



Potter's works illuminated at Rocky River Public Library

Published: Thursday, August 04, 2011, 4:00 PM Updated: Thursday, August 04, 2011, 4:01 PM



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By



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Jaycox Road One-Room School Address: Jaycox Road One-Room School, just south of Mills Road (on the North Ridgeville/Avon border), on the west side of Jaycox Road **Hours:** From 2-5 p.m. on the last Sunday of the month from May through October **Website:** northridgevillehistoricalsociety.org/private/jaycoxschool

Description: The 1859 schoolhouse was restored to its original state by North Ridgeville Historical Society Members in 2004, complete with blackboard and desks. It took 15 years to renovate after it was used for farm equipment storage for several decades. They did a great job, evidently — an original student checked it out after the project was completed and gave the building her seal of approval.

West Suburb Museums 2011 gallery (12 photos)

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Inside the walls of the Rocky River Public Library are exhibits illuminating the career of Reginald Guy Cowan, an Ohio-born potter who brought his studios to the West Shore area in the early 20th century.

They are not all on display, but curator Carol Jacobs and staff have acquired more than 1,200 pieces of Cowan-style pottery at the museum.

"It kind of went into obscurity for a while. It took several people to bring Cowan pottery back to the forefront in the early '70s," Jacobs said.

The library acquired its most recent collection in 1976 thanks to a private request. Private monies were used to purchase the initial 800 pieces and the board agreed that it made sense for the library to be the repository for this beautiful piece of cultural history.

"What is unique is that we have an art pottery museum, which is really a distinction for Rocky River and the entire area," Jacobs said.

She added that about 10 classic films, including the 1930 Academy Award-winning film "The Divorcee," feature pieces of Cowan pottery visible on screen.

The Cowan Pottery Museum ended up in Rocky River because the artist ran his Cowan Pottery Studio in the city from 1920-1931. This location is



where its output blossomed into full-scale production of a variety of pieces.

Cowan had a degree in ceramics engineering and took a lot of chemistry and technology courses having to do with the production of ceramics.

Chemistry was always his strong point, but he was never satisfied with his artistic ability so he enrolled in and later taught art classes at the Cleveland School of Art.

As he began intermingling with movers and shakers of the art world in University Circle area, Cowan gained the attention of some backers of artists and cultural figures in the area. Families like the Rorimers and the Severances helped him accomplish his real goal, which was to start his own pottery studio.

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Curator Carol Jacobs shows off the Jazz Bowl, a centerpiece of the Cowan Pottery Museum. Viktor Schreckengost captured the details of New York City on New Year's Eve in the design of the punch bowl, which was used by Eleanor Roosevelt.

From 1913-1917, Cowan ran a studio at the corner of Nicholson and Detroit Avenues in Lakewood. In the early days a lot of tile projects were done, like the Egyptian mosaic that greets visitors at the library's entrance.

The recently expanded Cowan Pottery Museum is the result of a 2006 renovation of the library, which allowed numerous display cases holding the art to be spread throughout the first floor. In the lower level of the library, visitors can find historical maps, photographs and even Cowan's old instruction books detailing his craft.

According to Jacobs, Cowan Pottery styles range from Arts and Crafts to Art Deco, and draw from sources in mythology, literature and nature. Unique shapes and colorful glazes are hallmarks of the art. Highlights of the collection include unique ceramic sculptures such as the Jazz Bowl, a punch bowl that Viktor Schreckengost created for Eleanor Roosevelt.

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R. Guy Cowan developed different glazes to illuminate his pottery creations. This case shows pieces covered in his Oriental Red glaze.