

# Presence Of Clay In County Offers New Crafts Business

While the number of hand-craft articles being made in Macon County is increasing, still another opportunity is open to someone with the potter's talent, for the clays are available in the West's Mill area.

The world-famous firm of Josiah Wedgwood spent a vast sum nearly 200 years ago to obtain five tons of Macon County clay for use in its expensive china and earthenwares. In the opinion of the present president of the English firm, who himself visited here six years ago, the local clays could be used by craft potters for mak-

ing stoneware.

Artistically-made folk ware would have a market. That is indicated by the number of craft shops in and around Franklin which sell such wares—now made outside the county.

**Answers Letter**

Hensleigh C. Wedgwood, in answer to a letter from The Press, said Macon County red clays would be ideal for such ware.

"As far as we could judge, however, from our brief inspection trip there appeared to be little white clay suitable for making porcelain." The only

place the Wedgwood party had time to see while here was the old Rickman clay mine at the head of Cowee.

This lack wouldn't hinder a potter interested in red clays. Even so, there must be white clays available, too, near West's Mill. If Josiah Wedgwood's agent could find five tons of it in 1767—and Indians told the agent that men before him had got it—such clay must still be there, somewhere.

(T. M. Rickman of Cowee says he has never seen it but has been told many times that there is white clay "as white as flour" on

a small stream near the head of Cowee Creek. Cowee residents call this stream Sigmond Creek after a farmer who once lived on it.)

**Here In 1950**

A fifth generation descendant of the famed Englishman, Mr. Wedgwood came here in 1950 for the unveiling of a state historical marker commemorating the clay venture of Thomas Griffiths, sent here by Josiah Wedgwood. In his letter to The Press Mr. H. Wedgwood quoted information about how the Macon clay was used in a sales promotion of that day. (Apparently, merchants as far back as the 18th century knew a good bit about the power of advertising.)

**Quotes From Letter**

Hensleigh Wedgwood quotes from a letter of his ancestor to Josiah Wedgwood's partner, Bentley: "I have often thought of mentioning to you that it

may not be a bad idea to give out that our jaspers are made of the Cherokee clay that I sent an agent to procure for me, and when the present parcel is out, we may have no hopes of obtaining more, as it was with the utmost difficulty the natives were prevailed upon to part with what we now have.

"But then his Majesty (King George III) should see some of these fine tablets and be told this story, which is a true one, for I am not joking, as he has repeatedly enquired what I have done with the Cherokee clay.

"A portion of the Cherokee clay is really used in all jaspers, so make what use you please of the fact. They want nothing but age and scarcity to make them worth any price you could ask for them."

(Webster's defines jasper as, "A virified earthenware invented by Josiah Wedgwood, usual-

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ly of delicate color with white embossing.")

**No Other Clays**

The present Wedgwood president writes: "Of course, the supply of five tons was eventually exhausted and as far as we know no other clays were brought over from America."

Asked why the original Wedgwood sought no more Macon clay, Hensleigh Wedgwood replied: "There was only one occasion on which Wedgwood obtained Macon County clay. He obtained it because he was interested in knowing its nature and finding out whether it was superior to the English clays obtainable at that time.

"Although the clay was of good quality, it was found to be no more superior than the Cornish clays, and of course its inaccessibility and the tremendous cost of obtaining it ruled out its use.

"In addition, many obstacles were placed in Wedgwood's way in obtaining permission to dig the clay, not only by the Lords of Trades and Plantations but by the Indians themselves who were deeply suspicious of his motives and who thought that if Wedgwood were willing to go to such trouble and expense to obtain the clay, it must be worth its weight in gold."

In its Aug. 10, 1950, issue The Press carried an extensive account from Mr. Griffith's detailed diary of his trip to Macon County to get the clay.

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