

**Journal - Fall 2019 - Vol. 35, No. 4**

# FULPER'S GIFT BOX POTTERY



No. 047 Foliage Vase with a Blue Wistaria and Green Flambé glaze. The vase is shown with an original No. 047 gift box, which has the verse "Knowing that you're fond of flowers; And appreciate their beauty; I send this bowl for you to use; So consider this a duty."

The Fulper Pottery Company produced a highly popular art pottery line, originally called Vasekraft, for about twenty-five years (1909-1934).<sup>1</sup> Its long-term success was due not only to attractive forms and glazes, but arguably also to Fulper's innovative marketing strategies. One novel selling approach, introduced in 1915, used artistic gift boxes to package a wide assortment of affordable Vasekraft pottery.

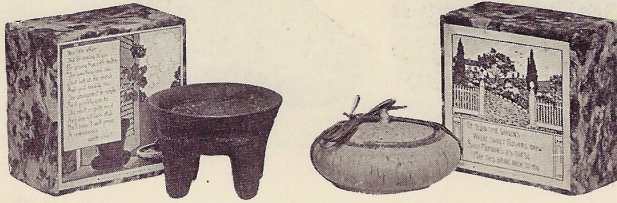
Called "Gift Thoughts in Texted Boxes," Fulper sold fifty-four products (model Nos. 01 to 054) in colorfully decorated boxes with images and verses pertinent to the forms.<sup>2</sup> For example, the box for the No. 08 Twig Stick depicts the vase with the verse "Made for one single blossom; This twig stick so slender; Bears a message of love; To you from the sender." Likewise, the box for the No. 027 Bowl and Scarab Flower Holder, which included instructions for Japanese flower arrangements, illustrates the pottery combination with the verse "Enclosed you'll find a bowl and insert; With instructions from Japan; To give the joy of flower arrangement; On the Oriental plan."

The Vasekraft pottery packaged in gift boxes has been commonly called the "Gift Box" forms.<sup>3</sup> They include vases, bowls, flower holders, coasters, candleholders, ashtrays, potpourri containers, and bulb jars (for growing a single flower

bulb). Other notable Gift Box forms are a cocktail mixer, a honeypot (in the shape of a beehive), an incense burner, a child's money bank (in the shape of a barrel), a Roman lamp, and a set of place card flower vases. These forms were produced with a variety of Fulper's famous mirrored, matte, and flambé glazes. Several types of dinnerware with a Rockingham glaze were also packaged in gift boxes, including pie plates, bean pots, a casserole, and a mayonnaise bowl. A few of the gift boxes with a bowl or bulb jar also contained Narcissus or Hyacinth flower bulbs. Curiously, several gift boxes were sold with only flower bulbs and did not include any Vasekraft pottery. Because

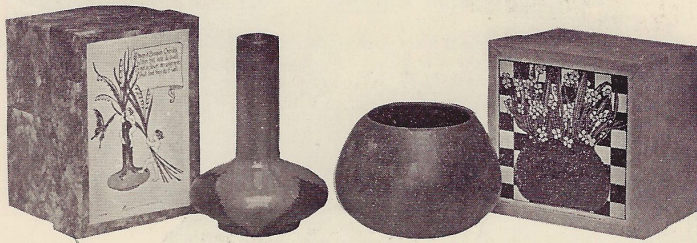


## GIFT THOUGHTS IN TEXTED BOXES



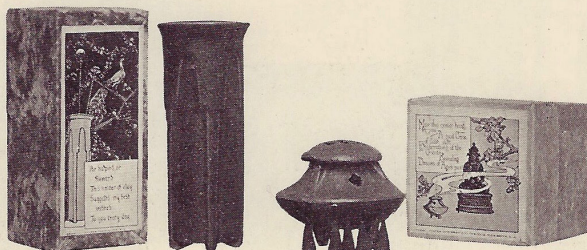
No. 100,048 Bulb Cup for use in bowl, with box, diameter  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches, verte antique glaze, \$1.00

No. 100,049 Pot Pourri Box and Contents with box, dia. 4 inches, blue wistaria, verte antique or mustard matte, \$1.00



No. 125,018 Blossom Cup, height  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches, with box, yellow, green or blue flambé, \$1.25

No. 110,047 Foliage Vase, dia.,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches with box, blue wistaria with green flambé, mustard matte with Chinese blue flambé or white matte with mahogany flambé, \$1.10

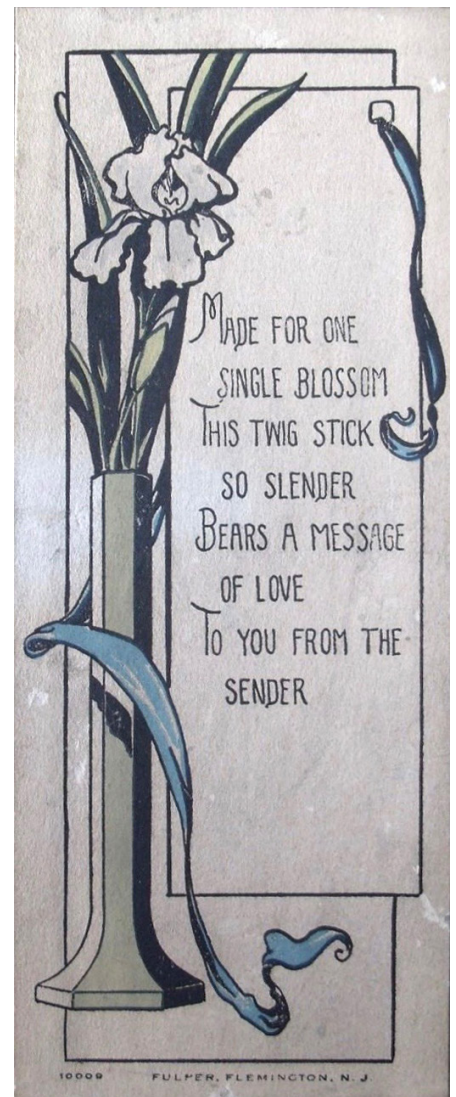


No. 125,046 Flower Vase or Hat pin Holder, height 6 inches, verte antique or mustard matte, \$1.25

No. 150,041 Incense Burner and 12 cubes with box, diameter  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches, mustard matte or mission matte, \$1.50



No. 08 Twig Stick with a Verte Antique glaze, No. 09 Twig Stick with a Mission Matte glaze, and a No. 010 Twig Stick with a Café au Lait glaze (left to right).



Label on an original gift box for the No. 08 Twig Stick.

A page from the 1916 Vasekraft catalog showing several of Fulper's gift boxes and associated pottery.

some boxes contained flower bulbs or dinnerware, only thirty-nine Vasekraft art pottery forms were packaged in the fifty-four gift boxes.

Many of the Gift Box forms were introduced for the Christmas shopping season of 1915.<sup>4</sup> By the time the 1916 Vasekraft catalog was issued (about mid-1916), the remaining Gift Box forms had been introduced and all gift boxes with flower bulbs had been discontinued.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the 1916 catalog showed 42 of the 54 gift boxes and their associated pottery.<sup>6</sup> The next Fulper catalog issued in late 1917 or early 1918 showed thirty-two Gift Box forms, but it did not show any gift boxes.





No. 012 Dip Stick with a Verte Antique glaze and an original No. 012 gift box, which has the verse "Do you know a burning candle; Writes a message in its smoke; This one breathes to you my greeting; Just as true as though it spoke." This form was designated No. 012 when packaged individually and No. 013 when boxed as a pair. Gift boxes containing the candleholders also included bayberry candles.

Thus, it is likely that all gift boxes were discontinued sometime in 1917. Although no longer marketed in gift boxes, many Gift Box forms were produced into the early 1920s.<sup>7</sup>

The Gift Box forms were given special model numbers with a "0" prefix that ranged from 01 to 054.<sup>8</sup> At least some of them were originally assigned standard Fulper model numbers, which were then changed to "Gift Box" model numbers in 1915.<sup>9</sup> Most forms retained their Gift Box model numbers in later years even when they were no longer sold in gift boxes.<sup>10</sup>

Besides the Gift Box forms, the Vasekraft pottery line in 1916 contained over two hundred other diverse products, including many bowls, vases, bookends, and



No. 028 Bulb Jar with a Blue Wistaria and Green Flambé glaze. Gift boxes containing this form were available with and without a Hyacinth bulb.



No. 042 Potpourri Jar with a Mulberry Flambé glaze and No. 049 Potpourri Box with a Verte Antique glaze. Gift boxes containing these forms also included potpourri.



No. 011 Foliage Vase and Nos. 016, 017, 018, and 019 Blossom Cups (left to right). All five vases were available with either a Yellow Flambé, Green Flambé, or Blue Flambé glaze. However, these glaze names were typically shorthand for more complex glaze combinations consisting of a flambé glaze over a different underlying glaze: "Yellow Flambé" consists of Mustard Matte with Brown or Yellow Flambé, "Green Flambé" consists of a light green matte with Green Flambé, and "Blue Flambé" consists of Powder Blue with Blue of the Sky Flambé.



No. 027 Bowl and Scarab Flower Holder, which were sold as a set in a single gift box. The bowl has a Verte Antique with Green Flambé glaze and the flower holder has a Verte Antique glaze. Four other bowl designs (Nos. 04, 032, 034, 035) and three other flower holders (Nos. 014, 015, 029) were sold individually in gift boxes.



No. 037 Place Card Flower Vases with a Green and White Flambé glaze. Gift boxes contained sets of either six or twelve vases and carried the verse "For a dinner most select; These place card vases are quite correct; I know you like all things that's new; Hence I'm sending these to you."

lamps. Their prices ranged from \$1.50 to \$8.00 for bowls, \$1.50 to \$25.00 for vases, \$2.00 to \$10.00 for bookends, and \$24.00 to \$75.00 for lamps.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, most Gift Box items were priced at \$0.75 to \$1.50.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Fulper's introduction of the Gift Box forms not only expanded their range of products, but also provided customers with more affordable types of Vasekraft pottery.

The packaging of small inexpensive products in attractive boxes with relevant illustrations and verses was a new marketing strategy for the gift trade in 1915.<sup>13</sup> The concept apparently originated in 1914 when the Rust Craft Shop began selling artistic gift boxes containing flower bulbs.<sup>14</sup> The company subsequently marketed gift boxes carrying their paper novelties and a wide variety of products made by other companies.<sup>15</sup> At some point, their gift line even included a few Fulper pottery forms.<sup>16</sup> Rust Craft's gift box idea quickly became a popular marketing approach that was adopted by a number of other businesses, including the Fulper Pottery Company.

Fulper's decision to market Vasekraft pottery in decorated gift boxes may have also been inspired by an exhibit at a trade show in May 1915. Fulper shared an exhibition room with the Colonial Candle Company, which displayed bayberry candles packaged "in gift boxes with appropriate messages and dainty decoration."<sup>17</sup> The candle company also showed gift boxes of flower bulbs with and without glass vases for growing the bulbs. Interestingly, when Fulper introduced their Gift Box pottery later in 1915, eight of their gift boxes contained various flower bulbs with and without Vasekraft pottery, one gift box contained a single flower bulb with



No. 033 Cocktail Mixer and Strainer Cover with a Mustard Matte and White Flambé glaze and No. 044 Small Roman Lamp with a Mustard Matte and Green Flambé glaze.



No. 023 Coasters, Wild Rose design, with a Rose and Green Flambé glaze and No. 025 Coasters, Heraldic design, with a Café au Lait and Green Splash glaze. The Gift Box line also included the No. 024 Coasters, Octagonal design, with a Mustard Matte glaze. Gift boxes contained sets of three coasters with the same design.



No. 029 Lily Pad Flower Holder, No. 014 Duck Flower Holder, and No. 015 Indian Wigwam Flower Holder with Naturalistic glazes (Fulper's term for various combinations of standard glazes on some flower holders). These forms are typically used in bowls for flower arrangements.

a glass bulb jar, and bayberry candles were included in the three gift boxes containing Vasekraft candleholders.

Fulper's Gift Box pottery was an innovation in the highly competitive art pottery marketplace in the United States. Among the major American potteries operating in 1915, Fulper was the only one to offer a diverse line of small low-priced products in addition to premium art pottery. Because they were inexpensive, the Gift Box forms allowed Fulper to attract a wider audience for their highly regarded Vasekraft pottery.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, by packaging the pieces in artistic gift boxes, Fulper employed a novel marketing technique to help promote sales.



Although an important part of Vasekraft history, Fulper's gift boxes are rarely found today due to their limited production period and likely low survival rate. Similarly, several Vasekraft forms packaged in gift boxes are also now quite scarce because they were only made for about two years or less.<sup>19</sup> However, most Gift Box forms were produced for longer terms and are readily available today.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jon A. Kornacki, Ph.D., is a longtime collector and researcher of Fulper pottery. He has published several other articles in the *Journal of the American Art Pottery Association*: "Fulper's Vasekraft Lamps" in 2012, "Fulper's First Fifteen" in 2013, and "Fulper's Marking System" in 2017. He and his brother David W. Kornacki created Fulper.net, a website for information on Fulper art pottery. Please send any correspondence to vasekraft@comcast.net.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## PHOTO CREDITS

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## ENDNOTES

1. For a history of Fulper's art pottery line, see Jon A. Kornacki, "Fulper's Marking System," *Journal of the American Art Pottery Association*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Winter 2017), p. 6-15.
2. Many products with gift boxes (model Nos. 01 to 039) are shown on a two-sided promotional leaflet titled "Gift Thoughts in Texted Boxes," which was probably issued in late 1915 (collection of Jon A. Kornacki). Most of these Gift Box forms, along with others up to model No. 054, are shown in a Vasekraft catalog dated to about mid-1916 (collection of Jon A. Kornacki).
3. The Gift Box pottery included several Vasekraft forms already in production (Nos. 4, 11, 13, 81S, 401M, 422S, 424) and many new designs, including two vases (Nos. 011, 047) derived from earlier mug designs (Nos. 93, 94) by removing the handles and another vase (No. 019) that is a smaller version of an existing form (No. 57).
4. *Vogue*, Vol. 46, No. 11 (Dec. 1, 1915), p. 127; *Charlotte Observer*, Charlotte, NC, Dec. 19, 1915, p. 26.
5. One pottery form, the No. 030 Honey Hive, was also discontinued prior to publication of the 1916 Vasekraft catalog.
6. Late 1916 publications also show a few of these gift boxes and pottery; *Country Life in America*, Vol. 30, No. 6 (Oct. 1916), p. 112-114 and Vol. 31, No. 2 (Dec. 1916), p. 106-114.
7. Fulper catalogs show the following numbers of Gift Box forms: 42 in 1916 (including four dinnerware forms), 32 in 1918, 20 in 1920, 24 in 1922, 17 in 1923, 7 in 1924, and 3 in 1927. Later catalogs do not show any Gift Box forms.
8. The 1916 Vasekraft catalog shows the Gift Box pottery with item numbers that are combinations of model number and price. For example, the No. 041 Incense Burner, which cost \$1.50, is listed as No. 150,041.
9. When three early cabinet vases (Nos. 4, 11, 13) became Gift Box forms, they were given new model numbers (Nos. 018, 016, 017, respectively); see Jon A. Kornacki, "Fulper's First Fifteen," *Journal of the American Art Pottery Association*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Spring 2013), p. 14-21. Four other forms are shown in the 1916 Vasekraft catalog with both standard model numbers (Nos. 81S, 424, 401M, 422S) and Gift Box model numbers (Nos. 04, 029, 032, 034, respectively).
10. After the gift boxes were discontinued, one Gift Box form (No. 019) was given a standard model number (No. 57XS) and four Gift Box forms (Nos. 04, 029, 032, 034) reverted to their standard model numbers (Nos. 81S, 424, 401M, 422S, respectively).
11. Prices are listed in the 1916 Vasekraft catalog. Adjusted for inflation, the prices in today's dollars would be about \$35 to \$185 for bowls, \$35 to \$575 for vases, \$45 to \$230 for bookends, and \$550 to \$1700 for lamps.
12. Prices are listed in the 1916 Vasekraft catalog. Adjusted for inflation, the prices for most Gift Box forms would be about \$17 to \$35 in today's dollars.
13. Fred W. Rust, owner of the Rust Craft Shop in Boston, reported on this new marketing strategy: "There are now on the market a number of lines made up of little gifts in beautiful boxes, and with attractive verses suited both to the articles and to the persons to whom they are to be sent. The way in which these little gifts are boxed is distinctly novel." *Bookseller and Stationer*, Vol. 31, No. 11 (Nov. 1915), p. 37.
14. The Rust Craft Shop was a major producer of greeting cards and other paper items. Fred W. Rust founded the company in Kansas City in 1906 and moved the business to Boston in 1913; *Walden's Stationer and Printer*, Vol. 44, No. 9 (Jan. 1921), p. 59. By late 1914, the Rust Craft Shop introduced artistic gift boxes containing flower bulbs and they claimed to be the originator of this gift product; *Hartford Courant*, Hartford, CT, Dec. 7, 1914, p. 3, *Akron Beacon Journal*, Akron, OH, Nov. 23, 1915, p. 16, and *Vanity Fair*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Nov. 1915), p. 24. The company's name was changed to Rust Craft Publishers in 1915; *Geyer's Stationer*, Vol. 58, No. 1487 (May 6, 1915), p. 20.
15. In 1915, Rust Craft marketed gift boxes containing a variety of products; *Asbury Park Press*, Asbury Park, NJ, Jul. 23, 1915, p. 18 and *Santa Cruz Evening News*, Santa Cruz, CA, Nov. 18, 1915, p. 5. By the early 1920s, hundreds of Rust Craft "Greeting Gifts" were available; *Modern Stationer and Bookseller*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Apr. 25, 1921), p. 63, *Ladies Home Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 11 (Nov. 1922), p. 168, and *Good Housekeeping*, Vol. 75, No. 6 (Dec. 1922), opposite p. 129.
16. A few Fulper pottery forms were made especially for Rust Craft, including a twig stick vase, a candle sconce, and a wall pocket. Although produced by Fulper, these pieces were labeled with a Rust Craft ink mark. Fulper also used private labels on specific art pottery forms produced for other companies, including Prang, Rafco, and Mount Hope; see note 1.
17. The exhibition was held May 17-22, 1915 at the Adelphia Hotel in Philadelphia; *Bookseller, Newsdealer and Stationer*, Vol. 42, No. 11 (Jun. 1, 1915), p. 675-680. The Rust Craft Shop also displayed their products at this exhibition; *Bookseller, Newsdealer and Stationer*, Vol. 42, No. 9 (May 1, 1915), p. 495.
18. Fulper was awarded the Medal of Honor for their Vasekraft pottery at the renowned 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco; *Pottery and Glass*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Jul. 1915), p. 9-10 and *Garden Magazine*, Vol. 22, No. 6 (Jan. 1916), p. 245.
19. Several Gift Box forms were produced for about two years or less: No. 015 Indian Wigwam Flower Holder, No. 020 Sconce, No. 030 Honey Hive, No. 033 Cocktail Mixer and Strainer Cover, No. 035 Bowl, No. 046 Flower Vase or Hat Pin Holder, and No. 048 Bulb Cup.