

HOMESPUN CERAMICS: STICK SPATTER

By Virginia Larsen



Stick spatter was a common household earthenware in 19th century homes. Once a utilitarian ware, it is now considered a decorative art form.

The term “stick spatter” refers to ceramics that feature repetitive designs applied with a cut sponge mounted on the end of a stick to enable continual application on the same piece. They include hand-painted decoration along with the cut sponge designs.

It is helpful to note the influence by its processor, spatter ware (“true spatter”), an earlier ware decorated with more random spattering of pigment created by ie. rubbing fingers across brush bristles.

Another related ware is spongeware, created by an all over application of paint by sponge without any particular design.

The popularity of these two forms led to the creation of open spaces which left room for stamping cut sponge patterns. The number of designs and patterns of application appears to be endless, limited only by the decorator's imagination.

Stick Spatter was exported from England and Europe to all parts of the world and proved to be especially appealing to the Pennsylvania Dutch due to its bright colors and fanciful hand done patterns which included leaves, flowers (rosettes) and geometric shapes.

Some makers include Staffordshire and Baker & Co. (England), Maastricht and Petrous Ragout (Holland), Wallerfangen and Villeroy & Boch (Germany), Manufacture Imperiale (Belgium), as well as Willets (Trenton NJ) and Mayer (Pennsylvania) of the U.S..

It was considered "untutored decoration". One ad called it "suitable for the country trade". In Canada it dominated the market for half a century.

Names were given to patterns such as "Virginia", "Camelia", "Adam's Rose", "Plum", and the "Bullseye". And all manner of forms were created for everyday use, from covered serving dishes to egg cups.

Professor Cornelius Weygandt, an expert on the Pennsylvania Dutch and their possessions, once wrote, “Come and see my spatter, all of it, in the Dutch cupboard in my back room, and you will see why I like it.”

Bibliography

Robacker, Earl F. “Stick spatter ware” Antiques Magazine, 551 Fifth Ave. New York, NY pp. 245-251 February 1971.

Greaser, Arlene and Paul, Homespun Ceramics, Wallace Homestead Book Co., Des Moines, IA, 1973.

Robacker, Earl F. and Ada F., Spatterware and Sponge, A.S. Barnes and Co., Cranbury, New Jersey, 1978.

Kelly, Henry and Kowalski, Arnold and Dorothy, Spongeware 1835-1935, Schiffer Pub. Ltd., Atglen, PA., 2001.

Graber, Sharon, “The Art of Stick Spatter”, Country Living Magazine, Hearst Communications, pp. 38-40, September 2005.