



Grandma's Tea Leaf Ironstone, A History and Study of English and American Potteries

Annise Doring Heavilin

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Tea leaf ironstone dishes are named for their decorations. There was a superstition that it was lucky if a whole tea leaf unfolded at the bottom of your cup. This idea was translated into the pattern of dishes known as tea leaf. By 1850 at least twelve English factories were making this pattern, and by the 1870s it was a popular pattern in many countries. The tea leaf was always a luster glaze on early wares, although now some pieces are made with a brown tea leaf. There are many variations of tea leaf designs, such as Teaberry, Pepper Leaf, and Gold Leaf. The designs were used on many different white ironstone shapes, such as Bamboo, Lily of the Valley, Empress, and Cumbow. The tea leaf pattern pictured a luster tea leaf on a white dish. Beginning in the 1840's, English potters began to ship white ironstone ceramic ware to the U.S., decorated with copper lustre bands and/or simple motifs, made exclusively for the American market. Anthony Shaw is considered to have produced the original Tea Leaf motif on his Sydenham, Niagara Fan and Chinese Shape body styles, registered in 1856. These are the first of over 150 body styles decorated with the Tea Leaf motif by dozens of English and American potters. These talented potters continued to furnish this beautiful copper lustre decorated white ironstone to the Americas until the beginning of the 20th century. In 1980, some 130 years after its American introduction, a group of Tea Leaf collectors from ten states gathered in Springfield, Illinois to formally organize the Tea Leaf Club International -- hundreds of Club members now span almost every state in the US, as well as members in Canada. This beautiful book covers all this history with gorgeous pictures to accompany the story.

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