

1980

## The Kiln and Red Earthenware Pottery of the Jordan Pottery Site: A Preliminary Overview

David W. Rupp

Follow this and additional works at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha>



Part of the [Archaeological Anthropology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Rupp, David W. (1980) "The Kiln and Red Earthenware Pottery of the Jordan Pottery Site: A Preliminary Overview," *Northeast Historical Archaeology*: Vol. 9 9, Article 3.

<https://doi.org/10.22191/neha/vol9/iss1/3> Available at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha/vol9/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). It has been accepted for inclusion in Northeast Historical Archaeology by an authorized editor of The Open Repository @ Binghamton (The ORB). For more information, please contact [ORB@binghamton.edu](mailto:ORB@binghamton.edu).

# The Kiln and Red Earthenware Pottery of the Jordan Pottery Site: A Preliminary Overview

David W. Rupp

## INTRODUCTION

The Jordan Pottery Excavation Project was created in the spring of 1976 by the Niagara Society of the Archaeological Institute of America, the Jordan Historical Museum of the Twenty, and the Brock University Museum of Cypriote Antiquities, to undertake the excavation of a suspected red earthenware pottery kiln and workshop located on the Niagara escarpment in the Town of Lincoln, Region Niagara, Ontario, Canada. The site is situated to the east of 19th Street, Louth, next to a small stream and an old Indian trail (now called the Bruce Trail) which runs along the top of the escarpment. The area abounds in glacial clay deposits and was once forested. The site was excavated on weekends by volunteers supervised by a small, experienced staff which included Jon K. Jouprien, Rita Michael, Catharina van Waarden, Dianne Berrigan and Rita Granda. The excavation ran from May 1976 through December 1977. A total of 15 weeks work was put in at the site. The excavation project as required by Ontario Heritage Act of 1974 was licensed as B-76-0113 and C-77-0149.

The excavations uncovered the fairly well preserved remains of a kiln, a workshop area, and large quantities of sherds, kiln furniture, and bricks. A primary analysis of the finds and information obtained during the course of the excavation is now in progress under the auspices of the Jordan Pottery Study Project at Brock University. The Study Project is financed by a grant from the Ontario Heritage Foundation. The following comments represent a preliminary overview of the major finds from the excavation and their relationship to the red earthenware pottery tradition in early 19th century Ontario and to the red earthenware and stoneware traditions in the middle Atlantic states.

## KILN

The Jordan potter used a simple, rectangular multi-flued updraft single chamber kiln in which to fire his pottery. The kiln is oriented approximately northeast-southwest and its approximate overall dimensions are 2.70 meters wide by 3.55 meters long (not including the projection for the firebox at the northeastern end). The firing chamber is divided into two unequal sections by a central partition wall along the longitudinal axis of the kiln (Figure 1).

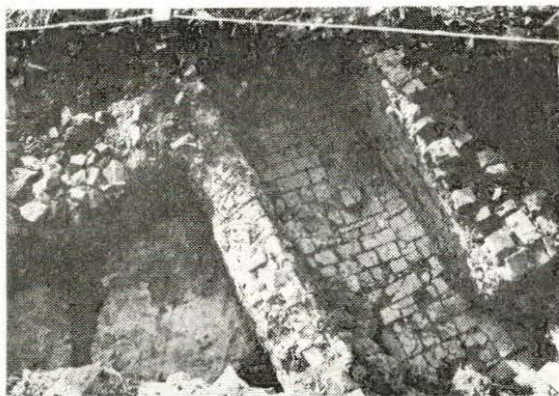


Figure 1. View of kiln during excavation.

The partition wall projects from the western wall and stops short of the eastern wall, thus allowing communication between the two sections. The approximate dimensions of the larger southern section are 0.82 meters wide by 2.78 meters long and those of the smaller northern section are 0.72 meters wide by 2.78 meters long. The central partition is 0.38 meters wide. The firebox is 0.44 meters wide at its narrowest point and 0.54 meters wide at its widest point on the exterior where the short narrow walls terminate.

The kiln is constructed of regular mould-made bricks mortared with clay. The brick floor of the kiln lies in a shallow trench which was cut through the surface soil horizon into the thin layer of compact fine clay that overlies the limestone bedrock. The exterior walls and the central partition are approximately 0.38 meters thick and consist of three parallel rows of stretcher construction, set in staggered positions. The walls of the chamber rise ten courses high (0.75 meters) before the brick inner vaulted roof begins its spring. At the eleventh course the hand-shaped skewbacks are set back a few centimeters from the inner face of the walls. The archaeological evidence implies that the inner vault was constructed of regular bricks, crude wedge-shaped bricks and a high proportion of clay mortar. The firebox was spanned by a low-rising vault. The lack of a sufficient number of bricks with which to make a vaulted roof of necessary thickness, and the presence

a large quantity of small irregular limestone fragments immediately around the kiln not found elsewhere at the site, strongly suggest that the roof of the kiln was completed with these limestone fragments set in clay mortar. A number of flues could be left in such a roof to create the required updraft. There was no evidence to suggest that a chimney was used with the kiln.

The presence of a substantial foundation of limestone slabs, *in situ* at the southeast corner of the kiln and similar slabs in a disturbed context at the northeastern corner indicates that the kiln was once covered by a wooden roof supported by thick beams. Excavation revealed a narrow, shallow depression approximately one meter away from the northwestern side of the kiln running parallel to it that might represent the drip line of this supposed roof. The fact that numerous nails were discovered in the general area of the kiln and especially to the west/southwest of the kiln also supports this hypothesis. Furthermore, there is other evidence to suggest that the potter's workshop area was situated immediately to the southwest of the kiln. In this area there are the remains of a foundation of unknown function, made of limestone slabs. Whether or not the kiln and the workshop area were located under the same roof and in the same structure cannot be determined from the available evidence.

#### WASTER DUMPS

The principal waster dump of the pottery begins less than two meters to the northeast of the kiln. The roughly circular dump rises approximately 60 centimeters above present grade and has a diameter of about 5.65 meters. Broken, overfired, and warped bricks constitute the major components of the dump. Kiln furniture make up the next largest component, with broken, overfired and warped red earthenware sherds the smallest. This material was in an ashy soil matrix. A possible second, smaller waster dump is located about 20 meters to the southeast along the edge of the stream.

#### VESSEL SHAPES

Red earthenware sherds constitute approximately 80% of the artifactual remains at the site. Only a few whole or nearly whole vessels were recovered in the course of the excavation. All of them were thrown on a wheel, with a light to dark orangish red body or fabric, and usually containing small stone inclusions. The pottery produced a side variety of earthenware vessels. Open shapes include pie plates, low bowls (Figure 2), milk bowls, cups and crocks of various sizes (Figure 3). Closed shapes include cylindrical bottles, jugs, pitchers, preserve jars of various sizes and shapes, small spice jars, and butter churns. A variety of lid types were made for the jars, including flat ones with and without nobs, broad low and high dome-shaped ones with nobs, and butter churn lids. There is limited evidence for the production of chamber pots, teapots, flower pots

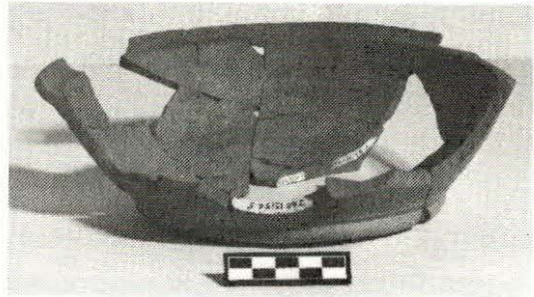


Figure 2. Red earthenware bisque-fired bowl.



Figure 3. Red earthenware interior glazed crock.

with attached saucers, and two different types of moneybanks (Figure 4). In comparison to other Ontario red earthenware craft potteries, the range of shapes thrown by the potter is most unusual for the early 19th century (Newlands 1977:28; Webster 1971: 57-66). The vessel shapes of the Jordan pottery are strongly reminiscent of earthenware and stoneware shapes made in the middle Atlantic states between the 1810's and the 1840's (Barber and Hamell 1974: 19, 22, 28, 36, 45; Greer 1978, pers.comm.; Guillard 1971: 195 and 196; Smith 1974: Figure 60).

#### GLAZES AND SLIPS

The Jordan potter utilized a basic lead oxide glaze to seal the surfaces of his bisque-fired red earthenware pottery. The color of the glaze ranges from light brown to deep reddish brown with occasional darker flecks caused by oxidized iron particles. The majority of the open shapes appear to have been glazed only on the interior while almost all of the closed shapes were glazed both inside and out, but not on the base. This basic lead glaze was frequently augmented with various oxides to vary the resulting color. Glazes with dark green or mottled light greenish yellow are the most common of the colored glazes. Some of the bowls exhibit a marbled appearance, the result of the partial mixing of the basic lead oxide glaze with the light greenish yellow glaze. A small proportion of the interiors have

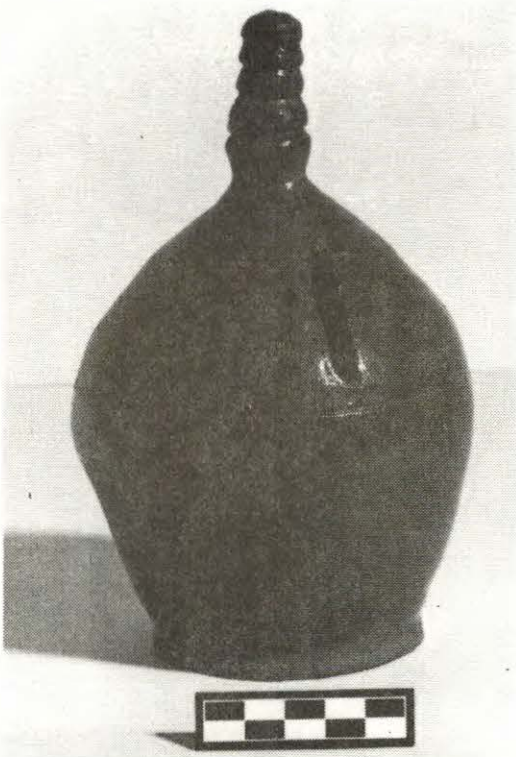


Figure 4. Red earthenware exterior glazed moneybank.



Figure 5. Red earthenware stamp decorated exterior glazed dome-shape lid.

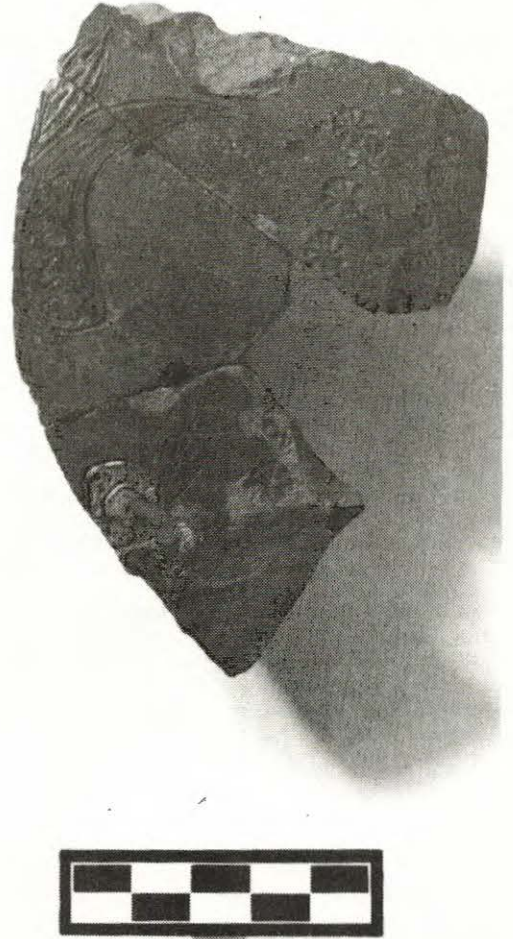


Figure 6. Red earthenware stamp and incised decorated exterior and interior glazed preserve jar sherds.

a thin chalky engobe or more often a creamy greenish yellow slip underneath the lead oxide glaze. A very limited number of the jars have a matt dark black slip on the interior surfaces which was then overglazed. One cup has this matt dark black slip on both interior and exterior surfaces. This use of slips or an engobe was not common in the 19th century Ontario red earthenware pottery (Webster 1971: 77).

#### DECORATION

Most of the vessels produced at the Jordan pottery lack any decoration except for a noticeable tendency toward complex rim forms and one or two parallel grooves encircling the shoulder area or upper body. However some of the vessels that were recovered during the excavation do exhibit a limited range of decorative motifs. The most common decorative motif is a rosette stamp which is found encircling the body of jars just below the articulation with the shoulder, on the shoulder of bottles just below the neck, or on domed-lids just above the rim (Figure 5). In at least one instance the rosettes were alternately colored with a greenish and whitish slip. A smaller plain circular stamp was also used on the shoulders of the jars in association with the rosette stamps (Figure 6). A diamond shaped stamp made of nine small diamonds was applied to one large crock immediately below the flaring rim (Figure 7).

Large and small floral motifs were also

incised on the sides of crocks and jars. They range from simple leaf and flower combinations to complex floral arrangements. On at least two vessels the main parts of the flowers were painted-in before glazing with a black slip and a creamy white slip (Figure 8). Although the style and motifs of this incised decoration is reminiscent of the red earthenware vessels with



Figure 7. Red earthenware diamond stamp decorated interior and exterior glazed crock.



Figure 8. Red earthenware incised decorated bisque-fired crock.

sgraffito and slip decoration produced in the 1820's and 1830's in Montgomery and Bucks counties in Pennsylvania (Barber 1970: 127-204; Guilland 1971: 93, 141, 162, 228, 234 and 273), it has closer affinities with similarly decorated saltglazed stoneware produced elsewhere in the United States in the early 19th century (Barber and Hamell 1974: 45; Guilland 1971:

color plate 1, 22; Smith 1974: Figures 3 and 119).

A number of the vessels also carried the stamp "B. LENT U. C." or "B. LENT/U. C." on their upper bodies near the rim or their shoulders or necks, probably the name of the Jordan potter. Thin braided handles were occasionally used for finer pieces and on vessels with incised floral motifs. The presence of decoration such as this on red earthenware pottery made in Ontario is heretofore unrecorded (Webster 1971: 57-62). Despite the fact that the decoration would add little to the monetary value of the vessel and that it would take longer to produce, the Jordan potter devoted some of his time to making different (and sometimes unpractical) shapes and to decorating some of his pottery. The decorations display innate artistic talent and motifs and decorative techniques derived from the earthenware and stoneware traditions of the middle Atlantic States in the first half of the 19th century. Nothing comparable is known to exist from Ontario for this period.

#### KILN FURNITURE

Approximately 15% of the artifactual material recovered from the site (excluding bricks) was kiln furniture. There are two types of carefully made kiln furniture: flat elongated hand-made base or rim setting tiles and thrown circular ring sills (or spurs or cockspurs) with spurs with negative scalloping. The setting tiles are similar to those used at the stoneware Brantford Pottery in Brantford, Ontario, dating ca. 1850-1883 (Webster 1868:34, Figure 16d). The ring sills bear close resemblance to some found at Albion Square, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, England dating to ca. 1690-1714 (Celoria and Kelly 1973: 47, No. 357). Other cruder kiln furniture "made on the spot" at the time of the stacking of the kiln included various sized thick solid rectangular, ovoid, and circular base tiles or saggars, ring shaped base or rim tiles or collars, thin flat discs or bobs, and slightly curved cross-support wedges. These ring-shaped tiles and the cross wedges are similar to those utilized at the Brantford Pottery (Webster 1968:34, Figure 16 a, b, f, g).

#### THE POTTER

The land on which the pottery is located was not owned during the probable period of its production by anyone known to be connected with pottery manufacture (Lot 18, Concession V, Old Louth Township, Lincoln County, Ontario). So far, no documentary evidence has been found to identify the potter who worked at the pottery or its floruit of production.

Despite this lack of information, there are a number of sherds with "B. LENT U.C." stamped in all large upper case letters or in large and small upper case letters or in all small upper case letters. This stamping occurs on both bisque fired and glazed vessels. It seems plausible to assume the "B. LENT" was the craft potter who ran this pottery. The only piece of

documentary evidence that might pertain to the site is a wedding announcement in the *St. Catharines, Ontario Journal*. It states that a Benjamin Lent married Mary Ann Bradt, both of Louth Township, in Lewiston, New York, on January 16, 1841. Since the Lent name is otherwise unrecorded in Louth Township, it is quite likely that this is the same person who is referred to on the stamped vessels.

The name Lent is connected with stoneware potteries in New York and New Jersey in the 1820's and 1830's. In Troy, New York, George Lent made stoneware vessels bearing the stamp "G. Lent/Troy" between ca. 1820-1824 (Ketchum 1970: 99-100, 245). Lewis B. Lent worked as a potter in Peekskill, New York, some time around 1830 (Ketchum 1970: 67, 234). William Lent, son of George Lent, worked as the chief assistant for Daniel R. Weston's stoneware pottery in Ellenville, New York, between 1849 and 1875 (Ketchum 1970: 84, and 2.2). Finally, a B. Lent worked for the T. Warne and J. Letts stoneware pottery in the village of Cheesequake in the town of Madison (near South Amboy), Middlesex County, New Jersey, when it was operated by Catherine Brown, between 1815 and the 1820's (Mitchell 1973: 331). A stoneware basal sherd signed B. Lent and dated 1827 was found at the pottery site (Sim and Clement 1944: 120-22). In the late 1820's or 1830's B. Lent worked as a stoneware potter in Caldwell, Essex County, New Jersey, stamping his pieces "B. LENT/CALDWELL" (*New Jersey Pottery* 1972: No. 11; Mitchell 1973: 331, Figure 2b; *New Jersey Stoneware* 1955: 15-16, No. 15a). The use of a rosette stamp and to a lesser extent, the incised floral motifs (occasionally with interior slips) is also found on stoneware vessels made at the Warne and Letts pottery, ca. 1805-1815 (Sim and Clement 1944: 120, Figures 6-8). Thus it is possible that the Lent of the Jordan pottery immigrated to Ontario from either New York or New Jersey where he had learned his craft as a stoneware potter from his father. Because of the lack of the availability of suitable clay for stoneware vessels in Ontario, he worked there as a red earthenware potter.

#### CHRONOLOGY

The lack of specific historical documentation for the pottery poses a problem in dating the floruit of its production. As a result, it is necessary to rely upon more general documentary evidence and the archeological record to suggest a tentative date.

The presence of the initials "UC" as part of the Lent stamp certainly refers to Upper Canada, of which Louth Township was a part. The fact that Upper Canada ceased to be a political entity in 1841, when Canada West was formed, should give us a reliable *terminus ante quem* date. A firm *terminus post quem* date is more difficult to determine. The signed and dated piece by a B. Lent found on the site of the Cheesequake New Jersey pottery of T. Warne and J. Letts provides 1827 as an approximate *terminus*, if the New Jersey B. Lent is the same person as Jordan B. Lent. The existence of

different Lents working in upstate New York in the 1820's and the 1830's undermines the validity of such an assumption. Thus a late 1830's *terminus post quem* date is the best that can be proposed at present.

Various types of artifacts found in the course of the excavation support the 1827-1841 time span. The general shapes of the vessels themselves point to a date between 1820 and 1840 (David Newlands 1976: pers. comm.). In addition, the style and manner of decoration of the vessels is similar to that of red earthenware and stoneware vessels made elsewhere during the same decades.

A preliminary analysis of the other types of artifactual material agrees with a date in the late 1820's or 1830's. One can infer from the refined white earthenware with transfer printed decoration and very limited quantities of sprigged creamware and pearlware, including an underglazed hand-painted polychrome decorated sherd made by the Davenport Pottery, ca. 1810/1820 (Lockett 1972:36; 110-111, No. 2), that the site was first occupied in the latter part of the 1820's (Arnold Pilling 1978: pers. comm.; Miller 1974: 200-201). The majority of the refined white earthenware sherds associated with the pottery's period of operation date to ca. 1832-1835 (Arnold Pilling 1978: pers. comm.). There is also evidence for a much more limited occupation in the 1840's and early 1850's (Arnold Pilling 1978: pers. comm.; Miller 1974: 209; and 1973:8).

Structural hardware provides other chronological data. Numerous hand wrought nails were recovered at the site. These were in use as early as the 17th century and are still being produced (Nelson 1962: 85). However, in an Ontario context they would suggest a late 18th century or early 19th century date. Machine cut nails also occurred in large numbers. Such cut nails have been in use continually since about 1790 (Nelson 1962: 85). Nevertheless, the cut nails found at Jordan have machine made heads, inferring a post-1815 date of manufacture (Nelson 1962: 86). The bottle glass collected in the course of the excavation was mostly heavily rippled sodium glass. Neck sherds terminate at a rudimentary hand applied collar. Basal sherds reveal deep pontil scars. All of these attributes indicate early manufacturing techniques; the most diagnostic feature, the pontil scar, points to a pre-1840 date (Kendrick 1967: 20).

Thus the various types of artificial material from the pottery site infer a date for its operation sometime between 1815/1820 and 1840/1845. Taking the limited documentary evidence discussed above into consideration, as well as the archeological evidence, a date during the early to mid-1830's appears to be most probable for its floruit.

## REFERENCES

- Barber, Edwin Atlee  
1970 *Tulip Ware of the Pennsylvania-German Potters*. Dover Publications Inc., New York. Reprint of 1926 edition.
- Barber, Daniel M. and George R. Hamell  
1974 *Clay in the Hands of the Potter*. An Exhibition of Pottery Manufactured in the Rochester and Genesee Valley Region, c. 1793-1900. Rochester Museum and Science Center, Rochester.
- Celoria, F. C. S. and J. H. Kelly  
1973 *A Post-Medieval pottery site with a kiln base found off Albion Square, Hanley; Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, England (SJ 885 474)*. City of Stoke-on-Trent Museum Archaeological Society, Report No.4
- Guilland, Harold F.  
1971 *Early American Folk Pottery*. Chilton Book Company, Philadelphia.
- Kendrick, George  
1967 *Bottle Fragments betray age of historical sites*. *El Palacio* 74: 19-24.
- Ketchum, William C., Jr.  
1970 *Early Potters and Potteries of New York State*. Funk and Wagnalls, New York.
- Lockett, T. A.  
1972 *Davenport Pottery and Porcelain, 1794-1887*. David & Charles, Newton Abbot, England.
- Miller, George L.  
1974 *A Tenant Farmer's Tableware: Nineteenth-Century Ceramics from Tabbs Purchase*. *Maryland Historical Magazine* 69 (2): 197-210.
- 1973 *Selection and Replacement of Tablewares by the Nineteenth Century Tenants Of the Moses Tabbs House, St. Mary's City, Maryland*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Mitchell, James R.  
1973 *The Potters of Cheesequake, New Jersey*. In *Ceramics in America*, edited by Ian M. G. Quimby, pp. 319-38. University Press of Virginia. Charlottesville.
- Nelson, Lee H.  
1962 *Nail Chronology as an Aid to Dating Old Buildings*. American Association for State and local history technical leaflet, no. 48. Nashville.
- New Jersey Pottery to 1840*  
1972 *Catalogue of an Exhibition, March 18-May 12*. New Jersey State Museum.
- New Jersey Stoneware*  
1955 *Catalogue of an Exhibit, May 21st-June 21st*. Monmouth County Historical Association.
- Newlands, David L.  
1977 *Rare and Unusual Ontario Pottery*. *Canadian Collector* 12 (6): 25-29.
- Sim, Robert J. and Arthur W. Clement  
1944 *The Cheesequake Potteries*. In *The Art of the Potter*, edited by Diana and J. Garrison Stradling, pp. 119-22. Main Street/Universe Books, New York.
- Smith, Joseph Johnson  
1974 *Regional Aspects of American Folk Pottery*. May 12 to October 12, 1974. The Historical Society of York County, York.
- Webster, Donald B.  
1971 *Early Canadian Pottery*. McClelland and Stewart Limited, Toronto.
- 1968 *The Brantford Pottery*. Royal Ontario Museum, Art and Archaeology, Occasional Paper 13. Toronto.