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## A Lot On My Plate: Family Dishware Serving Up a History of Global Commercialization

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### Cover Page Footnote

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## **“A Lot On My Plate”: Family Dishware Serving Up a History of Global Commercialization**

Grace Thanasiu, *The University of Akron, Department of History*

Dishes are objects that are easily overlooked: when literally serving their purpose, the food atop them is the center of attention, and once the meal is complete, dishes only seem to annoy us as they pile up in the sink. However, these everyday objects are actually artifacts when they are placed in their historical context that can tell their own stories, connect people, and reflect changes. I have had such an artifact in my life since April of 2002. The artifact is an off-white dinner plate with a deep brown circle around the rim, featuring a design with two pinkish-orange flowers and green stems surrounded by little etchings of baby’s breath (See Figure 1). According to a backstamp on the plate, it was created by the Homer Laughlin China Company and “Made in USA” (See Figure 2). I presume the plate belongs to Homer Laughlin’s “Hearthside” shape collection. The plate was originally my grandmother’s and was likely purchased in the early 1970s. Perhaps this is obvious, but the plate was created for the functional purpose of serving food. I shall discuss the context of the plate in more detail throughout this research summary and provide commentary on the plate’s approximate value in the early ‘70s based largely on information about how my grandmother obtained it. From there, the consequences of the plate can be examined: the plate’s value reflects the decline of Homer Laughlin’s relative popularity as globalization emerged and American consumers began to engage with an international market.

The artifact initially belonged to my grandmother and was a part of a set of plates just like it. It came under my mother’s permanent ownership after my grandmother unexpectedly passed away on April 8, 2002 after suffering a heart attack at the age of 62. About a week before, she cooked dinner for my family and sent my mom home with a serving of leftovers on the plate that is our object of study. My mom never got a chance to return it to her, and so it remains in use as the only one of its kind amongst our dishes— serving as a regular reminder of my granny’s generosity. As previously mentioned, the plate was produced by the Homer Laughlin China Company, which opened its original two-kiln pottery in East Liverpool, Ohio in 1871. By 1930, Homer Laughlin had built several new factories and moved production to the other side of the Ohio River in Newell, West

Virginia (Cunningham, 172). Owing to this information from *The Collector's Encyclopedia of American Dinnerware* and the backstamp on my artifact, it is fair to assume that my plate was fired at one of five plants in Newell, West Virginia. I am asserting that the plate belongs to Homer Laughlin's "Hearthside" shape collection based on primary and secondary sources. For the primary source, my mom remembers my grandmother saying she obtained the set of plates to which the artifact belonged in the early 1970s when my mom was a very young child. I have a wonderful picture of my mom that corroborates the fact that the plates were definitely in my grandma's original possession sometime after the early 70s and before 2002. The photo, which was taken in '87, shows my mom as a junior in high school in front of a meal she cooked for my dad's birthday. Since she was in high school, the meal was cooked at my grandma's house and eaten in the basement, and the photo shows the meal being served on one of the plates in the set, possibly my exact artifact (See Figure 3).

After reading a secondary source called *Homer Laughlin China: Guide to Shapes and Patterns*, I believe that my plate is of the "Hearthside" shape collection for a few reasons. First, "the Hearthside shape was designed by Vincent Broomhall, art director of the Homer Laughlin China Company from 1963 until 1973" (Nossaman, 115). It is plausible that a plate designed during this decade-long period was widely sold in the early 1970s. Second, the physical characteristics of my plate are extremely similar to the description of the Hearthside design according to Nossaman's text and images found in the book of other Hearthside plates (See Figure 4). My plate is oatmeal colored, features a floral design, and has a deep brown line around the rim, which was quite popular on Hearthside shaped plates. It also fits the distinguishing characteristic of having ridges "on the rims of the flatware pieces" (Nossaman, 115).

My mom's story about how my grandmother obtained the set of plates helps reveal their approximate value in the early '70s, specifically that they were likely not a rare design of plates, nor were they probably extremely expensive. She recalls my grandmother saying that the set of plates was "purchased" using redemption stamps. Redemption stamps—also called trading stamps—were distributed by stores "under a program where customer-savers could redeem books of stamps for cash or merchandise" (Gellhorn, 907). With the assistance of a woman named Victoria who works at The Special Collections Division of the Akron-Summit County Public Library, I found a few advertisements for local redemption stores that accepted Top Value stamps, a popular company in the stamp market. One poster proclaims the grand opening of a new redemption store

in Stow that occurred on September 23, 1959, while another advertises “open house days” at the redemption store located at 55 East Market Street and is dated with the year 1960 (See Figures 5 and 6).

These posters urge the reader to “Visit your Top Value Redemption Store—this week. You’ll find gifts for every room in your home...gifts for every member of your family” (Figure 6). I suspect my grandmother exchanged her stamps for goods at this redemption center, owing to the fact that 55 East Market Street is an eight minute drive from where she lived in South Akron. Upon first acknowledging the dates of these advertisements, I became a bit discouraged—I suspect my plate was obtained with redemption stamps in the early ‘70s, but the dates on these local trading stamp ads hint that they were mostly popular in the early ‘60s. While it is true that they were growing far less popular by the 1970s and even being done away with in some stores, I have evidence that suggests they were still used in northeast Ohio at the time my grandma found her set of plates. Figure 7 shows an advertisement for Fazio’s, a Cleveland based grocery chain that saw its heyday throughout the 1960s and 70s (Cleveland.com, “John Fazio, Fisher Foods and Fazio’s grocery store co-owner, dies at 99”, <https://www.cleveland.com/business/2019/03/john-fazio-fisher-foods-and-fazios-grocery-store-owner-dies-at-99.html>). The advertisement announces that Fazio’s is getting rid of their Blue Chips Stamps program in order to keep food prices low and competitive. However, it encourages shoppers to “complete your books now for Christmas” because the program would be in operation until December 31, 1972.

With this evidence that the plates were likely obtained with redemption stamps, I can now discuss how this supports the idea that the set of plates was not initially rare. Profit was possible for stamp companies largely because “the stamp company's cost of merchandise is lower than the merchandise's retail value because the company purchases the merchandise as a large wholesaler” (Gellhorn, 909). If my grandma’s set of plates was indeed “purchased” with redemption stamps, this means a stamp company bought several sets of Hearthside Homer Laughlin plates at wholesale prices to later distribute to stamp collectors. Wholesale merchandise is sold in large quantities, which supports the claim that my plate was not a rare item at the time it was obtained. I may be incorrect in my original assumption that all goods “purchased” with redemption stamps are inherently cheap—goods that are normally sold for expensive prices simply need to be obtained with many stamps. For example, an article from the *Akron Beacon Journal* in 1963 tells how nuns from St. Ambrose Parish got their church a new

station wagon by collecting 1,464,000 trading stamps! (See Figure 8). I suspect my grandma saved stamps for a long time in order to purchase her set of plates, because an advertisement for a set of Homer Laughlin Hearthside plates found in *An Overview of Homer Laughlin Dinnerware* depicts a set of 20 plates selling for \$17.77 (See Figure 9). Adjusted for inflation, these plates would cost \$119.21 today, a price I do not consider to be cheap. Using the \$17.77 price and the \$2.50 rate for stamp books as described in the *ABJ* article as a benchmark, I calculate that my grandma probably saved 7 full stamp books before she could obtain the set of plates from the redemption store. I imagine she was proud of her patience and thriftiness, and that's why my mom recalls her talking about how she earned the plates with redemption stamps.

This brings our discussion to the consequences of this artifact. According to a brief overview of the company's history on their website, "The sixties and seventies were difficult years for the American pottery industry, with low-cost imports carving out market share in the retail markets at the expense of domestic companies" ("Our History", <https://fiestafactorydirect.com/pages/our-history>). Low-cost imports to the United States were a result of several federal actions to increase globalization after World War II, including the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 and the Kennedy Round Negotiations of 1964-1967. The Trade Expansion Act of 1962 had three key purposes: it intended to "stimulate the economic growth of the United States and maintain and enlarge foreign markets for the products of United States agriculture, industry, mining, and commerce; to strengthen economic relations with foreign countries through the development of open and nondiscriminatory trading in the free world; and to prevent Communist economic penetration" ("Title I—Short Title and Purposes Title II—Trade Agreements", <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-76/pdf/STATUTE-76-Pg872.pdf>). The Kennedy Round Negotiations resulted in industrial tariff reductions of around 35 percent, and helped to avoid a trade war between the European Economic Community and the United States, which would also have damaged Western political unity as well as trade links. "For good or ill, the round can be seen as a contribution to the process of globalization through economic integration" (Colman, 2018). The increase of globalization is linked to the decline of Homer Laughlin's relative popularity. The company's struggle with increased competition helps explain why they would agree to wholesale their products to redemption stores. However, Homer Laughlin's long standing reputation as a quality pottery since 1871 explains why they still justified above average prices for their goods, even when their value was converted into redemption stamps.

In conclusion, this Hearthsides Homer Laughlin plate is incredibly important for several reasons. The history of how it was obtained reveals a fascinating system of purchasing goods that boomed in the mid-twentieth century, and its contradictory value as an item that went for wholesale prices to redemption centers but also had a high retail cost reflect how Homer Laughlin adopted to increasing globalization: they participated in promotional sales of their goods via redemption stamp programs to ensure that American consumers were still buying their products, but also insisted on selling their goods for a handsome price owing to their reputation as a quality brand, probably to assert their dominance in the growing international market of pottery that was becoming available to American consumers as a result of globalization.

## Index



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

GRAND OPENING TOMORROW

# NEW

## Top Value Stamps Redemption Store

**STOW-KENT CENTER**  
U. S. Route 5, Stow, Ohio

**STORE HOURS**  
Mon. 12 to 6 P.M. Tues. 11 to 6 P.M.  
Wed. 12 to 6 P.M. Thurs. 12 to 6 P.M.  
Fri. 12 to 6 P.M. Sat. 10 to 6 P.M.

### GIFTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

The gift for the home... from Uncle Sam's gift certificate. In Store Selections. Your choice of 50 gift saving certificates—General Electric, Sylvania, Radio Shack, and many others.

The "Gift Yourself" book select anything from a Double Mite Bag to a 100' Power Saw. You'll find them here along with cameras, trunks, drills, shavers, clocks, watches and lots of other gifts for home working.

**YOUR NEW TOP VALUE STAMPS REDEMPTION STORE** is ready to serve you. All gifts are attractively displayed for easy personal selection. Visit your new Top Value Store soon... pick out a gift of your choice or a surprise gift for the family... see for Top Value Stamps.

Available in all 48 states...  
Book, Cash & Carry, Cash, Time, Savings,  
Radio, Cigarettes, 100' Power Saw,  
Double Mite Bag, Clock and more.

VISIT OTHER TOP VALUE  
REDEMPTION STORES LOCATED AT:

**55 E. MARKET ST., AKRON**  
\*Location At Stow-Kent M.B. Branch  
**Gift of Golden Savers Book**  
With 50 Free Stamps  
Sweet Success For Children

# Top Value Stamps

*They're just like Gold*

WE GUARANTEE  
each of our stamps  
will be redeemed  
for the full value of  
any item in the  
catalogue.

**Top Value Stamps  
Golden  
Guarantee**

ST. P. O. BOX 1000, OHIO

Top Value Stamps ABJ Ad Tue 22 Sep 1959 p10

Figure 5

**TOPPIE**

It's **OPEN HOUSE DAYS** at your **Top Value Redemption Store**... thru Feb. 27

**Redeem now... get**

## 100 FREE Top Value Stamps with every gift!

**Come on over**—to your Top Value Redemption Store! Bring the youngsters. And be sure to bring your filled books of Top Value Stamps! It's "Open House Days!" And, as a special bonus when redeeming your books, you'll receive a certificate good for 100 free Top Value Stamps.

These certificates will be accepted by merchants who give Top Value Stamps.

Visit your Top Value Redemption Store—this week. You'll find gifts for every room in your home... gifts for every member of your family. Special "Open House Days" offer good through February 27.

**Furnish your home Free for Top Value Stamps**

**Stinking Horse.** Tubular steel, bronze finish legs. Seat 26" square, 14" high. Leather grain. Comes in choice of green, orange or white..... Each 15¢ books

**Table or Desk Lamp.** Swedish brass with solid walnut handles. Shades swivel as required. 3-way switch. 27" high..... 8 books

**Bath Thomas Mantel Clock.** Early American design. Mahogany case. Brass spool and accents. 24 1/2" x 8 1/2" x 10 books

**Lane Slip Table.** Elegant hand-matched maple burl and walnut parquetry set into quartered walnut top. Hand-glazed finish. 18 x 26 x 23 1/2" high..... 10 books

**Top Value Stamps Guarantee**

Top Value Stamps Guarantee each gift you receive to give you complete satisfaction—or you may return it for replacement or exchange.

*The best gifts in life are free for*

# Top Value Stamps

Visit your **Top Value Redemption Store**... today!

**AT 55 E. MARKET ST. — AKRON**  
Open 11:30 A. M. to 9 P. M. on Monday—Tuesday. Also Sat. 10 A. M. to 5:30 P. M.

**SHOW-AGENT SHOPPING CENTER — STOW, OHIO**  
Open 12 Noon to 6 P. M. Monday, Tuesday and Saturday  
12 Noon to 9 P. M. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday

**Kroger**

Top Value Redemption Store ABJ Ad Wed 17 Feb 1960 p21

Figure 6

**COLOR**

**fazio's**  
*Shopping Bag*

**ALL 46 STORES ARE NOW**

# DISCOUNT

**EXTRA BONUS!**  
WE WILL STILL GIVE  
BLUE CHIP STAMPS  
THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 1972  
Complete your books now for Christmas!

**THOUSANDS  
OF EVERYDAY SHELF  
PRICES REDUCED**

SHOP, COMPARE AND SAVE LIKE  
YOU'VE NEVER SAVED BEFORE

**Block Buster**

**BONUS COUPON**

**BLOCK BUSTER  
SPECIALS**

**BONUS  
COUPONS**

EXTRA SPECIAL MONEY SAVING VALUES YOU'LL  
FIND THROUGHOUT YOUR FAZIO'S AD.

**WE HAVE A  
NEW**

**COMPANY NAME ★ MANAGEMENT TEAM ★ PRICE POLICY**

**NOW YOU TAKE YOUR SAVINGS HOME IN CASH!**

**MR. JOHN FAZIO**  
PRESIDENT  
FAZIO'S INC.  
4 N.W. 22<sup>ND</sup> STREET

In 1968 our total volume was \$18 million. Our company volume almost hit \$600 million this year. The astounding growth is just right proof we've exceeded ourselves at our basic price of quality merchandise at the lowest possible price. To show to those of you as much as possible, we must announce Blue Chip Stamps. Our policy of lower prices starts December 31, 1972. In order to share savings through December, your stamp books will give you an opportunity to complete them before the holidays. Each stamp book you complete will earn a special discount price PLUS Star Chip Stamps. I need to take this opportunity to thank you for your past patronage, and you can rest assured that I will do everything in my power to improve it in the future.

Very truly yours,  
**FAZIO'S SHOPPING BAG**  
 JOHN FAZIO

fazio's ...THE FOOD PEOPLE

Figure 7

## **Trade 1,220 Books For Car**

# *Stamp Out' Nuns' Transport Problem*

BRUNSWICK (P)—Nuns of St. Ambrose Parish here own a new station wagon because of 1,464,000 trading stamps and a small amount of cash collected by parishioners.

The shiny, nine-passenger wagon obtained Tuesday climaxed a year-long stamp collection project by the church's Women's Guild. The group collected 1,220 books of trading stamps by placing boxes in supermarkets, the church vestibule and the church grade school.

★

Cash donations were described as "inconsequential" compared with the value of the stamps. "We received \$2.50 for each book of trading stamps," said Sister

Mary Aime, principal of the grade school. "We had some left over."

★

The sisters of the Holy Humility of Mary used to call on parishioners for transportation to go shopping, attend funerals and other activities.

Now they can do these things on their own in the new wagon, which two nuns polished after it arrived. Sister Mary Gordon will be official chauffeur—she's the only one who drives.

Trading Stamps for a car ABJ Wed 20 Nov 1963 p51c6

Figure 8



Figure 9

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