



UPTON TEA IMPORTS

30th Anniversary

Experts of Loose Leaf Tea Since 1989

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A 30-YEAR TEA JOURNEY

*A letter to our Valued Customers:
Upton Tea Imports is celebrating our 30-year Anniversary in 2019. We have been successful because of you, our valued customers. Thank you!*

We are often asked what makes Upton Tea Imports successful? Our formula is simple: we source premium loose leaf teas, sell our tea at fair pricing, and provide outstanding customer service. We have evolved over the last 30 years, and our commitment to you, our valued customers, is unwavering. In a recent customer survey, 98.5% of our customers would recommend Upton Tea Imports to a friend or family member. We welcome your calls Monday through Friday (9:00am – 5:00pm EST), to speak with our Tea

Consultants. You may have noticed that we changed our Customer Service titles this past year to Tea Consultants. Our Tea Consultants have been certified by the Specialty Tea Institute and have an average of twelve years of tea experience and working at Upton Tea Imports. Karen, our Master Tea Consultant, has worked for Upton Tea Imports for twenty-three years. She loves interacting and speaking with you to answer your tea questions and help you select teas. (Please turn to Page 3.)



Original Upton Tea Imports sign.

Our 30th Anniversary is going to be a year of celebration, a perfect time to introduce some exciting new changes and initiatives. First, we are introducing our *Valued Customer Program*, where you may earn points for referrals, purchases and other activities on the Upton Tea Imports website. You will receive an e-mail in the next few weeks with additional information.

It is with great enthusiasm that we share the next initiative. Upton Tea Imports is now a proud member company of the Ethical Tea Partnership. The Ethical Tea Partnership is an international non-profit organization that focuses on improving the lives and livelihood of tea workers, tea sustainability and the environment in which the tea is produced. As you enjoy your next cup, know that Upton Tea Imports is a committed part of elevating ethics so the tea industry will continue to thrive.

Our Tea Buyer continually searches the world for premium teas that we are proud to offer to our customers. On occasion, we find teas that are so special that we have them shipped to us by the fastest method today – the airplane – so we can share them with our customers as soon as possible. This is very similar to the nineteenth century when tea merchants would ship their precious cargo by the swift tea clippers, ensuring the fastest arrival times. In honor of this great tradition, we are introducing a new line of the highest quality teas - *The Great Tea Race Collection*. This collection is named in honor of the Great Tea Race of 1866, when five of the fastest tea clippers set sail from Foochow, China, bound for London with their cargo holds filled with tea chests. Ninety-nine days and over 15,000 nautical miles later, the *Taeping* and the *Ariel* docked first in London, only twenty-eight minutes apart. Please see page 31 for the introductory teas in this exciting new collection.

We saved the best news for last with our exciting announcement of our new 6-cup *Chatsford Teapot*! We listened to you, our valued customers, and have worked with *Homer Laughlin* to design and develop a larger version of our 20-oz *Chatsford Teapot*.

Our new 6-cup *Chatsford Teapot* is manufactured by *The Hall China Company*, the sister company of the *Homer Laughlin China Company*, the same manufacturer of our 20-oz. teapot. I had the opportunity to visit *The Hall China Company*,



Galen Corbett (above) has been employed by The Hall China Company for forty-two years.

located in East Liverpool, Ohio, to see the production of our 6-cup *Chatsford Teapot*.

The moment I walked through the front doors, I felt the tremendous sense of employee pride and loyalty. The majority of their 100 employees have worked there for over twenty years. The tenure of the half-dozen employees I spoke with ranged from thirty-five to forty-three years of service. And they all made the same comment, "Hall China employees are like family." They talked about attending each other's weddings and sharing good times and bad times. Most of all, they spoke about the quality of the products they produced. The employees are cross-trained in all production jobs so they are experts in all phases of production. They take great pride in the quality of their work as they do not want to let their family down. This is very similar to the employees at Upton Tea Imports as we consider ourselves a family and you, our valued customers, an extension of the Upton Tea Imports family.

To celebrate the introduction of our new *Chatsford Teapot*, and to recognize your loyalty, your first pot of tea will be on us! A complimentary sample of our new "South Street Breakfast Blend" (page 38) will be included with every limited-edition teapot. This blend is one of four anniversary teas we will introduce this year. The "South Street Breakfast Blend," which is named for Upton Tea Imports original address, is a unique blend of black teas from old and new tea origins: India, Ceylon (old) and Colombia (new). We hope that you will enjoy this very special tea as much as we do.

We thought you would like to read the original article, *A Reversal of Fortune for the Chatsford Teapot*, which was first printed in the Fall 2016 *Upton Tea Quarterly* while you enjoy our "South Street Breakfast Blend."

Happy Tea Drinking,
Steve and The Staff at Upton Tea Imports

Please turn to page 49.

REVERSALS OF FORTUNE IN THE TEA INDUSTRY

PART XLI: A REVERSAL OF FORTUNE FOR THE CHATSFORD TEAPOT



It was at the London shop of H.R. Higgins (Coffee-man) Ltd. that the owner of fledgling *Upton Tea Imports* first saw the *Chatsford** infuser teapot. The year was 1989, and specialty tea had just been added to the *Higgins* product line the previous year. Audrey and Tony Higgins, daughter and son of founder Harold R. Higgins (who had died in 1968) were tending the sales floor. What began as a discussion of the world of specialty teas soon turned to a discussion of the merits of the *Chatsford Teapot*.

Thanks to Tony Higgins and his enthusiasm for the *Chatsford Teapot*, *Upton Tea Imports* was the first company to market this unique teapot in the United States, and in the course of 26 years, we have sold tens of thousands of them.

Early production of the *Chatsford Teapot* was limited to two sizes. The small size, intended for the catering trade, yielded 12 ounces of tea. The larger size, which steeped 36 ounces, was for household use. Some of our customers ordered both, but feedback suggested that there should be an intermediate size. One customer claimed that, whenever he wanted to make tea, he felt like *Goldilocks*. He had one teapot that was too small, and another that was too large.

It was not long before the “just right” 24-ounce size was created, and eventually a jumbo 60-ounce size was produced. But just as the size range was being expanded to satisfy all preferences, problems with ceramic quality began to surface, primarily in the earthenware versions of the *Chatsford Teapot*.

One stated objective of *The London Teapot Company*, creator of the *Chatsford Infuser System*, was to offer a superior infuser teapot at the same price as an ordinary earthenware teapot. Ideally, this seems like a desirable objective, but in practice, this may be unattainable. The *Chatsford Teapots* that have had the most positive consumer acceptance have always been the premium versions, with porcelain, bone china and fully vitrified ceramics. Those versions are now completely sold out, and no replacement was being considered.

The infuser baskets for *Chatsford Teapots* have always been produced in the U.K. There has literally been no variance in size, shape or structure of the baskets throughout their production history. The ceramic lids and bases, however, have been produced in at least seven countries with varying degrees of success. Today, the only ceramic base and lid for the *Chatsford Teapot* in active production is being manufactured in Thailand.

It was roughly two years ago that we received our last container of earthenware *Chatsford Teapots* from Thailand. Quality issues surfaced early and forced us to reject the entire shipment. crazing of the glaze was chronic, and once the glaze crazed, the teapot often began to leak! The clay was so porous that glaze defects eventually led to a leaky teapot. We had no choice but to discontinue the line. Some customers actually reported heat-stress fractures while simply pouring boiling water into their teapot. Much to our dismay, the Thai manufacturer refused to admit that there was a problem.

In desperation, we sent a few teapots to the Ceramic Engineering department of Alfred University in New York in hopes that they would identify the cause of the teapot failures. Autoclave tests determined that there were a number of potential issues, including quality of the clay, incompatibility of glaze and clay body and improper firing. All teapots sent to Alfred University failed.

Although the Thai manufacturer was unwilling to take responsibility for the defective teapots, The London Teapot Company stood behind the product and provided a refund for the teapots as well as our shipping costs. But there we were with only a small inventory of teapots from an earlier production run.

It was time for a change. Rather than accept a replacement of the same product, we requested that The London Teapot Company grant us a license to have the ceramics for a new line of Chatsford Teapots produced in the United States. The first challenge was to find that manufacturer.

Quality and durability would be our first objective. A target price was not considered. It would cost whatever the manufacturer required for the quality we wanted.

Finding the right company for our new teapot proved simpler than first expected. Karen, our Customer Service manager, suggested we contact the manufacturer of FIESTA® dinnerware. We soon learned that FIESTA® was manufactured by the Homer Laughlin China Company, of Newell, West Virginia, which is affiliated with (and under the same ownership as) the Hall China Company of East Liverpool, Ohio. Our new Chatsford Teapot became a collaborative effort between these two venerable American ceramic institutions.

Homer Laughlin and Hall are prime examples of U.S. corporations that have survived in a labor-intensive industry within a global economy, where imbalance of wages, environmental regulations, and other factors create an uneven playing field. Yes, they have survived, but not without challenges. At times, their very existence seemed bleak. Key to their success was a persistent focus on quality and innovation that have made both companies paragons in the U.S. ceramics industry.

Homer Laughlin was founded as *The Ohio Valley Pottery* by Homer and Shakespeare Laughlin in 1873. Their original plant in East Liverpool, Ohio opened for production on September 1, 1874. By the end of that year, they had approximately 100 employees. Three years later, Homer bought his brother's share in the business and renamed the company *Homer Laughlin*.

Two decades later, Homer decided to sell the company and move to California. The company was purchased by William Edwin Wells, with financial backing from Louis I. Aaron of Pittsburgh. Wells had started as bookkeeper in 1889 and rapidly rose to the position of general manager.

In 1896, the company name was officially changed to *The Homer Laughlin China Company*. Under new ownership, the company experienced phenomenal growth. Two new plants were built to keep up with demand. Needing more space for expansion than was available in East Liverpool, the company acquired land across the Ohio River. As further expansion continued, the town of Newell, West Virginia was developed to provide services for employees.

Homer Laughlin's fourth plant was built in 1906. At the time it was the largest plant in the world, and their production capacity was raised to 300,000 china pieces per day!

Woolworths was, by far, the largest customer for *Homer Laughlin* in the early decades of the 20th century. Reflecting on the level of business done between *Homer Laughlin* and *Woolworths* in 1916, W.E. Wells noted, "I think that I may safely say that this is the first time in history that the purchases of any one concern from any pottery firm have reached the million (dollar) mark in one year." It is worth noting that the average price of a single piece of pottery, sold to *Woolworths* at that time, was six cents. That translates to nearly 17 million pieces, produced for a single customer.

The *Hall China Company* was founded by Robert Hall in East Liverpool, Ohio in August 1903. Upon his death, just one year later, the company was taken over by one of his eight sons, Robert Taggart Hall. Teapots were

among *Hall's* most successful products. Along with *Homer Laughlin*, *Hall China* did a brisk business in toilet sets, which included water ewer, wash basin, soap dish, shaving mug, and the indispensable chamber pot.

Toilet ware was in heavy demand during the nineteenth century. At that time, nearly every household had at least one set for the master bedroom. The better hotels had a set in every room. Indoor plumbing, even in luxury hotels, did not exist until 1829.

Boston's *Tremont House*, designed by Isaiah Rogers at the age of 27, was the first guest house in America that featured indoor plumbing. The second, also designed by Isaiah Rogers, was *Astor House* in New York.

Tremont House is considered to be America's first luxury hotel, and it set the standard for excellence in the hospitality industry. Once indoor plumbing was introduced to the hospitality industry, it became a priority for wealthy home owners, but average Americans would have to wait a century to experience that luxury. In 1920 fewer than 1% of American households had indoor plumbing.

By the middle of the twentieth century demand for toilet ware came to a halt. Simultaneously, teapot sales declined as American tastes shifted from tea to coffee. *Hall* and *Homer Laughlin* were facing hard times.

The most difficult years for *Hall* and *Homer Laughlin* began in the 1950s and continued well into the 1960s. During that time, inexpensive household ceramics from post-war Japan were flooding the U.S. market. In *A Centennial History of The Hall China Company*, Catherine S. Vodrey states:

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, Japanese potteries were doing everything possible to stay solvent after the privations of the second World War. Using a population of citizens who were pleased to get any sort of paying work, the Japanese ceramics industry was able to keep operating and wage costs low. By the mid-1950s, Japanese porcelain was being sold in the United States for less than American earthenware. American consumers began buying Japanese porcelain dinnerware in greater and greater quantities.

Hall China responded with advancements in automation and technical innovation, which was all they could do to keep labor costs as low as possible. But automation and technical innovation were not enough. Fortunately, management at *Hall China* was quick to respond to a shift in American taste. As stated by Vodrey:

What [Hall China] had on its side as far as dinnerware design was concerned was Hungarian industrial designer Eva Zeisel. Born in Budapest in 1906, Zeisel brought to her work at Hall China a disciplined mind and a freewheeling design sense. Before coming to America, Zeisel had lived in Hungary, Austria, and Russia. In the 1930s, at Russia's Duolevo china factory- at that time the world's largest- Zeisel had established a design laboratory. Her work at Duolevo soon led to her being named to the lofty position of Artistic Leader, or Art Director, of the U.S.S.R.'s entire china and glass industry. She subsequently returned to Europe, but soon fled as the Nazis began their dramatic ascent to power.

The most successful of the *Hall* lines designed by Zeisel was named *Tomorrow's Classic*. In its first year, over 71,000 starter sets of sixteen pieces were sold at \$11.95 per set. But the fact that innovative designs are easily copied continued to plague the U.S. ceramics industry.

Both *Hall* and *Homer Laughlin China* redirected their focus from household dinnerware to durable products for the food-service industry. In the formative years of *Hall China*, R.T. Hall, along with a group of talented ceramics engineers, perfected the single-firing method of producing durable, brightly colored ceramics. With their process, special clay-based glazes were applied to the unfired bisque and heated to a temperature of 2700 degrees. In this single firing, the glaze and bisque bond as a single, non-porous structure that will not craze.

Homer Laughlin and *Hall* were united under common ownership in 2010. They retained their individual identities, but now share resources as a single entity.