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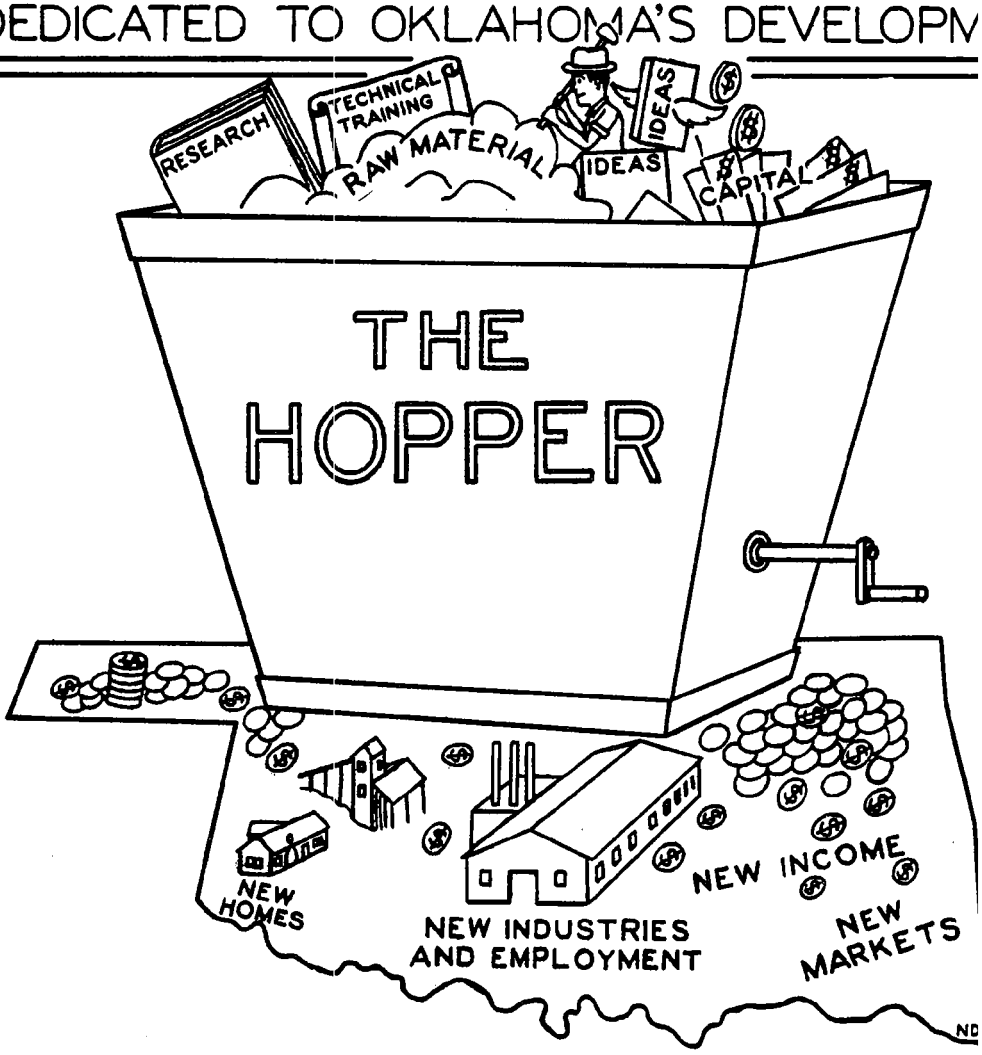

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POTTERY INDUSTRY OF OKLAHOMA
(continued)

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III. Potteries of Oklahoma

Frankoma Pottery: In 1927 the University of Oklahoma added to its faculty a young man from the Chicago Art Institute, John Frank, to instruct in the ceramic art department. He immediately became interested in the great wealth of unexploited material here for the artist to interpret. As his field was ceramics he begun to wonder if it were not possible to find native clay suitable for the production of art ware. His desire being to express through the medium of the clay of Oklahoma the spirit of the early days of the state--the Oklahoma of the Indian, of the Pioneer, of the Plainsman, and of the Wagon Trail. This creation being a part of and an expression of the creative tendencies of the youthful Southwest.

Experiment after experiment was made to test the firing of various clays, and in attempting to develop a glaze that would be in harmony with the envisioned product. The Stuart formation of the Pennsylvanian System which is quarried at Ada, Oklahoma by the Ada Brick Company, answered the greatest number of the varied requirements. Arrangements were made with John Harris and Sons, owners and operators of the brick plant, for the necessary clay.

By 1933, Frank was not only sure that his dream was a commercial possibility, but had convinced others of his ability as an artist in interpreting the lore of the great southwest in creations both useful and beautiful. He asked for and was given permission in 1933 to be placed on a half

time basis at the University. This enabled him to open his first factory, located in the town of Norman. By 1936 the business had grown to such a size it became necessary for him to sever all connections with the University in order to devote his full time and energy to the young business. The trade-mark, Frankoma, a combination of his name and that of his adopted state, was beginning to be known throughout the state and adjoining areas.

In 1938, Mr. Frank reorganized, moved his pottery to Sapulpa, and enlarged his operating capacity. Not all the years were smooth. The plant was burned twice, and twice more it was to be refinanced, each time to rise from its ashes larger than before. The beautiful Frankoma factory, a few feet off Highway 66, is a living example of a man's faith in himself as an artist and his belief in his ability to interpret man's natural desire to possess articles for his home at once useful and lovely.

Frankoma Pottery is a modern factory in which the interested visitor is encouraged to see the complete operations from clay to finished art ware. From 600 to 700 tons of clay are trucked each year from Ada to the factory. The first step is "slip" preparation. The clay is ground to a powder, water is added, and it is screened through 120 mesh screens. If it is intended to be used for casting it is stored in overhead tanks and from there poured into the molds as needed. For plastic clay the "slip" is passed through a filter press to remove the excess water and is then processed in a pug mill. The plastic clay is used on a jigger and by this means plates, saucers, bowls, tumblers, lids, etc. are made. All designing is done by Mr. Frank who creates his original in clay or wood. From the original the master molds are cast, and from these the working molds are made.

The sequence of manufacturing is the same in

all factories: "slip" preparation, casting (or hand molding or stamping on a jig), trimming, glazing, kiln room, and finally the packing department. The glazes, almost exclusively metal oxides, are ground from basic materials and mixed according to formulas which have been evolved by careful experiments. Frankoma colors produced by secret formula are: Prairie Green, Desert Gold, Red Bud, Onyx Black, Sorghum Brown, and Turquoise Blue. Three complete and distinctively different lines of table ware are available in a choice of Prairie Green or Desert Gold color. The "Oklahoma Plainsman" pattern is characterized by its simple lines and sturdy shapes; the "Wagon Wheel" pattern combines ranch brands with the wagon wheel motif; the "Mayan-Aztec Indian" pattern is characterized by its simplicity of shape and richness of decoration created by the use of Mayan and Aztec hieroglyphs. In addition to the table ware, Frankoma manufactures a varied line of decorative art ware for the home. The hundreds of items in this list, available in a choice of all six colors, would include such items as figurines, vases, pitchers, mugs, cookie jars, and ash trays.

Today, the visitor to Frankoma on the old route of Highway 66 between Sapulpa and Tulsa is first impressed by the spacious modernistic show and sales room. This show room, which occupies the entire front of the establishment, with its enormous plate glass windows from ceiling to floor, may in a sense, be termed the result of progressive evolution from the simple road-side stand. As the volume of sales grew, the factory site sale and show room also went through several stages of enlargement and modifications before it evolved into the present beautifully appointed, air-conditioned, invitingly arranged area. The offices are directly behind the show and sales room and are separated from the manufacturing area by well insulated walls.

The work rooms of the manufacturing area are arranged on an assembly-line basis. The kiln, in-

spection, sorting and packing room occupy most of one side of this area. Other segments include clay and glaze preparation areas, slip storage vats, two jigger wheels, mold pouring tables, trimming and smoothing tables, glazing section, and drying shelves. The 85 foot tunnel kiln, the only one of its kind in operation in a pottery plant in Oklahoma, dominates the scene for the average visitor. Seventeen to eighteen cars are in the tunnel at the same time. These are hydraulically pushed through the kiln at a carefully calculated and governed speed. Cars loaded with unfired pottery stand on the track, as one car moves out one exit end of the kiln another is moving into the tunnel. Movement of the cars through the lower temperatures in the ends of the tunnel and through the much hotter center must be timed with exactness. The pieces are fired once, and having sufficiently cooled for handling, are moved to the packing room where they are carefully inspected, sorted, and are ready for display in the show room at the factory or to be packed and shipped. Over 20,000 pieces pass through the kiln each week.

Ample all weather parking is provided and the tourist is welcome to come in, browse through the collection of hundreds of different pieces, buy as much or as little as he wishes--or as his purse dictates. The same hearty welcome is found for all. Any interested visitor who wishes to see the actual process of the manufacture will be taken on a conducted tour of the plant. Thousands avail themselves of this opportunity each year.

Eighteen years of hard work, and experience, at times painful, has seen the Frankoma Pottery develop into a highly successful business firm. This pioneer in ceramic art ware made of Oklahoma clay continually advocates the expansion of the ceramic industry in the state of Oklahoma, and envisions the time when it will be one of the major industries of the state. Mr. Frank has a justifi-

able pride in the achievements of Frankoma Pottery which, he reports, has an annual payroll of $200,000 and provides a livelihood for 80 persons. The products of Frankoma Pottery are sold in every state in the Union, and have been exhibited and sold abroad.

Tamac, Incorporated: Tamac, Inc. is, in a sense, the result of a sympathy for all persons who have struggled down the line at a buffet (indoors or at a barbecue) balancing a heaping plate of food in fine style until confronted with the awful necessity of adding not only cup and saucer but slippery silverware and possibly a napkin as well! The first product of the firm, and the one on whose success hinged the future of all the remainder of items which have since been created and distributed under the Tamac trade-mark, was their conception of the most attractive and usable answer to the buffet juggler's prayer -- the "One-Hander". Functionally, this article is a lovely, highly specialized tray, designed to be easily managed in one hand. Not only does it have a built-in saucer, a place for relish, but in addition to the generously sized plate there are three grooves to keep slippery silver in the right place. With the coffee cup in place the complete meal can be easily managed with one hand. The cup, itself, is no less unusual than the cleverly designed 'plate-tray'. A unique article, it has no handle in the usual loop design; a built-in tunnel in the body wall of the cup gives a place for the index finger, a slight depression on the outside wall below the tunnel provides a rest for the third finger. The cup capacity is half again that of the conventional china cup -- most satisfactory to the person who takes his coffee-drinking seriously.

In the summer of 1946, Mr. and Mrs. Leonard

Tate of Perry, Oklahoma were entertaining Mr. and Mrs. Allen Mcaulay of New Jersey. Mcaulay and Tate had just discarded their army and navy uniforms for "civvies" and were in the post-war "what shall we do?" mood.

The Mcaulays and Tates were agreed on one thing--the determination to go into business for themselves. Tate, a business major graduate of Oklahoma A and M College, and his wife, an art major graduated by the famous Emma Willard College at Troy, New York, pooled their know-how with the Mcaulays who had studied ceramics.

Investigations of the opportunities available for a business venture in the town of Perry, Oklahoma, revealed two important factors favoring the location of a new ceramic plant--availability of gas rates among the lowest in the nation, and the standing offer of free land for factory sites by the progressive town of Perry.

In August, 1946, Tamac, Inc. started operations in a made-over two car garage in Perry. Its original equipment included one kiln, some electrical gadgets, various spare parts salvaged from old cars and out-board motors, and the patented design for the "One-Hander". The original inventory item which could not be photographed, measured, or weighed, but upon which all else was to depend was the courage to start and the faith of the individuals in the industrial future of the southwest.

After a year in the garage, more assured than ever by the sales and reorders for the "One-Hander" and the growing demand for more items to be added to their line, the young corporation sold new stock. The town of Perry, recognizing the fact that this was a new industry desirous of permanently locating there, contributed the factory site. This 300-foot location fronting on U.S. Highways 64 and 77 just south of Perry made an ideal location. By mid-sum-

mer of 1948 the new plant, a 40 x 120-foot steel and concrete, Quonset-hut type building, was ready and occupied. Three 20 cubic foot capacity kilns were the pride of the plant. Now they could go ahead with the plans for enlarging the line toward producing a complete table service. As items were added and displayed, the orders that came in slowly at first were to multiply far beyond the expectations of the amount of equipment needed when the new plant was first opened.

In early 1951 Mr. and Mrs. Tate bought out the Mcaulay's interest and reorganized the company. It is now a Tate family enterprise consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Tate and Mr. and Mrs. Henry Tate, the parents of Leonard. For some time Mrs. Tate, the younger, had been taking over the work of designing new pieces. After her art training at Emma Willard and commercial experience in designing for Armstrong Linoleum Corporation she found it comparatively easy and natural to turn to the medium of clay. Mrs. Tate, mother of Leonard, is in charge of the retail sales and show room at the factory. Her husband, Henry, has become an expert in casting molds, and is now making all that are in use at the present. Leonard, as is to be expected from his business training, is the president of the company and its business manager.

The new organization found itself faced with immediate need for expansion if it were to be able to supply even a part of the market indicated by the orders which were now literally pouring in. During a three week period in April of 1951 the firm had to turn down more orders than it had received and filled during the entire first half of 1950. Clearly, if they were to stay in business and supply the demand they had obviously created and filled, expansion was the only possible answer. By late July two more 20-foot kilns were added to the plant and a third was on order, thus doubling the original 60 cubic foot kiln capacity of the

plant when the factory opened on U.S. Highways 64 and 77.

The plant, located on the east side of the highway has a large volume of tourist business. The large glazed front of the building is used to excellent advantage by Mrs. Tate, senior, to provide attractive displays of the many pieces of the ware. That she has a "green thumb" is evident in the many beautiful displays of plants thriving in the planters. Tables are arranged with the various services, and shelves are placed so that the visitor may take down and handle any piece in which he is interested. If the visitor cares to see the plant one of the Tates will gladly put aside his work of the moment and show him through the pottery, from the "slip" to the just-cooled bowl from its final firing.

Within the plant proper everything is arranged on assembly line basis to yield the maximum production with the minimum effort. The clay used for some time by the Tates was a combination of Oklahoma clay with some from southern Kansas. Due to the fact that there are no commercial producers of Oklahoma clay and the consequent difficulty of obtaining the necessary amount at the right time the Tates now depend entirely on clays imported from the states of Tennessee and Georgia.

The buffet services and regular dinner ware are in a choice of two greens -- Avocado, which is in color tones exactly like the colors seen in an avocado cut in half, and Frosty Pine, a clear green with a frosty white blending into the green. All floral ware, including planters, vases, etc., is made in the Frosty Green only. The colors are made by the Tates from the grinding and blending of basic ingredients.

The entire line of articles is characterized by originality of design. The design type would be

classified as free form. All have been developed with the goal of producing a piece that satisfies three Tate requirements: "artistic soundness, works better, lasts longer".

The "slip" is prepared in a Blunger mixer and is then strained through a fine mesh screen, and is stored in overhead tanks ready for use in the molds. From seven to eight days is required to change the clay from this state into the finished product. After the shell has formed in the mold and is air dried it is hand finished in preparation for the first firing. After the first firing the article is virtually china, absorption less than .4 percent. It is now ready for the color, and the treatment depends on the desired effect -- some are dipped and some are sprayed. After a careful air drying the pot is ready for the trade-mark to be stamped on for the final firing which will forever set the color. Twenty-four hours are required for each firing. When sufficiently cooled for handling the ware is carefully inspected to be sure that each piece released for sale meets the same high standards.

A well-organized marketing system has been established in the state. More retailers have asked for the concession to sell the Tamac Pottery than the present scale of production will permit the Tates to supply. However, plans for a national market are in the making. A number of national magazines have given recognition to the Tamac products. At present there are twenty full time employees at the plant in addition to the four Tates, and two salesmen have been recently added.

(To be continued)

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NEW PUBLICATIONS

Oklahoma Geological Survey Circular 29, "Mineral Production of Oklahoma 1885-1949", compiled by Phyllis Dale and J. O. Beach, is now available at the Oklahoma Geological Survey, Norman, Oklahoma. The price is 30 cents, postpaid.

Resumé of contents from Introduction, pp. 5, 8:
"This report is prepared to bring up to date the mass of statistical data on volume and value of mineral production in Oklahoma from the earliest date for which records are available. Primary purpose of this compilation is to make available in one report a record of the mineral production of Oklahoma and at the same time show something of the magnitude and importance of minerals in the economy of the State.

"The scope of the information presented covers the full period of time from the earliest available statistical figures reported on either production or value of any mineral resources of Oklahoma to the latest date for which such figures were available at the time of publication. For some items, latest authentic information on production is for the year 1948, but for most major groups the figures were available for the year 1949, and are included.

"Pending further industrial development in Oklahoma, it is difficult to over-emphasize the importance of the mineral industry to Oklahoma. These industries are contributing a large share to the general revenues of the State Government as well as to the total income of the people and the creation of new wealth in the State. The mineral industries are providing employment for a part of the population not required in operating the farms and service industries of the State, thus holding some of our young people in Oklahoma who otherwise would be forced to seek employment in the industrialized areas of the nation."