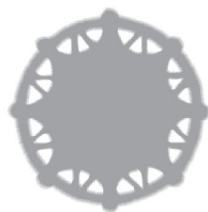


WHITE PINES POTTERY;
THE CONTINUING ARTS AND CRAFTS EXPERIMENT
by
Jane Perkins Claney

footnotes numbered as such : **20**
appear on page 13



ROBT EDWARDS

AMERICAN DECORATIVE ARTS, 1860-1960

POST OFFICE BOX 238

SWARTHMORE, PA 19081

(610) 543-3595

WWW.AMERICANDECORATIVEART.COM

© 2004 Robert Edwards



WHITE PINES POTTERY; the continuing arts and crafts experiment by Jane Perkins Claney

In a small dilapidated frame building fifty yards from the main house at White Pines, stands a potter's wheel, still coated with dried grey clay dust, stacks of three- and four-part plaster molds on the wide shelf beside it, and three pottery kilns, two small and one large, doors hanging on hinges now stiff with disuse.



The White Pines pottery logo as it appears on the paper label

The exterior of the White Pines pottery shed as it appeared in 1981



The interior of the White Pines pottery shed (1981) showing plaster slip molds stacked on shelves. The pottery wheel in the foreground was probably not used by the Whiteheads because it appears to be of a later date



Notes and letters written by Jane Byrd Whitehead (1861-1955) 70 years ago bring the pottery back to life:

“Potters wheel going. Visited with R[alph]”; “fired little kiln”; “Father is overseeing the new kiln, which was so heavy & difficult to manage coming up from Saugerties that Carl had to lead his team home from Rock City . . .”; “The kiln is up - in the horse shed. It looks very fine & is going to be great fun because Father is taking an interest in it and will help me with the glazes.” 1

The long, breezy attic room of White Pines itself contains further evidence of a prolific and flourishing pottery. Pots in all stages are there: greenware and biscuit-fired ware, some partially decorated, some with glazes applied but not yet fired, and a multitude of glazed wares consisting mostly of vases, but including also objects for the table, such as pitchers and egg cups. Plain glazed pieces, displaying a profusion of colors and textures, predominate. There are also some glazed pieces with molded or underglaze decoration, and a few molded and incised ones with biscuit exteriors and glazed interiors. Most decorated pieces exhibit floral motifs, with eucalyptus leaves and pods, reminiscent of the Whitehead’s California home, being the favorite subject.

Surprisingly, these objects are not the remains of the Byrdcliffe Pottery, active c. 1907-1928 and described by Paul Evans in Art Potteries of the United States and in other sources,² but of the White Pines Pottery, heretofore unmentioned in the literature. The Whiteheads themselves were the makers of White Pines pottery.

ROBT EDWARDS

© 2004 Robert Edwards



Jane had begun ceramics lessons at the Byrdcliffe Pottery during the summer of 1913, and by 1915 the Whiteheads were already outfitting their own pottery. Despite the wealth of material evidence and surviving correspondence between members of the family, the reasons for their establishing a pottery separate from the Byrdcliffe enterprise are not clear. However, coming long after Byrdcliffe had become more of a Whitehead family compound than an Arts and Crafts colony, the act would probably not have been seen by the Whiteheads as a diffusion of community effort. Edith Penman and Elizabeth Rutgers Hardenburgh, whom the Whiteheads called “the Pottery Ladies,” ran the Byrdcliffe Pottery until 1923, with the help from time to time of Mabel Davison. According to a note in Jane Byrd Whitehead’s calendar, Zulma Steele took it over that year, operating it until at least 1928.



Greenware (unfired pottery) and bisque (fired but not glazed pottery) as it was found in the attic of White Pines in 1981.

The relationship between the White Pines and Byrdcliffe Potteries was never explicitly stated. The Whiteheads labeled their pottery “White Pines,” but Ralph gave his working address as the Byrdcliffe Pottery, according to the records of the American Ceramics Society, which he joined in 1917. Nevertheless, their products are easily distinguishable. White Pines pottery was slip-cast for the most part, although some pieces were wheel-thrown, and a few were handbuilt. Byrdcliffe pots were always handbuilt. The contemporary press said of them: “Misses Penman and Hardenburgh showed a number of their handbuilt pieces, which are ever interesting and show much appreciation of fine color, textures and form”; and, “The Misses Penman and Hardenberg [sic], whom many of us have watched as they built up one interesting shape after another at their pottery at Byrdcliffe in the Catskill mountains, exhibited a water jug and several bowls with colorful underglaze decorations.”³



Various White Pines pottery shapes decorated with applied leaves and flowers. The large vase is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is the largest size of pot known to survive although molds exist for larger pieces. Another example with a darker glaze is now in the Milwaukee Museum of Art. The hanging pot is now at the Woodstock Art Association. Both vessels exhibit versions of the “Byrdcliffe blue” glaze. These pieces are shown against one of Ralph Whitehead’s silk weavings.



Mat green Greuby-like glaze on a Byrdcliffe Pottery vessel.



The Byrdcliffe Pottery mark.

ROBT EDWARDS

© 2004 Robert Edwards



Byrdcliffe ceramics were marked with a pair of stylized wings, impressed, and sometimes with “Byrdcliffe” and/or “Penman” and “Hardenburgh” also impressed. White Pines pottery displays a variety of marks. One is an arrow and a single wing wither incised or applied with glaze. Sometimes the initials RRW, standing for Ralph Radcliffe-Whitehead, are included with the wing and arrow device.



The smaller White Pines Pottery paper label with glaze and shape numbers on the bottom of a little White Pines vase



Incised capital letters designate the clay body used, and painted numbers further identify the pots, which in some instances can be coordinated with Whitehead’s pottery record books and sales book.

Also a black and white paper label, comprising a circle with a stylized pine tree, remains on some of the pots. In addition, some pots have paper price labels or price labels or prices marked on the bottom.

Through evidence compiled from correspondence, Whitehead’s record books, and plans, photographs, and drawings remaining at White Pines, there unfolds a fascinating account of the couple’s working methods, the division of labor between them, their goals, both aesthetic and commercial, and the not inconsiderable role that pottery making played in their emotional lives.

The wing and arrow mark with Ralph Whitehead’s initials as it appears on a White Pines pot.



Jane Whitehead decorating a vase in the attic studio at White Pines



Ralph Whitehead finishing pottery in the attic studio. Apparently the glazing and decorations were done in the attic where all the glazing compounds, scales, and china paints were found in 1981

Jane’s first lessons were undoubtedly from Penman and Hardenburgh, but upon her return to California in the fall of 1913, she turned for instruction to the internationally



respected ceramist and teacher Frederick Hurten Rhead, who had established a pottery studio and school in Santa Barbara that year.

This large (15" high) vase incised with long leaves is marked with the Frederick Hurten Rhead pottery logo. It was owned by the Whitehead's and is now in a private collection



Jane's calendar entries record that she met with the Rheads the day after her arrival in California, and five days later she noted: "Carried to Pottery all biscuits." She must have transported her biscuit-fired pots from Woodstock to Santa Barbara, seeking specific help with glazes. Documents reveal business and social relationships between the Whiteheads and the Rheads as well, the Rheads having come to Christmas dinner in 1913, and in early January Jane noted, "R[alph] takes share in Pottery."

The following summer Jane worked again with Penman and Hardenburgh, and during August she attended ceramics classes at the University of Chicago. A calendar entry, "Whitford," on her first day of classes identifies her instructor as William G. Whitford, formerly of the Buffalo Pottery.

After Jane's return to Woodstock in late August, Ralph, whose interest in his wife's work heretofore could have been considered merely supportive, began to take an interest in pottery making himself. Jane wrote: "He has been helping me daily in the pottery work, & I am very grateful. I really think it must interest him a bit."⁴ Her speculation proved correct, for in January 1915 Ralph began to keep detailed records of his own work, and he wrote to his son, "Mother and I have burnt the pottery today. I think we can find out some of the processes of pottery in the next two months. But you cannot learn much about a craft like pottery unless you work at it daily for a couple of years. Anything else is merely amateurish!"⁵ With his fear of amateurishness, Ralph pursued mastery of the craft for the next decade.⁶ The last of his pottery record books was dated 1926.

Jane had studied all phases of pottery making, but from 1915 on, Ralph seems to have taken charge of technical problems. He acquired numerous treatises on the chemistry, physics, and engineering of ceramics, and he consulted with outside experts. He wrote to Jane in the fall of 1915 that he was going to New York for a few days "to try to get some information about pots, and how to glaze them. The biscuit firing goes alright but alas, as to glazes & what they will do & what can reasonably be attempted with them all is still to learn."⁷

ROBT EDWARDS

© 2004 Robert Edwards



One of Ralph's chief advisors was Jane's pottery instructor at the University of Chicago, William G. Whitford. During the fall and early winter of 1916-17 Whitehead hired Whitford as a corresponding consultant; Whitford was, at the time, studying Iowa clays at Iowa State College, Ames, "to determine their practicability as art pottery material . . ." Through Whitford's letters, we learn some of the technical problems Whitehead faced. Of great importance to Whitehead was finding a clay body that could hold water when fired to art pottery temperatures, which were generally low. The problem frustrated him, as numerous notations saying "exudes water" penciled on the sides and bottoms of pots attest. Whitford advised him to hire a clay expert to "do some prospecting and testing of your local clays, both English and American; one was called "Woodchuck Hollow" clay, which was probably local. Among other problems the Whitehead/Whitford correspondence dealt with were how and when to add flint or lime to the clay mixture, and kiln temperatures and kiln types for art pottery.⁸

Jane seems to have been the chief decorator and designer of White Pines pottery. There are references to her decorating pots for Ralph, and a notebook filled with sketches and notes in her handwriting show that she designed both the paper label and then wing and arrow mark. The wing and arrow, with distant birds in flight silhouetted in front of a sun at the horizon, was printed on Whitehead's books *Grass of the Desert* and *Pictures for Schools*, the third pamphlet in the "Arrows of the Dawn" series. The design was heavily symbolic to the Whiteheads; Jane occasionally signed letters with a single wing, standing for her middle name, but precisely what the rest of it meant to them is not known. Most importantly, Jane created some of the early White Pines shapes, throwing pots from which Ralph later casted. In October of 1915 he wrote of learning to make casts, adding, "So now I can make little pots as many as I want & shall begin today to accumulate a stack of them to fill the kiln & fire next week." The following week he wrote:

I have today stacked the kiln with vases to be bisquited; I have made about two dozen slip casts of your pots & shall fire them tomorrow, along with some little tiles for more experiments . . . I am quite charmed with some of your pots, [from] which I have made plaster moulds; seven of them. I think some of your pots are little poems.⁹

Dozens of these little vases were cast for use as glaze samples. The sloping sides were ideal for making the glazes run to create flambé effects such as is on this example.



ROBT EDWARDS

© 2004 Robert Edwards



Thus whatever was original of White Pines Pottery shapes can probably be ascribed to her. There were numerous small vases in fashionable shapes that we might today call Arts and Crafts style.

This pot has a shape reminiscent of Native American forms that were so popular among Arts and Crafts Movement designers



There is evidence also that the Whiteheads used Rhead blanks to glaze or decorate. A small pot bearing the impressed mark of the Rhead Pottery is finished with underglaze eucalyptus leaves, probably executed by Jane, and another Rhead vase appears to have been glazed by the Whiteheads, the word “first” being penciled on its side.

This vase has an underglaze decoration using the eucalyptus leaves so abundant around Arcady the Whiteheads’ California home.



A White Pines bisque wall pocket with molded eucalyptus leaves.

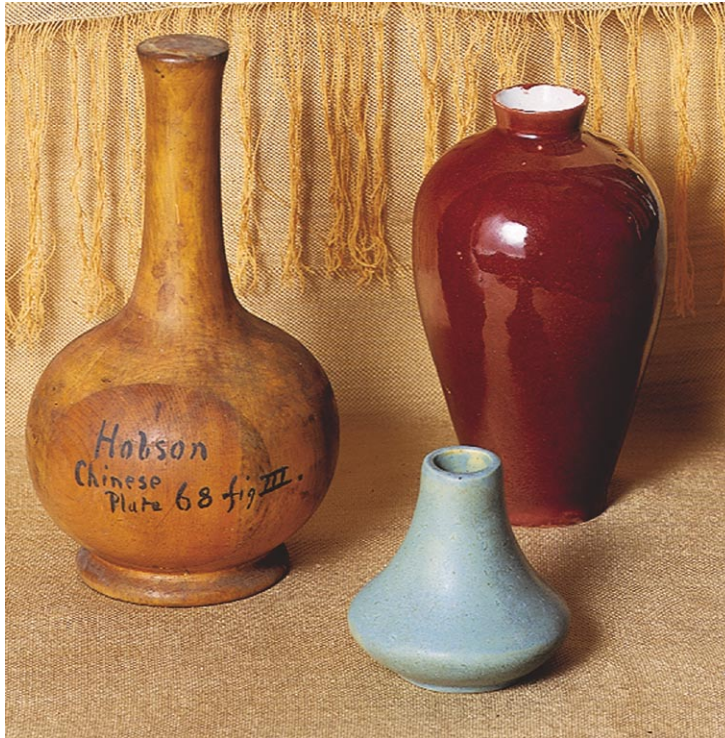


Shelves full of “firsts” remain in the attic at White Pines. Possibly the notation refers to the first attempt at firing a particular glaze. Also in a letter to Jane, dated October 19, 1915, Whitehead wrote: “I had a long letter from Rhead at last . . . He has sent some ‘wall pockets’ for you so he says.”¹⁰

A molded wall pocket with eucalyptus design found among the White Pines pots exhibits not only the same clay body as the pot bearing the Rhead Pottery mark, but the decoration was executed by a surer hand than that on most White Pines ware. It is fair to say that originality of shape was not an issue with the Whiteheads. In fact, the shape of many of White Pines vases and bowls was copied directly from antique Near Eastern and Far Eastern sources. Whitehead employed an interesting method of obtaining some of the shapes. He enlarged photographs taken directly from the pages



of Robert Lockhart Hobson's two-volume Chinese Pottery and Porcelain, published in 1915, and from Garrett Chatfield Pier's Pottery of the Near East (1909), then made outline drawings from the photographs, and templates from the drawings. From these he shaped wooden models, from which he formed plaster molds. Whitehead eschewed copying designs from the old pottery, but, following a time-honored tradition among art potters such as Jane's mentor Rhead, he freely copied Chinese shapes.



The wooden form shown to the left was used in the mold-making process. It is marked "Hobson Chinese plate 68,fig.III" referring to illustrations in Hobson's book, which was in Whitehead's library. The vase to the right is a fine example of a red glaze, which was among the most difficult to achieve because it turned to gray if the kiln was even slightly too hot. The center pot shows another variation of the "Byrdcliffe blue" mat glaze. These pots are shown against one of Ralph Whitehead's silk weavings

It is not known whether whitehead originated any glazes. In his notebooks, he referred to "Rhead's tin" or "Rhead's bright," "Whitford's matte" and "bright," and to many of Binns' glazes. Charles F. Binns headed the New York School of Clay Working and Ceramics at Alfred, and Whitehead owned a well-worn copy of his Ceramic Technology (1897). Not all the glaze formulae in the record books are identified by their originators, however, some may have been Whitehead's own. He experimented unceasingly. The pottery record books list about 3,000 pots fired, and well over a thousand body and glaze experiments in the form of 1 1/2" and 2 1/4" glazed ceramic tiles that filled drawers in the attic at White Pines.

Hundreds of these glaze sample tiles were found in the Attic of White Pines. In 1981 when Robert Edwards catalogued the contents of the house, He tacked wood rails along the walls of an attic room so that these tiles could be spread out and the full range of Whitehead's remarkable accomplishments could be properly studied





The clay body and glaze was recorded on the back of each tile.¹¹ A Santa Barbara newspaper review of a White Pines Pottery exhibition noted that the Whiteheads showed special interest in light sea-green matte glazes and in turquoise blue.

This reticulated vase is unique in the known White Pines production. The eucalyptus leaves have been painted with a dark blue underglaze and a mat "Byrdcliffe blue" glaze has been brushed over the entire pot



(The Byrdcliffe Pottery also produced a turquoise blue known as "Byrdcliffe blue.") The review also cited "some very good ones in red and orange, some of the reds being like the autumn coloring of the sumac, in the east."¹²

This White Pines vase is an extraordinary achievement. The exterior has a textured dark-red ("sumac") glaze that would have required a low kiln temperature, while the interior has a Byrdcliffe blue glaze that would not have the resulting gloss if it had been fired at the same low temperature as the red glaze



The pottery glazes thus displayed in the predominating Byrdcliffe colors found also in the furniture and silk weavings, and their description echoed the Whitehead practice of drawing artistic inspiration from materials indigenous to their environment.



In addition to the red described, Whitehead achieved a good sang de boeuf glaze.

An oxblood flambé glaze on a Hobson Chinese shape



Test tiles also display a highly successful aventurine glaze, a black luster, and a matte rose. Whitehead admired the products of the Paul Revere and Hampshire potteries, and indeed some White Pines glazes are similar to those produced by Hampshire. The Whitford correspondence reveals that Whitehead was also trying to produce the elusive underglaze crimson.

By early 1917 Jane was evaluating the White Pines Pottery in terms of commercial success or failure. She started the year with a pessimistic outlook: “Certainly the way we do things does not succeed, the furniture failed, the weaving failed, & now the pottery looks to me to be going to fail because Ralph won’t have an expert here to show him the way, & an outlet in New York to get rid of what he makes.”¹³ However, gloom was soon dispelled by the promise of promotional help from a friend in the advertising business. She expressed ambitious plans for the pottery:

I tackled Phillip [Chase] and made him “Promotor” for our exhibition in N.Y. in May. He is by way of being a business man, in the advertising trade in connection with his father’s business newspaper (he has two I believe) . . . I want to have our pottery - what is already made - shown in N.Y. this Spring before it is placed at a shop for sale. All that entails much work - work which cannot be done by correspondence. Phillip will do this professionally - see the gallery agent & do the advertising - attend to the exhibition - tote around the pots which I left at Anne Moore’s to shop & interest them in taking it for sale.”

At the same time she had no illusions about the financial potential of the pottery, adding, perhaps wistfully, “. . . you were quite right in what you said - the only way to make it pay is to have a brick kiln etc., but - we are too old darling, I’m afraid it must just be an amusement, if we had found this out 6 or 8 years ago, perhaps we might have made it go, but you know Father with all his shrewdness & intelligence is not practical.” Nevertheless she was able to say five days later, “Do you know I think our pottery is going to succeed.”¹⁴

The Whiteheads marketed their pottery across the country, in shops and at exhibitions in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and I, of course, Woodstock and Santa Barbara. They recorded sales that ranged from

ROBT EDWARDS

© 2004 Robert Edwards



modest to more than gratifying, considering especially that interest in ceramics had received “a blow during the war,” to quote Keramic Studio.¹⁵ In 1919 Jane wrote to her son Peter: “Were you ever told how very successful the pottery sale was? Two hundred and fifty pots sold - bringing \$450.00. Clearing \$300. Some pots sold for \$25, \$20 and \$15 a piece - and down to \$1. A few of the best judges of art in Santa Barbara said it was the best pottery made in America.¹⁶



The subtle variations in the mat blue glaze on this 15 inch White Pines vase are an indication of why the lavish praise offered by the Santa Barbara judges might not have been hyperbole.

The Whiteheads’ interest in ceramics appears to have remained active until about 1926; Ralph’s notebooks continue until that year, as do notations in Jane’s calendar about making pottery. For more than a decade, potting had clearly represented a bond between the couple, the activity seeming to be associated, at least in Jane’s mind, with contentment and good spirits. She wrote to her husband from France in 1915: “Dear! Tell me about the glazes. What fine pots we shall make, when we are together. Hold on and wait a while & don’t get discouraged. I’ll do what you can’t do, & you’ll do what I can’t do, & so we will evolve something worthwhile.” And to her son Peter, she wrote the preceding year, “As I look out of the window I see the mountain blue & cold opposite with brown woods at its base. It is beautiful & reminds me of old days when we spent the winter here. You can’t think how dear & nice father is, & how hard he is trying to help me with the pottery. It is quite like the old days.”¹⁷



If she sat in the built-in seat in the White Pines attic, Jane had a view such as this one painted by Zulma Steele. This seat had no other purpose than to provide the sitter with a vantagepoint for the contemplation of the vista below the house

ROBT EDWARDS

© 2004 Robert Edwards



The Whiteheads' attitude about their pottery was a quintessential expression of Arts and Crafts belief: they took pleasure and pride in producing useful and beautiful objects and sought validation for their efforts through sales and exhibits. But it was always the process that was of paramount importance to them, as Jane wrote to Peter: "I spent all morning doing pots up in the workroom. It is good to have a comfortable house & some hand work, I ask nothing better."¹⁸



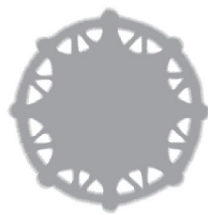


**JANE PERKINS CLANEY
HAS WRITTEN AND
LECTURED EXTENSIVELY
ON HISTORICAL
CERAMICS, FOCUSING
ESPECIALLY ON
CERAMICS IN AMERICA.**

**SHE HOLDS A PH.D.
IN AMERICAN
CIVILIZATION
FROM THE UNIVERSITY
OF PENNSYLVANIA.**

- 1** Jane Byrd Whitehead, *Calendar entries, 9 and 30 October 1914; Jane Byrd Whitehead, Letters to Peter or Ralph Radcliffe-Whitehead, Jr., 13 May and 3 June 1915.*
- 2** Whitehead had planned a pottery as part of Byrdcliffe from its inception. A pottery building had been built at the same time as other workshops, but according to an announcement of the Byrdcliffe Summer School in Handicraft, published by the Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston, ceramics was not on the roster for the opening season. Ralph Radcliffe-Whitehead, "A Plea for Manual Work," *Handicraft*, June 1903, p. 73. Nor did the Byrdcliffe billhead dated 1903 include pottery along with its other offerings of decorated furniture, metalwork, and hand-woven curtains and rugs. For more information on the Byrdcliffe Pottery, see also Ulysses G. Dietz, *The Newark Museum Collection of American Art Pottery* (Newark, NJ: The Newark Museum, 1984), pp. 22-23; Kirsten Hoving Keen, *American Art Pottery* (Wilmington, DE: Delaware Art Museum, 1978), pp. 58-59.
- 3** Maud M. Mason, "Exhibition of the New York Society of Ceramic Arts," *Keramic Studio*, May 1911, p. 8; "The Twenty-fourth Annual Exhibition of the New York Society of Ceramic Art," *Keramic Studio*, June 1922, p.22.
- 4** Jane Byrd Whitehead, *Letter to Ralph Whitehead, Jr., 19 November 1914.*
- 5** Ralph Radcliffe-Whitehead, *Letter to Ralph Whitehead, Jr., 19 January 1915.*
- 6** See Karen Evans Ulehla, ed., *The Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston, Exhibition Record 1897-1927* (Boston: Boston Public Library, 1981), p. 231.
- 7** Ralph Radcliffe-Whitehead, *Letter to Jane Byrd Whitehead, 30 October 1915.*
- 8** William G. Whitford, *Letters to Ralph Radcliffe-Whitehead, 13 November, 12 December, 1916, 5 January 1917.*
- 9** Ralph Radcliffe-Whitehead, *Letters to Jane Byrd Whitehead, 19 and 29 October 1915.*
- 10** Whitehead included in this letter a tantalizing fragment of gossip. Referring to the letter from Rhead, he said: "They are in the same unhappy state, & I should think it could end by his going away. She is still up on the hill & the neighbors are scandalized." Rhead and his first wife did divorce, and in 1917 Rhead married Lois Whitcomb, one of his assistants at the pottery.
- 11** Whitehead admired Jane's cousin Henry Chapman Mercer's tiles, and those designed by his lifelong friend Halsey Ricardo for William De Morgan, but there is no evidence that the Whiteheads made tiles for anything other than glaze tests.
- 12** "White Pines Pottery is Placed on View," newspaper clipping from unidentified newspaper, 20 January 1920, n.p.
- 13** Jane Byrd Whitehead, *Letter to Ralph Radcliffe-Whitehead, Jr. 6 January 1917.*
- 14** Jane Byrd Whitehead, *Letters to Ralph Radcliffe-Whitehead, Jr. 6, 14 and 19 January 1917.* A letter from Chase to Ms. Whitehead dated January 17, 1917 notes that a representative of the Montross Gallery said, ". . . that it was very artistic but that they could not do anything for us because they handle the old Chinese pottery. The White Pines pottery resembles and is very much like the old Chinese so they said, and they also said that the public could not tell the difference. This I thought quite a compliment."
- 15** Editorial, *Keramic Studio*, June 1922, p. 19.
- 16** Jane Byrd Whitehead, *Letter to Peter Whitehead, 7 May 1919.*
- 17** Jane Byrd Whitehead, *Letter to Ralph Radcliffe-Whitehead, 25 October 1915*
- 18** Jane Byrd Whitehead, *Letter to Peter Whitehead, 13 January 1916.*

Robert Edwards assembled the information on the web site
AmericanDecorativeArt.com to share his interests.
Important figures like Jane and Ralph Whitehead of the
Byrdcliffe Arts and Crafts Colony and Will Price of Rose Valley
are featured. This site also explores the work of artists
and craftsmen like Daniel Pabst, Frank Furness, A. H. Davenport,
John Scott Bradstreet, Wharton Esherick, Max Kuehne,
Norman Arsenault, and many others who were active between
1860 and 1960.



ROBT EDWARDS

AMERICAN DECORATIVE ARTS, 1860-1960

POST OFFICE BOX 238
SWARTHMORE, PA 19081
(610) 543-3595

WWW.AMERICANDECORATIVEART.COM

© 2004 Robert Edwards