

MCCOY LIGHT – “A Market For Lamps”

By Mal Anderson

Not soooooo long ago, maybe 100 years or there about, a renaissance was taking place in the pottery world. Around the turn of the century into the 1900s, pottery manufacturers were considering that “new fangled thing” called electric. They were thinking how they could increase sales with appliances that used electricity and other items made from pottery for general use. Their main focus had transgressed from utilitarian ware in the 1800s, to the unfolding era of “art pottery” as early as 1900.

The Victorian Era influence in the USA was coming to a close with the death of Britain’s Queen Victoria in January of 1901. During her reign, society was withdrawn and privacy was foremost in everyone’s daily life. Homes had heavily draped windows and the furnishings were very ornate yet muted and somewhat dark in color. Everyday dress was also muted and plain in coloring with heavy stylish adornment. Homes had oil lamps or in the city, they also had lamps lit with coal gas.

Just imagine that depressing outlook on everyday life that had existed for all those years. In the beginning of the 1900s, society was more than ready for a change. Then, along came the “Arts and Crafts Movement” and the “Art Pottery” eras began.

With electricity becoming increasingly available to more and more homes and buildings, “Potters” began filling the need for electric lamps in every household and business. The Nelson McCoy Sanitary and Stoneware Company was no exception.

In the mid-1920s, Nelson McCoy Sr. was resolved to enter the electric lamp market as were other potteries especially in the Ohio area. The earliest found lamps made by McCoy were produced about 1925-26. It was a huge undertaking for McCoy with an opportunity for increased revenue in a basically different market. I’m sure that Nelson McCoy Sr. was overjoyed or at least enlightened to venture into it.

The marketing of this newly designed and sellable ware would possibly take a different approach than with regularly offered utilitarian pieces. It is thought that Nelson McCoy Sr., having participated as one of the potteries in forming the American Clay Products Company (1919-1926), a cooperative with eleven other potteries, was hesitant to jump into the lamp producing market until he saw more of a need where he could exploit this expanding use. In January of 1926, the ACPC was dissolved and each member pottery was again able to exclusively market their own ware.

During the many years since Nelson McCoy Sr. started his pottery business, and subsequently through the continued guidance of later Presidents, Nelson Melick and Nelson McCoy Jr., marketing was an extremely huge part of the business. These men had the foresight to place offices and representatives in many of the large cities throughout the country. They were told: “We have to and it’s your responsibility to Delight the Customer”. “If you can make them feel comfortable and they know what they’re getting, it will be easier to work with them later.

Representatives had to meet with and discuss the design with the customer prior to manufacturing so they would understand what they were getting. McCoy Salesmen and the wholesaler had to resolve issues before going into production. Discussions may have been focused on general design, color, weight, production time, costs, bulk discounts, quantity of the order, returns and exclusivity to name a few topics. Then, a small run of examples was made, reviewed and an agreement to move forward had to be considered by both sides. Salesmen reported to the main office in Roseville if they had a signed contract and production scheduling was arranged with a delivery date.

The eastern half of the country had the most populated areas and with that, housing and businesses were abundant as was the need for electric lighting. In the early days, McCoy

Pottery was mostly marketed from the Mississippi River eastward. St. Louis and Chicago were lucrative markets as were Boston, New York, Philadelphia and the Baltimore/ Washington area. As years passed, sales moved into the western states.

Electric lighting acceptance was expanding in the late teens and early twenties and Nelson McCoy Sr. had his sales people positioned to make pottery sales increase. 1926 saw one of the first early McCoy lamps marketed which was the V-2 Lamp. As time passed, sales of lamps were made to many small department stores in those cities mentioned. There was another movement underway that would have a large impact on McCoy's lamp sales.

In the early 1910s, Louis J Schwartz, a man born in Philadelphia but living in New York City had started his own lamp company. He was going to market lamps that he would construct from different acquired new parts and sell on the open market. Louis was a friend of Isidor Leviton who started his company in 1906 selling brass mantle tips for natural gas lighting. In 1910, Leviton designed and sold screw-in fixtures for Edison's Electric Lamps. Of course, Isidor and Louis' friendship produced a mutual goal in the mid-twenties. Isidor would sell the fixtures for lamps to Louis and then Louis would solicit and acquire the pottery for the bodies of lamps and would sell them after building completed lamps. (Note: Look for "Leviton" on old and new lamp sockets)

When discussing this with Nelson Jr. it was said that his father was approached by Louis Schwartz to make the pottery parts of the lamps he was marketing. Nelson Sr. agreed and a long relationship was started. Nelson Jr. said that he dealt with Louis' son Murray Schwartz while he was running the pottery long into the time when Mt. Clemens and Lancaster Colony were owners.



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124 W. 17th St., N. Y. C.
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This ongoing relationship with Louis Schwartz had its rewards. The Schwartz Co. marketed their lamps to the S.S. Kresge Co. (Later to become K-Mart) and the F.W. Woolworth Co. (Later to become Venator Corp. then still later Foot Locker). Can you imagine seeing **McCoy Lamps** on the shelves of these stores? That would be great!

Left is an example of a Louis J. Schwartz Company ad for some of their lamp products targeted to Jobbers and Distributors.

The following two listings, right and on the following page, are from the Nelson McCoy Pottery company and are lists of lamps that were made for Schwartz. Several are hard to identify with only the description given but a few are indeed very recognizable; Cowboy Boots, Auto, Rearing Horse and Fireplace for sure.

NO.	ITEM	PKD.
594	Panther	1
714	Panther	1
780	Cowboy Boots	2
1000	Round Base w/ Brocade Gold Round Base - Plain Round Base w/Sponging Gold	
1001	3 Leg Base w/Brocade Gold XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX 3 Leg Base w/Sponging Gold	3
1008	3 Leg Spindle w/Brocade Gold 3 Leg Spindle w/Sponging Gold 3 Leg Spindle -Plain	
1009	Spindle w/Brocade Gold Spindle w/Sponging Gold Spindle - Plain	
1010	Bow Tie - Gold	(3)
1012	Auto - Gold	(1)
1031	Rearing Horse - Gold	(2)

SCHWARTZ LAMPS		
NO.	ITEM	BKD
115	Dome 3	3 Doz.
121 or 2121	Dome w/Chromoveil	3
	Dome w/Brocade Gold	
	Dome w/Veiling Gold	
	Dome w/Sponging Gold	
124	Dome ^{Red}	3
125	Dome	3
126	Horse Shoe	3
127	Horse Shoe	3
454	Open Handle	2
455	Closed Handle	2
567	Ship	1
578	Fireplace	1
579	Horse	1
581	Swan	1
584	Pagoda Top	1
585	Pagoda Bottom	1
587	Chinese Base - Plain	2
1005	Chinese Base - W/Brocade Gold	2
588	Horse	1
589	Flower	1
1590	Cone - Plain	1½
1003	Done - W/Gold	2
592	Cone	1½
593	Gondola - Plain	1
1004	Gondola - w/Gold	1



As was told before, McCoy representatives were set up in various cities around the country so widespread sales added to the prosperity of McCoy's lamp sales. The L.J. Schwartz Co. sold thousands of McCoy Lamps to these two retailers and other companies. McCoy also marketed to the National Lamp Co. and Hamilton Lamp Co. from Chicago and as Nelson told me, "They sent train car loads down to Louisiana to a supermarket/retail chain" and also to a drugstore chain throughout the south. He wasn't sure of the names. He also said that "Most were either Blossomtime or Wild Rose Lamps". Where did they all go???

In closing, marketing was an essential part of the pottery business and when lamps became a part of what McCoy produced, huge efforts were extended to capitalize on this growing market and increase their bottom line of profits.

Years passed and through all of the years that McCoy was in business, lamps were always an integral part of what they made. Maybe not as important and large as their many other lines but a profitable one none the less. I keep thinking about those Blossomtime and Wild Rose Lamps sitting on shelves begging to be sold. **Oh well !!!!**

