



Carriage Museum of America

Fall Newsletter 2017

***What's in a name?** Now and then I am presented with a research question that requires a brief answer, yet the question is so intriguing I find myself wanting to learn more. Such was the case here. So I thought it would be interesting for our Friends of the Library to “look behind the scenes” as I research a question.*

Brewster Green; we've all heard the term. The question originally came to me regarding the origin of American color names: did the term Brewster Green start as a coach color? Simple answer, yes. Better answer: maybe? Was it a coach color or a paint color? And who first coined the term? Inquiring minds (mine) wanted to know!

A review of the CMA library's literature did not yield any specific information, although *The Coachmaker's Illustrated Hand-Book* (1875) mentions “drop-black and yellow produce a green well suited to heavy carriages.” I then reviewed some (not all) Brewster Specifications records, where carriages were painted with a variety of greens (green, dark green, light green, apple green, olive green, rifle green) yet none of “Brewster Green.” I knew generally that Brewster and Company kept color records unique to each client and that no one else was permitted to use a “bespoke” color for his or her carriage. I wondered if what we might consider Brewster Green today might have originated as a color belonging to a specific family and the “commonly known” shade was an attempt to imitate it.

So I turned to the internet. Images of “Brewster Green” carriages and automobiles flooded the screen – and in a rainbow of dark green shades!! Dark, medium, tinged with blue(?!), olive, drab...

When I am “stuck,” my go-to for knowledge of all things carriage-related is the CMA's Board and Advisors; their accumulated wisdom could fill volumes, and they have forgotten more than I could learn in a lifetime. So I posed a few questions and received several interesting replies:

- A copy of a Masury paint chip from 1895 was sent that contained a label for Brewster Green, but the sample (as well as the other samples on the page) had badly faded and the color could not be determined. It was thought that at some point Brewster used Masury as a paint supplier.
- Two directors both indicated their understanding of the color as black mixed with yellow. But one mentioned the removal of lead from paint in the current era and that mixing the two no longer works. He tried it and came up with something appropriate for an Army jeep!
- One mentioned Valentine's paint company and also recalled that Colonel Downing experimented with re-creating the color and was never satisfied with the result.

- Another indicated that Brewster Green was the company's version of dark green and that unless one were viewing the carriage in daylight, it was difficult to determine whether it was black or dark green.

Armed with this information, I set out to determine a time-line for the first mention of Brewster Green in our collection.

In the May 1881 edition of *The Coach Painter*, an article by C.W.V. ("Treatise on Painting") contains a list of all pigments or paints required in coach painting; 18 shades of green are mentioned, but none specifically as Brewster Green.

I then turned to *The Hub* (a carriage trade publication from the late 19th and early 20th centuries). The earliest mention of Brewster Green in that trade publication was in November 1882 (vol. 24, no. 8, p. 503): "Edward Smith & Co., New York, exhibited five coach panels, finished, and in various stages of completion showing the effect and working of their priming, filling, roughstuff and varnish. The finished panels in Brewster Green and Munich Lake were very handsome."

Just one year later (1883, vol. 24, no. 10, p. 627), I found a full-page ad from Valentine & Company. Brewster Green is offered in two shades: light and deep! In 1884, an Albany cutter was mentioned: "The back and main side panels of the body are painted in dark green, of the shade *now commonly known* in the trade as "Brewster Green" *of the deep shade*" (emphasis mine) (vol. 26, no. 9, p. 631). So, again, Brewster Green is not one color but possibly two, and by that time was a term in general use?

Two years later (1886), I found something specific. In an ad from Valentine's masquerading as a question-and-answer column, a query was posted: "I will soon have 2 gears to bring up in *dark* [emphasis mine] "Brewster Green" color, and any information you can give as to which is the best way to obtain the desired shade will be thankfully received." Aha! A formula! Well, no. Valentine's reply: "Yellow Lake and Dutch Pink are both used to glaze over greens [not black?]. The former is to be preferred, as it produces a richer shade...." The column goes on to impart the virtues of Valentine's aforementioned ready-mixed paint in Brewster Green as yielding nearly the same effect (vol. 27, no. 11, p. 717).

The July 1895 issue of *The Hub* (vol. 37, no. 4, p. 282) went into further detail with the formula (sort of). The author recommended mixing Prussian blue and a small portion of lemon chrome yellow to produce a grass green. To this was added lampblack or ivory black and a few drops of vermilion, yet this shade was not yet rich enough to achieve the desired effect. The final coat was the aforementioned glaze of yellow lake. The article stated this would produce "Brewster green, Nile green, bottle green, etc." In other words, different shades of the color may be achieved – depending on who was stirring the paint pot.

Practical Carriage and Wagon Painting (M. C. Hillick 1898) mentions Brewster Green as a solid color, requiring no specially prepared ground work color. By 1902, Cray Brothers of Cincinnati was offering ready-mixed Brewster Green in medium and dark. (Their 1908 catalog offers just Brewster Green.) In late 1909 Model T Fords were exclusively Brewster Green. And most assuredly, automotive paint was also pre-mixed.

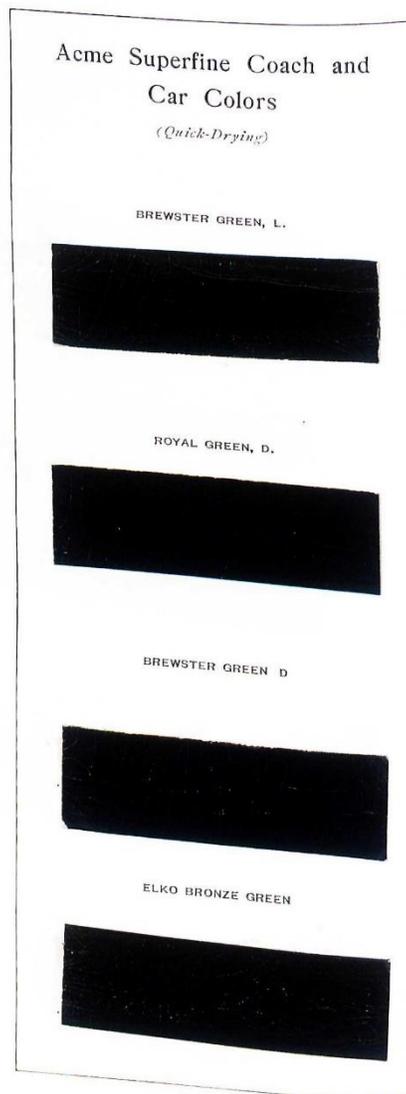
My final hint came from *An Inkling of Brewster: Brewster and Company Automobiles and the Wealthy Who Owned Them* (Wisner 2012): “We also associate Brewster and Company with the color that bears their name, Brewster Green. The fact of the matter is, however, that there was more than one shade of Brewster Green.”

Verdict? I conclude the color name was an attempt to describe “that beautiful dark green color used on Brewster carriages,” but it was not a term coined by Brewster and Company or used by them until they were manufacturing automobile bodies. I believe it was a paint manufacturer (perhaps Valentine & Company?) who first used the phrase. As it came into common use in the 1890s and was adopted by other carriage manufacturers (to give class and panache to their offerings), the color probably changed according to proprietary formulas.

I consulted with Merri Ferrell, former Curator of Carriages & Carriage Reference Library, Museums of Stony Brook. She agreed that Brewster Green was “branded by third parties to garner caché” to their products, and that “the Brewster green one finds in cans...is a medium green, slightly less yellow than ‘permanent green’ and not as blue as Thalo green. Talking about colors with words is a bit like describing an elephant to blindfolded audiences.” Indeed!!

I do not believe we can definitively state when the color was first used, by whom, on whose coach, or even what it looked like, although we can come close. Applying layers of lead paint and varnish over virgin timber that was cut and dried over 150 years ago with a recipe that called for a bit of this and a soupçon of that cannot possibly be duplicated by pre-mixed paint of the early 20th century, let alone now. But Brewster Green, however we choose to define it, certainly makes for a lovely carriage!

I do not pretend to be an authority on coach paint. So I would love to receive any and all stories, anecdotes or documentation you can share about Brewster Green. Please contact me (Virginia Goodman) at cmalibrary@windstream.net.



An example of how difficult it is to determine true 19th century coach paint color is this page from an Acme White Lead and Color Works catalog (date unknown, Detroit, MI) depicting two shades of Brewster Green. Age, oxidation, and limitations of printer ink have taken their toll.