

# Glenbow Museum, Ceramics Collections

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The Glenbow Museum's ceramics collections, numbering well over a thousand pieces, fall into two main categories: research and reference collections, and those acquired to fulfil general exhibit needs. Our policy is to collect, record, and preserve the history of western Canada, and in particular the products and history of the potteries situated in Alberta. Of equal interest are the commemorative pieces that record places, businesses, people, and events in the west.

Glenbow's policy to preserve the story of the pottery industry in Alberta came after the National Museum of Man in Ottawa and the Provincial Archives in Edmonton had taken the initial steps. The National Museum of Man acquired the Richard and Jean Symonds' Medalta collection numbering around 800 items, while the Provincial Archives preserved the company's records. Together, these records and products shed insights into the inner workings of the Medalta Potteries of Medicine Hat, during the years 1916-54. They record the difficulties this small western Canadian company had trying to compete with the established potteries of eastern Canada and the United States. They record the lines that were developed and the introduction of new wares to meet new demands and customers. They also record the effects of the Great Depression, World War II, and changes in management on the company.

Examination of these collections, however, revealed that Medalta wares had been overemphasized. Medalta was the first major pottery in the west; the company grew to be the largest in business for the longest time, but it should be studied in relation to the overall pottery industry in Alberta, and in particular the companies in the Medicine Hat area. Our aim is to document and collect items representative of the wider industry, and to build collections of Medalta ware to complement rather than duplicate those held by other museums.

The companies of particular interest and the number of pieces in our collection include:

**Medicine Hat Pottery Company Limited, Medicine Hat, 1914** (1 piece).

**Gas City Pottery Limited (later named Canada Pottery), Medicine Hat, 1917-24** (no products as yet).

**Medalta Stoneware Limited, Medicine Hat, 1916-24** (40 pieces of stoneware). It took over the plant built by the Medicine Hat Pottery Company Limited.

**Medalta Potteries Limited, Medicine Hat, 1924-54** (700 pieces representing its stoneware, household, hotel china, and art ware lines). Medalta Stoneware was reorganized as Medalta Potteries when it changed owners around 1924.

**Alberta Potteries Limited, Redcliff, 1930-38**, under J.W. Wyatt's direction (12 pieces). When Wyatt left Medalta Potteries, he built a small pottery at Redcliff; but because of the Depression, it was never any serious threat to the well-established Medalta plant.

**Medicine Hat Potteries, Medicine Hat, 1938-56** (around 200 pieces of crockery, household, and art wares). This was Medalta's chief competitor, both in quantity and range of products produced.



Fig. 1. Products made by P.I.E., ca. 1940. Lacquered vase (height 16.9 cm), and stencilled bowl (height 7.0 cm, diameter 9.2 cm). Collection: Glenbow Museum, Calgary, cat. nos. C-26310 and C-26169. (Photo: Glenbow Museum, neg. no. P-2269-3.)



Fig. 2. Products made by Sunburst Ceramics Limited, 1960-75. Ashtray, style no. 16 (length 32.1 cm, width 15.8 cm), fish-shaped condiment tray (length 23.1 cm, width 17.9 cm), mixing bowl (height 11.9 cm, diameter 22.9 cm), 1/4-gallon crock (height 13.8 cm), and vase, style no. 117 (height 12.0 cm). Collection: Glenbow Museum, Calgary, cat. nos. C-28183, C-27436, C-25199, C-23837, and C-28249. (Photo: Glenbow Museum, neg. no. P-2269-5.)



Fig. 3. Edward VIII coronation plate made by Grindley, England (diameter 25.2 cm), and Wedgwood plate with City of Calgary crest, ca. 1910 (diameter 26.3 cm). Collection: Glenbow Museum, Calgary, cat. nos. C-215 and C-29922. (Photo: Glenbow Museum, neg. no. P-2118-187.)

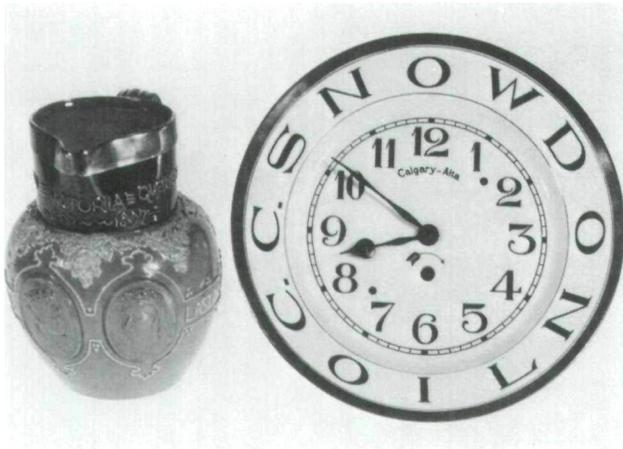


Fig. 4. Queen Victoria diamond jubilee jug made by Doulton, Lambeth, England (height 16.0 cm), and C.C. Snowdon wall clock, n.d. (diameter 25.1 cm). Collection: Glenbow Museum, Calgary, cat. nos. C-13847 and C-29011. (Photo: Glenbow Museum, neg. no. P-2118-186.)

**P.I.E. (Provincial Industrial Enterprises), Redcliff, ca. 1940** (2 pieces, see figure 1). This pottery occupied the Alberta Potteries Limited plant for a short time.

**Alberta Potteries, Redcliff, 1941-66** (9 pieces). Hop Yuill acquired J.W. Wyatt's Alberta Potteries Limited and produced items at Redcliff until Medalta Potteries (1966) Limited acquired the plant.

**Hycroft China, Medicine Hat, 1956 to present** (70 pieces). In 1956 the Medicine Hat Potteries' plant was acquired by Marwell Construction of Vancouver who, in the next year, sold it to Harry Veiner. He still operates the plant. The items produced were marketed under the name Hycroft, even though the company retained many of the original styles and moulds of the Medicine Hat Potteries.

**New Medalta Ceramics, Medicine Hat, 1958** (1 piece). Malcolm MacArthur leased the Medalta Potteries Limited plant in 1958 and produced wares under this name until a fire destroyed his operation on 24 December.

**Sunburst Ceramics Limited, Medicine Hat, 1960-75** (23 pieces, see fig. 2). Sunburst was established in the Medalta Plant but the operation was moved from Medicine Hat to Lethbridge in 1966 and finally closed in 1975.

**Medalta Potteries (1966) Limited, Redcliff, 1966 to present** (4 pieces). Medalta Potteries (1966) Limited ac-

quired the old Alberta Potteries' plant in 1966, but within a year the building burned down. It was rebuilt and continues to operate.

In addition to the research collection, ceramics were acquired to be used in exhibits. These collections deserve mention as other researchers may be interested in what they include.

**Chinese Community Ceramics.** A collection of 500 pieces of food preparation, storage, and service items used by the Chinese community of Vancouver. The collection consists mainly of cups, plates, soup bowls, and spoons imported from China during the early twentieth century.

**Souvenirs and Commemoratives.** Glenbow's collections of 100 pieces representing businesses, people, places, and events in western Canada include ashtrays, cups and saucers, plates, platters, and wall plaques (figs. 3 and 4). The majority are made by British firms and date from 1900 to 1940. Glenbow also has a small collection, numbering 40 pieces, of royalty commemoratives from the Victorian period to the present.

**General Household Wares.** The collection is quite diverse to fulfil exhibit needs and includes bedroom china (40 sets); dinner service sets, including serving platters, soup tureens, cake plates, etc. (300 pieces); moustache cups and saucers (50 sets); shaving mugs (60 pieces); and assorted household crocks, jugs, bowls, vases, jardinières (200 pieces). The majority are British made, but French, German, and American pieces are included, and they represent the period 1830 to 1920. Our eastern Canadian pieces are limited to a few jugs made by the Toronto Pottery Company, one 6-gallon crock made by the Belleville Pottery Company, a 5-gallon demijohn by Glass Brothers and Company of London, Ontario, and two demijohns by E.L. Farrar of Iberville, Québec.

**Miscellaneous Collections.** The balance of the collections include 50 German porcelain figurines representing various ranks and regiments of the British Army; 30 other porcelain figurines; 50 animal and bird porcelains, largely German or Austrian, with dogs and the Lippizan horse most commonly represented; and 150 Far Eastern items, largely of hand-painted vases and plates. Glenbow also has costume jewellery, watches, and clocks with ceramic faces or bodies, a few floral ornaments, and a ceramic escritoire.

Glenbow is actively collecting and documenting products produced in Alberta or relating to its history, and we would welcome inquiries concerning our collections. We will be glad to provide specific information upon request.