



# Yesteryears

Vol. 3, No. 5

Tuesday, August 10, 1993

Section of the Salem News

## The pottery that was East Palestine's finest

### William Shaw George built empire with ware made from local clay

By Lois Firestone

PROFESSOR HENRY ASH-bridge and his fellow musicians were swinging into a few jazz numbers while Strong Man Paul Kridler was showing off before a six-deep circle of awed boys — it was Aug. 24, 1921, and the occasion was the W. S. George Pottery picnic, held every year for potters and their families at the East Palestine fairgrounds.

Over the clamor and the blaring horns, the voice of R. G. Sutherin reverberated: "George Rockenberger's Men O' War, gentlemen, has won the tug of war again."

The Men O' War was another appendage for the potters in the clay shop at the George company, and the tug of war was only one of the events scheduled for the day-long party, a three-mile automobile race, baseball throwing and boxing bouts, among them. The women's race drew only two contenders, Minnie Garside who came in first, and Blanche Shaw, who was second. Possibly the lack of interest among the female contingent was because the prescribed costume for running was wearing bloomers. By and large, though, all this was taken seriously by the 800 employees and their families and the competition was fierce.

At the pottery, though, everyone worked together, and the pottery owner, William Shaw George, was the reason. On this day, the 54-year-old owner was sauntering from one group to another, swallowing lemonade, munching a wiener sandwich and consuming a roasting ear. The largest individual owner in the country — and probably the world — W. S. knew every one of them well and they knew

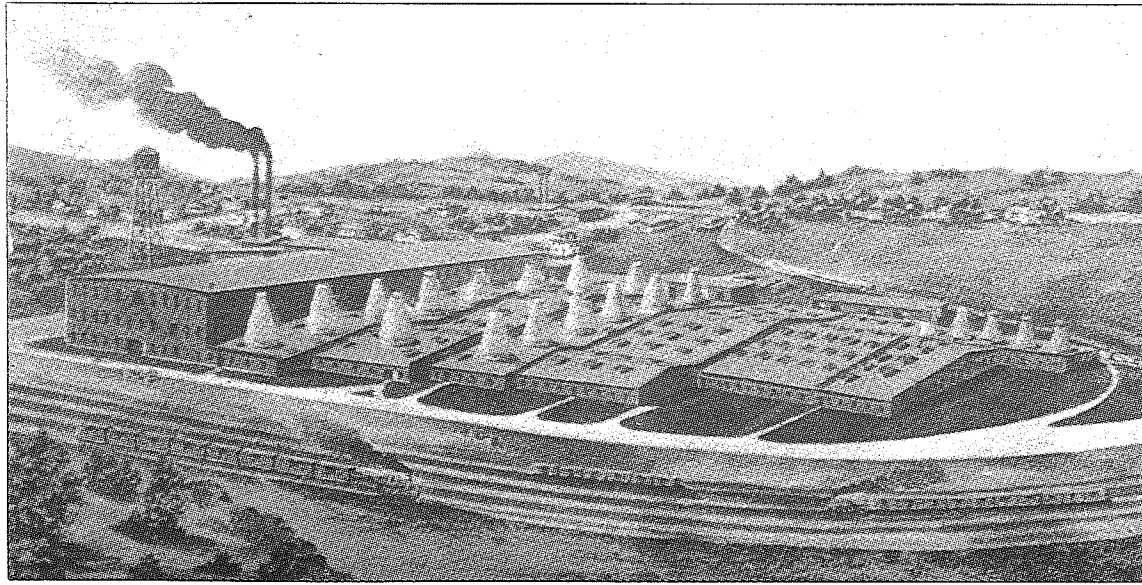
him. East Palestine was a special place to him, and he often said that "I never feel so happy when on a trip as when I have my face toward East Palestine, have finally crossed the Pennsylvania line and can say, home again."

Only Homer Laughlin's was manufacturing more ware than the eight George potteries with their 43 gloss and bisque kilns and 36 decorating kilns. The company payroll had soared to \$1.1 million by 1921, a far cry from the \$52,000 payroll he handed out his first year of managing the East Liverpool pottery 23 years earlier.

W. S. — most people in town called him that, probably never knowing his full name — was 32 when he came from East Liverpool as decorator foreman at the Ohio China Co. A year later, in 1898, he launched into business for himself when he took over the East Palestine Pottery; the site later became Plant 4 in the chain.

His parents, William Shaw and Mary Cavett George were hard-working farming people and young William was expected to do his share of the chores at the Dry Run Station farm where he was born the year the Civil War ended. Later on, when the elder George learned the pottery trade, the family moved the few miles into town. Young W. S. entered the trade, too, when he was old enough.

By the time he was in his 30s, W. S. had a personal working knowledge of every phase of the pottery business, from clay room to sales. As a salesman he quickly learned his customers' needs and filled them. Throughout his career he kept in close personal touch with jobbers and did his own selling. His word was his bond.



The complex that was the W. S. George Pottery Co. lies along acres of land in East Palestine in this postcard courtesy of Baird Stewart.

He was 22 when he married Anna Stewart Campbell of Philadelphia. They had nine children: William Campbell, who became company vice president, John Stewart, Lois, Robert Barnett, Janet, and W. S. Jr., who remained in East Palestine after they were grown; Mrs. J. L. Adams and Frank Cavett of Kittanning, Pa. where the pottery had a branch; and Dorothy Woodard of Asheville, N. C. The Georges had been married 34 years when Anna passed away in 1921.

1910 was a prosperous year for the company and W. S. added on several kilns and departments. He hired 75 more workers, bringing the total to 375. The 14-kiln plant which resulted was fourth in size among U. S. potteries. That same year the company started using gas from the George gas line which ran from Negley through Pine Hollow.

By 1912, 750 men and women, almost an equal number of each, were working in the two shops when they were running at full capacity. That was most of the time; the exception was a few weeks in the summer when the shops shut down for repairs.

Most workers were skilled journeymen who worked



Anna Campbell George worked along with her husband for the good of East Palestine until her death in 1921.

three to five years to learn the trade: jiggers, whirlers, footers, liners, pressers, packers, casters, moulders, chippers, spongers, fillers-in, batters-out. They produced high quality ware speedily. For instance, five fruit dishes were manufactured every minute, hour by hour, for nine hours a day, six days a week.

The potters were the best-dressed in town — they worked hard, made good wages and spent freely. W. S. never missed getting their pay to them, either. When



William Shaw George, owner of W. S. George Pottery Co. of East Palestine in his younger days.

other businesses were giving workers script, he was handing out envelopes filled with cash, every two weeks before noon on Saturday. One time, he cashed in an insurance policy to make the payroll.

W. S. was a believer in helping others outside his factories; he was immersed in missions work. Active as a member of the local United Presbyterian Church and member of the church session, he was a strict tither. He never missed a prayer

See George, page 6

# A tragedy unfolds on the Flickinger's Columbiana farm

By Lois Firestone

**Third in a series**  
**T**HE THERMOMETER HAD dipped to nearly zero on Thursday morning, December 12, 1872. Inside the Flickinger house, the kitchen was warm and cozy from the heat radiating from the cast iron stove in the corner.

Eighteen year old Lydia Flickinger had washed up the breakfast dishes — her mother, who usually fixed the first meal of the day, was away — and she was busily cracking nuts. Every now and then she'd pause to offer a handful to the waiting Porter youngsters, one-year-old Adelaide and three-year-old Minda Jr.

Lydia's brother Jacob was bundled up in boots, scarf and coat preparing to go out to the barn to feed the livestock when Ervin came down from the upstairs bedroom where Minda Sr. was making up the beds.

Ervin carried a hatchet with him and methodically began smashing nuts with it, commenting to Jacob that the blade was dull and needed sharpening. Little Minda had wandered into the adjoining sitting room with her treat — the room was a makeshift bedroom for Joshua Flickinger in the overcrowded house, but Joshua had risen early and gone into Columbiana to Koch's wagon shop. He'd returned but left again on another errand, although the morning was still quite young. It was about eight o'clock.

Ervin stood contentedly munching on the pile of nuts he'd shelled — he hadn't taken breakfast with the rest of the

family but had been still sleeping upstairs when they'd eaten. After about 15 minutes he'd eaten them all and sauntered into the sitting room, still holding the hatchet.

A shaken Lydia later recounted what next took place: "I heard him tell Minda to shut the door; she did, and said, 'Now it's shut Papa.' Then I heard her utter a pitiful cry...Porter opened the door to get Adelaide. I saw Minda lying on the floor in blood. Porter caught Adelaide between the door and the stove; the hatchet was bloody. He pulled Adelaide into the room. I heard no noise after that. I saw him five minutes later starting west toward Columbiana; he didn't have the hatchet then."

Terrified and near hysteria, the stunned Lydia ran outside screaming to her brother Jacob for help. As they rushed back into the kitchen they found Minda Sr. standing in the doorway to the sitting room. Later, Minda said she'd watched Ervin sort through his tool chest in the bedroom and pull out the hatchet. Her husband had gone downstairs then, she said, and, next, "I heard Minda



These winsome young ladies were employees of the Church Budget in Salem in 1921: (from left) Ethel Frankford, Stella Dalrymple, Hazel Stouffer, unknown, Mary Heintzelman and Lena Cronic. Ms. Frankford was the grandmother of Ron Firth, a Salem News reporter and sports writer.

utter a pitiful cry...I said 'Erb, what have you done?' He left the house. I opened the door and found my children lying on the floor dead...He'd threatened to take my life and the children's lives about three months ago."

Lydia's other brother Joshua

had gone to a neighbor's home to borrow a rifle because the men were planning to butcher that day. "When I left, Porter was standing by my brother Jacob cracking nuts," Joshua said. "I saw him coming up the road after me. I went on to Witt's and while I was there

Porter went out toward Columbiana, walking pretty fast. Soon after I went back to the house and found the children both dead...I hadn't reached Hum's house when I heard the screaming at home."

See Porter, page 8

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**Yesteryears**  
A historical journal  
Published 2nd & 4th Tuesday  
by the Salem News  
Founded June 8, 1991  
161 N. Lincoln Ave.  
Salem, Ohio 44460  
Phone (216) 332-4601  
Thomas E. Spargur  
publisher/general manager

Cathie McCullough  
managing editor

Lois A. Firestone  
editor

Linda Huffer  
advertising executive

# Telescope builder's home still standing

By Dale E. Shaffer

READERS OF YESTER-years will remember an article in the April 27, 1993 issue about John E. Mellish, the Leetonia builder of telescopes who discovered five comets. Soon after that article appeared, John Simonds called me to say that his wife, Teresa Orincsak, grew up in the Mellish house and the house is still standing at 331 High St. Extension.

Found in the house by the Orincsak family, many years after Mellish had moved out, was a medallion dated Sept. 13, 1915. It was presented to Mellish by the Astronomical Society of the Pacific for discovering a comet. The Simonds have kept this medallion through the years as a family keepsake.

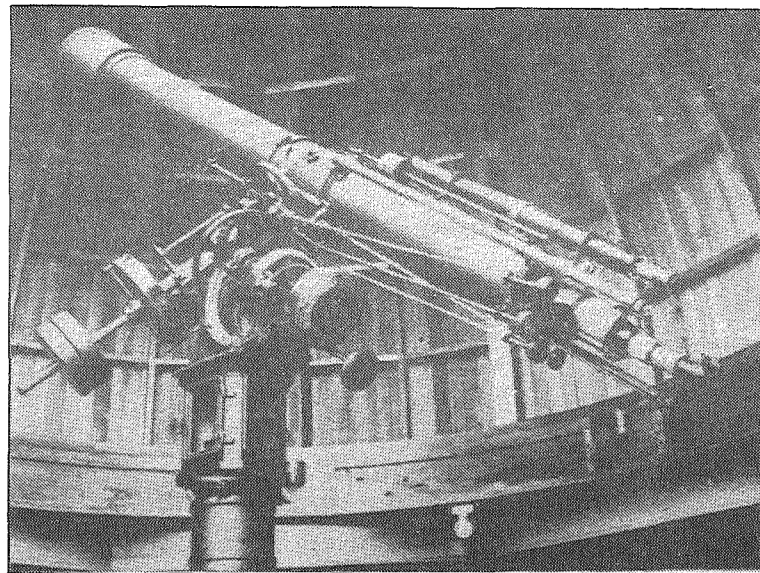
I visited the old Mellish house and talked with its present owner, Ken Winger and with neighbors. They had no knowledge of Mellish, but one person who had lived in the neighborhood most of her life mentioned that Elmer Harrold's private observatory in 1916 was located at 638 Columbia St. It is now the beautiful home of Mrs. Guy Nicolette. She and her husband made many renovations to the original house.

Mrs. Frank Guerrier, sister of Dr. Nicolette, lives next door. She once owned the observatory property, which by then was a home. She worked for Elmer Harrold at the Crescent Machine Co. and bought the property from him. She later sold it to the Nicolettes. Mr. Harrold and Clint Wilderson were founders of the Crescent firm.

Mrs. Guerrier recalls that in 1920 or 1921 Mr. Harrold gave the telescope, instruments and dome of the observatory to Mount Union College. An addition was eventually made to the top of the house and a garage added on the west side.

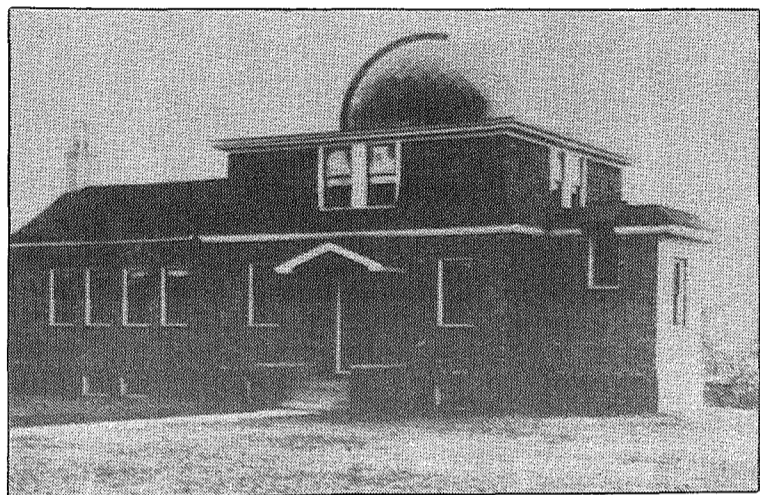
Mrs. Nicolette has one of the 1916 Christmas cards Mr. Harrold sent to all his friends in the area. It contains photos of the observatory and large telescope. An insert, titled "Telescope Parties," invited people to organize groups of 15 to 20 to visit the observatory.

A list of names was to be sent to Harrold's Observatory, so that a time could be assigned. The group was expected to be there at that time unless the evening was cloudy or colder than 20 degrees. Instructions were "not to come if the sky was cloudy,

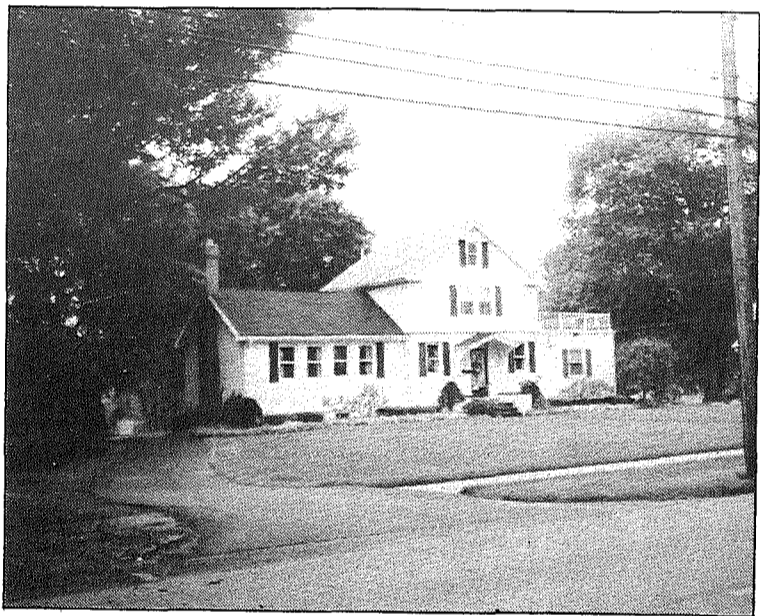


Photos courtesy of Mae Nicolette

Elmer Harrold's telescope inside his Leetonia observatory.



The Harrold observatory along Columbia Street.



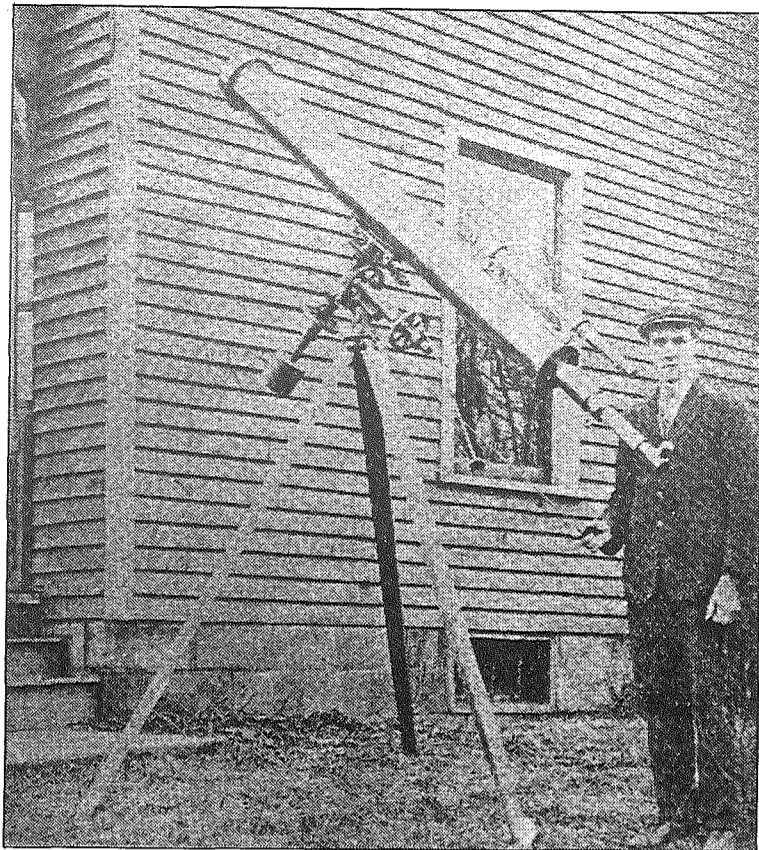
The Nicolette house on Leetonia's Columbia Street once housed Elmer Harrold's private observatory. John Mellish was in charge of it from 1916 to 1920. The top portion and garage on the right were added when it became a home.

or partly cloudy. Neither should the group come in zero weather, since the dome room was kept at the same temperature as the outdoors." No charge was made for these "Telescope Parties." In 1917 Mr. Harrold made the observatory freely open to the public on Tuesday and Thursday evenings.

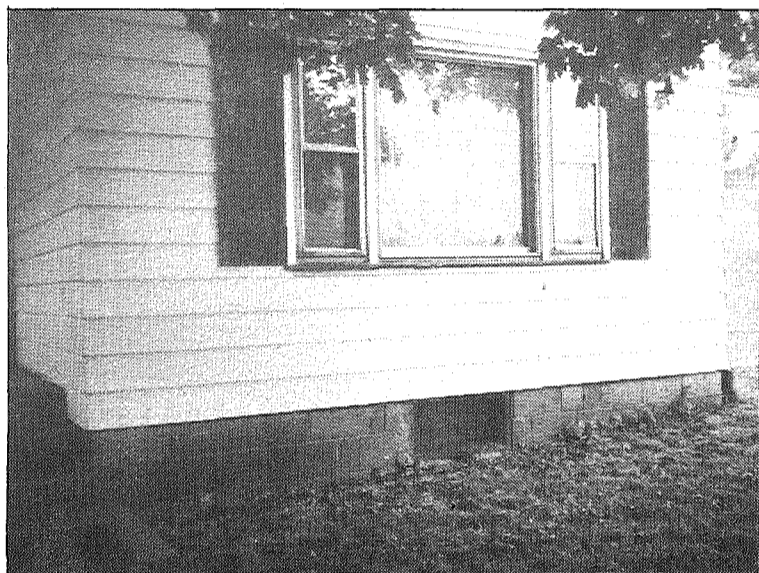
The telescope was 10 feet long with an equatorial mounting and a driving clock to keep the lens directly on the object viewed. A complete set of

instruments for determining the correct time for the stars was installed. People from all over the country came to visit the observatory. The people of Leetonia were very proud of Mr. Harrold and his facility.

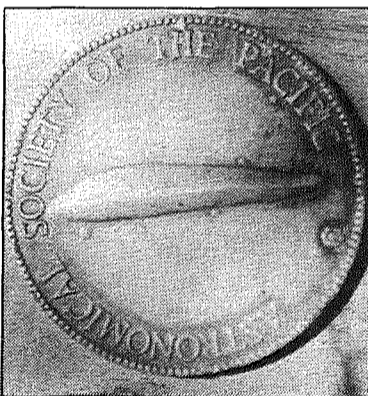
"Then and now" photos are shown on these pages of the Mellish house, along with photos of the medallion and observatory building. I thank John and Teresa Simonds, Mrs. Guerrier and Mrs. Nicolette for adding important historical information to this story.



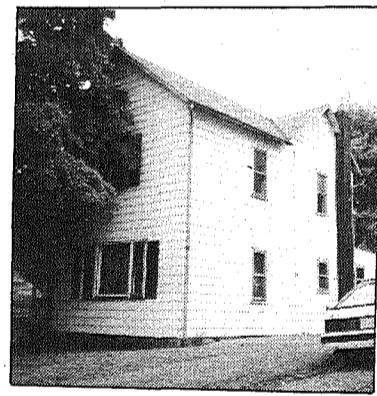
John E. Mellish with one of his telescopes in the backyard of his Leetonia home where he lived from 1916 to the mid-1920s. Photo was taken in February 1923.



This 1993 photo shows the Leetonia house where John Mellish made telescopes.



Front view of medal given Mellish in 1915 for discovering a comet. It's 2 1/2 inches in diameter and weighs 3 1/2 ounces. Photo courtesy of John Simonds.



A 1993 photo of the Leetonia house where John Mellish once lived and built telescopes. Located at 331 High St. Extension, it's now owned by Ken Winger.

## C. Auguste Dupin came before Holmes

In 1841 Edgar Allen Poe introduced a new literary style, the detective story. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" appeared in Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine which Poe edited. These were followed by

"The Mystery of Marie Roget" and "The Purloined Letter."

C. Auguste Dupin was the detective featured in these stories, an amateur who solved crimes that baffled police.

George  
Continued from page 1

meeting when he was home. He gave \$50,000 to build a hospital in Abyssinia, continuing to contribute over the years, and was a trustee of the University of Cairo in Egypt.

The main office and showroom was in East Palestine but as the business grew, offices and permanent display rooms were leased in New York City and Chicago — people wandering through Chicago's Merchandise Mart saw a room filled with dishes made in East Palestine, displayed with gilt letter placards reading "W. S. George Pottery Co., East Palestine, Ohio." Samples of EPPCO ware, along with those of the company's three other potteries, were displayed at pottery shows each year, especially the newest patterns and shapes.

W. S. spent most of his time on the road, and products moved to all sections of the country. In the early years, basins, pails, combinetts, and chambs were sent to southern markets. Cuspidors went to stores, hotels and offices everywhere. Hotel and home dinnerware was distributed widely. Five and tens were filled with George ware: before 1925, the backs of most dinnerware people bought was inscribed with the pottery name.

The union was strong at George potteries from the beginning. The local, formed early on, had become affiliated with the National Brotherhood of Operative Potters by 1897, and became NBOP No. 31. Through the years, major strikes were unheard of; even minor flare-ups seldom occurred.

Only two accidental deaths marred the company's high safety standards: Ernest Bruno's father was crushed between box cars on a siding and Jim Clark's son was crushed under a belt in the sagger room.

A disaster which threw 200 workers out of a job was the blaze which wiped out the Old Shop, the original East Palestine Pottery plant, in the early morning hours of Sunday, May 5, 1912. Henry Ashbridge, a night watchman at the railroad crossing, sent in the alarm shortly after 2 a.m. but firemen couldn't save the building. The \$125,000 loss was only partially covered by insurance.

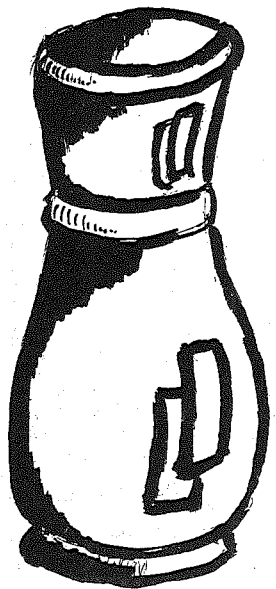
In 1920 W. S. started rebuilding the plant on the ruins of the Old Shop. The three kilns of the old Feustal Pottery were repaired and W. S. added others, making a total of five glost, four bisque and eight decorating kilns.

The two-floor building measured 405 by 156 feet. The combined capacity of the company would be 38 kilns, including the local kilns and those at Cannonsburg and Kittanning.

W. S. didn't live to see the completion of the work on the new plant. In early April 1925 he and his daughter were stopping over in New York City after a month's trip abroad. Lois, his traveling companion on stays in Central America and the West Indies after Anna's death, left for a brief visit with her sister Dorothy in North Carolina.

Alone in his room at the Hotel Astor, W. S. was stricken with a severe heart attack. He never recovered, and he died four days later, at 5 a.m. on Easter Sunday morning, April 12, 1925. At his bedside were his three daughters, Marguerite, Dorothy and Lois; his three sons; Campbell, John and Fred; and his nephew, Willard George.

Word of his death stunned the people of East Palestine — businesses and industries shut down Wednesday, April 15 in deference to the man the town revered. Crowds gathered at the United Presbyterian Church for the funeral that day, and The Daily Leader editor echoed the feelings of many: "His modesty forbade that he ever claim to have placed East Palestine on the map, but always insisted that East Palestine had put him on the map. This tells the cause of the sadness that pervades every home and heart today...a world traveler and donor of large sums to foreign institutions, his home held the largest and warmest place in his heart...Today, as the lifeless body passed along our streets for the last trip, making home for the last time, every citizen felt that he had lost a personal friend. These are the things that make men great."



Only the shell of kilns remain in the smoldering ashes of the Old Shop, the original pottery building, following the disastrous 1912 fire at the George pottery which threw 200 workers out of a job.



The boys dipping room crew poses for the photographer in this photo taken in 1916 at the George pottery. R. B. Stewart stands with arms folded at far right. Courtesy of Baird Stewart.

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# East Palestine's history of pottery making dates back to 1879 and Herman Fuestel

By Lois Firestone

**H**ERMAN FUESTEL'S three-kiln pottery wasn't quite finished when Herman ran out of money, a disappointment to the townspeople in East Palestine who were looking forward to, at last, having a thriving industry.


It was October 30, 1879 when the announcement that Herman couldn't finish the project was made in the local newspaper along with a request for donations from the residents. "Let everyone give a helping hand, and success is assured," the writer urged, adding that Herman, "coming among us as a stranger, he has proven by his temperate, industrious habits and manly conduct to merit the title of gentleman and worthy of support. The indomitable

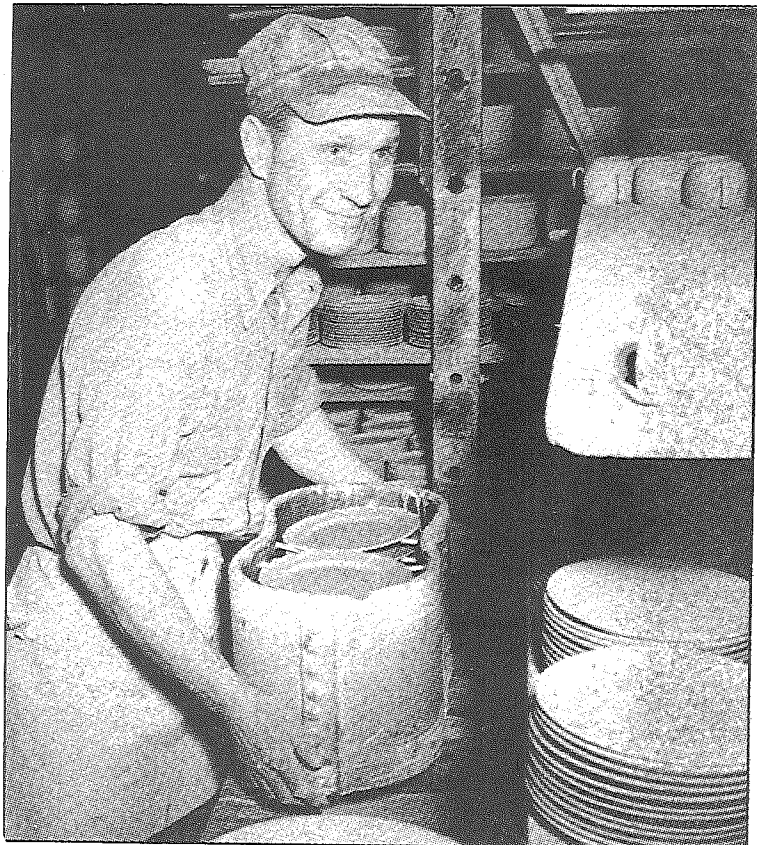
energy and perseverance he has thus far manifested, prove him to be possessed of sufficient go-ahead-it-iveness to carry out the pottery business successfully."

For as long as people could remember, East Palestine had been a mining town — men and boys worked underground for 14 hours a day at small wages. Every spring miners disputed the low wages and long hours by striking. The 1878 strike had stretched to nine months and everyone in town was suffering. It was an exasperated group of people who met one evening at James Taggart Chamberlin's lumber company to talk about the town's future.

Why not start a pottery, they asked, and not have to depend on mining alone as they had in

the past? Top-quality clay — huge amounts of it — had been unearthed in the State Line coal mines. Three men were chosen to go down to East Liverpool and invite "the potters of the river bank" to try Palestine's native clay, along with promising them "free sites, excellent schools, and no debts, lots of pure air, clean water and room to grow." The committee included Enos Goble, a miller and the town mayor; councilman and general store owner Charles Beyers, and the 25-year-old editor of *The Echo*, the town's weekly newspaper, Ellis Roberts. They did their best, but, unfortunately, East Liverpool potters weren't interested.

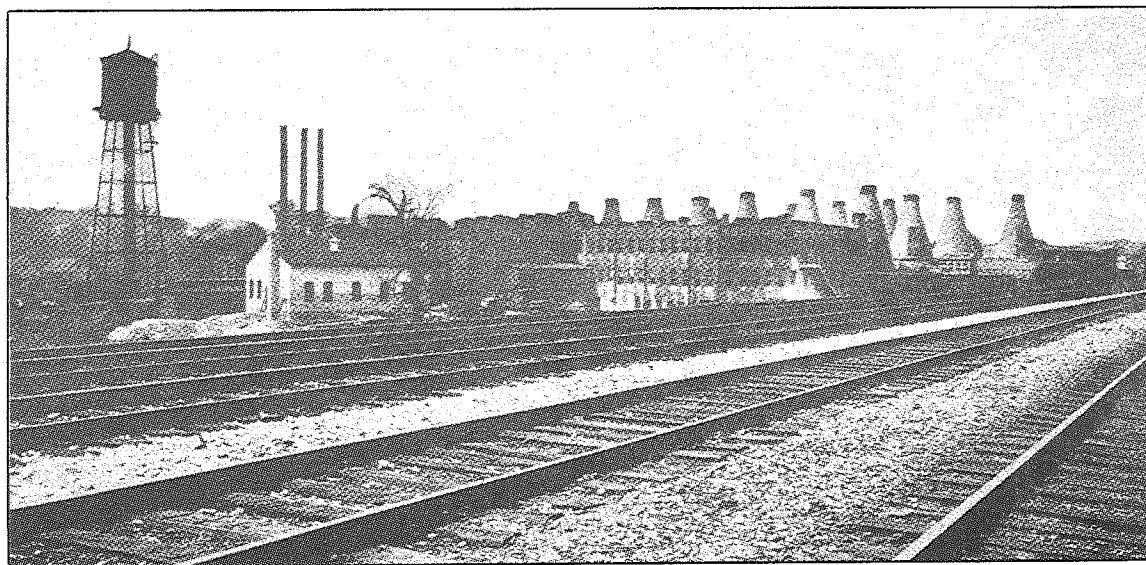
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Kiln placer John Lambright works in the kiln shop in this 1944 photo.

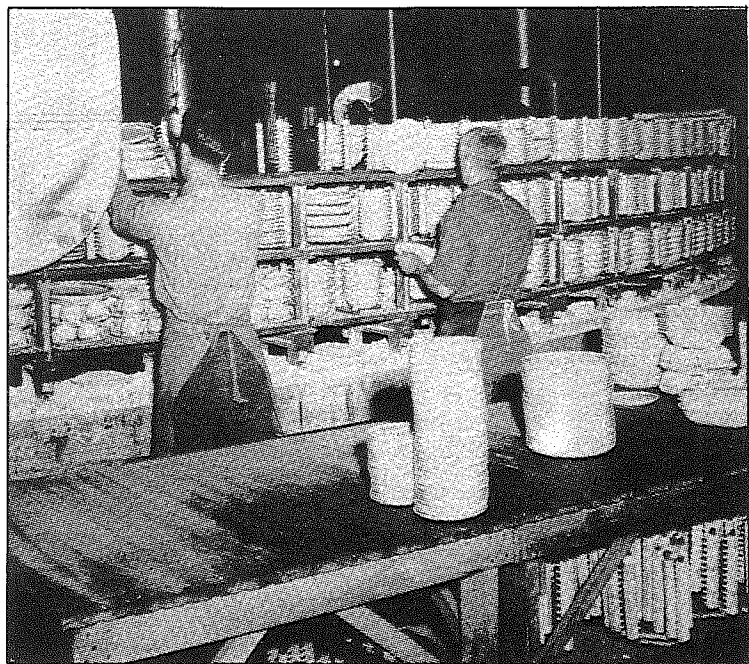


Dorothy Kuntz Shook putting the varnish and decal on Lido pattern dinnerware.

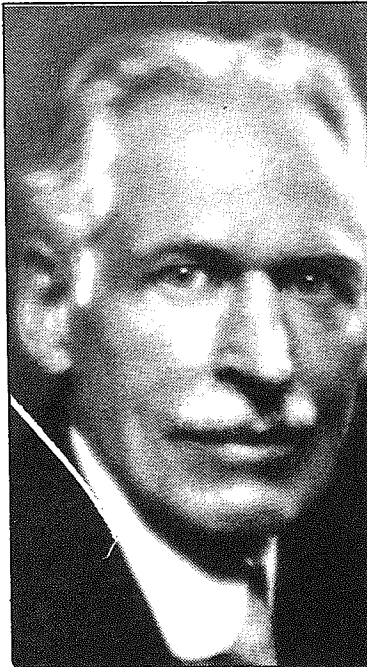


Plant 1 of the George pottery lies along the railroad tracks running through the city of East Palestine. Postcard courtesy of Baird Stewart.

Photos courtesy of East Palestine Historical Society and Baird Stewart



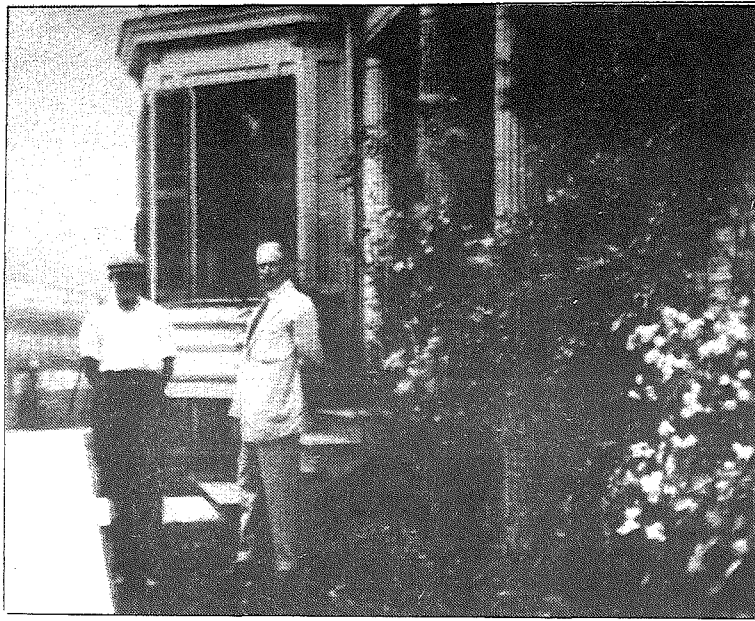
Herb Mohr and Harry Fitzsimmons work the continuous decorating kiln. Ben Anderson was boss of the department.



W. S. George knew every facet of the pottery operation he built into an empire.



Earl Herrington executes some painstaking trimming in the decorating shop in 1944.



W. S. George waits at the front of his East Palestine home along the city's East Main Street in this 1920s photo. The young may be his chauffeur.



The Ohio China Co. complex can be seen in this 1900s scene.

**Pottery**  
Continued from page 7

The State Line clay turned out to be remarkable — after weathering the samples were fired and they were found to be equal to the best of the Liverpool clay and superior to Liverpool's because it didn't take as high temperatures to work it.

Herman was operating a pottery in Leetonia when he heard about the East Palestine clay and in March 1879 he came to town to see it for himself. He was impressed when Goble showed him the small Rockingham and yellow ware bowls made from local clay. After some figuring, he decided that he could make ware in East Palestine at half the cost, and have a better quality of clay. The clay used at Leetonia cost him \$2.35 a ton, while the plentiful clay in East Palestine could be purchased for the cost of mining or less. Coal was cheaper, too, because the veins were heavier.

When Feustel's first kiln was fired in 1880, the whole town turned out to celebrate. Every family took home a souvenir pie plate, tea pot, spittoon or mug, because Herman had announced that Herman was giving away samples of his work. Orders poured in from throughout the country, and he received letters of enquiry from England and Germany. People called their local pottery "the

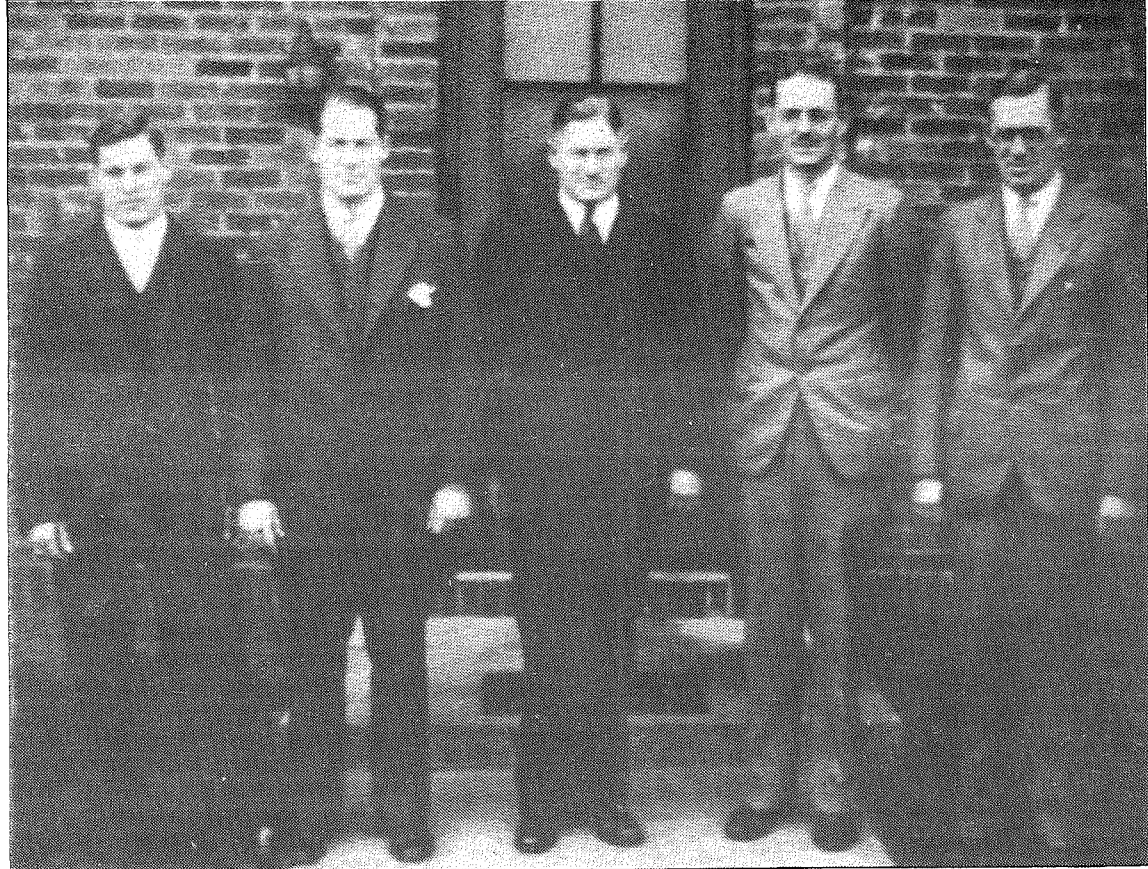
pride of Palestine."

Benjamin Nowling moved from Beaver Falls a few years later to join the firm and later Chamberlin became a partner. In 1884 the company was sold to several East Liverpool potters, but the venture wasn't a success and five years later locals resumed control with local capital and W. C. Chamberlin as president. The company operated the plant until 1893, when the George and Frank Sebring of the Sebring Pottery Co. of East Liverpool took over the management on a commission basis.

W. S. George assumed control when the Sebring agreement expired two years later, and in 1901 the company absorbed the Canonsburg Pottery Co. in Canonsburg, Pa. In 1904 a second plant was built adjoining the original factory with a capacity of seven kilns, giving the East Palestine Pottery three plants with 21 kilns, 14 in the city.

During the time the Sebrings were managing the original East Palestine Pottery, the brothers built the Ohio China Co. and began to make white ware, with O. C. Walker in charge.

By 1904, W. S. George had the controlling interest in the East Palestine Pottery.



The George family men stand in front of a pottery building (from left) William, Robert, Frank, John S. and Jack Campbell.



Photos courtesy of East Palestine Historical Society and Baird Stewart

The women and men in the dipping room pause in their busy work day in this photo taken January 1916. R. B. Stewart is standing in the center.

**Porter**  
Continued from page 2

Meanwhile, Jacob had gone to Reuben Rupert's home which was about 100 yards from the Flickingers. Rupert took one look at the gory scene in the sitting room and ran to the barn. Hurriedly saddling his horse, he set off in pursuit of Ervin, although he never caught up with him.

Joshua Roller was the town marshal and knew Ervin well, because both men had served in the same company during the Civil War. Joshua arrested Ervin about 9 o'clock that morning near Collin's saloon in Leetonia. "We went down the

street to James McNulty's tavern," Roller said, "From there I took him to the station. We took the 9:40 train to Columbiana. He made no resistance when I arrested him." Ervin would say then, and would continue to repeat it over and over again in the months ahead, that he was innocent and didn't know how his children had died.

That afternoon Charles Snyder was called to the office of a local lawyer, Mr. Rohrbaugh. Snyder had known Ervin for five years and as a fellow carpenter had worked with him various building projects. "He wanted me to get his chest of tools," Snyder said, "And asked me to sell them at auction and give the proceeds to his wife. He talked about the

funeral which I supposed would take place the next day."

Dr. A. C. Yengling, a local physician and member of the county coroner's jury, pronounced the two children dead at 2 p.m. that afternoon. The funeral took place at the Columbiana Methodist Church.

A reporter from the Cleveland Leader interviewed Ervin in his jail cell in Warren a few days after the murders, and concluded, after Ervin continued to claim he had no idea how his children were killed, that "he is either an innocent man with an iron nerve to thus bear the shocking news coolly, or one of the most horrid and willful of murderers to thus coolly do the deed laid to his charge."

To be continued