

## Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

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### Redware Potters and Their Works

Carroll County Times article for 26 August 1990

By Jay A. Graybeal

One of the earliest exhibitions sponsored by the Historical Society featured redware objects loaned by thirty-two members. Held in August 1956 at the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House in Westminster, the exhibit included documented works by three local potters and historical information on three other craftsmen. The public was asked to bring additional examples for examination by Miss Eugenia C. Holland, curator of the Maryland Historical Society.

Redware is a low-fired earthenware made from commonly found red clays similar to those used to make bricks. It was relatively inexpensive to produce and therefore most examples were utilitarian kitchenwares. A shiny clear lead-based glaze was usually applied to the interior surface since redware is not impervious to liquids. The lead-based glaze chipped easily and adversely reacted with some foods and therefore posed a significant health risk. Despite the danger, which was well understood by 1800, redware remained popular for another century.

Carroll countians demonstrated a strong preference for locally made redwares during the nineteenth century. Recent archaeological excavations at the Historical Society's Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House and the Miller's House at the Union Mills Homestead uncovered numerous sherds of redware crocks, jars, bottles and jugs. Far less common were pieces of the safe salt-glazed stonewares that were widely used in other parts of the country.

The local preference for redwares can be traced to the Pennsylvania German immigrants who settled the northern and western towns of present-day Carroll County. These settlers brought a tradition of making and using utilitarian redwares.

Recent research has revealed the names of over thirty redware potters who worked in the county before 1900. Most, if not all, were of German descent as were the majority of their customers. Typically, these craftsmen did not work year-round and only periodically produced wares as a supplement to their farm incomes. Most of their wares were purchased by families living nearby. This may be the principle reason why so few of their works are signed.

The Historical Society owns a small but important collection of local redware. All the objects are relatively plain wheel-thrown wares, similar to examples made throughout the region. One piece was signed and dated by the maker and several others have strong attributions based on family histories supplied by the donors.

Theodore Crawford made an impressive mixing bowl with a decorative piecrust lip. Crawford's pottery was located on the Smelser Mill road between New Windsor and Uniontown. Incised on the bottom of the bowl is "MADE BY T. CRAWFORD 1872 5 10". The donor, Mrs. Frank (Maude) Haines recalled that her mother-in-law Mrs. J. Edward Formwalt used it "as a container for small amounts of rising bread also as a bowl in which to work butter." Mrs. Haines was given the bowl in 1944 and used it "to cool batches of preserves before jarring." She displayed her bowl at the 1956 exhibit and donated it to the Historical Society two years later.

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Three unsigned objects have been attributed to local makers. A small barrel-shaped jar with a lid given by Mrs. R. N. Darby is believed to have been made by John Wike who operated a pottery on his father's farm between Manchester and Snydersburg. Wike, who was born in Germany in c.1840, was one of the six potters identified in the Society's 1956 exhibit.

A small somewhat crudely made bowl given by Mrs. Sterling Hively has a history of being made by black slaves at Samuel Warehime's brick yard located between Frizzellburg and Pleasant Valley. This object clearly shows the close relationship between brick making and redware production. The bowl also is only one of a few known local objects believed to have been made by a black slave craftsman.

The Historical Society's collection includes two similar flowerpots attributed to Samuel Crouse of Taneytown. Neither example retains its original flat underplate which probably had a similar piecrust lip. The example given by Mr. Basil C. Crapster has a yellowish glaze highlighted with purplish-brown splotches. The one given by Miss M. Janette Fleagle has a medium brown glaze with dark brown splotches. The difference in glazing was probably due to different formulas or firing conditions.

A simple two-gallon ovoid storage crock with a handle, recently found in the cellar of the Dr. Jacob J. Weaver, Jr., house in Uniontown, was donated by Western Maryland College. It is almost certainly of local manufacture and may be the work of Theodore Crawford who worked nearby. A period pencil inscription "Crock Apple B 1889" reveals its use in the Weaver household to store apple butter.

The Historical Society is seeking information about local redware potters. Of particular importance are account books, diaries and letters written by these craftsmen. We would also like to record any personal recollections about potters. The Historical Society would also like to acquire examples by potters whose work is not now represented in our collection. Two potters who signed their works were Samuel Baumgardner of Taneytown, who stamped his pieces "S. BAUMGARDNER", and Leonard Kopp of Lineboro, who signed his wares "L. KOPP."

These surviving redware examples, shards from archaeological sites, and historical records reveal that local redware production persisted well into the nineteenth century. This strong preference helps us understand the influences of the Pennsylvania Germans on local craft and domestic practices.

Photo Caption: A mixing bowl made by Theodore Crawford near Uniontown, signed and dated 1872, is one of the highlights of the Historical Society's ceramics collection.