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Portfolio: Photographs of Gladding, McBean & Company

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1 Ernest Kadel's office, 1984

2 Ernest Kadel's office, 1984

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In 1984 I first visited Gladding, McBean & Company and, like anyone who has seen Earnest Kadel's* office, I was seduced by the dusty light, the curling, crumbling old photographs, and the almost shrine-like quality of the studio secured by a padlocked door. My first visit was brief, and I only made one or two pictures, one of the Corinthian capital and the other a humorous conjecture of Nipper and Classical Man. I knew that I had to come again. Since then I have made at least a half-dozen trips back to the factory in Lincoln, California, allowing the place to reveal itself slowly. Never did I intend that the work should be a documentary of a place or explain the process of manufacturing glazed terra cotta architectural ornament and vitrified clay sewer pipe. My response was visual, that is, what these work spaces looked like and how I could organize their order and chaos expressively in terms of form, space, and light.

The negatives have been made with an 8 × 10 field camera. The prints are contact prints printed directly by sunlight on printing-out paper and then toned with a gold chloride solution. The choice for this method of printing was primarily for the soft delicacy of the print surface that has a slight pinkish color and a long-scale tonality rendering detail in the darkest corners and the most brilliant highlights.

*Earnest Kadel was the in-house sculptor at Gladding, McBean & Company for approximately 30 years.





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3 The studio, Gladding, McBean & Company, 1984



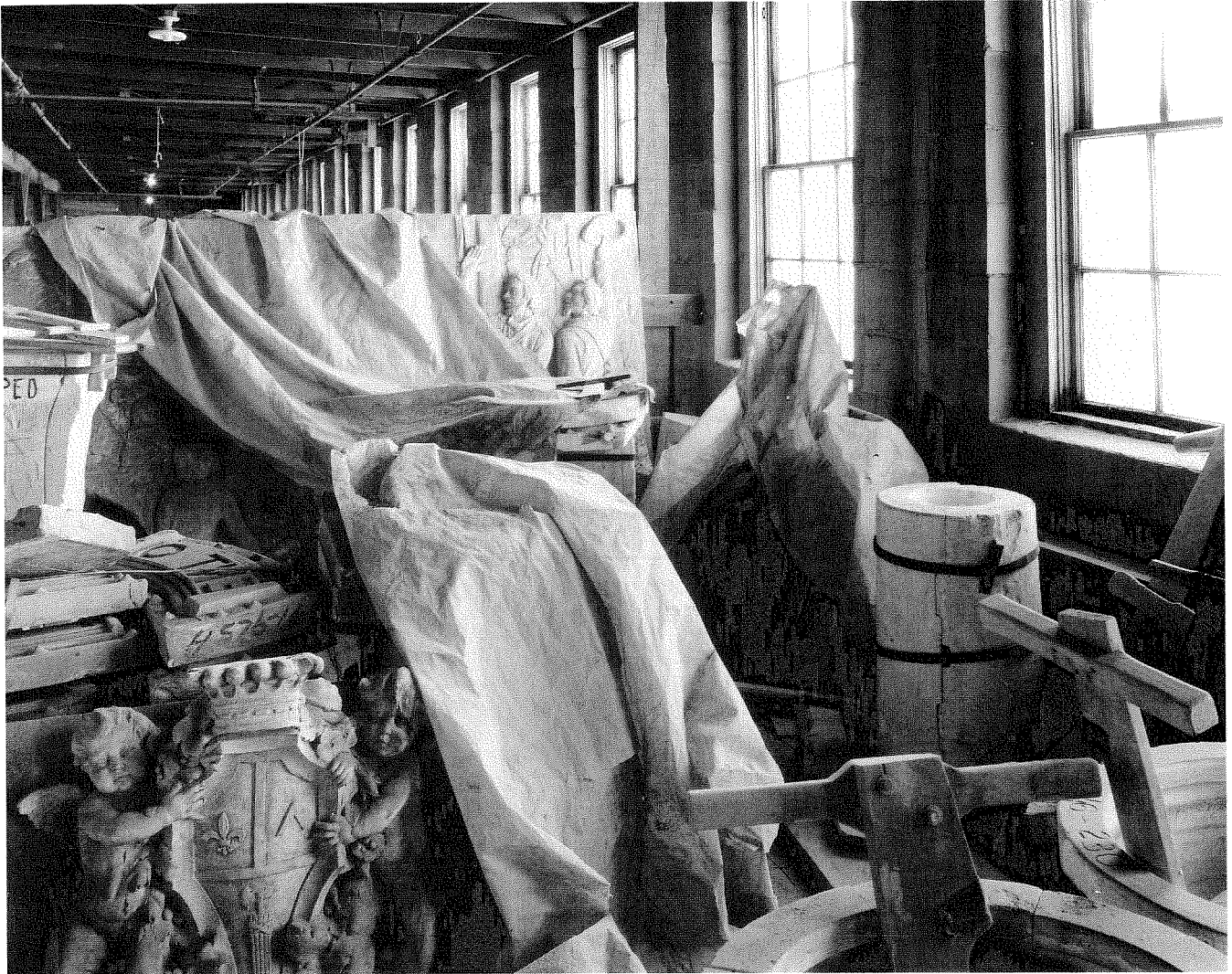
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4 The studio, 1984



5

5 Modeling scholars, 1984



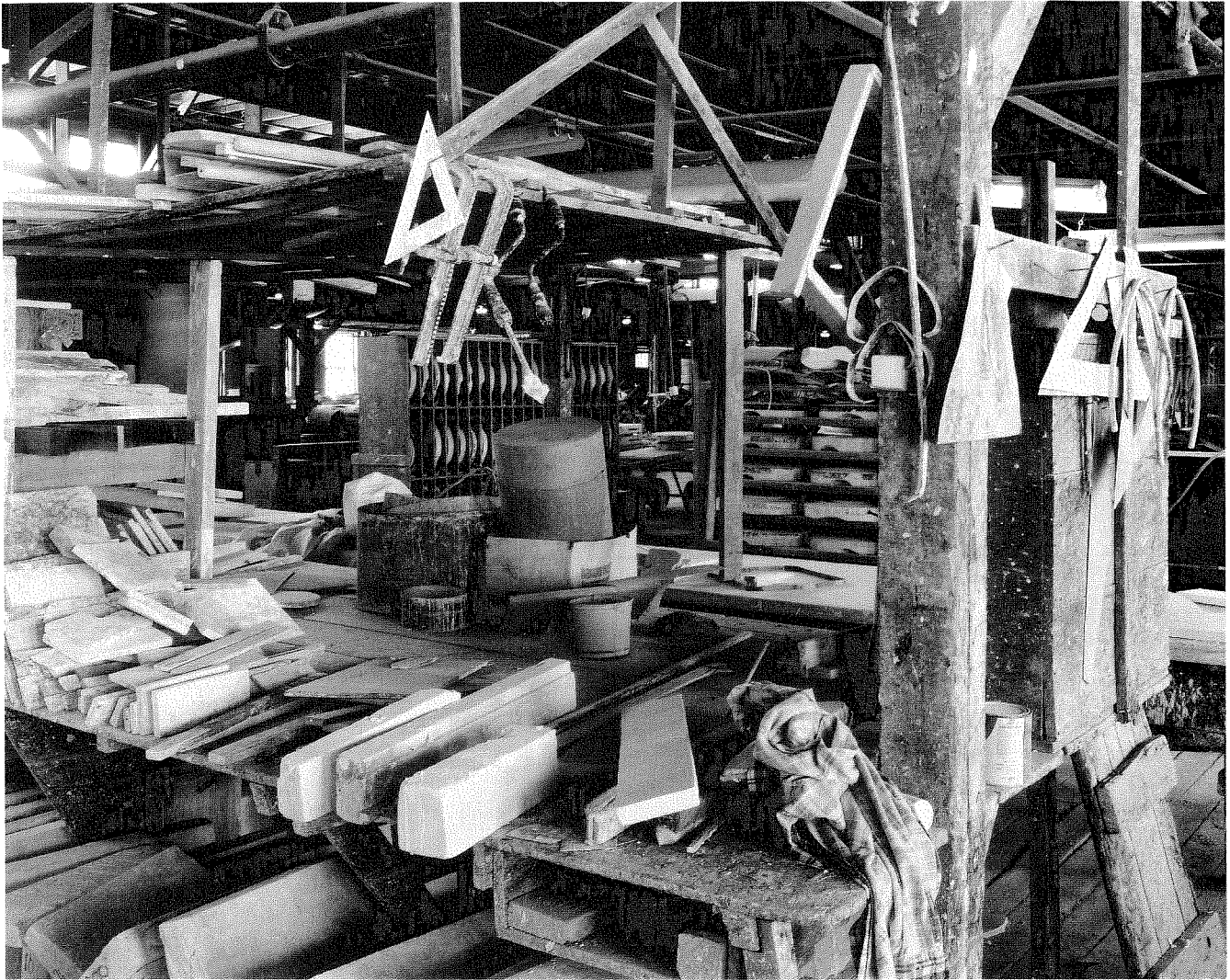
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6 Storage room, 1985



7

7 Plaster room, 1984



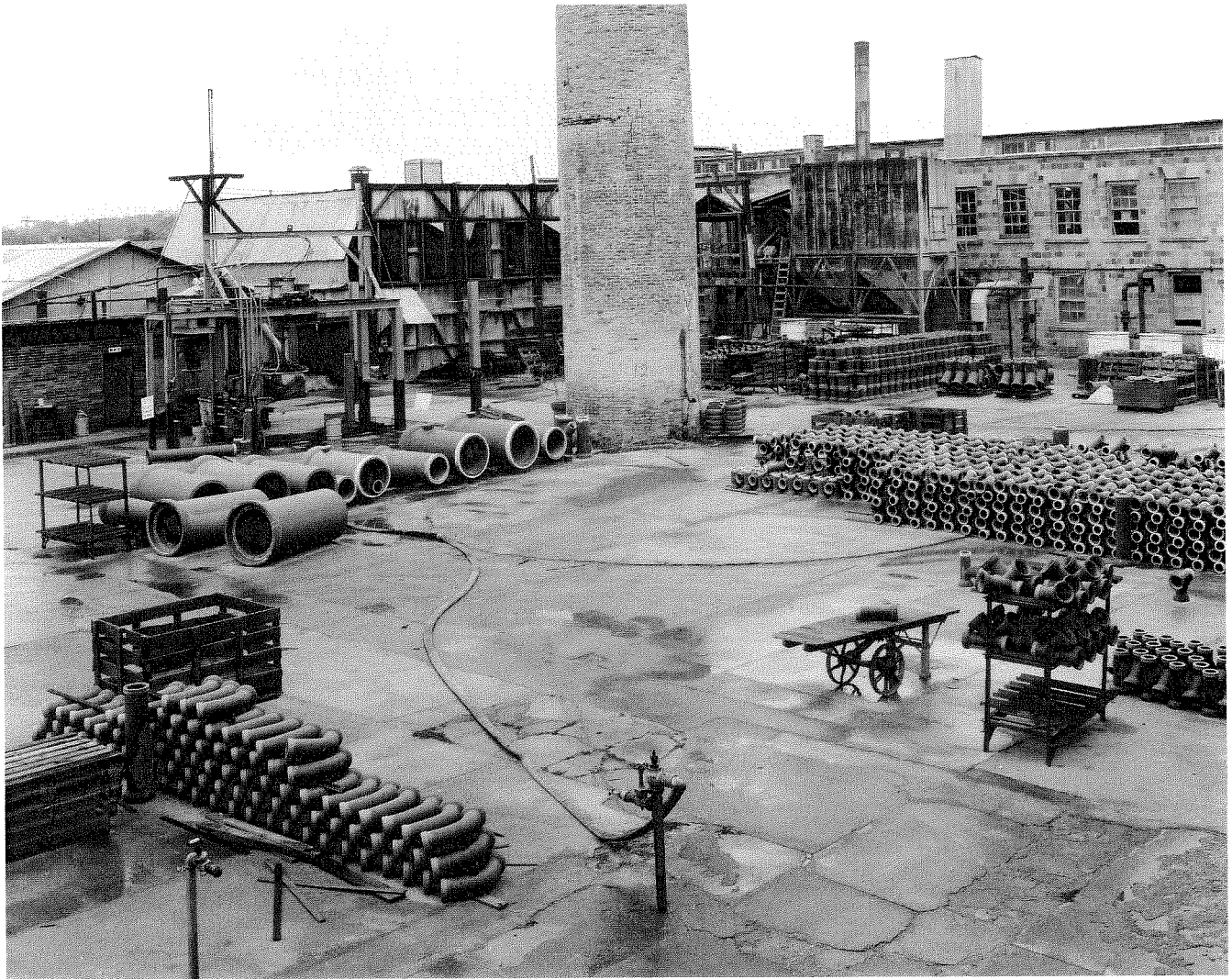
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8 Plaster room, 1985



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9 Glaze room, 1985



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10 Pipe yard, 1984

57



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11 Molds and models, 1986

The Company

Work on a county road one mile north of Lincoln, California, led to the discovery of potter's clay in the fall of 1874. Charles Gladding of Chicago was visiting in San Francisco and read of the find in a newspaper. He came to Lincoln and took samples of the clay back to Chicago for testing by ceramic experts. It proved to be of excellent quality and was in abundant supply.

On May 1, 1875, Charles Gladding, Peter McGill McBean and George Chambers, all of Chicago, made a monetary investment of \$12,000 to build a factory to manufacture vitrified sewer pipe. Gladding, McBean & Co. was founded.

Charles Gladding returned to Lincoln on May 12, 1875, with a group of skilled workmen, purchased the land, and began construction of the first plant. This was a frame building containing one down-draft kiln. The machinery included a boiler, engine, pumps, steam press with dies, and a roller crusher. The machinery arrived on June 24. The first rail carload, which held ten tons of 4-inch, 6-inch, and 12-inch salt-glazed sewer pipe, was shipped to San Francisco on August 9, 1875—just 46 days later. Soon pipe was being shipped to cities throughout the state.

In 1884 the company built a two-story office building on a 50-foot lot on Market Street in San Francisco using terra cotta trim made at the Lincoln plant. This was the first time this material had been pro-

duced on the Pacific Coast, and the building attracted a great deal of attention. Terra cotta has since been used to decorate and enhance buildings throughout the world.

In the 1890s the company expanded its building products line by manufacturing fire brick, roof tile, enamel brick, and a complete line of chimney pipe and flue lining. It also began to manufacture garden pottery, including vases, flower pots, benches, tables, fountains and bird baths. A catalog that was published in 1910 showed all of these building products, including porcelain sinks and laundry trays and vitrified salt-glazed pipe up to 30 inches in diameter.

The labor force consisted of about 30 men, and early records show that a strike of short duration occurred in 1906. At that time a 10-hour work day began at 6:00 a.m. and ended at 5:00 p.m. The work week was 6 days, and the pay was \$2.00 per day. Settlement of the strike changed this schedule to a 9-hour work day, which began at 7:00 a.m. and ended at 5:00 p.m. The work week remained at 6 days with a daily wage of \$2.25. This 9-hour day prevailed until 1930.

Clay for production was hauled in on horse-drawn wagons until about 1908, when a new pit west of the plant was opened and a narrow gauge railroad was laid, connecting clay pit and plant.

Wood was the source of energy. It was cut and hauled in by teamsters from the vast stands of pine in the

surrounding foothills. As the supply diminished, wood was brought in by rail from outlying areas. Early photographs show huge stockpiles, which were needed to feed the furnaces. About 1900, wood was replaced by crude oil, which was shipped to the plant in rail tank cars and was used until 1939, when natural gas was piped in from the Sutter Buttes.

Gladding, McBean & Co. operated until 1962, when it merged with Lock Joint Pipe Co. and formed what was known as Interpace Corporation. In 1976 Interpace announced their intention to cease operations at the Lincoln plant. At this time, Pacific Coast Building Products of Sacramento acquired the company, rescued it from closure, and restored the famous name of Gladding, McBean & Co.

The company now covers 411 acres, with 20 acres under roof and even more acres of open "floor space." Currently there are 240 employees, many of whom have been with the company for 25 to 40 years. Some even had fathers and grandfathers working here before them. The payroll peaked in 1948, when the work force numbered about 750.

Today the plant is thriving, manufacturing vitrified clay pipe, roof tile, floor tile, architectural terra cotta, split pavers, and tile veneers.

This brief statement of the history of the company has been excerpted by the editors from a brochure published by Gladding, McBean & Company