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.
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.

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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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