

# FRANKOMA POTTERY HISTORY

John Frank received his higher education at the Art Institute of Chicago, graduating in 1927. He was then an educator before he was a businessman, serving as a professor in the Ceramic Art Department at the University of Oklahoma after his move there from Chicago in about 1927. While there, he became exposed to the high quality local clays through his interaction with geology professors at the university and with private companies they consulted. Frank saw the potential here in creating fine art pottery, and in 1933 he established the Frank Potteries in Norman, Oklahoma with his wife Grace Lee. His first steps into business were small ones, operating with only a small kiln and while retaining his professorship at the university. As the company became more successful, John Frank finally resigned his position with the University of Oklahoma and decided to rename the company Frankoma, an aggregation of his own name with that of his new state Oklahoma suggested by his wife Grace.

His vision for the company was to position it as a manufacturer of high quality, distinctive ceramics reflective of the American west, but affordable enough for the general population. The years leading up to World War II were successful ones for Frankoma Pottery, and in 1939 they expanded the operations and relocated from Norman to Sapulpa, a small town near Tulsa. Frankoma pottery designs showed the clear influences of native American Indian arts and crafts. Only local Oklahoma clays were used in the production of Frankoma pottery, most specifically a unique red clay that through its use gave Frankoma pottery a unique look of older terra cotta. This base colorations of sand, green, and shades of tan made possible through the Oklahoma red clays were coupled with ever more experimentation in glazes, making Frankoma works highly desirable in the marketplace. Frankoma ceramics have always retained a base flair consistent with the American southwest, the midwestern prairie, and the native cultures and spirit which came with the territory. Their southwestern styled dinnerware first produced in the early years of World War II was made in vivid colors new to the general population; colors included "White Sand", "Onyx Black", "Desert Gold", and "Prairie Green".

Frankoma Pottery made a wide variety of wares including limited collector editions and "theme" production of holidays, politics, religion, and American history. Production pieces included plates, mugs, candlesticks, plaques, trivets, pitchers, and salt & pepper shakers, all in the distinctive Frankoma colors and glazes. John Frank and his family were active in religious life, helping churches, charities, and other individuals and organizations in time of need. While John Frank died in 1973, his daughter Joniece took over as President of the company. Frankoma Pottery is still in business today, now owned by Crystal Merryman and still making rugged and beautiful ceramics with a western flair for both display and everyday use.

## Personal Letter from Crystal Merryman

In 2005, when my husband, Det, and I purchased Frankoma, one of the oldest potteries in the US, we were determined to continue the tradition of American craftsmanship. Today we hand craft Frankoma's classic designs as well as beautiful new patterns and colors and everything is **Microwaveable, Oven Proof, Dishwasher Safe.**

In fact our production starts at our own Sugar Loaf Hill about a mile from our plant where we mine our clay source. We sort and sift our raw terra cotta to remove leaves, twigs, so **We Even Make Our Own Clay.**

We painstakingly pour or press our special clay into individual molds. Then we air dry, wash, sand, smooth, glaze and fire each piece twice in our kilns. It takes as many as eight artisans to create and finish a single piece so **Because It's Hand-Crafted, Each Item is Really Unique.**

There may be slight variations but our attention to detail means your Frankoma will be beautiful on its own and will complement and coordinate with our other products as well.

If you are ever in Sapulpa, Oklahoma please stop by to visit our plant, factory store and just to say hello. You are always welcome!

Crystal Merryman, Frankoma Owner  
9549 Frankoma Road, Sapulpa OK 74066  
(800) 331-3650