

Documenting the shards, EPA cleanup at Carr China Plant

The Carr China Company was built in 1916 by Thomas Carr on the bank of the Tygart River in Grafton, West Virginia, and made vitrified commercial china.

Production continued until the fateful day in July 1952 when company owner Wheeler Bachman took exception to the news that his employees were considering unionizing, and he abruptly ordered the plant closed. Fourteen years later, on July 16 and 17, 1966, the abandoned plant burned.

After the building burned it became an attractive nuisance for vagrants and children and it was eventually bulldozed, except for the floor and one remaining portion of a wall. The rubble was left and the site became a dumping area.



Above: Onion pattern in blue peeking out from its hiding place on the right.

With the news that the lead-contaminated, nine-acre site was slated for cleanup, a small group of virtual friends, brought together by their love for restaurant ware and the thrill of the hunt, gathered there in October 2009 to walk among the remains: the factory's back wall, thousands of bricks, stilts, undecorated bisque-fired shards and high-fired decorated shards, and saggars strewn over the overgrown property.

And they spent some time digging, too, hoping to find any treasures or clues to Carr's past hidden deep in the layers of ash and rocks and mud on the Tygart's hilly bank.

Trucks began hauling off the top layer of shards on Oct. 20, 2009, in preparation



Left: Walking the bank of the Tygart, strewn with pottery shards.

for the site cleanup – thought to involve scraping off four feet of dirt from the entire parcel of land. Workers cut down trees that had grown up on the plant site and took down the plant walls.

Two surveyors spent a day at the site on March 18, 2010, and said their work was in preparation for the final cleanup later on in the spring.

On Oct. 13, 2010, three 18-wheelers



Above: Shards found under the roots of downed tree. Below: Another intriguing find on the steep slope.



were spotted hauling pottery remains from the Carr site. They were thought to be headed to serve as landfill for a roadbed near Forman, W.V. – and to be forever encapsulated in concrete.

Photos on these pages give an idea of the general lay of the land of the Carr property; the massive number of shards scattered on the grounds; the property in March 2010 after the cleanup the preceding fall; and photos taken by EPA employees as their work progressed.

Right: Doorway in factory wall. Below: Firebricks and shards tumbled down the hill and into the river and remained there all those years.



Many thanks to Helen Cutshaw and Sherri Harris for their photos from that day of the first dig.



Left: Bisque-fired undecorated shards like these were scattered all over the site. Below: Bricks were everywhere.



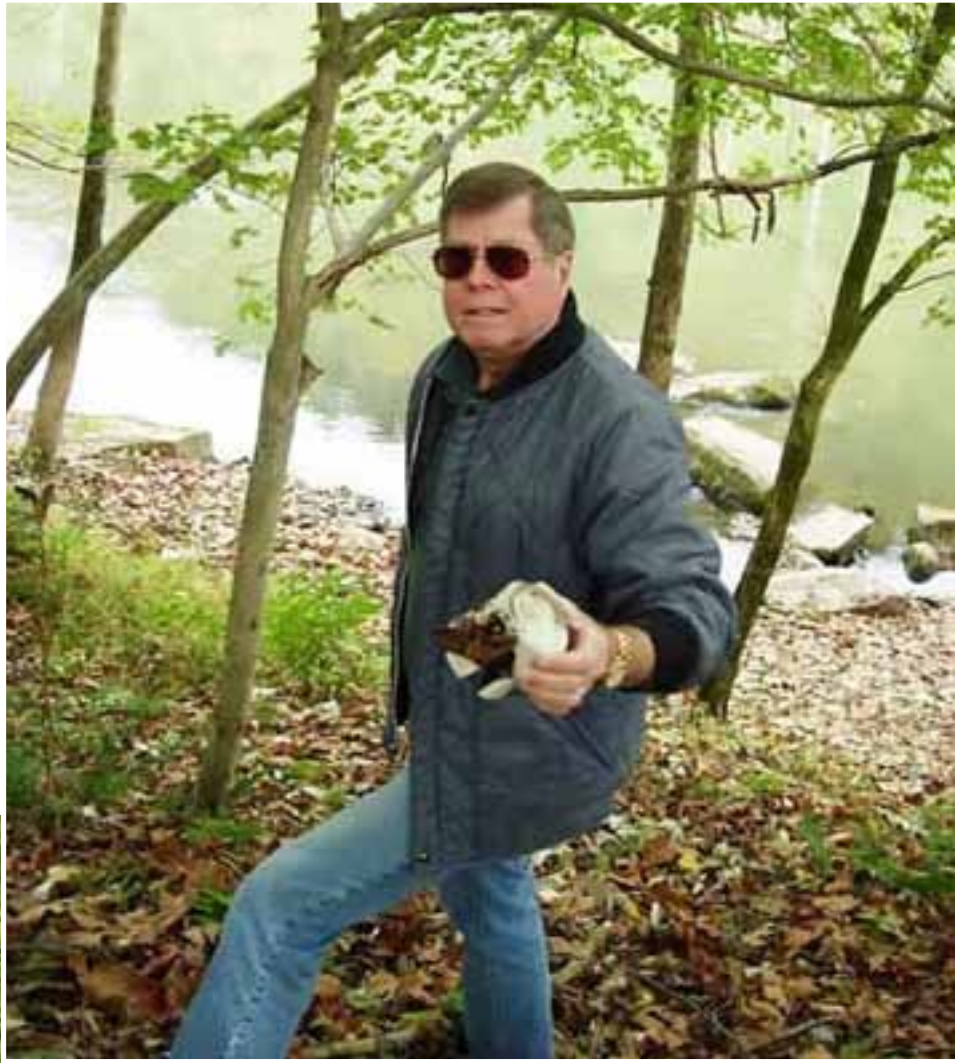


Above: A factory wall. Left: These are most likely firebricks.



Above: Shards lay everywhere. Left: A gnarled tree made its way through the shards.

Right: Remains of a mug found on the bank.
Below: A portion of the factory floor between
the kilns and the finishing and packing area.





Top: One glazed green-lined mug shard stood out among all the bisque-fired pieces. Bottom: A factory wall.



Above: A variety of patterns, clockwise from top left: Empire, Marine, Delray, Madeline, and a mystery pattern. Right: Nobility pattern. Below: Various topmarks include Bowles Lunch, Triangle Diner, Rikers, White House Shops and Bucking Horse.





Above: A series of three cones were used when firing the ware to the correct temperature. One would be the guide cone, the middle one the firing cone and the third the guard cone. Each slumps as it reaches a different temperature. Below: A pottery cone, Rho Dendra shards and what is believed to be chunks of Rho Dendra-colored pink clay.





Above: Various topmarks including Cleveland Athletic Club, the Seal of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Waverly Hills Sanatorium, SKF - Svenska Kullagerfabiken AB, and Peddie School, located in Hightstown, N.J. Below: Mold for watch mug plus portion of watch mug shown on the mold.





Above: B.P.O.E. Elks, White House Shops, Erwin pattern; Top Right: White Tower, Riker's, Hot Shoppes; Below: Maythorne pattern; Right: Cafe Brulot cup.





The site was revisited on March 18-19, 2010, to see what work was done in the fall and what artifacts, if any, remained. Two surveyors were at work to prepare the site for what they said would be the final cleanup later that spring.

As a contrast to photos from the fall, all trees that were on the plant grounds had been cut down, all plant walls had been razed, and what remained of one of the beehive kilns had been torn down, too. There was a direct line of sight between the plant's neighbors across the street and the grounds.

Left: The "stairway," still intact for monitoring the river.
Below: The view to the street from the side where bisque-fired ware was dumped.



A concrete floor remained, but it was untouched, and shards and artifacts could still be found there and on the river bank, as shown in the following photos. The woods that lay between the plant and the river were

Below: The only remains of the plant's back wall.





Top row, from left: What looks to have been the keystone for one of the beehive kilns' arched openings; an approximately 14-inch gear; mold. Below: Despite that initial cleanup, there were still thousands of shards left behind.



Photos on these pages were generously provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, which carefully documented the cleanup work at the Carr site with photos ranging from June through December 2010. The W.V. Department of Environmental Protection requested an

assessment of the Carr site by the EPA, which found lead concentrations in the soils up to 15,100 mg/kg. According to the EPA report, "Some sample areas of the site contained materials that were approximately 50% china and 50% soils, and contained up to 21,600 mg/kg lead."



Above: Shards from the plant formed a white path down to the lake. Left: An EPA employee seemed to have fallen under the spell of shards.

