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**LEE FOREST FIGURINES
AA MS 11**

**Total Containers: 1 Oversize Drawer
Linear Feet: 3**

**By
Christina E. Walker**

**Portland, Maine
May 2014**

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Administrative Information

Provenance: The Lee Forest Figurines were donated by Lee Forest, Director of Environmental Services at the University of Southern Maine, in 2002.

Ownership and Literary Rights: The Lee Forest Figurines are the physical property of the University of Southern Maine Libraries. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the creator or his/her legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the Head of Special Collections.

Cite as: Lee Forest Figurines, African American Collection of Maine, Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity in Maine, University of Southern Maine Libraries.

Restrictions on access: This collection is open for research.

Historical Note

During the post-Reconstruction period in America there was an expansion in the production of items depicting black figures. Far from benign, these advertisements frequently employed derogatory images and themes that were meant to symbolize African Americans' inferiority. The historian Larry Vincent Buster writes, "there is no single figure in blackface that has held such an enduring place in American culture and commerce...as Aunt Jemima. She was a fabrication steeped in white America's myths and memories of 'mammy' or 'auntie,' the selfless and devoted female house servant who raised the master's children, cleaned his house, and cooked his meals" (35). The Aunt Jemima caricature evolved from minstrel shows where she was frequently depicted by white men in drag and blackface. In the late nineteenth century the Aunt Jemima character was adapted by the R.T. Davis Milling Co. (which was bought by Quaker Oats Co. in 1925) to market their pancake mix. In the early years of the twentieth century the commoditization of Aunt Jemima expanded beyond commercial flour mix to include a diverse array of products such as rag dolls, dish towels, cookie jars and salt-and-pepper shakers. Eventually, a husband was added, Uncle Mose, and two children, Diana and Wade. Household notions depicting the family continued to be produced into the 1960s, when the civil rights and black consciousness movements encouraged an examination of the symbolism behind representations of African Americans.

Buster writes, "By far the most prevalent images depict blacks in service as butlers, maids, cooks, porters, and 'mammies'" (47). A similar theme is present in the representation of the Aunt Jemima figure who is often depicted wearing an apron and handkerchief and carrying symbols of service, such as a platter or mixing bowl. Uncle Mose is depicted in a deferential posture, holding his hat in his hands.

References:

Goings, Kenneth W. *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indian University Press. 1994.

Buster, Larry Vincent. *The Art and History of Black Memorabilia*. New York: Clarkson Potter Publishers. 2000.

Description of the Collection

The Lee Forest Figurines collection consists of 11 glazed ceramic figurines depicting Aunt Jemima and Uncle Mose (1930s-1950s). Objects include kitchen jars, a toothbrush holder, and several salt and pepper shakers.

1. One 12 inch high Aunt Jemima kitchen jar with removable top
2. One 11 inch high Aunt Jemima jar with removable top, figure is washing laundry
3. One 5.25 inch high Aunt Jemima toothbrush holder with four rectangular holes in the back
4. Two 4 inch high Aunt Jemima figures, salt and pepper shakers
5. Two 4 inch high Uncle Mose figures, salt and pepper shakers
6. Two 3.25 inch high Aunt Jemima figures, salt and pepper shakers
7. Two 3.25 inch high Uncle Mose figures, salt and pepper shakers