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Paper Title: Crocks or Pots? Relating Redware Vessel Forms to Folk Terms in Nineteenth-Century Ontario

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Abstract:

This paper presents a type series for lead-glazed coarse red earthenware (or redware), a common artifact recovered from nineteenth-century sites in southern Ontario. Indeed, domestic potters produced a myriad of vessel forms that met the needs of rural consumers, who used the inexpensive redwares in food preparation, food storage and dairying on a daily basis. It is recognized, therefore, that a standardized classificatory scheme based on functional form would help researchers relate the artifacts that they find to the uses to which they were put. It is hoped that the typology will promote future critical comparison of redware assemblages on both intersite and inter-regional levels.

Why study redware?

As archaeologists working on historic domestic occupations in Ontario well know, redware is everywhere. In fact, a brief review of reports published by Archaeological Services, Inc. during the past 3 years failed to discover a single domestic site *without* redware artifacts. In spite of this ubiquity, published studies on historic redware vessels are uncommon in the archaeological literature, with the notable exceptions of those few produced in the 1970s and '80s by Newlands, Webster, and others[1]. While the subject in the United States receives somewhat more interest[2], it remains secondary to the sustained interest in imported refined white earthenware. This disparity is reflected in the most fundamental level of artifact analysis—functional typology. While we are relatively clear regarding the variety, size and shape of the myriad of RWE vessels available to consumers in the nineteenth-century—the specialized vessels that accompanied the individualization of the meal—we are seemingly less certain about the identification of redware vessels available during that same period. To address this issue, we present a nascent functional typology of commonly-potted Ontario redware vessels in an effort to encourage a more sensitive examination of this often understudied ceramic type.

Earthenware Manufacturing in Ontario

Locally manufactured earthenware vessels were an easily obtained and inexpensive choice for preparing, storing, and serving food in the nineteenth century. Potters could produce this type of vessel cheaply because the clay was mined in Ontario, whereas stoneware clays had to be imported from the United States[3]. Earthenware clay with a high iron content fired to a terra cotta or red colour, hence the origin of the term "redware,"

while clay with a high lime content fired to a buff colour. Due to earthenware's porous nature, food vessels had to be finished with a glaze to seal the surface that was to come into contact with the liquid or food solids. The glaze also made the vessels easier to clean and more attractive[4]. The most common glaze colour was brown, hence early advertisements called it "coarse brown ware," or "brown earthenware"[5]. It was also called "common ware" or "common earthenware."

The heavy and bulky nature of the earthenware vessels worked in favour of the local potters, who initially did not have to compete with imported English wares that were difficult to transport to Canada. Once the domestic pottery industry was well-established circa 1849, some potters expanded into manufacturing vessels with imported stoneware clay. Stoneware production eventually dominated the market; by 1881, 66% of the total value of pottery produced was stoneware. The development of new technologies to process and preserve foods—such as the ice box and the glass sealing jar—caused the decline of the pottery industry as whole[6]. It is unclear when the last redware pottery in Ontario ceased operation, but it may have occurred with the closure of the New Hamburg pottery in 1916[7].Therefore, Ontario's redware industry spans the period between the late 1790s and the 1910s. [8]

Identifying Vessel Forms

In the 1980s, Ian Kenyon identified 12 different redware and stoneware vessel forms[9]. However, in our practical experience, ASI analysts had only applied a very few of these to our archaeological collections—milk pan, cream pot, bowl, pitcher—and often used

the general term “crock” as a catch-all for hollowware vessels that were unidentifiable. As we developed a finer appreciation for redware, it occurred to us that perhaps a more formal functional typology based on historic documents and archaeological examples was in order. This typology is based upon published nineteenth-century potter’s lists and cookbooks, as well as archaeological collections.

Potter’s Invoices

David Newlands’s excellent pottery study entitled *Early Ontario Potters* reproduces several potter’s invoice and sales lists from the mid- to late nineteenth century. A number of these lists clearly specify that the vessels were made from “common ware” or “common earthenware.”

The earliest of these advertisements—that of A, Geralds of Prescott—dates to 1837. Gerald’s pottery produced jugs (one qt. to 5 gal.), large and small butter crocks, milk pans, preserve jars, flower pots, stove crocks (tubes), pitchers, candlesticks and other items “too numerous to mention.”[10] In 1851, the Bailey pottery of Bowmanville offered the following wheel-thrown vessels: three sizes of cream pots, two sizes of covered butter pots, four sizes of preserve jars (ranging from 2 gal to ¼ gal.), five sizes of jugs (3 gal to ¼ gal), three sizes of milk pans, two sizes of milk crocks, chamber pots, wash bowls, two sizes of churns, and two sizes of stove tubes[11]. The remaining advertisements and invoices, dating between 1853 and the 1890s, offer largely the same vessels, including milk pans, cream pots, milk crocks, preserve jars, molasses jugs, and covered butter pots,

in addition to stove tubes and flower pots. Less common advertised vessels include bottles, water pitchers, “air-tight” jars, pie plates and spittoons.

Especially helpful in the identification and characterization of these vessels for typological purposes are the invoices of J.H. Ahrens of Paris, Ontario, dated to 1874 and the 1880s. Ahrens includes illustrations of cream pots, milk crocks, milk pans, lidded butter pots, jugs, molasses jugs, tomato/fruit jars (with corks), lidded preserve pots/jars and flower pots. Although it is unclear if these vessels were potted in stoneware or “common earthenware” (Ahrens produced both), it is likely that the vessel shapes were similar, regardless of ware.

Cookbooks

Cookbooks are an important form of prescriptive literature that reveal much about how ceramic vessels were used during food and beverage preparation[12]. The cookbooks used in this study are English-language editions either written by Ontario women or are known to be popular editions of foreign works sold in Canada during the nineteenth century. The Ontario cookbooks in particular were geared to rural, lower and middle class households, where by necessity large quantities of baked goods and preserved foods were prepared and stored on a regular basis to feed the farm family and the hired help.

Six different cookbooks were examined. The first English-language cookbook for all of Canada was *The Cook Not Mad; or Rational Cookery*, published in 1831. The first English-language cookbook actually compiled in Canada is the *Frugal Housewife’s*

Manual, authored by the mysterious "A. B." of Grimsby, and published in Toronto in 1840[13]. The third English-language cookbook to be published in Canada was an 1845 edition of Scottish author Elizabeth Nourse's *Modern Practical Cookery*. The feminist and abolitionist Lydia Maria Child first published the *American Frugal Housewife* in 1828. Sarah Hale was an influential American editor and author whose aim in the *Good Housekeeper* was to write a cookbook that married the best aspects of Lydia Child's frugality with Dr. William Kitchener's art of "good living."[14] Catharine Parr Traill's *Female Emigrant's Guide* has been characterized by Canadian cookbook bibliographer Elizabeth Driver[15] as "the most authentic voice" of all of Canada's nineteenth-century culinary writers. Thus it can be assumed that Traill has written her instructions using the words most familiar to Canadian women when describing the materials for the task at hand.

Earthenware Vessels and their Use as Revealed by the Cookbooks

Certain earthen vessel forms were similar if not identical to stoneware, glass, and metal vessel forms. This is determined from references in cookbooks that cited the author's preference when a choice was available. Thus, the use of the word "earthen" as a modifier is helpful in collecting folk terms for vessels. In this study, it was found that the term "earthen" or "earthenware" was used to distinguish **ten** different folk terms for vessels: **jar, can, pot, plate, cup, dish, basin, pan, mould,** and **pitcher**.

The use of descriptors in text such as "wide," "deep," "cylindrical," and "large," help to match the folk term with the vessel type as these terms alone may be ambiguous[16]. The

Cook Not Mad[17] specified that to keep apples and pears over the winter, one should put whole fruit in "glazed cylindrical earthen vessels large enough to hold a gallon, and closely fitted with covers." A straight-sided butter pot, which was always sold with a cover, could easily function as a storage vessel for apples and pears.

It is clear that vessels could function in multiple ways, thus complicating the construction of a functional typology. Perhaps this was acknowledged by the cookbook authors who rarely referred to the vessels in terms of a function in the same manner that pottery manufacturers advertised their wares. For example, none of the cookbooks studied called for the use of a "mixing bowl" in recipes. Rather, the hollowware vessels specified for mixing were earthen pots and pans. This correlates with the general absence of bowls for sale on pre-1900 Ontario potters' lists and advertisements, with the exception of "wash bowls." Although pots and pans were sold with descriptors that indicate they were manufactured for dairying, it would appear that they were put to other uses in the kitchen. Catharine Parr Trail[18] used a "deep red earthen pot" to mix the sponge used to raise her potato bread, and when the sponge was ready, it was mixed with 10 lbs of flour in a "large milk dish." Sarah Hale[19] set her bread sponge by mixing brewer's yeast and flour in a "well-glazed earthen pan." Elizabeth Nourse[20] used earthen pans to mix savoy cake and gingerbread batter. Mrs. Traill[21] also used an earthen pan to prepare 8 doz. ripe tomatoes for an "excellent tomato sauce."

Redware vessels often took centre stage in the dairying process. To make butter, earthenware milk pans were used to settle the liquid after milking so that the cream used

to churn butter would separate from the skim milk. Isabella Beeton[22] advised that the dish used to raise cream was a “shallow basin” of glass, glazed earthenware or tin that measured 16 inches in diameter at the top, 12 inches at the bottom and 5 or 6 inches deep, holding approximately 8 to 10 quarts when full. This volume accords well with the Ontario potters’ lists that indicate the capacity of the milk pan was two gallons (8 quarts).

The cream from multiple milkings would be stored in an *earthenware pot* until a sufficient quantity had been collected for churning[23]. This vessel may correspond to the potter’s cream pots. By contrast, the “milk crocks” that they sold held a smaller capacity, and it is assumed that they held the skimmed milk by-product of the butter-making process. Mrs. Traill[24] advised that cooks should reserve a *bowl* of milk for the family’s use before making their skim-milk cheeses. Perhaps this “*bowl*” was a “*milk crock*” purchased at the local potters. Once made, however, butter was better-stored in a stoneware vessel, which was considered more sanitary and durable than cheaper common earthenware. Stoneware is less porous and doesn’t chip as easily, thus it stands up to repeated scouring to ensure the butter is preserved in a clean environment.

Clearly redware vessels were central to women’s work in the kitchen and dairy. The terms used in cookbooks reflect the parlance of the day, as well as the multi-functionality of the vessels in the practical sense. This may reflect a slight disconnect between these terms and those used in the semi-industrial world of the mid-to-late nineteenth-century potter. By contrast, potters’ lists tend to list vessel forms with functional descriptors, and **nine** different folk terms were used commonly: **milk pan**, **cream pot, butter pot (with**

cover), preserve jar, tomato (or fruit) jar, tea pot, water pitcher, milk crock, and **molasses jug**. Other vessels for sale but not mentioned as frequently in period advertisements include churns, covered dishes, platters, mugs, oval bakers, and beaded nappies. And this begs the question, to which terms to we give primacy in our typology?

Archaeology and the Redware Typology

Using the vessel shapes and terms used by potters and cooks as a framework, we have identified the following vessels within ASI's collection: cream pot, milk pan, pitcher, bowl, porringer, and milk crock:

Vessel Photo 1: Cream pot

This cream pot was recovered from the Allerson site (AkGw-183). The vessel exhibits interior glaze only, with an approximate diameter of 11 inches. The vessel is widest at the shoulders and the bottom diametre is approximated to be less than or equal to the orifice. The vessel would have had strap handles. Recorded volumes for the vessel range between 6 and ½ gallons.

Vessel Photo 2: Milk pan

A very common artifact, this reconstructed pan is from the Henry site (AkGt-267, Cat.#979). Milk pans exhibit straight sides which meet the base at roughly an oblique angle. This example exhibits complete glazing, a 14.5" orifice diameter, and is 5" deep, resulting in an approximate volume of 2 gallons Therefore, this is a mid-sized pan.

Vessel Photo 3: Small, ovoid pitcher

From the Henry site (AlGt-267, Cat.#1423), this small pitcher has a basal diameter of 3.5", and is approximately 6" tall at the shoulder, resulting in an estimated volume of ½ gallon. It is decorated on the interior and exterior with a rough green glaze, although the base is unglazed. It is characterized by a bulbous body and applied handle. Similar vessels are not depicted on the Ahrens lists and may, in fact, represent an earlier form that was later replaced by more durable imported wares.

Vessel Photo 4: Bowls

While the term "bowls" is not mentioned in any of the invoices, advertisements, or cookbooks reviewed for this paper, the form was clearly dominant with the New Hamburg pottery assemblage, comprising over 84% of the total identified vessels. The form is characterized by a slightly bulbous body and a basal diametre less than the orifice diametre, and roughly equal to the depth. Excavations at the Holden site (AlGt-275) have produced several bowls of varying sizes, ranging from 9" orifice diameter (5" deep) to 11.5" inch orifice diameter (6" deep). It is interesting to note that the form is somewhat similar to the milk crock illustrated by Ahrens, although "bowl" does seem to be the term used most often for this form by collectors and archaeologists.

Vessel Photo 5: Porringer

This partially-reconstructed slip-decorated porringer or cup dates from *circa* 1807-1837 and is unique within the ASI collections. Webster illustrates a similar vessel, but states

that it likely originated in Staffordshire[25]. We suggest that there is no reason why this vessel could not have been produced in Ontario.

Vessel Photo 6: Milk crock

This example is from the Joseph Shaw site (AiHb-131). The vessel is glazed both inside and out, has an orifice diametre of 8 inches, a depth of approximately 5 inches, and a basal diameter of 5¾ inches, resulting in an approximate volume of 0.8 gallons. It also exhibits a form similar to a "York Shilling crock" identified by Webster[26].

Conclusions

A review of ASI's collections has resulted in the identification of only a few of the forms noted by potters or modern researchers. This is explained partly by the fragmentary nature of most of the specimens, where it is not possible to reconstruct more than a few vessels per assemblage more fully. It may also reflect consumer choice or local availability. Interestingly, the terms the archaeologists—and often the potters themselves—have chosen for vessels seem to be different from terms used by pioneer women who used the vessels daily. Why this apparent discrepancy? One answer may be that the time period under study was a time of transition. As stoneware and refined ware vessels became more common in the mid- and late nineteenth century, demand for some redware versions declined. Therefore, a larger variety of vessels may have been available in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and may more closely correspond to the folk terms for vessels taken from the cookbooks written during the first half of the nineteenth century. It is difficult to know what those vessels looked like as the majority

of the illustrated invoices and price lists are from the late nineteenth century. Another answer may be that the cookbooks were written with generalized terms for vessels, such as "basin," or "pot," in acknowledgement that any suitable vessel could be used by the cook, and no specialized equipment was necessary. The cookbook terms match much more closely with those recorded by collectors documenting the early American redware industry. For example, Ketchum's work on 17th-20th century American redware does mention (and define) seven of the ten terms used in Ontario cookbooks. In fact, it would seem that our "bowl" is actually a "pot"[27]!

We realize that this paper has only scratched the surface of the research needed on Ontario redware from archaeological contexts, but this work has certainly inspired us to reconsider redware, both simply as a utilitarian object, as well as its role in women's work, the greater domestic economy, cultural transmission and preservation, and the emergent merchant economy of Ontario in the nineteenth century.

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[1] See Barton 1981; Michael 1983; Newlands 1979; Rupp 1980; Webster 1969, 1971.
[2] See Beaudry et al. 1983; Jones 1988; Kelso and Chappell 1974; Turnbaugh 1985; Yentsch 1991
[3] Newlands 1979, p. 4
[4] Newlands 1979, p. 16
[5] Newlands 1979, p. 63
[6] Newlands 1979, p. 27-28
[7] Newlands 1978
[8] Newlands 1979, p. 22
[9] Kenyon 1982
[10] Newlands 1979, p.31
[11] Newlands 1979 p.52
[12] Scott 1997, p. 132
[13] Driver 2008, p. 274
[14] Longone 1996, p. ix
[15] Driver 2008, p. 275
[16] Gibble 2005, p. 34
[17] *The Cook Not Mad* 1831, p. 65

[18] Traill 1854, p. 97
[19] Hale 1841, p. 24
[20] Nourse 1845, p. 278, 280
[21] Traill 1854, p. 132
[22] Beeton 1861, p. 1006
[23] Traill 1854, p. 182
[24] Traill 1854, p. 188
[25] Webster 1969, p. 19.
[26] Webster 1971, p. 58.
[27] Ketchum 1991

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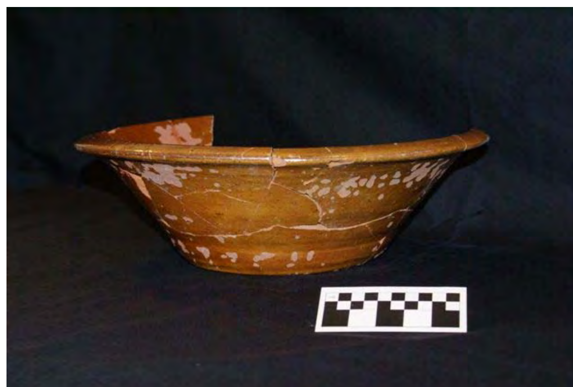
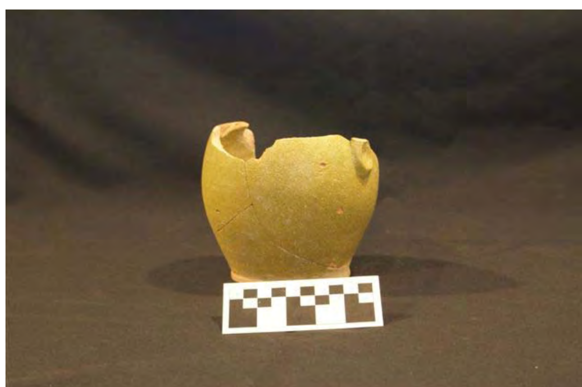
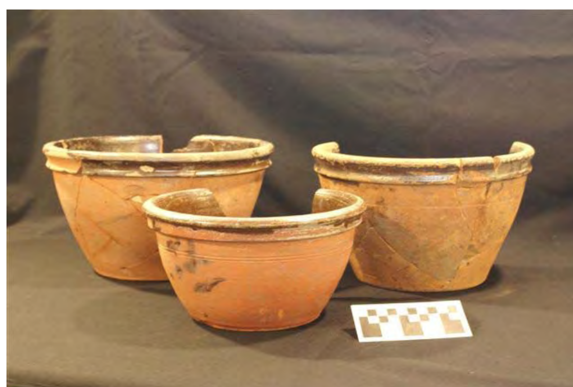
Vessel Photo 1: Cream Pot



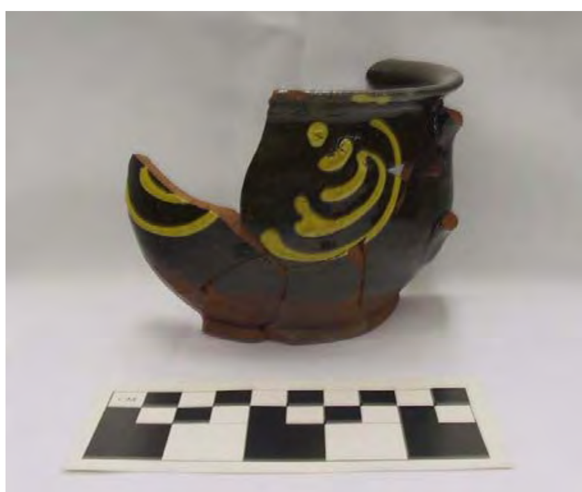
Vessel Photo 2: Milk Pan



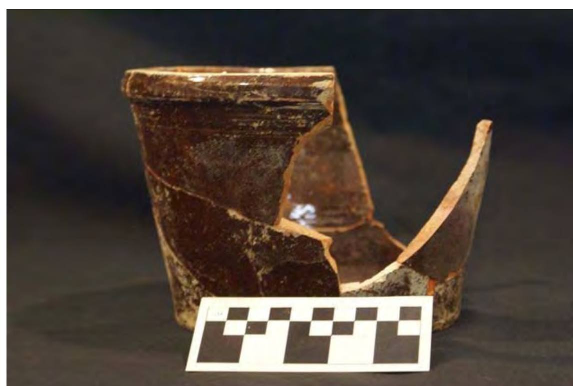
Vessel Photo 3: Ovoid Pitcher



Vessel Photo 4: Bowls



Vessel Photo 5: Porringer



Vessel Photo6: Milk Crock