

Nineteenth-Century Canadian Importers' Marks

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Résumé/Abstract

Les poteries et porcelaines portant l'estampille d'un importateur canadien comptent parmi les moyens les plus utiles et les plus sûrs pour se renseigner sur le commerce de la céramique au XIX^e siècle. L'estampille de l'importateur est très explicite: elle révèle que tel modèle de tel article était vendu dans une région définie, à une date qui peut être déterminée. Elle permet de mieux connaître les goûts et la situation économique de l'importateur et de ses clients.

Cet article traite de ce type d'estampilles employées au Canada pour la première fois dans les années 1830, période qui coïncide avec l'essor des marchands de porcelaine. Il importe de noter que toutes les premières estampilles de commerce répertoriées jusqu'à présent se rapportent à des marchands de centres d'approvisionnement comme Halifax, Saint-Jean (N.-B.) ou Québec. C'est là notamment que les marchands ruraux viennent s'approvisionner auprès des grossistes. Les pièces marquées de ces estampilles du XIX^e siècle indiquent le genre d'importations qui constituaient l'essentiel du commerce canadien. Au XX^e siècle, les estampilles d'importateurs prolifèrent et sont de plus en plus réservées aux articles coûteux et de meilleure qualité; au XIX^e siècle, on les retrouve le plus souvent sur la faïence et sur la porcelaine opaque. À l'occasion, des articles portant une estampille d'importateur identifient ou désignent le potier par des symboles connus. Elles constituent ainsi un autre moyen d'établir quels étaient les fournisseurs du marché canadien.

Pottery and porcelain with a Canadian importer's mark are one of the most useful and reliable ways to document the Canadian ceramic trade in the nineteenth century. The importer's mark clearly states that a specific type of ware, in a specific pattern, was being sold in a defined area, at a date that can be determined. It adds to our knowledge of the taste and economic status of importer and customer.

Marks of this kind first came into use in Canada in the 1830s, a period that coincides with the rise of the china merchant. It is significant that all the early marks so far recorded are for dealers in supply centres such as Halifax, Saint John, or Quebec City. It was to these wholesalers that country storekeepers came for their stock. The wares with these nineteenth century marks indicate the type of importations that formed the bulk of the Canadian trade. In the twentieth century importers' marks proliferated and were increasingly reserved for the better or more expensive class of goods; in the nineteenth, they are found in most instances on printed earthenware and on ironstone china. Occasionally wares with an importer's mark also carry a potter's name, or they may point to one through a known pattern. In this way they are yet another means of identifying suppliers of the Canadian trade.

In documenting the Canadian trade in earthenware and porcelain, nothing presents more objective evidence than wares marked with a Canadian importer's name. With such wares there is no need to rely on the uncertainties of oral testimony or to speculate on how or when these wares arrived in Canada. Unlike tablewares brought by settlers, which obviously must be treated as individual occurrences, the piece with the importer's name makes a clear statement. That statement may be more precise than the cryptic entry in a merchant's ledger or on his bill of sale; it is more precise than many an advertisement announcing "the newest patterns" with never a hint as to what they were.

The importer's mark indicates that a specific type of ware in a specific pattern formed part of the Canadian trade at an easily ascertained time and in a defined area. The ware so marked tells the historian something of taste,

demand, and the economic status of both importer and customer. Sometimes it points directly to an overseas potter, adding still another name to the growing list of known suppliers of the Canadian market.

The earliest china sellers in Canada were general merchants. They were men like the erstwhile fur trader Joseph-François Perrault, who was selling "plain and painted earthenware" in Montreal in 1790 and dealing in goods too varied and "too tedious to mention" in his *Gazette* advertising.¹ They were men like the transplanted French royalist, Laurent Quetton de Saint-Georges, who journeyed from York (Toronto) to Montreal in 1804 to lay in supplies of snuff and sleigh bells, as well as crockery.² They were men like James Peake, who emigrated from Plymouth to Charlottetown and was dealing in rum and earthenware in 1824, and Horatio Curzon, who had been a china merchant in Liverpool but who was selling Swiss

muslins along with "Earthenware of all description in any quantity" in Halifax in 1836.³

Ceramic wares in the early days stocked every general store. Nova Scotia's Cunard and Company sold earthenware as well as sailcloth. Quebec's George Pozer not only dealt heavily in earthenware and was an agent for an English pottery, he also sold groceries, supplied the garrison, bought and sold real estate, and acquired the famous Chien d'Or hotel. (In 1805, when a rival hotel collapsed, Pozer the money-making china seller, was seen wearing his cocked hat and "strutting up and down in front of the ruins in great glee.")⁴

None of the earliest importers of pottery and porcelain called themselves anything other than general storekeepers. Gradually, however, the "china merchant" emerged. Among the first were Joseph Shuter and Robert Charles Wilkins. In Montreal's first directory (1819) Shuter and Wilkins were listed as china merchants. Yet the partners by no means restricted their business to ceramic wares: they sold cheese, tarred cordage, and country produce. But the term was on its way to becoming established, and by the 1830s it was in frequent use. By that time, an importer selling a substantial quantity of pottery and porcelain was apt to call his place of business a Staffordshire warehouse. Charles Jones of York was advertising his "Staffordshire Ware-House" in 1831 and Samuel Cooper of Saint John his "Staffordshire & Yorkshire Warehouse" in 1838.⁵

It is now impossible to state with assurance why only certain dealers and only some of their wares were identified by an importer's mark. There were probably a number of reasons. A name on the back of tableware was – and is – a good advertising ploy. In the list that follows it is significant that the earliest marks are all for importers in areas that were supply centres for dealers in less populated districts. There was keen competition on the part of importers in the larger centres, not only for the considerable local trade, but also for the wholesale trade with country storekeepers. Montreal, for example, was a major supply centre for Upper Canada at the time Shuter and Wilkins were in business. There is a relationship between the earliest importers' marks, the type of importers using them, and the geographical location of those importers.

What today are called "in-house brands" undoubtedly had their nineteenth-century counterparts. The importer's mark may be an indication that only one dealer would distribute that particular pattern in Canada, or at least in a particular area in Canada. Again, a pattern bearing an importer's name may have been produced to that importer's specifications. An example would be the multi-scene pattern of Quebec views made in Scotland for Quebec china merchant Francis Thomas. A dealer who had conceived the idea of a pattern he felt confident would sell well in his

area would wish to make sure it went to no one else. In this connection, it is interesting that although Thomas must have handled a vast number of patterns in the quarter century he was in business (and his business continued after his death), this is the one pattern so far recorded with the Thomas name.

In *Nineteenth-Century Pottery and Porcelain in Canada* (1967), I published the marks then known to me. The expanded list below includes all I have noted since. It gives the importer's name, the mark (all are printed marks), the type of ware on which the mark appears, the potter (where known), and a contemporary reference. The date following each name is the approximate date of the piece on which the mark appears. The list does not include names which appear on salt-glazed stoneware (jugs, crocks). Marked wares of this type were often of local manufacture and fall into a different category. Unfortunately space does not permit me to provide details of each importer's business.

Alcorn, Samuel ca. 1840. "S. ALCORN / IMPORTER / QUEBEC" on blue- or brown-printed English earthenware. Noted on a vegetable dish, coffee-pot, meat dish, all in the same floral pattern. "S. ALCORN ... 75 PACKAGES assorted EARTHENWARE, put up ... for this market" (*Literary Transcript*, 1 June 1839).

Atkins, R. & R. ca. 1840. "R. & R. ATKINS / IMPORTERS / QUEBEC" on a blue-printed English earthenware egg-cup, floral pattern. The only listing I have been able to find in what seems to be the period of the egg-cup is one in the Quebec directory, 1844-45, for a Robert Atkins, grocer.

Barber, W.H. ca. 1875. "W.H. BARBER / IMPORTER / MONTREAL" in red on French porcelain plates (two painted patterns, floral). Barber took over John Patton's crockery business in 1872 and went bankrupt in 1877 (*Gazette* [Montreal], 28 September 1877).

Boxer Bros. & Co. ca. 1887. "MANUFACTURED / EXPRESSLY FOR / BOXER BROS. & CO. / MONTREAL" in black on porcelain tea ware (commemorative items for Queen Victoria's golden jubilee produced by R.H. Plant & Co., Staffordshire). Other marks appear on Staffordshire earthenware printed in rose, black, green, or brown (plates, tureens, etc.). Patterns include Anglo-japanese types, several floral patterns (one called "Montreal" by J. Dimmock & Co.), and two animal patterns (one called "Sylvan" by W. Brownfield & Sons). The Boxers took over John

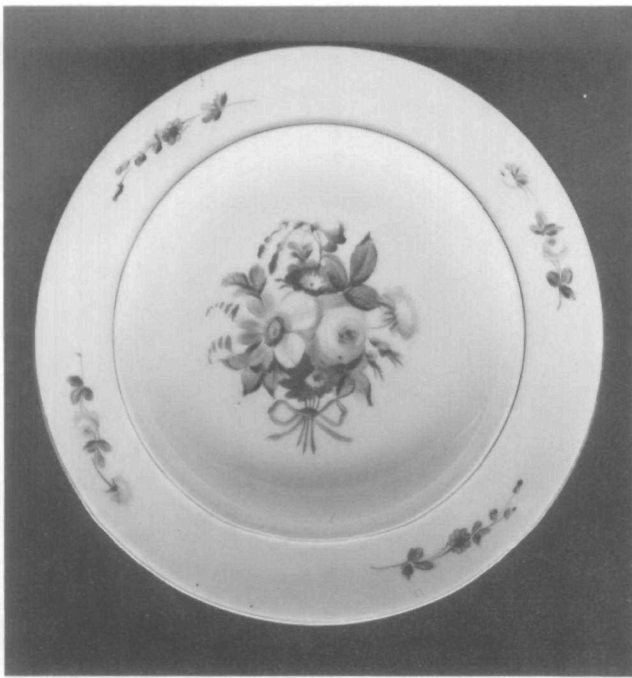


Fig. 1. French porcelain plate, ca. 1875, with flowers painted in natural colours, the bouquet tied with a blue ribbon. It was imported by W.H. Barber, Montreal, in business from 1872 to 1877. Collection: National Museum of Man. (Photo: Rob Fillion. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa.)

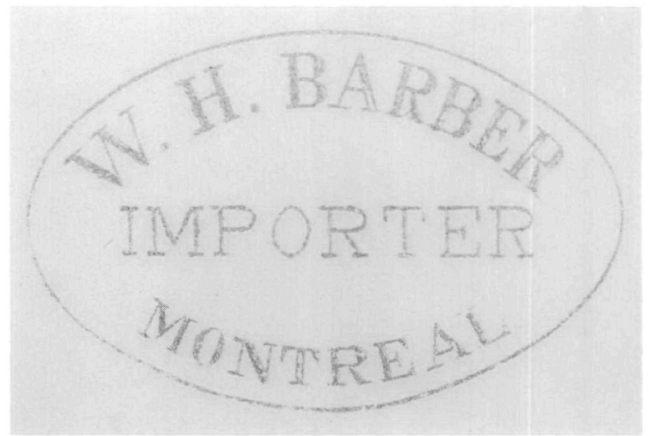


Fig. 2. W.H. Barber's mark in red on plate shown in fig. 1. (Photo: Rob Fillion. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa.)



Fig. 3. Earthenware plate, printed decoration, imported by Boxer Bros. & Co., Montreal, ca. 1887. Judging by the quantity of this pattern which has survived, it was very popular; it was available in rose, black, brown, or green. Collection: National Museum of Man. (Photo: Rob Fillion. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa.)

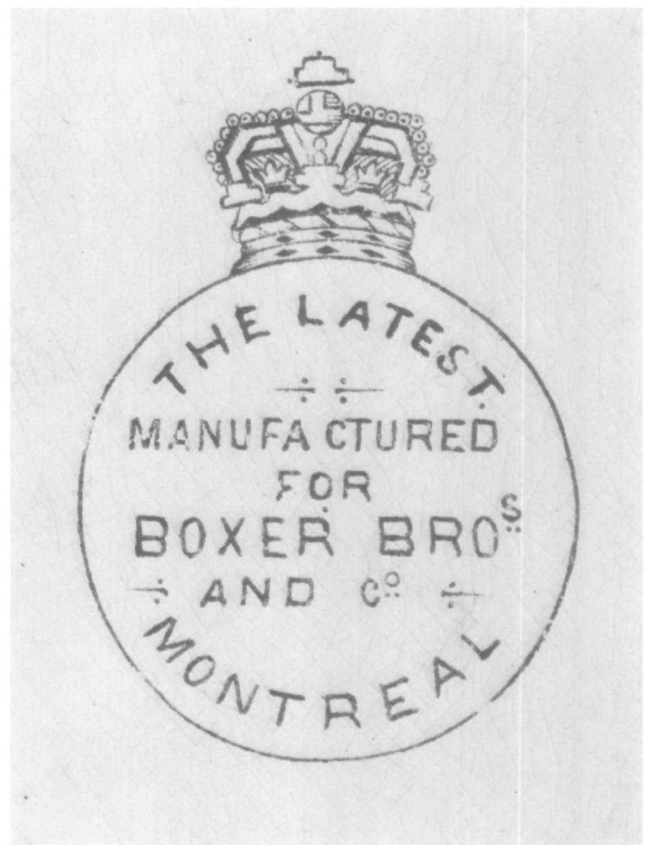
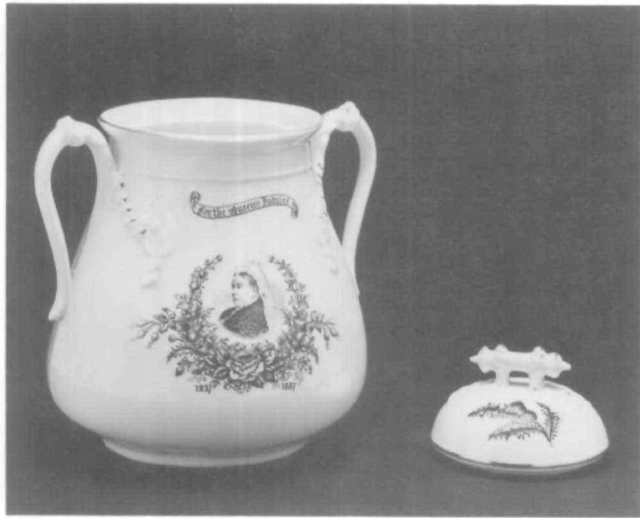


Fig. 4. Boxer Bros. mark on the back of plate shown in fig. 3. Note the advertising slogan incorporated in the mark. (Photo: Rob Fillion. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa.)



Watson's business in 1885 which they continued until 1890. "BOXER BROS. & CO. wholesale importers ...are again well to the fore with their enormous stock of crockery" (*Daily Witness* [Montreal], 12 September 1885).

Britain, Robert ca. 1850. "FROM ROBT BRITAIN / 46 DOCK ST / ST JOHNS" (a misprint for Saint

Fig. 5. This Staffordshire porcelain sugar bowl was produced as a commemorative item for Queen Victoria's golden jubilee in 1887 and was imported by Boxer Bros., Montreal. MANUFACTURED FOR / BOXER BROS. & CO. / MONTREAL" is on the back. (Photo: Rob Fillion. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa.)



Fig. 6. Brown-printed earthenware plate with pattern name, "Medallion," and maker's name, B. Godwin, on the back, and, to the right, John Glennon's mark on a green-printed teapot in the same pattern, ca. 1835. On the lid of the teapot is one of the vignettes seen in the border of the plate. Private collection.

John, N.B.) on a blue-printed ironstone gravy boat, which also has the Staffordshire maker's name (J. Meir & Son) and the floral pattern name ("Kirkee"). "R. BRITAIN will receive a variety of patterns of ... DINNER SERVICES ... from which he will import to order" (*New Brunswick Courier* [Saint John], 27 March 1847).

Cassidy, J.L. & Co. ca. 1890. "J.L. CASSIDY & CO. / IMPORTERS / MONTREAL" in red on a French porcelain dish painted with moss roses. One of the oldest china-selling firms in North America still in existence, Cassidy's assumed the business style in this mark in 1865. The firm advertised for wholesale business across the country (see, for example, *Henderson's Directory of Manitoba*, 1882).

Darling, Adam ca. 1875. "POUR / ADAM DARLING / MONTREAL" in blue on a French porcelain jug by Haviland & Co., with pink decoration incorporating the names "Geriken" and "St. Lawrence Hall." (Geriken was the proprietor of the Montreal hotel, 1872-79.) Darling was briefly in partnership with Thomas Jordan prior to 1873, and a variation of this mark on French porcelain plates, painted with flowers, gives the name as "DARLING & JORDAN." "ADAM

DARLING ... has ... English, French ... and other wares" (*Daily Witness*, 21 December 1882).

Douglas & McNiece ca. 1885. "MANUFACTURED FOR / DOUGLAS & McNIECE / MONTREAL" in black on ironstone plates, mugs, etc., in an embossed floral pattern. The mark incorporates the Royal Arms and the Staffordshire maker's name, T. Furnival & Sons. Douglas was a misprint for Douglass, the name being correctly spelled on an invoice for goods sold to a country dealer in Ontario (18 July 1883) in which Furnival items are listed. The partnership, which lasted for twenty years, began in 1873 (*Daily Witness*, 6 May 1873).

Glennon, John ca. 1835, ca. 1850. "GLENNON / MONTREAL" within a wreath on a green-printed earthenware teapot. The Staffordshire maker is identified from a plate which gives the pattern and the potter's name: "Medallion," Benjamin Goldwin, but no importer's mark. The same Glennon mark appears on a blue-printed saucer in a later landscape pattern. The earlier mark belongs to Glennon's first business, opened in 1829; he was later in partnership and still later, during the period of the second mark, he was again on his own. As an importer, he solicited country trade in an Eastern Townships advertisement: "on the arrival of the Spring shipping ... EARTHEN-WARE ... on very reasonable terms. J. GLENNON" (*Missiskoui Standard*, 12 May 1835).

Glennon & Bramley ca. 1845. "GLENNON & BRAMLEY / MONTREAL" within a wreath on

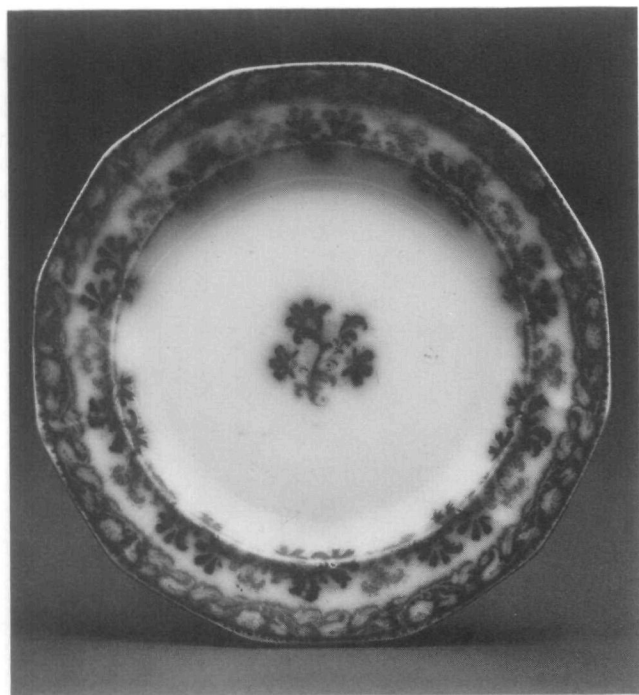


Fig. 7. Plate with flowing blue decoration, ca. 1845, imported by John Glennon when he was in partnership with C.C. Bramley. Collection: National Museum of Man. (Photo: Rob Fillion. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa.)

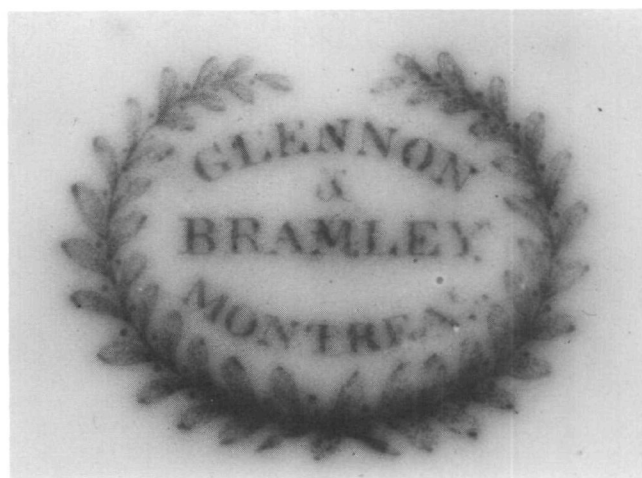


Fig. 8. Glennon & Bramley's mark on the plate shown in fig. 7 and on the tureen in fig. 9. (Photo: Rob Fillion. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa.)



Fig. 9. This is one of several flowing blue floral patterns that have been recorded for Glennon & Bramley. Handles and flower knob have painted decoration in dark blue. Private collection.

English earthenware in several flowing blue floral patterns. This is the Glennon who appears in the listing above; see also Shuter & Glennon. The latter's five-year partnership with C.C. Bramley began in 1842 (*Montreal Gazette*, 17 May 1842).

Harrison, Glover ca. 1865, ca. 1885, ca. 1895. "GLOVER HARRISON / KING STREET / TORONTO" on English ironstone, all white or with a gold edge, the mark incorporating a jug with "CHINA HALL" on it. This mark, in brown, black, or blue, was in use from about the mid-1860s. An 1880s mark in blue, POUR / GLOVER HARRISON / TORONTO," appears on porcelain with a painted decoration of butterflies and flowers by Haviland & Co. Harrison died in 1888 but his China Hall continued into the present century. An 1890s mark in red, also on Haviland porcelain, omits Harrison's name: "CHINA HALL - 49 KING ST. EAST / TORONTO." A similar mark - "FOR CHINA HALL / TORONTO" - appears on ironstone, ca. 1890, Imari-type pattern made by Ashworth Brothers, Staffordshire.

Jackson, James ca. 1855. "J. JACKSON / IMPORTER / TORONTO" on blue-printed English earthenware plates, floral pattern. The mark appears on a blue-printed sugar bowl, landscape pattern, with importer misspelled "importor." In *Brown's Toronto General Directory*, 1856, Jackson

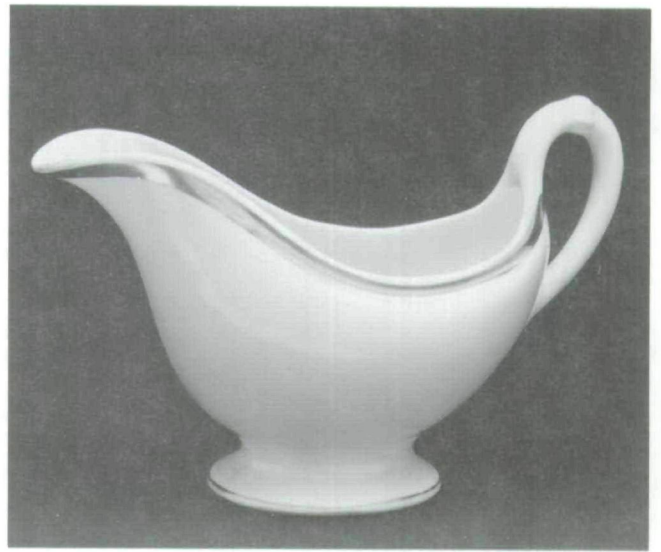


Fig. 10. White ironstone sauce boat with gold rim and a gold line around the foot, imported by Glover Harrison, Toronto, ca. 1865. Collection: National Museum of Man. (Photo: Rob Fillion. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa.)



Fig. 11. Mark, printed in brown, on the bottom of the sauce boat in fig. 10. (Photo: Rob Fillion. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa.)



Fig. 12. Blue-printed earthenware plate imported by James Jackson, Toronto, ca. 1855 or a little earlier. His importer's mark is on the back. Private collection.

advertised: "Every description of Ware imported to order direct from the Manufacturers." He was still in business in the 1860s.

Jennett, J.R. & Co. ca. 1869. "MANUFACTURED EXPRESSLY / FOR J.R. JENNETT & CO. / HALIFAX / N.S." on ironstone tea ware printed in purple in a pattern of frets, scrolls, and entwined ribbons, registered by the Staffordshire potter, E.D. Bodley & Co., 1869. At the beginning of the 1860s the firm was Jennett & Taylor, and Jennett continued into the 1870s under his own name. He called his establishment Burslem House (*Halifax Evening Recorder*, 15 May 1869).

McCaghey, Dolbec & Co. ca. 1868. "McCAGHEY DOLBEC & CO. / IMPORTERS / QUEBEC." The mark incorporates a beaver and the motto, *Rendre le peuple meilleur*. The firm was in business by 1867 when a fire in the shop was reported (*Montreal Gazette*, 15 April 1867). In 1874 Francis Thomas took over the business.

Nerlich & Co. ca. 1895. "N. & C. / TORONTO" in black on a porcelain plate (continental, not English) with portraits of the first four Canadian prime ministers. This commemorative item, intended more as an ornament than for use, was probably produced shortly after Sir John

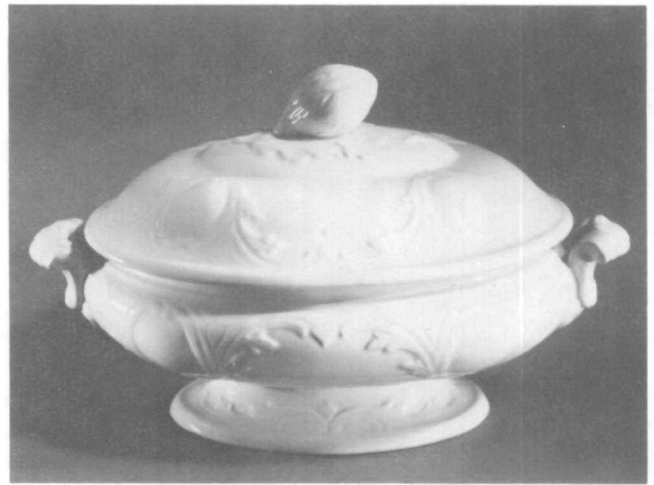


Fig. 13. Ironstone vegetable dish with moulded decoration and fruit knob, ca. 1868, imported by McCaghey, Dolbec & Co., Quebec, and with their mark on the bottom of the dish. Private collection.

Thompson died suddenly at Windsor Castle in 1894. Nerlich & Co., still in business in modern times, dates back to the 1850s but was primarily concerned with fancy goods, not tablewares.

Norris, H. ca. 1849. "H. NORRIS / IMPORTER / TORONTO" on a small English earthenware plate, blue-printed in a floral pattern with a classical urn in the background. "Importer of and wholesale and retail dealer in china, glass and earthenware of all kinds" (*Canada Directory*, 1851).

Norris, Thomas ca. 1865. "THOMAS NORRIS / QUEBEC" in brown on a white ironstone covered dish, the moulded floral pattern embellished with blue enamel. The Meakin firm (Staffordshire) made wares with this same moulded pattern. Norris' business lasted from 1850 (or slightly earlier) into the 1890s. (He is not listed in the classified section of *MacKay's Quebec Directory*, 1850, but is in the general listing.)

O'Neill, Bernard ca. 1835. "B. O'NEILL / 23 BEDFORD ROW / HALIFAX" on an earthenware meat dish, printed in blue with a Chinese-style landscape. The maker (identified from other pieces without the importer's mark) was the Tyneside potter, Thomas Fell & Co. By the 1840s O'Neill's business style was B. O'Neill & Co.; he died in 1877. "Earthenware ... BY AUCTION ... at the STORE OF MR. O'NEAL [sic] in Bedford Row" (*Times* [Halifax], 25 May 1835).



Fig. 14. Blue-printed earthenware meat dish, ca. 1835, made by Thomas Fell & Co., and imported by Bernard O'Neill, Halifax. Collection: National Museum of Man. (Photo: Rob Fillion. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa.)



Fig. 15. Bernard O'Neill's is one of the earliest importer's marks recorded. Here it is on the bottom of the meat dish in fig. 14. (Photo: Rob Fillion. National Museums of Canada, Ottawa.)

Reid, W.J. & Co. ca. 1887. "MANUFACTURED FOR / W.J. REID & CO. / LONDON, CANADA" in black or brown on dinner and tea ware in a printed pattern called "Stately Homes of England," registered in 1884 by Moore & Co. (Staffordshire). A date mark for 1887 is sometimes impressed. W.J. Reid's father founded the business in the 1840s. The name also appears on wares decorated at their Crystal Hall, which was still in business at the turn of the century. "The largest, most complete, and finest stock of crockery in the Dominion" (Bixby's *Industries of Canada*, 1887).

Rous, F.H. & Co. ca. 1886. "F.H. ROUS & CO. / BELLEVILLE" in black on an English ironstone plate on the face of which is printed "BRIDGE ST. METHODIST CHURCH / BELLEVILLE / 1886." The business was in operation in the 1850s, although it was not listed in the Canada directories of 1851 or 1857-58. In my possession is a letter written by Sarah Thompson, whose husband worked for F.H. Rous: "F. Rous is desirous to open a branch store somewhere & it does seem very desirable to do so, they have so very large a stock of crockery" (dated Belleville, 10 October 1857).

Shuter & Wilkins ca. 1835. "SHUTER & WILKINS / MONTREAL" on a pink-printed English earthenware plate in a landscape pattern. Wilkins, who resided in Upper Canada, withdrew from the

partnership in 1836 and John Glennon then joined Shuter. "The Subscribers ... have received ... CHINA and EARTHENWARE ... ONE THOUSAND crates ... SHUTER & WILKINS" (*Montreal Gazette*, 3 June 1835).

Shuter & Glennon ca. 1838. "SHUTER & GLENNON / MONTREAL" within a wreath on pink- or blue-printed English earthenware plates and a serving dish in landscape patterns. There are two different patterns, one entitled "Canton." The partnership lasted for the period 1836-42. "SHUTER & GLENNON ... expect a large assortment ... by the first Spring Vessels" (*Montreal Gazette*, 10 May 1836).

Thomas, Francis T. ca. 1882. "F.T. THOMAS / QUEBEC" on a multi-scene pattern, Quebec views, printed in brown or pink, made by the Britannia Pottery, Glasgow. The earliest date for this pattern would be the beginning of the 1880s, and it was continued into the twentieth century. In directory listings (for example, *Quebec Indicator*, 1889), Thomas emphasized the scale of his importing business with both showrooms and a warehouse.

Wiley, A.T. & Co. Ltd. ca. 1895. "A.T. WILEY & CO. LTD. / MONTREAL" on a blue-printed earthenware dish, toy size, willow-type pattern, made by W.T. Copeland & Sons (Staffordshire). The dish has an impressed date code for 1889 but "Ltd." did not become part of Wiley's mark until the 1890s. (Printed decoration and marks were often applied to blanks made earlier.) Founded in



Fig. 16. Brown-printed earthenware plate, ca. 1882, with a view of "Dufferin Terrace & Citadel," Quebec, from the multi-scene pattern ordered from the Britannia Pottery, Glasgow, by Quebec china merchant Francis Thomas. His mark is on the back. Collection: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal.

1880, Wiley's China Hall continued well into the twentieth century. Wares with the Wiley name more usually belong to this century. "We have some beautiful designs ... All goods marked in plain figures" (*Daily Witness*, 29 September 1880).

In the twentieth century importers' marks proliferated; they are to be found on a wide range of patterns and increasingly on higher-priced goods. The earlier importers, who laid the solid foundations of the trade, tended (as this list shows) to put their emphasis not on the costly wares

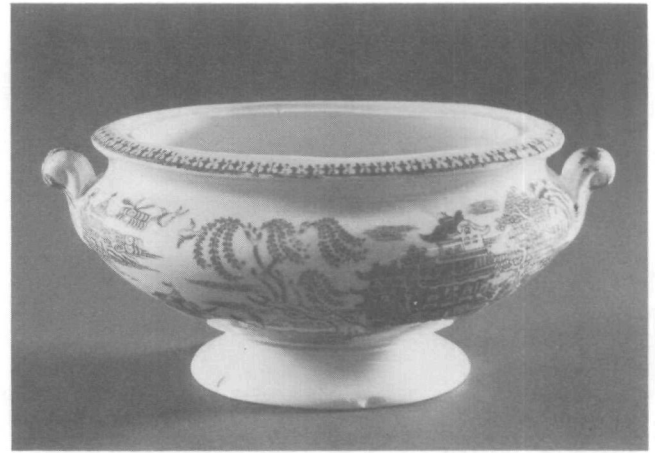


Fig. 17. Tureen from a blue-printed toy service made by W. T. Copeland & Sons and imported by A. T. Wiley & Co., Montreal, ca. 1895. Wiley's mark is found on some of the articles of the service. Collection: Vancouver Museum.

but on the printed earthenware and white ironstone that would move quickly, on floral patterns that would please easily in town or country. By establishing what was used, where it was used, and when it was used, nineteenth-century importers' marks make a valuable contribution to the history of the Canadian ceramic trade.

NOTES

1. *Montreal Gazette*, 29 July 1790.
2. *Upper Canada Gazette* (York), 10 November 1804.
3. *Prince Edward Island Register* (Charlottetown), 14 August 1824; *Novascotian or Colonial Herald* (Halifax), 3 and 10 August 1836.
4. Eyewitness account by William Henderson quoted in J.M. LeMoine, *Maple Leaves* (Quebec, 1906), 287.
5. *Colonial Advocate* (York), 10 March 1831; *New Brunswick Courier* (Saint John), 16 June 1838. Staffordshire warehouse was a term borrowed from English usage, where it became current at an earlier period. In 1800 there were more than 200 Staffordshire warehouses in London alone. In Canada "China Hall" became a popular name from the middle of the century.