ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Imagining Consumers* had its genesis in the 1980s, when I worked on the research staff at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History. During this decade, the NMAH director Roger Kennedy encouraged his staff to undertake serious scholarly research and wrestle with tough historical questions. Washington’s rich resources attracted dozens of university scholars to NMAH, many of whom were pioneering the study of consumerism. Through exhibition projects, the Tuesday Colloquium, and conversations with visiting academics, I became stimulated by the debates about consumer society, which offered promising paradigms for putting the material world in historical context. More important, I discerned a missing component in the emerging body of literature. With some notable exceptions, including Neil McKendrick’s seminal work on Josiah Wedgwood and Thomas Bentley, historians were examining consumer society from every vantage point except that of the companies that made the goods. Few considered the strategic intersection of design practice, consumer taste, and changing demand.

To explore how manufacturers and retailers figured into the creation of consumer society, I undertook several projects that laid the foundation for this book. At George Washington University, I completed a master’s thesis on product design and development, working under the tutelage of the cultural historian Bernard Mergen, in the Department of American Civilization, and of the business historian William C. Becker, in the Department of History. For NMAH, I curated exhibits and assembled collections of artifacts and documents relating to the pottery and glass industries, concentrating on the everyday objects used by consumers in a range of social classes. In 1988, I received a Smithsonian Institution Research Opportunities Grant from the Office of the Secretary and traveled to the Midwest, where I recorded oral histories with aging designers, sales-
men, and managers. These experiences fueled my determination to examine how home furnishings companies—firms that made and distributed the most commonplace and meaningful artifacts of the American consumer revolution—created effective links to their audiences.

When I left the Smithsonian in 1989 to pursue a doctorate and an academic career, I chose a graduate program that promised to foster my growth as a historian of American business, technology, and culture. Fortunately, I found strong mentors and excellent funding in the Hagley Program, Department of History, University of Delaware. Four scholars—David A. Hounshell, Anne M. Boylan, Glenn Porter, and Philip B. Scranton—listened, advised, and commented on my research, writing, and thinking for much of my graduate career. Concurrently, I continued to draw sustenance from the Smithsonian, revisiting NMAH as a predoctoral fellow under the sponsorship of Steven Lubar, Robert C. Post, Susan H. Myers, and Charles McGovern. During my two-year fellowship, Steve Lubar and Bob Post, my sponsors in the Department of Science and Technology, provided much of the encouragement that furthered my scholarly growth. As always, Susan Myers guided me through thick and thin, granting me access to the documents, artifacts, photographs, and staff under her care in the Department of Social History. Bonnie Lilienfeld, Sheila Machlis Alexander, Shelley Foote, Anne Golovin, David E. Haberstich, Eric Long, Lori Minor, Dane Penland, James Roan, Rodris Roth, Lonn Taylor, Roger White, Helena Wright, and others aided my research in countless ways.

This book would not have been possible without the generosity of executives and professional staff at four firms: Homer Laughlin China Company, Salem China Company, Kohler Company, and Corning Incorporated. In West Virginia, Homer Laughlin’s owner-managers granted me unrestricted access to historical records in the art, engineering, executive, research, and sales departments. Trained in history and law, company president Marcus Aaron II, nicknamed “Pete,” took a genuine interest in my project. As I visited his office with weekly reports of my discoveries from the company’s dusty dungeon, Pete Aaron acted as a sounding board for ideas, and, on my behalf, he compiled valuable data from the confidential financial records. Joseph M. Wells Jr. listened quietly and carefully to my questions and, drawing on his lifetime of experience in the pottery business, pushed me in the right directions. Joseph M. Wells III, the company’s executive president, imparted his enthusiasm for Homer Laughlin’s future. But my extended visits to the East Liverpool district would have been less productive and enjoyable without the support of the art department. With an interest...
in design history, art director Jonathan O. Parry first welcomed me to his division in 1986, when I began studying Frederick Hurten Rhead. During my trips to Newell, Jonathan and his staff warmly opened their design annex to me, so that Homer Laughlin became my home away from home.

At the Salem China Company, J. Harrison Keller and his son Gary Keller made their archives accessible to me during the late 1980s, eventually donating these materials to NMAH's Archives Center and Department of Social History. Harrison Keller, part of the pottery trade since the late 1930s, had preserved Salem's enormous sample collection, which includes the products of his firm and competitors. Similarly, the longtime salesman Rudy Linder had squirreled away departmental memoranda in a deserted area of the factory. Although relatively modest, Salem's collection provided an important complement to Homer Laughlin's exhaustive records.

At the Kohler Company, the Communications Department hosted my stay in 1993, and Peter Fetterer, Cheryl Prepster, and Leah Weiss guided me through the archives. Once the firm opened the executive files of Walter J. Kohler and Herbert V. Kohler, Cheryl demonstrated her patience and skill in facilitating long-distance research. In the summer of 1997, we exchanged countless phone calls, as she diligently sifted through recently released files to locate documents. Cheryl's efforts immeasurably strengthened my interpretation of Walter J. Kohler's efforts to imagine the consumer.

Among the firms in this study, Corning Incorporated alone has a records management program staffed by professional archivists, who extended a warm welcome to me as the first business historian using the firm's papers. From 1990 through 1997, Michelle L. Cotton, working under the division chief Stuart Sammis, used her knowledge of American history to provide direction. The former designer Jerry E. Wright shared his knowledge and files, while Tony Miday enthusiastically retrieved records boxes. During his tenure as chief executive officer, James R. Houghton granted me permission to use the Houghton Family Papers, and Nina R. Houghton, widow of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., gave me access to her husband's papers, all housed in the Department of Archives and Records Management.

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Massachusetts Historical Society, Maytag Archives, Good Housekeeping Institute, East Liverpool Museum of Ceramics and the Ohio History Center at the Ohio Historical Society, New Jersey State Museum, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Trenton Public Library, Tiffany & Company, Museum of American Glass at Wheaton Village, and State Historical Society of Wisconsin. In addition, I thank several funding sources: Corning Museum of Glass for a Rakow Grant; Early American Industries Association for a grant-in-aid; Business History Conference for the John E. Rovensky Fellowship; State Historical Society of Wisconsin for the John C. Geilfuss Fellowship; and Duke University's Hartmann Center for the History of Advertising, Marketing, and Sales for the J. Walter Thompson Fellowship. At Boston University, Dennis Berkey, the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, provided a summer travel stipend; the Material Culture Fund, resources for illustrations and manuscript preparation.

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Laboring over my revisions in New England, I missed the Washington-Delaware corridor, where institutions such as the Smithsonian and the Hagley
Museum and Library encourage vigorous scholarship on the modern material world and the cultural dimensions of American business and technology. That supportive intellectual environment midwived and nurtured this study of producers and their strategic ties to consumers. In a fitting tribute to those origins, I am pleased to see this book published in Hagley's Industry and Society Series by the Johns Hopkins University Press.
IMAGINING CONSUMERS