

Fulper's Vasekraft Lamps

2011 marked the 100th anniversary of the introduction of Fulper's Vasekraft lamps

The Vasekraft lamps produced by the Fulper Pottery Company during the height of the Arts and Crafts movement have a unique design that combines pottery bases with pottery shades. These extraordinary lamps, many of which are now in major museum collections, are some of the most significant works of decorative lighting made during the early twentieth century.

Fulper's Vasekraft lamps were an amazing accomplishment by a company previously known only for its manufacture of utilitarian products. From its founding in about 1814, the Fulper Pottery Co. of Flemington, New Jersey produced wares such as drain pipes, crocks, cookware and water filters. However, in late 1909, under the direction of William H. Fulper, the company began to market a commercial line of art pottery called Vasekraft. By mid 1910, the Vasekraft line consisted of about 35 pottery products including vases, bowls, mugs, and coffee sets. At the same time, the company was developing its innovative lamps with the technical expertise of J. Martin Stangl, a newly hired ceramic engineer from Germany.





1. Vasekraft lamp prototypes (from *Pottery and Glass*, April 1911). These preliminary lamp forms have rudimentary designs, pull-chain electrical switches, and electrical cords that extend through openings in the shades. In contrast, the fully developed Vasekraft lamps have refined designs, an electrical pin switch mounted on the base, and an electrical cord that exits through a hole in the base.

By the end of 1910, the Fulper Pottery Co. (hereafter referred to as "Fulper") had created a number of lamp prototypes, but their features and proportions were somewhat crude and awkward (Fig. 1).⁵ Fulper quickly refined the various lamp designs and in early 1911 the company was ready to publicly display and market their new and unusual Vasekraft lamps.⁶

VASEKRAFT LAMP DEBUT

Fulper exhibited their first fully developed lamps in late March 1911 at the Hotel Collingwood in New York City. This debut was followed by a 5-month long nationwide series of exhibits that concluded back in New York with a display at the National Household Show in Madison Square Garden (Fig. 2). Shortly thereafter, by November 1911, Fulper established a permanent New York showroom for their lamps and other art pottery at 333 Fourth Avenue. These successful showings elicited enthusiastic praise for the novel Vasekraft lamps:

These lamps were entirely original, having resulted solely from experiment and research, nothing in any way similar having ever before been produced ...the results obtainable are delightful and exceptionally beautiful.¹⁰

One falls immediately under the spell of this lamp, which, for the first time, offers the charm of completeness in base and shade of pottery.¹¹

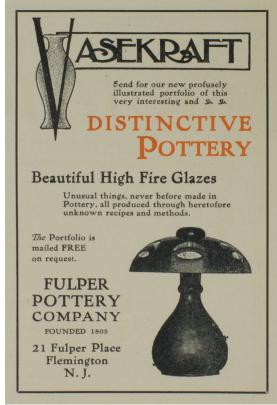
So beautiful is the result of this uniting of lamp shade and base that one is moved to wonder why some potter did not develop the idea long ago.¹²



2. An early exhibit of Vasekraft lamps and other pottery by the Fulper Pottery Co. at the 1911 National Household Show, Madison Square Garden, New York City, August 19-26, 1911 (from *Pottery, Glass and Brass Salesman*, August 24, 1911).



3. Vasekraft lamps were first advertised to the trade in this August 1911 notice in *Pottery and Glass*. Lamps shown are (clockwise from top right): Funnel (model No. 1), Curved Clean Stem (model No. 17), Smoke Stack (model No. 4), Chinese Globular Bottle (model No. 23), Bulbous Base With Curved Stem (model No. 14), and Ball (model No. 2).



4. A Vasekraft advertisement showing the Chinese Pear Shaped lamp (model No. 19), from *The Fra*, November 1912.

Fulper began to advertise their Vasekraft lamps in trade journals in August 1911 (Fig. 3), and by October 1911 they were advertising to the public in a broad range of popular magazines. ¹³ Fulper used these advertisements to promote the innovative design and beauty of the lamps, with one advertisement even comparing Fulper's lamps with the art glass lamps being made by Tiffany, Handel, and numerous other manufacturers:

The most beautiful pottery in the world has made possible a lot of things never before made in pottery. The most noteworthy, undoubtedly, is Vase Kraft lamps, an absolutely new conception of electric portables with much more distinction than the now ordinary metal and art glass affairs. 14

During the next several years, Fulper marketed the Vasekraft lamps through magazine advertisements, richly illustrated catalogs, their showroom in New



York, electric company showrooms, ¹⁵ and retail stores throughout the country. ¹⁶ Fulper also continued to show the lamps at major exhibitions, including the 1912 House Furnishing Show in New York, ¹⁷ the 1913 Clay Products Exposition in Chicago, ¹⁸ and the renowned 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. ¹⁹ At the latter show, Fulper was given the highest possible award, the Medal of Honor, for the display of their Vasekraft products. ²⁰ The lamps also continued to receive other accolades like this complimentary review in the *Fine Arts Journal*:

For the Vasekraft lamp is possessed of a beauty not to be escaped or ignored by anyone with a normal love of things lovely. It is not only exquisite, but odd, strikingly different from anything hitherto attempted or achieved, for both base and shade are of the thick opaque, heavily glazed pottery. Set into the shade, however, are designs of opalescent glass, glowing like jewels when illuminated from within and forming pleasing color contrasts and harmonies when seen in the daytime unlighted.²¹

VASEKRAFT LAMP DESIGN

Although all Vasekraft lamps have common features — glazed pottery bases and shades with art glass decoration — they fall into distinct groups based on size and style. In terms of size, the lamps are divided into two general categories: large and small.²² The large lamps have two light sockets, range in height from 17 to 24 inches, and have shade diameters of 11 to 18 inches. At least 36 different large lamp models were produced, with each assigned a model number and a descriptive name (e.g. Slanting Base Pillared lamp).²³ Each model consists of a unique base design matched with a specific shade design. Although all large lamp models have different bases, some models share the same shade design, but often

with different glass patterns. Fulper also created some large lamp models by scaling the base and shade to construct two different sized versions of the same form (each with its own model number).

Fulper's large lamp designs reveal various stylistic influences. Several lamps were inspired by Asian designs, as indicated by the names of the lamp models and by short descriptions in the Vasekraft catalogs. For example, the base of the Chinese Pear Shaped lamp (Fig. 4) "is an adaption of the old Chinese porcelain in this shape," and the base of the Ginger Jar lamp (Fig. 5) is "reproduced from the famous Ginger Jars of the ancient Chinese." Additional lamps whose names suggest an Asian design influence include the Chinese Globular Bottle lamp (Fig. 6), the Pagoda lamp (Fig. 7), and the Turkish lamp (Fig. 8).

Some other lamp models have what Fulper termed a conventional design, which consists of simple lines and usually with a monochromatic matte glaze finish. ²⁵ Fulper



claimed that these lamps, which include the Funnel lamp (Fig. 3) and a few others, are "very adaptable to Mission, Flemish and Arts and Crafts rooms." Several additional lamps have a similar style that incorporates simple geometric elements into their design. These include the Straight Line Pillared lamp (Fig. 9) and the Slanting Base Pillared lamp (Fig. 10). Fulper also produced a few lamp models, including the Flowing Base Mushroom lamp (Fig. 11), based on organic forms that were popular sources of design inspiration during the Arts and Crafts period.

All of the aforementioned Vasekraft lamps possess simple original forms that we would refer to today as "Arts and Crafts" designs. Therefore, it is surprising that Fulper also created several intriguing lamps based on ornate period styles, including Empire, Jacobean, Renaissance, Louis XIV, and possibly others (Fig. 12). Although these large lamp models were published in mid 1914,²⁷ no actual examples have surfaced and it is

uncertain if they were ever put into commercial production.



11. Vasekraft Flowing Base Mushroom lamp (model No. 6a) with a Cucumber Green glaze. The shade is inset with a complex pattern of 64 pieces of art glass in various shades of green, yellow, white, and red. This model was available for the duration of the Vasekraft lamp production period and it is the most prevalent lamp model found today. It was produced in three known versions with different art glass designs. Height, 17¼ in.; shade diameter, 16¾ in.

- **5.** Vasekraft Ginger Jar lamp (model No. 20) with a Mirrored Chinese Blue glaze. The shade is inset with 36 pieces of striking polychromatic art glass. This rare lamp model, whose base design is derived from the Chinese ginger jars, is the large version of a form that was produced in two sizes. Height, $21\frac{1}{2}$ in.; shade diameter, $15\frac{1}{4}$ in.
- **6.** Vasekraft Chinese Globular Bottle lamp (model No. 23) with a Mirrored Green Flambé glaze. The shade is inset with a simple pattern of six oblong amber-colored glass jewels. The Asian influence in this lamp design is particularly apparent in the shade, which resembles the conical Asian hat that is popular in China and other East Asian countries. The glaze on this lamp is unusual for the model, which commonly has a Brown Flambé glaze. Height, 19 in.; shade diameter, 18 in.
- **7.** Vasekraft Pagoda lamp (model No. 21) with a Mirrored Green Flambé glaze. The shade is inset with an alternating pattern of green and yellow art glass. This is one of only five large lamp models that were available throughout the entire Vasekraft lamp production span. Height, 17 in.; shade diameter, 14 in.
- **8.** Vasekraft Turkish lamp (model No. 18a) with a Cucumber Green glaze. The shade is inset with a repeating design of green, yellow, and red art glass. This unusual model was produced in two known versions with different glass patterns. Height, 18¾ in.; shade diameter. 11¼ in.
- **9.** Vasekraft Straight Lined Pillared lamp (model No. 29) with a Brown Flambé glaze. The shade is inset with an alternating pattern of pink/yellow bell-shaped art glass and round red textured pieces of glass. This is the small version of a form that was produced in two sizes. Height, 18¾ in.; shade diameter, 14 in.
- **10.** Vasekraft Slanting Base Pillared lamp (model No. 28) with a Leopard Skin Crystal glaze. The shade is inset with predominately red art glass in a pattern of squares. This is the large version of a form that was available in two sizes and it was produced in two known variations with different art glass designs. Height, 22¼ in.; shade diameter, 15¾ in.



In addition to the large Vasekraft lamps, Fulper produced a line of small Vasekraft lamps, which were variously called desk, boudoir, cabaret, or café lamps (Fig. 13).²⁸ The small lamps have a single light socket, range in height from 13½ to 16½ inches, and have shade diameters of 6½ to 10 inches. Fulper produced at least 20 different small lamp models, which are identified only by their three-digit model numbers (they were not given names).²⁹ Like the large lamps, each small lamp model has a unique base design matched with a particular shade, and some models share the same shade design (Fig. 14).

As the first and only major art pottery producer to make lamps with both pottery bases and shades, Fulper was granted patents for the Vasekraft lamp design in the United States,³⁰ Canada,³¹ and Great Britain,³² and apparently also in Germany, France, and Italy.³³







12. Vasekraft lamps in various period styles (left to right): Empire (model No. 33), Jacobean (model No. 36), and Renaissance (model No. 43). It is unknown if these rare large lamp models were ever put into commercial production. Photos are from *Pottery and Glass*, August and September, 1914

Although Fulper had patent protection for their all-pottery lamp design, the California studio potter Fred H. Robertson made some similar lamps in about 1914.³⁴ However, only a few Robertson lamps are currently known to exist and their production was probably short-lived due to infringement of the Fulper patent.

VASEKRAFT LAMP DECORATION

The bases and shades of Vasekraft lamps were finished with a wide variety of colorful and stunning glazes, boldly advertised by Fulper as "a work in glazes covering a greater scope than has ever before been attempted." ³⁵ Fulper was concerned not only with color, but also with the tone and texture of the various glazes they applied to their pottery: "Colors are only part of the work in glazes. Textures or tones, in addition to helping the colors, give an effect beyond the visible, namely, through sense of feeling." ³⁶ Thus, Fulper employed five classes of Vasekraft glazes based on tone and texture: mirrored, flambé, luster, crystal, and matte. ³⁷



Because each of these glaze classes contained an array of colors, and more than one color or type of glaze was often used on a piece, Fulper claimed they had thousands of glaze combinations to work with:

Lucky indeed is the pottery with a palate [sic] of even five glazes. Vase-Kraft has thousands, each one more beautiful than the other. Only ceaseless research and experiments covering many years, combined with science, has unfolded the secrets of these wonderful glazes for Vase-Kraft.³⁸

In actuality, the number of different glazes Fulper used on their lamps is in the dozens.³⁹ Each lamp was typically finished with a particular glaze that was standard for the model.⁴⁰



13. A group of small Vasekraft lamps (from *Pottery and Glass*, December, 1912)

- **14.** Small Vasekraft lamps: (a) No. 203 with a Verte Antique matte glaze (height 15½ in., shade diameter 9¾ in.), (b) No. 304 with a Café au Lait matte glaze (height 16¼ in., shade diameter, 9¾ in.), (c) No. 300 with a Mirrored Black and Blue of the Sky Flambé glaze (height 16½ in., shade diameter, 9 in.), (d) No. 301 with a Mirrored Black and Yellow Flambé glaze (height 16 in., shade diameter, 9 in.). Note that models No. 203 and 304 use the same shade design and glass pattern; models No. 300 and 301 use a similar shade design, but with different glass patterns.
- **15.** Vasekraft Curved Clean Stem lamp (model No. 13) with a rare glaze combination of Cat's Eye and Yellow and Black Flambé. The shade is inset with a pattern of comma-shaped blue/brown art glass alternating with highly unusual round mottled jewels containing blue and brown colors. Note the original Fulper pin switch mounted on the base. Height, 21 in.; shade diameter, 17 in.
- **16.** Vasekraft Curved Base Pillared lamp (model No. 25) with a Mirrored Green Flambé glaze. The shade is inset with a repeating design of teardrop-shaped polychromatic art glass pieces surrounding a round multifaceted red jewel. This is the small version of a form that was produced in two sizes. Height, 16¾ in.; shade diameter, 14 in.

Some lamps have a single color glaze, while others have more complex glazes that combine different colors to form some striking glaze effects. Because both base and shade were almost always matched with the same glaze, the lamps exhibit a consistency that makes them appear to be single solid pieces of pottery. Although most of the lamps were produced with their standard glazes, some large lamps were also made with alternative glazes. In contrast, it is rare to find a small lamp with anything other than its standard glaze.

The finishing touch to the lamps was decoration of the shades with patterns of inserted translucent colored art glass. Fulper utilized a variety of glass types, including sheet glass with smooth or textured surfaces and glass jewels whose surfaces are smooth or multifaceted (Fig. 15 and 16). The different glass types were used in a wide range of shapes, sizes, and colors. Some glass pieces are monochromatic, whereas most pieces have multiple colors that form contrasting striations or swirls within the glass.

The glass patterns vary from simple arrangements of only several glass pieces to intricate designs containing up to 64 glass pieces. Most of the patterns are of repeating geometric and curvilinear designs, but a few rare patterns depict representational figures such as dragonflies and period touring cars. ⁴¹ Each lamp model typically has a specific glass pattern for its shade, but some large lamp models were produced in multiple versions with different glass designs. ⁴²

The various combinations of form, glass type and color, glass pattern, and glaze color and texture give each Vasekraft lamp a unique appearance. Even lamps with identical forms can look quite different depending upon the glass selection and glaze application. Although Fulper often used glass colors that were complementary with the glaze, they also occasionally used bold combinations of glass and glaze colors to create remarkably vibrant lamps (Fig. 17).



17. Vasekraft Curved Base Pillared lamp (model No. 7) with a Mirrored Yellow, Green, and Black Flambé glaze. The shade is inset with an alternating pattern of bright blue and red art glass. This is the large version of a form that was produced in two sizes. This model was made in multiple variations with different art glass designs and at least two shade designs. Height, 21 in.; shade diameter, 16½ in.

VASEKRAFT LAMP PRODUCTION

After the initial introduction of the large lamps in early 1911, Fulper expanded the Vasekraft lamp line by introducing the small lamps in mid 1912.43 Most of the lamp models (large and small) were introduced by the end of 1912, but a few new additions to the lamp line were made in 1913 and 1914.44 During the period 1911-1914, the lamps were the principal products in the Vasekraft pottery line, and Fulper featured them prominently at shows, in magazine advertisements, and in the Vasekraft catalogs. The importance of the lamps is clearly illustrated in the 1912 and 1914 catalogs where the lamps are conspicuously displayed at the front of the catalogs and they account for about half the catalog pages.⁴⁵ Thus, one could argue that for a few years Fulper was primarily a lamp company.⁴⁶

During the latter half of 1914, Fulper began to de-emphasize the lamps and started to introduce numerous lessexpensive Vasekraft products.⁴⁷ This transition in Fulper's product line was

perhaps precipitated by the severe recession of 1913-1914.⁴⁸ Although several lamp models were apparently discontinued prior to 1913,⁴⁹ the production of most lamp models ended during the period from 1914 to 1915. As a result, the 1916 Vasekraft catalog contains only 5 large lamp models and 9 small lamp models.⁵⁰ The catalog shows that Fulper was now focused on their more affordable products such as vases, bowls, bookends, flower holders, and candlesticks. The lamps appear to be minor products in the Vasekraft line at this time, as demonstrated by their placement at the back of the catalog. Fulper continued to make this reduced line of Vasekraft lamps until 1918 or 1919, when production finally ceased for the remaining lamps.⁵¹

Thus, for a period of about eight years, Fulper produced some of the most remarkable works of decorative art to come out of the Arts and Crafts movement. By combining a unique all-pottery design with ornamental art glass and various superb glazes, the Vasekraft lamps exhibit both novelty and exceptional artistic merit. As Fulper accurately predicted in an early advertisement (Fig. 3), the Vasekraft lamps continue to be appreciated for their distinctive and aesthetic qualities:

Here is a variety of lamp that is unquestionably decorative in effect, unique in appearance, individual and distinctive in character, and withal thoroughly practical and utilitarian. ... They are new and novel and are a radical departure from the ordinary run of portable lamps. They are certain to acquire immediate and lasting favor.⁵²

Where to see more Vasekraft lamps:

MUSEUMS:

Fulper's Vasekraft lamps are in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Newark Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Everson Museum of Art, and the Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art.

INTERNET:

Fulper.net, the author's website, provides numerous photos of Vasekraft lamps.

About the Author:

Jon A. Kornacki, Ph.D., is a longtime collector and researcher of Fulper art pottery. He and his brother David W. Kornacki created Fulper.net, an Internet site dedicated to the appreciation of Fulper pottery. Jon continues to research the Vasekraft lamps and intends to eventually publish the first comprehensive book on the subject. He welcomes any additional information on the lamps, including photos of lamps and their marks. Please contact him at vasekraft@comcast.net.

Photo Credits:

All color photographs are by David W. Kornacki; period images are from the cited sources.

Endnotes:

- For the company's early history, see Robert C. Runge, Jr., Collector's Encyclopedia of Stangl Artware, Lamps, and Birds, Identification and Values (2nd Ed.), Collector Books, 2006
- 2. The Craftsman, Dec. 1909, p. xiv; Democrat-Advertiser, Flemington, NJ, Jul. 7, 1910. The Vasekraft name was sometimes written as Vase-Kraft or Vase Kraft.
- 3. Pottery and Glass, Aug. 1910, p. 42-43.
- 4. Spinning Wheel, Oct. 1973, p. 14-18; Pottery and Glass, Apr. 1911, p. 16-18.
- 5. Pottery and Glass, Apr. 1911, p. 8, 16-18.
- 6. Ibio
- New York Times, Mar. 24, 1911, p. 13; Pottery and Glass, Apr. 1911, p. 16-18.
- 8. Pottery and Glass, Jul. 1911, p. 32; Sep. 1911, p. 17-18.
- 9. Advertisements for Fulper's New York showroom began in Nov. 1911; e.g., see *The Craftsman*, Nov. 1911, p. 34a.
- 10. Pottery and Glass, Apr. 1911, p. 16-18.
- 11. Suburban Life, Nov. 1911, p. 281-282.
- 12. Arts and Decoration, Dec. 1911, p. 82-83.
- 13. For example, see The Craftsman, Oct. 1911, p. 34a.
- 14. Pottery and Glass, Aug. 1912, p. 25.
- Pottery, Glass & Brass Salesman, Nov. 23, 1911, p. 22;
 Pottery and Glass, Jun. 1915, p. 9; New York Times, Jun. 7, 1915, p. 5 and Jul. 28, 1915, p. 4.
- By 1919, Fulper art pottery was sold in about 1,200 retail stores throughout the United States; *Brick and Clay Record*, Sep. 23, 1919, p. 592-596.
- 17. Pottery, Glass & Brass Salesman, Aug. 29, 1912, p. 28.
- 18. Pottery and Glass, Mar. 1913, p. 22; Electrical World, Mar. 15, 1913, p. 586.
- 19. Pottery and Glass, Jul. 1915, p. 9-10.
- Fulper publicized their Medal of Honor in advertisements, catalogs, and on labels affixed to their pottery; e.g., see *The Garden Magazine*, Jan. 1916, p. 245.
- 21. Fine Arts Journal, Oct. 1913, p. 607-616.
- 22. Vasekraft catalog (collection of the Hagley Museum and Library) and Vasekraft catalog (collection of the Newark Museum). Although these two different catalogs are undated, I have dated them to late 1912 and early 1914, respectively, and refer to them as the 1912 and 1914 Vasekraft catalogs.
- 23. Large Vasekraft lamp models were numbered consecutively beginning with No. 1. As many as 43 large lamp models may have been produced because this is the highest known model number; *Pottery and Glass*, Aug. 1914, p. 25.
- 24-26. See note 22
- 27. Pottery and Glass, Aug. 1914, p. 20, 25; Sep. 1914, p. 26.
- 28. See note 22.
- 29. Small Vasekraft lamps were divided into three numbered series (100, 200, and 300) depending on their base dimensions and the configurations of their electrical components. The 100 series lamps (model No. 101-109) each have a light socket mounted on top of the base and a pull-chain electrical switch. The 200 series lamps (model No. 200-203) each have a light socket installed inside the top of the base and an electrical pin switch. The 300 series lamps (model No. 300-308) each have a light socket mounted on top of the base and an electrical pin switch. Many of the small lamp models were also available equipped for the use of gas instead of electricity.

- 30. United States Patent 1,045,965.
- 31. Canada Patent CA135255.
- 32. Great Britain Patent GB191122925.
- 33. Some Vasekraft lamp bases are marked with "Patents Pending in United States and Canada, England, France, and Germany"; also, see *Pottery, Glass & Brass Salesman*, May 22, 1913, p. 21.
- Timothy J. Andersen, Eudorah M. Moore, and Robert W. Winter, ed., California Design 1910, California Design Publications, 1974, p. 71.
- 35. Arts and Decoration, Nov. 1911, p. 35.
- 36-38. See note 22.
- 39. The Vasekraft catalogs list about three-dozen standard glazes for the lamps and several additional glazes have been seen on some lamps.
- 40. See note 22.
- 41. Vasekraft lamps with dragonflies and period touring cars are in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- 42. Additional versions of a large lamp model were often given model numbers with letter suffixes (e.g. No. 6a).
- 43. See note 14.
- 44. Pottery and Glass, Mar. 1913, p.22; Feb. 1914, p. 20; Aug. 1914, p. 25.
- 45. See note 22.
- 46. Although the lamps were the principal products in the Vasekraft art pottery line during 1911-1914, Fulper's water filters and cookware were still significant products at this time (see note 1).
- 47. Period publications show many introductions of vases, bowls, bookends and flower holders during this time; e.g., see *Country Life In America*, Dec. 1914, p. 20, 34; *Fine Arts Journal*, Jan. 1915, p. 32-36.
- 48. Victor Zarnowitz, Business Cycles: Theory, History, Indicators, and Forecasting, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 226-229.
- 49. Several known lamp models were not shown in the 1912 and later Vasekraft catalogs, apparently indicating that they were already discontinued by late 1912.
- 50. Vasekraft catalog (collection of Donald S. Hall). Although this catalog is undated, I have dated it to mid 1916, and refer to it as the 1916 Vasekraft catalog.
- 51. An exact date for the termination of all Vasekraft lamp production has not yet been firmly established, but it appears to coincide with the post-World War I recession of 1918-1919 (see note 48). The last advertisement showing a lamp is from Dec. 1917; e.g., see Arts and Decoration, Dec. 1917, p. 87. The last catalog with lamps, titled "Fulper Pottery Complete Showing" (ca. 1917-1918), shows the same lamps as the 1916 Vasekraft catalog. A catalog from 1919, also titled "Fulper Pottery Complete Showing," does not show any lamps. Also, an article in Brick and Clay Record, Sep. 23, 1919, p. 592-596, does not mention lamps in its description of Fulper products.
- 52. Pottery and Glass, Aug. 1911, p. 37.