



BY JON A. KORNACKI

FULPER'S First Fifteen

The Fulper Pottery Company produced art pottery in a variety of forms and styles for about twenty-five years (1909-1934). Among their earliest products was a set of cabinet vases now commonly called the "First Fifteen" (Fig. 1). These vases were inspired by old Chinese pottery and finished with exceptional mirrored, matte, crystal, and flambé glazes. Today's Fulper collectors enthusiastically pursue the First Fifteen for their aesthetic quality, scarcity, and significance in the history of Fulper pottery.

EARLY VASEKRAFT POTTERY

The Fulper Pottery Co. of Flemington, New Jersey was incorporated in 1899, about one year after the bankruptcy of its predecessor, Fulper Bros. and Co.¹ The officers of the new company were George W. Fulper, President; Edward B. Fulper (George's brother), Vice President; and William H. Fulper (nephew of George and Edward), Secretary and Treasurer.² For about ten years, the company produced mostly utilitarian pottery products, including their popular Fulper Germ-Proof Water Filters and a successful line of cookware.³ However, in late 1909, under the direction of William H. Fulper, the company entered the art pottery market with their Vasekraft products.⁴

FIGURE 1:

The First Fifteen, a set of Fulper's early Vasekraft cabinet vases (model Nos. 1-15). Fulper actually made two attempts at establishing the Vasekraft art pottery line. The first attempt in 1909 utilized a small number of hand-thrown forms and an "Old Rose Matte" glaze, which was advertised as a rediscovery of the ancient Chinese *famille rose* glaze. This short-lived endeavor was largely unsuccessful and in early 1910 Fulper hired twenty-one year old J. Martin Stangl to redevelop the Vasekraft line. Stangl, a trained ceramic engineer from Germany, recounted the initial effort to create art pottery at the company:

Fulper wanted me to create a line of artware for the factory. He was convinced that there was money in it, in spite of the fiasco made by his first venture in the field. This ware had a red glaze of oriental character supplied by Professor Parmelee of Rutgers, and it required a reducing atmosphere to change the green to red. Nobody ever bought any of it, but the jobbers collected from the freight carriers when the shipments arrived broken. So I did the designing for Fulper and he supplied the ideas in many cases.⁸

With the addition of Stangl's technical expertise, the Fulper Pottery Co. (hereafter referred to as "Fulper") was able to successfully re-launch their Vasekraft line with new forms and glazes. A promotional advertisement to the trade in August 1910 shows an initial group of about 35 pottery products - including vases, bowls, mugs, and coffee sets - available in various mirrored, matte, and crystal glazes.9 By early 1911, Fulper had significantly increased the number of products by adding a variety of lamps¹⁰ and an assortment of new vases (Fig. 2).¹¹ This expanded Vasekraft line was introduced to the public in March 1911 at an exhibition in New York City.12

FIGURE 2:

A group of Fulper's early Vasekraft vases (from *Pottery and Glass*, April 1911).

FIGURE 3:

A set of Vasekraft cabinet vases (model Nos. 1-15). This photo is from the 1914 Vasekraft catalog (courtesy of the Newark Museum); the same photo is also shown in the 1912 Vasekraft catalog. Numbers were added to the photo to indicate the model numbers of the vases. Note that model No. 14 is mislabeled in the table below the photo.

THE FIRST FIFTEEN

The early Vasekraft products included a number of small vases in various shapes (Fig. 2). A set of fifteen of these cabinet vases is shown in the 1912 and 1914 Vasekraft catalogs (Fig. 3). Because they were assigned model numbers 1-15, some Fulper collectors call this set of vases the "First Fifteen." It is important to note that this name refers specifically to the model numbers and does not indicate the first fifteen Vasekraft forms designed by Fulper. 14

Fulper introduced the First Fifteen vases during 1910-1911.¹⁵ They were all apparently produced until at least 1914 because the group photo is shown in the 1914 Vasekraft catalog. However, based on their scarcity it seems plausible that some models were discontinued prior to 1914. Beginning in 1916, only three of the First Fifteen forms (Nos. 4, 11, 13) appear in the Fulper catalogs, but with new model numbers (Nos. 018, 016, 017, respectively).¹⁶ These three



1 14 12 12 5 10 2 2 10 3 7 4 4	6
No. 1 Animal Vase, Smoke green, Yellow flambé	\$2.00 .75 1.00 1.00 1.00 1.00 1.25 1.00 1.25 1.00 1.25 1.00 1.25 1.00











Smoke Green and Chinese Blue glaze (left) and a Brown Flambé glaze (right). Marks: Squat Rectangular (left), Rectangular (right). Height: 8 in.

FIGURE 4: Animal Vase (model No. 1) with a

FIGURE 5: Cabinet Vase (model No. 2) with a Mirrored Black glaze (left) and a Cucumber Green crystal glaze (right). Marks: Squat Rectangular (both). Height: $2\frac{3}{4}$ in.

FIGURE 6: Low Bottle Vase (model No. 3) with a Blue of the Sky glaze (left) and a Yellow Flambé glaze (right). Marks: Squat Rectangular (left), Rectangular (right). Height: 3¼ in.

FIGURE 7: Bottle with Long Neck Vase (model No. 4) with various glazes (left to right): a Leopard Skin Crystal glaze, a Cucumber Green crystal glaze, a Mustard Matte with Brown Flambé glaze, and a Powder Blue with Blue of the Sky Flambé glaze (this glaze combination is simply called Blue Flambé in the Fulper catalogs). Marks: Squat Rectangular (left), Rectangular (all others). Height: 5¼ in.

FIGURE 8: Elephant Vase (model No. 5) with a Chinese Blue glaze (left) and a Mirrored Brown glaze (right). Marks: Squat Rectangular (both). Height: 5 in.

vases were part of a series of small forms sold in special gift boxes during 1916-1917¹⁷ and all three continued to be produced with their new model numbers until 1923.¹⁸ Consequently, they are the most common First Fifteen forms found today.

The First Fifteen vases were given descriptive names based on their shapes, many of which appear to be inspired by old Chinese pottery forms (Fig. 3). This is not surprising because Fulper clearly expressed their admiration for Chinese pottery: "Inspiration for the best in pottery has for the last three hundred years been derived exclusively from the Chinese." Thus, the Animal Vase (No. 1), the Flat Oviform Vase (No. 7), and the Amphora Vase (No. 14) strongly resemble three of the eight basic shapes of the Chinese peach bloom set from the Kangxi period (1662-1722) of the Qing dynasty. Likewise, the Octagonal Vase (No. 9) is similar to an octagonal vase from the Qianlong period (1736-1795) of the Qing dynasty, the Hexagonal Vase (No. 10) resembles hexagonal vases from the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279), the Bottle with Long Neck (No. 4) corresponds to a vase from the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE-25 CE), and the Double Oviform Vase (No. 12) looks like snuff bottles from the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). Other First Fifteen vases also have distinctive Chinese design elements, including gourd-shaped forms (No. 15) and decorative elephant-head handles (Nos. 5, 8).





VASEKRAFT GLAZES

Fulper finished the First Fifteen vases with a variety of superb Vasekraft glazes (Figs. 4-18). Each model was typically produced in two standard glazes (Fig. 3), but many were also made with alternative glazes. Fulper was extremely proud of their wide assortment of glazes, which were advertised as "a work in glazes covering a greater scope than has ever before been attempted"26 and "many of them have been taken to a higher perfection than that reached by the ancient Chinese."27 The various Vasekraft glazes were divided into five classes based on tone and texture: mirrored, flambé, lustre, crystal, and matte. Fulper provided the following rather poetic descriptions of their different glaze classes, which were all available in an array of colors:

The **CRYSTAL** class, are of many tones – mirrored, showing the weird swirling reflection of moonlight on water; the clear crystals like the starry Heavens; surface crystals like the hoar frost on window panes and still others like the surface effect of galvanized iron. This type of glaze is a ceramic curio. A satisfactory explanation of the cause of the formation of crystals is yet to be made.

The **MATTE** class, are glazes with a texture or tone as revealed in the velvety warmth of nature, realized by a sense of feeling in the touch of foliage or the petals of flowers. Other matte glazes have a sleek, smooth surface like the skin of fruit; still others the uneven smoothness of the melon or cucumber. Colors are consequently sombre in tone.28

The **MIRRORED** class, as signified by its name, gives high reflection as from a highly polished mirror, comparable only with patches of sky in single color. This class of glazes are highly reflectant [sic] and monotone in color, although a change in the color is frequently occurring, where the glaze, drained thin, is inspired by the body, giving a pleasing variation to the single color.

The **FLAMBE** class, are also mirrored glazes, displaying the gorgeous colors seen in the sky at sunset in autumn. The blending of the colors, one into the other, with flames of one color into another is why this style of glaze is called flambé. They are all highly reflectant [sic] and iridescent.

The **LUSTRE** class, are also mirrored glazes, giving off an iridescence similar to oil on water or as seen in our youthful days in the soap bubbles.



FIGURE 9: Small Ovoid Vase (model No. 6) with a Green Flambé glaze (left) and a Mission Matte glaze (right). Marks: Squat Rectangular (left), unmarked (right). Height: 4 in.

FIGURE 10: Flat Oviform Vase (model No. 7) with a Leopard Skin Crystal glaze (left) and a Mirrored Green glaze (right). Marks: Rectangular and Vasekraft paper label (left), Squat Rectangular (right). Height: 2¾ in.

FIGURE 11: Oval Elephant Vase (model No. 8) with a Mirrored Yellow glaze (left), a Mirrored Brown glaze (middle) and a Cat's Eye Mirrored glaze (right). Marks: Squat Rectangular (left and right), Vasekraft paper label (middle). Height: 5 in.

FIGURE 12: Octagonal Vase (model No. 9) with a Mission Matte glaze. Mark: Squat Rectangular. Height: 5 in.









Fulper gave imaginative names to many of their Vasekraft glazes, including Blue of the Sky,"the azure blue of a cloudless day"; Mission Matte,"a brown black glaze resembling the finish of fumed oaks or mission furniture"; Verte Antique, "a green of rich shade"; Leopard Skin Crystal, "a lustre crystal on a slate or mauve color" that resembles the skin of the leopard frog; Cucumber Green, a variegated green in matte or crystal; Cat's Eye; and Elephant's Breath.²⁹

The unusual glaze names have sometimes led to confusion in the identification of certain glazes. For example, the Yellow Flambé (Figs. 6, 14) and Brown Flambé (Figs. 4, 13, 15) glazes have been frequently described incorrectly as Fulper's Cat's Eye glaze. In actuality, the Cat's Eye glaze consists of a taupe-like color (Fig. 11), which has often been misidentified as Fulper's Elephant's Breath glaze.³⁰ Two other glazes, Leopard Skin Crystal (Figs. 7, 10, 14, 18) and Cucumber Green Crystal (Figs. 5, 7), are also frequently misidentified and the glaze names are often interchanged. Although these two glazes are somewhat similar, they can be distinguished by their specific colorings (Fig. 7). Another of Fulper's glazes, Green Flambé (Figs. 9, 14, 15, 17, 18), has been regularly called Flemington Green, but this name is not found in original Fulper catalogs and its origin is unclear.

FIGURE 13: Hexagonal Vase (model No. 10) with a Brown Flambé glaze (left) and a Blue of the Sky glaze (right). Marks: Squat Rectangular (both). Height: 5¾ in. Note that the vase on the right is missing the bottom tip of one handle (this is a manufacturing defect).

FIGURE 14: Slender Ovoid Vase (model No. 11) with a Green Flambé glaze (left), a Yellow Flambé glaze (middle), and a Leopard Skin Crystal glaze (right). Marks: Squat Rectangular (all). Height: $5\frac{1}{2}$ in.

FIGURE 15: Double Oviform Vase (model No. 12) with various glazes (left to right): a Cucumber Green matte glaze (Vasekraft paper label), a Green Flambé glaze (Squat Rectangular mark), a Verte Antique matte glaze (Squat Rectangular mark), an unusual type of Brown Flambé glaze (Squat Rectangular mark and an Early Round Vasekraft paper label), and a Mirrored Black and Brown Flambé glaze (Prang mark). Height: 5¾ in.



IDENTIFYING MARKS

Fulper labeled their art pottery with various marks, which were each used for a specific time period during 1909-1934.³¹ Four common marks were used on the First Fifteen during 1910-1917: Squat Rectangular, Rectangular, Prang, and the Vasekraft paper label (Fig. 19).³² The most prevalent mark found on these vases is the Squat Rectangular mark, which can be found on any of the fifteen forms. The Vasekraft paper label, which usually contains written model

number, form name, glaze name, and price, can also be found on any of the fifteen vases (and it may hide an ink mark underneath). The Rectangular mark is found on some of the First Fifteen forms, but usually less frequently than the Squat Rectangular mark. The Prang private label mark is sometimes found on model numbers 12 and 13, which were two of the three First Fifteen forms sold by the Prang Company.³³

The three First Fifteen vases produced until 1923 (Nos. 4, 11, 13)³⁴ are also frequently found with other identifying marks: the Oval Ink mark and the Fulper paper label (Fig. 19).³⁵ Because these two marks were first used in about 1917, a vase with either of these marks was produced sometime during 1917-1923. Although the Oval Incised and Oval Raised marks were also in common use during this time period, they are unlikely to be found on any of these three First Fifteen forms.³⁶





COLLECTING THE FIRST FIFTEEN

The First Fifteen represent some of Fulper's earliest vase forms and they exhibit many of the company's outstanding mirrored, matte, crystal, and flambé glazes. Thus, collectors often seek these vases as examples of Fulper's fine early work. However, putting together a complete set of the First Fifteen presents a formidable challenge. Although a few forms were produced over a long period and are readily available today, most are now quite scarce and rarely come to market. Consequently, collecting all fifteen vases typically becomes a long-term endeavor.

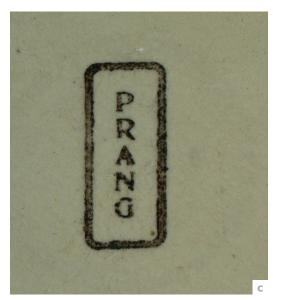
FIGURE 16: Shouldered Oviform Vase (model No. 13) with a Mustard Matte and Brown Flambé glaze (left) and a Cucumber Green matte glaze (right). Marks: Rectangular (left), Prang (right). Height: $4\frac{1}{2}$ in.

FIGURE 17: Amphora Vase (model No. 14) with a Black Flambé glaze (left), an extremely rare Peach Bloom glaze (middle), and a Green Flambé glaze (right). Marks: Rectangular (left), Vasekraft paper label and an Early Oval ink mark (middle), Squat Rectangular (right). Height: $8\frac{1}{4}$ in. The two vases on the left are in the collection of the Newark Museum.

FIGURE 18: Gourd Shaped Bottle Vase (model No. 15) with a Leopard Skin Crystal glaze (left) and a Green Flambé glaze (right). Marks: Squat Rectangular (both). Height: 5 in.

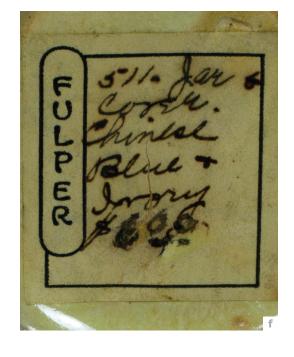












ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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PHOTO CREDITS:

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

FIGURE 19:

Various Fulper marks with their common names and dates of use:

- (a) Squat Rectangular ink mark, ca. 1910-1914
- (b) Rectangular ink mark, ca. 1910-1917
- (c) Prang ink mark, ca. 1913-1917
- (d) Vasekraft paper label, ca. 1911-1917
- (e) Oval ink mark, ca. 1917-1934
- (f) Fulper paper label, ca. 1917-1928

There are several versions of the Rectangular mark that differ in font style and size.

ENDNOTES:

- Geological Survey of New Jersey: Annual Report of the State Geologist for the Year 1898, Trenton, NJ, 1899, p. 202; Corporations of New Jersey: List of Certificates Filed in the Department of State From 1895 to 1899 Inclusive, Trenton, NJ, 1900, p. 197; Democrat-Advertiser, Flemington, NJ, Jul. 7, 1910. The pottery was founded in about 1814 and operated under various names until the Fulper Pottery Co. was incorporated in 1899; for the pottery's early history, see Robert C. Runge, Jr., Collector's Encyclopedia of Stangl Artware, Lamps, and Birds: Identification and Values, 2nd Edition (Paducah, KY: Collector Books, 2006).
- 2. Democrat-Advertiser, Flemington, NJ, Jul. 7, 1910.
 George W. Fulper (1848-1919) remained with the Fulper Pottery Co. until his retirement in Dec. 1910, after fifty years of service with the company and its predecessors; Pottery and Glass, Dec. 1910, p. 24. Edward B. Fulper (1860-1926) withdrew from the company to form the Standard Lamp and Glass Company in 1904; Corporations of New Jersey: List of Certificates Filed in the Department of State During the Year 1904, Trenton, NJ, 1905, p. 227. William H. Fulper (1872-1928) managed the company until his death on Oct. 15, 1928; New York Times, Oct. 16, 1928, p. 31.
- 3. The House Furnishing Review, Apr. 1908, p. 57; Democrat-Advertiser, Flemington, NJ, Jul. 7, 1910; also, see Runge, 2006 in note 1.
- 4. The Crafisman, Dec. 1909, p. xiv; Democrat-Advertiser, Flemington, NJ, Jul. 7, 1910. Fulper used the Vasekraft name (also sometimes written as Vase-Kraft or Vase Kraft) in catalogs and advertisements only until the end of 1916; e.g., see The Craftsman, Nov. 1916, p. 12a. Beginning in 1917, Fulper's catalogs and advertisements refer to their art pottery as simply "Fulper Pottery." For example, see The New Country Life, Apr. 1917, p. 149; May 1917, p. 149; Dec. 1917, p. 113
- 5. The Craftsman, Dec. 1909, p. xiv.
- 6. *Spinning Wheel*, Oct. 1973, p. 14-18.
- 7. Johann Martin Stangl (1888-1972) graduated from the Royal Ceramic Technical School in Bunzlau, Germany; see note 6. The two-year course of instruction included all aspects of pottery production, including drawing, modeling, chemistry, and glaze preparation: Brick, Dec. 1897, p. 224-225; The Pottery Industry: Report on the Cost of Production in the Earthenware and China Industries of the United States, England, Germany, and Austria, United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Washington, D.C., 1915, p. 550.
- 8. See note 6.
- 9. Pottery and Glass, Aug. 1910, p. 42-43.
- For a review on the Vasekraft lamps, see Jon A. Kornacki, "Fulper's Vasekraft Lamps," Journal of the American Art Pottery Association, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Spring 2012), p. 8-15.
- 11. Pottery and Glass, Apr. 1911, p. 8, 16-18.
- 12. New York Times, Mar. 24, 1911, p. 13; Pottery and Glass, Apr. 1911, p. 16-18. Whereas the first Vasekraft forms in 1909 were advertised as being "shaped by hand," the forms in this new Vasekraft line were mostly cast in molds.

- 13. 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.
- 14. With some exceptions, model numbers for Fulper forms are generally in chronological order. However, Fulper apparently did not give model numbers to their forms during the first year or so of Vasekraft production. When Fulper began using model numbers, it appears that they randomly assigned numbers to the early forms already in production. Consequently, the early model numbers are not in exact chronological order.
- 15. Model Nos. 1-5 are shown in a 1910 advertisement to the trade; *Pottery and Glass*, Aug. 1910, p. 42-43. All of the First Fifteen vases except model Nos. 12 and 13 are shown in a photo published in early 1911 (see Fig. 2); *Pottery and Glass*, Apr. 1911, p. 8. Model Nos. 12 and 13 were apparently also introduced at about this time or soon thereafter, but no later than Oct. 1911 because they were displayed with other First Fifteen vases at the 1911 Art Crafts Exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago (Oct. 3-25, 1911); *The Art Institute of Chicago Catalogue of the Tenth Annual Exhibition of Examples of Art Crafts and Original Designs for Decorations*, 1911.
- 16. 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. The only First Fifteen forms shown in this catalog are model Nos. 018, 016, and 017 (alias Nos. 4, 11, and 13, respectively). All other First Fifteen forms do not appear in the 1916 Vasekraft catalog or any later catalog. However, model Nos. 7 and 12 appear as bases of small bedside lamps in a catalog entitled "Fulper Pottery Complete Showing" (ca. 1917-1918).
- Shown in the 1916 Vasekraft catalog (see note 16); also, see *Country Life in America*, Oct. 1916, p. 112-114 and Dec. 1916, p. 106-114.
- 18. Model Nos. 018, 016, and 017 (alias Nos. 4, 11, and 13, respectively) are shown in all Fulper catalogs from 1916 to 1923. They are listed on the January 1, 1923 index and price list for the corresponding catalog (collection of Donald S. Hall), but they are not listed in the 1924 catalog (collection of Jon A. Kornacki) or any later catalog.
- 19. See note 13.
- Suzanne G. Valenstein, A Handbook of Chinese Ceramics (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975), p. 199-201, Fig. 138.
- 21. He Li, Chinese Ceramics: A New Comprehensive Survey From the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1996), p. 307, Fig. 666.
- 22. *Ibid.*, p. 159, Figs. 278 and 279. Although the Chinese and Fulper hexagonal shapes are similar, the styles of the handles are different.
- 23. Ibid., p. 77, Fig. 84.
- 24. Trevor W. Cornforth and Nathan Cheung, *Chinese Snuff Bottles: A Guide to Addictive Miniatures* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2007).
- 25. For examples, see Valenstein, 1975 in note 20, p. 117, Fig. 36 and p. 159, Fig. 101. Also, see Li Zhiyan,

- Virginia L. Bower, and He Li, ed., *Chinese Ceramics:* From the Paleolithic Period Through the Qing Dynasty (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 373, Figs. 7.49a and 7.49b; p. 507, Fig. 9.63a; p. 539, Fig. 10.4; p. 580, Fig. 10.53.
- 26. Arts and Decoration, Nov. 1911, p.35.
- 27. See note 13.
- 28. See note 13.
- 29. Pottery and Glass, Apr. 1911, p. 16-18.
- 30. The correct color for Cat's Eye was determined by examination of specific forms that have this glaze listed as a standard glaze in the Fulper catalogs. In addition, a few examples were observed with paper labels containing the Cat's Eye glaze name. I have not yet conclusively identified Fulper's Elephant's Breath glaze.
- 31. John Hibel, Carole Goldman Hibel, Robert DeFalco, and David Rago, *The Fulper Book* (privately published, 1992), p. 78-79.
- 32. Approximate dates of use for the four marks have been previously published; see Hibel *et al.*, 1992 in note 31. The revised dates presented here (see Fig. 19) are based on an extensive examination of forms with these marks. A couple other rare marks have also been found on First Fifteen vases: an Early Oval ink mark (ca. 1910-1911) and an Early Round Vasekraft paper label (ca. 1910-1911) (see Figs. 15, 17).
- 33. For a certain period, the Prang Company (an art supply business) sold Fulper forms with a Prang mark instead of a Fulper mark. Prang marketed specific Fulper pottery forms for use as drawing models during 1913-1929 (see Runge, 2006 in note 1). The Prang Art Catalogue (3rd Edition) from about 1915-1916 (collection of Jon A. Kornacki) shows 24 Fulper forms, including three of the First Fifteen vases: model Nos. 11, 12, and 13. Many of the forms in the Prang catalogs are also shown in the Fulper catalogs, while some are found only in the Prang catalogs. The pieces sold by Prang were labeled with the Prang ink mark only from 1913 (cited in a Fulper company memo; R. Runge, personal communication) to about 1917, which is when Fulper also discontinued using their Rectangular ink mark. After 1917, it appears that all Fulper forms sold by Prang were labeled with Fulper marks. Although the Prang mark has been observed on model Nos. 12 and 13 (see Figs. 15, 16), this mark is unlikely to be found on model No. 11 because it is too large for the vase's narrow base
- 34. During 1916-1923, model numbers 4, 11, and 13 were produced with new model numbers: 018, 016, and 017, respectively.
- 35. Previously published dates for the Oval Ink mark and the Fulper paper label (see Hibel *et al.*, 1992 in note 31) are now known to be inaccurate. The revised dates presented here (see Fig. 19) are based on an extensive examination of forms with these marks.
- 36. The bases of model Nos. 4, 11, and 13 (alias Nos. 018, 016, and 017, respectively) are too small to fully accommodate the Oval Incised and Oval Raised marks. For photos of the Oval Incised and Oval Raised marks, see Hibel *et al.*, 1992 in note 31.