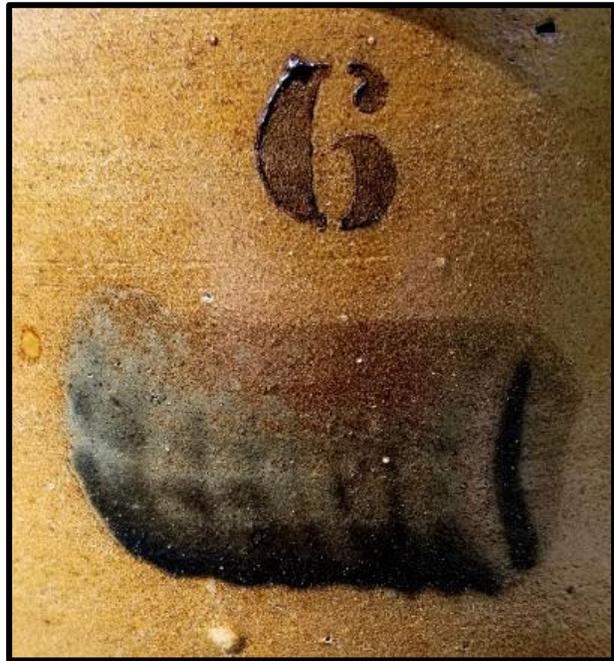


The Upper Alton Cobalt Cloud Decoration

By Greg Mathis



6 gallon Upper Alton storage jar featuring the cobalt Cloud decoration

Madison County, Illinois cc: 1868

Within the village of Salu at Upper Alton, Madison County, Illinois, located north of Salu Ave., west side of Seminary, an exhaustive amateur excavation occurred of the waster dump that accommodated the pottery of Isaac Warnack 1842 to 1866. Isaac's son Frederick Warnack ran the operation a short period in the end, until potter Henry Bundock took ownership in late 1866. Frederick Warnack moved on to work at the Alton Glass foundry. Noteworthy is: 1) Robert Harrison owned a large area of property in Salu and sold lots to Isaac Warnack. They shared a common tie to pot making and Fielding Harrison, son of potter Robert Harrison, resided and potted in this Salu vicinity; 2) William J. Mahar represented the Isaac Warnack Probate estate settlement. Mahar also shared a common pottery manufacturing interest 1880-1888, nearby in Salu; and 3) The Western Stoneware Company at Buck Inn was located a short distance from Salu, where vessels featuring the most uncommon distinctive style of vessel rims and handles were produced 1868-1875. The distinctive rim and handle trait found on the Buck Inn vessels identically match the vessels of Salu that bear the rare cobalt Cloud

decoration pictured above. These significant Buck Inn traits match the small number of known whole vessels and few recovered shards that bear the odd cobalt Cloud hand applied decoration. Thus, the cobalt Cloud decorated shards, excavated in the Salu waster dump, establish a logical connection to Bundock and the Buck Inn operations, and further connect these vessels to Salu. Potter possibly worked at both locations, as needed. No known other vessels or shards that feature this style rim or handle type, marked or unmarked, are attributed to the Isaac Warnack operation. Known Warnack whole vessels and shards feature either an everted, square bolstered, beaded bolstered, or round bolstered style rim. Also, known Warnack whole vessels or shards feature a lug handle type of either the smooth, rigged, or ribbed, and it is common that the Warnack lug handles bear finger welds to be better affixed to the vessel body.

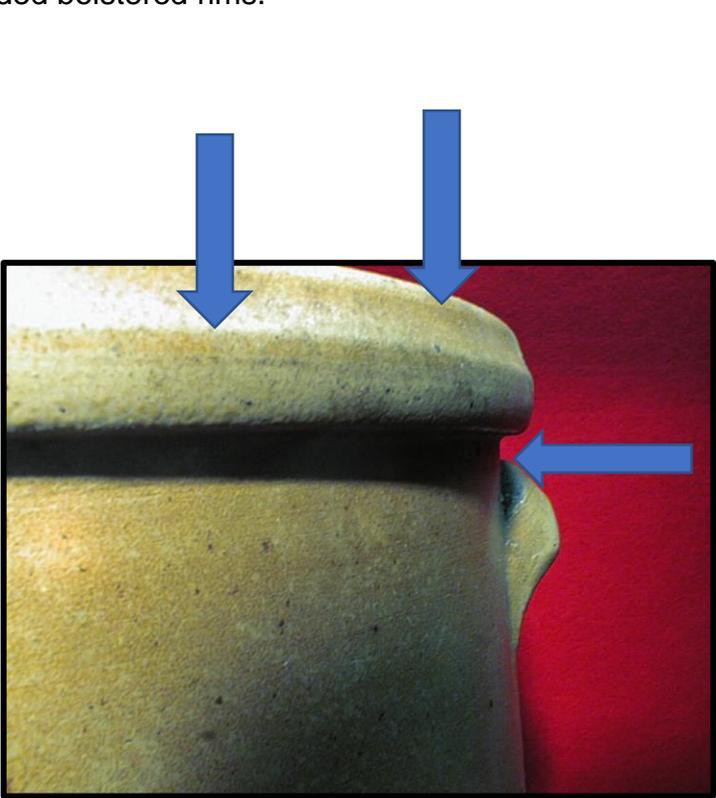
Albeit, supposition, speculation, postulation, presumption, opinion, view, belief, and unconfirmed hypothesis abound, when shards and vessels bear no maker's mark. As a basis for reasoning, several empirical observations do connect the theoretical postulations within the archaeological investigative report by state archaeologist Bonnie Gums with the extensive amateur excavation of the Salu waster dump. The hand applied cobalt Cloud decoration, rim style, handle style, match the two waster dump recovered shards bearing the distinctive cobalt Cloud decoration.



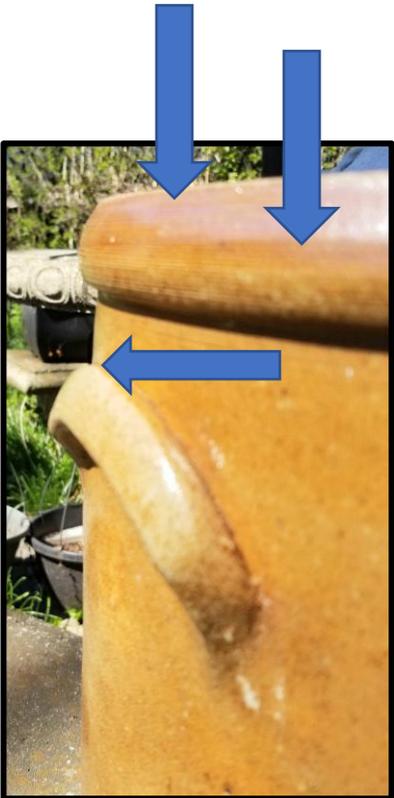
4 and 2 gallon Upper Alton vessels featuring the distinct cobalt Cloud decoration.



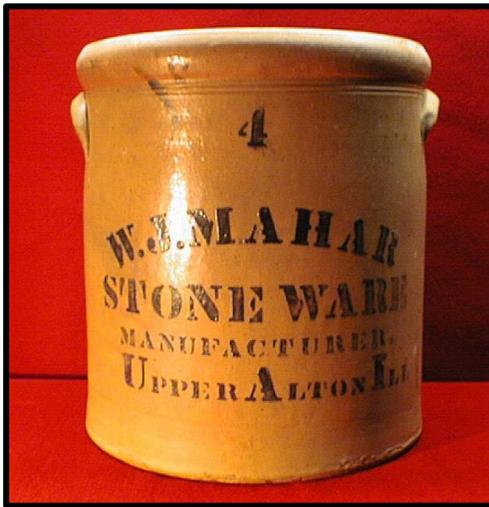
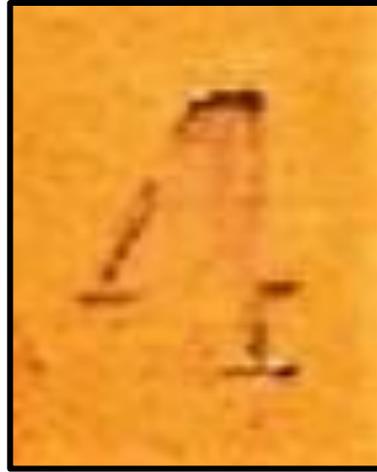
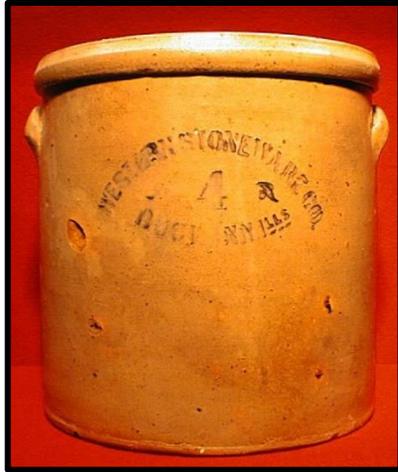
Buck Inn vessels feature the uncommon “sharp ridge” lug handles and “angled style” sided bolstered rims.



6 gallon Buck Inn storage jar.



6 gallon cobalt Cloud decorated storage jar.



These cobalt stencil "4"s bear the same identical dimensions outer H, W, Dia. Though the style of "4" is used by other makers, their dimensions do not match up.



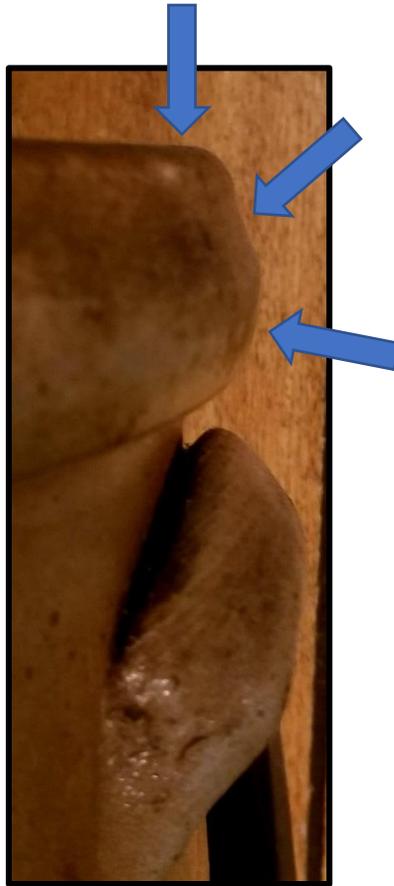
6 gallon cobalt Cloud decorated Upper Alton vessel.



6 gallon cobalt stencil Western Stoneware Co., Buck Inn, Illinois vessel.

These cobalt stencil "6"s bear the same identical dimensions Height, Width, and Diagonals. Though the style of "4" is used by other makers, their dimensions do not match up.

Unlike the everted, square bolstered, beaded bolstered, or round bolstered style rims of Warnack and Ulrich Wietfeld, and the Warnack and Ulrich Wietfeld known application of smooth, rigged, or ribbed style lug handles that often bear finger welds to better secure the handle to the vessel body, the Cloud decorated storage jar vessels and Buck Inn storage jar vessels feature the distinctive identical Buck Inn “sharp ridge” lug handles and same unique “angled style” sided bolstered rims.

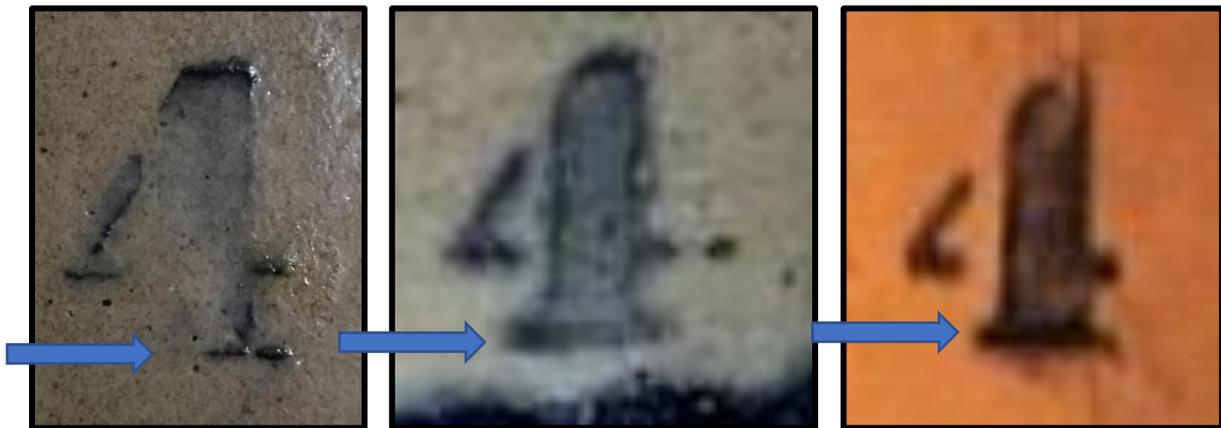


The “angled style” sided bolstered rim.

The distinctive Buck Inn “sharp ridge” style lug handle and of the unique “angled style” sided bolstered rim are traits that indicate a shared relatively high kurtosis and greatly suggest the potter and apprentices were adhering to a high degree of product standardization. Hypothetically, these distinctive traits developed before, during, and after storage jar production at the Western Stoneware Company, Buck Inn, Illinois and the turners of the cobalt Cloud decorated vessels.

The two Upper Alton stoneware manufactures applied a cobalt stenciled makers marks were the "Western Stoneware Company / Buck Inn Ills" and the "W. J. Mahar / Stone Ware/ Upper Alton, Ills." All known marked Warnack vessels bear a typeset impressed stamping "H.D.Warnack / Upper Alton, Ills." and an impressed capacity marking. No cobalt applications of any type are known or securely attributable to the Warnack operation.

In Madison County, Illinois, cobalt stenciled capacity applications are attributed to only the Upper Alton operations of the Western Stoneware Company at Buck Inn and that of W. J. Mahar at Upper Alton. The Cloud decorated storage jar's rim, handle, and stenciled capacity mark traits coincide with those of the Buck Inn vessels. Also, the Cloud capacity stencil "4" coincides with the atypical style thin base (blue arrows) and size dimensions of the "4" stencil used by the Buck Inn and Mahar potteries.



Buck Inn stencil "4"

Cloud stencil "4"

Mahar stencil "4"

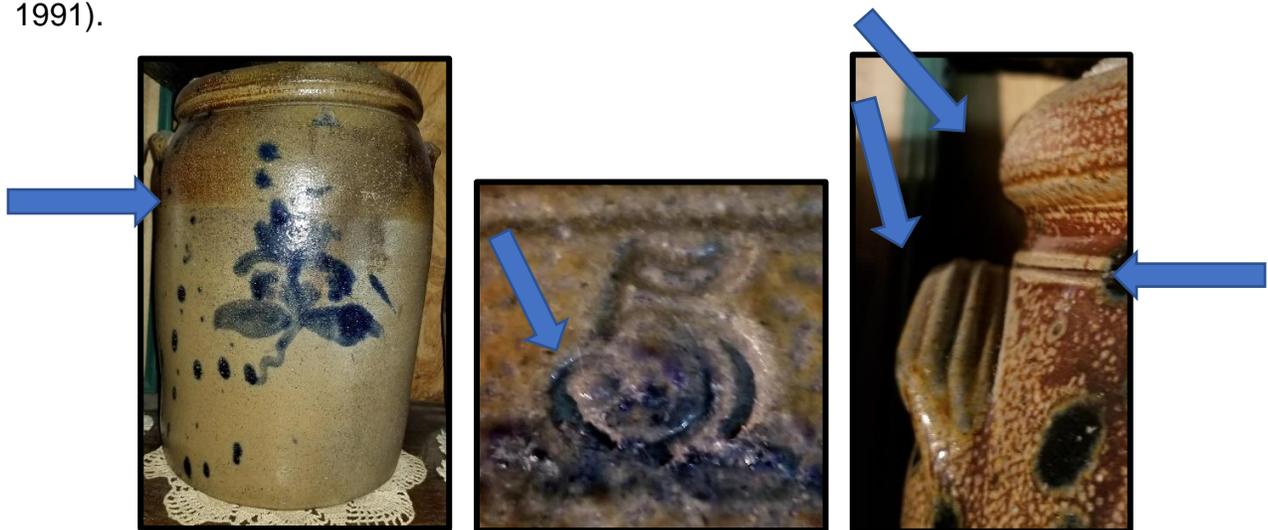


Most typical Central Illinois stencil "4" bear thicker bases and greater overall Height, Width, and Diagonal measurements.

Of the large number of the Warnack whole vessels and shards analyzed in the *Illinois State Museum of Investigations Report No. 46* by John Walthall, Bonnie Gums, and George Holley, no cobalt Cloud decorated examples were found, and among the many partial vessels and the several hundreds of shards recovered in the amateur excavation of the Salu waster dump, just two shards bearing the cobalt Cloud decoration were found.

Also recovered in the extensive amateur excavation of the Salu waster dump were shard segments of one partial vessel that featured an ornate cobalt/ Albany stenciled rose. Interestingly, the rose stencil pattern style closely resembled stencils commonly applied to Western Pennsylvania decorated vessels. Conclusively, these singular instances, recovering two Cloud shards and the shards of one rose stencil, highly suggest their likelihood of being intrusive to the waster dump.

Archaeologist Bonnie L. Gums concludes that “Vessel # 23 {Plate 1 and Fig. 45} is attributed the Warnack kiln based on the squared bolstered rim, slip height, and capacity stamp. This vessel is unique because it is the only example from the Warnack site, including whole vessels and sherds, with a painted cobalt floral decoration.” (Walthall, Gums, Holley; *Illinois State Museum of Investigations Report No. 46*, page 53: 1991).



The exterior slip height, bullet style capacity stamp, rounded bolstered rim, ridged lug handles, and the two groves exterior treatment, are established manufacturing traits of Warnack storage jar vessels. The bullet style impressed capacity stamp is the major connecting factor to the Isaac Warnack kiln at Upper Alton, Madison County, Illinois.

The aforementioned criteria and suppositions serve as a starting point for further investigation and the study of Upper Alton cobalt decorated Cloud vessels. Likely, current and future conclusions will hold a variety of opinions, views, and beliefs. Some presumptions will tie the Cloud decoration to the pottery, or a potter, of Henry Bundock, W. J. Mahar, and of the Western Stoneware Company, Buck Inn, Illinois. It needs to be granted that within the Upper Alton pottery center potters and apprentices occasionally moved around to find employment and to yield help when neighboring kilns needed additional hands. One documented example being the instance when Henry D. Warnack worked and apprenticed at the nearby pottery of Ulrich-Wietfeld, prior to settling at the Isaac Warnack & Son operation in Salu. Henry D. Warnack's learned Ulrich-Wietfeld vessel traits were soon implemented through him at the nearby Warnack operation.