

Recent Finds

In the Fall issue of *Bottles and Extras* we reported that Delores Brawley had been the fortunate purchaser of a probable salesman's sample from the Winkle Terra Cotta Company of St. Louis, Missouri. Just how fortunate a purchase was not established until after the show, when in the process of researching the find we contacted Bob Corbett, a St. Louis Historical Society member who has interest in the company. He reported that the Historical Society does not have a single marked sample in its collection.

The piece of terra cotta is marked "THE WINKLE TERRA COTTA CO / ST. LOUIS, MO. / CENTURY BUILDING" and appears to be a sample of one of the building crowns for which the company was famous.

The following information comes from a pamphlet written by Mimi Stiritz for an exhibit held by the Sheldon Art Gallery in St. Louis from February to May, 2000. This exhibit, entitled "The Winkle Terra Cotta Co. (St. Louis) Architectural Art From The Ambassador and Comet Theatres From The Skyscraper To The Movie Palace", provided a detailed look at the history and work of the company:

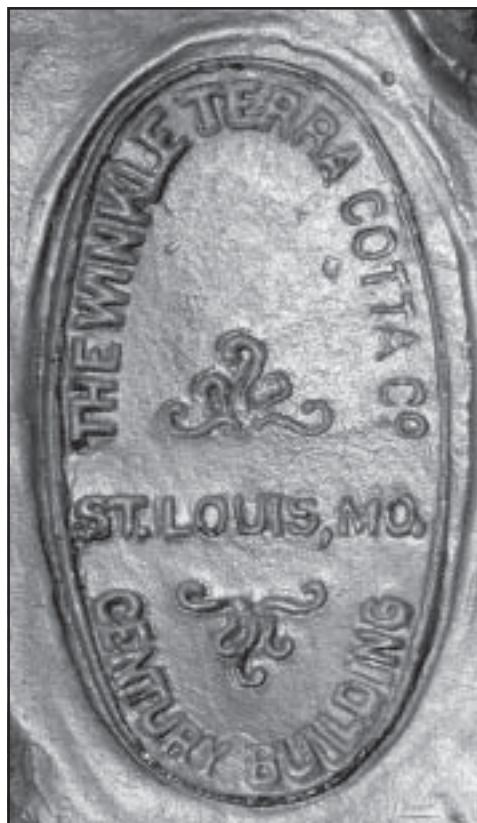
"The American architectural terra cotta industry was still in its formative state in 1882 when the Winkle Terra Cotta Co., St. Louis' first major manufacturer, began operation. Compared to brick, the manufacture of architectural terra cotta was far more complex and demanding. The industry required the expert talent of sculptors as well as moldmakers, draftsmen and ceramic chemists. Technicians experienced in the precision of drying and firing were also essential to the process. Efficient management was critical for meeting delivery schedules. In the past, many architects had been reluctant to use terra cotta because they believed it was inferior to stone. Some also held prejudice against a "dishonest" material which could imitate stone.

"Joseph Winkle (1837-1914), entered the industry armed with a

background few of the day could match. Trained as a potter in his native Staffordshire, England (a leading center of clay manufacturing), Winkle emigrated in 1857. He settled first in Ohio, then Pittsburgh where he opened a queensware pottery. St. Louis' booming fire-brick industry drew Winkle to the city by 1874. He began work at the Laclede Fire Brick Co. Headed by James Green, the Laclede Co. was located along Manchester Road in Cheltenham, the hub of the city's brick industry. The Cheltenham area boasted rich deposits of fine clay and offered convenient railroad service for shipping.

"Winkle was joined in the new company by partners Alexander Hewitt and Andrew A. Hewitt, his English-born brother-in-law and nephew. The family-managed firm was located in Cheltenham at 5739 Manchester Road. Early work consisted largely in filling orders for house trimming along with panels, cornices, and capitals for St. Louis' moderate-size commercial building of the late 1880s. The company's output expanded dramatically with the appearance of the tall office building. The display of Winkle's work on Louis Sullivan's Wainwright Building (1890-92) proved to be the catalyst for a new understanding of terra cotta's potential. Between 1890-1897, the business quadrupled..... Products were shipped to points throughout the Midwest and as far west as Texas and Colorado. Winkle terra cotta embellished most of St. Louis' tall brick office buildings as well as a variety of other building types."

Additional information regarding the Winkle Terra Cotta Company may be found at: <http://www.webster.edu/~corbette/dogtown/history/winkle-brick.html>.



Reference:

The Winkle Terra Cotta Co. (St. Louis) Architectural Art From The Ambassador & Comet Theatres From The Skyscraper To The Movie Palace, Mimi Stiritz.