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Lisa Hudgins

University of South Carolina - Columbia, hudgins@mailbox.sc.edu

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John Bartlam: America's First Porcelain Maker

By Lisa Hudgins

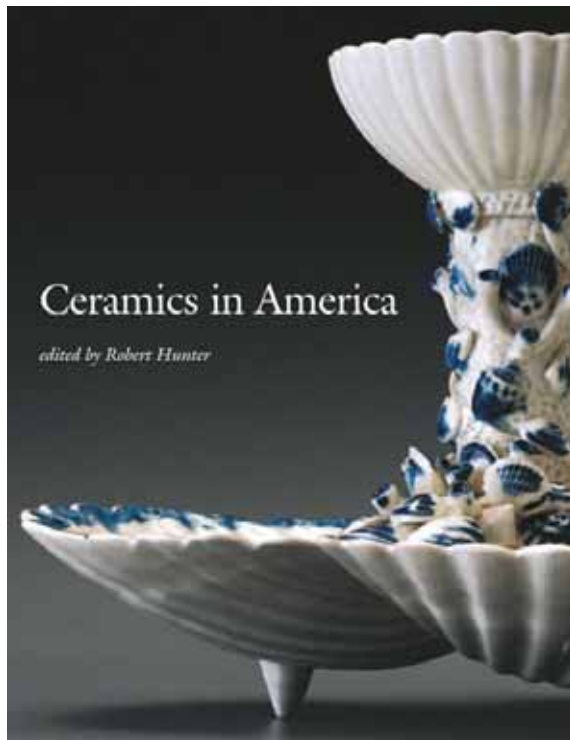


Fig. 1: Cover of "Ceramics in America 2007," edited by Robert Hunter.

Here in South Carolina, we are proud of our ceramic heritage. Whether it is Native American pottery, 16th century Spanish redware, or the alkaline-glazed wares of Edgefield, we are privileged to have had centuries of potters in our midst. Now, it appears that South Carolina is once again heralded for a "first" in clay.

John Bartlam, known to many as America's first creamware potter, is now being listed as the first American manufacturer of soft paste porcelain. Between 1763 and 1770, at his Cain Hoy pottery just north of Charleston, Bartlam created blue and white porcelain with delicate chinoiserie designs, native plants, and floral motifs that rivaled anything being produced in England during the same time period (Figs. 2 and 3). The porcelain works of Bonnin and Morris, long held as the "first" porcelain manufacturers, did not begin their production until 1770.

The discovery of Bartlam's porcelain achievement has recently been outlined in the 2007 edition of "Ceramics in America," edited by Robert Hunter (Fig. 1). Here Bartlam's story is told in four articles: "America's First Porcelain Manufacturer," by Robert Hunter; "John Bartlam's Porcelain at Cain Hoy, 1765-1770," by Dr. Stanley South of SCIAA; "John Bartlam's Porcelain at Cain Hoy: A Closer Look," by Lisa R.

Hudgins, also of SCIAA; and J. Victor Owen's analytical chapter on the "Geochemistry of High-Fired Bartlam Ceramics."

Bartlam's ceramic works on the Wando River were first

introduced to us in 1992 as a result of two expeditions carried out by Dr. Stanley South and his colleagues. The complete record of the discovery was later outlined in South's reports, published in 1993 and 2004, respectively. This recent publication, part of a nationally-acclaimed series published by the Chipstone Foundation, places John Bartlam's work in the context of American porcelain production, and once again points to South Carolina as a leader in the history of ceramics production.



Fig. 3: Blue and white soft paste porcelain from Cain Hoy.

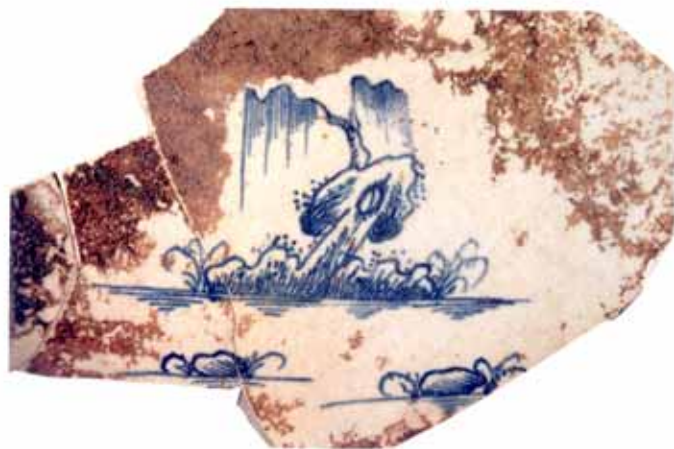


Fig. 2: Blue and white soft paste porcelain from Cain Hoy.