

Moore County Pottery Has An Interesting History

BY CHARLES G. ZUG III

During the late 1850s, a young potter named Jacob Dorris Craven packed up his small family and moved south into upper Moore County. The Cravens had already lived in southern Randolph County for nearly a century—in fact, Dorris's great-great-grandfather Peter is often cited as the original potter of this region. Whether Peter or his sons were potters remains unproven, but Dorris's grandfather John, father Anderson, and numerous uncles, cousins, and brothers were all active in the craft.

Why Dorris chose to leave his home county at this time remains something of a mystery. Family tradition allows that some members were against slavery and left Randolph County because of the growing tensions that would soon culminate in war. Dorris's younger brother Thomas appears to have accompanied him—a few pots survive which are stamped "JD & T.W. CRAVEN"—and another brother William headed for Missouri at the same time. But there may have been more compelling economic reasons for Dorris's migration.

The 1850 Census for Moore County lists carpenters, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, tailors, millers, hatters, gunsmiths, even a basketmaker—but not a single potter. Moreover, with the completion of the Fayetteville and Western, a plank road running across Moore from the Moravian communities of Bethania and Salem to the northwest to Fayetteville in the southeast, the area was ripe for commercial expansion, and distant markets were now much more accessible. Dorris may well have recognized the opportunities for a young potter, and so he set up shop at a site about three miles west of the current Jugtown Pottery. In the 1860 Census he is listed as a "manufacturer of Stoneware" and is the only potter so designated for the county.

Perhaps there were one or two earlier potters in Moore County, but if so, they remain anonymous. Dorris clearly played the central role in establishing the craft here. In terms of surviving signed pieces, he is the most prolific of all North Carolina potters. And he trained numerous other young men in the art of "turning" and "burning,"



BEN OWEN — The famed late master potter Ben Owen is shown with one of his products at his shop in Westmoore.



SELF PORTRAIT — This self portrait of Jacques Busbee is owned by Dr. Clement Monroe.



BUTTER JAR — Salt-glazed stoneware butter jar, c. 1870, J.D. Craven, Moore County, H 11-1/8, 2 gallons. Stamp: "J.D. CRAVEN." Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Hurdle Lea. The wide, flattened terminals of the handles and the coggled gallonage capacity are both characteristic of the Moore County tradition that Dorris pioneered. The jar originally had a flat lid with an inner flange and a finial on top to facilitate handling.

some of whose descendants are still at their wheels today. The Census of Manufacturers for 1860 reveals that he was employing 3 men to process 60,000 pounds of clay, 16 bushels of salt, and 20 cords of wood into 6,000 gallons of "jugs, churns, crocks & pitchers" valued at \$600. By 1870, 4 workers who were active 7 months of the year were producing \$800 worth of pottery.

Today the old wares are no longer used. We buy them instead for nostalgic or aesthetic or historical reasons—at prices that would have made Dorris's head spin—and venerate them on mantels or in curio cabinets. But Dorris made pots that were to be used daily and were critical to the survival of a rural, self-sufficient people. The majority of forms was directly connected to food-

ways, specifically, for preservation (jar, jug, milk crock, churn), preparation (baking dish, bowl, colander, beanpot), and consumption (pitcher, plate, mug, teapot). Less common was a variety of implements (chamberpot, chicken waterer, pipe, gravemarker), as well as some horticultural wares (flowerpot, wall pocket) and whimsies (ring jug, face jug, monkey jug).

The bulk of Dorris's output was in salt-glazed stoneware which was fired to a temperature of perhaps 2400 degrees F in a long, low groundhog kiln. Earlier generations had produced lead-glazed earthenwares, but by the late eighteenth century, the toxic nature of lead had become widely recognized. And so, during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the safer, more durable

stoneware gradually displaced the earthenware in North Carolina. It was coated with a salt glaze in the eastern Piedmont and an alkaline glaze in the western Piedmont and the Mountains. Still, potters such as Dorris continued a small sideline of earthenware, notably in the form of baking dishes and flowerpots, right into the twentieth century.

Training in a folk craft such as pottery was a continuous process. The showowners took on their sons and neighbors and taught them the fine points of locating and processing clays, turning on the treadle-wheel, glazing, and burning the groundhog kiln. The technology was traditional and time-tested, and it was learned by the young men in informal ways, that is, through oral tradition and imitation. Here

there were no schedules or textbooks or classes or Master of Fine Arts degrees. The aspiring turner stayed near his mentor, watching and helping, and taking every opportunity to try his hand when the wheel was free. And he followed no set routine—the "lesson" for the day depended on the particular forms needed to fill current orders.

As the main perpetuator of the folk craft, Dorris Craven was extremely active as a teacher. In 1870 his immediate neighbors were William Henry Hancock and William Henry Luck, both of whom stated in the Census that they were "Working in Potter Shop." During the 1880s, Hancock—along with Manley W. Owen—turned for E.A. Poe & Co. in Fayetteville, thus carrying the Moore County tradition into the

Coastal Plain, where there were few potters. Yet another likely disciple was Benjamin Franklin Owen, who in 1870 lived just four houses away from Dorris. A fourth was young William Henry Chrisco, who went to live with Dorris at age 13 or 14. Chrisco later constructed his own pottery just south of the Craven site and turned ware into the 1930s, until he was almost eighty years old. In 1969 his log shop was dismantled and hauled off to the Smithsonian Institution, where one day it may become a permanent exhibit.

Dorris did not neglect his children, notably his sons Isaac Franklin and Daniel Zebedee, who later established their own potteries and represent the last generation of folk potters. In the illustration is Daniel's log shop as it appeared about 1915. Daniel appears to be contemplating some problem in his clay mill while two of the children take a welcome break by the shop door. In the foreground are salt-glazed storage jars and milk crocks, perhaps the two most popular utilitarian forms at this late stage of the folk tradition. Subsequent

generations of the Craven family—particularly Daniel's sons Weldon Braxton, Charles Boyd, and Lester Farrell—played an important role in the development of the new forms, glazes, and technology that transformed the craft starting right after World War I.

In particular, the Cravens have strong ties to the Teague Pottery at Robbins. The original potter in this family, John Wesley Teague, was also apprenticed, at the age of nine, to Dorris Craven. Then, John Wesley's sons Bryan Dewey ("Duck") married Daniel Craven's daughter Bessie Lee. Finally, working out of a shed in his back yard, Bessie's brother Charlie has turned many of the larger forms sold at the Teague Pottery, which is now run by Bessie's son-in-law Hobart Garner and his son Daniel. If fact, if Dorris's distant ancestor Peter Craven was indeed a potter, then Daniel Garner represents the ninth generation at the wheel, for he is Peter's great-great-great-great-great-grandson.

Perhaps no family has been more active in the pottery business in Moore County over the last century than the Owens. As suggested, their connection to Dorris Craven is somewhat more tenuous. While Frank Owen lived very close to Dorris in 1870, Melvin L. Owens suggests that Frank's son James H. was the first potter in the family, and that he learned to turn with Pascal Marable in Randolph County. Then he returned to the homesite in Moore County—adjacent to the Joe T. Owen Pottery on Route 705—and taught his father and brothers. Finally, after working as a journeyman in Randolph and Chatham Counties, Jim established his own shop about 1910, where his son M.L. and his family carry on the business today.

Whatever the precise origin of the craft, the Owen(s) family has exerted a wide influence in this century. An orange, lead-glazed pie dish made by Jim's brother Rufus is said to have inspired Jacques and Juliana Busbee to found the Jugtown Pottery. Jim built the first shop there, and Rufus's son Benjamin Wade was for years the main turner. And when Ben founded his old Plank

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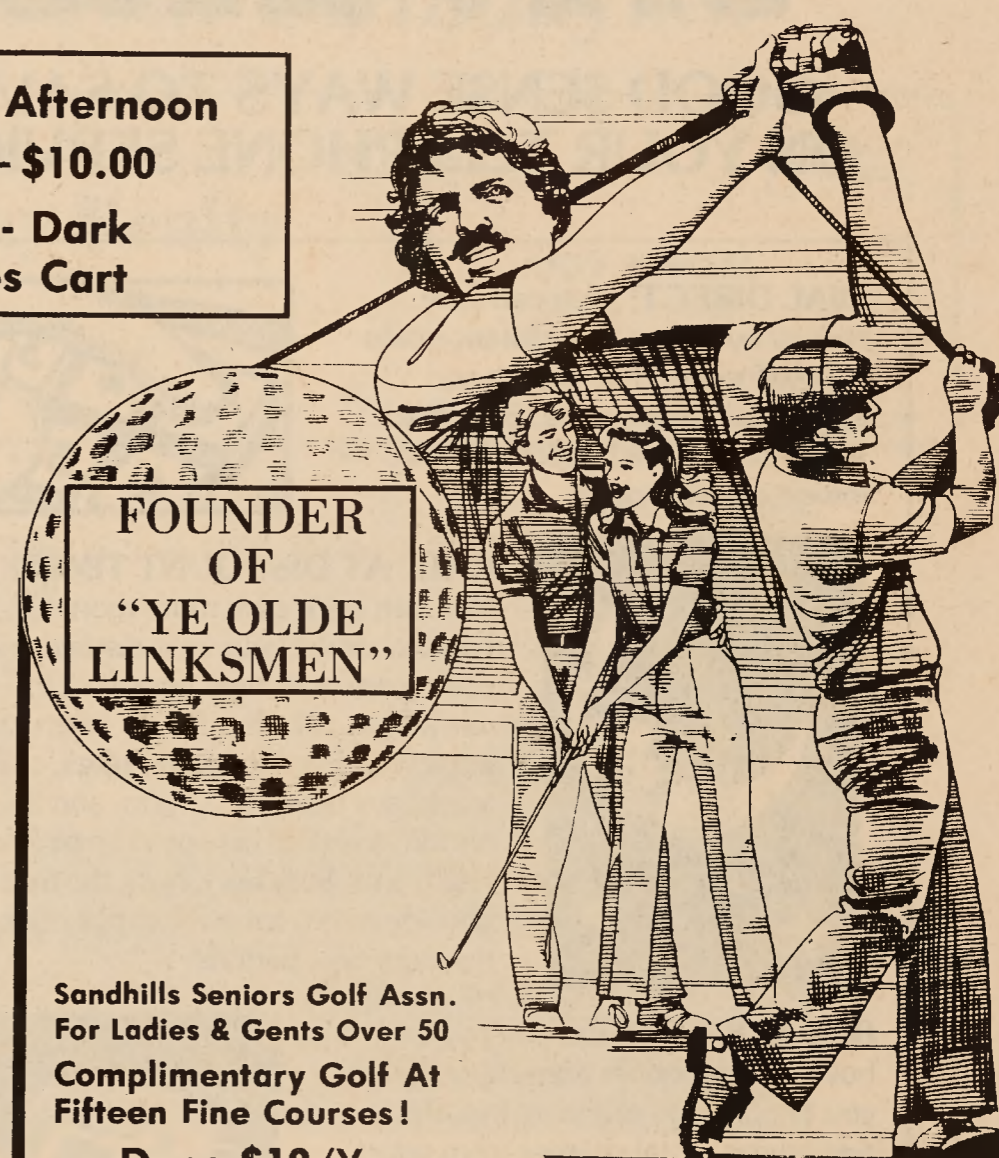
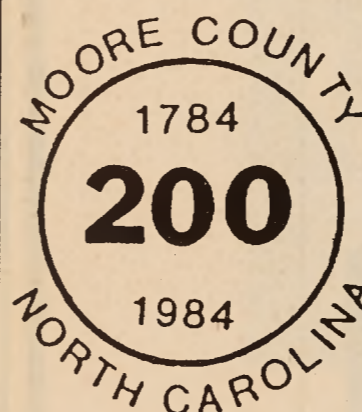
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