

(Rev. 8-86)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION FORM

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1. Name of Property

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historic name: Pewabic Pottery

other name/site number: N/A

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2. Location

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street & number: 10125 East Jefferson Avenue

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Detroit

vicinity: N/A

state: MI

county: Wayne

code: 163

zip code: 48214

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3. Classification

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Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	buildings
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	sites
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	structures
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	objects
<u>  1  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 1

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_ entered in the National Register \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.
\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.
\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register
\_\_\_ removed from the National Register
\_\_\_ other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action



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Significant Person(s): Stratton, Mary Chase Perry

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Stratton, William B.  
Baldwin, Frank D.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.  
X See continuation sheet.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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X See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 667) has been requested.
- X previously listed in the National Register (part of Historic District)
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- X State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- X Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- X Other -- Specify Repository: Pewabic Pottery Archives

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References:		Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	17	336820	4691630		B	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____		D	_____	_____

\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet

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Verbal Boundary Description: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Lot E of Water Works Subdivision of all that part of Private claim 257 East of Cadillac Boulevard and between Mack Street and Jefferson Avenue, Hamtrack, Wayne County, Michigan, recorded in Liber 9, Page 91; also the west thirty (30) feet of lot D of Water Works Subdivision of that part of Private Claim 257 East of Cadillac Boulevard and between Mack Street and Jefferson Avenue. Subject to all easements and restrictions of record.

Boundary Justification: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The boundary includes the entire city lot that has historically been associated with the property.

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**11. Form Prepared By**  
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Name/Title: Jill S. Topolski

Organization: National Coordinating Committee

Date: June 12, 1991

for the Promotion of History

Street & Number: 400 A St., SE

Telephone: (202) 544-2422

City or Town: Washington

State: DC

ZIP: 20003

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7

Pewabic Pottery

Page #1

DESCRIPTION OF SITE:<sup>1</sup>

The Pewabic Pottery at 10125 East Jefferson Avenue in downtown Detroit, Michigan, was designed and built for Mary Chase Perry Stratton by her husband William B. Stratton and his partner Frank D. Baldwin in 1907. They were two of the most influential architects in Detroit in the first part of the century; theirs was the first firm in Michigan to be headed solely by architects trained in American schools.

The pottery is a two-story, half-timbered building with an oversail second level, designed to recall the lines and irregular plan of a Kentish inn. The first level is timber and brick, and the second level is half-timbered stucco. The building has a medium hip roof with two chimneys, both offset to the left on the front and rear slopes of the roof. The eaves project over the walls and are framed with metal trim.

There are leaded, one-sash, flat, casement-swing windows in the first level, four-sash windows in the second. The single-leaf front door entrance to the pottery is positioned off-center in the main facade of the building, with straight stairs at ground level.

The interior of Pewabic Pottery is virtually unchanged since its founding. Space inside the pottery is used for display galleries, an archive, offices, studios, classrooms, and storage. There is also space for museum exhibits, both of Pewabic Pottery pieces as well as pieces done by other ceramicists. The floors are cement and tile, the walls are stucco with wood beams, and the original cabinets and tables, built by William Stratton, are still in use. Pewabic's original clay making machine and dumbwaiter are extant and still in use. Pewabic Pottery's layout is much the same as it was when it was founded; the same rooms are used for production, gallery and studio space as in 1907, and remains virtually unchanged.

Minor alterations to the building include the installation of a tile floor in one of the galleries in the 1980s, and the installation of a ventilation system in the kiln area in 1991.

<sup>1</sup>Information draws heavily on: National Register Nomination Form, prepared by Jim Schutze of the Michigan Historical Commission, 13 November 1970; Melanie Bazil, Archivist at Pewabic Pottery; and a February 1991 site visit.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

Pewabic Pottery

Page #1

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Pewabic Pottery at 10125 East Jefferson Avenue, in Detroit Michigan, was built in 1907. Founded by Mary Chase Perry Stratton four years earlier, Pewabic Pottery gained national recognition for iridescent glazes as well as for their production of architectural tile. An artist of the Arts and Crafts Movement, Perry was concerned with raising the artistic standard of American ceramicists. Pewabic Pottery's architectural tiles used throughout the country in murals and mosaics, are evidence of this idea. Perry's tile installations are in private homes, schools and churches, as well as in the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Ford Factory in Oklahoma, Cranbrook Academy of Art, and the Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Washington D.C. Furthermore, Perry's pottery is the only American work displayed in the Freer Gallery of Art of the Smithsonian Institution.<sup>1</sup> According to the National Park Service Thematic Framework, Pewabic Pottery falls under theme: XXVI. Decorative and Folk Art.

Mary Chase Perry Stratton's original work in pottery began in 1898 when she opened an experimental workshop with Horace James Caulkins, inventor of the Revelation China Kiln. This workshop was located in a carriage house behind a mansion on Alfred Street in Detroit. Perry and Caulkins experimented with different firing techniques, and Perry spent much of her time away from this studio studying with ceramic experts. In 1903, after receiving a pottery commission, she coined the term Pewabic Pottery-- three years later, as Pewabic was growing in size and scope, she hired architect William Stratton to design a building for Pewabic Pottery. The building on Jefferson Avenue in Detroit has housed Pewabic Pottery from 1907 until the present day. It exemplifies the professional work of Mary Chase Perry Stratton; it was at this site that she fully developed her trademark glazes and architectural tiles that gave Pewabic Pottery the national reputation it enjoys today. All of Pewabic Pottery's major commissions were executed from this studio building.

Nationally, the Arts and Crafts Movement fostered the production of utilitarian but beautiful objects. American potters sought to establish

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<sup>1</sup> "Michigan Women's Hall of Fame Candidate Nomination Form,"  
Pewabic Pottery Archives, Detroit, Michigan.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

Pewabic Pottery

Page #2

their own identity, by creating original, non-European styles and techniques.<sup>2</sup> Within the context of other art potteries of this period, Pewabic is the only remaining one with integrity. Artist Maria Nichols Storer, a contemporary of Mary Chase Perry Stratton, founded the nationally renowned Rookwood Pottery in Cincinnati in 1880. The former Rookwood Pottery is now a restaurant. Newcomb Pottery in New Orleans is extant but served a very different purpose from Pewabic. Newcomb was a training facility for women in the decorative arts, so that they would be able to earn their own living. In addition, it provided employment for its former students.<sup>3</sup> Of all the other art potteries in the United States in this time period including Rookwood, Grueby, and Newcomb, none reached the scale of Pewabic. Furthermore, Pewabic Pottery never commercialized; to this day, artists create Pewabic's wares. Pewabic's iridescent glazes are legendary, and the scale of their architectural installations unmatched.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the founders of other potteries in the early years of the twentieth century, founder Mary Chase Perry stayed at the helm of Pewabic until her death in 1961. She was responsible for Pewabic's national identity.

The Arts and Crafts Movement, begun at the end of the nineteenth century, was responsible for vast changes in the decorative arts. The artists of this movement sought a return to craftsmanship from machine produced objects; they believed that art and industry could work together. Thus they created beautiful objects intended for everyday use. The movement addressed all aspects of material culture-- its artists,

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas W. Brunk, "Ceramics in Michigan, 1886-1906" in Thomas K. Maher and Mary Jane Hock, eds., The Arts and Crafts Movement in Michigan: 1889-1906 (Detroit, MI: Pewabic Society, Inc., 1986), 23.

<sup>3</sup> Marion Tinling, Women Remembered: A Guide to Landmarks of Women's History in the United States (Westport, C.T.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 549; Robert Judson Clark, ed. The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1876-1916 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> Ann E. Berman, "Motown Mary: Pewabic Pottery bears the mark of Mary Chase Perry," Art and Auction (June 1989), 172. For a further discussion of potteries in the Arts and Crafts movement, see Eileen Boris Art and Labor (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

Pewabic Pottery

Page #3

craftsmen, and furniture makers all were influenced by it. Objects created as a result of the movement were simple in design and construction, yet appealing. Ceramics were particularly attractive to women, as many victorian women had china painting as a hobby. Most women were socially restricted from most other crafts, such as architecture and furniture making, but art pottery had widespread appeal. Consumers purchased wares as an inexpensive way to decorate their homes.<sup>5</sup>

Mary Chase Perry was born in 1867 in Hancock, Michigan. After her father's death when she was thirteen, the Perry family moved to Detroit. Shortly thereafter, Mary Perry began art lessons with local artists. She developed an interest in china painting, which she studied with Franz A. Bischoff, at a local art school. Between 1887 and 1889, Perry studied clay modeling and sculpture at the Art Academy of Cincinnati. She returned to Detroit in 1890 to further her education at Detroit's Museum School. Perry then moved to Asheville, North Carolina, where she opened a small china painting studio. Three years later, in 1893, Perry once again returned to Detroit and opened another china painting studio with three other women. During this period, she continued to study art at the Detroit Art Academy.<sup>6</sup>

Perry's interest in china led her to Horace James Caulkins and Dr. Charles Land who were experimenting with porcelain to use in dentistry. Caulkins invented the Revelation China Kiln which could fire objects at a temperature as high as 2400° F a great improvement over standard kilns that could not fire at temperatures over 2200° F. Together, Perry and Caulkins experimented with clay objects, glazes and firing temperatures. They opened a workshop together in 1898.<sup>7</sup>

Perry and Caulkins' studio was a carriage house behind the Cornelia S. Fox mansion on Alfred Street. It was simply furnished, containing a large heating stove and a small, portable Revelation kiln. Their early staff

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<sup>5</sup> Tod M. Volpe and Beth Cathers, Treasures of the American Arts and Crafts Movement, 1890-1920 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1988), 7-21, passim.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas W. Brunk, Arts and Crafts in Detroit 1906-1976: The Movement, The Society, the School (Detroit, MI: Detroit Institute of Art, 1976), 141-142.

<sup>7</sup> Brunk, Arts and Crafts in Detroit, 142.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

Pewabic Pottery

Page #4

consisted of Caulkins, who was responsible for the business aspect of the pottery and served as a clay specialist, Perry, the glaze chemist and artist, and a young assistant named Julius Albus, who was to remain with the Pottery for over fifty years. During the early years of the Pottery, Perry spent much time in the library searching for clay and glaze formulas, and visiting other local craftsmen. In 1901 and 1902, Perry studied glaze chemistry at Alfred University under Charles Binns where she was able to observe glaze processes firsthand, not just through books.<sup>8</sup>

The Pottery's first commission was a thousand dollars worth of bowls and jars for the Chicago dry goods company Burley & Company. Mr. Burley felt that Perry's pottery should have a name, and thus in 1903 it became Pewabic Pottery.<sup>9</sup> "Pewabic" is a Chippewa Indian term meaning "clay with a copper color" and was chosen by Perry as a tribute to her first home in the Upper Michigan Peninsula Copper Country.<sup>10</sup>

Perry believed in the nineteenth century idea separating the artist from the potter. Beginning with the Burley & Company commission, Perry merely sketched the design for her pots and pinned them on the wall near the potters wheel. She then had potter Joseph Herrick execute them on the wheel. This method, although different from other ceramicists of the Arts and Crafts Movement, both increased production and allowed Perry to concentrate on glazing techniques.<sup>11</sup>

Even as Pewabic grew, Perry insisted that it would not take on commercial or factory characteristics. In order to emphasize its artistic commitment, Pewabic never published catalogues of its pottery or architectural tiles. According to Perry,

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<sup>8</sup> Lillian Myers Pear, The Pewabic Pottery: A History of its Products and People (Des Moines, IA, 1976), 23; Brunk, Arts and Crafts in Detroit, 142.

<sup>9</sup> Pear, 28.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Evans, Art Pottery of the United States (New York: Feingold & Lewis Publishing Corp., 1987), 225.

<sup>11</sup> Brunk, Arts and Crafts in Detroit, 143.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

Pewabic Pottery

Page #5

It is not the aim of the Pottery to become an enlarged systematized commercial manufactory in competition with others striving in the same way. Its idea has always been to attempt to solve progressively the various ceramic problems that arise in the hope of working out results and artistic effects which may happily remain as memorials, or which may at least stamp this generation as one which has brought about a revival of the ceramic art, and prove an inspiration for those who are to come after us.<sup>12</sup>

In 1906, architect William B. Stratton, whom Perry later married in 1918, designed a new Pewabic building on East Jefferson Avenue in Detroit. The Arts and Crafts styled building was a cross between a studio and laboratory<sup>13</sup> and although larger, Pewabic Pottery's new quarters did not lose its atelier atmosphere.

Perry believed that "simple shapes endure through the ages" and thus created pieces that had clean lines and spectacular glazes. Early works included vases, bowls, candlesticks, jars and lamp bases. Until 1907, Pewabic pieces were made of hard white porcelain with a heavy opaque matte enamel, often with crystalline spots, sometimes with ornamentation in the form of relief leaf forms. Pieces were usually glazed with a number of different colors, and thus had a trickle down effect. Pewabic glazes came in various shades of ivory, brown, blue, orange, green, purple, and black.<sup>14</sup>

Pewabic produced objects in which color, shape and texture complemented each other. Perry described her artistic philosophy as follows:

We do not need to exploit special feats of execution nor technical specialties, in order to 'show off.' That was the manner of the yesterdays, when to do one's 'best work' meant the most elaborate treatment possible, introducing every known trick of the art on the

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<sup>12</sup>Mary Chase Perry Stratton as quoted in Thomas W. Brunk, Pewabic Pottery: Marks and Labels (Detroit, MI: Historic Indian Village Press, 1978), introduction.

<sup>13</sup>Evans, 226.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas W. Brunk, "Ceramics in Michigan, 1886-1906" in Thomas K. Maher and Mary Jane Hock, eds., The Arts and Crafts Movement in Michigan, 1886-1906 (Detroit, MI: Pewabic Society, Inc., 1986), 27; Brunk, Arts and Crafts in Detroit, 144.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

Pewabic Pottery

Page #6

=====

same piece of ware. Now we know that one's 'best work' is often-- rather always-- his most simple yet appropriate conception, relying on the thought back of it, instead of the fanciful executions of a momentary fancy.<sup>15</sup>

In 1903 Perry's friend, art collector Charles Lang Freer, urged her to try to recreate the iridescent glazes of ancient ceramic ware. Up until this point, she had been using traditional matte glazes, including Egyptian Blue Glaze, which was a great success due to the depth and intensity of the color. By 1909, Perry perfected six of these iridescent glazes. Pewabic's iridescent glazes in rose, green, gold, purple, gold-yellow, and copper were used either singly or with other glazes. Using more than one glaze at time resulted in brilliant displays of color and unusual surface textures.<sup>16</sup>

According to art historian Wendy Kaplan, on her pieces Perry "did not consider form to be as critical as surface." Furthermore, "the complexity of many colors . . . turned the plain cylindrical shape into a classic statement of the art of glaze chemistry."<sup>17</sup>

Charles Freer introduced many architects and artists to Pewabic Pottery, including Ralph Adam Cram, the architect of St. Paul's Cathedral in Detroit, Michigan. In 1908, Perry and Caulkins saw the construction of St. Paul's Cathedral as an opportunity to merge architecture and art. Pewabic designed architectural tiles to adorn the cathedral, thus providing beauty in a utilitarian form. Following the St. Paul's commission, other well-known architects used Pewabic tiles in such buildings as the Detroit Public Library, and the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC.<sup>18</sup>

Pewabic Pottery continued its production of ceramic ware until 1966, when the pottery was used as a classroom facility for Michigan State

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<sup>15</sup>Mary Chase Perry Stratton as quoted in Brunk, "Ceramics in Michigan," 26.

<sup>16</sup>Brunk, Arts and Crafts in Detroit, 144.

<sup>17</sup>Wendy Kaplan, "The Art that is Life:" the Arts and Crafts Movement in America 1875-1920 (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1987), 256.

<sup>18</sup>Brunk, Arts and Crafts in Detroit, 144-147.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8

Pewabic Pottery

Page #7

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University. In 1981, Pewabic was then taken over by the newly formed Pewabic Society and the following year it once again began production. Mary Chase Perry Stratton died in 1961, but left a ceramics legacy. Today, Pewabic Pottery artists are continuing Perry's work, creating architectural tiles and installations, as well as the brilliant, iridescent glazes for which she was known.

