

# Restaurant Ware Collectors Network®

## Iconic Establishments

A series of articles about the china used by venues ranging from hotels and restaurants to burger joints and hospitals

Writing and compilation by Larry R. Paul  
Editing and layout by Phillip Lord

ELLIS ISLAND  
NEW YORK  
8 February 2020

Between its opening in 1892 and its closure in 1954, about 12 million immigrants passed through Ellis Island in New York Harbor. As many as 5,000 people could go through the entry process in a day. The federal government had private contractors bid for exclusive three-year contracts as a food concessionaire. Immigrants who passed their physical inspections and had all of their papers in proper order could buy boxed meals or snacks from the caterer's food stands. The people who were detained due to health or visa problems were fed in a large, 1,000-seat dining room, located in the Laundry and Kitchen building, which adjoined the Main Building.

The Kitchen and Laundry Building was completed in 1901. It contained dining rooms for both immigrants and Ellis Island employees. These buildings were all connected by passageways so that people did not have to go outside to move between them. The catering contract specified that the vendor would provide bread for breakfast, beef or fish, soup, and potatoes for "dinner," and bread and stewed prunes for "supper." Coffee, tea, milk, and sugar were to be provided. Immigrants paid for their food. In 1905 they were charged 5 1/2¢ for breakfast, 11¢ for lunch (the large meal), and 8¢ for dinner. In some cases, the steamship companies that brought the immigrants from Europe were charged for this food and housing, because it was their fault the immigrants arrived in poor health.

Some 1917 menus in the New York Public Library collection provide information on what was being served at that time. A 1923 menu shows a different selection. As often happens, the quality of the food varied depending upon the caterer who held the contract. With no competition, some caterers took advantage of the immigrants and served less than the highest quality food. In some cases, it was month-old pies made with apple skins and cores, or tainted meat and fish. There was no kosher food available for Jewish immigrants until 1911, when the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society set up a kosher kitchen on Ellis Island.

The dining halls were originally set up with long tables flanked by benches, which were bolted to the floor. By 1925, bentwood chairs had replaced those benches.

Early views of the dining hall show the tables set with enameled tin plates, with unsanitary chips plainly showing in the photos. By 1910, plain white china was in use, along with some remaining enameled bowls. A 1920 photograph shows plain soup plates and handleless cups, along with a plate and small bowls with a lined border, but the pitcher is enameled tin.

The earliest known crested china features a view of Ellis Island in the center of the well. The "HB" Old-English-style monogram stands for Harry Balfe, the caterer from 1905 to 1908. Maddock made this china on a Lamberton body, and it was supplied by Frederick Loeser & Co. , a Brooklyn, NY department store. This pattern has been reproduced for the National Park Service, which sells it in their gift shop.

In 1922 Charles A. May created a border design that Maddock wanted to market to a large number of customers, so they applied for a patent in hopes of keeping other china companies from copying it. The patent was issued on May 13, 1923. (62,090). One of the many customers of this pattern was the caterer that had the Ellis Island food contract. Photographs from as early as 1926 to as late as 1931 show this pattern china used at Ellis Island. This black transfer pattern is shown and described in the IDwiki. This china service, based on the photographs, seems to have been limited to 9 1/2" plates, soup plates, and handleless cups. All of these pieces are fully backstamped for the Commissary Contractor on Ellis Island. There are also cups with handles. These may have been used in the employee dining room, which was located on the second floor of the Powerhouse Building. If you look on WorthPoint.com, you will find items such as individual creamers and handled bouillon cups without the Ellis Island backstamp, but were sold as if those items were used there.

Immigrants with health problems were transferred to the hospital section on Ellis Island. Their care and feeding came under the United States Public Health Service. A platter with the Public Health Service circular crest is part of the National Park Service collection.

In the fall of 1941, before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Justice Department began planning to round up 'foreigners' and hold them on Ellis Island. They began making these arrests on December 8, 1941. The internees were housed in the baggage and dormitory building behind the Great Hall building. The camp was closed in late 1945. The Ellis Island complex itself was closed in 1954.

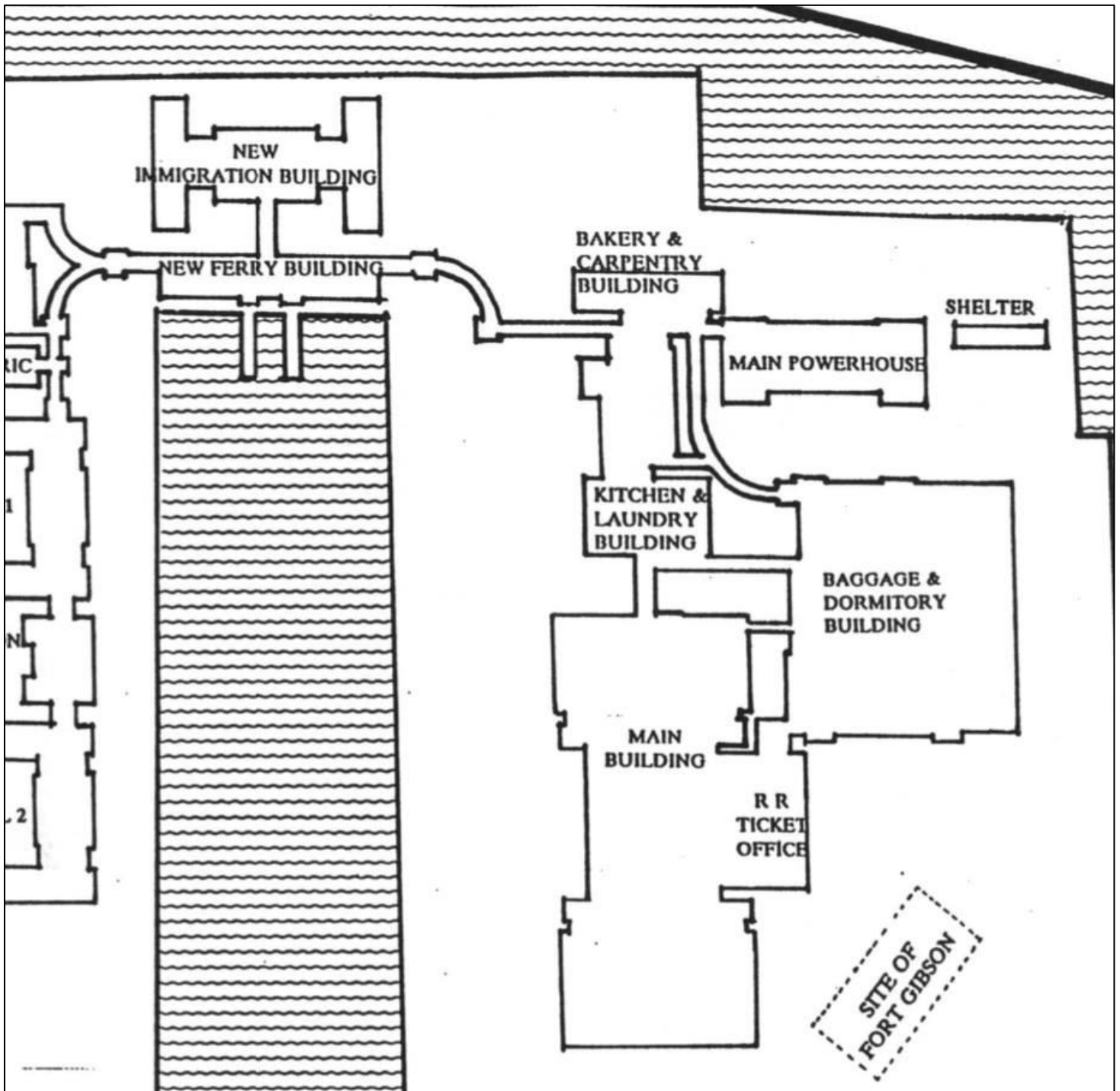
Information sources: IDwiki; Paul Trosko; Gettyimages.com, Getty Image search; Pixels.com, Pixels website; History.com, History Channel website, various articles about Ellis Island; [www1.nyc.gov/site/lpc/index.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/lpc/index.page), New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission website, Ellis Island Historic District, LP-1902; NPS.gov, National Park Service website; Wikipedia.com; LOC.gov, Library of Congress website, prints and photos; MCNY.org, Museum of the City of New York website, Prints & Photos collection; Ephemeralnewyork.wordpress.com, Ephemeral New York website, article "The World War II internment camp on Ellis Island," January 31, 2011; Granger.com, Granger Historical Photo Archive website; eBay.com; WorthPoint.com; AOL.com, image search; Google.com, image search.



### Postcard view of Ellis Island







Kitchen & Laundry Building where dining hall was located



Box lunch counter for immigrants who have completed their processing



The “Kitchen & Laundry” building is on the left in this view of Ellis Island.

J.J. LUSSIER  
COMMISSARY CONTRACTOR  
ELLIS ISLAND, N.Y.H.

BREAKFAST

Boiled Eggs  
Fried Potatoes  
Bread and butter  
Coffee

DECEMBER 20, 1917.

J.J. LUSSIER  
COMMISSARY CONTRACTOR  
ELLIS ISLAND, N.Y.H.

BREAKFAST

Corn Flakes  
Minced Ham and Scrambled Eggs  
Bread and butter  
Coffee

DECEMBER 27, 1917.

J.J. LUSSIER  
COMMISSARY CONTRACTOR  
ELLIS ISLAND, N.Y.H.

BREAKFAST

Stewed Prunes  
Fried Eggs  
Bread and butter  
Coffee

DECEMBER 28, 1917.

Breakfast menus from 1917



TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1917.

BILL OF FARE  
for the  
IMMIGRANT DINING ROOM

BREAKFAST  
Oranges  
Boiled Rice  
Bread and Butter  
Coffee (Tea on request)  
Milk and crackers for children.

DINNER  
Lima Bean Soup  
Scrambled Eggs  
Lyonnaise Potatoes  
Bread and Butter  
Milk and crackers for children.

SUPPER  
Macaroni with Cheese  
Bread Pudding, Raisins  
Bread and Butter  
Tea (Coffee on request)  
Milk and crackers for children

Milk and crackers will be served to children  
between the regular meals.

Ellis Island  
New York Harbor

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 1917.

BILL OF FARE  
for the  
IMMIGRANT DINING ROOM

BREAKFAST  
Oranges  
Oatmeal  
Bread and Butter  
Coffee (Tea on request)  
Milk and crackers for children

DINNER  
Bean Soup  
Codfish Cakes, Tomato Sauce  
Spaghetti  
Bread and Butter  
Milk and crackers for children

SUPPER  
Corned Beef Hash  
Coffee Cake  
Bread and Butter  
Tea (Coffee on request)  
Milk and crackers for children

Milk and crackers will be served to  
children between the regular meals.

Ellis Island  
New York Harbor

1917 menus with all three meals

# IMMIGRANT DINING ROOM

## BILL of FARE

FOR, ~~TUESDAY JUNE 5th 1923~~ 192

### BREAKFAST

Boiled Rice with Milk

Stewed Peaches

Coffee

Bread and Butter

Milk served to all women and children.

### DINNER

Mock Turtle Soup

Ragout of Mutton - Vegetables  
Boiled Potatoes

Liberty Pudding  
Coffee

Bread and Butter

Milk served to all women and children.

### SUPPER

Roast Beef - Green Peppers

Apple Sauce

Tea or Coffee

Bread and Butter

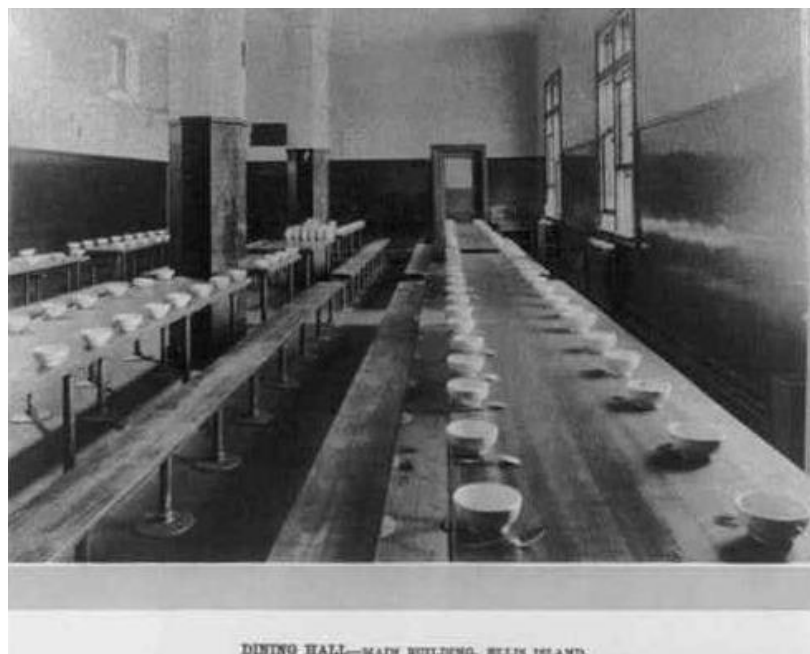
Milk served to all women and children.

For all women and children Milk and Crackers are served in the Detention Quarters, between regular meal hours, and are distributed at bedtime.





Enameled tin plates with showing chips in the enamel



1902 view of dining area with a bowl and spoon at each place



1907: Meal time



Dining room in 1910



*One of the twenty-five cent meals served at Ellis Island, 1920. (Credit: Bettmann/Getty Images)*

A view from 1920 shows a few pieces had border and verge lines.





The tablecloths were likely oilcloth, and the pitchers were still enameled tin- note the chipped surface.

U. S. IMMIGRATION STATION, ELLIS ISLAND, NEW YORK



DINING ROOM

© 1925 D. T. MAGOWAN, MAPLEWOOD, N. J. 11

A 1925 postcard view. The bentwood chairs have replaced the benches.



Maddock 9 1/2" x 6 1/2" platter, crested for caterer, Harry Balfe, 1905.

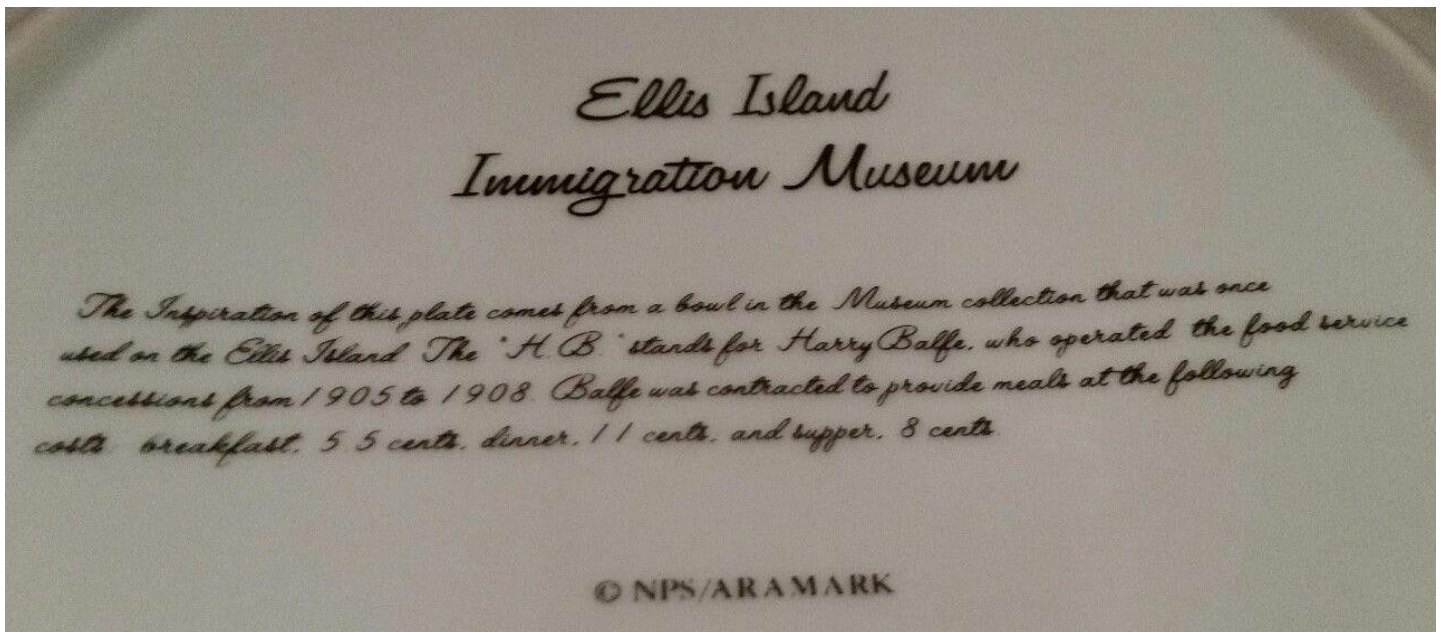


Backstamp on the platter above





Modern reproduction of the 1905 pattern platter, made for the National Park Service



Backstamp on the reproduced platter above.



Handleless cup by Scammell



Scammell's Trenton China with Ellis Island backstamp on cup above



1943 view of employee Lunch room (Granger image)



Platter from the hospital with Public Health Service crest

Source: <https://www.nps.gov/stli/learn/historyculture/history-of-ellis-island-from-1892-to-1954.htm>



The following comments concerning Ellis Island china service were posted in advance of, and in response to, this article. These postings were edited to include only substantive material.

Keith Marantz

8 March 2018

I've had this Scammell's Trenton piece in my garage for awhile now. Didn't know Ellis Island used this pattern as well.



This image was followed by comments about the backstamp on pieces with this pattern and where those pieces were used including the Ellis Island commissary.

Patrick Dressler

The pattern on Keith's cup looked familiar to me so I pulled this out of the cupboard. Similar but different, and more recent, Walker 1961



Larry Paul

This pattern was used by many many customers. The Ellis Island caterer's pieces are back marked.

Paul Trosko

This is what the Ellis Island backstamp looked like.



Larry Paul provided a copy of the original pattern design of 1922, seen on the next page.

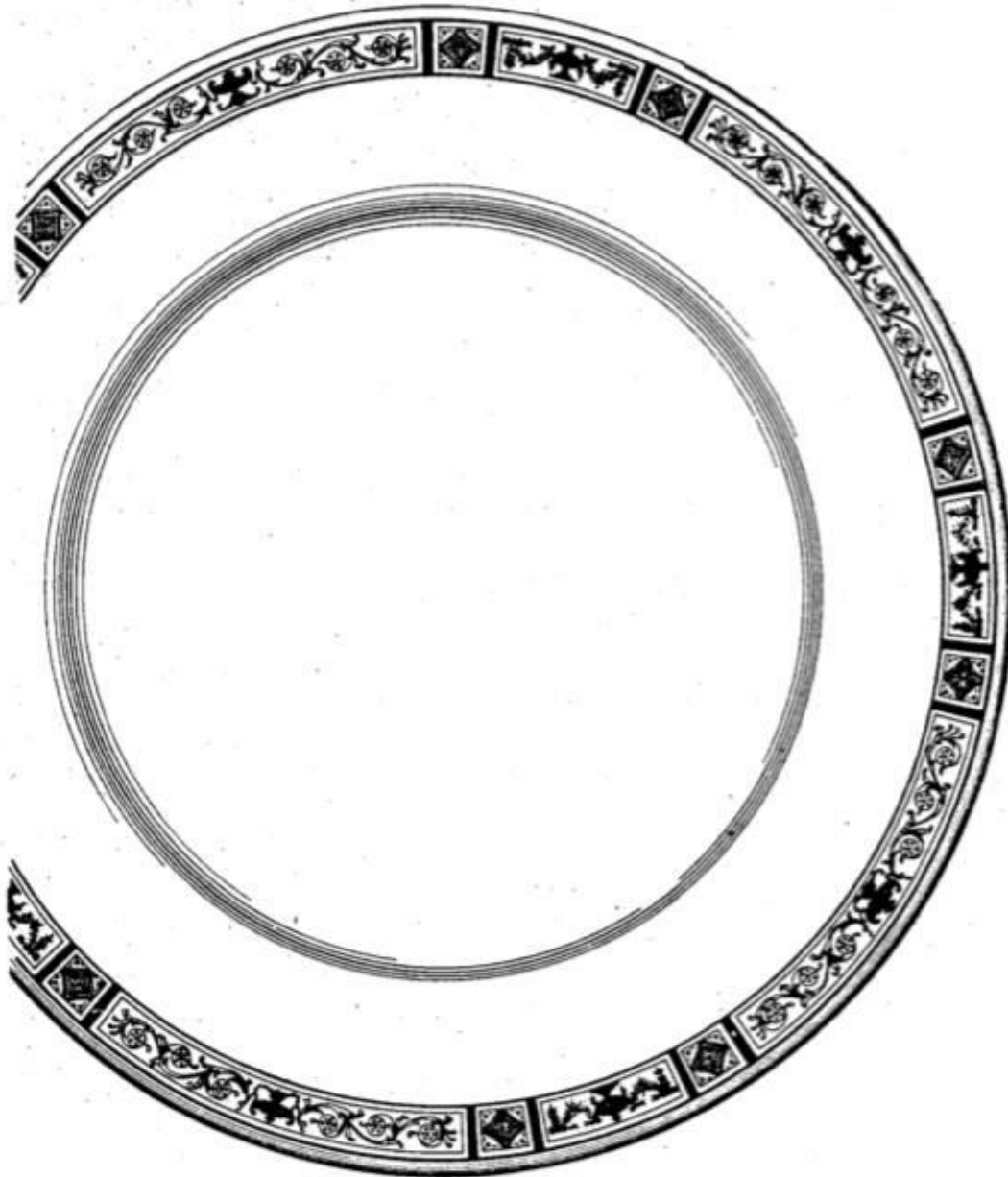
Mar. 13, 1923.

Des. 62,090

C. A. MAY

PLATE OR SIMILAR ARTICLE

Filed June 28, 1922



WITNESSES

*Charles H. Ourand*

INVENTOR

*Charles A. May*

BY

*W. Parker Reinold*

ATTORNEY



Larry Kent Neil Jr

8 June 2018

I am curious about back marked Scammell's Trenton Ellis Island china. Has this been reproduced? I came across this plate and it got me thinking. Any ideas what time frame this would have been used.



Larry Paul provided the illustration on the previous page with the comment:

This is the design for the pattern. The production date would be from 1923 onward. This design was patented with the idea of producing it for as many customers as possible, which is exactly what Maddock and Scammell did. Without the "Ellis Island" backstamp, it was most likely made for one of their many other customers.

Larry Kent Neil Jr

I have seen this pattern mainly in black backstamped for Ellis Island, but my plate has a blue design. I wonder how many times this was ordered through the 19650s?

What period did Scammell's Trenton China also back mark their plated with their incised name?



Larry Paul: My feeling is the combination incised backstamp that was done when the bisque ware plate was turned and the decal or transfer backstamp was applied when it was decorated ended probably around 1930. I have no facts to back this up.

Doing the incised backstamp required the turned to flip the plate after completing the turning operation to do the mark. This took time and potentially could cause damage to the wet clay. As with almost everything business related it was about money. Not doing two backstamps saved a few pennies per piece.





Anthony Draper

12 July 2020

Posted the following three images of historic pieces





