

RIGHT: Aerial view of the Tepco factory built in 1947 after a fire destroyed the original plant. Note the clay-filled train pulling up to the Tepco spur. BELOW: The batter-out (right) and the jiggerman at Tepco, ca. 1947. Each team "threw" about 200 dozen pieces a day.



nia series commemorated scenes of state history from the Spanish missions to the forty-niners. Keeping the spirit of Mark Twain alive, a Calaveras County hotel ordered custom tableware for the Celebrated Jumping Frog festivals, including a slip-cast frog whose gaping mouth held toothpicks. It is possible that Pagliero, a naturalized Westerner, was unaware of the tongue-in-cheek humor of some designs. For example, a guest at the White Log Tavern, finishing his plate of rare roast beef, might find himself staring down into a wagon train scene with the caption "Donner Party 1846."

Tepco outfitted Victor Bergeron with the original ware for his Polynesian-theme Trader Vic restaurants: the Samoan Fog Cutter, the Tiki, Scorpion and Hula bowls, the Kamaaina coconut cup and a Death's Head mug for hot rum.

Restaurants in the West are still serving on Tepcoware. Shelves at lunch counters and coffee shops are stacked with the thick, clunky white or tan dishes. The Tijuana Cafe in East Oakland has a complete Branding Iron set (brands on the rim spell out T-E-P-C-O), including a spectacular 16-inch, 3-compartment chuck wagon plate in which chiles rellenos, enchiladas, quesadillas and frijoles refritos are customarily served. And the funky-chic Royal Cafe, a few blocks from the original Tepco site, uses a colorful eclectic set. Local residents and former employees of the company have had Tepcoware in daily use for over 20 years. Others keep "working collections" of colorful plates on display until dinner time, when they earn their keep. A recent meal at the Selvins' included Zuni stew on Western Traveler plates, salad in Early California bowls and coffee in Oregonian Rose or Belfast Root Beer mugs.

Throughout World War II, Pagliero supplied china to ships' galleys of the United States Pacific fleet sailing from San Francisco. Each day 30,000 pieces emblazoned with blue ropes, flags and anchors, packed with redwood shavings in oak barrels, rolled down wooden ramps into Navy trucks.

By this time Pagliero owned two California clay mines—in Lone and in Livermore—a gold mine, a cattle ranch, a vineyard and a deposit of Nevada andalusite. The latter was used by Eddie and Tony (John's oldest son) in Pyramid Alloy,

1908 the brothers emigrated to California, where they both found work at Carnegie Brick and Faience in Livermore. The building supply trades were booming during the restoration of San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake.

In 1918 John Pagliero, who by this time was the superintendent of a porcelain casting plant, established Tepco in his backyard. He hired a two-man crew to dry-press porcelain in a hand-operated screw press. The ware was fired in two round 20-foot-high brick "bottle" kilns. The placer climbed a ladder with the ware balanced on his head to stack porcelain in the kiln's upper reaches. These bottle-shaped kilns were gas-fueled; air for combustion entered from below and vented upward in a strong draft which heated the ware evenly, then passed through a central bottleneck-shaped chimney stack.

By 1925, Pagliero had left his superintendent's job and moved Tepco to a site alongside the Santa Fe Railroad track. (When this first factory burned down in

1947, it was replaced by a 200- by 500-foot structure consisting of a low brick building for offices and a barrel-vaulted, reinforced-concrete production room.) He converted the existing building to a plaster shop for making molds and installed Pasquale Rosatti as master. Rosatti's early molds and the corresponding metal jigger tools produced exceedingly heavy, wide-rimmed china; when jiggered and dry, the ware had walls three-eighths of an inch thick. Later Rosatti made molds that turned out thinner, lighter ware with scalloped edges and narrow rims, as well as coupes (rimless plates and bowls). The quarter-inch walls were semitranslucent.

With these design changes, the dishes had a larger surface for the growing number of decorative patterns on the shop's palette. At one point Pagliero offered 25 airbrushed patterns and over 30 tissue transfers; underglaze decals with custom logos were also available. Many of the standard patterns were western in theme: Branding Iron, Wagon Wheel, Ox-Head and Western Traveler. An Early Califor-