

The Celadon Terra Cotta Company



The Terra Cotta is an Alfred landmark listed in the National Register of Historic Sites. It was built in 1892 as a combination office and display center for a local terra cotta company.

During the 1880's, it was discovered that the clay in the vicinity of Alfred could be used to make quality terra cotta products. In 1889 the Celadon Terra Cotta Company was organized by a small group of Alfred entrepreneurs to manufacture bricks and roofing tile. The word, celadon, referred to the resemblance of their greenish brick glaze to ancient Chinese ceramic work. This company also catered to the decorative tastes of the era by manufacturing ornamental tiles for the exterior of homes and business buildings. These tiles include bas-relief heads, fruit, and geometric designs. Several examples of these distinctive and arresting tiles were set into the exterior walls of the Terra Cotta so that prospective customers could view them on display. Other examples can be seen in the area, especially along the top front wall of the Greene Block on Main Street in Alfred. The Terra Cotta was such an unusual building that a replica was produced and exhibited at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago.



The Celadon Terra Cotta Company prospered and was partially responsible for locating the New York School of Clayworking (now the New York State College of Ceramics and Material Science) in Alfred. In 1906, the company was sold to the Ludowici Company of Ohio, which became the Ludowici-Celadon Company. By that time the original tile works had expanded until it covered more than an acre of ground, occupying the space where presently are located McLane Physical Education Center and the football field of Alfred University. The plant was completely

destroyed by fire on the morning of August 26, 1909, except for the Terra Cotta building which stood separately along North Main Street. The tile works was not rebuilt.

For the past several years, with the assistance of a federal matching fund grant, the local historical society has been engaged in restoring the Terra Cotta. Financial aid was provided by scores of the Friends of the Terra Cotta, several private corporations, Alfred University, Keramos (student ceramic engineering society), and the New York State College of Ceramics. Special mention is made of Ludowici-Celadon Company of New Lexington, Ohio, which contributed the reproductions of the large ornamental foundation tiles.



The value of the Terra Cotta lies not only in its relationship to local ceramics, but also it serves as a reflection of Victorian thought and tastes, a truly unique artifact of our past.

By Dr. Warren L. Bouck