



Isaac Broome's

Baseball Vases

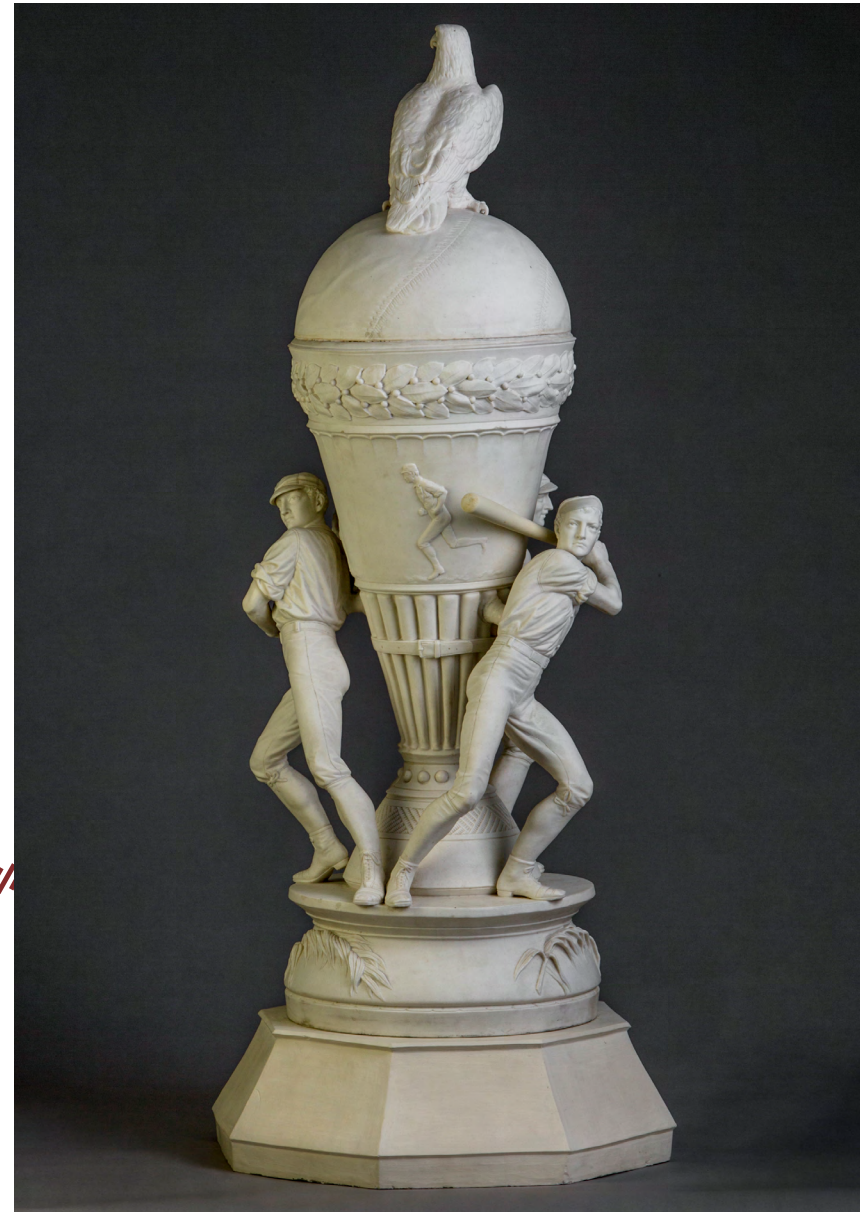
At New Jersey
State Museum

By Nicholas P. Ciotola

TRENTON, N.J. – They called it the Staffordshire of America. At the turn of the Twentieth Century, Trenton led the nation in ceramics production due to its prime location along railroad, canal and river networks, as well as its proximity to anthracite coalfields and the wealthy markets of major East Coast cities. Its nearest competitor, East Liverpool, Ohio – the self-styled pottery capital of the world – may have rivaled Trenton’s output of utilitarian wares. New Jersey’s capital city, however, also claimed the distinction of producing two of the most-heralded icons of decorative American ceramics: Isaac Broome’s baseball vases.

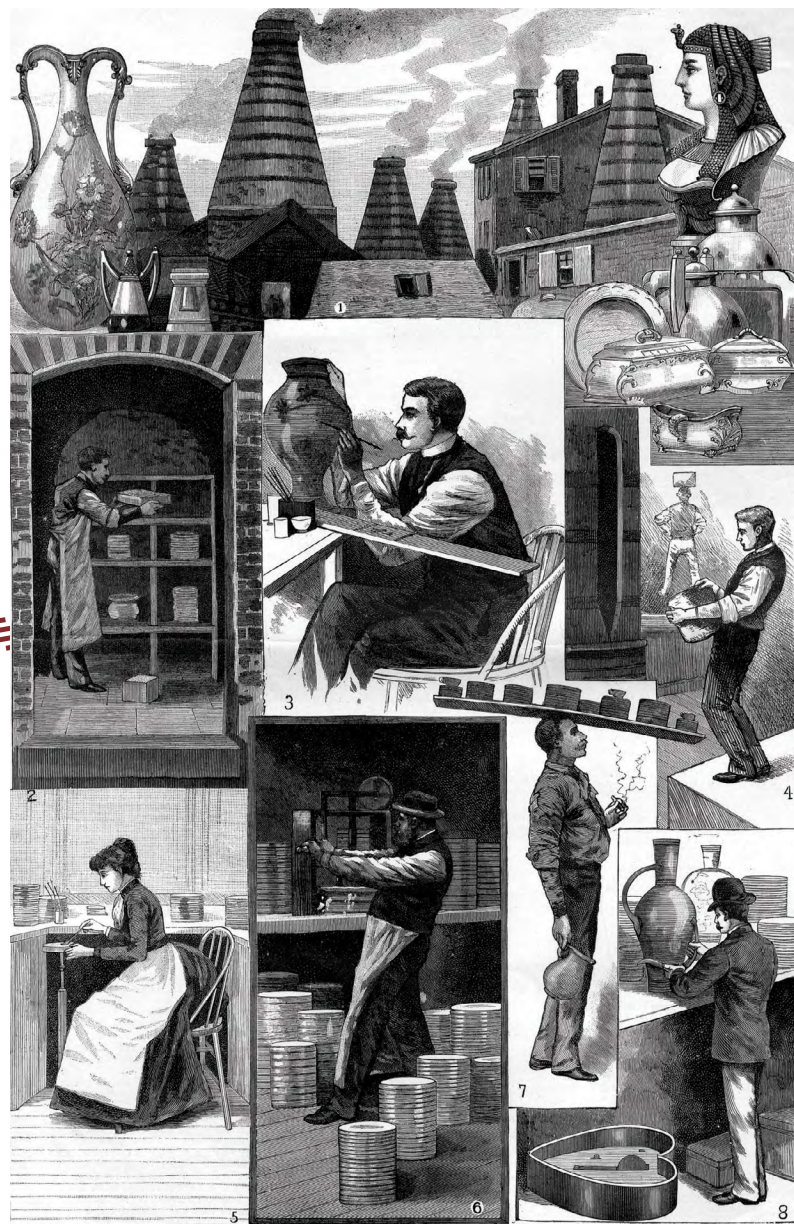
Baseball vase (I), 1876, 38¾ inches tall. New Jersey State Museum, the Brewer Collection. —Ricardo Barros photo

Page Above: Baseball vase (II), 1876, 38¾ inches tall. Detroit Historical Society. —Ricardo Barros photo





"The American National Game of Baseball, Grand Match for the Championship at the Elysian Fields," Currier & Ives Lithographers, circa 1866. Library of Congress.



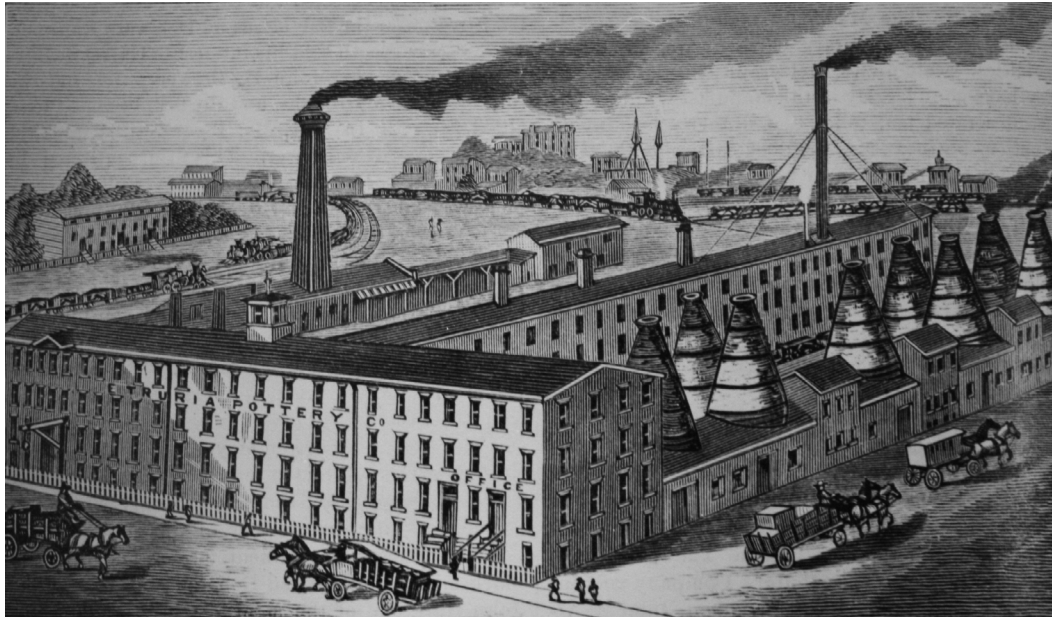
Reunited in the city of their manufacture for the first time in more than a century, these Parian porcelain creations chronicling "America's Game" are on display at the New Jersey State Museum as part of the exhibition "Pretty Big Things: Stories of New Jersey History." For a limited time, visitors to the museum can view the two masterworks of American decorative arts that ceramics historian Edwin Atlee Barber called "spirited" in design, "harmonious" in detail and "faultless" in modeling.

Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen became the first scholar to reunite the two pieces for "American Porcelain, 1770-1920," the groundbreaking show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1989.

Porcelain manufacturing in Trenton, N.J., showing kilns and, upper right, Isaac Broome's Parian Cleopatra bust. Frank Leslie's *Illustrirte Zeitung*, circa 1880. Library of Congress.

Research by Ellen Paul Denker, who located the second vase, facilitated the reunion. In an exhibition featuring a multitude of spectacular porcelain artifacts, Broome's baseball vases were singled out as showstoppers.

The initial idea for the baseball vases came from John Hart Brewer, a Trenton industrialist and partner in the ceramics firm Ott & Brewer. In 1873, Ott & Brewer hired Isaac Broome to design a series of pieces to promote the company's Etruria Works at the upcoming 1876 Centennial International Exposition in Philadelphia.



Etruria Works, Trenton, N.J., circa 1865. New Jersey State Museum.



"Grand United States Centennial Exhibition 1876, Main Building, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia," Currier & Ives Lithographers. Library of Congress.

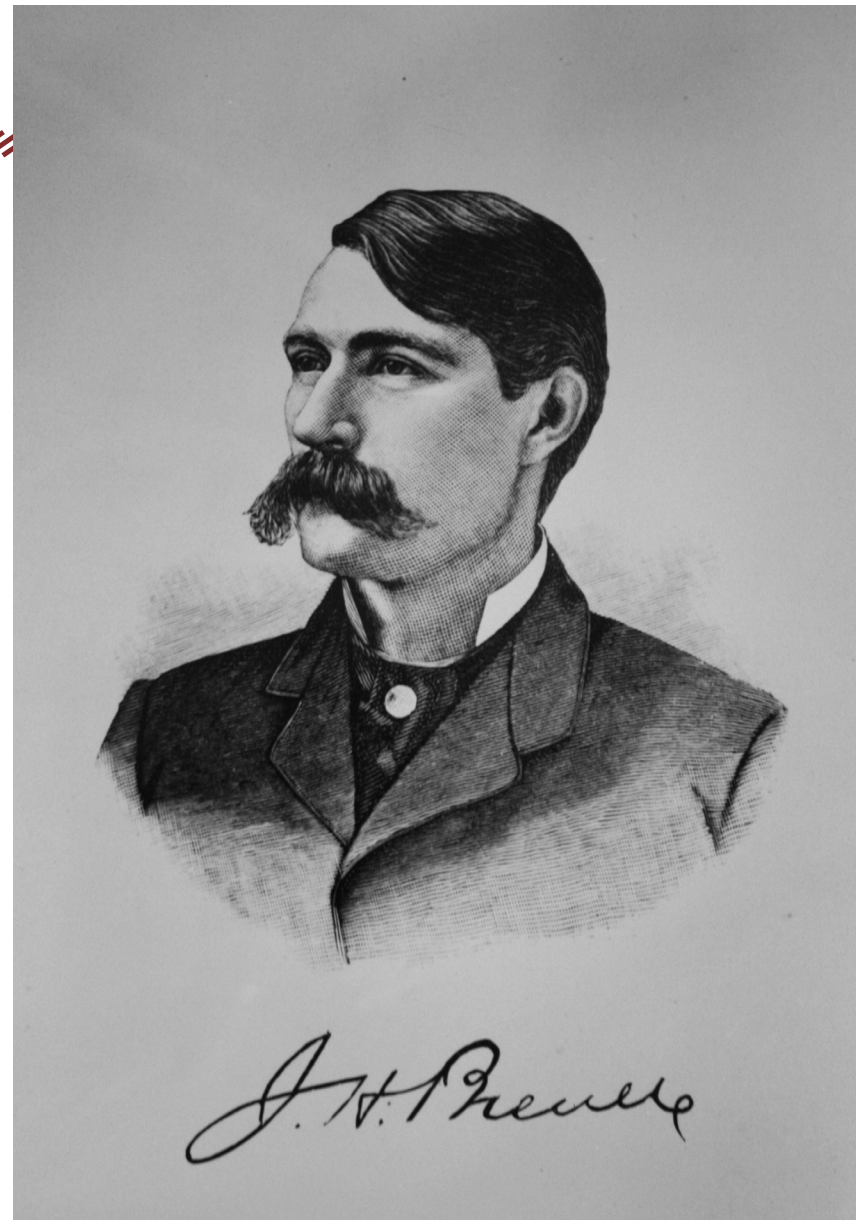
Portrait of John Hart Brewer, circa 1875. New Jersey State Museum.

Trained at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and with past experiences in marble sculpture, portrait painting and architectural terra cotta, Broome envisioned a wide range of pieces crafted in Parian porcelain – a medium that appealed to the artist for its unglazed, marble-like qualities reminiscent of Renaissance sculpture.

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