

# WPA PRESS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE WISCONSIN POTTERY ASSOCIATION

PO BOX 46 MADISON, WI 53701-0046  
TEL 608 241 9138 FAX 608 241 8770  
WWW.WISCONSINPOTTERY.ORG



## A Letter from the *New Past* President

At our December business meeting it was decided that we will do away with the practice of requesting \$1 per meeting to cover the cost of renting the room. We are doing this at this time because it was felt that we have enough money in the budget to cover our costs and because it will simplify record keeping.

We once again voted to keep our meetings on the **2nd Tuesday** of each month. A schedule of meetings will be printed in this newsletter and we're encouraging everyone to put them in your calendar now so that you'll be sure and remember to join us.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you all for making my year as President of the WPA a most successful and enjoyable one. As the world's most nervous public speaker I won't miss dealing with the jitters as we conducted the business portion of our meetings. My fears were unwarranted of course as everyone has been so helpful and forthcoming that it has made my job an easy one. I would especially like to thank Kari Kenefick, our Vice President in 2000, who is tak-

ing over this month as the new President of the WPA. She will undoubtedly do a terrific job for us in 2001. On behalf of the Executive Committee I would like to wish everyone a happy holiday season and a New Year filled with "great pottery finds".

- Barb Huhn, *WPA Ex-President*

### In This Issue of the *Press*:

- WPA 2001 Schedule
- Getting to Know WPA Member Steve Dana
- Camark Pottery by Nicol Knappen
- From the Webmaster's Desk by Tim Zinkgraf
- Remembering WPA Member Dave Auclair
- In Memoriam: Marion John Nelson

## 2001 WPA Calendar

- January 9** - Purinton Pottery by Ellen and Jim Tyne
- February 13** - To Be Announced
- March 13** - Weller Pottery by Chris Swart
- April 10** - Pickard Pottery by Gloria Groh
- May 8** - Tour of an Arts & Crafts House
- June 12** - Oral History Update ~~at the Picnic~~
- July 10** - WPA Picnic
- August 25** - Annual WPA Exhibit and Sale
- September 11** - History on Pauline & other Edgerton Pottery
- October 9** - Contemporary Native American Pottery by Ervin Bublitz
- November 13** - Galena Pottery (or Blue & White) by Bill Engel (to be confirmed)
- December 4** - WPA Holiday Party (the *first* Tuesday in December)

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*Note: WPA meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month (except July, August and December) at the Shorewood Community Center.*

## Getting to Know WPA Member Steve Dana

Steve Dana is a relatively new member of the WPA, having joined the club fairly recently. Although a new club member, Steve has quickly established himself as a thoughtful and educated pottery aficionado. Steve recently took a little time to talk about what he collects, why he collects and what got him interested in the business of collecting.

When asked about what got him started collecting, Steve admits to being a history buff, both as a hobbyist and in the formal sense – he has a degree in history. In his words, Steve has long been “interested in old things”. Although he enjoyed attending auctions regularly 25 years ago, collecting old books and such, Steve says that he wasn’t very interested in pottery at that time. There was a long intervening period where Steve did almost no collecting, instead spending time raising a son and daughter. He does confess to an appreciation for ceramics in his early years though, having taken a ceramics elective in junior high school. And there were a few cherished pieces of art pottery in his family; Steve inherited a piece from his parents that he later learned was Roseville Pottery.

When asked if he sells as well as buying pottery, Steve admits to doing a little of both, especially using eBay. In fact it sounds as though Steve knows his way around this popular auction website pretty well (in fact, Steve used the word “obsession” when talking about his pottery collecting on eBay). In our conversation it was apparent that Steve has learned to use eBay as an

educational tool, gaining knowledge of values and what things sell for, at least in the electronic, worldwide auction scene. He uses the web to find particular pieces and has learned to watch for the good prices that sometimes occur online. When asked his opinion of prices on eBay Steve says that he thinks they are lower than in malls – perhaps the sellers on eBay deal in larger volumes (he mentioned about a dealer that had 800 auctions at eBay at one time) and more specifically with pottery. Steve notes that a nice piece in a mall might be the only good pottery that dealer has, thus they tend to ask a fairly high price. As an example Steve mentioned a lovely, although rather damaged piece of Pauline he recently found, filled with marbles, in an antique mall. The seller was reluctant to part with the piece (until Steve offered a price that she couldn’t refuse).

Since Steve frequently uses eBay, I asked him if he’d had any bad experiences with pieces bought via the online auction company. He says that he has returned three pieces – including the most expensive thing he’s bought. These returns have all gone successfully. However, Steve noted with some scrutiny that twice when he has won auctions the seller has notified him that the pieces broke during packing – he thinks it is fairly obvious that the seller had a better offer and opted to sell to someone outside of the auction, although Steve had the winning bid. But no complaint from Mr. Dana about how the popular auction site is run, or about the majority of his experiences there.

When not collecting pottery,

Steve works as the purchasing manager for the Watertown, WI hospital. So we are safe in suspecting that he has some insider information on purchasing efficiently. He probably does online searches for his job!

We talked a bit about what types of pottery Steve fancies – he admits to pursuing some “obscure” types of pottery, such as Clifton and Mountainside (made in New Jersey). A natural question then is how did he learn about these lesser known potteries? Due to his interest in old books, Steve bought a box of old collectors books at an auction – one of them was a 1970s Kovels edition – from it he read and learned about the various potteries. In addition his searches on eBay have also helped to gather information on potteries.

In addition to Clifton Steve is interested in Hull House, some Eugene Deutsch pieces, and Van Briggie. He likes Arts and Crafts pottery (he is a matte finish fan) and some southern pieces. We discussed Van Briggie briefly; Steve noted that although Van Briggie is still being produced, some of even the recent handthrown pieces are very collectible. Overall Steve favors hand-built pieces from the smaller potteries and mentioned Sheier, Volkmar and Jervis as other potteries he is interested in.

Steve made an interesting observation on collecting pottery that is 40–60 years old. He noted that the stuff is quite fragile, so if it is still around it’s because someone has taken good care of it, valued and treasured it.

Steve has a talent other than collecting pottery – he is a volleyball

player of considerable talent. His coed team has won their league for the past nine years. Steve has played in the State Senior Olympics (that must be for players 25 and older – Steve assured me that he was one of the younger members) where his team spiked their way to a first place finish. He has also played in the National tournament. When asked what it takes to get to the U.S. Nationals for volleyball, Steve noted that “you buy your way in” but he is most certainly being modest. That or he has lots more money than we might have guessed.

-Kari Kenefick, Editor, WPA Press

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### Asking the WPA for Pottery Values?

One of the goals of the Wisconsin Pottery Association is to educate the public about pottery and one part of that education is to estimate pottery values. We get many requests for pottery values on the WPA website and we try our best to give an idea of the price range of a piece. We can't give a definitive answer because the market place changes, and reference books may not be available to the person trying to provide the appraisal, or may not be available at all the piece in question.

Remember that this is a volunteer organization. We volunteer our time and resources to the organization. If you put some time into describing and getting pictures of your pottery, chances are far better that we can estimate the value. To give you an answer, we need you to educate us

about your piece. If you do the following, you'll increase the chances of us being able to place a value on your piece or to give you more background.

#### 1. Send us a picture!

A picture is worth a thousand words! Many times we can identify a piece by just looking at it because of the distinctive style of many potteries and pottery lines. This also helps in identifying reproductions. Send us a picture of the front and the back, if they are dramatically different. Also send us a picture of the bottom. The bottom of the piece can give a lot of clues about the pottery and the quality of the piece. When sending pictures, use the JPEG or JPG format and try to keep the photo size under 200KB.

#### 2. Accurately Describe the Piece

If you can't send a picture, then you need to give a *very* detailed description of the piece. Saying “I have a white Haeger vase #207” makes it unlikely that a value can be found. Start by answering the following questions: How tall? How wide? Vase or bowl? Color of the clay (if visible)? How is it glazed? Matte or glossy finish? Any patterns or objects (flowers, birds)? Is the pattern painted on under the glaze or over the glaze? Is the pattern molded into the piece, or incised into the piece? Is the bottom flat, indented or grounded? Any marks or numbers? Even with a number, it might be hard to identify a piece. Many potteries used the same number on dramatically different pieces. Sometime value books don't list prices by numbers, which means we would have to search the whole book for that number.

#### 3. What do you know about the piece?

If you got that Roseville vase from your grandmother and she had it back in the 50's, then we probably don't have to worry about reproductions. If, however, you found the piece at an antique mall and it was labeled Roseville, then it might raise doubts – especially without a picture. What part of the country did the piece come from? Any information that you can give can be helpful.

So you've done all of the above, does that guarantee that we'll be able to identify and value your piece? Unfortunately, not. Sometimes you just need to hold a piece to give it a value or to figure out what it is. Even at our monthly meeting, some pieces stump every member. If you don't have a picture, it will depend on the pottery. For the more commonly collected potteries like Roseville or Weller, there are several reference books and many people with knowledge of it. For pottery like Haeger, Abingdon or hyalyn, they made hundreds of different items and there may be few reference books and few members who actively collect them. Again, remember that we are a volunteer organization and can many times provide a lot of information that is not available anywhere online, but we don't know everything.

- Tim Zinkgraf - Webmaster  
Wisconsin Pottery Association  
[www.wisconsinpottery.org](http://www.wisconsinpottery.org)



Tim Zinkgraf demonstrates the logo for Potter's Field Pottery, one of his recent finds (left) and premieres the new logo of the Wisconsin Pottery Association (right), as designed by Brian Huebert.

### **What I learned as WPA's Webmaster (Or How the WPA's Website Got a New Logo)**

The best part of being the Webmaster for the WPA is that I get people asking me questions all the time. The worst part of being the Webmaster is that I get people asking me questions all the time! After all, how many times can you answer a question about the value of a "white piece of Haeger Pottery"? Now, lest you think I am disparaging Haeger, one of my favorite pieces is an early Haeger. But since I don't have a book to look up the values and I collect so little of it, it's a lot of work to come up with a value on something that usually ends up under \$20. Also, I don't always learn that much from all the work. (See related article on how to help us to find information for you.)

But I love a good mystery! The questions I enjoy the most are people asking for help in finding something. And when one person asks something, it seems others ask the same thing soon after. This summer someone emailed me to see if I

could help him find a plaque made by Trinity Pottery from Wisconsin. He was cleaning and broke the plaque, which was a present from his father to his mother and had a lot of sentimental value. I was able to track down the pottery's telephone number and several stores that sold it. He contacted the pottery and was able to get a replacement. Less than a month later, a woman wrote me looking for Trinity Pottery. Her mother died and one of her prized possessions was a Trinity plaque. This woman wished to buy some more so all of her brothers and sisters could have one.

In the fall, two people asked for help finding replacements for some mixing bowls and some cookware on the same day. At first I didn't think they were related but eventually found out after a couple of emails back and forth that they were both talking about the Friendship Pottery from Roseville, Ohio. The first person to ask only knew it was from Roseville and had "FP" on it. I checked my reference books and came up with Friendship Pottery. The reference book mentioned that they had two plants in

Roseville. Then I started searching the web for the pottery. I found shops that sold it but I wasn't able to find a web-site for the pottery. I couldn't find the pottery in yellow page directories, but I could find the probable addresses and phone numbers of the owners in Zanesville, which is 20 miles away. Then I found an article from a newspaper that mentioned that one of the factories was destroyed in a fire in 1996. Since it was one of the two factories, maybe the other one was still in business, so I contacted the Zanesville Chamber of Commerce. The next day, I found out that the fire destroyed the entire business.

In November, I found out all about "Potter's Field". I got a message from a woman who was trying to find a Wisconsin Pottery called "Potter's Field" because she had a vase she really liked and wanted to purchase another. I started doing searches on the term "Potter's Field" and kept getting hundreds of sites. It was making it very difficult to find this pottery, so I started looking at some of the sites. I never knew that the term, "Potters Field" meant a cemetery for the poor or

the unknown. I found that it came from the Gospel of St. Matthew (27:3-8) where the silver that Judas received from betraying Jesus was used to purchase a field, from a potter, to bury strangers.

In one of my searches I came across what appeared to be an ad for "Potter's Field pottery". I emailed the webmaster, Brian Huebert, to find out if he could give me an address for the pottery. It turns out that the ad was a class project for a web design class. Brian decided to look at the Wisconsin Pottery Associations website. One night, Brian sent a logo that incorporated a vase of Pauline into the words "Wisconsin Pottery Association" replacing the "o" in Wisconsin. Brian did a great job, and you can expect to see it soon on the website.

Nice, but none of that got me any closer to finding Potter's Field pottery. After a few more emails back and forth, I found out the lady could barely make out "??k Creek" on the bottom of the vase. Oak Creek clicked into my mind instantly and I check the yellow pages and found it. It turns out to be a block away from my sister's house and I had passed by the place several times but never noticed it.

Finally, we get a lot of questions about our pottery. Members know we don't make pottery, we barely have time to collect it! But, people assume that we are a firm in Columbus known as Wisconsin Pottery. So I email back the firm's telephone number and address and we're all happy.

Firms mentioned in this article (accurate 12/2000):

Trinity Pottery, Inc.  
1824 Macauley Ave.  
Rice Lake WI 54868  
(715) 234-6408

Friendship Pottery (out of business)  
1365 Chamberlin St.  
Zanesville, OH 43701

Potters Field Stoneware  
8612 S Market Pl  
Oak Creek, WI 53154  
(414) 762-1085

Wisconsin Pottery  
1082 Park Avenue  
Columbus, WI 53925  
(920) 623-3406

- *Tim Zinkgraf* - Webmaster  
Wisconsin Pottery Association  
[www.wisconsinpottery.org](http://www.wisconsinpottery.org)

## Camark Pottery

The Camden Art Tile and Pottery Company was founded in the fall of 1926 in Camden, Arkansas, by Samuel "Jack" Carnes, John Lessell, Stephen Sebaugh and the Camden Chamber of Commerce. Factory production began in the summer of 1927.

John Lessell produced first designs of (Camark's) "Lessell-ware" in Ohio using Arkansas clays. A veteran of many pottery companies, his designs traveled with him as he moved from firm to firm. His Camark designs include Old English Rose (similar to Weller Marengo), Bronze (similar to Weller LaSa and Owen China Company Swastika Keramos). Other lines emulate J.B. Owens' Sudanese and Oppalesce lines. Lessell died suddenly in December 1926 while still in Ohio; after his death his wife and stepdaughter moved to Camden to do decorating for the firm until the end of 1927.

Other beginning employees included Stephen Sebaugh, who developed mono-, bi- and tri- chromate glazes. Sebaugh had worked with Lessell at other companies and understood the complexities of Lessell's luster glazes.

Designer Alfred Tetzschner was another early employee. He introduced a modernistic line in 1927 – this line included Cracko and Spano. Former Niloak hand-thrower Frank Long joined Camark in the spring of 1927. Former Muncie and Weller employee Boris Trifonoff came aboard sometime before 1930 and is credited with development of mottled, stippled and drip glazes.



Examples of some of the Camark Pottery that Nicol presented at the November 2000 WPA meeting (photos by Kari Kenefick).

Camark's early ware produced or designed by Lessell, a pioneer of the American Arts Pottery movement, is much sought after. Camark produced before 1935 is often associated with the Arts & Crafts movement, but this is tenuous at best. Matte glazes and simple wheel-thrown shapes reinforce this idea, but the early Camark designers undoubtedly considered their work as "modern."

About 25 early Camark shapes are similar or identical to products manufactured by RumRill and Red Wing. George Rumrill once distributed Camark and Niloak pottery through his Arkansas Clay Products company, circa 1930. Some Pfaltzgraff and Coors shapes emulate Camark as well. The similar catalogs of all these firms suggest a common source for the catalogs, if not the molds themselves.

Jack Carnes returned from European trips with wares that served as inspiration for new Camark products. For instance the Camark hanging cat is said to have French origins.

Ernest Lechner joined the Camden Arkansas pottery in 1939

to assist in the production of the bas-relief handpainted ware. From that point until the pottery's closing, Camark produced vases, decorative bowls and flower frogs, console sets, flower pots and some utility items such as teapots, cups and saucers, salt and peppers shakers, as well as decorative wall plaques.

Jack Carnes, one of the Camark Pottery founders, died in 1958. The company was sold to Mary Daniel in the early 1960s and remained in production sporadically until her death in 1983. She operated the company primarily as a retail store, using past inventory. While the pottery closed after Ms. Daniel's death, it was purchased and is presently owned by the Ashcroft family of Camden.

- Nicol Knappen, WPA Speaker, November 2000

### Remembering Dave Auclair

*In October of 2000 the Wisconsin Pottery Association lost a founding member and a good friend. Several members of the club agreed to share their memories of Dave – we thank them for their insights into his life and love of pottery.*

**From Tim Holthaus and Jim Petzold, reprinted with permission from the CAS Collector newsletter, October 2000:**

It is with much sadness that we report the passing of a person whom many of our members have known over their years of collecting. Dave Auclair passed away on October 13, 2000 in a Marshfield, Wisconsin hospital at the age of 59, following a long battle with cancer. Dave came to Madison from Detroit as a young man to attend college, and, like so many current Madisonians, decided to stay here and make it his home. His primary career, spanning thirty-five years, was a teacher of adolescents at the Mendota Mental Health Institute, a state institution.

But everyone who knew Dave realized immediately that the main

interest in his life was collecting pottery. He owned one of the largest and highest caliber Roseville Pottery collections in the nation and was recognized by his peers among that group as an expert in the field. His knowledge didn't begin and end with Roseville, however; he, in fact, knew something about almost every type of pottery ever made. His was a phenomenal intellect and his ability to remember details and history of thousands of pieces was truly amazing. He was the driving force in bringing the Wisconsin Pottery Association into being. He began it with simple get-togethers of a few people who had this common interest and from there, it bloomed into what it is today.

But collectors in our own association will remember Dave as having bought and sold some of the finest pieces in the Ceramics Art Studio inventory, including many one of a kind lunch hour pieces and a few from Betty Harrington's cache of originals. He had a vast knowledge of the Studio and the people who worked there and we often consulted with him for his recollections on details. His knowledge base was constructed over many years of setting up at flea markets and shows and talking to, literally, everyone who came by. That is, in fact, how we met him when he sold us our very first piece of literature from the Studio, the *1954 Catalog*. Along with it, he gave us a few stories about the local scene around the time the Studio was in operation, information he had gleaned probably from these very workers or their families who would speak to him as they looked over his wares. His was a gift of not only talking but also of listening. He obviously recognized that much was to be learned and his was a highly devel-

oped art in this regard. We all owe Dave a tremendous debt of gratitude for pointing us in this direction. He'll be missed most acutely in and around town and, we suspect, also in places that most of us have never heard of.

#### **From Jim Riordan and Barb Reed:**

One of my favorite memories was when Barb and I first went over to Dave's house to see his collection. This was maybe 8 years ago or so. Dave was always so enthusiastic about his collection, and generous about sharing his wealth of information, especially about Roseville. We went there with Chris Swart on two different occasions. Dave had five dogs then that he was very attached to. But beyond the dogs, the house seemed to be nothing but Roseville, oozing from any conceivable place, in every room that you entered, more Roseville. It was great! We were budding Roseville collectors then, and were just awestruck by what we saw. The visit whetted our appetite to learn more about Roseville and art pottery in general. Dave could tell you a story about any piece you asked him about, where he obtained it, how much he paid or bartered for it, he had amazing recall. He was very proud of his collection and rightfully so! We felt very privileged to have been invited to Dave's, a memory we will always cherish.

#### **One of Barb's favorite anecdotes involving Dave:**

Dave gave me a ride home from an estate sale and I invited him inside our house to see our art pottery. He looked around at our collection asked "What gives with all the Apples?" referring to a collec-

tion of Hull apple cookie jars that I had collected, then saw our collection of Roseville Clematis vases and said, "Nice cluster of Clematis", something that I thought we had quite a bit of so I felt a little slighted (keep in mind we hadn't visited Dave's house at this time). I then apologized for not having dusted recently, and Dave laughed heartily and said, "You haven't lived."

#### **From Betty and Dave Knutzen:**

Our stories about Dave are from his yearly pilgrimage to Zanesville, Ohio, his mecca. This was his annual July pilgrimage for at least 25 years. He saved his money all year for this event. He would take out a load of pottery to sell but bring back more as this was his annual Roseville buying frenzy of those pieces he still needed for his collection. He was in seventh heaven sitting beside his table of pots for sale outside his room at Clarabel's motel and pottery store; he talked pottery to every person who stopped to look at his wares. Then after sitting in the hot sun, he would dine with friends at his favorite pizza place. He claimed it had the best pizza in town. All evening and well into the night he would make the rounds of the other dealers set up in the motels talking Roseville and filling in his collection. On Friday he would spend all day at the big pottery show talking and buying. He never seemed to tire of looking at and talking about Roseville. He knew the pattern, shape number and the page it was on in the Roseville book for all the Roseville lines.

On Saturday he had the job of packing all his pottery for the return trip home. One year, rather than trust his old van, he borrowed

his mother's car. We helped him stuff his big purchase that year, a huge jardiniere and pedestal, into an already overloaded car. There was barely room for Dave to sit for the 12 hour drive. But he was very happy – he had enjoyed another great Zanesville experience.

Zanesville and the Pottery Lover's Convention will miss Dave's presence and will never be the same without his enthusiasm. That was Dave during his big week of the year.

#### **From Nicol Knappen:**

I FIRST MET Dave Auclair at the monthly antique show that used to be held on the first Sunday of the month at the Dane County Forum. Dave was always set up in a corner booth where it took him a long time to unpack because he was continually involved in conversations with people. His tables were jammed with ceramics, everything from garage-sale quality up to the finest Roseville and beyond. Everything was helter-skelter. Display was of little interest to him: it was the pottery that mattered.

Back in the early 90s, as editor of the *Journal of the American Art Pottery Association*, I used to make the rounds of local antique shows to pass out extra copies to dealers I thought might potentially become members. Dave didn't join right away (if at all), but he did read the issues I provided with great interest. In one issue I editorialized a need for regional pottery clubs. Although I didn't say it in print, I'd found the disorganization of the AAPA's national convention depressing, and realized

this was because everybody who was active in the organization lived in a different state. Regional clubs, I thought, could do a better job of hosting national events.

Local clubs could also, I reasoned, share information and research local pottery history, which was fast becoming lost. This must have made an impression on Dave, particularly as a Ceramic Arts fan, for shortly after I wrote this, Dave mentioned to me that he knew a number of people in the area who were interested in pottery. He suggested we get together sometime and I thought this was an excellent idea. Sure enough, he became the prime mover in asking people to meet one evening at Dave and Betty Knutzen's house to talk about starting a group. After the first couple of such meetings when we formally organized as a club, it was a natural that Dave become our first president.

AT THE RECEPTION held after Dave's funeral, I was lucky enough to sit at a table with a fellow who told me that he sold Dave his first two pieces of Roseville, some 20 or more years ago. He said that at that time Dave told him that he didn't know anything about Roseville, and that Dave had said, "I'll have to look into it."

Look into it he did, becoming one of the country's top authorities on Roseville pottery. His collection was truly astounding huge, of course, but more importantly it reflected his unerring sense of connoisseurship. He continually upgraded his collection, replacing specific

pieces of lesser quality with better examples in terms of glaze or mold. The pride of his collection was his Roseville "experimentals," the rarest of rare for Roseville collectors. I don't remember exactly how many he had when he died (the number was always changing), but it was probably more than anyone else in the country. Certainly he knew more about the experimentals than almost anyone else.

Dave was not just the founder of *our* institution, he was an institution himself. The way he held forth on pottery and the wheeling and dealing of same was well-celebrated. He was so much a fixture of our world that it's almost inconceivable that we won't run into him at meetings or shows. Never again will we hear his opinions on one piece or another, or hear about who bought what or who sold what and why they should or shouldn't have done it.

Why, some of us are asking, didn't we just keep a video camera handy whenever he was around? Those of us who knew him know it will be hard for future generations to understand just exactly what we've lost with Dave's passing.

## On the Life and Legacy of Dr. Marion John Nelson

by Tim Holthaus  
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The world of art history and historic preservation has lost a strident and gracious advocate with the passing of Dr. Marion John Nelson. His contributions in furthering the appreciation for a varied array of art objects and cultural heritage remains one of the most prominent of its kind in a field in which excellence itself is the standard. His command of detail in this field was matched only by his gift for sharing it effortlessly with all who would listen.

Many of our readers' first exposure to Dr. Nelson came in 1996 when he consulted with us on a presentation we asked him to deliver at our first convention (Ceramic Arts Studio). He spoke on the history and impact of the Ceramic Arts Studio with a focus on its chief designer, Betty Harrington. He had arranged to come to our home to photograph pieces which he'd use in his presentation. Having never met him, we presumed he'd be somewhat stuffy and dry. Not so. We were at the same time surprised and thrilled to learn that he was much more than just the professor emeritus who came by simply to gather historic details and photographs. On the contrary, he turned out to be one of the most delightful persons we had ever encountered. Beyond the facade of quiet dignity and competence, we detected a sly wit, a love for the bold and unusual, and a passion for life itself, unmatched even in persons of far fewer years.

As it turned out, his lecture was a great success, very comprehensive in its scope. His chosen topic was the evolution of the figure in human history from its very beginning to the present day. He wove a fascinating story, holding the audience, including Betty Harrington and her family, in rapt attention. In favorably contrasting her work with the many other figure designers through the millennia, he led us all, and most of all Betty herself, to more clearly see how art, and the total human effort to express ideas through it, transformed the world and continues to do so even today. We believe she viewed her accomplishments in a wholly different light after that presentation and we are eternally in his debt for letting Betty feel that while she was still with us.

But he was much more than just the world expert with a legendary command of detail and historical nuance. These traits were well-balanced with his exuberance for life itself. He was not what one might think of when conjuring up the idea of an elderly academic in the years past retirement. Indeed, his hobby was Life itself and he pursued it with gusto until the very end of it. He was able to meld seamlessly and effortlessly a public and private life on a stage that was filled with a world of fascinating players. He lived a life that many of us would envy - rich in knowledge and adventure; to our minds, a perfect combination. Those of us who knew him in his public and private lives were awed at the aplomb with which he kept them elegantly distinct, yet subliminally integrated into the fabric of his life. We feel privileged, indeed, to have known him and to have seen the world, in

all its aspects, through his eyes and we are grateful that we could introduce our fellow collectors to some part of this man's legacy. The knowledge we gained from him about art and history and life itself will remain with us always. For us, that is the true legacy of our friend, Dr. Marion Nelson. He shall be missed...enormously.

*- We asked our good friend and colleague, Nicol Knappen, to comment on Marion Nelson's passing. The three of us held Dr. Nelson as a mutual friend - and a very dear one. As a scholar of art pottery in his own right, Nicol can put into proper perspective the knowledge Marion left us with, a knowledge we might not have had it not been for some of the things he did for us and left us with.*

## Marion Nelson

by Nicol Knappen  
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Marion Nelson studied at the University of Minnesota, where he received his bachelors, masters and Ph.D., the latter in 1950. He had a long and distinguished career with two specialities: Scandinavian art and American art with concentration on art pottery, folk art, and the arts and crafts of the Scandinavians in America. He was the author of, or major contributor to more than a dozen books, and a contributor to many, many more. He curated or organized well over fifty exhibitions and was the recipient of numerous grants and honors, including being made a Knight in the Royal Order of St. Olaf by King Olav V of Norway. Nelson was professor emeritus of Art History at the University of Minnesota and Director Emeritus of Vesterheim, the Norwegian-American Museum of Decorah, Iowa.

But he is most know to pottery lovers as the author of the catalog that accompanied an exhibition he curated in 1988 at the University of Minnesota. Entitled *Art Pottery of the Midwest*, it ranks among the very best texts on American Art Pottery. In addition, the exhibit itself successfully blurred the relevance of Paul Evan's distinction between Art Pottery and industrial art ware. In the catalog Nelson wrote that

"Ultimately it appears to have been artistic merit that has determined whether or not a piece of decorative ceramics from the general period of the art pottery movement is art pottery. Since this is a value

judgment and therefore inappropriate as the basis for a definition, I am not distinguishing between art pottery and industrial art ware."

Thus he included - for the first time in a proper museum exhibition - pottery by firms like Haeger, Red Wing, Cliftwood and the Ceramic Arts Studio. Seen next to and in the context of the more celebrated pottery of firms like Owens, Wheatley and Rockwood, the "industrial art ware" could be appreciated and evaluated without prejudice. Indeed, to the viewer unfamiliar with pottery history, little distinction between the two kinds of ware would have been apparent.

Pottery scholarship - for want of a better word - has exploded in the last ten years. Even the books of the *Let-Me-Show-You-My-Collection* variety have value especially if one can remain open minded about the accuracy of the text. But a professional academic's work cannot be considered in the same context as these kinds of publications, they have to be compared to the work of their peers. With Marion Nelson, however, there are very few scholars - if indeed any - who could be considered his peer in this field.

In addition to the scrupulously researched and well-written texts, Marion's writing (and talks) on art pottery included critical and aesthetic evaluations, something lacking in most pottery scholarship. He could tell us why something appealed to us, why it deserved our attention, why it was 'good.' I remember with pleasure his comparison of two figurines of Native American girls, one by Cybis, one by Ceramic Arts Studio. In marked contrast to the Ceramic Arts figure,

he said, the thin and stylized Cybis girl looked like she couldn't paddle a canoe if her life depended on it.

My favorite memory of Marion dates to 1993, In Arkansas. As invited guests to an exhibition opening at the Old State House Museum, and as first time visitors to Little Rock, we were given a tour of that city by the curator, David Gifford. I remember well how Marion and I were tossed like a salad in the back of a limousine being driven furiously by David, who was on a tight schedule. Later after the reception, there was another whirlwind city-wide tour and a late dinner. Afterwards, David took us into the basement of the Old State House to look at the museum's recently acquired Hagen collection of Camark pottery, some of which had formed the basis of the exhibition. It was two in the morning and there we three were pulling pottery out of boxes, inspecting and commenting. Exhilarating as it was, I felt tired and disheveled, all the more so because I couldn't help noticing that Marion was fresh as a schoolboy, having a wonderful time.

Marion was unfailingly kind and generous to all of us interested in the history of American pottery. I was especially indebted to him for his encouragement and academic support, particularly at a time when it was essential to me. I am sorry beyond words that we will not have an opportunity to work together on a project we discussed. When it comes to fruition, it will be due in no small part to the inspiration his enthusiasm and integrity have imparted.

## A Few Final Notes

The contents and various submissions for this newsletter have made my job as editor a simple one this issue. **Thanks so much** to Tim Holthaus, Jim Petzold, Nicol Knappen, Jim Riordan, Barb Reed, Tim Zinkgraf, Betty and Dave Knutzen and Barb Huhn for the excellent content for this premier 2001 issue!

We all have our preferences for remembering close friends and those preferences are as varied as we are. My hope is that the letters regarding Dave Auclair and Marion Nelson in this issue would provide insights into these men for those of us that did not know them well. If you know of information that was omitted here, please let me know and we will certainly print it in a later issue of the *Press*.

As we go to *Press*, there is an exciting announcement: **Glenn Clark has agreed to be our Vice President for 2001!** I, as well as others, have promised to help Glenn with certain vice presidential duties, such as staffing the 2001 Exhibit and Sale with volunteers, as he is also our Show Manager for that event. We will make certain to not interfere with the excellent job Glenn always does as manager of our annual fundraiser.

Finally, I wish to thank Barb Huhn for her support as I learn the ropes and assume the duties of WPA President for the year 2001. As Barb Huhn calculates, she has been president for about 15 months now (Jim R. believed in early training [grin]) so it's high time I took over. Barb has been the model of patience, good communication and

efficiency – she will be a tough act to follow!

Thanks for your patience while I learn what does and does not require a motion or a vote for the next couple of meetings. Heck, it couldn't be as bad as trying to figure out what all those mystery pieces are!! That is the *real* challenge.

See you **January 9** at the **Shorewood Community Center!!**

- *Kari Kenefick, WPA President*

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**In Error**

*Please accept my sincere apologies for printing the incorrect date for the WPA Holiday Party in the October issue of the WPA Press. The date was correct in the July newsletter, but somehow was printed incorrectly in October. I've made every attempt to insert correct dates here, but would appreciate your comments if you notice an error.*

- *KBK*

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Your contributions to the *WPA Press* are welcome. Please submit them to:

Kari Kenefick  
5610 Old Middleton Rd., Apt. 2  
Madison, WI 53705

karken@chorus.net

