

Ludowici-Celadon, Inc. A Historical Perspective



Ludowici Celadon was formed in 1906 when Ludowici Roofing Tile Company bought the Celadon Roofing Company.

Celadon Roofing Tile Company was organized on October 3, 1888 as the Celadon Terra Cotta Co. Limited in Alfred, New York. The Company was organized under the laws of New York state with \$10,000 in authorized capital stock. The first plant building cost \$75.00. A pug mill was purchased which was motivated by a horse. \$5,000 was spent in building a kiln. The plant at the time manufactured architectural Terra Cotta and chimney pots.

In late 1888, George Babcock of the Babcock and Wilcox Boiler Company became interested in the new company as they were considering making clay roof tile.

Babcock was elected president on October 8, 1889 at the first annual meeting. He served as president until his death in December 1893. During his tenure he took out 28 patents for various roof tile patterns and improvements. He is credited with designing the Conosera pattern tile considered by many to be the very finest tile ever made. Its longevity has certainly supported this theory.

The capacity of the Alfred, NY plant was about 6,000 squares per year with forty-seven men and boys as employees. Tile sold for about \$6.00 per square. That was considered a high price for the tile at the time as Ludowici Roofing Tile Company, in Chicago, was selling tile for \$5.00 per square. Celadon, however, felt Ludowici manufactured an inferior tile.

The Conosera tile even then commanded a higher price and sold for about \$10.00 to \$15.00 per square, F.O.B. job site. Tile installation was about \$5.00 per square including all nails, felts, cement, flashing and labor. Labor was about \$2.50 per square.

In about 1902, Celadon Roofing Tile Company purchased the Imperial Brick Plant at New Lexington, Ohio and converted it into the largest clay roof tile plant in the United States.

Ludowici Roof Tile Company was formed on February 10, 1893 as an Illinois Corporation. The three shareholders were Henry W. King, Cyrus I. McCormick, and Carl Ludowici. King and McCormick each purchased 125 shares while Ludowici held 150 shares. The first plant was at Chicago Heights, Illinois. It is thought it was an existing plant called United States Tile Roofing Company. The Company took advantage of the Great Chicago Exposition providing tile for its construction. The Chicago Heights plant was constantly expanded until it ranked amongst the largest plants producing clay roof tile in the United States.

In 1904, Ludowici built a plant at Johnston Station, (later renamed Ludowici,) Georgia.

About the time Ludowici bought Celadon, they also acquired the Western Roofing Tile Company at Coffeyville, Kansas. The new Company now had five operating roof tile plants. They were located at Alfred, NY; New Lexington, OH; Chicago Heights, IL; Ludowici, GA; and Coffeyville, KS.

In the fall of 1909, the Alfred, NY plant was destroyed by fire. It was never rebuilt. Shortly thereafter, the Chicago Heights plant succumbed in the same manner.

The Ludowici Celadon Company was operated by its principal stockholder, a Mr. A.W. Brown, who held the title of president. The Company grew with the New Lexington facility being doubled in size in about 1914. Much of this was accomplished by moving the Ludowici, GA operation to New Lexington and closing the Georgia plant. It was some time in the late teens that Mr. Brown died. His heir was a daughter who was married to a dentist by the name of Styravent. Dr. Styravent was an aggressive marketer and businessman. The Company continued to grow under his direction. It was not that the market was expanding, but rather Dr. Styravent was undercutting prices and attempting to buy out his competition. This eventually resulted in an antitrust suit by the Federal Trade Commission. The Company was allowed to operate under a consent decree and has continued to since 1926.

The Great Depression wreaked havoc on the world economy and the Company did not escape unscathed. In the early 1930s it had three operating plants. They were Coffeyville and Peru, KS; and New Lexington, OH. Little is known of the Peru plant except that sometime during the 1930s it was closed and dismantled. The Company did, however, remain viable through the

Depression. It was during this time the Tuileries were produced, a large costly undertaking for a company suffering from the Depression.

The New Lexington plant was diversified to manufacture rock wool insulation and insulating fire brick. The quarry tile line was expanded. By 1941, the New Lexington plant was manufacturing 56,000 squares of roof and flooring tiles.

Employment at New Lexington reached a peak of 500 employees just prior to World War II.

Building construction came to a virtual standstill during the global conflict. The New Lexington plant was converted to a pottery plant. Nearly 200 women were employed at this time making hand decorated pottery, cookie jars and other tableware. The only roof tile Ludowici manufactured was for military installations like Hickam Field at Pearl Harbor. The Coffeyville plant was practically shut down.

It was some time in the early 1940s that Dr. Styravent died and Ludowici Celadon lost a strong leader. The Company struggled for years to recover its position in markets across the country after World War II. Prior to the war, the Company had sales offices in every major city as far west as Oklahoma City. These offices were one-by-one closed and eventually all business was conducted from the Chicago office.

By the early 1950s, pent-up demand helped return production volume to the pre-World War II of 50,000 squares. However, this quickly diminished as America's housing industry turned to building track and low cost houses in the suburbs.

In 1958, the Coffeyville plant was liquidated, thus leaving the New Lexington plant as the only production facility. Until the early 1970s, it manufactured no more than 12,000 squares of floor and roof tiles per year. The sales department continued to operate from the Chicago office. Despite the low volume, Executive Vice-President C.L. McGee proved adept at operating the company in a shrinking market maintaining the company's profitability.

Sometime in the early 1970s, the construction industry began returning to quality construction for commercial, institutional and residential projects helping spark new corporate growth. At this same time, the owners decided to invest in the operation so it could be sold. The tunnel kiln, which was installed in 1941 and virtually unused from the time of its installation, was remodeled. This provided an opportunity to produce tile at a much lower cost than could be accomplished in the periodic kilns.

In 1976, the Company was purchased by CSC Incorporated of Chicago. More investments were made in plant repairs, dryers were remodeled, the tunnel kiln was improved and buildings were repaired. Too, the company continued to realize a steady six to seven percent growth each year, as they still do today.

Edward E. Ryser was promoted to general manager of Ludowici-Celadon, Inc. in 1978. He successfully carried on the previously established marketing through manufacturers representatives approach guiding the Company to profitability, year after year. In 1985, he was named president and has played an instrumental role in the company's continued growth.

CSC Incorporated sold the assets of Ludowici-Celadon, Inc. in 1989 to Certainteed, Incorporated. A strong company and manufacturer of numerous building products, Certainteed will enable the Company to maintain steady growth while equipping itself for the demands of tomorrow.

Today, Ludowici Celadon roof tile can be found on many of America's most famous institutions, universities and architectural landmarks. We are proud of our history: a history of quality, growth and unparalleled product beauty. As the corporation looks ahead to its second century, Ryser and his young, savvy and aggressive management team will continue carving new markets and identifying new opportunities for growth.

Although the Company has undergone numerous changes in its first 100 years, one thing has remained constant: our commitment to producing America's premier high-grade clay roof tiles for commercial, institutional and residential applications. And regardless of what the next century brings, architects and buyers can be sure Ludowici Celadon will maintain that commitment.



LUDOWICI-CELADON, INC.