

Williamsburg[®]

COLLECTIBLES

LIMOGES PORCELAIN

About 200 miles southwest of Paris along the Vienne River is the bustling town of Limoges, world renowned for creating fine porcelain.

This centuries-old tradition began in the 1770s when the first French source of kaolin, a white clay material used to make high-quality porcelain, was discovered at Saint-Yrieix, near Limoges. The discovery made it possible to manufacture hard-paste porcelain, a material far superior in strength and longevity than the soft-paste porcelain that was previously possible. Soon, porcelain manufacturing began to boom.

Throughout the 18th century, hinged boxes became increasingly popular for holding everything from jewelry to tobacco. Sophisticated ladies and gentlemen were enchanted by the detailed decorations that Limoges artists produced. Each box was hand painted and often included a delightful element of whimsy.

Today, about two dozen Limoges porcelain factories specialized in dinnerware, giftware, and industrial porcelain. But perhaps their best-known export is the "Limoges box." These charming creations come in all shapes and size and are adored by collectors and gift-givers alike.