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Seagrove: The Rich Pottery Center of North Carolina

Growing up in North Carolina around a family of art admirers I had heard about Seagrove and Jugtown, but I never heard too much about the amazing Moravian potters of Salem and pottery center that the area once was. I even attended Salem College as an art student and never heard about Gottfried Aust and Rudolf Christ, two of the professional potters from the single brother's house. Through the studies in ART6917, I wondered why Salem has dropped off the map as far as a pottery center in North Carolina today, and in contrast, what were the factors that have made Seagrove and Moore County still alive and well as a rich pottery center in North Carolina today? I believe three of the main factors that go into making Seagrove the rich pottery center it has been in the past and continues to be today, have to do with the strong foundation that Jacques and Juliana Busbee laid with the potters in the 1920s, the strong family traditions being a backbone to the pottery industry, and the work of Walter and Dorothy Auman in preserving the history of the Seagrove Potters through apprenticeship programs and the Seagrove Pottery Museum.

Jacques and Juliana Busbee played a major role in Seagrove and Moore County by being the liaisons between the potters and the buying

public. The entrepreneurs came from Raleigh and started Jugtown Pottery in 1921. Several years earlier Mrs. Busbee had stumbled upon an orange pie plate at the Lexington Fair that was made in the area. After her friends saw the orange pie plate along with the other pieces she purchased, she and Jacques knew there would be a market for the pottery. They returned to Seagrove to find the area and the potters in decline. They encouraged several potters to create pieces for "The Village Store," a store they opened in New York's Greenwich Village in Manhattan.

In the 1940s my grandmother, Bethea Wells and her friend, Virginia MacDonald, a home extension agent, went over to Jugtown from Raleigh to eat lunch with Mrs. Busbee. By this point in time the Busbee's had opened and established a market for North Carolina art pottery in and outside of North Carolina by printing brochures and opening "The Village Store" in Manhattan and "Jugtown Pottery" in Moore County. Jugtown was a long cabin with dirt floors and several kick wheels for potters to turn their pots. There was also an area for displaying the pottery and a place Mrs. Busbee could serve food to people who came to visit. As I interviewed my grandmother about her experience at Jugtown, she spoke about the lunch they ate. She said, "It was such a long time ago, let me remember, Mrs. Busbee served something unusual that Mrs.



MacDonald would not eat, now what was it? I believe she served some mushrooms she had either grown or gathered herself and Mrs.

MacDonald would not eat them, but I thought to myself if Mrs. Busbee is eating them and she's fine, I would too!"



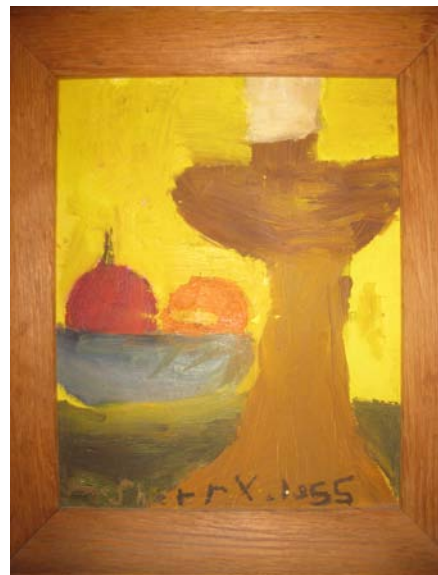
While there, my grandmother made several purchases some of which she kept and others she gave away. One of her purchases was a candlestick in the "Jugtown Orange Glaze" that Mrs. Busbee had first seen at the Lexington Fair.

When my dad was 6 years old, he used this candlestick in a still life painting. I have grown up

seeing this candlestick and painting at my grandmother's home and it is refreshing to see these items with a new perspective and relationship to history.

The Busbee's had a way of selling pottery. Charles Zug in the Folkways PBS series, "The Potter's of Seagrove," said that the Busbee's could sell a 5 cent jug for 10 cents. With the influence of the Busbee's,

the art pottery became smaller, more colorful and artistic, and more expensive. Mr. Busbee and Ben Owen made trips to museums and



libraries where they would study and learn about art and pottery from around the world. These examples of Chinese or Roman pottery they would study influenced the pottery of Jugtown and Seagrove with classic



lines and forms that are still used today. The Busbee's came in to this little known pottery community and created a place on the map. They helped to continue the pottery tradition when many potters were turning to farming to support their families, and gave a history to the pottery that made people want to purchase it.

The Busbee's had several potters who worked at Jugtown. Those potters were Charlie Teague, Ben Owen, and JH Owen. These men had worked with their fathers and learned how to turn pots, just as they also passed the tradition down to their families. The family trees of Seagrove and Moore County seem to run together with names overlapping. The rich pottery tradition ingrained in these families runs thick. Children of potters learned to turn pots at the early ages of 8 or 10. I believe that the strong family tradition in pottery was something lacking in the Moravian



Village of Salem. Although young men became apprentices and the tradition was passed on, since they had no sons and daughters to pass on

the pottery customs, eventually after Gottfried and Christ died the



tradition was no longer passed on and the pottery practice in Salem fused out. In Seagrove, however, there were networks of families such as the Coles, Cravens, Owens, Lucks, Teagues, Aumans and so on. These family organizations trained kids when they were as

young as 4 or 5 years old to get their hands in the clay. These potter families also taught their neighbors and would even apprentice hard working outsiders at times. The traditions were passed through generations and marriages.

Children learned from their fathers and were often



taught to make pottery to give them something to do to stay out of trouble. The Cole Family has 10 generations of potters including the first woman potter in the area, Nell Cole Graves who turned pots into her 80s (Folkways). Another member of the Cole family that produced pottery was Dorothy Cole Auman. She grew up surrounded by members of her family making pots – her grandfather, Ruffin Cole; father, C. C. Cole; as well as brothers, uncles, and cousins. Dorothy could not go to the shop unless she got her work done at the house first. She was given a chunk of clay to keep her out of the way and would learn to create pots and

designs by being around the pottery environment. When her father couldn't stand it any longer, he made her a pottery wheel of her own where she began to make miniature baskets, jugs and Rebecca pitchers. When Dorothy returned from college in 1946 she worked with her father and in 1949 Dot married Walter Auman and he became a potter as well (Zug).

The strong family networks in the area of Seagrove along with the knowledge and assistance from Jacques and Juliana Busbee were important factors in the pottery tradition at Seagrove continuing, but just as important was the remarkable work of two potters whose roots in pottery run deep. Walter and Dorothy Auman recognized the significance of North Carolina Pottery and the importance of preserving the history and traditions. After Dot's father, C. C. Cole, spurred them on, they begin to collect pots, tools and pottery memorabilia at a time when not many others were interested. In 1953 Dorothy and Walter bought an old store front on NC Highway 220, fixed it up and opened their shop, "Seagrove Pottery." When they opened their own workshop, sales shop and retail outlet for the wares of C. C. Cole, they continued their research and work in accumulating artifacts. In 1969 they opened the Seagrove Potters Museum, which was first located in an old railroad depot that they had moved to a location behind their pottery shop. The museum not only featured the work of potters from the Seagrove, but also recognized

potters from areas around North Carolina such as the Catawba Valley. The Auman's historical awareness allowed many of the potters from the past to live on through their research and chats they would have with others who were interested. The Aumans were leaders in the area and pottery community. They produced flyers that would guide buyers and visitors to the area potteries as well as assist in promoting the first Seagrove Pottery Festival in 1982. They arranged and organized the first North Carolina Pottery Conference in 1987 and helped found the North Carolina Pottery Center. The Mint Museum now owns their pottery collection which stands as a huge testimony to the dedication and vision of their extraordinary work (Perry 12).

The Aumans not only passed and preserved the pottery tradition through the work of their research and the pottery museum, but also continued the pottery customs by teaching and apprenticing others. One such family the Aumans apprenticed was the King Family. Terry and Anna King were friends with the Aumans and they later learned, were relatives as well. When the Kings first began their apprenticeship, Walter was getting older and he told the Kings they could come help mow the lawn, mix the clay and load the kiln, and exchange, they would show them how to make pots. The Kings worked for no money while they learned and would later open their own shop. At the time they began their apprenticeship Terry and Anna's daughter, Crystal was 6 years old.

On that first day there Crystal tagged along and made her first pottery elephant and bear. Crystal talks about how she learned about pottery from Dot while her parents were working with the Aumans in her documentary, *Reverence in Clay*.

Dorothy would turn a pot on the wheel and let Crystal add the face with clay and teeth from broken China, just as she would. Dorothy was mainly a production potter, but would occasionally take time out to create hand built pieces. Today Crystal mainly creates hand built folk art pieces and she got her start from her work as a child with the Aumans.



Dorothy taught Terry and Anna how to make jugs with a grape motif and encouraged them to create something that would not compete with other Seagrove potters, but instead, to make something all their own. Crystal does not say it in her documentary, but I believe Dot also passed on some of her historical awareness to Crystal as well. This can be seen as Crystal collects pots and gets to know the potter behind them. She keeps her collection in her store where she can talk to people about the history of Seagrove and the potters when they come into her shop.

After visiting the Seagrove Pottery Festival last November, there is no question that the pottery tradition is alive and well in the center of North Carolina. The work that Jacques and Juliana Busbee did as entrepreneurs enabled a strong foundation for the potters in the area. Once this foundation was laid the family networks and rich pottery traditions were carried on from generation to generation. At a time when history could have been forgotten, Walter and Dorothy Auman realized the importance of preserving the past and recognized the significance of collecting pots and passing on the pottery customs through their apprenticeship programs. Without the strong foundation, nurturing families, and passion to preserve the past, the traditions might have faded out as they did in Salem. Thanks to the work from those of the past, there are over 100 potteries open in the Seagrove and Moore County areas today. Some have been around for generations and some are new to the area, however all are touched in some way by the rich history, family traditions, and North Carolina clay.

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