

## The Cookeville Pottery

As a young man, Arnold Lacy worked briefly for the Harley Pottery Company (later named the Nashville Pottery Company), the Paducah (Kentucky) Pottery Company, and the Bower Pottery in Los Angeles, California.

Upon returning to Tennessee about 1921 or 1922, he became a bricklayer. About 1930 he formed a partnership with Oliver Sherrill of Sparta, Tennessee. In July, 1936, Sherrill's brother-in-law, Wat Bockman, who operated a pottery in Los Angeles, came to Tennessee for a visit and talked to Oliver and Arnold about starting a pottery in Tennessee. Arnold wrote Jackson, "We've been figuring on the pottery for a long time, but I wouldn't think of quitting the contracting business until we had the other making good." That same month, they went to Smithville to look at a pottery and, by September, had construction under way for the Cookeville Pottery Company on the "new highway."

For the next three years, Arnold's father, William Woolsey Lacy, played an active part in planning and building the pottery plant and making and selling the ware, at least as much as his declining health would permit. Sometimes he worked night and day, even though he was in his 70's. As WW's wife, Martha Jane, died early in 1936, perhaps the hard work for the pottery was good therapy for WW and Arnold.

In an early letter to Jackson, Arnold reported that, "Mr. Bockman says he will give us all the information and advice we need and papa has had several years of experience."

Construction of the pottery had to be slow, as Arnold and Oliver couldn't give up their contracting business. WW did much of the work. By December 21, the first kiln of ware had been "burned." WW wrote Jackson that the ware was real nice; Arnold said it didn't turn out as good as they had hoped for, but, "Some of it is pretty fair."

The *Nashville Banner* reported that the first baking had about 1,300 pieces, both hand and machine made. (WW said it was all made by hand.) Levi Lafever did much of the hand work on an old-fashioned kick wheel. The clay, they reported, came from Dripping Springs in Putnam County and west Tennessee.

The *Putnam County Herald* reported: "This plant of Arnold Lacy and Oliver Sherrill is a distinct addition to the manufacturing interests of Cookeville. Its owners are worthy gentlemen and they deserve success in this new venture."

Arnold wrote Jackson: "Pottery work is interesting all right and every one that visits our plant says, 'boys, you have the right thing.' and they would rather have it than anything to make money. But what we are wondering is, if we will starve to death listening to people boost us. So far the sales have been small."

The following month, they put in a glaze mill to grind the colors; during March, they burned kilns 2 and 3. They built a small warehouse in January, 1937.

## Cookeville Pottery (Contd)

In April, 1937, Arnold wrote: "We have had trouble with our clay cracking and warping in the kiln and have lost a lot that way, but the last kiln was better." In September, he wrote: "One day last week, we sold \$25."

In November, Mr. Bockman visited the pottery and was pleased with the way it was progressing. But Arnold wrote that month, "The pottery is a lot of worry and anxiety. No money and a lot of expense."

In December, Arnold wrote: "we've been trying to work down at the pottery, but it's almost impossible in such weather. The clay is all froze up both inside and outside the building. We're having a harder time than at any time during the depression. If things don't get better, looks like we will have to sell out or sell someone an interest."

In January, 1938, they bought a lot above the pottery, and in February, did some additional building. By March, the pottery was able to start up again. However, in November, Arnold wrote: "We just don't seem to make any money and we are not large enough to contact the big markets. If we can make it till next spring, I think we will be going good." That month, Arnold visited a large pottery in Atlanta.

In March, 1939, he reported: "Our pottery truck makes frequent trips to Nashville, Chattanooga, and Knoxville." In January, 1941, Lee Lacy bought Oliver Sherrill's share in the pottery and started working in the pottery. But, by summer, he had moved to Detroit and didn't return until after World War II had ended, about 1946.

In July, 1941, Arnold wrote: "William and Raymond (his sons) have run the pottery this summer while I was away and have done a good job. We have more tourist trade than we have ever had."

During the war, Arnold's wife, Frances, kept the office open and made retail sales. By 1943, William was in the Army, and by 1944, Raymond was in the Navy. Dudley Murray made the pottery ware during the war years.

Lee operated the pottery from 1946 to 1960 when an Urban Renewal project demanded the site of the pottery, forcing it to go out of business. At that time, the equipment was sold to the Nance Pottery Company in Murray, Kentucky.

At its peak production, the pottery employed two men firing the kiln, one grinding clay, one on the jigger wheel, one on the finishing wheel, and one on the turning wheel.

In addition to the people named previously, the following worked at the pottery at some time, either full-time or part-time: Boone Anderson, Alvin Lacy, George Dunn, Bill Turner, Harry Eldridge, Lyndon Nance, Nell Lacy, Ed Lacy, David Lacy, and Joe Lee Dyer (the on-the-road salesman.) Also, Riley Lafever, Eli Lafever, and George Hedgecough.