

TOM AND DOT CASE WORK LONG HOURS TO BUILD COLLECTION OF EARLY PISGAH FOREST POTTERY

Now on Loan to Asheville Art Museum

Given the time, Tom Case of Film Division's Process Control Department would be creating more of the rare American Cameo pottery that collectors are eager to get, for which they pay plenty. He was left the formula and the know-how by his step-grandfather, the late Walter B. Stephen, who also passed on to his young apprentice his Pisgah Forest Pottery business at Arden.

From early childhood Tom Case was working with clay and trying his hand at the wheel, listening closely to what the elder potter taught, and to his stories that delighted all visitors. He watched as new designs were created in the American Cameo ware, often called American Wedgewood, and he shared the disappointment when a month's work would go wrong in the kiln. Approaching manhood he also worked alongside Grady Ledbetter, who is now his partner in

operating Pisgah Forest Pottery.

Case has an orderly arrangement to his two-job responsibilities. He works the same shift as his wife, Dorothy, a member of the Medical Center's nursing staff since August 1956, and together they do the many side jobs connected with so old a business. One activity is that of enlarging their collection, a wide range of articles made both by Mr. Stephen and by his mother who developed the cameo technique soon after the turn of the century. More than one museum has expressed interest in having part or all of the collection.

The Asheville Art Museum won out. In accordance with an arrangement worked out early this year, almost three dozen pieces from the Case collection are on permanent loan to the museum in its new Civic Center location. In spite of pressure from the North Carolina Museum of Art to have the collection, Tom and Dot Case were anxious to keep it in tact in the locality of its origin.

The collection will be given a Bicentennial opening July 6 with a special showing lasting through August 9.

Collectors have cherished the American Cameo pottery for years and are reluctant to part with it, yet opportunities arise unexpectedly. A case in point was when a woman in another state wrote the shop at Arden, as told by Dot Case:

"She wrote that she had several American Cameo pieces she was willing to sell, after having loved them in her home for years.

"I wrote back to say I would be to see her soon. I wanted first refusal, not knowing what prices would be asked. I bought them.

"Tom and I look at it as a family investment. We love the old work, as we did him. But sometimes, we feel, the prices are out of reason and we don't buy. Even so, there aren't many opportunities these



The late Walter B. Stephen is shown with brush in hand, painting the creamy white porcelain paste which went on layer by layer to build the American Cameo design. The cameo vase below reflects the lure of the West and the vigor needed of the pioneer, major theme of Stephen pottery reflecting his early years as a cowhand. Born in 1876, he described himself in one of his journals as a "Centennial child," and in others told of his encounters with Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill Hicock.



Tom Case of Film Division's Process Control Department is a familiar figure at Western North Carolina craft shows where he demonstrates use of the potter's wheel.



days."

But there are opportunities for losses. One calamity several years ago reduced prized items to rubble when rising creek water smashed things about. They had been on exhibit for years in a small struc-