears porous and heavy-walled, suggesting poor clay resources, and the glaze often is thinly applied. A few shards exhibit real artistry with thin walls and fine glazing, which point to an ability to produce superior wares given adequate materials. Most of the ordinary pottery burned to a pumpkin orange color, often speckled with brown (impurities in clay or glaze) with a clear sparse glaze. He favored a dark brown glaze, almost black, on his lidded storage jars. Several flaring straight-sided jars have been seen in which the inside and upper half of the exterior are glazed dark brown while the lower exterior remains unglazed. A few shards were found in a deep yellow glaze splashed with dark brown, closely resembling Whitewater pottery (Figure 7).

Fragments of applied work also have been found as shards, including a turned hanging basket with applied leaves and fruit in speckled brown glaze, and a multi- or slab-sided (not wheel thrown) flower basket in deep yellow glaze with splotches of dark brown. The sides of this piece contain a cast figure of

a robed female in a classical pose applied to the joined slabs of clay with decorative touches at the joints. The rim is pierced for suspension.



Figure 5 Klais hanging flower pot shards found at the Mineral Point Pottery site. Yellow lead glaze over a deep red clay body with manganese decoration with an applied molded relief figure of a maiden holding a branch. In most respects this piece is atypical of known Klais pottery, but illustrates the point that many potters made custom pieces and experimented with different glazes and forms.

A major defining characteristic of Renaissance and later German stoneware is the use of mould technology to produce delicate relief ornament, often using designs based on contemporary woodblocks. This process had the great advantage that, unlike painted designs, the patterns, once created, could be produced in quantity and with great accuracy. The emergence of the Cologne stoneware industry during the early sixteenth century coincided with the introduction of woodblock printing Designs include figurative and botanical friezes and coincided with the introduction of woodblock printing Designs include figurative and botanical friezes.³⁸

Klais' most noted characteristic was to attach storage jar handles at their ends only, leaving 1/8-to-1/4-inch distance from the handle to the side of the vessel (another characteristic of pottery from the Cologne area) as opposed to continuous ear handles found on most other Wisconsin pottery. He often stamped the capacity of open storage vessels near one handle with what appear to be hand-carved wooden numerals. One Great-Grandson reported "as a boy on our farm near Preston we had many

crocks, and large earthenware receptacles including one 30-gallon jug, one 20 gallon jug, and some 10 and 5 gallon jugs" made by his ancestor, but it all was dispersed when the family moved off the farm in 1920.³⁹ A preliminary list of forms made at the pottery includes:

- ovoid handled storage jars of 1-, 2-, 3-, 4- and 5-gallon size
- jugs, not often seen and of indeterminate size (maybe 1, 5, 10, 20, 30 gal.)
- small preserve jars 5 in. high, rolled rim (no cover), upper half glazed exterior
- round-shouldered jars with recessed covers, dark brown, almost black glaze
- tall flaring jars with no cover, dark glaze inside and upper half of exterior
- milk pans (*Figure 2*)
- churns (a few shards only)
- glazed cheese strainers - to drain cheese curd, sometimes called a colander (*Figure 12*)
- glazed milk or cream pitchers, ovoid shape, 5 in. high by 4 in. dia.
- deep plates or shallow bowls, 2 in. deep by 8 in. diameter, glazed inside
- glazed handled teacups and saucers
- glazed handled cooking vessels with covers, 6 in. deep by 8 in. dia.
- glazed hanging flower baskets, wheel-thrown with attached saucer, or slab-built
- unglazed jardinières or large elaborate flowerpots with attached saucer
- unglazed flowerpots, often with ruffled rim and incised line
- unglazed flowerpot saucers, also with ruffled rims
- unglazed small flowerpots, no rim, 4 1/2 in. high by 4 in. dia.
- unglazed saucers for flowerpots
- unglazed stove pipe sleeve, to join metal pipe to chimney through house wall
- unglazed T-shaped chimney pots to keep rain and snow out of chimney
- molded paddle-shaped roof tiles, glazed upper side only (on Klais house) (*Figure 6*)
- S-shaped pantiles formed by hand over an open mold (on pottery building)
- T-shaped tiles inserted at roof peak to seal both sides (both structures)
- glazed chamber pot with dark brown/black glaze (*Figure 11*)



Figure 6 Photo from about 1916 showing the former Klais house at left and pottery building with the roof off.

Pendarvis House co-founder Robert Neal at one time owned a forward-facing spaniel dog doorstep in yellow-brown glaze which he believed was 'local', though similar dogs also were made in Galena where Stephen Klais worked as a potter for a time.

By 1880 widower Bernard Klais remained in his Mineral Point home. He was cared for by Elizabeth Roerher, 24, a resident housekeeper.⁴⁰ By 1883 his failing health brought him to son Stephen's home in Galena.

Bernard Klais died at Galena, Illinois he came down there to reside with me - had been there three months [at the time of his death]. [Stephen] knew of the real estate he owned in Mineral Point, he had abandoned the house and lot in Mineral Point where he formerly lived, he lived at time of his death, and was making his home with me. Had been a resident of Wisconsin since 1858 [sic - in Mineral Point since that year]. He left no widow surviving, left seven children.⁴¹

State of Wisconsin Iowa County, In County Court In the matter of the Estate of Bernard

The petition of Stephen Klais respectfully shows to the court that he is a son of Bernard Klais deceased. That said Bernard Klais departed his life at the city of Galena Jo Davis County, Illinois on the 5th of July, 1883 without leaving any last will and testament to the knowledge ... of your petitioner of certain personal property in the state of Wisconsin [belonging to the deceased] does not exceed one hundred dollars (\$100.00) ... said deceased also left certain real estate to the probable amount of two hundred dollars⁴²

[Claim filed on the estate of Bernard Klais by his son Stephen for expenses incurred during 1883 when the elder Klais made his home with his son in Galena:]

May-22	cash advanced for Sundries	2.30
Jun-22	doctor bill and medicine	20.35
Jun-22	doctor bill and medicine	57.50
Jul-22	coffin	40.00
Jul-22	funeral expense	<u>35.00</u>
	total	155.15

A descendant by marriage told the author that the Klais family was never very close and her husband [Bernie Klais 1883 -1970] seldom mentioned any other family members. His father Jacob once remarked that as soon as they were old enough, the children simply "walked away" from home to find work and never came back or kept in touch. They "scattered to the four winds," most of them pursuing mining careers. Some of the children simply disappeared, leaving no trace ...

John Klais - left home for Milwaukee, later parts unknown

Mary Ableiter married John Ableiter, farmed near Platteville

Ann Sherman - married Nick Sherman, lived in Collinsville, Ill. and later went to St. Louis, Mo.

Gertrude Oaks - Tacoma, Washington, later somewhere in California

Jacob Klais - went to Galena, then to a farm near Stitzer in Grant Co.; he worked at the Black Jack Mine south of Galena in 1907; had to have his feet amputated and then always walked on crutches; later legs amputated at the knee and he was bedfast the rest of his life; died 1939

Stephen Klais - potter in Galena, 1883; later a miner in Cripple Creek, Colorado; later was murdered and body found in mine shaft near Joplin, Missouri (a lead mining center)

Michael Klais - miner in Joplin, Mo., Black Hawk, Gillette and Central City, Colorado

The author once asked Mineral Point native son and co-founder of Pendarvis House Robert Neal, whether he ever heard anything of the pottery growing up in Mineral Point. Bob had collected a number

of fine examples, several of which now are at Pendarvis Historic Site. Bob said all he ever heard was that Klais was a cranky old man, who chased the neighbor kids away from the pottery.



Figure 7 Ovoid storage jar with no handles and a dark olive/brown lead glaze. Double incised lines above and below a scratched wavy line between double incised lines at the shoulder. The clay body is deep orange.

The pottery site was heavily graded and landscaped as a tourist attraction ca. 1971. The remaining foundation stones of the pottery were pushed aside, and a concrete block replacement structure was built faced with Lannon stone. One wall of the house in poor condition was torn down and a modern brick wall installed with a picture window. Grading removed several cistern and privy holes filled with roof tiles, potshards, and cultural debris. Many liberties were taken 'fixing up' rather than restoring the remaining structures and grounds. Today in 2018 Shake Rag Alley brings music and theater to a tranquil and imagined landscape far removed from the reality of 19th century Mineral Point and environs.



Figure 8 Klais hanging basket or flower pot with applied floral motif. Shards found in Klais waster dump match basket.



Figure 9 Slightly ovoid earthenware chamber pot with flat rim. Handle missing. Lead-based glaze tinted black with manganese on exterior; large areas of glaze loss. Clear lead glaze on interior. From the Wisconsin Decorative Arts Database 73-101_ <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/wda/id/1268/rec/30>



Figure 10 Mineral Point cylindrical earthenware crock. Thick lead-based glaze tinted black with manganese. Unglazed lip. The thick, slightly undercut "tie-down" rim indicates that this food-storage crock was not made with a lid but was instead designed to be covered with a cloth and secured with a string. From the Wisconsin Decorative Arts Database



Figure 11 Earthenware cheese mold attributed to Bernard Klais. Rolled rim and five rows of pierced holes. The interior is fully glazed and the patchy exterior glaze may be the result of clear lead glaze on the interior that leaked out of the holes during the glazing process. From the Wisconsin Decorative Arts Database A77-82-1. <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/wda/id/148/rec/14>. To the right are shards dug at the pottery site similar to the intact strainer.



Figure 12 Cylindrical earthenware flowerpot with slanted sides. Exterior glazed yellow with brown spots; interior unglazed. From the Wisconsin Decorative Arts Database [1981.402.435 https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/wda/id/2175/rec/7](https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/wda/id/2175/rec/7)



Figure 13 Unglazed earthenware flowerpots with slanted sides. The left pot is rim stamped with a 1 ½ gallon capacity. The others are not stamped. The center pot has holes for hanging. From the Wisconsin Decorative Arts Database – left to right:
 72-140, <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/wda/id/1271/rec/18>
 72-140, <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/wda/id/1271/rec/18>
 PD017 <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/wda/id/324/rec/4>

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- ⁴ The History of Iowa County, Wisconsin, Western Historical Company, 1881, p. 509.
- ⁵ A Canoe Voyage Up the Minnaw Sator, George W. Featherstonehaugh, 1847, p. 85; observed 1837.
- ⁶ "Pioneering in Wisconsin Lead Region" in Wisconsin Historical Collections, Vol XV, p. 356.
- ⁷ History of Iowa County, Wisconsin. Western Historical Company, 1881, p. 660.
- ⁸ Letter, J. Edward Foster to his brother, ca. 1840 in Wisconsin Historical Society Manuscript Collections.
- ⁹ A Canoe Voyage Up the Minnaw Sator, George W. Featherstonehaugh, 1847, p. 65; observed 1837.
- ¹⁰ A Canoe Voyage Up the Minnaw Sator, George W. Featherstonehaugh, 1847, p. 73; observed 1837.
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- ¹² "Pioneering in Wisconsin Lead Region" in Wisconsin Historical Collections, Vol XV, p. 362.
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- ¹⁴ "Pratt's Reminiscences", Wisconsin Historical Collections, Vol I, p. 145.
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- ¹⁸ The History of Dane County. Wisconsin, Butterfield, 1880, p. 706.
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- ²¹ *Early Milwaukee*, 1916, p. 59.
- ²² *Industrial Resources of Wisconsin*, Gregory, 1853, p. 159.
- ²³ *The Wisconsin Tribune*, May 12, 1848, p. 3.
- ²⁴ *The Wisconsin Tribune* (Mineral Point), May 25, 1848, p. 2.
- ²⁵ *The Wisconsin Tribune*, June 2, 1848, p. 2.
- ²⁶ *The Wisconsin Tribune*, July 7, 1848, p. 1.
- ²⁷ "Reminiscences of Life at Mineral Point", John Truan, ca.. 1850 at Wisconsin Historical Society Manuscript Collections.
- ²⁸ *Mineral Point Tribune*, Feb. 19, 1856, p. 3.
- ²⁹ *Mineral Point Tribune*, Sept 18, 1873, p. 3.
- ³⁰ *Mineral Point Tribune*, Nov. 30, 1858.
- ³¹ *Mineral Point Tribune*, Dec. 21, 1858, p. 3.
- ³² Letter, J. Kenneth Ableiter to Mark Knipping, Dec. 12, 1974.
- ³³ *Mineral Point Weekly Tribune*, May 24, 1859.
- ³⁴ *Mineral Point Weekly Tribune*, Aug. 26, 1863.
- ³⁵ *Mineral Point Weekly Tribune*, July 20, 1864.
- ³⁶ 1870 Manuscript Census, Iowa County, p. 415.
- ³⁷ 1870 Manuscript Census, Iowa County, Products of Industry Schedule, p. 839.
- ³⁸ *Ten Thousand Years of Pottery*, Emmanuel Cooper, 4th ed., 2000, p. 132.
- ³⁹ Letter, J. Kenneth Ableiter to Mark Knipping, Dec. 12, 1974.
- ⁴⁰ 1880 Manuscript Census, Iowa County, City of Mineral Point, p. 50.
- ⁴¹ Iowa County Register in Probate Records, microfilm 150,43 - 0.
- ⁴² Iowa County Register in Probate Records, microfilm 150,43 - 0.