

#17 Pottery Factory

Long before the Fairport Biological Station opened in 1910, Fairport was known for another industry, namely pottery kilns. During the last quarter of the 19th century, Fairport was home to four or five pottery factories. The abundance of high-quality potter's clay in the vicinity of Fairport gave rise to pottery factories beginning as early as the 1850s and 1860s. Potters in Fairport primarily manufactured stoneware ceramics, such as jugs, jars, crocks, and other types of container vessels, which were used for storage of a wide variety of "wet" and "dry" goods. Due to the large number of pottery factories in Fairport, the town was affectionately known as "Jugtown".

The first potter, Elijah Sells, also served as Iowa Secretary of State from 1856-1863. The 1874 Plat Map of Muscatine County indicates that George F. Lee and Willian Thompson operated a pottery factory near this location. In 1876-1877, 67 percent (36 of 54) of the names in the Fairport Business Directory were engaged in the pottery business. By 1884, George Schmidt owned this property, and in March 1909 his widowed wife Anna sold 60 acres to the Fairview Land and Improvement Co. (Henry Umlandt owner and president). In May 1909, Umlandt (on behalf of several button company owners) sold the land to the US Government for construction of the biological research station. Several pottery manufacturing companies continued to operate in Fairport into the early 1900s. It is not clear if Mr. Schmidt participated in the pottery business, or if he was strictly in the farming business.

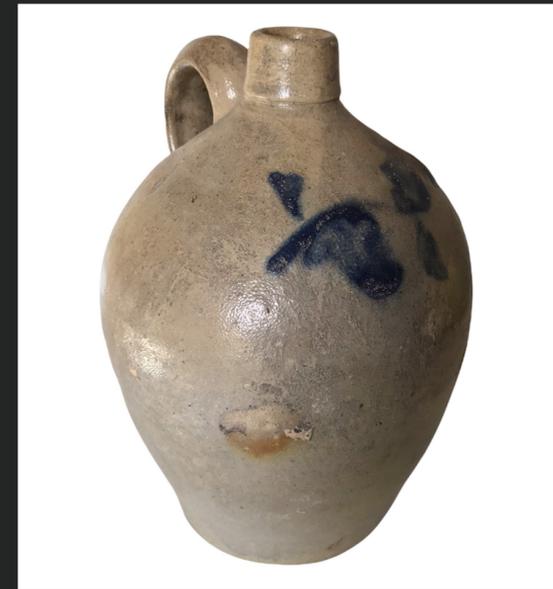
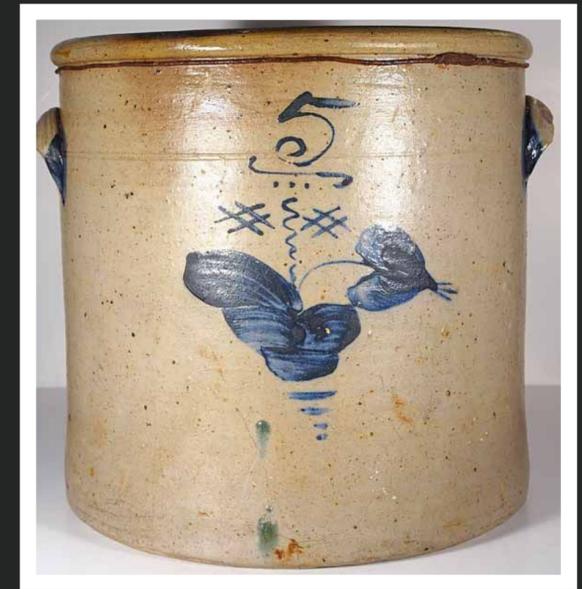
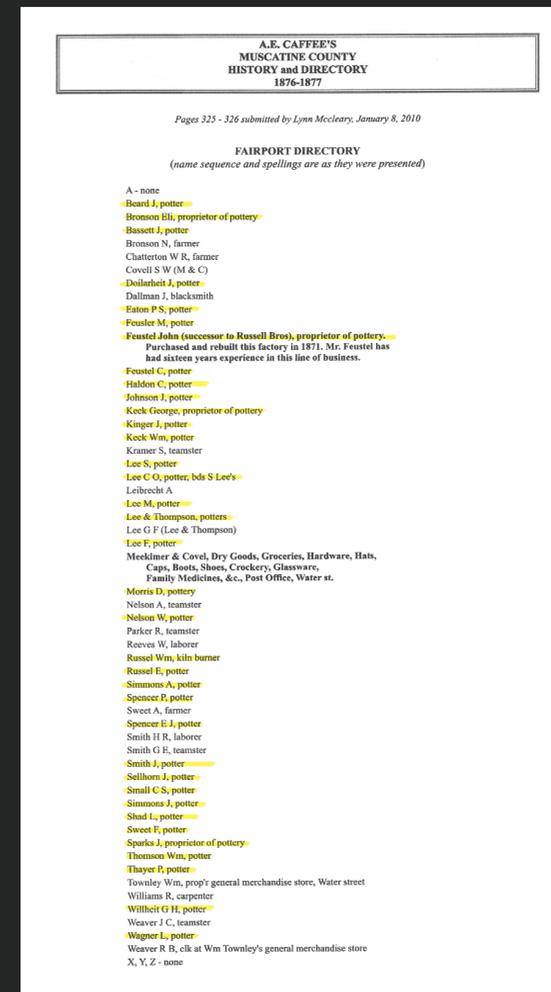


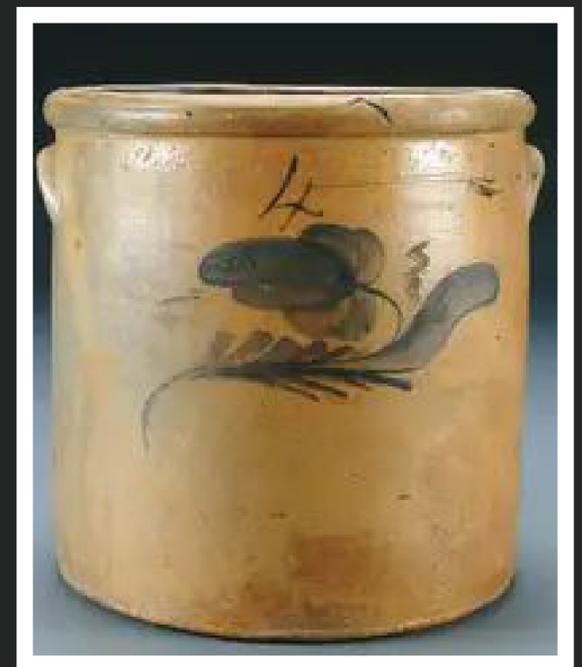
Photo of 19th/20th century stoneware vessel "jug" from Fairport.



Example of stoneware vessel "crock" from Fairport.



1876-1877 Muscatine County business directory, note high number of owners/ laborers in pottery industry.



Example of stoneware vessel "crock" from Fairport.



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